CREATING INDIGENOUS FUTURES

Using Applied Theatre to Construct a Participatory Creative Space for Indigenous Australian Young People

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the use of applied theatre with disadvantaged Indigenous Australian young people. It examines the characteristics, challenges and opportunities of using applied theatre practices with Indigenous young people in an Indigenous community setting. The research considers the relationship between the fields of applied theatre, participatory forms of qualitative research and Indigenous research.

The research responds to the low attendance and engagement of Indigenous young people in education in Australia. Poor rates of school completion combined with high rates of imprisonment means that at least half the Indigenous young people in Australia are underachieving, and are at risk of a future characterized by extreme disadvantage and disconnection from the mainstream. This research began as broad concern with how to reconnect disaffected Indigenous young people with education. Subsequently the research question was reframed as: how can applied theatre be used in the construction of a participatory creative space for Indigenous Australian young people?

The study began as an invitation from Nungalinya College in Darwin to the researcher, a non-Indigenous teaching artist experienced in intercultural drama and theatre. Adopting a reflective practitioner stance the researcher explored the central role of applied theatre in building Indigenous young people’s engagement with culturally appropriate creative practices. The study consisted of three applied theatre projects conducted over three years. The first was a one-week Pilot Project in 2006. The second was a five-week intensive program conducted in 2007; the third was two weeks in 2008. The research was a partnership between Trinity College, the researcher-practitioner, who was employed at Trinity College, and Nungalinya College Youth Program. Contact was maintained between the three projects.

The researcher became immersed in a new and unfamiliar cultural, social, political and environmental space in order to try to understand the lived realities of the young people. The development of deeper understanding by the researcher of Indigenous perspectives on partnerships, relationships, and cultural safety facilitated the young people’s participation. The researcher found it necessary to
adapt applied theatre to incorporate the making of short films as a medium of storytelling and as an initiative of the young people.

The building of conditions for participation required complex and sensitive relationships, which evolved through negotiation and collaboration. In a newly constructed creative space the young people had the opportunity to build new narratives to move beyond their habitual patterns and to imagine a different future. As a result of this research, a model for partnerships and for participation is proposed. The researcher identified a range of modes of participation in the creative space and these were subsequently characterized as a continuum from Peripheral to Marginal to Embodied to Active Participation.
DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

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

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

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

Rosemary Blight
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CHAPTER ONE : LOOKING ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE

PROLOGUE

As a young woman, I was in a theatre group called Star Magic Show, which toured for Arts Councils throughout Australia. Our show presented mime and magic-illusion to a classical soundtrack; our costumes and make-up borrowed from French Pierrot and Harlequin of Commedia dell’Arte traditions.

The non-verbal, visual aspects appealed to Arts organisers, and the touring schedule occasionally placed us in unusual contexts. In our first year, 1981, my highlight was a remote area tour organised by the Queensland Arts Council. We were flown from Thargomindah in South West Queensland to Thursday Island at the tip of Australia, presenting shows in halls, schools, pubs and cattle sheds to outback audiences.

The tour included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander settlements such as: Doomadgee, Edward River, Mornington Island, Kowanyama, Aurukun, Bamaga and Jessica Point. The responses of the Indigenous audiences alternated between loud sighing, silent concentration and jubilant applause. It was exciting and I felt an immediate attachment to these communities. The “magic” of theatre united us, a human link, which went beyond words.

I was confronted with the paradox of poverty in paradise: we didn’t speak each other’s languages; alcohol problems on canteen nights; and the differences between our worlds. This was my first contact with Aboriginal people and I realized how ignorant I was about their culture.

Twenty-four years later…

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an account of a white “teaching artist” (Taylor, 2003, p. xxviii) invited to Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia, to undertake an applied theatre project in partnership with Indigenous Australians, aiming to make a difference in the lives of Indigenous young people.
The idea for this project germinated in October 2005. On behalf of the Indigenous Principal of Nungalinya College, the former supervisor of my Masters’ thesis, Dr Murray Seiffert, visited Melbourne in his capacity as Academic Dean of Nungalinya College. Murray asked whether I would be interested in coming to Darwin to facilitate some drama workshops within a new youth initiative called *Creating Indigenous Futures*, which was being established at the College. This was a surprising proposal as I was working as a drama lecturer in the Foundation Studies Program, Trinity College, at the University of Melbourne, had not seen Murray for a long time, and had never heard of Nungalinya College. I felt the hairs standing up on my body, thrilled with the challenge this idea implied, and conscious of the pioneering aspect of the proposition. This brief meeting with Murray marked the beginning of negotiations of a partnership between the two Colleges, Nungalinya and Trinity, on opposite sides of Australia, and the beginning of my adventurous undertaking. What began as an experimental applied theatre project within the Nungalinya Youth Program also became my research study.

When I received the initial invitation I was not enrolled in a PhD, but was instantly drawn into the project through my passion for intercultural theatre and from my earlier contact with remote Indigenous Australian communities when on tour. I wanted to go beyond conducting a series of workshops, to wanting to systematically collect and analyse data beyond the one-week short course. There had been a substantial amount of work and goodwill to get the project started, and it felt unsatisfying to leave it there. So with the intention and hope of exploring the work at a deeper level, I designed my research questions: To what extent might applied theatre, as a creative practice, positively impact on Indigenous Australian students and extend their capacity to engage and succeed in further education and training, and if it does so, how does it? What are the characteristics, constraints and limitations of using Drama programs for Indigenous Australian students? Using action research I aimed to research the potential of applied theatre in Indigenous Australian contexts. However, these questions were framed in Melbourne, and would change once I was in the context of the Youth Program. I describe the new questions later in this Chapter.

**The Youth Program at Nungalinya College**

Nungalinya College is situated in Casuarina, a suburb of Darwin and is close to Charles Darwin University, the beach, river and wilderness areas nearby. It is also a short walk from Casuarina Shopping Mall, Darwin’s largest retail complex. The name Nungalinya comes from the *Larrakia* people meaning “Old Man Rock” or “Big
Rock”. This name describes the long low reef that can be seen from Casuarina beach at low tide.

The context of the study was the newly established Youth Program within the financially insecure Nungalinya College. Nungalinya was established as an Indigenous Christian College through a partnership between the Anglican, Catholic and Uniting Churches, and is primarily a training place for ministers and leaders within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Leadership formation and community development are key outcomes of their programs. Indigenous Australian people come from all over Australia to study at Nungalinya and many of these students are mature age and hold positions of authority in their own communities. These students board at the College in a variety of dormitories, cabins and houses. In 2005 the Principal applied for a grant to fund a youth initiative, for the first time addressing the needs of Indigenous Australian youth at the College. This was a radical proposal as it was a departure from their core business.

The Youth Program offered a bridging course for marginalized young people to develop skills in literacy, numeracy, Information Technology and Art. Life skills such as resume preparation, self-defence, health and lifestyle awareness were also taught. I conducted the applied theatre project within this Youth Program.

The Creating Indigenous Futures Youth Program was initially aimed at young women between 15-19 years. From the outset, however, the program incorporated young men as well as young women. Unlike the other Nungalinya students, these participants did not live on site but attended the Youth Program during the day. I was not involved in any of the programs of the main College, but spent my time in the youth space, a former Chapel, which also housed the Indigenous Australian textile arts workshop, and was situated on the fringe of the vast college grounds.

The Partners and Young People

Each year from 2006 - 2008 I facilitated an applied theatre project within the Youth Program. In 2006 I spent two weeks at Nungalinya and conducted a full-time drama project over five days. In 2007, I spent five weeks at Nungalinya and conducted a drama project over twenty days. In 2008, I spent two weeks at Nungalinya and conducted a drama project over ten days. For three years I facilitated these applied theatre projects as part of the Youth Program, and worked alongside my Indigenous Australian partners, who coordinated and taught in the Youth Program throughout the year. There were three key women with whom I
collaborated in facilitating the workshops and conducting the study in the Youth Program: Pat, Naretha and Kim.

During the course of my research there was considerable staff change and movement within Nungalinya College. There were three Principals, two Youth Coordinators, administrative and teaching staff changes, as well as the involvement of different outside organisations. There were also changes amongst the cohorts of young people who attended the Youth Program and my drama workshops.

The applied theatre project and my research were built on the relationships between these different stakeholders, from my partners and the young people, to the executive and administrative levels of both colleges. So, while my starting point was the hope of regular participation in the applied theatre project by the young people, to help build confidence and positive relationships, my partners faced a wider agenda. The stakes were high for all of us; they would lose their jobs if the funding was discontinued, and I felt responsible to Trinity for their investment in the projects, as well as wanting to complete my research.

Before my departure from Melbourne, Pat, the first Coordinator of the Youth Program collaborated with me by phone and provided her perspective on the young people attending the Youth Program. I called the applied theatre project Let’s Act Now and Pat distributed flyers to attract the young people. Pat explained the Principal wanted to include drama in the Youth Program to provide the young people with an experience that would build self-esteem and confidence. Pat shared her insights into the lives and backgrounds of the participants, to help me with my preparation and planning. This is how she described the young people:

Failed at school, accustomed to violence, well known to the Police, with anger management issues, defensive, requiring communication and teamwork skills. Devoid of positive role models. No sense of cohesion never succeeded at anything and at risk of abuse and homelessness. Most of the participants came from single parent families, had street life skills, liked football and fighting and spoke English from living on the urban fringe and were probably unaware of what they could do if they tried.

Pat, personal communication 24-01-06

Pat’s descriptions presented a bleak picture, and brought into focus for me the disadvantages of the young people’s lives.
We get the kids who are virtually homeless here. This is a support system for kids to attend school on a regular basis. The program is getting credibility with the kids who respect the site and nothing has been taken.

*Pat’s comments, NT News, 04-05-06.*

Was Pat’s description a deterrent or blunt warning of what was ahead of me? It had the effect of de-romanticising the project and I prepared myself for a major challenge. I had no great expectations; it might work or it might not. I could not predict what might happen. Pat claimed the drama was “something different” and “likely to appeal to the young women”\(^1\).

**The Projects**

I have provided a table (Figure 1) summarising the main features of the study, the artistic achievements of the young people, their attendance, the different staff involved and the number of participants. I provide this to give an overview of the projects.

---

\(^1\) Telephone conversation recorded notes 24-01-06.
## Workshops at Nungalinya College 2006 – 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program/duration</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Artistic outcomes</th>
<th>Indigenous Australian Partner(s) and others</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2006</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot Project: 6 – 10 March Creating Indigenous Futures Let’s Act Now; 5 days Drama Project 9 AM – 4 PM; No cancellations</td>
<td>3 males 5 females</td>
<td>Nungalinya core of 8</td>
<td>1 script &amp; film <em>Just Another Friday Night</em> 7 minutes in length 8 actors + 1 staff</td>
<td>Principal Karuah; Coordinator Youth Program Pat; Naretha and Clive from Palmville Alternative Education</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2007</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>First research phase: 30 July to 16 August Creating Indigenous Futures 20 days Drama Project Scheduled workshops - 13; unscheduled – 4; Unpredictable – 1 hr, 2 X 1 hr + all day sessions 9 AM – 3 PM 7 cancellations (Nungalinya group)</td>
<td>Nungalinya 2 males 9 females Seaview 2 males 4 females Core 7 females 1 male</td>
<td>Uneven and unreliable Nungalinya core of 4 Seaview core of 4</td>
<td>2 scripts &amp; films <em>When They Stole Us</em> 5 minutes in length 11 actors + 4 staff <em>Waggin’</em> 5 minutes in length 5 actors + 2 staff</td>
<td>New Principal Bernadette; New Program Coordinator Naretha; New teacher Kim; Landscape mentor Jack; New research assistant Arika; Seaview High – Liaison coordinator, Indigenous assistant, assistant teacher and bus driver</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2008</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Second research phase: 5 – 19 September Creating Indigenous Futures 10 day Drama Project 14 workshops Sessions - all day 9 AM – 3 PM and later No cancellations</td>
<td>6 males 11 females Core 4 males 7 females</td>
<td>Nungalinya core of 11</td>
<td>1 script &amp; film <em>Hiccup</em> 9 minutes in length 11 actors, no staff</td>
<td>New Principal Guy Ambrose; Coordinator Naretha; main teacher Kim; 2 new teachers – Mick &amp; Ted Artist – Tammy Andersen performs <em>I Don’t Wanna Play House</em></td>
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*Figure 1.*

Total number participants 2006 – 2008 = 45 +

Total number of core participants each year: 2006 – 8; 2007 – 8; 2008 – 11; total = 27
BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Intercultural Communication through Drama and Theatre

In this section I give some background as to why I was invited to participate in the Youth Program. This will involve a brief discussion of my professional experiences up to this point, as well as my teaching philosophy, and how I had developed expertise in intercultural communication through my drama and theatre work with international students. This largely came about from my participation and leadership in the Foundation Studies Program at Trinity College, the University of Melbourne. Much of my approach to the work at Nungalinya was influenced by my experience with international students, and was the reason why I was considered for the new initiative.

In 1990 the Foundation Studies Program began at Trinity College, the University of Melbourne, as an orientation and bridging program to assist international students with the difficult transition to tertiary study in a country with a different culture, language and education system. As a member of the creative team employed to develop the Foundation Studies Program, I designed a compulsory drama course, as part of students’ English language preparation. A distinctive feature of the course is a study of non-verbal communication through mime and movement activities.

My experiences as a young woman touring and performing shows to widely different audiences developed my view over time of the universality of communicating through theatre; there seemed to be fewer barriers to understanding, as theatre form involves the use of the body as well as the voice. I therefore believed that it was an effective form of communication that could translate into confident everyday usage for people who did not want to be actors, but communicators of a foreign language in a foreign context. Borrowing Spolin’s idea “the techniques of theatre are the techniques of communication” (1977, p. 3), I hoped to unlock the students’ potential.

In 1994, (as Rosemary Dansick), I completed my Master of Education by research, based on the evolution of the drama course in its first three years: From Theatre to Communication: The Application of Theatre Techniques to an Orientation Program for Overseas Students. I undertook the study using reflective action research methodology (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1984 & 1992). I will briefly draw on this research to clarify aspects of my thinking in approaching intercultural theatre work and how this impacted on my preparation for the Pilot Project at Nungalinya.
It was a matter of improving communication rather than accepting a permanent cultural wall. International students needed skills to access a different culture, without loss of their own identities. This involved skills of adaptation and change. Like Stanislavski who wrote that "All peoples possess the same human nature" (1958, p. 137), I also believed in the universality of theatre.

_Dansick, 1994, p. 8_

I decided to train the students in theatre techniques to improve their overall communication in a Western English-speaking context and to assist them with integrating new ideas.

I wanted to empower the students by using theatre and acting techniques, which would:

- Train them in all aspects of communication e.g. listening, speaking, observing, projecting, use of the voice, eye contact and gestures.
- Develop their self-confidence and self-knowledge.
- Help them find their identity in a foreign culture and to find appropriate ways of expressing it within the culture.
- Assist them with assertiveness techniques and skills for interpreting and negotiating situations.
- Train them in improvisation techniques that would be useful for interpreting context and adapting language and behaviour accordingly.
- Teach them relaxation techniques to deal with stress and to help them unwind.

This was my way of assisting the students with their challenge – giving them “structures of knowledge” (Elliott, 1991) to help with the problems of living, useful for the students.

_Dansick, 1994, p. 6_

From my professional experiences with international students I had discovered that theatre techniques offered a substantial skill base for students negotiating their way through educational, cultural and language differences (Blight, 2003). Other practitioners including Schewe (1998), the contributors to Byram and Fleming’s book on intercultural communication (1998), and Gassin (1986, 1992) have expressed similar views. Over the 14 years of teaching in the Foundation Studies Program I taught students from 55 different countries from the Asia/Pacific, South America, South Africa, Europe and the Middle East. This meant I had the chance to refine the curriculum and to develop activities and approaches related to the
Program’s goals. I was conscious of conducting workshops that developed the potential of students of different cultural backgrounds, without imposing my ideas.

I felt my experience of working with young people of different cultural backgrounds was a strong foundation for me to explore the education and communication skills required by Indigenous Australian young people. At Nungalinya I developed a version of applied theatre practice to learn about the context, the participants and to find strategies, which might be effective in bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. As a non-Indigenous woman, I entered the research context on my own and it was a journey where I was the instrument that engaged with the "situation and made sense of it" (Eisner, 1991, p. 34). As such I fully recognized that my responses to the experience required a significant personal commitment and would bear my own interpretation and signature (Eisner, 1991).

Are the Benefits of Applied Theatre Transferable to Indigenous Youth?

My invitation into the Youth Program was based on my hypothesis that the skills for building confidence in international students might also be effective for an Indigenous Australian context. I began to ask questions about this new and unfamiliar context. Is mainstream non-Indigenous Australia like a foreign culture to Indigenous Australian young people who need skills to access it while maintaining their own identities? Would theatre techniques build confidence in these young people? Is it possible to develop skills and engage Indigenous Australian young people who have rejected school? How do you trust and how do you belong in a cultural mainstream where you feel rejected? How do young people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background maintain the integrity of their own cultural background and participate in the unfamiliar context of mainstream education?

There is considerable literature demonstrating that drama can be used successfully as an agent for developing social well-being with disadvantaged people in contexts apart from and including schools. These include: Dalrymple’s Dramaide Project (1996) and Ebewo’s reconciliation work in South Africa (1999), Mangeni’s health projects in Uganda (1996), Chinyowa’s children’s theatre for empowerment in Zimbabwe (1999), Schonmann’s school encounters with Jewish-Arab children (2002) and Chitrachinda’s work with children in Thailand (1996). This project has been informed by this literature.

Gassin’s observations about the impact of integrated learning of drama techniques on second language learners is echoed within Drama theory (1986). Greenwood
(1999a) observes that Heathcote & Bolton (1995), O’Neill (1995), Neelands (1990), Boal (1979), O’Toole (1992) and Taylor (1996) share fundamental understandings and ways of working with an approach to learning that is “integrated, not compartmentalized, one in which intellectual, emotional, social and aesthetic capabilities are engaged” (p. 70). It is this approach that I wanted to embrace with the project at Nungalinya.

There has been significant research internationally with regard to the benefit of arts experiences for marginalized or ‘at risk’ young people (O’Brien & Donelan, 2008c). The Risky Business project was the first longitudinal, interdisciplinary analysis of creative arts interventions for marginalized youth in Australia. O’Brien and Donelan (2008b) investigated the premise that “through the use of artistic processes and creative media young people can rebuild their sense of personal and social identity, shape and represent their views of the world, and re-imagine their future” (p.3). O’Connor (2008), Kelman (2008), Brown (2008), Cahill (2008), Coulter (2008), Hughes and Howard (2008), Hogan (2008) and Burton (2008) support this view. Its focus and themes helped with the analysis of my own work.

**Drama, Theatre Techniques and Applied Theatre**

Four areas of literature inform this research and highlight its particular themes: marginalized youth (Wyn & White, 1997; Giroux, 2003); applied theatre (Taylor, 2003; Prentki & Preston, 2009b; Nicholson, 2005) and drama processes (Donelan & O’Brien, 2008); drama and theatre practice in intercultural contexts (Greenwood, 1999a; Donelan, 2004; O’Connor, 2003; Chinyowa, 1999); and working and researching in Indigenous Australian spaces and communities (Martin, 2003, 2008b; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, 2005; Atkinson, 2008; Marshall, 2004).

‘Applied theatre’ best defines the approach I took at Nungalinya. This term describes arts interventions in non-traditional social and cultural contexts. There are a wide variety of applications within this field with overlap to other areas of drama and theatre practice. Drama practitioners including Nicholson (2005), Taylor (2003) and Neelands (2007) have written about applied theatre and drama. When I began in 2006 I did not define my work as applied theatre, but in the analysis phase of my study found this term within the literature to be the most relevant and applicable to my reflections about the project and its context. Ackroyd contends that applied theatre is “outcome-focused” with “utilitarian agendas” (2007). Applied theatre defines my intention to employ theatre processes to create opportunities for self-development, well-being and social change (Prentki & Preston, 2009a), while engaging in a creative partnership.
Youth and Marginalized Youth

For this research ‘youth’ and ‘marginalized youth’ are central concepts. What does it mean to be ‘marginalized’ or ‘at risk’ as an Indigenous young person? What are the differences between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australian youth? What causes the high rate of non-completion of school for Indigenous young people? There are significant challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to overcome as they progress to adulthood. Key among these challenges is the ability to stay in school and to form a social identity (Wyn and White, 1997). This study explores the concept of ‘participation’ and how it is enacted by the young people within the Nungalinya Youth Program. While my focus was specifically on the young people’s participation and engagement in an applied theatre project, it has been evident throughout this research that the difficulties the young people encountered in their social, cultural and familial lives also had a substantial negative impact on their ability to be involved.

Methodological Approach

I was conscious of the fact that as a teaching artist and researcher I was crossing a line into a world that I did not understand. My belief about communication skills and applied theatre as a creative practice formed the foundations of my teaching approach with the Indigenous Australian young people in the Youth Program. I did not expect there to be a direct parallel with my previous intercultural work at Trinity, but wondered if the theatre processes might be a way to explore the possibilities. Action research as a methodological approach was familiar to me, as I had employed it with my previous research for my Masters of Education. It is a methodology suited to examining creative teaching practices with emancipatory outcomes (Orton, 1994). It allowed me opportunities for observation and reflection within the action of the workshop (Orton, 1994, p. 85). My initial decision to undertake an action research approach is also aligned with the view of Indigenous Australian theorists. Martin (2003, 2008c) suggests action research as a research methodology, as it is inclusive and suited to Aboriginal peoples. There is an expectation of a high level of engagement by the researcher and participation by the research participants throughout the process.

Action research is a process that requires the development of a collaborative relationship between participants, where “the ownership of knowledge” is shared, and where the process and product can be as varied as the people involved (Orton, 1994, p. 86; O’Toole, 1992). However, I found that action research did not sufficiently accommodate my needs as a practitioner and researcher nor the
realities in the young people’s lives, as I tried to understand and respond to the context. At times I found myself overwhelmed by the challenges that confronted me regarding the responsibilities of the partnerships and relationships, and the need to build trust in the creative processes. The high turnover of staff and unreliability of participants was also a factor. For this reason I adopted an alternative methodological model as a reflective practitioner researcher, while retaining some key principles of action research. I discuss this in detail in Chapter Four.

**Changed Research Question**

The complexities of conducting research in the field forced me to change the emphasis of my research stance to be more responsive to the needs and interests of the young people and to understand the changes in my applied theatre practice which were needed to develop a participatory space. Adopting a reflective practitioner research role changed the emphasis so that my major research question became:

How can applied theatre be used in the construction of a participatory, creative space for Indigenous Australian young people?

My subsidiary question was slightly modified and became: What are the characteristics, challenges and opportunities of using applied theatre with Indigenous Australian students?

**ESTABLISHING A PARTNERSHIP**

**Beginning the Partnership with Nungalinya College**

In November 2005 the formation of a partnership between Nungalinya and Trinity Colleges began when the Principal at Nungalinya sent a letter to the Warden of Trinity College. She described their new youth initiative and proposed that Trinity support my involvement in it.

We have just commenced a Pilot Program for Indigenous girls who have dropped out of school in Darwin. This project runs until September 2006, and is funded by the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation. Being a struggling Indigenous young woman is almost a pre-requisite to joining the program. They have been described as at risk of homelessness. The Youth Program is just starting, and we are confident that most will respond positively to being in an environment which is Indigenous, caring and Christian.
Our Academic Dean has suggested that Trinity College might consider sponsoring Ms Rosemary Blight, of the Trinity Foundation Studies Program to come here for a couple of weeks in March or April 2006. Murray supervised Rosemary’s Master’s thesis and remains excited about her outstanding cross-cultural work at Trinity, and her ability to build confidence and relationships amongst apprehensive young people.

The proposal is that Trinity sponsor the costs of Rosemary’s travel, accommodation and salary.

Principal Karuah, Nungalinya College, 14-11-05

The Warden of Trinity College in Melbourne responded positively, however was “not convinced that we should be footing the whole bill”\(^2\) for the trip, which led to further negotiations. Nungalinya agreed to provide accommodation as evidence of its commitment to the exchange\(^3\). This was an important stand by the Warden, as it established a partnership in terms of Nungalinya being committed to the project through the provision of my accommodation. I stood in the middle as an excited teaching artist hoping that my years of intercultural experience would be a satisfactory foundation for the challenge ahead.

Trinity College, where I am employed as a Drama Lecturer, is situated in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, and is the oldest residential college at the University of Melbourne. It began in 1872 as an Anglican residential college and in 1878 also became a Theological College. It maintains these functions today, among its other educational programs. Trinity had distinguished itself in my eyes through its radical (at the time) adoption of the Foundation Studies Program in 1990, and later its commitment to creating pathways for Indigenous students. Trinity had been fostering its own Indigenous Australian initiatives through residential scholarships in Melbourne and was keen to develop an Indigenous Australian bridging program similar to the Foundation Studies Program. In sponsoring me to facilitate a drama project, Trinity hoped to gain some idea of how a bridging program might work.

Following the successful Pilot Project in 2006, Nungalinya College gave written approval for my proposal to undertake further study of the applied theatre project in 2007. This project aimed to build on the promising foundations we had established with the Pilot Project and the research structure would enable me to

\(^2\) Email correspondence 04-01-06

\(^3\) Email correspondence 20-01-06
better identify and understand the impact of the workshops and the young people’s responses to them.

The College is pleased to support such a project, and believes that it will be conducted in a most professional manner, and that you will have the personal skills to consult relevant members of staff if and when difficulties arise, especially those of a cultural nature.

*Portion of letter confirming research agreement 08-05-06*

The Principal and Youth Coordinator wanted to facilitate my continuing involvement in the Youth Program and were keen to explore the areas of research I was focusing on.

**Critical Phase of the Relationship between both Colleges**

There was a critical moment of re-commitment six months after I had conducted the Pilot Project. The newly established partnership between the two Colleges was tested, as numbers of young people attending had been irregular and Pat, the coordinator, was leaving. It seemed that Nungalinya would be forced to close the Youth Program, as they lacked the financial resources to keep it going without external contributions. Pat had tried various ways to attract young people, but their attendance was sporadic. The Principal took action to reach out to the wider Darwin community for support and funding. What is significant is the request by Karuah, the Principal, to ask Trinity to maintain the partnership, and to confirm their commitment in writing, to add weight to her argument.

I am currently in the process of holding discussions with various groups to be partners in the Youth Program. We have a meeting with our local member in September … I would be most grateful if you could write a letter of support for the program to accompany the application.

*Nungalinya Principal’s email 22-08-06*

I asked the Warden to maintain Trinity’s commitment to the Youth Program, as I believed it was a much-needed program in Darwin and the Pilot Project had been sufficiently positive to warrant further work in the area. I wanted to continue working at Nungalinya where I had developed relationships with staff and young people involved in the Youth Program and the College.

I am writing to add my support to your initiative in extending the period of the Creating Indigenous Futures Youth Program beyond 2006 … I am happy for Trinity College to send Rosemary to Nungalinya again in semester one 2007 for a period of up
to 3 months, so that she may continue to develop the Drama program and take the young people to the next level of confidence and achievement.

*Trinity College Warden’s email 11-09-06*

The weight of Trinity’s support and involvement in Karuah’s political negotiations contributed to securing funding for the Youth Program to continue, and deepened the partnership between the two colleges.

The new agreement between the Colleges meant I was seconded to the Youth Program in 2007 and again in 2008. Nungalinya continued to provide accommodation on site and Trinity subsidized my travel and living costs. My experience of the instability of the Youth Program was an important area of learning for me about working in this Indigenous context. The fact that the projects extended over three years meant that changes in personnel in both colleges was inevitable, but it also meant that the passion for the project and the initiative needed to be maintained. The commitment from both colleges was the foundation upon which the applied theatre projects and the partnerships were built. The agreements involved an investment of resources from both colleges and demonstrated a *shared* vision in wanting to improve the circumstances of marginalized Indigenous Australian young people and of maintaining the relationship between the colleges.

“Research ethics for Indigenous communities is at a very basic level about establishing, maintaining, and nurturing reciprocal and respectful relationships” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p. 97). The fact that Nungalinya had *invited* Trinity to be part of the initial project and had re-negotiated the second and ongoing partnership demonstrated a commitment to a respectful relationship. Such consultation, negotiation, and mutual understanding were among principles recommended by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2010) and formed the basis of the ethical relationships central to this project.

The “culture of support” for what was an interventionary drama project within the Youth Program at Nungalinya, meant there were negotiated “shared values and goals” (Donelan & O’Brien, 2008, p. 84) right from the beginning of the partnership. This provided a solid starting point, for me as the teaching artist, and for Pat and Naretha as the Indigenous Australian coordinators. It provided essential infrastructure to support our working relationship, providing human and physical resources, funding and what Donelan and O’Brien define as “a safe space,
a set time within the schedule, respect for artists and their logistical needs and support for artistic outcomes” (2008, p. 84).

The complexity of these early arrangements was challenging and forced me to reassess my decision to undertake the project and my research a number of times. In order to appreciate the significance of this partnership, the project and the site for this study some background to contemporary issues for Indigenous Australians is warranted, as is a brief discussion about the protocols for a non-Indigenous researcher working with and writing about an Indigenous community.

**CONTEXT OF THE STUDY: INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN DISADVANTAGE**

**Language Protocols**

Aboriginal peoples have a shared history of colonialism and identity as Aboriginal Australians. Nationally, Aboriginal peoples have terms of reference to broadly identify themselves, such as Koori for NSW, ACT; Koorie for Victoria; Goori for northern coastal NSW; Murri for Queensland, northern NSW; Nunga for South Australia and Ngarrindjeri, S.A. – River Murray, Lakes, Coorong people; Nyoongah for Western Australia; Palawa for Tasmania and Yolgnu (top end) or Anangu (central) for the Northern Territory; Torres Strait Island Peoples; Murray Island Peoples; Mer Island Peoples. (Aboriginal Reference Group, 2009; Appropriate Terminology, 2008).

Various protocols have been developed for non-Indigenous Australians working with communities and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Protocols can be classified as a set of rules, regulations, processes and guidelines for behaviour or a “code of manners”, which are respectfully adopted when engaging with Indigenous Australians (Hurley, 2003, p. 3). There are different versions of appropriate terminology for research within an Indigenous Australian context and these have changed over time. “Language can be a tool that either empowers or disempowers people” (Aboriginal Reference Group, 2009, p. 1). These language protocols are particularly relevant when writing about or discussing Australian Aboriginal peoples. The significant issue for me is the use of appropriate terms when referring to participants in the project. I have adopted the usage recommended by Flinders University, South Australia (Appropriate Terminology, 2008)4.

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4 This document was adapted from “Using the Right Words: Appropriate terminology for Indigenous Australian Studies for Primary Pre-service Teacher Education”, School of Teacher Education, University of New South Wales in 1996.
According to Flinders University, the preferred names are: *Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal peoples and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples* when referring to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and I adopt this usage within my thesis. “Indigenous” is commonly used but is now considered less appropriate as it is more generic and is not specific to Australian Indigenous peoples. Apart from quotations, I will interchange the preferred terms suggested by Flinders University.

According to the Aboriginal Reference Group at Flinders University, *European colonisation or European invasion* is preferred to describe the arrival of European people to Australia on 26 January 1788. ‘Pre-contact’ and ‘post-contact’ is the preferred terminology and refers to the period before and after European colonisation. Less appropriate terms for referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people include: ‘traditional’, ‘modern’, ‘urban’, ‘rural’ and ‘isolated’, as these categorize and classify Indigenous Australian peoples and can have a pejorative interpretation in certain contexts. For example, ‘traditional’ Aboriginal people living in remote regions have been viewed as ‘real Aboriginal people’ when compared to Indigenous Australians living in cities.

Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are diverse with different languages and cultural beliefs and practices (Aboriginal Reference Group, Department of Community Services, NSW, 2009). Every community will have common ground and similarities, but also very different issues: “there are different ways of communicating, different understandings, different sensitive issues, different Elders” (Hurley, 2003, p. 6).

The names *Indigenous, Aboriginal* and *Torres Strait Islander* were originally colonial labels imposed on a range of people with diverse cultures and languages. Before, during and after European colonisation the First Nation’s people of this land identified themselves by their country, such as *Yolgnu, Larrakia, Darug* and *Gandangarra* to name a few. Permission should be given to non-Indigenous people before using these names. Indigenous Australia is linguistically diverse and before European colonisation it comprised 200-300 autonomous language groups.

**Impact of Colonisation**

Before 1788 several European diseases common in 18th century Europe such as smallpox, measles, influenza, tuberculosis, sexually transmitted syphilis and gonorrhea were unknown to Indigenous Australians (Jackson & Ward, 1999; Butlin, 1983 & 1993; Campbell, 2002; Webb, 1995). The devastating impact of these diseases caused deaths, depopulation and social upheaval among Indigenous
Australian populations. The spread of non-Indigenous people across Australia meant significant loss of control over their lives. Their culture was devalued, families were separated, communities were dispossessed and their traditional food base was destroyed (Butlin, 1983 & 1993). Losing their autonomy as people undermined social vitality, which affected their capacity to meet challenges, including health challenges. A cycle of dispossession, demoralization and poor health was thus perpetuated (Thomson, MacRae, Brankovich, Burns, Catto, Gray, Levitan, Maling, Potter, Ride, Stumpers & Urquhart, 2012).

In 2000, the Medical Journal of Australia described the state of health of Indigenous Australians as “a cause for national shame”. The concern was not simply sickness and inadequate medical facilities. Socio-economic disadvantage in childhood, inadequate nutrition, poor education, unemployment, and psychosocial factors (such as lack of self-esteem and social support, often associated with addictive behaviours) were seen to be “causative of ill-health.” (Eades, 2000, p. 468).

On 8th June 2010, at the Start Stronger, Live Longer, National Aboriginal Health Symposium, Kulunga Research Network, Mick Gooda, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner said:

You can’t work on Aboriginal issues without being a human rights activist, working in Indigenous affairs means that you are working with human rights day in and day out. All the issues being dealt with in Indigenous affairs – effective engagement, poverty, education, health, protection of culture and languages, incarceration rates, protection of women and children, all of these are human rights issues.

Gooda, 2010

Anderson and Whyte support this view: “Indigenous health inequalities are multifaceted and produced within diverse social contexts characterized by social inequalities and political marginalization” (2008, p. 215). There are daily determinants of health that suggest a holistic approach is more suitable for Indigenous people. Included in this are the factors of the significance of “identity formation (self-esteem, lack of self-confidence) and relationship with mainstream” (Mowbray, 2007). These reports indicate that for young Indigenous Australians to develop their potential, there needs to be significant improvement in lifestyle, educational outcomes and socio-economic opportunities, as well as social inclusion and cultural recognition.
**Indicators of Educational, Health, Economic and Social Disadvantage**

There are many factors contributing to the high level of disadvantage in the lives of Australia’s Indigenous peoples. In the table on page 15, I have highlighted some of the key areas of disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples compared to non-Indigenous Australians, especially with regard to education. I have included comparisons such as number of teenage mothers. In 2008, my second research phase, there were four pregnant girls, aged from 14 – 16 years, in the group of 17 young people in the Youth Program.

The tables (Figures 2 and 3) show examples of some of the areas of disadvantage and where there is a need to close the gap\(^5\). This overview presents a snapshot of the different kinds of issues which impact on the lives of young Indigenous Australians. The density of the Indigenous Australian population in the Northern Territory, where my research was based, is the greatest of all states, and disadvantage seems to be increasing. For example, there is a higher level of incarceration (see Figure 3). There appears to be a direct link between the higher levels of non-participation in high school education of Indigenous Australian 15 year olds, and the risk of offending (Purdie & Buckley, 2010). The link between crime and poor educational achievement for Indigenous Australian young people is clearly evident (Thomson et al. 2012).

In providing this statistical overview, it is important to note that there can be wide discrepancies in the data relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. There are a number of problems with the collection of information which impact on effectiveness and accuracy, including: different interpretations of census records where Indigenous status is unknown or not stated; the changing level of identification as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person; wide variations in results between the States and the Commonwealth; the manner in which data is collected and interpreted; differences and variations between remote, rural and urban populations; linguistic differences; English as a second or third language; and sometimes differences in results depending on the Government website and the focus of the report. It demonstrates the level of complexity and multiple challenges of disadvantage within an Indigenous context. Understanding this background was crucial to my understanding of my research.

\(^5\) Close the Gap refers to a National Partnership Agreement established on 2 October 2008 between the Commonwealth of Australia and all the states and territories to address the gap in health, education and economic outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.
A Snapshot of the “Gap” between Australians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total population Australia 22,556,066</th>
<th>Indigenous Australian people 562,681 (2.6% of total)</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous Australian people 21,993,385</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>21 years</td>
<td>37 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 15 years</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 years or younger</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 65+</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age death</td>
<td>Males – 52.5; females – 61.3</td>
<td>Males – 78; females – 83.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality per 1000 births</td>
<td>Males – 8.9; females – 6.7</td>
<td>Males – 4.4; females – 3.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of children under 5</td>
<td>86.2 per 100,000</td>
<td>45.6 per 100,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenage parenting rate</td>
<td>75 per 1000 babies</td>
<td>17 per 1000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved national benchmark in reading</td>
<td>Yr 7: 65%</td>
<td>Yr 7: 88%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved national benchmark in writing</td>
<td>Yr 7: 74%</td>
<td>Yr 7: 99%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved national benchmark in numeracy</td>
<td>Yr 7: 49%</td>
<td>Yr 7: 67%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School retention years 7/8 - year 12</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24 year olds not working</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean equivalized gross income</td>
<td>$398 per week</td>
<td>$597 per week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attained Year 12 or equivalent</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in fulltime employment, education or training after school</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>73.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portion of 15-64 year olds employed</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attained non-school qualification</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attained Bachelor degree</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home ownership or mortgage in Australia</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>72.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2**

Sources:

a – ABS No. 3101.0 (2011) Australian Demographic Statistics.
e – ABS 4704.0 (2011) The Health and Welfare of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, October 2010.
f – ABS 1301.0 Yearbook Chapter, 2009-10. Schools Collection.
h – ABS No. 42210.0 Schools 2012.
i – ABS No. 4714.0 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008.
Creating Indigenous Futures  Ch1: Looking Across the Landscape

*The National Indigenous Reform Agreement: Baseline Performance Report for 2008-09* to the Council of Australian Governments, 30 April 2010, describes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as “the most economically and socially disadvantaged group within Australian society” (p. xi).

**Incarceration**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are massively overrepresented in the criminal justice system of Australia. When the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody reported in 1991, Aboriginal Australian people made up 14% of the total prison population and were up to 15 times more likely to be in prison than non-Indigenous people. In 2008 Indigenous prisoners represented 24% (higher in different states) of the total prisoner population. This increased by 34% between 2002-2006. According to Snowball, the overrepresentation of Indigenous young people in the Criminal Justice System is “one of Australia’s most significant social problems” (2008, p. 3).

**Over-representation in Criminal Justice System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Indigenous Australians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total prisoner population</td>
<td>26% (compared with 2.6% of national population) 15 times more likely to be in prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Australia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recidivism rates for prisoners</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:5 family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of imprisonment for men and women</td>
<td>Women 23 times more likely; men 16 times more likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-17 year olds in jail</td>
<td>52% nationally; WA – 75% (48 times more likely); SA – 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imprisonment rates in Australia</td>
<td>1892 per 100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total prisoners in jail</td>
<td>WA – 43%; NT - 84% of total prisoners (800-1000) Source: Dept. of Justice 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3*

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011c) Prisoners in Australia no. 45170
The total population of Northern Territory is 225,938 (2009) of which 68,599 Indigenous people make up 30.5% (12.2% of Australia’s total Indigenous population). In 2005-06 in NT 100% of persons charged with homicide were Indigenous Australians. Nationally 22% persons charged with homicide were Indigenous Australians (ABS 2011 Prisoners in Australia).

Indigenous Australian children live in families that have experienced three or more major life stress events such as death in the family, serious illness, family breakdown, financial problems or arrest. 22% have experienced seven or more such events (Zubrick, Silburn, Lawrence, Mitrou and Dalby, 2005).

**Close the Gap**

The *Close the Gap* campaign evolved from a Social Justice Report (2005) by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner, Tom Calma, where he called on Federal, State and Territory governments to make it a priority to close the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation. In March 2008 the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd declared the intention of the government “to work together to achieve equality in health status and life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians by the year 2030”. COAG (Council of Australian Governments) subsequently agreed on a number of targets for reducing Indigenous disadvantage in the areas of education, early childhood development, health and employment (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2009). The high level of commitments made by the Australian, State and Territory governments increases the possibility of substantial reductions in the disadvantages experienced by Indigenous people (Thomson et al. 2012). The *Close the Gap* campaign focused on narrowing the life expectancy of Indigenous Australian and non-Indigenous people with a current difference of at least 10-17 years. This government initiative was one of others, which began during the period of research.

**Political Context**

During the period between 2006 and 2008 there were some public attempts by the Government to improve the quality of life for Indigenous Australians. While these did not directly impact on this research project, they occupied some of the conversations of the participants and adults involved in the Youth Program and other Indigenous Australians working and living at Nungalinya. I discovered that these initiatives were not always popular amongst the Indigenous Australians with
whom I worked. They seemed to create either fear and concern as to what impact new policies might have on the young people's lives, or scepticism that the government had been unable to change anything before so were unlikely to make a difference now. These government initiatives meant that the participation of Indigenous young people in education had become a priority in relation to improving the outcomes for young Indigenous Australians.

The Little Children Are Sacred report was published on June 15, 2007 and had significant repercussions around Australia. It presented a picture of Indigenous Australian communities riddled with violence, drug and alcohol abuse, pornography and sexual abuse. It demanded the protection of Aboriginal Australian children from sexual abuse within communities. Lack of education and excessive alcoholism were blamed. The report stated that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian men used alcohol as a "bartering tool" for sex with under-age girls and boys. On June 26, 2007 John Howard, the Prime Minister of Australia, created controversy when he described the content of the report as Australia’s "Hurricane Katrina". The Northern Territory Intervention in June 21, 2007 was part of a Howard Government initiative and The Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) was its immediate response to the child sexual abuse allegations. This initiative involved a wide range of measures for education, child and family health, welfare reform, law and order, employment, housing and land ownership.

In 13 February 2008 the then Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, delivered an official apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for all the harm perpetrated on them since white settlement in Australia, describing some of the atrocities such as the Stolen Generation as a "stain on the nation’s soul". This Apology is also known as the Sorry Speech. In his speech, Mr. Rudd made a commitment to improve the living conditions of Indigenous Australians: “Harness the determination of all Australians to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity” (Rudd, 2008, p.1). He acknowledged that what had been happening was not working and that new approaches were needed to address the serious disadvantages within the lives of Indigenous Australians.

Footnote 6: Stolen Generation refers to a Parliamentary policy, which meant Federal and State Governments imposed the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families between 1869 and 1969.
It was against this backdrop of grand political initiatives by non-Indigenous Australia, that I undertook my two research phases. How did these movements impact on life at Nungalinya Youth Program? For the most part, the common reactions I heard were “we’ve heard all this before and nothing ever changes”. The Intervention made many people feel scared and created more stress amongst my Indigenous colleagues. The fact that funds were withdrawn from one set of government programs to establish a new set of initiatives meant that the 2007 Youth coordinator’s partner lost his job.

The negative effects of colonization are still evident in the Indigenous Australian communities of Australia today, and the recognition of this fact is the reason for programs like Creating Indigenous Futures, which aim to promote positive change in the lives of young Indigenous Australians. It was significant for this research that the original initiative came from the Indigenous Australian partners at Nungalinya and that it has been driven and sustained by them ever since.

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS**

In Chapter Two I examine four fields of literature: marginalized youth; applied theatre and drama processes; drama and theatre practice in an intercultural context; and working in Indigenous spaces and communities. I begin with a discussion of the challenges facing marginalized young people, especially in terms of ‘identity formation’. Within the field of applied theatre and drama processes, I examine participation, relationships and creative spaces, which emerge from creative partnerships and the impact of these elements on ‘at risk’ young people. Next I examine drama and theatre practice in an intercultural context focusing on a capacity to build cultural understanding and social competency across cultures. Many writers argue that drama/theatre provides participants with opportunities for reflection and openness to cultural dialogue and that this develops inclusiveness and empowerment. Finally, I consider these fields within the context of working in Indigenous Australian communities and spaces.

In Chapter Three I address the issue of researching in an Indigenous context, as a non-Indigenous researcher. I discuss the fields of Indigenist and Indigenous research and the use of participatory research models that enhance the involvement of Indigenous people.

In Chapter Four I begin a discussion of my methodological approach by employing eight key themes articulated by Tuhiwai Smith (2005). I propose that qualitative research offers appropriate methods for research in Indigenous settings, and is
particularly suited to a non-Indigenous researcher wanting to establish a
collaborative approach to research. An account of my methodology follows, which
involves a discussion of action research, participatory action research and reflective
practitioner research. Central to this discussion is my adoption of a reflective
practitioner stance to inform my role as a teaching artist participating in an
Indigenous project partnership.

In Chapters Five, Six and Seven I provide an extensive analysis of the three
projects conducted between 2006-2008. Based on my reflective practitioner
approach I analyse the young people’s responses to the applied theatre projects.
The discussion reflects my developing understanding about the meaning of
participation, relationships and creative spaces for the Indigenous young people.
The fieldwork has been divided into three chapters, which reflects my time in the
field. The Pilot Project was the shortest phase and is discussed in Chapter Five.
Chapter Six covers the substantial fieldwork and longest project in 2007, which is
discussed in two parts. In Chapter Seven I discuss the final research phase of
2008.

In Chapter Eight I discuss my findings of this research, focusing on my discoveries
about the meaning of partnerships and relationships, and the nature of participation
by Indigenous Australian young people in applied theatre projects. In reflecting on
the characteristics, challenges and opportunities of using applied theatre processes
to construct a participatory creative space for Indigenous young people, I propose a
model for participation in this context.

In my account of this research study, I refer to data from interviews with key
informants, my Indigenous Australian partners and participants, my research
journal and workshop video recordings. In including direct quotations from adults
and young people I have not edited the content or grammatical structures as I
respect and honour the individual’s manner of expression and their contributions to
the research. I wanted to incorporate their energy and insights, which are reflected
through the use of each participant’s linguistic register.

INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS

The key stakeholders in this study were the coordinators of the Youth Program, key
staff members, a visiting Indigenous performer, the Principals of Nungalinya
College, and the young people who were involved in the three applied theatre
projects.
I have created pseudonyms for all those participating in this project to protect the identity of the young people. This accords with the University’s Research Ethics guidelines and was part of the research agreement with Nungalinya College. The only names I have kept unchanged are those of Nungalinya and Trinity Colleges, and the Indigenous performer Tammy Andersen with her permission.

I have provided an introduction to some of the main people involved, whose voices will be heard throughout this work. In providing a brief background description of some of the young people, I aim to move beyond the negative statistics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. My aim is to present the young people as individuals with their own life experiences and worldviews. The choice of pseudonyms represents my sense of each participant as the workshops evolved.

**Staff:**

**Karuhah** – Indigenous Australian Principal at Nungalinya 2006-07. She initiated the Youth Program and established the partnership agreement with Trinity College.

**Bernadette** – Non-Indigenous Acting Principal at Nungalinya 2007. She questioned the role of the Youth Program in the College. Her view was that an Aboriginal Australian should be teaching the drama.

**Guy Ambrose** – Non-Indigenous American Principal at Nungalinya 2008. He was supportive of the Youth Program and encouraging of the drama.

**Pat** – An *Arrente* woman and first coordinator of the Youth Program 2006. She is a qualified nurse with extensive experience working in Darwin and remote communities. Pat worked previously on the Night Patrol assisting Police in dealing with anti-social behaviour in Darwin. Currently finishing Postgraduate qualifications.

**Naretha** – an Indigenous Australian woman of Aboriginal, Papua New Guinean and Scottish descent. In 2006 she observed the Pilot Project in her role as youth worker at Palmville Alternative Education Unit. In 2007, she became the second coordinator of the Youth Program. We worked closely together in 2007 and 2008.

**Clive** – youth worker at Palmville Alternative Education Unit in 2006.

**Kim** – an Indigenous Australian teacher who came to Nungalinya to teach art, literacy and numeracy in the Youth Program in 2007. She also conducted cultural

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7 Made on 08-05-06
awareness programs for the College. We worked closely together in 2007 and 2008.

Arika – Indigenous Australian research assistant in 2007. She was a student at the Victorian College of the Arts, and resident scholarship student at Trinity College.

Jack – Indigenous Australian who had many skills, including writing poetry, making scones and riding camels. Jack mentored the young people and directed the landscaping project for young men. Jack participated in the filming in 2007.

Mick and Ted – two non-Indigenous teachers who joined the Youth Program in 2008 and stayed only briefly.

Auntie Kath – a Torres Strait Islander textile artist and elder who taught the young people sometimes and joined us on excursions. She was an active observer of every project. Her grandson participated in the 2008 project.

Auntie Trish – an elderly textile artist originating from South Africa, who conducted art sessions for the young people. She was very supportive of the Youth Program and me.

The Young People:

Abby – was 15 when she participated in the first Youth program in 2006. She was a keen participant and leader of the group.

Dorak – was 14 when he participated in the 2006 project. He had lightning physical skills and would leap over the furniture. He was homeless, but attended every day.

Jannali – was 16 when she joined the Youth Program in 2007. She attended regularly for two years, sometimes bringing her baby sister along.

Burnum – was 14 in 2007. He is one of Jannali’s brothers. He was on probation and had already spent time in Juvenile Detention. His attendance at Nungalinya was part of a Court Order. He participated in the landscaping project.

Nama – was 19 and participated in the Youth program 2007-08. She loved sport and participated in the Indigenous Australian Games in Sydney and Canberra.

Yindi – was 13 in 2007 and banned from the program. She returned in 2008 heavily pregnant. She did not know the father of her baby. She was a cousin of Jannali and Burnum.
**Tinara** – was 16 and Jannali’s cousin. She attended sporadically in 2007 and returned in 2008 heavily pregnant, but committed to the project.

**Amarina** – was 18 with a 4-year-old son and participated in 2007. In 2008 she was pregnant with her second child and worked in Reception at the College.

**Nerida** – was 15 when she joined the program in 2007. She had a history of running away. She told me her mother and grandmother were “drinkers”.

**Myndee, Darri, Marinna and Yani** – were aged 14-15 and participated in the program in 2007. They were students from an alternative program for Indigenous Australian students at Seaview High School.

**Yirrigee** – 16, was at Nungalinya on a court order. Her mother asked her to leave and make her own way. She was in the 2007 project.

**Tallara** – was 16 and frequently ran away from home. She was on a court order to attend Nungalinya in 2007.

**Oola** – was 15 and a participant in 2008. She participated in every aspect of the project.

**Derain** – was 16 when he participated in the 2008 project. He had not participated in any educational or training project for two years.

**Tinka** – was 15-16, joined the Youth Program in 2008 and showed aptitude for continuing education.

**Tarana** – 15 and pregnant, joined the program in 2008.

**Girra** – was 14 and had poor literacy in 2008. He came from a violent background.

**Parri** – was 16, Torres Strait Islander and attended in 2008. He sometimes danced in a troupe for tourists. He was awarded a scholarship to Melbourne.

**Arunta** – 16, a shy participant in 2008 who responded to Tammy Andersen’s performance.

**Balun** – 16, a reluctant participant in 2008.

**Ashley, Bonnie, Lena, Mina, Diana** – 15, who joined the Nungalinya group in 2008.
EPILOGUE

A brief transition at Adelaide airport on the way to Darwin

There is a group of Aborigines making a lot of noise. One has a ghetto blaster and there is much loud talking, shouting, wailing. It draws everyone’s attention in the waiting lounge. At times the noise reaches a loud crescendo so that security comes and a number of ‘white’ passengers get up to ‘look’. It appears that there was grief, as a group was leaving on the flight to Darwin and the others were staying in Adelaide.

For me – from Melbourne, it is unusual to see a large group of Aborigines at the airport. Already I feel like I am entering a new place, a new country with a different culture.

The sheer fullness of the group’s expressiveness makes me feel a mixture of things. Humour – that they dare to be so alive in such an antiseptic subdued place. Pity – that they are getting a lot of sideways looks – being misunderstood? Curiosity – they are speaking a foreign language.

On announcing boarding I find myself hoping that I will not be sitting next to them! I will be learning about and facing my own fears and prejudices. The challenge has begun.

Written on my way to facilitate the Pilot Project, 01-03-06
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The study investigates how applied theatre and drama may be used as a creative medium to construct a participatory creative space for marginalized Indigenous young people. There are four main bodies of literature that inform this study:

- Marginalized youth
- Applied theatre and drama processes
- Drama and theatre practice in an intercultural context
- Working in Indigenous spaces and communities

I will begin my discussion with an investigation of some key concepts with regards to marginalized ‘youth’. The concepts of ‘identity formation’ and ‘youth at risk’ are fundamental to this study. Through a discussion of applied theatre and drama processes I will examine how practitioners have facilitated a variety of creative programs designed to make a positive social impact on young people, and how the establishment of such programs has evolved.

MARGINALIZED YOUTH

Concepts of ‘Youth’

‘Youth’ as a category for institutional and Australian policy purposes is defined as between the ages of 13 – 25 years of age. Wyn and White assert that ‘youth’, is regarded as preparation for adulthood and a time of transition between childhood and adulthood. This reinforces the idea that young people are marginal members of society waiting for full acceptance or involvement in the real world. According to Hogan (2008) many young people struggle with “issues of identity, independence, competency and social role” observing that it is a “complicated affair” (p. 125). Hogan, Munro and McLean contend “adolescents differentiate themselves by taking risks” (2004, p. 9).

Wyn and White (1997) argue that a search for identity, or “becoming somebody” (p. 65) is the most important and consuming activity of young people. One of the key places where this search is undertaken is in school, “because in schools young people do the work of negotiating gender, class, race and other divisions” (p. 71). The experience of schooling produces significant challenges for young people, but
for those who fail to stay at school for various reasons, it marks the beginning of an enormous struggle and a loss of personal power if they are under the age of 18 years. The ability to stay at school or not, marks the introduction of other terminology to represent these young people. Those staying in school are deemed as normal as opposed to the rest, who may be “in need of intervention” (p. 12). According to Wyn and White (1997), it is during this period of development that social inequality is constructed and reconstructed via social and political processes.

This perspective of categorizing young people ignores cultural diversity and the variety of circumstances – social, cultural, economic and physical – impacting on young people. Wyn and White (1997) contend that fundamental social change has meant that both achieving adult status and the meaning of adulthood have become “increasingly ambiguous” for Indigenous Australian young people who are caught between two worlds (p. 17). They are “exposed to many anxiety-provoking stressors” including challenging socio-economic and social issues. “Ongoing anger, loss and grief felt by Indigenous people resulting from their original dispossession following colonisation still affect their wellbeing” (Adermann & Campbell, 2007, p. 36). A recent survey indicates that 24% of Aboriginal Australian children aged 4 to 17 years are at a “high risk of suffering clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties”, as a direct result of these life stressors, compared with 15% of non-Indigenous young people (Zubrick et al., 2005). They are also less likely to access agencies or school services for support, due to “feelings of shame they experience when they are not coping” (Adermann & Campbell, 2007, p. 38).

The view of “youth without a future” expounded by Giroux (2003) is widespread across western democracies to the extent that youth is the site where the “anxieties of living” in urban contexts are played out and projected (Giroux, 2003, p. 4). Young people are problems to be feared, contained and solved. However, O’Connor (2008), Kelman (2008) and Wyn and White (1997) contest this negative view. O’Connor (2008) suggests that perhaps it is not young people who are at risk, but adults’ faith in them.

Another term ‘at risk’ is employed to describe marginalized young people, in contrast to the supposed majority who are in the mainstream, doing well and “on target” (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 22; Te Riele, 2006, 2007). The widely used term ‘at risk’ refers to young people who are experiencing one or more of a number of risk factors in their daily lives, to the extent that they are likely to be excluded from mainstream activities such as school and employment. There is general agreement across the literature as to what constitutes a risk factor, such as: family
dysfunction, disconnection or family or social breakdown, pregnancy and teenage parenting, illiteracy and school exclusion, physical and emotional abuse, issues with drugs and alcohol, aggressive behavior and violence, criminal activity, poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, marginalization from refugee status or Indigenous cultural background (O’Brien & Donelan, 2008c; Oakley, 2007; Te Riele, 2006).

This ‘at risk’ categorization highlights the vulnerability of the young and can involve constructing moral, ethical and political judgments about them in relation to others (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002). Being ‘at risk’ can also refer to “those students at risk of not achieving their major learning outcomes to levels which enable them to achieve their potential” (Oakley, 2007, p. 28). The use of this term ‘at risk’ can similarly perpetuate negative stereotypes of young people as “victims, potential criminals or agents of social disorder” (Cahill, 2002, p. 20).

**The Arts and Youth ‘at Risk’**

Through the *Risky Business* project O’Brien and Donelan examine whether and how “the creative arts might increase self-esteem and wellbeing, improve life skills and build social inclusion for young people at risk” (2008a, p. 171). *Risky Business* parallels other research and government involvement with arts-based interventions in UK and USA, as a means of addressing the many issues associated with marginalized young people. The arts projects are seen as having a “transformative” effect, “facilitating a transition from the margin to the social norm” (p. 176; Thiele & Marsden, 2003). There is other recent international research examining the arts as a means to achieve positive social and educational outcomes both inside and outside schools (Grumet, 2004; Rabkin & Redmond, 2004; Deasy, 2002; Brice Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; Dreeszen, April & Dreasy, 1999 and Fiske, 1999). This focus for research is also reflected in Australia (O’Brien & Donelan, 2007; Jones, 2000; Thiele & Marsden, 2003).

O’Brien and Donelan (2008b) undertook a systematic analysis of the impact of young people’s participation in creative arts projects and found there are cognitive, health, social and economic benefits resulting from this participation. They cite studies in the USA (McCarthy, Ondaatje & Brooks, 2004; Stone, Bikson, Moini & McArthur, 1998; Stone, McArthur, Law & Moini, 1997; McArthur and Law, 1996) and studies in the UK undertaken by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education that demonstrate similar positive results. The benefits of arts experiences with youth ‘at risk’ are argued by O’Connor (2008), Kelman (2008), Brown (2008), Cahill (2008), Coulter (2008), Hughes and Howard (2008),
Hogan (2008) and Burton (2008). Art and play have been used as positive interventions with young Indigenous Australians (Adermann & Campbell, 2007, p. 40). The use of narrative, personal stories, anecdotes and yarning “reflects Indigenous oral traditions” thereby providing a means for “alternative stories” of marginalized people to be told. These alternative stories are believed to be “empowering” (White, 1997; Solomon, 2005) and may have application in “assisting anxious Indigenous youth” (Adermann & Campbell, 2007, p. 40).

Arts practitioners, such as Nicholson (2005) who devise creative projects to develop the skills and unrecognized talents of their participants similarly share this approach. The contexts for the creative interventions include rehabilitation and custodial contexts as well as schools and communities. There are examples of these kinds of interventions in my discussion of applied theatre and drama processes, where I examine further creative applications for working with marginalized or ‘at risk’ youth. Taylor (2003), Nicholson (2005) and Prentki and Preston (2009) in particular have informed my study.

APPLIED THEATRE AND DRAMA PROCESSES

Issues around a Definition

The meaning and interpretation of ‘applied theatre’ as a term to describe theatre and drama processes has developed over time. There has been a proliferation of literature about its application by drama and theatre researchers and practitioners in many different contexts. In 2007 at the Applied Theatre Research Conference in Sydney, Judith Ackroyd problematised its evolution by revisiting her earlier work, and reflecting on the developments in the field since 2000, when the term ‘applied theatre’ was “relatively new” (Ackroyd, 2000). Ackroyd contends that ‘applied theatre’ is an “umbrella term for a range of practices”, rather than a term or “label for particular types of practice” (2007, p. 7). In many cases, she argues, the term could equally be applied to examples of drama in education, rather than ‘applied theatre’ and therefore should not be assumed to be a style, form or practice.

Prentki and Preston (2009a) argue applied theatre as a term “defies one definition”, and concur with the notion of “umbrella” to incorporate a “multitude of intentions, aesthetic processes and transactions”, which for them is a hallmark of applied theatre practice (p. 11). The search for a clear definition of this contested term indicates how applied theatre is experimental, and used in as many different ways as there are contexts and practitioners. Ackroyd argues the word “theatre” is used in the title, because it is “grander” and has “magic”, unlike ”drama” (2007, p. 5).
Her comments suggest the underlying political implications of applied theatre projects and how social efficacy is an argument for larger amounts of funding in preference to other less “utilitarian” drama projects. Ackroyd warns against the “overwhelmingly positive descriptions” and the prevailing attitude that all applied work is “for a public good” (2007, p. 4).

Nicholson (2005), Prentki & Preston (2009b) and Taylor (2003) contend that what happens in applied theatre projects is influenced by the context, the social and political landscapes and the different understandings and interpretations by practitioners, which presents a broad canvas of possibility for practitioners. Ackroyd claims applied theatre is defined by its “intentionality”, “participant engagement” and the fact that it “takes place outside a specific theatre setting” (2007, p. 7). Prentki and Preston (2009a), Nicholson (2005) and Taylor (2003) contend that applied theatre involves “a broad set of theatrical practices and creative processes” (Prentki & Preston, 2009a, p. 9) in non-traditional contexts rather than in a conventional theatre setting (Taylor, 2003). For Nicholson, the praxis of applied drama is “a diaspora rather than a disciplinary space” distinguished by encounters between artistic practices and “the vernacular know-how of participants”. It is informed by cultural, personal, social, political and artistic narratives where “learning is negotiated” (2005, p. 159).

Nicholson (2005) prefers the term ‘applied drama’ and discusses the etymology of the words drama and theatre from the Greek words dran (to make, do) and theatron (viewing place). She concludes that processes of action and reflection “lie at the heart of applied drama/theatre” (p. 5). Nicholson (2005) seeks to conceptualize and articulate practice and compares applied drama to mathematics in the way it is used “to solve problems” (p. 10). She employs the metaphor of a “gift” to distinguish some of the ambiguity around the term and demonstrates the potential of a double-edged experience of offering something for nothing, but with expectations attached. “A well-intentioned present (the act of bringing theatre to a community) can be thought poisonous by those who live in a different context” (p. 161). In this sense, she says the gift is “unstable” and has the potential “to interrupt” established patterns of social interaction. Nicholson wants to demonstrate that the ethical considerations with applied drama are an on-going challenge, and require continual negotiation, action, reflection and evaluation as part of the process. According to Nicholson, practitioners “create spaces and places that enable participants to be heard” (p. 163). There is a shared desire among practitioners to “touch the lives of others” in the hope of extending their perceptions of life to “imagine how it might be different” (p. 163). Nicholson is
emphasizing the two-way communication between all stakeholders and the need for continual negotiations within the theatrical processes between practitioners and participants in the development of the creative work and within the power relationships.

Prentki and Preston (2009b), Nicholson (2005) and Taylor (2003) all discuss a function of applied theatre as one of “transformation”. It is where “new modes of being can be encountered and new possibilities for human kind can be imagined” (Taylor, 2003, p. xxv). Notions of participation – inclusivity and enabling of people to take control over their lives – are central principles of applied theatre (Taylor, 2003; Prentki, 2009c; Nicholson, 2005 and others). There are key themes within the applied theatre literature which derive from historical influences: political (Brecht, 1950), performative (Boal, 1979) and educative (Freire, 1996); these concepts give insight into some practitioners’ interpretations and applications of applied theatre in practice.

**A Definition**

I recognize that applied theatre is a contested field with active debates and disagreements around such issues as whether and how change and transformation by participants takes place (Nicholson, 2005; Taylor, 2003; Ahmed, 2004; Prentki, 2009c; Preston, 2009c). However there seems to be some agreement about the central elements of applied theatre and drama practices (Taylor, 2003; Nicolson, 2005; Prentki & Preston, 2009b; Ackroyd, 2007). These elements include:

- Participants as co-creators or joint partners in the exploration and development of ideas;
- Context influencing the location and style of the work;
- Many forms and styles of theatrical techniques;
- The experience as a transformative process for actors and audience;
- Collaborative relationships and community engagement;
- Use of unconventional settings as flexible theatre spaces;
- Outcome focused interventions.

Prentki and Preston incorporate different forms under the umbrella of applied theatre. These styles go beyond conventional theatre by responding to “ordinary
people and their stories, local settings and priorities” (2009a, p. 9). These styles commonly evolved in response to practitioners and communities: theatre for development, community theatre, community performance, theatre for social change, popular theatre, interventionist theatre, drama in education, prison theatre, theatre in education, theatre for conflict resolution/reconciliation, theatre in health and participatory performance practices.

**Relationships between Practitioners and Participants**

Taylor (2003) argues that applied theatre is a medium for action, reflection and transformation and “people are the instruments of inquiry” (p. 30). An applied theatre project creates opportunities for participants who usually have “no real experience in theatre form” (Prentki & Preston, 2009a, p. 14) to experience personal empowerment by exploring their potential and unexpressed ideas within a supportive and creative social context. This creative process between practitioners and participants provides an experience of mutual learning and development, whereby participants equally direct the focus and direction of the work. The success of applied theatre programs relies on the fact that practitioners work in partnership with the principal stakeholders, so they share in the process and the solution. This leads to the situation that practitioners learn as much as the participants.

**The Role of the Practitioner**

There are different terms used to describe applied theatre practitioners to illuminate aspects of the role. Significantly, the practitioner’s relationship with participants is a partnership based on shared knowledge and experience. The role of the practitioner is influenced by the context and a hands-on relationship with all participants is essential for understanding in most circumstances. Taylor (2003) employs the term “teaching artist” to convey both the artistic and educative nature of the role. Prentki & Preston (2009a) discuss the role of “social worker” and “fool”, alluding to the view that engagement by participants in applied theatre helps lead to positive change, “even to the extent of achieving social change” (p. 9). The “fool” is a “trickster adept at spanning two worlds” (Prentki, 2009d, p. 20), bringing fun and instigating a fresh perspective to life. This apparent contradiction “shows that another world is possible, and as citizen artists and human beings, we are always walking on the edge of possibility” (Prentki, 2009a, p. 366).

Nicholson (2005) describes the applied drama practitioner’s style as eclectic, because of the wide variety of techniques and approaches employed in the field.
She claims it is counterproductive to restrict the boundaries between process and product and between script and improvisation. The efficacy of the project depends on the practitioner’s “formulation of a praxis – the embodied synthesis of theory and practice – rather than a particular battery of drama strategies, forms and techniques” (p. 56). This suggests the inherent creativity of applied theatre or drama as a methodology for a practitioner entering into non-traditional contexts to promote positive change. There is no single approach, because the work is dependent on and responsive to the participants and the context. Hence, the artist practitioner is engaged in reflection-in-action (Schön, 1987), a creative dialogue with a community, to adapt to the needs and interests of the participants, to promote change while also guiding the artistic medium. According to Nicholson “participants and practitioners will identify or empathize not only with the narratives of the drama, but also with each other” (2005, p. 80).

**Examples of Practice and Processes Described as Applied Theatre**

Prentki and Preston (2009a) attempt to distinguish the range of “intentions, aesthetic processes and transactions” of applied theatre by dividing their edited volume into broad thematic sections such as: Poetics of Representation, Ethics of Representation, Intervention, Participation, Border crossings, Transformation and Globalization (p. 11). Even though there is overlap between the sections, these themes are convenient ways to identify several elements of applied theatre practice and to highlight the sense of hope and possibility within the practice.

The *Poetics of Representation* is a way of describing the experimental approach, grappling with goals for social change while finding an artistic form that is relevant and responsive to the social circumstances and needs of the community. There is an educative sense about the “intellectual empowerment” for participants, which will enable them to make changes in their real lives. This theme resonates with the influences of Brecht, Freire and Boal (Prentki, 2009d, p. 21). According to Prentki (1999) theatre has assumed an important role among some of the most marginalized communities in the world, as drama processes are about engagement and participation in change.

When an atmosphere of trust and rapport is created amongst participants, this opens the opportunity for negotiating change and development “by using mediums relevant to the participants” (Idoko, 2002, p. 29). Theatre is seen as a language, capable of being utilized by any person with or without artistic talent (Boal, 1979). Within a drama or theatre workshop participants can exist in the paradox of imagination and reality. The imagination enables participants to project themselves
into other levels of experience, in ‘as if’ mode, opening up opportunities to be something and someone else (Wootton, 1982). The imagined world of the drama becomes “a window through which others can gain a sense of their own power, self-worth and being” (Chinyowa & Merley, 2004, p. 52). The other benefit of participating in these fictitious worlds is that “the rules can be changed” to make way for “new possibilities” (O’Toole & Donelan, 1996, p. 10).

Applied theatre provides opportunities for individuals, groups and communities to develop confidence for engaging with the world and with a greater self-awareness. Marginalized people or “the oppressed” (Boal, 1979), can use theatre as a new language, a way to express themselves to discover new concepts. The enjoyment of exploring ideas with other people “in a temporary space” within the applied theatre workshop creates an energy or “buzz”, that “can help forge new conceptualizations of self and relationships with other people” (Hughes & Ruding, 2009, p. 222).

The Ethics of Representation signals the vulnerability of marginalized people. By inviting the participants to be co-researchers, rather than research subjects, the participants are in control of the way their lives and ideas are represented and the reality of their lives is valued. These methods invite dialogue and inclusion as opposed to monologue (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2009, p. 91). Many practitioners (Schechner, 1993; Neelands, 2002) argue performance can be “empowering” and “transformative” for participants through opportunities to imagine “beyond a restricted socially and culturally defined sense of self” (Donelan, 2004, p. 28). It is also an intellectual challenge for participants to think and make decisions about the action, and those with poor literacy and numeracy skills are not denied access. There is no exclusion of individuals, as ideas are embodied and expressed in a variety of ways, not requiring written forms of expression. Through “negotiating and renegotiating the elements of dramatic form, in terms of the context and purposes of the participants” (O’Toole, 1992, p. 2) group meaning is explored.

Preston identifies the challenge of achieving genuine Participation by those involved by highlighting the artist’s skill at developing relationships with participants thereby “enabling democratic ownership” of the creative medium (2009b, p. 129). This idea resonates with Freire’s ideas for empowering relationships between students and teachers. By enabling normally marginalized groups to engage at this level of “committed involvement” means it is not “pseudo participation” (Freire, 1996, p. 51). Prentki (2009a) raises questions about the context specific nature of applied theatre, which can be a strength and a limitation. If participants are too safe, he
argues, participants will stay within their comfort zone, “where habit and identity are confirmed, familiar stories are retold, and ancient prejudices are affirmed” (p. 364). He claims it depends on the practitioner “to make something into meaningful social action” (p. 364), so that participants can speak openly, imagine without fear and develop new relationships and understandings. Providing opportunities for participation, play and ownership are three important elements of applied theatre practice.

The concept of *Border Crossings* highlights the experience of participation and of going outside the familiar in the pursuit of change, not just for the participants, but also for the applied theatre practitioner. Prentki (2009b) applies the notion of “border crossings” (p. 251) as processes of trust, risk and vulnerability, which participants enact when engaging in imaginative and reflective processes. Prentki equates the process of “self-empowerment” for participants to the idea of moving from one place to another, and crossing borders “into unfamiliar territory”, or going outside comfort zones when improvising characters and exploring different perspectives within the drama (p. 253). The dual purpose of the “border”, which provides protection and security within its confines, simultaneously restricts participants from “developing new capacities or trying on new identities” (p. 251). Therefore, Prentki (2009b) argues, practitioners need “a willingness to engage participants in border crossings” (p. 251). This difficult process applies equally to individuals, communities and the practitioner who conducts the theatre project (p. 253).

*Intervention* is a vital feature of applied theatre practices and Prentki suggests practitioners can facilitate processes of self-empowerment and act as a “decolonizing agent” (2009c, p. 182). Prentki draws our attention to notions of power and the danger of intervening “on behalf of or with those whose voices are not normally heard” (p. 181). These practitioners use applied theatre as a creative means to intervene in communities and to contribute to positive change. Boal’s influence is marked with regard to creative interventions. His Forum Theatre was a means by which the audience became directly involved in the action of a play. It is this act of participation, which Boal hoped would translate into taking action in real life. Trends for theatre in education and community theatre in the UK were influenced by these ideas. The Geese Theatre company, for example, uses theatrical interventions with offenders and people at risk of offending, believing the performance and/or process has the power to motivate, to shift people’s thinking and to act as a catalyst for change. A key feature of their approach is for actors to represent recognizable characters engaged in negative behaviors in situations
familiar to the offenders. Being forced to confront their behaviour from the audience helps them to reflect on their own decision-making and “to consider potential alternative strategies” (Watson, 2009, p. 49).

Other creative interventions in the UK involve the use of applied theatre with young offenders to support their transitions to adulthood by reinforcing protective factors through creative and social skills, and to tackle risk factors associated with anti-social or offending behaviors (Hughes & Ruding, 2009; McAvinche, 2009; Wilkin, Gulliver & Kinder, 2005). Through the creation of fictional characters in situations, the young people have a reflective distance to view and evaluate their responses and actions as an imagined other. According to Wilkin, Gulliver and Kinder (2005) drama enhances perspective through role-taking options and empathic capacity, so the young participants may later more readily engage in mainstream educational opportunities (Hughes & Ruding, 2009). The imagined world of the drama becomes “a window through which others can gain a sense of their own power, self-worth and being” (Chinyowa & Merley, 2004, p. 52).

Transformation refers to the effectiveness of the applied theatre process and its impact on the lives of the participants, as well as the recognition of the difficulty of sustaining long-term positive results for individuals and communities. According to Prentki (1999), it is through the dramatic process, when playing a character, devising and improvising a scene or story that some of the power and capacity which occurs “leaks out into the psyche of the actor” thereby providing the spark “which can ignite that moment of initial transformation” (p. 106). Taylor (2003), Prentki & Preston (2009b) identify the significant influence of Freire who argued that at the heart of educational transformation is an enabling of human beings to consciously reflect on their actions and then change their behaviour as a result. Taylor describes this transformation as a praxis consisting of action, reflection and transformation (Taylor, 2003, p. 9).

Nicholson (2005) critiques the concept of transformation, self-confidence and self-empowerment. Rather than participants thinking about themselves in new ways, she argues participants break old patterns by developing new kinds of relationships with others. The drama process is about “being accepted and judged differently by others in society” (p. 124), which is crucial in the process of personal change. Teerijoki (2001) contends the kind of interpretive meaning-making which occurs in drama through its artistic processes forces an individual to create meaning with regards to relationships as well as gaining new perspectives on him/her self, life and the world in general. The key concept is that the experience is transformative.
and gives life to a new type of awareness (p. 102). According to Teerijoki, central to the notion of transformation are elements of “mental broadening, connection and an opening towards a new type of awareness” (2001, p. 103). O’Connor (2003) observes that the educative function of improvised role-play is to both act and reflect on the role, like a spectator of a performance. “Reflection in the action of drama occurs as a result of the ability to both act and reflect on the actions of the role at the same time” (p. 19). Boal (1979) in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, defines this self-other imagining as metaxis, whereby a person in role is able both to perform and view the performance as an outsider, thus becoming actor and audience simultaneously.

Prentki links applied theatre with *Globalisation* arguing that applied theatre work is concerned with “the restoration of dignity, the reclaiming of rights” and the discovery of “the person beneath the label” (2009a, p. 363). Applied theatre is a way for people to “try to make the world a better place in which to live”, and a method of “playing” away from the demands of participants’ usual lives (p. 366). Prentki argues that applied theatre has to go beyond the benefits of confidence building and social change for the participants, by finding ways to incorporate the power brokers at both national and local levels. He describes the process as “empowerment for the disempowered” (2009c, p. 182) helping victims of personal or social oppression. Prentki provides two examples where theatre has directly impacted on forcing government change. He cites the work of Annet Henneman in Italy, Teatro di Nascosto, where she brought politicians with the power to change the legal framework into direct contact with refugees and asylum seekers, using theatre to convey their stories (Prentki, 2009c).

The theatre group *Nos do Morro* made a significant contribution in Brazil’s marginalized communities known as the “favelas” (Coutinho & Nogueira, 2009). Through gaining recognition using theatre and performance, the community managed to stop the destruction of their houses and livelihoods. This was a story by men and women who believed that together they were “capable of transformation” (Coutinho & Nogueira, 2009, p. 176). Other examples of transformative globalisation using applied theatre practice include: performance and self-advocacy for people with learning disabilities in UK (Terret, 2009), Zimbabwean community theatre in a time of hardship (Byam, 2009), child rights theatre for development with disadvantaged and excluded children in South Asia and Africa (Etherton, 2009), and mobilizing rural Indigenous populations in Canada around issues of HIV (Auger & Heather, 2009).
Problems with Applied Theatre Practices

Rahnema (2009) questions the concept of imposing “empowerment” on others and refers to Sachs’ formula (1999) that ‘A has the secret formula of a power to which B has to be initiated’ (p. 143). This formula recalls Spivak (1990) who also questioned “benevolence towards others” (p. 19), by those who presume that their understanding of the world will “liberate” those they deem less fortunate. For Rahnema, “people are not powerless, but their power is a different kind” (p. 144). Therefore participating in applied theatre processes means being able to listen and to share “free from any fear or predefined conclusion, belief or judgment” (p. 145). According to Rahnema change does not mean conforming to a preordained pattern designed by others, or even by one’s own illusions and conditioned ideals, but “starts from within”, and is not reliant on external factors (2009, p. 146).

Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2009) contend that there is a need for applied theatre practitioners to monitor themselves through interrogatory practices and to avoid “speaking for others” (Alcoff, 1999). According to Preston (2009b) achieving genuine participation in applied theatre projects is challenging, as the practitioner must tread carefully through the “myriad of agendas, power relations and competing ideological interests rife in most projects and settings” (p. 127). Preston (2009b) draws attention to the political and ethical issues facing applied theatre practitioners when working with participants who may be vulnerable and/or marginalized from the dominant mainstream culture. Some practitioners, such as bell hooks, make a distinction between choosing marginality as a site of resistance in preference to being marginalized within the mainstream and describe this position as a “space of radical openness” (2009, p. 80).

Thompson’s (2009) confronting article about an applied theatre project with child soldiers in a rehabilitation centre in Bindunuwewa, Sri Lanka, raises an important issue for applied theatre practitioners, as for some participants it is a life and death issue. In this case, all the participants were killed the day after a workshop because of political issues outside of the control of theatre workers. While the projects might enable a means of coping and resisting the worst of a context, rarely do they enable people to transcend it and a “strategic vision of change” is difficult (p. 122). Thompson refers to De Certeau’s theory about tactics and strategies with respect to applied theatre projects in vulnerable contexts. Tactics are “ways of operating” within the situation, in the moment. These are everyday practices such as “clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things” which differentiate from strategies “that seek to intervene in a situation” (De Certeau, 1984, p. xix).
According to Thompson, many applied theatre practitioners want to generate strategic action when usually they are “only operating at the level of tactics” (2009, p. 121).

Prentki (2009c) raises concerns about the role of applied theatre in vulnerable communities and challenges its effectiveness, even questioning the validity of working based on an invitation. He comments that it depends on “who has done the inviting” (p. 181). He argues that intervention by an applied theatre practitioner, as a “decolonizing agent” to promote autonomy and empowerment, is a necessary process to enable oppressed people to make meaning of their lives. “The people may have the will to decolonize but the generations of oppression may have robbed them of the means” (p. 182).

**The Arts and ‘Youth At Risk’ and Applied Theatre and Drama Processes**

There are similarities between the work of applied theatre practitioners and artists facilitating creative arts practices for marginalized youth. Notably, the *Risky Business* research by O’Brien and Donelan (2008b) presents a canvas of extensive research in the field of arts-based interventions for young people ‘at risk’. O’Brien and Donelan interrogate the concept of ‘risk’ and its implied meanings and employ the term to describe the engagement of young people in arts activities for the first time, as a “risk” (2008a, p. 172). While acknowledging the complex interpretations associated with the concept “at risk” (Oakley, 2007, p. 28) the artists, researchers and practitioners participating in the *Risky Business* project operated from two broad assumptions: “that there is latent or unrecognized potential in marginalized young people, and that making art is about taking risks” (O’Brien & Donelan, 2008a, p. 173).

One of the key themes running through the *Risky Business* research is that of social inclusion of young people living on the margins drawing on their current skills (Cahill, 2008). Much of what these artists and researchers attempted to do is to generate changes in the way disadvantage was viewed both by the young people who participate in the programs, and by society at large. Boese (2008) asks if social inclusion can be achieved through participation in the arts and argues for the provision of “pathways” into employment and the creative industries (p. 41) and for inclusion in a political sense by finding ways for the participants “to express themselves as citizens” (p. 42). Cahill (2008) raises the notion of the potential for young people at risk to unlearn or dismantle “disempowering stories about the self” (p. 17) through the experience of being viewed as citizens who have something to contribute. She proposes learning in contexts where skills are required for real and
current tasks (p. 19). When young people are cast in roles of “meaning, purpose and value”, as they are in *Your Shoes My Shoes* project (Cahill, Murphy and Hughes, 2005), there are significant benefits and it is likely to be more empowering for the participants (p. 25). Cahill observes there is a sense of community usefulness for young people being involved in something that matters. The creation of a narrative with a purpose larger than the self, and which interests the young people, can have positive benefits.

Cahill argues that young people can engage in projects drawing on their current skills, rather than waiting until they become something else, for example, confident and successful. This process validates their positive qualities and place in the world, even if they are living on the margins, and builds a constructive sense of possibilities. According to Cahill, this approach is empowering because the young participants act as “co-providers” and part of the solution (2008). For Cahill “bridging” with the outside world, and “bonding” opportunities are rich experiences for young people and significant in terms of finding life pathways (p. 25).

Similarly, Brown, who has conducted research in youth correction centres, advocates the importance of focusing on what young people have to offer, what they can be proud of, their “strengths” and capitalizing on these (2008, p. 61). It is interesting to note that across the literature, young people comment on the importance of “socio-personal gains” more than the development of “artistic skills and knowledge” (Hughes & Howard 2008, p. 113). The arts in this context are used as a “bridging strategy” or “engagement tool” involving young people who have never felt comfortable in the mainstream of society (Hogan, 2008, p. 124). One of the strategies employed by practitioners to assist the involvement and commitment of at risk youth is through depersonalizing the narratives. This is seen as important as it provides a protective distancing for the participants and can be respectful of young people who are vulnerable (Cahill 2008, O’Brien & Donelan 2008c, O’Connor 2008, Kelman 2008). This is also utilized as a technique to enable young people to reflect on and analyze their own behaviour, from a distance ( Watson, 2009; Hughes & Ruding, 2009).

The role of practitioners within the field of arts and ‘at risk’ youth has a significant influence on project outcomes. According to Hogan (2008) there is a range of significant skills in the repertoires of those working with marginalized youth, as the young people need support physically, socially and emotionally. For this reason she describes the practice as requiring “head and heart”, as it is necessary for practitioners to address the social and emotional needs of the participants while
pursuing the artistic objectives (p. 130). Hogan observes that many of the young people she worked with lacked “the emotional and social competencies central to resilience” (2008, p. 134). She suggests daily opportunities to debrief can assist with the emotional and relational factors central to any planning considerations. This accompanying focus on the wellbeing of the young participants in applied theatre and arts projects is very demanding and requires individual artists and practitioners to have significant personal and professional experience and skills. Without them, the artistic work would falter if not fail. Donelan and O’Brien reiterate similar findings with the Risky Business project, where the research showed that the artists working within these programs required “complex pedagogical and interpersonal skills” (2008, p. 62).

Kelman, as part of his working process with at risk young people, creates opportunities to include their voices, “both as meaningful art making and as research” (2008, p. 94). In his practice Kelman noticed that the young people had important things to say, which gave them a sense of connection to the outside community and between themselves as individuals. For Kelman, the teacher or facilitator needs to take a guiding role rather than an authoritative stance as the group develops their stories and their script. He describes the process as “dialogical pedagogy” (p. 95), when using drama to empower the group over the individual. Kelman affirms that “the dialogical play-building process” enabled participants to “construct moral meanings that represented the messages of their play” (p. 102). He describes this process as “self-narrative of social agency” (p. 105), where the performance of the young people’s stories have a liberating effect through its power to engage the interest of peers and the outside world in the audience by sending a message that they wish society “might be different”. O’Brien and Donelan similarly argue that the arts give young people “agency and a voice”, through offering “opportunities for facilitating a dialogue” (2008a, p. 190).

There are arguments for longer-term projects, as trust takes time to build and there are a number of engagement and attendance issues with all young people ‘at risk’ (O’Brien and Donelan, 2008c; Kelman, 2008). A short-term and quick fix approach is not satisfactory as the youth ‘at risk’ research attests. Hogan argues for the need to have longer and realistic time-lines and an effective orientation phase (Hogan, 2008). Cahill argues for the need to resource long-term projects (2008). Brown discusses the process of stopping offending and compares the challenges of young offenders to those of school students undertaking an education: “offenders need an atmosphere in which they can stumble occasionally and not pay a penalty” (Brown, 2008, p. 60). Coulter argues that desistance from
offending is a process which develops over time, so there needs to be opportunities to attend more than one program (Coulter, 2008). From her research in Manchester and Vienna, Boese similarly observes the need for longer-term projects when working with marginalized teenagers (2008). Even within a large research program such as Risky Business, once the artistic projects finished, the researchers and artists were unable to maintain contact with most of the young people due to the transient nature of the young people’s lives; they therefore could not ascertain the extent to which the positive impact of participation and engagement was ongoing (O’Brien & Donelan, 2008c). For Hogan (2008) there is little benefit in offering arts-based programs without appropriate support structures. This requires pathways for the young people beyond the finishing date of the arts project.

Hogan (2008) offers recommendations in order to address issues of poor attendance and for sustaining participant engagement, including the provision of a range of learning styles. She suggests visual, kinesthetic, aural and oral styles as being effective with at risk young people, including developing opportunities “to play” and “have fun” (Hogan, Munro & McLean, 2004; Hogan, 2008). Hogan observes there are other critical factors when working with at risk youth, including the need to build partnerships and relationships of trust, through longer-term projects and flexible frameworks. Central to her argument is the need for effective collaboration between stakeholders and partners. There is an emphasis on teamwork and partnership processes for Boese (2008). These recommendations resonate with several practitioners who observe the need for the young people to be part of the solution in addressing their needs (Cahill, 2008; Brown, 2008).

Applied theatre artists and practitioners attempt to engage the young people in projects through the achievement of a tangible product (Hogan, 2008; Cahill, 2008; Donelan & O’Brien, 2008). A product provides a clear outlet for the young people’s creativity and the “development of personal agency” (Hogan 2008, p. 132). For Donelan and O’Brien, a tangible artistic product at the end of a project, facilitates “positive personal, social and artistic outcomes for the young people” including “increased connectedness with peers, family and community” (2008, p. 75). Another benefit of the performance or artistic product is that it challenges stereotyped views about marginalized young people and their inability to achieve anything.

A number of researchers and artists suggest that a “safe space” is a requirement for effective and ongoing engagement in the arts project. For Donelan and O’Brien the provision of an appropriate physical space “assisted in the development of
connectedness and a sense of community” (2008, p. 4). For Hogan (2008), it was somewhere the young people might relax and feel comfortable. For the artists and young people a safe space was a “liminal space” that fostered a sense of community and social connectedness, “a family sort of environment” where transitions and transformations were possible (O’Brien & Donelan, 2008a, p. 183).

O’Brien and Donelan, like Turner, argue that “artistic creativity takes place within a ‘liminoid’ space” (2008c, p. 184). This is a voluntary space within an applied drama process and enables participants the freedom to explore. As such, it offers the “potential to challenge societal norms and generate ‘the seedbeds of cultural creativity’ ” (Turner, 1982, p. 28, cited in O’Brien & Donelan, 2008a p.185).

With the complications and uncertainties in the lives of ‘at risk’ youth, facilitating arts projects is not straightforward. According to Hogan, there needs to be provision for “multiple entry and exit points” to facilitate the range of needs of the young people and to capitalize on any attendance and engagement that occurs during the project. She suggests that programs could “recycle or loop several times” allowing for recurring access and opportunity for as many young people as possible (2008, p. 135). Thiele and Marsden (2003) who employ the term ‘community cultural development’ to describe models of practice involving arts practitioners working with marginalized young people in the community, have influenced the development of applied theatre and drama projects. Community cultural development is strategic and takes place within health, welfare and community contexts rather than in traditional cultural or arts settings. By being more accessible the arts practice is seen as transformative as it can facilitate connections for a young person living on the margins of society.

As creative practice, applied theatre and drama processes are used to intervene in the lives of others to impact in positive ways. This intervention can be seen as a kind of “bridging” across cultural, racial and socio-economic divides (Grady, 2000), a connecting of two worlds (Greenwood, 1999a), an addressing of the inequalities and differences between mainstream and the fringe, between the powerful and the powerless (Prentki & Preston, 2009; O’Brien & Donelan, 2008a). This connection invites inclusion for those usually excluded (Nicholson, 2005).

Chinyowa, drama is a “tool for social change”, as it can empower participants to make choices in life based on new perspectives. Within the workshop space, participants question and explore ideas. Theatre functions as a medium through which disadvantaged students are “made to discard the oppressions real or imagined that act as barriers to their lifelong learning goals or aspirations”. Drama practice for Chinyowa & Merley is like a “window”, so “others gain a sense of their own power, self-worth and being” (p. 52).

The Indigenous participants in the Youth Program struggled with engaging in mainstream non-Indigenous educational programs. Living on the fringes of urban Darwin, in communities or pockets of Indigenous accommodation, they needed to move between the worlds of non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians. The negotiation between two worlds has been understood as causing a “split” (Greenwood, 1999a) or “self-contradiction” (Chinyowa, 1999) within young people. I would now like to examine the idea of moving between cultures through drama and theatre practice in an intercultural context.

**DRAMA AND THEATRE PRACTICE IN AN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT**

There is substantial literature which affirms the use of drama and theatre processes in an intercultural relationship between practitioners and participants, and in providing the means and opportunity to assist with the integration and investigation of two or more cultural perspectives (Alfred, Byram & Fleming, 2002; Donelan & O’Brien, 2006; Donelan, 2004, 2005; Greenwood, 1999a; Bharucha, 1996; O’Connor, 2003; Chinyowa, 1999; Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, 2009; Schechner, 1993; Neelands, 2002). The positive impact of the exchange stems from exploring imaginative relationships, the opportunity to “embody different ways of seeing the world” (Nicholson, 1999, p. 87) and the interactive dialogue which unfolds within the “transformative space” (Schechner, 1993; Neelands, 2002). It is claimed that the participation and exchange within performance allows participants to “engage with issues of identity, equity and diversity” (Donelan, 2004, p. 16), which occur at the “crossroads of culture” (Pavis, 1992, p. 2). For Brahmachari (1998) drama operates as a “space to create, explore, develop and invent cultures and identities” (p. 23).

Janinka Greenwood who researched drama and theatre processes in an intercultural context, has informed my thinking in this study. Greenwood (1999a) focused on how theatre might be used to interpret the “emergent space” between cultures. She claims theatre offers “ways of bridging the split” (1984, p. 46 cited in
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Greenwood, 1999a p. 151); participation in a dramatic experience, either in workshops or performance, leads to new and different insights through intellectual, emotional, physical and intuitive engagement. Such engagement builds opportunities for participants to explore new ideas. According to Greenwood (1999a) the creative, interactive and dramatic processes of a drama workshop become “tools” for “breaking down cultural ignorance” and promoting positive change in the lives of participants.

Creating the ‘Third Space’ and Cultural Integration

Greenwood borrows from Bhabha (1994) the term ‘the third space’ to describe the complex and emergent space that evolves from the bicultural encounter. Her idea of the ‘third space’ as a way to describe what happens when working across two cultures has resonance with Michael and Ludmila Doneman from Contact Youth Theatre who established a philosophy called the Third Place (Enoch, 1992). Wesley Enoch, Aboriginal Australian director and drama educator, (1992, p.25) describes this Third Place as a “meeting place” where two cultures can meet, discuss and work together, with a sense of integrity and equal cultural value. For Greenwood (1999a) the use of theatre enables the drama practitioner to create opportunities for exchanging ideas with participants, for establishing a dialogue between cultures and to share worldviews. Alfred, Byram and Fleming (2002) observed that theatre techniques offered students a potential skill base for negotiating a way through educational, cultural and language differences.

According to Greenwood, what occurs in the ‘third space’ is a range of drama and theatre activities, which are similar across forms. For Greenwood theatre is “a way of knowing”, not only as a form “where social understandings are acted out”, but it is also “a means for shaping and refining such understandings” (1999a, p. 138). Greenwood claims that some of the terms used by practitioners to describe a range of “related processes” used to create the third space include: drama (Bolton 1998; O’Toole, 1992), performance (Schechner 1988; Handelmann 1990), theatre (Boal 1995; Grotowski, 1995 and process drama (O’Neill, 1995). Greenwood (1999a) argues, “the terms can be regarded as interchangeable” (p. 140) in the sense they share “the search for form as well as for meaning” (p. 145). For Greenwood then, the purpose of engaging in a drama/theatre aesthetic is the bicultural understanding that occurs. “The engagement that takes place, and the knowing that results, occurs at emotional and visceral levels as much as at intellectual ones” (p. 145).
Gassin supports this view when she describes the use of drama techniques in the context of advanced second language learners as a “uniquely integrated approach to the development of both oral communication and personal growth” (1986, p. 57). Schewe describes this integrated approach to learning as an opportunity for participants to learn an “artistic grammar”, a universal language for shared communication and exploration of ideas. He argues that participants learn this “language” through exploring the various roles of actor, director, writer and audience (1998, p. 216). This experience develops personal understanding and “closeness to the foreign culture” (1998, p. 220).

Neelands (1996) defines four modes operating within drama and theatre processes: personal, cultural, communal and social/political. He argues that theatre can be a transforming cultural resource for the participants. Through exploration as actor and character participants “may be socially and culturally transformed” (2002, p. 8). Pascoe similarly defines four overlapping purposes of drama: to entertain, to inform, to express and to change. He claims drama can create meaningful experiences for individuals and the group across social, cultural, ritual and metaphysical levels of understanding (1999).

Chinyowa (1999) examines the notion of cultural division within young people in Zimbabwe. He argues that the impact of colonial modernization has contributed to a loss of connection with Indigenous modes of expression and socialization to the point of causing children “to become more and more alienated from their cultural heritage” (p. 79). The perception of risk and reluctance to negotiate between worlds is increased when a cultural group is in a vulnerable position in terms of the mainstream power culture (Bharucha, 1996). According to Chinyowa (1999) the “cultural violence” caused by European Christian missionaries in the mid nineteenth century who opposed traditional ceremonies, rituals and cultural practices, combined with the imposed Western-oriented school curriculum, meant African children “admired” the culture of the colonizer and stopped believing “in their names, their languages, their cultural practices and, ultimately, in themselves” (p. 77). The Children’s Performing Arts Workshop was created as a means to integrate traditional and modern cultural forms and provide an antidote to the “self-contradiction” where an individual’s identity is divided between two worlds (Chinyowa, 1999, p. 79).

Balme (1996) discusses the idea of *syncretic theatre*, which results from the interplay between a western theatrical tradition and the elements of indigenous performance forms of a postcolonial culture. This is demonstrated in the drama
workshop space where there is room for participants to explore and use their own performance skills developed within their families and culture. The work that is developed is a mix of the two. Chinyowa (1999) argues that post-colonial children’s theatre in Zimbabwe can be regarded as “an instrument of cultural integration” (p. 80) and a “potent vehicle for the mediation of children’s thought, behaviour and feelings during the process of growing up” (p. 81).

The Snuff Puppets project in Australia (Donelan and O’Brien, 2006) which took place in a residential secondary college for Indigenous Australian students, explored an Indigenous Dreaming story through music, storytelling, dance and puppetry. The performance was a “transformative experience” for the young people who were “trying to negotiate between their cultural and contemporary landscapes” and “offered a chance to walk in both worlds” (p. 14). According to Donelan and O’Brien, the use of giant puppets in the performance gave the young people the opportunity to be protected “from personal exposure and potential shame” (p. 13). The deputy principal of the college observed positive effects on the young people who had histories of family breakdown, violence, substance abuse and depression. The researchers argue that engagement in this project “resulted in a reduction of risk factors, improved personal skills, and a greater sense of community and social inclusion” (p. 3).

Donelan (2004) argues that drama processes enable students “to share, examine, build on, juxtapose, reconstruct and transform intersecting and divergent stories and perspectives”. The interactive nature of these processes allows space for “each person’s sense of cultural connections and differences”, which subsequently “becomes a resource for the group to generate new ways of seeing and to provoke new questions and new possibilities” (p. 24).

WORKING IN INDIGENOUS SPACES AND COMMUNITIES

In this section I discuss the work by Aboriginal Australian researchers Karen Martin (2008c), Lester Rigney (2002a) and Anne Marshall (2004) as key resources for this study. Rigney (2002a) has a clear vision for an education that offers both a western and an Indigenous emphasis for young people and as a means to strengthen the future for all Indigenous Australians. I discuss Karen Martin’s notion of ‘relatedness’, which is central to understanding how relationships and connections to all living entities are fundamental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews. Finally I examine Marshall’s perspective of incorporating
elements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander drama and storytelling skills into mainstream classrooms.

**Indigenous Australian Perspectives on Education**

Indigenous Australian researchers and educators claim it is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to achieve in Western education, as well as to maintain and foster their own culture and languages (Martin, 2008c; Atkinson, 2008; Rigney, 2002a; Marshall, 2004). Rigney (2002b) asks for the right for Indigenous people to be more than involved in the education of their children; they need to have “greater Indigenous control and autonomy” (p. 74). According to Rigney improving the situation for Australia’s Indigenous peoples “cannot be meaningfully discussed outside the context of Education and Language.” (2002a, p. 1).

Indigenous peoples have embraced non-Indigenous education as a tool for social and economic mobility, although with some reservations. Education is fundamental to prepare Indigenous peoples with the necessary skills not only to promote, protect and nurture Indigenous cultures but also the preparation of the next generation for the ever-changing modern society.

*Rigney, 2002a, p. 1*

This view is endorsed and supported by several key Indigenous researchers and leaders (Martin, 2008a; Atkinson, 2007; Gooda, 2010 and others). Rigney describes schools as “sites of dominance” and “of transformation”, which have the capacity to “integrate Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge together in one education” (2002b, p. 78). He identifies glaring holes within the government’s efforts to bridge the differences in achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. According to Rigney, a ‘one-size fits all’ approach will not work as an effective strategy, as Indigenous Australians are diverse and speak different languages.

The recent Government study by Purdie and Buckley called *Closing the Gap* (September 2010) claims: “engagement and participation in education is a key factor affecting the life chances of all Australians” (2010, p. 1). Their findings reinforce the statistics presented in Figure 2, Chapter One. The gap in school retention to Year 12 of 32% between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is highlighted. Rigney (2002b) argues this status quo position is no longer acceptable, and “an increase in Indigenous authority and jurisdiction over Indigenous education” are required to make a significant change (p. 79). According
to Rigney, the literature clearly demonstrates that factors such as racism, poor health, crowded housing and extreme poverty contribute to poor educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians (2002a, p. 2). The ongoing high levels of disadvantage complicate the development of educational initiatives for Indigenous young people. Other factors which impact on negative achievement include: a lack of recognition of Indigenous culture, history and a failure to fully engage parents, carers and the community in educational decisions and initiatives (Biddle, Hunter & Schwab, 2004; Herbert, Andersen, Price & Stehbens, 1999; Schwab, 2001). The Education for Social Justice Research group claim that to achieve the goal of success for all students is extremely complex and requires reforms beyond access provision such as Indigenous self-determination (Rigney, 2002b, p. 80). Purdie and Bucky’s findings support Rigney’s argument as they found a common feature of the successful educational programs was when the community, parents and agencies were engaged in a “creative collaboration” with each other (2010, p. 1).

In another Commonwealth government report called *What Works 2011*, the following programs were highlighted for their positive results: Booroongen Djugun College (NSW), Follow the Dream (WA), Gumala Mirnuwarin Education Project (WA), Port Augusta Secondary School (SA), Secondary Pathways Project (SA) and Swan View Senior High School (WA). These programs aimed to build engagement, participation and completion within mainstream schools. The significant factors for success related to establishing Indigenous Australian authority, knowledge and jurisdiction within the programs. Three key features of these programs are identified: building awareness of Indigenous Australian peoples’ perspectives, forming partnerships and working systematically.

Partnerships and involvement with outside organizations, including Indigenous Australian communities and future employers, are fostered as priorities. Given the complexities and differences of culture and languages programs meeting the needs of one particular community might not have application elsewhere. Some of the initiatives to promote a positive educational experience for Indigenous Australian young people include: flexible curriculum and learning programs suited to Indigenous Australian learners, beliefs and values – incorporating community involvement by elders and parents when appropriate; Indigenous Australian teachers or non-Indigenous Australian teachers with a good understanding of Aboriginal peoples; systems of mentoring and tutoring, including provision for after-school learning and homework programs; individual tuition and program planning; valuing traditional knowledge and culture – mainstreaming Indigenous...
Australian culture for all students; focusing on attendance, retention and completion of year 12.

The fundamental principles that contribute to the success of these programs align with the recommendations by Rigney (2002b) and Martin (2008b). Partnerships, relationships and recognition of the cultural perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also central to research in this context.

**Relatedness: Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being, Ways of Doing**

Speaking from the perspective of Aboriginal people Martin says:

> To authenticate our worlds is ultimately something we can only do for ourselves using our own processes and tools. Anything else is an imposed view that forgets the interrelationship between our ways of knowing, ways of being and ways of doing.

*Martin, 2003b, p. 212.*

Central to Indigenous Australian worldviews is the notion of relatedness (Martin, 2008c, p. 75), which Martin defines as a “particular manner of connectedness” (p. 69). Fundamental to relatedness are three bands of knowledge: ways of knowing, ways of being and ways of doing (Martin, 2003b, 2008c). I will discuss Martin’s interpretation of relatedness within Indigenous Australian worldviews, and how it impacts on communication, behaviour and relationships. Other Indigenous Australian scholars use other terms to describe relationships, including: kindredness (Dudgeon and Oxenham, 1990), connectedness (Forrest, 1998), and relationality (Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

Relatedness prescribes the way people conduct relationships with each other, and with other entities (Martin, 2008c). There are depths of relatedness and there can be “no state of un-relatedness” (Martin, 2008c, p. 70). According to Martin Indigenous Australian peoples exist within a network of relations that are reciprocal and occur in certain contexts. In their cultural domains relationality or relatedness means that “one experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of the self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, coexistence, cooperation and social memory” (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. 16).

For Martin, relatedness is an ontological premise occurring across different contexts and is “maintained within conditions that are: physical, spiritual, political, geographical, intellectual, emotional, social, historical, sensory, instinctive and intuitive” (2008c, p. 69). Relatedness is distinguished in two ways: *amongst* or *between* entities. For example, relatedness is *amongst* people, whereas
relatedness with other entities, such as plants, the connection is described as *between*. Amongst people relatedness is “ancestral” as for family, clan members or countrymen, or non-ancestral as for professional colleagues or sporting team members. Respect is a central feature of relatedness, and it extends to personal responsibilities with all entities. “All living things, be they mammals, birds, reptiles, insects are our sisters and brothers and therefore we must protect them. We are their custodians. We not only share with them, we also guard them” (Oodgeroo, 1990, p. 8).

Ways of knowing according to Martin (2003) directly shape a person’s identity and relationships to country, people and other elements, including personal, totemic and ancestral components that signify gender, life stage and role responsibilities and rites. In this system, there is not one person who knows everything, but people share knowledge and understanding for their particular role. There are various types of knowledge which contribute to the operation and functioning of the group. Knowledge or knowing is more than just facts or information taught and learned in certain ways in certain contexts, but it is purposeful to the extent in which it is used. For example, watching or observing is not considered a passive activity, but an aspect of learning. What is important is to know what to observe and when to apply the knowledge gained from the observation. “Individuals learn to acquire new knowledges in order to act and function in contexts not of their choosing or control within the dominant culture” (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. 89). The ways of knowing are embedded into the worldview and are socially refined and affirmed giving definition and meaning to the world. Saltwater people relate at a deeper level with other saltwater people, as compared with relating to desert or rainforest people.

Ways of being refer to relatedness elements including respect for self and other entities, accountability and responsibility. Ways of being are linked to beliefs, laws, morals and values and serve as guides for behaviour and for responsibilities to self and others. These responsibilities extend to elements such as land, waterways, animals, plants, skies, weather and spirits. Since “there is always change, there is always a need for renewal and realignment” (Martin, 2008c, p. 77). It is not a static state changing as contexts change. Ways of being entail processes for “staying in relatedness and dealing with the fluctuations” and changes, which occur in the world (p. 77). The kinds of change Martin refers to are from one life stage to another, from childhood to adulthood, or death to birth. The impact of colonization, Martin claims, has meant there is more engagement with other people and groups, which means a re-establishing of identities, interests and connections each time.
Identity is responsive to a person’s relationships with others. Martin contends the strength of respect for the stories of ‘relatedness’ enables people to actively participate in life, in contrast to “stagnation, digression or dislocation” (p. 77). Moreton-Robinson explains that for Indigenous women, relationality or relatedness “encompasses principles of generosity, empathy and care that connote ideals of respect, consideration, understanding, politeness and nurturing” (2000, p. 18).

The ways of doing, according to Martin, are life stage, gender and role specific where women have responsibilities and rites to fulfill as nurturers and men have responsibilities and rites to fulfill as protectors. The ways of doing are seen in Aboriginal languages, art, imagery, traditions and ceremonies and are a “synthesis and an articulation” of Aboriginal ways of knowing and being (2003, p. 4). Martin claims relatedness within ways of doing is “highly contextual and involves engaging consciously and subconsciously” through “processes of observing, discerning, filtering, applying, reflecting, sharing and confirming” (2008c, p. 79). Relatedness is further sustained through “story lines, ceremony lines, trade and marriage amongst Aboriginal groups and across great distances” (2008c, p. 75).

**Storytelling, Drama and Performance in Aboriginal Australian Culture**

Martin (2008c) connects her understanding of Aboriginal worldviews and ways of being with storytelling (2008c). By “story” she means a personal or collective history, a narrative or description of life events, which allow people to make meaning of their lives. Each person needs to know his or her stories of relatedness, individual and communal stories of the present, past and future, and through this, identity is known (Martin, 2008c). Stories capture the ever-changing environment, and this evolves into understanding. This is a lifelong process. Kath Walker (Oodgeroo) writes, “the time of learning in the Aboriginal world never stops. It goes on and on” (1984, p. 50). The sharing and telling of stories is a way for people to listen to and learn from each other and more recently has been described as “a way through their pain” (Atkinson, 2007, p. 115). The act of re-conceptualizing stories helps create different narratives and thereby reclaim power over Indigenous peoples’ lives (Martin, 2008c). According to Patrick Dodson, “the validity of the living oral cultural tradition of teaching and learning is that it engages the whole person and not just their intellect” (2006, p. 3).

Aboriginal Australian dancer, theatre practitioner and educator, Anne Marshall (2004) claims Indigenous people use a variety of forms and media to express their stories and worldviews. These include: dance, mime, storytelling, mask, body painting, costume, song and instrumental music, visual images, performed
mapping, religious and social ceremonies, oral histories and sung or danced geologies. Marshall contends that Indigenous cultures worldwide have complex and diverse oral traditions that are “essentially performative and receptive to elements of drama teaching”. Marshall explains the multi-layered messages conveyed through narratives via signs, symbols and incorporating the senses: “oral, visual, auditory, body, smell and taste and landscape” (2004, p. 65). Marshall (2004) claims there is “no such thing as a fixed, homogenous Indigenous identity” (p. 62) and the body is the “carrier of the most complex narratives and performances” within Indigenous performance (p. 65). For Marshall, Indigenous drama is concerned with “content and knowledge as much as it is about skill and display” (p. 76).

Marshall (2004) discusses the importance of storytelling in Indigenous drama and identifies ways for adopting narrative skills that can be used in applied theatre projects with Indigenous young people. She gives many examples including: clear and confident verbal delivery, establishing the relationship between storyteller and audience, using facial expressions, gestures and body language to tell the story, dramatic action, impersonation and improvisation of characters and incorporating everyday objects, people, places and familiar reference points to illustrate stories. Marshall observes the use of creative playmaking processes within Indigenous drama, such as dramatic tension, contrast, symbol, time, space, focus and mood, which are “essential elements to all drama, whatever the cultural situation” (p. 58). Marshall claims the processes of group devised and ensemble theatre are suitable for Indigenous peoples, as these are “collaborative” processes, which involve dialogue between participants. “Indigenous communities spend a great deal of time reaching consensus through dialogue before any performances are attempted” (p. 57).

Marshall’s work informs an approach to drama with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian students, whereby Indigenous students develop self-esteem from drama classes and projects, which value their heritage (Marshall, 2004). Another concept in Indigenous Australian performance is that of synaesthesia (Marshall, 2004, p. 56). Marshall claims Indigenous Australian approaches to drama make extensive use of touch, taste and smell, and the act of doing performance rather than watching. She defines synaesthesia as “the engagement and blending of all the senses in the acts of both creating and interpreting meaning” (p. 56). In acknowledging the fact that some Indigenous Australians living in urban environments may have only tenuous links with remote communities and therefore can experience cultural dislocation, Marshall asserts they access and even excel in
many forms of contemporary media – music, film, television and theatre. This work “draws on traditional roots but also has a contemporary feel and can be a source of pride to young Indigenous people” (p. 57).

**Relatedness, Education and Indigenous Australian Perspectives**

For Martin, “establishing relatedness remains core” (2008c, p. 76) as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians engage with each other through education, employment, recreation and politics. According to Martin, relatedness in education is measured as “Aboriginal agency”, rather than “power” (2008b). In Martin’s conceptualization of an Indigenous worldview, she sees teachers as learners as much as learners are teachers. This is a reflection of the belief all knowledge is shared and no one person can know everything. Martin recommends that teachers incorporate the understanding of relatedness in their teaching. Relatedness is not only to people, but also to ideas, knowledge and experiences that “need to expand the child’s understandings, not replace these” (2008b). Martin argues Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students respond positively to encouraging engagement through relationships, such as being invited to participate in “ongoing processes of critique and reflection” instead of “criticism and evaluation” (2008b, p. 10).

Central to Indigenous relationships are the responsibilities and obligations required to maintain and strengthen the connections between knowledge and the multiple perspectives that Indigenous peoples have accumulated since European colonization. Martin discusses ways of knowing, being and doing as they encapsulate the numerous layers of connection and responsibility which guide Indigenous Australians in their lives and to emphasize how ‘relatedness’ is maintained over time despite different influences. She quotes Vince Martin to demonstrate this view:

> We were brought up to share, no matter what it was. And that’s still the custom these days. You can put modern life in to all those changing attitudes. Some people want to go back to the old ways, some want to go ahead. It’s spreading the culture in certain ways. But you’ll find the majority of these people ... have never really lost their culture, it’s just done a different way. That’s the only difference...

*Vince Martin, 1997, p. 92 (cited in Martin, 2008c, p. 80)*

The perspective of Aboriginal culture presented by Martin, Rigney and others with respect to education and relationships is relevant and applicable to this project. Their views have informed my understanding of my partnership with Nungalinya and my approach to conducting the study, and the associated layers of respect,
accountability and responsibility. Martin’s interpretation of relatedness has significant methodological implications for research within Indigenous Australian communities. The acknowledgment of multiple perspectives and realities is fundamental to researching or co-researching in Indigenous Australian cultural and social contexts.

In the next Chapter I will begin with a discussion about Indigenous research methodologies, which raise essential issues and principles for a non-Indigenous researcher within an Indigenous Australian context.
"Research" has been described as one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 1; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) as it is seen as synonymous with the politics of domination, oppression and the "history of exploitation, suspicion, misunderstanding and prejudice" (Rigney, 1999a, p. 117). Tuhiwai Smith claims the term "research" is "inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism" (1999, p. 1), a view shared by Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 1). This perspective is critical to understanding the implications of conducting research in an Indigenous Australian context and its impact on the methodological decisions that I made, as a white Australian woman researching in an Indigenous Australian community.

In my discussion for this chapter, and in my research overall, I have chosen to prioritize Indigenous perspectives and principles of research, as they are fundamental to understanding the complexities of working in Aboriginal communities and settings. I focus this discussion on the work of two key Indigenous scholars: Linda Tuhiwai Smith from New Zealand and Aboriginal Australian Karen Martin. I examine why scholars advocate the need to incorporate these principles within all research projects with Indigenous peoples.

"ON TRICKY GROUND" – RESEARCH IN INDIGENOUS CONTEXTS

Tuhiwai Smith describes the research space for qualitative researchers as "tricky ground", explaining that it is "complicated and changeable": "the noisy communities of difference 'out there' in the margins of society (who) are moving into the research domain with new methodologies, epistemological approaches, and challenges to the way research is conducted" (2005, p. 85). She is referring to Indigenous peoples who remain culturally distinct living in minorities in regions over which they once held sovereignty. Names and labels have been employed to represent these peoples such as: "natives, indigenous, autochthonous, tribal peoples, or ethnic minorities" (p. 86).

This contested space has been described as the "eighth and ninth moment of qualitative research" (Martin, 2008c, p. 62; Lincoln & Denzin, 2005), characterized by "a rising tide of voices" and the desire by "Indigenous and postcolonial peoples" to determine "their own destiny" (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 1116). In Australia, scholars want research to better respond to the more "local needs of Aboriginal
peoples” (Martin, 2008c, p. 62). Rigney (1997) argues for culturally safe and respectful research through the use of ethics, research design, methods and interpretations congruent with Aboriginal worldviews.

**Research and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples**

Many Aboriginal scholars (Huggins 1998; Dodson 1995; Rigney 1999a) argue that the extent of research conducted in Aboriginal lands and on Aboriginal people since “British invasion” in the late 1770’s, is so vast that it makes Aboriginal people “one of the most researched groups of people on earth” (Martin 2008c, p. 25; Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p. 87). In the past research has been conducted without consultation, permission or involvement of Aboriginal peoples and was conducted on or about Aboriginal peoples, rather than in partnership with, or at the instigation of Aboriginal communities.

The representations expounded by non-Indigenous Australian researchers have been described as unrecognizable to Aboriginal peoples (Hart & Whatman, 1998); these have “engendered feelings of mistrust, animosity and resistance to all research” (Martin, 2008c, p. 28).

None of us has escaped the effects of the representation and invisibility. We feel it every day and when we come into contact with the dominant society. We even feel it when we look into the mirror. Our experiences of ourselves, and of our Aboriginality, have been transformed by these representations.

*Michael Dodson, 1995, p. 9*

Dodson refers to the notion of the socially constructed self where “people come to see themselves in part as others see them” (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 27). This led to “studies of the self-fulfilling prophecy and provided the background for the “labeling approach” to deviant behaviour” (Becker, 1963), which has also been imposed on marginalized and Indigenous peoples.

In Australia in the 1980’s and 1990’s there was increasing research in the education and health sectors by Aboriginal scholars. As a result, there developed a need to define the changing roles and discussion about ownership, control and protection of intellectual property (Martin 2008c). Accompanying this development was a move by Aboriginal scholars to determine Aboriginal knowledge separately from traditional Western knowledge constructs, which were seen to limit, restrict and colonize Aboriginal peoples through imposed relationships and structures (Rigney, 2001; Martin 2003b).
Introducing the Field of Indigenist Research

For Aboriginal Australian scholar Lester Irrabinna Rigney, “Indigenist” research highlights and emphasizes Aboriginal and Indigenous people’s knowledge and worldviews (1997, 1999b, 2001) and is undertaken by Indigenous Australians to achieve recognition and self-determination. Indigenist research deals with “the history of physical, cultural and emotional genocide”, which is part of the “long history of oppression of Indigenous Australians” (Rigney, 1999a, p. 118). Rigney theorizes that power within research is developed through three principles: resistance, political integrity and privileging Aboriginal voices. “Indigenist research is research that gives voice to the voiceless” (Rigney, 1999b, p. 16 cited in Martin, 2008c, p. 59). It has a strong emphasis on collaborative and participatory research models (Martin, 2008c, p. 146).

Important elements within Indigenist research include: cultural safety and cultural respect (Rigney 1997, 1999a), emancipation and decolonization (Hart & Whatman, 1998, Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Indigenist research highlights the recognition of distinctive worldviews, knowledge and realities as vital to the survival of Aboriginal peoples. This research paradigm “relates to ontology, epistemology and methodology, with relationships with ancestors, all entities and relatedness to the parts and whole at the same time” (Martin, 2008c, p. 12). Other features of Indigenist research include: an honouring of Aboriginal peoples’ customs as essential processes for living and an emphasis on the social, historical and political contexts which shape Aboriginal peoples’ experiences, lives, positions and futures. The belief that “country makes the people as much as the people make the country” is fundamental (Martin, 2003a, p. 3).

The starting point for Indigenist researchers is to identify who they are, where they are from and how they are related. By claiming and identifying their genealogy, ancestry (Morton-Robinson, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), and place in the world at the start of the research process, researchers have introduced key principles of Indigenist research. These are also key principles of relatedness (Martin, 2008c). Revealing your background is important protocol as it provides essential information for people and communities to make connections on political, cultural and social grounds. Through this the community determines whether a researcher is a suitable person to conduct the research “according to their criteria” (Hart & Whatman, 1998). In New Zealand, Maori researchers Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, 2005), Russell Bishop (2005) and Graham Hingangaroa Smith (2002) call for “self-determination” in research, addressing themes of healing, restoration, cultural
survival and cultural justice, leading to a “decolonization” approach (Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Martin 2008c). In contrast, Martin acknowledges that in Australia “an overall framework and strategic approach is yet to be articulated” (2008c, p. 59).

The flexibility of Indigenist research provides space for the expression of multiple worldviews and distinguishes between different Aboriginal peoples, a point continually emphasized by many Indigenous scholars. For example, “Ganma” is a social theory about the need for power balance between groups, proposed by the Yolgnu people of Arnhem Land, Northern Territory (Yunupingu, 1994). Collard and Pickwick (1995) describe processes for teaching and gaining knowledge based on Nyungar ideology. West (2000) outlines the constructs of Japanangka teaching and research paradigms based on the ideology of a Walpiri worldview.

For Martin, Indigenist research is the only way forward to a research future that “shifts the boundaries, recognizes multiple realities and truths, and enhances opportunities for reflection of self and of research traditions” (2003a, p. 7). Rigney acknowledges the contributions non-Indigenous researchers have made, but argues that Indigenist research should be conducted by “Indigenous Australians whose primary informants are Indigenous Australians and whose goals are to serve and inform the Indigenous struggle for self-determination” (1997, p. 119). Martin poses two questions: “can a non-Aboriginal/non-Indigenous person do Indigenist research?” and “why is it necessary to ask the question in the first place?” (2008c, p. 140). However, she also claims that continual resistance and critiquing of non-Aboriginal research, theories and methodologies can also be “limiting”. To be caught in this bind is “equally dangerous”, as it means not “using the spaces availed to centre our worldview and get our Stories back” (Martin, 2008c, p. 84). She identifies ways for non-Indigenous researchers to be engaged with Indigenous research projects. Later in this Chapter, I will outline Martin and Tuhiwai Smith’s models for non-Indigenous researchers doing research in Indigenous contexts.

**Distinguishing between Indigenist and Indigenous Research**

Indigenist research is “undertaken by Indigenous Australians” (Rigney, 1997), whereas Indigenous research is research *with* Indigenous Australians, undertaken by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Setting an Indigenous Australian political agenda for liberation (Rigney, 1997) is central to Indigenist research. Rigney borrows principles and insights from feminist research “which involve emancipation and liberation strategies” (Lather 1991, 1992; Waldby 1995, Ebert 1991, Weiler 1988). Indigenist research supports “the personal, community, cultural and political struggles of Indigenous Australians”. It aims to “heal past
oppressions” and create “cultural freedom” for the future (1997, p. 117).

Indigenist research highlights the notion of “lived experiences”, common to feminist research, as it expresses the “lived, historical experiences, ideas, traditions, dreams, interests, aspirations and struggles of Indigenous Australians” (Rigney, 1997, p. 119).

Indigenist researchers feel “accountable” to their institutions and communities, as this is where they come from and whom they represent. There is an impetus to take control and to “free individual groups and society from conditions of domination, powerlessness and oppression” through rewriting the misinterpretations of the past (Rigney, 1997, p. 120). Indigenist research provides a process for Indigenous Australians to “de-racialize” and “de-colonize” their lives to achieve cultural freedom and equity within Australian society. Indigenist research therefore opens up new models of research and a radical challenge to traditional research methods.

The distinction between the two forms of research is “messy”, as there is overlapping and blurring through parallel notions of sharing, collaboration and participatory practices, as well as goals for empowerment and emancipation.

Indigenous research requires the partnership and collaboration of Indigenous peoples, and as such, follows several key principles of Indigenist research. The strong stance of Indigenist researchers like Rigney and Martin has had a significant impact on the direction of Indigenous research, which has adopted and adapted Indigenist theories and incorporated these within a revised qualitative inquiry approach.

Denzin claims Indigenist pedagogies are rethinking and “radically transforming colonization, as they “imagine post-colonial societies that honour difference and promote healing”. According to Denzin, the emancipatory nature of Indigenist pedagogies espouses cultural wellbeing, cooperation and responsibility, which equip Indigenous peoples with “the tools they need to resist oppression” (2005, p. 944). The influence of these key principles of Indigenist research is evident within the field of Indigenous research.

Indigenous Research

According to Martin, this is research by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars about, on, with, to Indigenous Australians with the usual research agreements and Ethics requirements. Martin proposes when “non-Aboriginal scholars” engage in “Aboriginal research”, it can only be articulated through “models of collaboration or
participation” (Martin, 2008c, p. 61). This collaborative, participatory view of research is said to avoid “discord between Aboriginal and Eurocentric worldviews” (Youngblood Hendersen, 2002, p.261) and is advocated by other Indigenous scholars (Ivanitz, 2001; Ross & Coghill, 2000; N. Smith, 2001; S. Williams, 2001).

Contemporary qualitative research is influenced by “the voices of Indigenous and post-colonial peoples who are committed to determining their own destiny” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 1116). Therefore it adopts Indigenous principles of connection, relationship and community as integral to research processes. The Indigenous research community of participants and researchers is informed by feminist and democratic values and has a mandate to be reciprocal and reciprocating, characterized by a sense of interpersonal responsibility. This Indigenous research relationship positions researchers as being with and for the other, not looking at the other (Martin, 2008c). Tuhiwai Smith emphasizes that within the field of Indigenous research “researchers are in receipt of privileged information” (1999, p. 176), referring to the misinformation of research about Indigenous peoples in the past and the new “ethic” of obligation and responsibility.

According to Lincoln and Denzin, a characteristic of the eighth and ninth moment of qualitative research is the “rise of Indigenous social science”. There is a “new emphasis on ethics” for qualitative research conducted in Indigenous communities, which has a communitarian, egalitarian, caring, engaged and social justice oriented framework. There is a mandate for researchers to take a democratic, reciprocal and participatory stance, rather than “objective and objectifying”, and qualitative researchers have a “moral obligation to participants” and others, including “themselves as qualitative field-workers” (2005, p. 1118).

**INDIGENOUS INITIATIVES AND PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH MODELS**

Participatory Action Research is advocated by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars (Hill, Baird & Buchanan, 1999; Ivanitz, 1999; S. Williams, 2001) because of its goal to empower the participation of Aboriginal Peoples and its “compatibility with Aboriginal cultural and communication codes” (Martin, 2008c, p. 29). Martin and others advocate collaborative research, because there is an emphasis on consultation and negotiation. The involvement of Indigenous Australians is as participants and co-researchers rather than as “research subjects” (2008c, p. 29; Ross & Coghill, 2000; N. Smith, 2001).

The notions of responsibility and obligation are significant in the field of educational research in Indigenous contexts and settings. Worby and Rigney claim the dynamic
relationship between teachers, learners and researchers at all levels is “one of the most sensitive and complex tasks” (2002, p. 27). Bishop and Glynn (1992) argue researchers must be self-aware of their position within the relationship and there is a need to engage in power-sharing processes. The Yolngu Aboriginal peoples wanted to change their schools by developing a curriculum to bridge the worlds of Aboriginal and balanda (white people) culture for their children - they called it “Ganma or both ways education” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 583). This initiative emerged from a participatory action research project by the Yolgnu people (Yunupingu, 1991); consequently the Ganma Education Project was established in Yirrkala community school in the late 1980’s and 90’s.

This innovative research was about how schooling was done in their community. The research involved a partnership between the various groups of people including the community, Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, students and a non-Indigenous researcher. The word ganma describes “the situation where a river of water from the sea (in this case Balanda knowledge) and a river of water from the land (Yolngu knowledge) mutually engulf each other on flowing into a common lagoon and become one” (Marika & Ngurruwuthun, 1992, p. 9). The process of making knowledge available from one world in another was familiar practice for Yolngu people. According to Marika and Ngurruwuthun, the Yolngu people “controlled the process” through management of the agenda, the research questions and the emphasis of the research and “how the knowledge was produced” (1992, p. 10). The Ganma research project emphasised participation, negotiation and control by Yolngu people in the partnership with researchers and educators from Batchelor College, Northern Territory and Deakin University’s Stephen Kemmis. The theme of the Yolngu work was “collective responsibility” with an emphasis on “participation” and central to these processes was the “negotiation” between different groups (Marika, Ngurruwuthun 1992, p. 4). For the Yolngu people, participatory research relies on an explicit understanding of reciprocity as expressed by bala lili or “giving and getting something back” and there are obligations within the exchange (p. 5). This includes “trusted balanda” (white people) being involved in “positions of obligation” (p. 6). This process is described as “buku-wakthuman” (p. 7).

Another example of research partnership is with non-Indigenous ethno-botanist, Nick Smith, who was invited by the Wik people to conduct research. Smith developed a “flexible and creative” approach which was not “geared towards getting quick results”, but importantly developed research processes which cast Aboriginal people as co-researchers and professional colleagues (Smith, 2001, p.
21). This gave the Wik people greater agency within the research context. This meant the collaboration was meaningful, useful and powerful, because it was “self-reflexive and dialogic” (Martin, 2008c, p. 61).

While Martin, Smith, Rigney and others described research as a “tool of colonialism”, research has subsequently begun to be regarded as a source of power “to counter the ongoing forms of Aboriginal dispossession” (Martin, 2008c, p. 28) and a means of “self-determination and development” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p. 87). For Tuhiwai Smith, research offers a possibility for a “transformative agenda that moves Indigenous communities to someplace better than where they are now” (2005, p. 88).

MANAGEMENT OF OUTSIDERS FOR RESEARCH IN COMMUNITIES

Based on her work with the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji, Martin (2008c) discovered that the people had strategies to regulate outsiders, where the management of relationships promotes power and personal agency within the community. Transformation from one level of relationship to another “required much watching, listening, waiting and immersion” (p. 127). Martin explains three key forms of relatedness by the community’s management of a researcher or “outsider” with the community and research participants: *ngarrbal* - stranger is an outsider who is unknown, a temporary state of relatedness; *waybal* – an outsider who is known about - “coming amongst”, and *jarwon* – friend is an outsider who is known, “coming alongside” (2008c, p. 141). These relationships determine the level of knowledge to be revealed to an “outsider”, similar to developing trust. A researcher is able to deepen their relationship over time by demonstrating commitment to relational obligations, but the power and control of knowledge remains with the people.

Martin (2008c) had to learn and develop specific qualities to deepen her level of relationship with the community. These qualities are described simply as to “have a good heart”, “to have a good word”, “work hard” and “don’t be greedy” (p. 128). She describes the process as being meaningful: “I began to realize the depth of relatedness that had been established, the levels of trust that had been extended to me and the innate power of this trust” (p. 128). Tuhiwai Smith echoes these observations in her own research experience: “people entrusted me with information about themselves which was highly personal. I felt honoured by that trust, and somewhat obligated” (1999, p. 197).
Tuhiwai Smith articulates Kaupapa Maori - an Indigenist research paradigm to "decolonize" research, which promotes agency and self-determination within research. There are two principles in particular – *tiaki* and *whangai* – that manage relationships with non-Indigenous researchers. *Tiaki* is when a community invites or sponsors the involvement of a researcher. *Whangai* is when the research relationship extends beyond research and becomes one of everlasting friendship. Other principles involve power sharing with the community and follow an "empowering outcomes model" (1999, p. 177). “Envisioning” is dreaming a new dream or creating further opportunities for participants and the community to set a vision of their own (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 152).

Martin (2008c) explains how the researcher is “accountable” based on the trust shown by the community. Within her research context, the words expressing protocols on paper (signed consent and permission) were less meaningful than “a few spoken words and then acting on these words”. Martin found the accountability was a two-way relationship, with “shared task and the responsibility of both parties” (p. 137). This relationship represents a strong bond between the researcher and the community and underlines the importance of collaboration and shared participation. These processes are vital in the context of research. In fact Atkinson (2007) contends that the chaos in Aboriginal lives has “resulted from lack of attention to relationship responsibilities” (p. 4).

**INVITATIONS AND RELATIONAL OBLIGATION WITHIN INDIGENOUS RESEARCH**

Tuhiwai Smith (2005) and Martin (2008c) recommend the researcher be invited to the community for the purpose of research. It is the Indigenous way to be *invited* or *introduced* to do research work. In community terms this means they *vouch* for you and you will be *accepted in* on the basis of your relationship with that person who issued the invitation and that they have put themselves *on the line* in doing so – their relatedness to the community is at stake. It is a high level of trust, which is upheld by a network of relationships. There are two fundamental principles: relatedness and relational obligation, which govern Indigenous peoples; and non-Indigenous researchers invited to the community become enveloped in this relationship system (Martin, 2008c, 2003b; Atkinson, 2007; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Martin defines relational activities as “relatedness”, as discussed in the previous Chapter and asserts that there are some underlying constructs and elements that are relevant to all research situations. She describes these as: Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing because they are "ontologically distinct in
prescribing place and group specific knowledges, beliefs and behaviours” (Martin, 2003a, p. 3).

I explain the relational significance of my position in the Nungalinya project with reference to Yolngu decision-making, where “relationships, practices and shared or negotiated understandings” which arise from working together develop and where “decision-making power is equitable”. This is represented as a circle, because “circles imply reciprocity” (Marika et al, 2009, p. 409). According to Martin, circles are important because “there is no beginning and no end and therefore no completions but continuous cycles.” Circles allow “everyone to see each other” and “power relations are structured differently to ensure agency of each member” (2008c, p. 80). In accepting the invitation to be the drama practitioner and a partner within the project, I implicitly agreed to these terms and I am enveloped within the circle of the Indigenous Australian community at Nungalinya, of which the Youth Program is a part.

Qualitative research informed by principles of Indigenous research opened up possibilities within the project, and was fundamental for me to begin to understand the context and move beyond the restrictions of a western knowledge base. In the next Chapter I will explain how my methodological approach gave me the space to build understanding for a “both ways” applied theatre project, so I could better respond to the Youth Program’s vision and the needs of the participants. It was how I conducted the research, which provided the deeper foundations of our innovative exchange across difference.
CHAPTER FOUR : METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION TO THE KEY ELEMENTS

This discussion will begin with an examination of qualitative research as a guide for Indigenous research. The use of qualitative research opened up possibilities in the communication with my colleagues and the participants, and was fundamental for me to begin to understand the context and move beyond the restrictions of my own thinking. Rather than remaining simply a visiting artist in the community, my research stance brought a deeper awareness and understanding required for working respectfully in the Nungalinya Youth Program. Drawing from action research, participatory action research and reflective practitioner research within the framework of qualitative research, I was able to build a collaborative research partnership responsive to “a dialogue across difference” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

In this Chapter I explore the implications and impact of being a non-Indigenous researcher undertaking Indigenous research and in doing so shed light on Tuhiwai Smith’s description of “tricky ground”. I will show how Indigenous perspectives and principles of research were fundamental to understanding the complexities of conducting research in the Nungalinya Youth Program. The work by New Zealand researcher Tuhiwai Smith (1999, 2005) and Aboriginal Australian researcher Karen Martin (2003a, 2008c) informed my research design and practice. According to Martin “sharing is a responsibility” of Indigenous research (2008c, p. 136), which underlines the principles of reciprocity, connection, relationships and community that are integral to research processes in this context. Being invited into the Youth Program placed an emphasis on mutual obligations and a two-way accountability within our research relationship. I will demonstrate how my emphasis on collaborative and participatory methodologies framed the research and enhanced opportunities for reflection.

I will begin my discussion with an examination of the field of qualitative research and Indigenous contexts, using Tuhiwai Smith’s principles for qualitative research as the basis for my discussion. In responding to the mandate for a reciprocal and reflexive research stance, I will demonstrate how I attempted to ensure my research design, methods and interpretations were “culturally safe and respectful”, congruent with Indigenous worldviews and responsive to local needs. I will discuss the interventionist methodologies of action research, participatory action research and reflective practitioner research, which informed my research
practice and provided a theoretical framework for my study. I will then lead the discussion through the complexities of conducting research in the field, which influenced my capacity to respond to the research questions:

How can applied theatre be used in the construction of a participatory, creative space for Indigenous Australian young people? What are the characteristics, challenges and opportunities of using applied theatre with Indigenous Australian students?

Implementation of my applied theatre practice meant adapting to the particularities of the site which forced me to alter my initial research question and to broaden my methodological stance. Through a discussion of the Pilot Project and the subsequent research phases I will examine the reasons for these changes. I will discuss the data collection methods I undertook and the analysis of the data, followed by my writing up of the research.

Martin claims that in Australia an overall framework for approaching Indigenous research is “yet to be articulated” (2008c, p. 59). Tuhiwai Smith identifies the privilege and power of the researcher’s role “to extend knowledge”; this key responsibility has been my research intention throughout this study.

**QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND INDIGENOUS CONTEXTS**

Tuhiwai Smith claims that qualitative researchers must be more than “cultural tourists” (2005, p. 103). Using the metaphor of “qualitative travellers” (p. 85), she suggests researchers begin their journey by studying the “maps” of current qualitative research as a guide into the “terrain”, and “draw some new maps”, to extend the boundaries and thinking “beyond the margins” (2005, p. 102). Tuhiwai Smith contends that qualitative research has “an expanding set of tools that enable finer-grained interpretations of social life” (2005, p. 103). Drawing on a number of scholars and researchers, such as Fine et al (2000), Bishop (1998), Aldama, (2001), Tierney, (2000) and LeCompte, (1993) she maintains that qualitative research is important for Indigenous communities, and details eight aspects of its effectiveness. Examining qualitative research, Tuhiwai Smith proposes that:

It is the tool that seems most able to wage the battle of representation; to weave and unravel competing storylines; to situate, place, and contextualize; to create spaces for decolonizing; to provide frameworks for hearing silence and listening to the voices of the silenced; to create spaces for dialogue across difference; to analyse
and make sense of complex and shifting experiences, identities, and realities; and to understand little and big changes that affect our lives.

_Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, p.103._

According to Tuhiwai Smith, the “tools, strategies, insights, and expert knowledge” of qualitative research enable a deeper understanding and interpretation of Indigenous people’s lives. Through this deeper understanding she hopes “the Western world” might pause to consider alternative possibilities for research (2005, p. 103). I will discuss each element of Tuhiwai Smith’s statement to demonstrate how qualitative research might open up possibilities within Indigenous research projects. In doing so, I will show how the heritage of qualitative research complements the goals of Indigenist research models (Martin, 2008c). This discussion serves to foreground the issues I grappled with in my research.

To wage the battle of representation

In the context of contemporary Indigenous communities Tuhiwai Smith claims they are “not homogenous” and have their own internal struggles for power over issues of gender, economic class, age, language and religion (2005, p. 87). She claims Third World women, African American women, black women, Chicanas and other minority groups have led the way to building understanding about the intersection of gender, race, class and power against the “frame of colonization and oppression”. By presenting worldviews through the “lens of native people” they have reclaimed knowledge, languages and culture causing a “transformation of the colonial relations between the native and the settler” (p. 88). This battle of representation has occurred across “multiple layers” and “multiple sites”.

Martin argues, research is “essentially a western practice” and an “entirely indigenous” research paradigm is not possible. Martin demands a higher level of engagement by the researcher with a focus on the “lived realities of the researched” (2003a, p. 5). She proposes a multi-disciplinary approach, which draws on a number of social research frameworks to counteract the “non-Aboriginal values and perspectives” filtered through western research and to better represent Aboriginal peoples (2008c, p. 27).

Tuhiwai Smith argues for the importance of retaining the link between Indigenous communities, the “academy of researchers” and the “political struggle of decolonization”, as it counteracts the colonial stance of education as divisive and destructive (2005, p. 88). Although this research relationship is not harmonious,
she claims it is the way to transform research so that Indigenous communities have some agency in their representation. As with all qualitative research, the participants’ perspectives, responses and knowledge need to centrally inform those researching in an Indigenous context.

**To weave and unravel competing storylines**

Tuhiwai Smith contends that Indigenous communities have a “way of knowing about themselves”, which has survived the impact of colonization (2005, p. 101). Despite being “vulnerable” to research, they have also been able to resist and even to influence research “around their own interests” (p.86). According to Martin, presuming one research paradigm could be applicable for all research situations is “illogical” (2003a, p. 3), given the differences between communities and languages. Guba and Lincoln argue that within qualitative research processes there is “potential for interweaving of viewpoints” and the researcher’s essential task is eliciting “multiple perspectives” (2005, p. 197). Denzin and Lincoln contend that employing “multiple methods as a way of capturing as much of reality as possible” is a technique of qualitative researchers (2005, p. 5).

**To situate, place, and contextualize**

Tuhiwai Smith observes that within the research literature there is an emerging sense of empowerment amongst Indigenous peoples, a shifting from “victim” to “activist” (2005, p. 87). Fredericks (2008) claims non-Indigenous people need to experience personal discomfort in order to extend their knowledge beyond the familiarity of their own ideas and “normal modes of operation” and be willing to “let go” of stereotypes and to “accept what Indigenous peoples’ lives actually do encompass” (p. 5). Fredericks (2008) claims the current systems of education, health, community services, housing and correctional services “privilege the Western White knowledge systems” (p. 8), which is to the detriment of Indigenous Australians. Denzin (2005) and Bishop (1998) advocate a “participatory mode of consciousness”, which makes researchers accountable to communities, respecting local knowledge and incorporating their values and beliefs into the inquiry. Greenwood and Levin (2005) advocate the benefits of co-generative inquiry because it is built on “professional researcher-stakeholder collaboration” and aims to solve real life problems in context. According to Greenwood and Levin the local knowledge gives the research more focus and urgency, because “it centres on problems they are keen to solve” (2005, p. 54). Denzin advocates methodologies that are performatve, participatory and collaborative; when the researcher is a participating insider they are “reflexively
consequential, ethical, critical, respectful and humble” and they live with the consequences of their research actions (2005, p. 936).

Guba and Lincoln claim there is an expansion in the kinds of social data available through an increased reliance on “the experiential, the embodied and the emotive qualities of human experience” (2005, p. 205). According to Janesick (2003) qualitative research is not constructed “to prove something or to control people” (p. 57), rather it is about understanding the “whole picture”, through looking for meaning through the perspectives of participants, relationships and tensions in the project.

To create spaces for decolonizing

To provide frameworks for hearing silence and listening to the voices of the silenced
Tuhiwai Smith observes there are still native and Indigenous families and communities who “possess the ancient memories of another way of knowing” that inform their contemporary practices (2005, p. 87). She claims there is a need for Indigenous scholars to frame research agendas for their own communities. She gives the example of Kaupapa Maori formed by Maori researchers as a framework “for organising, conducting and evaluating Maori research” to build capacity and to provide an infrastructure “to support community aspirations and development” (p. 90).
According to Australian researchers Marika, Yunupingu, Marika-Mununggiritj and Muller (2009), “issues of visibility and voice are fundamental to challenging colonial power” and to give opportunities to Indigenous peoples to participate in dialogue to manage their own circumstances. Researchers are encouraged to re-imagine “institutional and procedural relationships with Indigenous people” (p. 405). Rose (1999) asks for researchers to become “ethically available” in relationships with Indigenous Australians which means instead of coming into communities with “ready made ideas” non-Indigenous Australians need to allow the people time to adapt or “mould ideas” into their own context (Marika et al., 2009, p. 407). Using Whatmore’s argument for redistributing expertise and research fields to “engaging knowledge practices and vernaculars beyond the academy” (2004, p. 1362), the Yolgnu people want to be part of both worlds and to ensure autonomy over their own lives. They ask for Ngapaki (non-Indigenous Australians) to “build their capacity to engage with the Yolgnu world” on Yolgnu terms (p. 412).

Denzin calls for arts-based disciplines to “help recover meaning”. He identifies the value of the imagination within storytelling as it gives people “a language and a set of pedagogical practices that turn oppression into freedom, despair into hope, hatred into love, doubt into trust”, and it works “historically, critically and sociologically” (2005, p. 948).

**To create spaces for dialogue across difference**

Tuhiwai Smith claims the activity of research is “transformed” when Indigenous peoples become the researchers, which creates the opportunity for an alternative perspective and focus. “Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, and people participate on different terms” (1999, p. 193). Despite the differences in worldviews between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, Tuhiwai Smith argues a blending of the two perspectives offers “the best possibility for a transformative agenda that moves Indigenous communities to someplace better than where they are now” (2005, p. 88). Lincoln and Denzin claim the stance of post-colonial research is “democratic, reciprocal and reciprocating rather than objective and objectifying” (2005, p. 1118). According to Marika, Western and Yolgnu decision-making processes are “fundamentally different”, so there needs to be opportunities for discussion and negotiation to reach understanding (2009, p. 408). In Yolgnu communities “solutions come from the ground up”, emanating from the relationships, practices and shared or negotiated understandings that arise from the dialogue of “working together” (p. 409). Developing relationships means developing responsibilities and
connections through “relational accountability” (Louis, 2007).

**To analyse and make sense of complex and shifting experiences, identities, and realities**

Tuhiwai Smith argues there are “multiple layers across multiple sites” (2005, p. 88). According to Moreton-Robinson (2000), Indigenous subjectivity is “multiple”, because people have had to adapt and function in contexts “within the dominant culture” (2000, p. 89). The researcher needs to engage with the “multiple realities” and contradictions of human experience, which exist within the research space. For Guba and Lincoln identities are “fluid rather than fixed” (2005, p. 212). Janesick (2003) claims the notion of crystallization (Richardson, 1994) makes qualitative research design “multifaceted”, as it encapsulates diverse and variable perspectives of the social world and promotes understanding on a complex level (p. 67). For Tedlock (2003) human identity is socially constructed and depends on a “multiplicity of locations and positions” and human beings exist in “multiple strata of reality, which are organized in different ways” (p. 190). She argues this representational transformation allows “both self and other to appear together within a single narrative that carries a multiplicity of dialoguing voices”. It recognizes that experience is social, “intersubjective and embodied” (p. 191). This view echoes Indigenist notions of relatedness, connection and relationships with all entities (Martin, 2008a).

**To understand little and big changes that affect our lives**

Tuhiwai Smith (2005) discusses the concept of “something lost” within Indigenous communities, and refers to Rey Chow’s “endangered authenticities” (1993), of stories, culture, languages, diversity and knowledge being “erased through the homogenization of culture” (p. 95). Denzin (2005) calls for qualitative researchers to develop culturally sensitive practices that “locate power within Indigenous communities”, so that these communities decide “what constitutes acceptable research” (p. 936). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” attempting to interpret phenomena according to the meanings people bring to them (p. 3). This notion is further examined by Reinharz (1997) who identifies that we bring different selves to the research setting, which influences and shapes our responses to the multiple layers of challenge within Indigenous communities.

Incorporating and responding to Tuhiwai Smith’s eight elements within my research design, called for culturally sensitive practices; I needed to provide an
interculturally responsive and reflexive platform for building understanding and relationships. I found it necessary to take risks in my thinking in order to examine alternative possibilities for education of marginalized Indigenous youth from my non-Indigenous perspective. As a non-Indigenous researcher in an Indigenous context the questions required me to employ “multiple interpretive practices” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 6).

**ACTION RESEARCH**

When I first entered the field I was the practitioner at the centre of the creative partnership and so I began with an action research model. Orton (1994) describes action research as a process where the ownership of knowledge must be shared requiring a collaborative relationship between the participants, and as “consonant” with the investigations by drama practitioners (p. 85). From the outset, I believed action research offered me the flexibility and freedom to explore my applied theatre practice collaboratively within a clear and systematic framework. It was a “map” for the unknown “terrain”.

The concept of action research originated in the work of sociologist Kurt Lewin (1946), with influence from Bion (1968) in UK, and Habermas (1972) in Germany and was later developed for use in education projects in Australia (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1984, 1992), North America (Argyris and Schön, 1974, 1978), and in UK (Elliott and Ebbutt, 1985). Action research is “action-oriented” (Orton, 1994, p. 86) in that it seeks to answer the question – what can be done about this? Kemmis & McTaggart argue the planning is seen to be “strategic” taking account of risks while “opening up potential” and has “flexibility with unexpected outcomes” (1984, p. 7). The action has its own dynamic within an interactive context and deviates as is necessary, rather than being constrained by the plan. The observational element in the process promotes detachment, thus enabling an emphasis on reflection and “the possibility of responding to unforeseen directions” (p. 9). The reflection stage “aided by discussion” asks: what happened; how did the participants respond; what changes to the plan were necessary; and what needed to happen next? The questioning leads to “the reconstruction of meaning of the social situation” providing the basis for the revised plan (p.9). The process is collaborative (1984, p. 7), so communication with everyone involved is “essential” (1984, p. 13).

I had found that Kemmis and McTaggart’s cyclical action research model (1984) of plan, action, observation, reflection, and re-plan aligned with the kind of
experimentation that occurred in my previous drama workshop project (Dansick, 1994), and was appropriate in a cross-cultural exchange. Kemmis and McTaggart describe the flexibility of the model as “risky, fluid and dynamic” requiring “instant decisions”, which aligned with the role of a practitioner conducting applied theatre who needs a plan that is “open to change in the light of circumstances” (1984, p. 9). At Nungalinya I was in an unfamiliar context and I was going to be experimenting with a form of applied theatre that would need to be responsive to the young peoples’ reactions. ‘Interculturality’ in a second-language context required not only my experience as a practitioner, but also “reflection, analysis and action” (Alfred, Byram and Fleming, 2003, p. 5). Central to applied theatre is a practitioner experimenting with their practice in non-conventional contexts (Nicholson, 2005; Prentki and Preston, 2009; Taylor, 2003). In Australia, action research has been used as a means to extend teachers’ understanding of their practice while also assisting with the development of curriculum (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1984, p. 6).

Kemmis & McTaggart revised their model in 1992 increasing the emphasis on group thinking, discussion, participation and collaboration, stating that action research was not “individualistic” (p. 15). In this way, groups “plan action together, act and observe individually or collectively, and reflect together” (1992, p. 9). So individual practitioners can instigate changes to benefit their own practice as a means of “advancing the collective interest” of the group (p. 16). In their later writing Kemmis & McTaggart (2003) are less prescriptive about the planning, action, observation and reflection as discrete cycles, suggesting that cycles can “overlap”, and initial plans can be made “obsolete in the light of learning from the experience” (p. 381). Therefore the whole process becomes “more fluid, open and responsive” (p. 381). Success depends more on the “sense of development” in the practice and understanding of participants’ situations, than strict adherence to the steps in the process. Action research enquiry “begins and ends with reflection on practice” (Orton, 1994, p. 88) and “sustained and consistent reflection” is the key to applied theatre practice (Taylor, 2003, p. 102).

A key difference of this research project from my earlier study with international students was the fact I was not in my familiar environment at the University of Melbourne in the Foundation Studies Drama program. For this project I needed to broaden my methodological approach to understand the impact of the Indigenous context and the challenges it provoked, while also relying on my project partners. As a practitioner/researcher I found facilitating the applied theatre project extraordinarily demanding. I shared the workshop space with
Pat, Naretha and Kim, my Indigenous project partners, and I relied on our relationship and their participation with the young people in managing the applied theatre project. Within the framework of the research my partners were co-collaborators in the process and gave me access to alternative perspectives through their roles as key informants.

My partners focused on their priorities for the young people and their own agendas for the theatre project in the Youth Program, both of which directly impacted on the research. I found their involvement in my research was vital; it increased the possibility of a transformative agenda through combining our different perspectives. To draw on the multiple perspectives and views of my partners and the young people required constant reflection and reinterpretation of behaviours that were outside my usual experience. The joint exchange of ideas with my partners and the young people within the research meant opportunities and practices evolved in the workshops as I drew on their different perspectives. A key element within action research, and according to Taylor, “one of the principal means through which the applied theatre operates” (2003, p. 112) is that of Schön’s “knowing-in-action” which is a “kind of intelligence that begins by being tacit and spontaneous” (1983, p. 25). In Schön’s view, competent practitioners are reflective practitioners. Firstly they reflect “on” action in the cyclical way described earlier. Secondly, “reflection-on-action” is joined to another process, which he calls “reflection-in-action”. According to Schön this skill is the “key competence of a competent professional” (1987, p. 31). As the researcher in my own experimentation with applied theatre techniques, I could construct a new framework responsive to this context, “a new theory of the unique case”, rather than being dependent on established theory and techniques evolved from other contexts (Taylor, 1996, p. 28). I was free to respond to the participants’ ideas artistically and educationally in the moment.

In Schön’s “reflective contract” Taylor observes the opportunity for participants to “gain a sense of increased involvement and action”, to “exercise some control over the situation”, and to “test their judgment about the practice” (2003, p. 116). The emphasis on ongoing reflection to understand what was happening within the workshops with the young people was central to my capacity to work effectively. As such I was more focused on exploring the “possibilities”, rather than testing “a problem” (Taylor, 1996, p. 38). This was useful as Schön observes that problems are not always presented as problems but more likely “messy, indeterminate situations” (1987, p. 4). These reflective processes were central to my ability to respond to the young people, my need to understand the
action I was undertaking within each workshop and to better develop my emerging practice.

Taylor has differentiated between action research and reflective practice in the following way:

Whereas action researchers tend to emphasize evaluation, rather than on-going reflection, as a culminating activity, i.e., one plans, one acts, one evaluates, then one acts again, reflective practitioner researchers are concerned with documenting and understanding the tacit and known knowledge base which enables reflection-in-action to occur.

Taylor (1996, p. 28)

This quote explains the difference in my approach between the Pilot Project and the subsequent phases of research, and how the reality of the context impacted on my initial research design.

According to Schön “reflection-in-action” is the way a practitioner is able to deal with the “indeterminate zones of practice”: situations where the practitioner is confronted with uncertainty, uniqueness and/or value conflicts. Orton observes these situations require artistry or “creative acts of 'try and see' performed on the spot, monitored on the spot and adjusted to on the spot” (1994, p. 94), which are suited to an experimental applied theatre workshop. Greenwood (1999a) observes that action research is useful for “increasing practitioner's understanding and self-development” (p. 25). She refers to McTaggart (1996) who concludes that the “action research spiral is less of a procedural mandate than an emphasis on dynamism and on continuity with an emergent practice” (p. 248).

The “emancipatory” (Orton, 1994; Martin, 2008c; Tuhiwai Smith, 2005; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003) nature of the research process helped release me from the constraints of my old ideas, and adapt to this new context. I was willing to “acknowledge my ignorance” about the young people and to share the possible directions of our project (Orton, 1994, p. 91). As such, I embarked on “action taken with the principal purpose of learning from experience by careful observation of its processes and consequences” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 580). Over time in responding to the uniqueness of my situation at Nungalinya the principles of participatory action research and reflective practitioner research emerged more strongly.
PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

The collaborative nature of the Nungalinya applied theatre project meant all of the participants, myself included, were "reconstructing" our worldviews on a day-to-day basis within the drama project. The flexibility of participatory forms of action research seemed to offer a collaborative and action oriented approach suitable for my research at Nungalinya. It highlighted the importance of the researcher-stakeholder relationship; it was purposeful for local needs and fostered independence, equality and co-operation.

MacIntyre (2008) describes participatory action research as a "cyclical process of exploration, knowledge construction and action at different moments throughout the research process" (p. 1); this accords with my experience at Nungalinya. According to MacIntyre, participatory action research offers a philosophy of social research with three distinguishing features:

1. Shared ownership,
2. Community-based analysis of social problems (marginalized youth and educational outcomes),
3. Orientation towards community action.

Discussing the research role of participants in participatory action research, McIntyre highlights the "quality" of the participation, not the "proportionality" of it. McIntyre argues it is unlikely that individuals or groups can or will participate equally in any research, and that participation is "a choice, not an imposition" (2008, p. 15). Kemmis and McTaggart describe the facilitator as a "co-participant" with some "special expertise that may be helpful to the group in its endeavours". They argue it is "naive" to think that the facilitator will be an "equal" co-participant, "as if the difference were invisible" (2005, p. 594). Even though participatory action research is a "social and educational process", Kemmis & McTaggart (2003) concede that it can be "a solitary process of systematic self-reflection”, but “best conceptualized in collaborative terms” (p. 381). McTaggart and others claim non-Indigenous researchers in Australian Indigenous communities "face a difficult time gaining access unless they commit to the principles of participatory action research” (2002, p. 8; Marika, Ngurrwutthun & White, 1992).

My project partners and the young people were in a position to observe every workshop and to inform me of their observations on a daily basis. This meant I
was learning about the young people and the context from within the action of the workshops and from an inside observer’s perspective. Furthermore I depended on their involvement and participation to negotiate the intercultural space as I had so much to learn and understand. Kemmis & McTaggart (2005) claim participatory action research is designed to be exploratory action. Greenwood and Levin (2000) developed the concept of “co generative inquiry” to explain and build the collaboration between researchers and local stakeholders (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 54).

More than participation McIntyre argues, “it is in the dialectical process of investigation and consciousness-raising, that participants rethink positions, imagine new ways of being, acting and doing” (2008, p. 31). Participatory action research is a “learning process whose fruits are the real and material changes” in:

- what people do
- how people interact with the world and others
- what people mean and what they value
- the discourses in which people understand and interpret their world

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 565.)

The Recursive Process of Participatory Action Research

I found that McIntyre’s model offers an explanation for the development of my research as it represents a clear image of how my understanding unfolded throughout the project. The dynamic design starts with a small and intimate beginning and then unfolds gradually, making progress outwards and gaining momentum and gaining strength and confidence, and so becoming more expansive. The design is open at the end, with a sense of further possibilities. It is like a nautilus shell, but also reminds me of the circles in some Aboriginal Australian art as well as the swirling patterns of a pond when a pebble is thrown in. Kemmis and McTaggart’s design of the basic spiral (2005, p. 564) and the recursive relationship diagram (2005, p. 566) seem more constrained and restricted, less responsive for a culturally diverse context. McIntyre’s is a more dynamic research design; it seems more open to possibilities and aligns with my research experience.
The spiral symbolizes how I began initially with an open mind and limited understanding about research in an Indigenous context. My thinking was based on my non-Indigenous perspective of the need to maintain control of the creative space. As my partners and the young people informed my practice there was continual development, adjustment and refinement of my plan, and so my understanding of the space began to broaden. The spiral represents my gradual understanding of how to interpret and conduct the workshop processes more effectively as well as the developing mutual understanding and relationships within the workshops. As I was informed by the young people and by my partners as co-collaborators, I implemented changes to my practice.

Over time, I began to feel a kind of freedom through relying on the young people to lead the way. For example, in the Pilot Project I started with small expectations and took limited risks as a practitioner and researcher. In the first research phase my research partners introduced enormous hurdles that I needed to overcome; this forced me to take further risks within my research thinking and planning, as the study felt threatened by the problems in my practice. Finally by the final phase of the research, I allowed myself the freedom to flow with the context, and was inclined to let go of further barriers in my thinking. The research structure helped me gain more confidence through continuous
reflections about my practice in the context and led to more effective implementation of the applied theatre project.

**Participatory Action Research and Applied Theatre**

Participatory action research, like applied theatre, is purposeful and emancipatory; it seeks to provide opportunities to explore meaning, experiment with identities and to construct new perspectives which may be potentially transforming. McIntyre describes the applicability and effectiveness of methods such as “drama, role-playing, music, art and movement” within participatory action research, as these depend on the “participants’ willingness to engage in them” and are “experiential methods of constructing knowledge” (2008, p. 20). For example, there were significant literacy problems amongst the group at Nungalinya so the theatre techniques freed the young people from the constraints of the written text.

The workshops themselves were the heart of our partnership. The workshops provided “not only a location, physical and metaphorical” where social understandings were acted out, but the applied theatre was “a means for shaping and refining such understandings” (Greenwood, 1999a, p. 138). Greenwood explains how meanings are shared through theatre processes:

> Theatre as a way of knowing implies not only a site where representation occurs and where meanings are consciously or unconsciously read but also active agency both in representation and in reading of meaning.

*Greenwood, 1999a, p. 138*

Cahill (2006) argues that the drama workshop is a useful site for conducting participatory action research, as it has the potential to open up the “communicative space” through “its use of multi-modal dialogic forms that incorporate aural, oral, visual, kinaesthetic and symbolic modes of conversation” (p. 62).

Facilitating group communication is central to participatory action research and to applied theatre. It was my intention to facilitate dialogue through the collaborative action, reflection and participation in the creative workshop space. The “aesthetic tools” of theatre offer participants multiple ways of representing their ideas and framing experiences, so at times there can be blurring and overlapping of goals and outcomes between the creative arts practice and research framework. O’Toole (1996) argues there are “three factors in the
making of art which are directly relevant to the making of research: the discipline of form, the operation of intuition and the social making of meaning” (p. 151).

REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

Greenwood observes that in the emergent bicultural space the reflective practice paradigm shares some elements with that of action research describing it as “two faces of the same coin” as both approaches involve participants in collaborative and critical inquiry that seeks to improve practice (1999a, p. 24). For Sinclair (2005) the role of reflective practitioner “inextricably links the process of research to practice” (p. 146); this has direct application to my research situation. In the research process I was engaged in a “reflective conversation” (Taylor, 1996, p. 28) with the young people, my partners and within myself at Nungalinya. As I discussed in the previous section, there was a greater need to understand the perspectives of my partners and the young people within each workshop, and their responses to my practice, rather than solving a problem. To stay within my initial research frame of action research was to limit my understanding of the young people’s responses and the learning possibilities in each workshop, as the method seemed less responsive to the intercultural context.

Sinclair found the principles of reflective practitioner research were effective and illuminating within her highly participatory researcher position in a school community. Like Sinclair I was involved in an intervention based on action that was collaborative, and I conducted dialogue with others and myself throughout the project. Sinclair observes that the “the centrality of the practitioner/researcher as the principal instrument for data collection and the principal instrument of data collection” (2005, p. 147) is a key characteristic of reflective practitioner research. I found my research aligned with the reflective practitioner model that enables an artist-researcher “to understand and to articulate their own artistic-aesthetic curriculum” (Taylor, 1996, p. 30).

The inflexibility of a strict action research model did not help me resolve the anguish which I experienced when the workshops felt out of my control. I had to keep asking myself questions about my approach and the meaning of the young peoples’ responses, juxtaposed with the comments by my partners. According to Taylor (1996), “unpredictability and uncertainty removes us from the world of singular truth, and plunges us into multiple realities and multiple visions. It is this multiplicity which is at the heart of reflective practitioner design” (p. 36).
Within Indigenous contexts there is a need to be available and to allow the 
framing of different questions within research. Adopting a reflective practitioner 
stance permitted me to make mistakes, ask questions and look for guidance from 
my partners and the young people, as I had to understand my own responses 
within the workshops. This meant an increased emphasis on reflection-on-action. 
According to Taylor (1996, 2003), “truths are constructed from within the 
circumstances in which people find themselves, and just as those circumstances 
may change at any given time, so might the truths” (p. 26, p. 109). A key 
principle of reflective practitioner research was resonant with the claims by 
Tuhiwai Smith (2005), Martin (2008c), Marika et al (2009), Greenwood and Levin 
(2005), Janesick (2003), Richardson (1994), Denzin & Lincoln (2005), Taylor 
(2003) and Sinclair (2005) about the need to respect and draw on multiple 
perspectives within research.

**Applied Theatre Practice and Research**

The dual stance of participation and observation of an applied theatre practitioner 
aligns with qualitative research where the people are “instruments of inquiry” 
(Taylor, 2003, p. 6). According to Taylor the reflective practitioner is the 
“principal instrument for mediating data”, which provides multiple perspectives 
(2003, p. 118). Taylor identifies the following characteristics of an effective 
facilitator of applied theatre: critical thinker, risk taker, theory generator, ability 
to be open-minded and flexible, collaborative and collector of stories (2003, p. 
75). These are all characteristics that opened up my thinking as a researcher and 
a reflective practitioner.

Writing up my observations and reflections each day not only meant I 
documented as much as I could, but it also prompted planning for the next day’s 
workshop. For Taylor “consistent and sustained reflection” is important because 
it shows the teaching artist is questioning throughout their facilitation (2003, p. 
102). He argues that “without immediate and ongoing reflective activity, it is 
difficult to see how applied theatre would ever occur” (p. 115). The coordinator, 
youth workers and teachers observed every workshop, sometimes participating 
themselves which enabled me to develop an understanding of their multiple 
perspectives within each workshop across the three phases of the research. There 
was an overlap between the applied theatre and research as both encouraged 
flexible methods, collaboration and co-construction of knowledge in the context.

The reflective practitioner model provided the backbone of my approach and 
enabled my research to flourish rather than falter. Taylor (2003) advocates the
centrality of reflection by the teaching artist, key stakeholders and participants “to yield knowledge that is critical to the future of applied theatre” (p. 106). For Taylor, applied theatre is a “reflective theatre” (p. 110) and Nicholson (2005) observes that reflection is central to applied drama practices. So, for me reflection was central to the project and the research.

My applied theatre practice involved theatre techniques using mime, improvisation, warm ups, theatre games, and movement activities. These activities were designed to promote confidence in the art form, improve cooperation, highlight teambuilding, stimulate creativity, develop trust, improve speaking and listening, and create opportunities for positive self-expression for the young people. I aimed to promote opportunities for the expression of the young peoples’ ideas and worldviews, to enable exploration of characters and situations of their choosing and to guide their “stories” into performances.

O’Neill claims it is a “function of art to allow experience to be reshaped so that it is perceived differently, its meaning arises in the dialogue that occurs between the work and those who co-create it” (1997, p. xii). The workshops provided opportunities for dialogue between my partners, the young people and me. Within the applied theatre workshops the young people and I were at times “spect-actors”, both actors and audience, who actively worked together “to construct meaning” (Taylor, 2003, p. 71). Action, reflection and transformation were central to my applied theatre practice and also centrally informed my research methodology.

**Positioning the Researcher**

Action research and participatory action research provided the informing principles that I used at the start of the research. When I began in 2006 I did not envisage the project extending across three years. As my research role responded to the context and the demands of the project, incorporating reflective practice into the participatory research processes was both natural and necessary. I was a practitioner in the field reflecting in and on the action. The nature of my particular context and situation meant I had multiple roles to perform on a daily basis including: artist, teacher, facilitator, organizer, manager, friend, fundraiser, partner, collaborator and researcher. The success of an applied theatre program, according to Taylor, rests “on the facilitators’ shoulders working alongside the community” and everyone else (p. 75).
I felt my research stance enabled me to get closer to the more intimate elements of the context through providing a critical and sometimes literal distance, a structure and process for my reflections and observations. Adopting the position of reflective practitioner researcher enabled me to separate and to manage the overall research responsibilities within the unfolding applied theatre partnerships. More importantly, reflective practice was the way I went about “solving the questions, dilemmas and problems” which I encountered daily within the research (Taylor, 1996, p. 27). According to Taylor, this constituted my “reflective praxis” (p. 106), as I was formulating an in-depth understanding of the young peoples’ perspectives within my practice in this particular context and building increasing knowledge of it over time.

ENTRY INTO THE FIELD

In encountering and responding to challenges of conducting research within the Youth Program at Nungalinya my methodological approach was not straightforward. During the Pilot Project in 2006 and the first research phase in 2007, my need for flexibility within the Youth Program prevented me implementing my structural plan for distinct research cycles. At Nungalinya there seemed to be a different set of rules, expectations and priorities, which I had not anticipated back in Melbourne, and these had to be accommodated into my planning. I found the young people’s participation was unpredictable, lacking my sense of behavioural boundaries. I had to create rules for my own survival within the workshop space and to enable me to understand the effectiveness of the applied theatre activities. In the beginning I focused on learning about the participants, the Youth Program and on conducting the workshops rather than focusing on the planned action research cycles.

I was aware of Nungalinya’s ambitious agenda of wanting to re-engage their young people in education, and this shaped my preliminary interventions and thinking about the research. After all I was there at my partners’ instigation and my role in the Pilot study was influenced by their vision for their youth. I saw myself as having expertise that might be useful for their purpose. The unexpected enthusiastic responses of the young people and the success of the Pilot Project changed the situation for all of us. I was keen to undertake further research and fully committed to the action research methods I had planned.

My initial research question was framed as: To what extent might applied theatre, as a creative practice, positively impact on Indigenous students and
extend their capacity to engage and succeed in further education and training, and if it does so, how does it? I thought my action research plan would be suitable for the project, that is, a plan that was responsive to change due to the circumstances. It was not until early in the first research phase that I was forced to reframe my thinking about my research design.

Despite the problems in the Pilot Project, I had felt optimistic about my planning for 2007. The Youth Program had evolved; there were new partners, a different group of young people and new partnerships. However the dynamic of the young people in this phase of research was completely different from the Pilot Project. Nothing was clearly delineated and each workshop became a mini action research phase in itself. There were tensions caused by the major difficulties in the workshops that I had not anticipated and these impacted on the way I thought about the research:

I’ve had lots of thoughts about stopping the PhD, as it seems fruitless. I don’t believe that I can do anything to improve things, as there are so many elements involved. Yet, I have decided that I want to finish the applied theatre project and I want to give the kids something from it. I have to keep clearing my head and thinking ‘this is an adventure’, just go with it and see where it leads. I want to control things, control the outcomes, but it is constantly apparent that I have to let go of control and go with the flow.

*Journal entry 01 August 2007*

My practice became more open and responsive, as I had to adapt to unstable and unpredictable circumstances almost on a daily basis. My research design began to incorporate elements of reflective practitioner research as a means to negotiate the multiple realities and challenges facing me.

I needed to be reactive and responsive in the field. Rather than abandoning my project, I began to alter my practice so that I conducted workshops whenever it was possible, even in an impromptu way, depending on the young people’s responses. Reflection became critical to my ability to make decisions around my practice, the choice of activities, understanding the young people’s participation and their use of the space. I found it difficult to negotiate the unreliability, disorganisation and sense of hopelessness that permeated the young people’s lives. I had to distinguish between what was affecting their participation - the content of the workshops or events outside my control. Implementing the workshops was a dynamic process in a complex context.
The focus of my research shifted to trying to understand whether, and if so how, applied theatre could be used for participation, communication and learning for Indigenous young people and for myself as a non-Indigenous teaching artist. It was a turning point moment as I reframed my research questions. I was committing myself to a much longer process of research in the field where I would investigate the potential of applied theatre with Indigenous young people and the characteristics and limitations of my practice as a teaching artist.

**CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH**

Before describing my process for conducting the research I would like to prioritize discussion of five forms of data and meaning making which were significant: living on site, keeping a researcher’s journal, the use of video recording of workshops, interviews with key stakeholders and with research participants.

In order to clarify the discussion I have differentiated between the following groups of participants in this study:

| Key informants | The adults and young people who participated in each research phase. This includes the coordinators, teachers, assistants, youth workers, Principals and visitors in the Youth Program who participated either directly or through observation in the applied theatre project. |
| Co-collaborators, project partners, partners | I am referring to Pat, Naretha, Kim and Arika. To a lesser extent staff from Palmville and Seaview, new teaching staff in the Youth Program in 2008 who participated in the applied theatre workshops and discussions, but who did not initiate and negotiate the three projects. |
| The young people | The workshop participants who were not the adults employed by Nungalinya or other organizations. This includes young people from Seaview. |

*Figure 5: research terms used in this discussion*
Living on Site

Physically living in the College while conducting the research was significant, as it meant I spent “extensive time in the field” (Creswell, 1998, p. 16). Staying there was a kind of separation from the way I usually lived, which meant I was both open to and challenged by the experience. I spent “extended amounts of time with people in the places they inhabit, fostering the development of both explicit and tacit knowledge” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1998, p. 41). I was inside an Indigenous Australian education community, and shared people’s daily struggle with minimum funding and scarce resources. Over time I gained a clearer sense of what the challenges were. As in any organization there were rumblings of discontent, frustration and competition between those with different responsibilities.

A significant feature of my early field trips was an overwhelming culture shock from immersing myself into a different world. Everything felt strange and I felt alone without the support of family and friends within the unfamiliar environment. It was the extent of the culture shock that not only increased the challenge of conducting research, but also enabled me to reach a deeper level of understanding.

I observed the young people in other activities in the Youth Program, which enabled me to extend my relationships and connections with them. In ethnographic terms I came across “rich points” (Eisner, 1991; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), which emphasized the gap between our two worlds. For example, young people accompanied me on a shopping trip to purchase a ball for the workshop activities. It became clear to me how different it was to enter a shop accompanied by a non-Indigenous Australian who received automatic respect through purchasing power in the transactions. I noticed the immediate suspicion by shop assistants of the young people to the extent that they could not get us out of the shop quickly enough. These experiences gave me “a glimmer of a different kind of life” (Agar, 1996, p. 38) and increased my understanding of challenges the young people faced.

Researcher’s Journal

Keeping a daily journal in the field “to make sense of experience” (Taylor, 2003, p. 123) was central to the research process, as it offered a space for my ongoing detailed reflections. These “personal accounts” (Agar, 1996, p. 163) opened up thinking space for me and as a data source reflected a comprehensive, personal
picture of my research experience. The journal helped me to acknowledge openly and reflect on my preconceptions and to explore the culture shock I experienced. I realized my capacity to cope with uncertainty was a significant factor, and critical when conducting research in this context. Many of the assumptions that had previously formed the basis of my applied theatre practice did not seem to make sense at Nungalinya. I realized that the more I let go of the assumptions I made as a practitioner the more I would understand the young people with whom I worked. Even though I was there to share my expertise, I was also very much in the learning role of “child and student” (Agar, 1996, p. 119). The following example shows my stress in coming to terms with the reality in the field:

All the heavy issues surrounding these kids makes it difficult to stay focused on your ideas, you have to work against the idea it’s impossible. You have to work against the idea that it’s hopeless

*Journal entry, 30 July 2007*

The descriptions and interpretative personal reflections enabled me to voice my internal dialogue and to think critically and honestly; this became a refuge at times. I wrote as thorough observations as possible, recalling key activities as well as small details, focusing mainly on the young people’s behaviour and responses, documenting my own decisions and actions, and any feedback from my partners. I asked questions about the young people, reflecting on the decisions I made to go in one direction, then to change my mind because the young people did not respond as I would have liked. I recorded my frustrations as I struggled to understand the young people’s participation and their interpersonal dynamics in the workshops. I agonized about my decisions around my practice, using the journal as a means to work through my thoughts and observations, trying to think about warm ups and activities which might solve some of the problems. Below is an example to illustrate how I used the journal:

I’m not sure that I got the combination of kids right for the two groups. I separated the two boys, which meant the two boys worked well. Then, I noticed Myndee didn’t work well as she wanted to be with Darri, then Marinna lost focus. This was a bit of a nightmare as one group worked ok on their own while the other group struggled. I spent most of my time with one of the groups to get them started and developing ideas. I left them to practise on their own, but they didn’t succeed with this as Myndee kept on saying she didn’t want to and walked away.

Running backwards and forwards between the two groups I felt like I was drowning. I wanted them to be engaged without being distracted all the time. It’s like all of
them had ADHD and individuals required my full attention for anything to happen. Still I persevered and got them to rehearse the scenes. They presented their ideas to each other. They lacked focus and sense of performance and were barely audible, but at least they got up to do something.

I went to speak to Naretha and Arika and lost it with them. I spoke strictly to them about interruptions and distractions. I asked Naretha if she was going to talk to visitors to take them away so it didn’t distract everyone else.

Arika’s perspective of the workshop is more positive than mine. Being in the moment the workshop felt like a nightmare, bordering on being out of control. When I was away from it, and sat down and wrote about it, it didn’t seem so bad. I’m worried about Myndee and Marinna as they both seemed to disengage towards the end. “I feel sick!” “I don’t’ want to do it!” I felt lacking in confidence and wondered what on earth I’ll do with them tomorrow.

Journal entry 07-08-07

I conscientiously wrote in my journal from the beginning of 2006, and over time I began to develop a different perspective on the meaning of participation for these young people. I realized there was a huge need to establish trust in the workshops and in the space. The journal became a regular place for thinking about the young people, myself, the context and all the significant moments of interaction; it enabled me to reflect, record, analyse and over time build deeper understandings.

**Video Recording of Workshops & Filming**

In 2006, Pat, the coordinator, was responsible for setting up the video and tripod in the corner of the workshop space. The footage recorded the sessions on the first two days and the last day, as we used the camera to make a film on the other days of the project. In 2007 my research assistant was responsible for setting up the camera on the tripod but often preferred to hold the camera in her hand. She also liked to engage with the participants by inviting them to do some filming. The footage consisted of several different sessions between days 1 and day 13. In 2008, a teacher and participants took turns to record the workshop sessions. The camera was rarely fixed on a tripod. The footage consisted of short components filmed over the two-week workshop period. The actual recording of the film took several days and the camera was also used for this purpose.
I did not always oversee the video recording as there were so many other concerns which took my attention on a daily basis. However this situation created an opportunity for the participants to claim ownership of their creative space and the research space through managing and interacting with the camera. It became their vehicle for communication, as well as mine for data recording. The camera became a moveable eye on the action, rather than a fixed point of observation. The camera "represented a vehicle for self-expression" that they did not experience in school (McIntyre, 2008, p. 24). The role of the video camera was in some ways integral to the developing research. The use was hesitant and functional at first, standing in the corner. Then it became the students' tool for learning, interpretation, control and discovery, and the centre of their attention. I recall McIntyre’s diagram (figure 4), which reminds me of a film unfolding, moving forward, “camera”, “rolling”, “action”, and “cut”. In a sense the young people recorded their own experience of the applied theatre workshops, while also driving the direction of the artistic work. This was their choice, and at their insistence, not mine.

The camera became a magnet for the shy or reluctant participants. Rather than leaving it to sit on a tripod, the camera was taken by my research assistant, a teacher or one of the young people who preferred to move around the room filming, which increased the young peoples’ participation. The video camera then was both unobtrusive and obtrusive; it was something the young people took for granted, but also something they wanted to control and use.

In the analysis stage, back in Melbourne, I watched hours of footage and transcribed the workshop sessions; my understanding and interpretation of the young people became more significant looking back on the workshops. It gave me a different lens in this relaxed, quiet space. In this sense I generated data from the video records of the participants in the workshops after the event. I refer to some of these moments in chapters 5 and 6.

The greatest impact of the video recording was that the young people claimed the camera as a medium for their own stories and the expression of their creativity in preference to the notion of a live theatre performance. None of us were experienced in video technique so I found it to be a huge complication to the project. The making of the short films in each research phase became fundamental to the building of relationships, development of skills and the representation of the young people’s stories. For the young people it was also a logical progression from the acting workshops. They all knew about movies, none
of them had seen a play. These four films became key data for my research as well as important outcomes of the applied theatre projects. This was useful during the analysis after the workshops had ended, as I had the opportunity to review the stories many times and this contributed to deepening my understanding about the work.

**Interviews with Research Participants and Key Stakeholders**

I hoped to uncover the diverse individuals’ points of view through interviewing, observation and by experiencing and grappling with the many “constraints of everyday life” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 5). Across three phases I conducted interviews with the Principals: Karuah, Bernadette and Guy Ambrose; the Youth Program coordinators/project partners: Pat and Naretha; the Youth Program Indigenous teaching staff partner: Kim; the Indigenous teaching staff landscape project: Jack; Indigenous research assistant: Arika; an Indigenous performer: Tammy Andersen; the non-Indigenous Youth Program teachers: Mick and Ted; all the young people who participated in the applied theatre projects; the youth worker from Palmville Alternative Education: Clive; the two Nungalinya textile artists: Auntie Kath and Auntie Trish; staff and assistants from Seaview High; and audience members and visitors in the Youth Program.

My original intention was to conduct short interviews with the young people to find out what they liked and did not like, as a result of their participation in the drama project. My interviews with Naretha, Pat and Kim were both casual and formal as we discussed the young people and the applied theatre project daily, and at the completion of each project I conducted individual interviews.

The most significant ‘semi-structured’ interviews were with Naretha, the Youth program coordinator in 2007 and 2008, as we had built a strong working relationship. Her perspective covered the entire research period. Being Aboriginal Australian, she had a deep understanding of the young people, had family among the cohort in 2006 and she was in the position of elder in terms of the community and the Youth Program. As much as Naretha helped me, she always focused on what was best for the young people and worked tirelessly to that end. I found the interviews with each Principal offered their own comprehensive view of the role of the applied theatre project in the Youth Program.

When I made the second trip to Darwin in May 2006, my main aim was to gain further insights into the Pilot Project through interviewing the coordinator and the
young people after a gap of three months. This was an illuminating trip as I learnt more in these few days than through months of email and phone contact with the coordinator. Conducting these interviews contributed to the deepening of my involvement in the Youth Program at Nungalinya, as well as informing my research.

When I reviewed my data later the semi-structured interviews with the young people seemed of limited value compared with the adults’ interviews, as the young people tended to be very constrained, but so too was I. On reflection I think there are a couple of interesting points to make about my formal interviews with the young people. Initially I decided the young people’s responses were too reserved, but with hindsight and reflection have discovered another perspective.

Due to my inexperience, I took an overly literal approach in following the proforma questions\(^8\) listed for my Ethics application. This resulted in a stilted and seemingly unproductive exchange with the young people. I took on the mantle of researcher, and the young people tended to become reticent, pressuring themselves to say the right thing. When the Dictaphone was off, everyone relaxed and our relationship returned to normal. The workshops were a shared space as it was the place of our artistic collaboration. The interview questions were mine and were designed to meet the research requirements before I had even met the young people. So without meaning to I created a distance through separating myself from our usual relaxed relationship. Below is an extract of an interview I conducted with Burnum at the end of the 2007 project, which demonstrates my approach:

Rosemary: Did you enjoy any or part of the drama program?

Burnum: Um yeah

Rosemary: Is there anything you didn’t like?

Burnum: Um, not really, not that I can think.

Rosemary: Do you think you will use what you learned from the drama program in other ways?

Burnum: Yeah.

Section of interview with Burnum 28-08-07

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\(^8\) Full list of questions in Appendix A.
Bishop and Glynn (1999) recommend researchers conduct “conversations” rather than interviews (p. 102). Bishop argues that the end result of the research is based on the “reciprocal interactions” between researchers and researched. In this sense conversation is seen as a metaphor for reciprocity (p. 105) and an enabling device to value the input of the student. As in a good conversation, one listens to the other, and how, when and what one says depends upon what the other has to say (Eisner, 1991). Bishop suggests that “sequential, semi-structured, in-depth interviews as conversations conducted in a dialogic, reflexive manner need to be developed in order to facilitate ongoing collaborative analysis and construction of meaning/explanations about the experiences of the research participants” (1999, p. 119).

This example with Burnum demonstrated what seemed like the limited value of my interview approach. However, in 2007 and 2008, I noticed that each young person watched me interview the other young people in the group and were conscious of being asked the same questions. I felt it was inappropriate to differentiate one individual from another by asking different questions. I realized that the young people’s willingness to participate in the formal interview process was a demonstration of trust and respect towards me. No one ever refused. Keeping to the planned interview format was a form of respect towards the young people, as they were conscious and aware of how they were represented through being asked identical questions.

In hindsight I now think Burnum’s simple statement communicated a great deal. When asked the question “is there anything you did not like?” Burnum’s answer is really honest. He was an outspoken young man who would not shy away from giving his opinions. It had seemed somewhat obvious to Burnum that he had liked the applied theatre project as his participation, attitude and behaviour had changed considerably since the beginning of the project, and he had been a keen workshop participant and contributor to the Nungalinya film. For Burnum, his actions were more important than words. His action of participating in the formal interview was what mattered.

In contrast, in an interview with Burnum at the completion of the 2008 project, his response to the same question was:

No, not at all, I liked everything. Probably if you want to make another movie or something I feel I can organize things. Thanks for coming and I enjoyed everything.

*Interview with Burnum 18-09-08*
His response here makes a clear point. These semi-structured interviews with the young people seemed stilted and unnatural given the experiences we had shared, but the young people willingly participated in them. I continued to undertake these formal interviews almost as a ritual for the completion of the project as much as for the content. My dialogue with the young people flowed directly from our developing relationships within the workshop processes which were recorded on video. The formal interview questions enhanced my understanding of the young people’s commitment and developing trust in me and gave a different perspective on the research.

**Young People as Research Participants**

The young people came from a variety of places including alternative education programs and outreach centres, YMCA, Mission Australia and Criminal Justice. There were individuals who would come and go, sometimes only participating for a day, others attending but with regular absences. There was a core group of only about eight individuals. These were young people in unstable living circumstances who were unaccustomed to rules, structured learning and time constraints and required intensive supervision. The number was large enough for small group work in the workshops, maximized individual attention and gave greater opportunity for the young people to feel comfortable.

I introduced myself to each group at the start of each research phase and asked them to advise me about what was needed for young Aboriginal Australian people to have a better chance in life. In 2007 they responded to this proposal by literally cheering, shouting and clapping happily, buoyed by the prospect of informing my partners and me, and contributing to our understanding and the project. They seemed to appreciate the importance of their role in the process, even though we had not yet begun.

It was the action in the workshops that excited the young people. Apart from short interviews, their reflections and observations happened in the moment, when they were ready, in conversations when relaxing on the couch between workshop sessions and during pick-up, which was when we collected the young people from around Darwin. These young people were not powerless within the Youth Program; their participation and responses to the project informed the adults’ planning and guided our efforts. I gathered data through conversations between workshops with my partners and the young people and through watching the video data. Significantly in the second research phase I realized the young people’s powers of observation should not be underestimated. Thus my
learning from these young people happened incrementally, over time; this was also related to their developing trust in me, their secure feelings in the space and their relationships with each other developed through the workshop processes.

**RESEARCHING THE WORKSHOP PROJECTS**

**Pilot Project: 6 – 10 March 2006**

Through regular phone and email communication with Pat, my co-collaborator and partner, we devised a plan for me to conduct two workshops daily, morning and afternoon, over one week, investigating whether applied theatre had a positive impact on a small group of marginalized Indigenous young women. I intended to follow the action research steps as my guide, as the context was unfamiliar and I needed a framework for my investigation. I wanted the group to perform a live piece as a culmination to the applied theatre workshops. I expected my sessions to be part of a larger Youth Program timetable, similar to a school day.

Instead there was not an established group of young women; young men joined in and additional participants came and went over the course of five days. I facilitated 7 workshops of roughly 1.5 hours each. There were no other activities, other than an excursion to the cinema midweek. The young people were willing to spend more time than we anticipated and wanted to drive the direction of the work by writing a script and insisted on making a film, instead of a performance. The time spent on the film was additional to the workshops and spanned several hours, including going on location and filming.

It was difficult to be methodical in researching these workshops as there were unexpected and unanticipated responses from the young people. My partner, Pat, seemed to have other priorities and deviated from our agreed plan without notice. Maintaining informed consent was difficult due to the comings and goings of new young people; some left after one or two days. Pat and the young people expected me to be there all the time; I found it an overwhelming space. The young people were undisciplined, attention seeking, unpredictable, unaccustomed to rules and would come and go from activities. We had to allow for the fact that some of the group were homeless which meant we spent time organizing food and meals. As a result, I oscillated between trying to conduct distinct planned workshops and going with the flow of the young people, learning to respond to their willingness to participate in script writing and filming their story. My plan changed dramatically as the young people drove much of what occurred. I
survived the Pilot Project by adopting a responsive practitioner role allowing room for the young people to explore their ideas within the drama space.

**Data:**

- Daily entries in researcher’s journal.
- Videotape and DVD footage of workshop sessions, scenes for film and rehearsals; short film – *Just Another Friday Night* (edited version: 7 minutes 43 seconds).
- Interviews with seven young people, three staff, and Principal.
- Workshop plans and notes. I often scribbled observations during workshops or immediately after activities from a reflective practitioner’s perspective.
- Copies of planning emails, notes from phone conversations, email correspondence.
- Photographs of young people in action and posed pictures. The photographs were less effective than other forms of data collection. Taking photos was an interruption, because it meant stopping the workshop and the images became “posed” and unnatural.
- Partnership agreements between Trinity and Nungalinya.

**Follow-up Visit: 17 June – 21 June 2006**

My reflections back in Melbourne, editing the footage into a DVD and returning to Darwin to do follow-up interviews transformed my thinking. This time I did not have the pressure of conducting workshops so was free to see through a different lens; my perspective was altered. Pat and I spent every day together talking about the Pilot Project and what had happened in the Youth Program since. Pat drove me around Darwin looking for the young people so I could interview them. We also had a meeting with the Chief Minister where Pat asked for support for funding of the Youth Program. This trip was an opportunity to question the purpose of the project and the aims of the research. It made me more aware of the young people’s leap of faith and their willingness to share their stories with me - given the circumstances of their lives. The contrast with my life in Melbourne and a second meeting with the young people in Darwin was a huge reality check as the gap between us outside of the workshop space seemed
insurmountable. The trip underlined the importance of acknowledging these differences as a novice researcher in Aboriginal Australia.

During these five days I realized Pat had in some ways cocooned me during the Pilot Project so I could facilitate the workshops as I would for any group of young people. I realized that I had been superficial in my thinking in the Pilot Project. I discovered things that had not been communicated to me previously through interviews or regular contact by phone and email with Pat since the Pilot Project. For example, after the Pilot Project the young people had returned to Nungalinya every day for three weeks to watch the video footage. It was their act of returning that made the difference to the research project. Pat and the College believed the Pilot Project had been successful and were keen to run and investigate another drama project. Consequently Pat and I began to develop a new plan.

**Data:**

- Interviews with Pat, four young people from the Pilot Project, the Principal, two youth workers and an outreach worker. This data was recorded on a Dictaphone and later transferred to my laptop. Unfortunately when my computer crashed much of the audio material was lost. I was able to salvage some interview notes I had kept in a notebook.

- Daily detailed entries in my researcher’s journal enabled me to recall some of the conversations and experiences during this trip. I drew on reflective practitioner elements to collect data.

- Email correspondence and phone conversations recorded as notes.

**First Research Phase: 30 July – 29 August 2007**

In December 2006 I began collaborating with Naretha the new coordinator of the Youth Program. We planned for applied theatre workshops over four weeks leading to the production of a short film. The possibility of a live performance was also discussed. We planned in detail and Naretha drew up a schedule. We expected a larger group of young men and young women to participate in this project. A young Indigenous research assistant, Arika, accompanied me to Nungalinya, specifically to record data and to offer another perspective on the workshops. The plan began with sessions of a few hours in the first week, building to all day focus in the last two weeks. Everything seemed more organized and we discussed the plans at length via phone and email.
In reality the plan was changed many times. Naretha had developed new partnerships with Seaview High School which meant we had another group of young people participating in the workshops and the timetable had to accommodate bus schedules, lateness and conflicting interests. I experienced an even greater loss of control in the space. I facilitated seventeen workshop sessions of roughly 1.5 hours. Seven workshops were cancelled due to the young people’s non-attendance. This project seemed a direct contrast with 2006, as nothing seemed straightforward. Adopting a reflective practitioner research stance was my response to the chaotic situation.

I did not feel in control of the research or of the workshop project most of the time. For example, my research assistant, whose role was to manage the videotaping of each workshop, made her own decisions about the camera’s use. I often felt powerless, as a lot of people were coming and going in the space which felt intrusive and unethical to me. The schedule changed to accommodate irregular attendance patterns making it difficult to investigate the developments within the drama workshops and its impact on the young people.

I felt the need to be increasingly collaborative as I responded to this situation. In the immediacy of needing to facilitate workshops, I focused on drawing out the young people and involving them in the artistic processes. I did not think about Arika’s actions with the camera until much later. With the increased difficulties and hurdles I faced within the applied theatre project, my partners engaged in daily questions, reflections and discussion about how to address these issues and the impact of the drama on the young people.

I recorded discussions and informal conversations with my partners to augment the formal interviews. Later, it was my reflection-on-action that particularly impacted on my understanding of my practice. Assisted by ongoing phone and email contact with my partners after the project and viewing the video footage in Melbourne I began to develop a different perspective on the young people’s participation. There were three layers to my reflections: while conducting the workshops; later in my daily journal entries; and back in Melbourne, which provided distance in geography and in time. This was an uncluttered space that enabled me to be more removed from the emotional dynamics of my relationships with the young people, enabling me to gain fresh insights into my artistic practice. It was this reflection-on-action, which informed my thinking, re-energized me and enabled my planning for the next phase of the investigation.
Data:

- Videotaped workshop sessions and final presentation transferred to six DVDs. Two short films on DVD – *Waggin’* (5 minutes) and *When They Stole Us* (5 minutes). Video recordings with five participants speaking to the camera about their role in the short film.
- Daily entries in researcher’s journal.
- Recorded interviews on Dictaphone with participants and staff, new Principal and audience members, later transcribed onto computer. I conducted fifteen interviews at Nungalinya and twelve at Seaview. Four months later in Melbourne in December I interviewed four Seaview participants again when they attended a scholarship program at Trinity College and transcribed these interviews onto my computer.

Arika, my research assistant, kept notes of her observations of the workshop sessions.\(^8\) This was one of her key responsibilities, as well as management of the videotaping, and to assist with the workshops. Her handwritten report consisted of eighteen separate commentaries, which varied from half a page to up to four pages in length. Her observations were descriptive rather than analytic, rarely critical, and usually supportive of my work. Beyond the detailed description of what happened and when, she usually wrote a sentence or two from her own perspective. Sometimes her views were different from mine, usually more positive, seeing improvement and progress in the young people. She identified with the young people as she was close to their age. She kept her report to herself until the project was finished when she handed it to me. Through my analysis I realized her comments and insights provided a counterpoint to my understanding of the young people and the significance of the applied theatre project in terms of their lives.

- I provided art diaries to offer the young people another form of response, through writing and drawing. I bought these small books with blank pages made of quality paper, which were ideal for artwork, sketches or writing. The young people were very excited to receive one each and did a combination of drawings, words and sentences. The disorganization in the

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\(^8\) Between 30 July to 24 August 2007.
daily schedule meant we did not allow enough time for the young people to enjoy this opportunity during the sessions. The Seaview young people filled in their diaries; I found it disappointing that there were only 5 separate entries. The Nungalinya group’s diaries were taken home and I did not see them again.

- Email correspondence and notes from phone conversations with co-collaborators.

- My workshop outlines, daily plans and notes.

- Photographs of workshops, the participants, the locations, the activities, and research assistant’s photo album. My research assistant took most of the photos with her own camera and presented them to me at the end. These photographs reveal behind the scenes work in the making of the films such as rehearsals, writing the scripts, warm up activities, workshop processes, participation in workshops, me leading the workshops, the audience watching the films, as well as posed groups of people involved in the project and general photographs about activities in and around Darwin. They helped remind me of the young people’s early reluctance and shyness, and their developing focus and commitment in the project over time.

Second Research Phase: 5 September – 19 September 2008

Our intention was to build on the established relationships with all the partners and the young people from 2007. We planned for a two-week intensive applied theatre course building to another film production. I invited Indigenous actress Tammy Andersen to come to the Youth Program and perform her show in the first week as the central feature of the applied theatre project. The second week was a blank canvas in direct contrast to my detailed planning of previous field trips. I wanted to allow the young people to drive our direction. I had a framework for action rather than a set plan. The workshops and arts practice would emerge and unfold in this open space. I did not expect to control much of what happened, but trusted the partnership and involvement of the young people.

I facilitated daily workshops, morning and afternoon between 9 – 4. It was the strongest and most effective collaboration of the three phases; some of the

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9 The dates of these diary entries were: 8, 13, 21, 23 and 28 August and 21 September 2007
young people from 2007 took leadership roles, read out the plain language permission statement and managed the group through the consent process. The young people were co-collaborators of all the action that took place within this phase of the applied theatre project. I was actively engaged as a reflective practitioner researcher.

As much as I wanted to facilitate a performance outcome for each project, the young people preferred to make a film. Taylor observes that within the applied theatre context, theatre can be “pressed onto something other than itself” (2003, p. 33). I understood that the purpose of the workshop was “interactive and worked when the teacher/actor is attuned to the participants’ needs and responses” (Dansick, 1994, p. 109). In responding to the young people’s idea of making a film, I was in fact “opening communicative space” between the community, staff, the young people and me. Kemmis & McTaggart claim the effect of opening a communicative space “builds solidarity between people” and underwrites understandings and decisions “with legitimacy” (2005, p. 576).

Data:

- Daily entries in researcher’s journal.
- Videotaped workshop sessions transferred to two DVDs; DVD of a short film – Hiccup (9 minutes).
- Recorded interviews on Dictaphone with young people, partners, staff and Principal. These were later transferred to computer and transcribed. Two interviews with Tammy Andersen recorded on Dictaphone and transcribed to computer and conversations recorded as notes in journal.
- Workshop outline and plan for first week and planning notes for second week.

OTHER RESEARCH ELEMENTS

The following informing principles that impacted on the project 2006-2008 throughout each phase, resonated with Tuhiwai Smith’s qualitative research principles for Indigenous research discussed at the beginning of this chapter:

- The need to present the views expressed in the research through the “lens of native people” (2005, p.88). The young peoples’ responses, knowledge and perspectives informed the research. This expanded my own understanding about researching this context.
• The young people had a “way of knowing about themselves” (2005, p. 101) and a way to influence the direction of the applied theatre project “around their own interests” (p. 86), which I did not understand. It was apparent quite quickly that I needed multiple methods of research and multiple forms of data so that I could build understanding of the young people and of their responses to my practice.

• There is a shift from “victim” to “activist” so Indigenous peoples are empowered in the inquiry (2005, p. 87). I was accountable to all the stakeholders and my partners and made sure of this by being present for every workshop. I had to facilitate the workshops in the central area and not in a discrete drama room. This was stressful and challenging for me. I felt exposed as a practitioner: as I was unused to this I found it hard to focus and to work artistically as there were a lot of distractions.

• Indigenous communities have an “alternative vision” and “alternative ethics” (2005, p. 101). Being centrally located in the Youth area meant the applied theatre workshops were conducted in a communal space. I was concerned about privacy and ethics with the coming and going of apparent strangers in the research space. I also felt a diminished control of the project.

• Research is transformed when Indigenous people become the researchers and people participate on different terms (2002). I relied on daily consultation, negotiation and agreement with my partners and found that plans had to adapt and change. Their priorities were different from mine; I needed to adopt relational accountability. This built mutual trust as we were accountable for our actions within the project – accountable to each other, the young people and all stakeholders.

• I had to acknowledge “multiple realities” and contradictions of human experience (2005, p. 88). I had to open my mind beyond the parameters of the workshops. For the young people and my partners it was essential to acknowledge their “multiple realities”, and I became a participant observer in their lives, as they were in mine when I lived at Nungalinya.

My Approach as Teaching Artist and Researcher

I am a “privileged westerner” (Denzin, 2005, p. 936) who wanted to work against what Tuhiwai Smith expresses as “they came, they saw, they named, they claimed” (1999, p. 80). I brought my skills and experience as a teaching artist to
the project. My approach to the Nugalinya project was influenced by my experiences designing Foundation Studies curriculum and as a performer who toured in remote Aboriginal settlements and communities. In these previous experiences where I had been “challenged by my own whiteness” (McIntyre, 2008, p. 9) in addressing issues of whiteness and racism both professionally and personally, I had a set of strategies in place to assist me as I negotiated the particular context. As Eisner (1991) observes, “It is about perceiving the presence of behaviours and interpreting their significance” (p. 34). I needed to activate my own “ability to think, assess and re-assess” in terms of the drama project within the Nugalinya context (Taylor, 2003, p.69).

**Ethics, Consent and Indigenous Australian Young People**

According to Tuhiwai Smith (2005) research ethics is more about “institutional and professional regulations and codes of conduct” than the needs, aspirations, or worldviews of “marginalized and vulnerable communities” (p. 96). I undertook my study with due consideration of research ethics and protocols. I received Ethics approval from the University of Melbourne to conduct the major research phases in 2007 and 2008, which built onto the experiences of the Pilot Study in 2006. The participants were in a dependent relationship with me in that I was the adult leading the workshop and they were the students. Their participation was completely voluntary and it did not involve any assessment for a course. The Principals of the College and the coordinators of the Youth Program gave me written and spoken permission for each phase.

I began each phase at Nugalinya by sitting with participants in a circle, introducing myself and explaining why I was there. Like O’Connor (2003), I positioned myself foremost as a teaching artist invited to come and conduct an applied theatre project in the Youth Program. I explained that the Principal had invited me to Nugalinya to lead drama workshops in the Youth Program to develop the confidence of the young people attending the workshops. I also explained that the video camera was for my data collection as I was doing research to see if drama activities built confidence for Indigenous young people and would need to refer to the video in Melbourne to remember what had happened in the workshops. I wanted to understand their responses to the drama activities so we could find ways of helping Indigenous young people. I
made it clear to the young people that I relied on their participation and input as I could not do anything without their involvement.\(^{10}\)

We read the Plain Language Statement out aloud, gave the opportunity for questions and I handed out the Consent forms. The course coordinators repeated the information explaining the important details, especially for the young people who struggled with literacy. Every young person in each research phase signed a consent form, except in 2007 when one girl did not sign, and two boys’ parents did not sign. In 2008 five of the young people had participated in 2007. Two from this group adopted the role of co-leaders. They took some ownership of the process through demonstrating their expertise to the newcomers by reading the Plain Language statement out aloud and leading discussion about the research.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

My analysis took place mostly with geographical distance and time from the research setting. As I had videotaped each workshop, I was able to observe what happened afresh and to glean new insights into the young people’s participation. My data analysis was informed by my detailed reflections on the workshops and on my own practice, which had been recorded in my journal. I studied the series of workshop sessions, and the observations made during each session and followed-up with detailed reflections before proceeding with further planning. I worked inductively through the stages within each project, noting themes or patterns as they emerged. The early themes that I identified I called the five C’s – commitment, control, collaboration, confidence and community, as they seemed to be the key to my understanding. I was aware of my relationship with the young people and my complex roles within the project.

Being the researcher I found my understanding deepened through taking the position of a reflective practitioner analyzing her own practice and the participants’ responses to it. I analyzed the data in terms of the young people’s participation, in tasks of various levels of difficulty, their focus, their responses to the workshop activities and sustained interest in challenging tasks. The analysis revealed how the young people were able to use the applied theatre to communicate their ideas and to influence the creative processes of the project. I reflected on the two-way communication between us, the young people’s capacity to negotiate the direction of the creative work, and how the creative space

\(^{10}\) See appendix B for copies of Consent form and Plain Language Statement
emerged as a platform for the young people to be heard. I discovered how the young people transformed the creative space so that it suited their needs and how the processes of trust and power were developed as they negotiated elements of dramatic form in terms of their context and purposes.

**Analytical Model**

The process of analysis began in the field within the research. Just as my research design was dynamic, similar to McIntyre’s design, each project opened up the communicative space with connections and involvements within the Youth Program. It was the reflective processes that enabled me to gain understanding of my practice and the young people in this context. Each phase of investigation brought further refinement, which was expressed in the next phase of implementation. On completion of the fieldwork, I undertook the following steps, adapted from Clandinin & Connelly (2000, p.131).

1. I identified models, themes and concepts in the researcher’s journal through self-reflection, noticing changes and similarities of approach for each research phase of workshops. I looked at the encounters between the young people and the artistic practices across the three projects.

2. I looked for and drew on multiple perspectives by re-thinking the young peoples’ responses in interviews, participation in workshops, drawings, photographs, and spontaneous comments, as well as the observations and feedback of all key informants.

3. I integrated steps one and two in relation to the research questions, looking for ways that the applied theatre enabled the creative participation of the young people and what sorts of constraints prevented this. I grouped the data into early themes such as: collaboration, community, commitment, confidence and control, which helped prioritize data and clarified the multiple layers of meaning within the project. This was helpful as I found there were multiple transactions, intentions and processes within the three applied theatre projects. There were central ideas about collaboration, partnerships and accountabilities which were relevant for the Indigenous context which also emerged through the young people’s joint partnership in leading the creative activities within the workshops. I used large sheets of cardboard, different coloured pens and sticky notes and grouped ideas together under key headings, always searching for deeper and deeper layers, particularly with regard to the key point of the research questions. Seeing the ideas spread out in front of me made it easier to see connections and relationships,
repetition and reoccurring ideas. I looked for relationships and connections, within each phase, and between the phases.
4. I interpreted the artistic products of each research phase and related them to key themes. I tried to connect with the perspectives of the young people in relation to the adults’ key observations and reflections at the completion of each phase.
5. I identified emergent issues – internal and external - that affected the project. I identified key elements with respect to the central focus of the young people’s participation and their co-construction of a participatory creative space within the applied theatre workshops.
6. I re-considered the researcher’s journal in the light of subsequent analysis and its role for understanding the young people’s participation with development of my practice. I linked my findings to the research questions and contemporary Indigenous worldviews that I had encountered in this context.
7. I repeated the process and linked issues and quotes to relevant theories. I constructed recommendations for building opportunities for increasing the participation of Indigenous young people and for conducting research projects as a non-Indigenous practitioner/researcher in an Indigenous context.

Writing Up

My analysis continued throughout this project and still continues as I work as a theatre practitioner in the field today. My focus was on incorporating these key factors in my writing: working in an Indigenous Australian context, the challenges and opportunities this brings to the non-Indigenous researcher, and reflecting my expanding understanding and knowledge development at each phase. At the same time, I wanted to try to take the reader to Nungalinya, to bring the site to life. I incorporated vignettes in order to express some of my ideas about the research. The creativity of the form opened up a research space for me where I was able to represent a more layered and aesthetic understanding.

I adopted the use of metaphor to frame the chapters focusing on the fieldwork; metaphor became a means of communicating the complexity of my research experience and representing the levels of discomfort and risk required to facilitate deeper levels of understanding within the context. The amount of data and information I gathered and interpreted across the three phases of the research and in the subsequent period of analysis was considerable. I resorted to charts, diagrams and lists to communicate in a clear fashion the complexity of my
experience, and to connect the reader to the impact of climate, landscape, social and cultural environment on the researcher.

The main focus of the next three chapters is to discuss the understandings I gained through my reflective practice and the phases of my research in the field. I give a narrative account that is predominantly descriptive, followed by analysis and interpretation of the layers of meaning and my learning, and its wider significance in this Indigenous context.

The chapters are of different lengths to reflect the period of time of the fieldwork and the different amounts of analysis required. In Chapter Five I discuss the Pilot Project in 2006, in Chapter Six I discuss the first research phase in 2007 and in Chapter Seven I discuss the second research phase in 2008. For clarity I have divided the discussion of the three phases across the three chapters to demonstrate the developing process of understanding as I conducted my study. I discuss the phases chronologically. I have employed the following framework to structure my discussion across each research phase:

1. Narrative account

In this section I focus on the story of what happened at Nungalinya in the Youth Program as I conducted the applied theatre projects: the Pilot Project; the first research phase; and the second research phase. In my accounts of each of these phases I draw on a range of data including: video data, journal extracts, informal conversations, interviews, email correspondence and research assistant’s report. I reflect on the data as a practitioner researcher.

2. Discussion

In this section I discuss the significance of the critical incidents described in the narrative sections of each phase and draw out my analysis and interpretation of these critical incidents and other key themes in terms of my study.

3. Reflections

In this section I consider the insights that emerge from each research phase and discuss the questions raised for me in this context and the ways they challenge my assumptions about my applied theatre practice. These reflections then form the basis for my preparation for the next phase of research.
CHAPTER FIVE : STAGES OF KNOWLEDGE – THE BEGINNING

THE LANDSCAPE

Casuarina beach was near the College, a vast panorama of sea, sand and sky into the horizon, different hues of blue water and the sand scattered with white and ochre rocks. There were warnings – crocodiles, sharks, stinging jellyfish and other dangers in the water. This was an unfamiliar beach and initially I looked at it from the safety of the viewing platform, shoes firmly on my feet. In the distance was Nungalinya rock, visible at low tide.

I did venture onto the sand and into the water, took the risk of getting my feet wet, paddling up to my ankles, staying within safe proximity of my clothes. These small steps that I took in the natural environment just down the road from Nungalinya College paralleled my early steps in the project.

THREE STAGES TO KNOWLEDGE – FROM SHALLOW TO DEEPER WATER

In this chapter and the next two chapters I discuss the research fieldwork of my three projects from 2006-2008. Firstly in this Chapter I discuss the Pilot Project and the knowledge I gained from this experience. I continue my discussion in Chapter Six with an analysis of the 2007 project. In Chapter 7, I discuss the third project conducted in 2008.

As previously explained in Chapter 4, I have divided my account of each project into three sections: narrative, discussion, and reflections. These were separate projects, but the critical learning was linked across the three years and indicated a progression in my understanding as practitioner and researcher.

I liken the complicated and changeable experience of research in Indigenous contexts to the act of stepping into water at the beach. Even if you’re only ankle deep, you get wet and you are conscious of the mass of water stretching to the horizon. You are connected to the whole ocean and diminished by the immensity of it. You have left the security of dry land, removed your shoes, and changed your usual clothing, treading carefully in unfamiliar water as you gingerly go deeper, not knowing what lurks beneath the surface. You have control in that you can run out of the water at any time. You can choose to relinquish control.
through complete immersion. It is a small yet significant beginning, which tests your mettle and capacity to go deeper.

**STAGE ONE: IN THE SHALLOWS TESTING THE WATER 2006**

The Pilot Project was a means to test the partnership and the relevance of applied theatre for the young women in the Youth Program. Pat, the coordinator, and I began with a series of questions: How would we work together in this applied theatre project? Would young women want to join in the applied theatre project? If they did come, would they return each day and participate in the whole project? How many young people would come? What would we do if they did not like the applied theatre workshops?

**NARRATIVE – BEGINNING THE PILOT PROJECT**

Two weeks seemed like a long sentence.

I wrote the above statement on 2nd March 2006 in my journal referring to the length of my stay at Nungalinya. It showed my state of mind – I had not expected to feel so overwhelmed by the context.

In the Youth Program building the cramped teaching space was uninspiring, unsuited to a drama workshop with its large tables and chairs, old couches, arm-chairs and rows of ancient computers along the wall. I had to change the room’s configuration for my workshops, which felt like a major intervention. Pat had set up the space to make it inviting for the young people and here was I clearing it all away, so it looked empty. I had to make space for the drama but it felt invasive to disturb the normal set up. I had bouts of self-doubt; I lived my privilege, as I tried to set up a space for active drama in less than ideal conditions instead of accepting what was there.

My first workshop began inauspiciously with Pat, the coordinator of the Youth Program, two young women participants and me. I introduced a warm up activity and a teller/listener exchange in pairs. Suddenly, two youth workers and seven young people arrived, including three young men. One of the young women retreated immediately. There was no time to react; I simply had to incorporate the young men into the workshop.

I re-introduced the project to the new arrivals and we played a chasing game, which they all seemed to enjoy, followed by whole scene freeze and action improvisation, which began slowly but which everyone got into.
There was a good sense of cooperation and involvement. The characters were also getting more interesting. It was a mistake to underestimate these kids.

*Journal 06-03-06*

It appeared to me that the group learnt quickly. However, I did not have time to reflect on the fact that they seemed to be responding well to the drama activities. Before long things went awry when one of the group suddenly walked over to the fridge for a drink which was consumed sitting in another part of the room. Once one left, the others wandered off. This occurred without warning mid game, mid activity several times. The young people were similarly drawn to the row of ancient but functioning computers. I had to re-group to reflect on what was happening. Were they telling me they were not interested? How did I interpret this?

I called a break and retreated briefly to think, having coped with the unexpected all morning. One of the young men, Mullion, caught up to me at the door and said:

> You’re not leaving are you? You’re my friend.

I assured him I would be returning shortly.

> The break was essential as it was pretty intense in the room and I had to watch so many different elements; the main one was keeping them focused. It was a bit like working with giant toddlers with a short attention span.

*Journal 06-03-06*

I returned to the room after about fifteen minutes and another young man, Dorak, approached me and asked:

> Can we do some more?

*Journal 06-03-06*

This was a positive sign. We played some blindfold games and activities, which were very popular and they all requested repeat turns. It caused a lot of giggling.

> I remember how great it felt when they all started to laugh and smiles shone on their faces.

*Journal 06-03-06*
I was struck by the young people’s energy. The young men ran around leaping over the furniture; their behaviour was erratic so that they seemed out of control. Yet, at other times, they seemed to completely focus. For example, in the blindfold trust exercises and games there was never a question of cheating to gain an advantage. Their manner towards me was polite and respectful.

In the afternoon on the first day Abby produced a list of preferred activities she had written on a piece of paper. She confidently read out her list which included writing a play about teenage gangs and making a film. She wanted to use my camera which was there to record the workshops.

Pat and I accepted the challenge without discussing our shared lack of competence in video production. We were caught up in the young people’s enthusiasm and followed their lead. Despite our cultural differences, it was surprising that the workshop plan had to a certain extent worked in that the group responded to most activities and to my approach.

I did do some of the activities in my original plan. I hadn’t planned to start a script so soon, but I am now just going with the flow. I had designed an extension activity – give them a location, and they have to make up a little scene that occurs in that location – who, what, when, where and why? So, in a way, we have ended up with something like that.

_I Journal 06-03-06_

This was the beginning of my understanding of this context. I started to let go of my own expectations as these had proven to be of limited value. I conducted daily workshops for skills development while also allowing time for developing their script, rehearsing the scenes and filming.

As my relationship with the young people developed I found they accepted some rules; for example I differentiated time for the workshop and for breaks. I began to realize the daily schedule was a relief as they re-entered the room each day with vigour and a developing interest in the project.

They were keen to come; we didn’t have to force anyone. They looked happy and walked taller.

_Interview Clive youth worker 10-03-06_

Three months later Abby and Arinya, two of the young women in the project, recalled in interviews:
The games were very exciting and different. I didn’t like it when them mob wasn’t listening. It was annoying when they just wanted to play on the computers and that.

*Interview with Abby 21-06-06*

I remember doing the little game thing where we chased someone and then writing down a movie script and doing some of the acts, getting dressed up for it. Make it longer next time. It was fun.

*Interview with Arinya 20-06-08*

**Just Another Friday Night – the First Film**

*Just Another Friday Night* captured the group’s combined stories through an improvisation based on Abby’s suggestions. The group had enthusiastically embraced her idea and the script developed collaboratively. I asked questions: Where is it going to take place? Who are the characters? When is it happening? They more or less developed the whole story themselves, alternating discussion and improvisation. This activity seemed to open up space to be creative and an opportunity for the young people to explore ideas that interested them. Abby was making the most of her opportunity to be creative. She recalled in an interview:

I just wanted to make the script and keep acting and that.

*Interview with Abby 21-06-06*

Their film depicted a gang wandering aimlessly in the streets and parks, drinking and looking for something to do. Coming across a young (white) woman on her way home from a nightclub, they “humbug”11; the conversation gets out of control and one of the gang hits her with a bottle. Horrified at what has happened they call an ambulance before scattering for cover. They retreat to one of their houses where they are accosted by a mother who calls the police, annoyed that her daughter had been up to something. The police interview the group and lock them up. The gang members show no respect towards the legal process and deny everything. The mother routinely collects them the next day and the comment is made that it was “just another Friday night”.

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11 Ask for money
Providing opportunities for the expression of the young people’s ideas within the workshops was integral to developing a meaningful relationship with them. I began to realize a new significance in conducting the workshops that I expressed in this conversation with Pat, recorded on the third day of the project.

Pat had said to me she had been amazed at how they had responded to me and she could see they really trusted me and were fond of me. She thought it had been really successful because of this. For some unknown reason while we talked I got teary – probably at the thought of the kids, their eager faces, how hard they had tried. Pat said they wouldn’t get praise from their parents or family. “Often it’s the family that drags the kids back: what do you think you’re better than us or something? It isn’t the white fellas who put the kids down; it’s their own people”.

*Journal 08-03-06*

We did not have the facilities or expertise to finish the video so I had to take all the footage back to Melbourne to edit and transfer to DVD. It was important to me to provide the finished product so the young people could see their vision realized. This was time consuming and not part of my plan, but it was worth it for the young people.

It was different like, acting and trying to make um, I can’t think of that word. It was just a different thing to do. Normally it’s just work, standing around. What I liked about it was all of us getting together and making a change. When I watched the video I thought we shouldn’t have had that much swearing in it. It kind of made it look a bit silly, but it was ok. We didn’t read the script as we wrote it, we just said what we thought cause everyone was excited.

*Abby interview 21-06-06*

Pat presented *Just Another Friday Night* to an Open Day event at the College, which drew attention to the situation of marginalized Indigenous Australian youth in Darwin. Pat described the event to me:

Karuah brought the Board down and the NT Administrator, Ted Egan and MLA Kon Vatskalis attended. I had up to 40 people. I showed them the power point presentation and then the film. Well you could’ve heard a pin drop. Everyone was so quiet. A bit shell shocked because I think it was a bit too upfront. Ted and a minister from one of the churches asked a lot of questions about the film, so I answered as honestly as I could. Staff were here from Alternative Ed and they were great explaining about the circumstances that these kids face every day and how these kids were drawing from their own life experiences. When I explained that they had written, acted and filmed the film they were quite surprised at how well it
was done. I shared with them some of your comments about the kids and they were all impressed. Kon Vatskalis then came up to me afterwards and told me that he was going to work with Bishop Philip Freier from the Anglican Church about getting some more funding for the program. So I may still be around for a while. It was a good day and I honestly think the film was the highlight of the whole event.

*Pat’s email correspondence 04-05-06*

The film worked to communicate with those beyond the immediate community as well. Without the film the Youth Program may have closed, as I think it was seen as evidence of participation and need and an appeal for help that the community could not ignore. In particular the Principal was more determined than ever to maintain the Youth Program within the College.

The young men and women thoroughly enjoyed the workshop and were quite excited on the video production. On viewing the DVD, I was overwhelmed by the lifestyle our youth live in our local area. It was full of emotion, despair and a real cry for help. It showed a real need in caring for our youth. I feel this experience has given the young women and men a sense of achievement and pride in who they are without being judged.

*Principal’s letter to me 07-04-06*

The experience of the Pilot Project was significant as it built my initial understanding about conducting an applied theatre project and research in the context of Nungalinya.

**DISCUSSION - THE PILOT PROJECT**

There were five aspects that emerged from the Pilot Project that were relevant to my understanding of the young people and their participation, and my dual roles. These were: (A) the need to understand the different context; (B) the different agendas of participants; (C) applied theatre as a process; and the importance of my reflections as (D) practitioner and (E) researcher.

**A. Learning About the Context**

*Becoming the practitioner in the context*

I had not expected to feel so overwhelmed by the context, the impoverished state of the facilities and my accommodation, the oppressive heat, but most of all being confronted with the shocking disadvantage of the young people’s lives. As I became acquainted with Pat and the young people and developed an emotional
connection with them, the challenge facing me was bewildering. It was hard for me to imagine how the applied theatre could have an impact. Pat’s stated goals for the project of building self-esteem, confidence and teamwork through drama activities seemed impossible. As a practitioner I was afraid of making mistakes, so tried to design the right ideas as I worked and re-worked my plan. Finally I stuck with my original workshop design as this approach was what I knew. I realized that without the applied theatre project we may not have started the conversation.

**Becoming the researcher in the context**

Building relationships and attempting to understand the cultural and social context were my immediate priorities as a practitioner, yet it was the research that facilitated connection and understanding at a deeper level. The research was like having a lifebelt to hold onto when entering the water. The way I managed during the Pilot Project was to hold on to some familiar things, patterns, and my identity as a reflective practitioner. I discussed plans, the schedule and any organizational details I could think of with Pat, to gain a sense of control. As such, I stayed “on the sand” with my suitcase of props and notes. These were tools from my world and I used them as props in more than one sense of the word. I adopted a systematic approach of observation and reflection for generating data and collecting other data which gave me a structure and focus as I grappled with so many confusing and contradictory feelings. Through my relationship with Pat and the young people I began to find meaning and let go of my hesitancy.

**The young people**

McIntyre says that we are informed through our relationships with research participants about the “most salient issues” (2008, p. 9): race, age, educational status, and social class. I recall the young people’s willingness to embrace the opportunity of the project as an image of children racing headlong into the water. These young people did not have any possessions to worry about, nothing to leave on the sand. Yet as vulnerable and innocent young people they had a need to be heard. There were dangers for them in the water. What did it mean to trust this white teaching artist? What did it mean to participate in a project, which only lasted a week? Most of them fended for themselves, often having nowhere to sleep and would “couch surf” each night; they had nothing much to eat and although they roamed urban Darwin, they made it every day to the workshops. Why? They were hungry. Their day in the Youth Program began with a mountain of toast and cups of tea. We provided lunch and they snacked
on donated junk food throughout the day. But were they also drawn to an opportunity to connect, to be included in a project with other young people, guided by adults who wanted to listen, to spend time in a place that was welcoming and safe? In terms of my metaphor this was like a day at the beach with total strangers.

At one point, Pat and I took the young people to the movies and they exhibited wild behaviour in the cinema, behaviour such as I had never seen – running up and down the aisles, going in and out to the toilets, changing seats every five minutes, talking loudly, basically not watching the movie. They were very excited, as most of them had been banned from the cinema. Auntie Kath, an elder and textile artist, had unexpectedly accompanied us. This was another form of relationship building, extending beyond the workshop group. One of the many questions I asked myself was – how was I to cope with behaviour, which was the opposite of what I was used to tolerating or understanding? I felt challenged by my own whiteness. I was face to face with my prejudices and difference.

**Place – settling in to the environment**

Staying in one of the houses on the grounds of the College, a mere fifty metres from the Youth Program building meant that I was always there. It felt like I lived and breathed the research. This immersion helped me in the way living in France in 1978 improved my French. Nungalinya wasn’t just a College: it was a community. I was an outsider in a foreign land. The groups of Aboriginal Australians living in the College, speaking different languages, those who had a campfire, silenced me. At night I tried not to think of the nocturnal snakes and rat-sized cockroaches, the non-functional bathroom and the poor lighting. It was difficult to cope with the sadness and overwhelming sense of disadvantage which permeated my surroundings. The dilapidated buildings and grounds, rusty play equipment and apparent neglect were signs of disrepair, disrespect or poverty. It was difficult not to leap to thinking in stereotypes of Indigenous communities where houses have been “trashed”, costing the government exorbitant amounts of money to replace them.

If I’m really honest I was confronted by the apparent poverty of the place. Not that it was that bad, but that you could sense the effort of gathering materials, keeping things going on a very tight budget, scrounging for basics.

*Journal 02-03-06*
B. ‘Myriad Agendas’ – Learning about Participation

The principle that no young person is turned away took priority in the workshops, which was one of the “myriad agendas” (Preston, 2009b) that I had to learn; it was part of the reason I felt a lack of control in this context. This also signalled the importance of the collaborative nature of the applied theatre project. I was not working alone, but was very much part of a process which was about creating opportunities for the young people in a context that I did not understand.

Readily accepting young men into the applied theatre project indicated an adherence to a broader picture. I began to appreciate that ‘participation’ for Pat meant something different from my own assumptions. It was getting the young people physically there, off the streets, being included in the action as opposed to being left out. Before my arrival Pat had struggled to recruit students who attended regularly so there was an impetus to get numbers into the program. Pat recognised there was a network of programs for Indigenous youth throughout Darwin and to be effective in her goals she needed to be part of this development. From my perspective as a researcher more participants were better for the research as I had designed an interactive applied theatre project involving creative collaboration.

C. Applied Theatre as Process

Workshop participation

When the young people participated, they did more than attempt the activities; the workshops became an opportunity for them to lead the rest of us in the directions they wanted to go. To this extent they were never really mere students there to learn but strong-willed partners in an experimental learning process. Their effectiveness at leading the action impacted on my practice and forced me to rethink my ideas. More significantly, influencing the direction of the project around their own interests is exactly what the Indigenous research model aspired to, a kind of research-in-action. I built my relationships and understanding through listening to Pat and the young people and by maintaining an awareness that I was in their space and needed to respect it. I tried to follow their lead.

Taking the lead – young people telling their own story

Indigenous Australian researcher, writer and academic, Professor Judy Atkinson writes about the need of the child to tell their story and that no one hears it as “parents are in crisis themselves” (2007, p. 119). Atkinson refers to Martin
(2003) reminding us that “stories have power and give power” and “stories give identity” as they build connection and provide a sense of belonging (p. 125). I wanted to give the young people a chance to voice their ideas so I changed direction in the workshops; the proposed play became their film. Sitting on the floor writing the script, discussing camera angles, travelling in the troopie\(^\text{12}\) to find locations and to film street signs, the young people showed me where they spent their time. They talked about their lives through the creation of this film that became a tangible representation of their input.

The young people committed themselves to the scripting and action. Abby wrote down the lines on large sheets of butcher’s paper while the others actively leapt around, improvising suggestions for the different characters. Nicholson observes that in drama “communication is embodied and meanings are created and read through the body, aurally, visually and kinaesthetically” (2005, p. 53). Being actively involved both physically and socially, the young people were experiencing a creative and active opportunity for meaning making within the Pilot Project. Neither Pat nor I offered any criticism so that the young people could develop their ideas fully.

Bruner (1990) describes stories as “instruments for social negotiation” (p. 55) so young people can organize or frame their experiences. For Kelman (2008), when young people explore or frame their stories for an audience it reveals “aspects of their society that they wished might be different” and the young people “see themselves as agents of social change” (p. 106).

The applied theatre workshop was a means for expression, a link between the young people and the outside world. So too was the creation of a script and a film. These young people exhibited many personal qualities that surprised me and did not match the stereotype of the marginalized, failures at school. It was important for me to acknowledge the stereotypes and through reflection work to eliminate them and to learn “how to listen to the participants so as to learn from them” (McIntyre, 2008, p. 9). In the process of working together I discovered the young people beneath the labels that I had unconsciously imposed through my stereotyping.

\(^{12}\) Four-wheel drive vehicle used to transport students.
D. Insights for the Practitioner

According to Taylor, flexibility and responding to the context are central features of applied theatre (2003). These were both significant in my study at Nungalinya in that it seemed the only way to move forward with the work and the relationships, while simultaneously respecting the young people and the context. My focus was on finding ways to develop the young people’s self-confidence using theatre techniques and getting the film made; the scripting and the storying were the “tools” of my trade. However, for the young people it was an opportunity to share their perspectives of their world. It was as if they grabbed the opportunity to be heard. I had not understood the full implications for the young people. It was an intense learning curve for me and I was impressed by the young people’s willingness to participate on their own terms. I was involved in a collaborative process in an unfamiliar context. I was committing to change as a practitioner.

E. Insights for the Researcher

The applied theatre project had become a catalyst for taking an alternative look at my own practice, and it developed space for meaningful dialogue with my partners, the young people and myself. The context challenged my research methodology, raised questions about Indigenous young people’s participation and capabilities and fostered ideas outside my experience and control. My involvement as a researcher demanded a different perspective to what I expected. I realized that the research was so much more than investigating the impact of applied theatre on Indigenous young people as a means to improving educational outcomes in the future. This focus was not aligned to the realities of the young people and their context. There were opportunities for me to learn from my partners and the young people within the creative space and to understand the world from a different cultural perspective. In deciding to return in 2007 I was acknowledging that I was participating in something much bigger than my initial research project and that I would not be in a position to control much of what would happen.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE PILOT PROJECT

There were some key discoveries that emerged from the Pilot workshops and my return visit three months later; these deepened my thinking about the nature of the young people’s participation, my roles as practitioner and researcher, and the meaning of control and power in the Youth Program. Central to these was the importance of building partnerships.
BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

The main challenge was that from my perspective we were not operating as equal partners in this context. A ‘partnership’ here meant that Pat could make decisions separately, showing her adherence to a different agenda beyond our project. Pat’s decisions meant her priorities were related to the young people, not those negotiated in our original agreement. This different notion of partnership undermined my sense of power in the context, and there was nothing I could do about it. Even though Pat had answered all my questions before I left Melbourne, I realized that we had been speaking from within different social, cultural, environmental and economic universes. I had to let go of wanting our partnership to function according to my own assumptions and prior experiences.

RESEARCH INFORMS PRACTICE

The Pilot project marked the beginning of my development as a reflective practitioner in this context, as I began to ponder many questions about my practice and the changing purpose of the drama activities. Maintaining a journal became essential as it enabled me to separate from the emotional challenges of the daily experience, and the writing provided a distance or space that helped me to reflect on my practice. I was well outside my comfort zone and writing was a resource that helped me regain some control in my thinking and planning. I had to re-think my whole approach to the workshops to accommodate young men, and adapt my ideas to be more flexible and responsive to the young people’s priorities and interests. I asked myself: What is success or failure in this context? On whose terms? What do you look for? Why did the young people want to do a film when I wanted to do applied theatre? From my non-Indigenous perspective I was looking for ways to evaluate the workshops; in my reflections I tried to be objective, balanced and critical, but it was difficult. The Pilot Project had been emotionally confronting and I questioned whether I could offer anything useful at all.

RETHINKING THE MEANING OF PARTICIPATION

Pat and I had not anticipated such a positive response to the workshops of near full attendance every day. The young people who arrived as isolated individuals seemed to flourish as part of the group. For Abby the workshop experience had fostered a new interest:
I think I could probably go a little bit further if I try more. I’ve actually joined a singing thing and we’ll be performing in July uptown.

*Abby interview 21-06-06*

Clive, a youth worker from Palmville, described the project as “very successful”:

He said he had seen it in the body language and the demeanour of the kids – head up, looking positive, happy and keen to come to Nungalinya.

For Clive the young people’s attitudes were a “stark contrast” to their usual behaviour as it provided a balance to the “negative experiences they usually had”. The use of video had proven to be an attraction and a means for the young people to communicate their stories to the outside world.

While looking at the unedited footage of the film, Clive commented how the kids were really concentrating and focusing on the task at hand. He had been impressed at the transformation in such a short space of time.

*Journal 10 March 2006*

I began to think about participation in a different way for these marginalized young people, as I felt more was at stake when they chose to join in. I found the young people lived in the present moment as this was the only certainty they had. The young people’s participation was a leap of trust in the workshop processes and me. I found the young people’s willingness to take this risk with the unknown quite confronting.

**CONTROL AND POWER**

Without having any power or control over the Youth Program, I found it challenging to be dependent on Pat most of the time, to not have my own space. I was earning my place as much as searching for it. I needed to find an alternative approach to understanding control and power in a context where I was a visitor.

I discovered that in my usual practice I was used to exerting a lot of control over the workshop environment which had contributed to my security as a practitioner. But at Nungalinya I felt powerless when the young people did not stay still but moved all over the room at random times. The schedule of neat workshop timeslots with a break in the middle of the day was abandoned; an
unspoken group dynamic, not an imposed work schedule, dictated the times for breaks.

ETHICS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RESEARCH

I had not considered the consequences of building relationships with the young people and then leaving. It seemed unethical to approach the research on a short-term basis, as it was clear that my relationships with the young people and the coordinator were more meaningful than I had anticipated. My second visit to Nungalinya from 17-21 June compelled me to confront the ethical implications of undertaking research in the Youth Program. Despite ongoing email and phone contact with Pat, I had not understood the full extent of the young people’s responses to the project. Spending time with Pat and conducting interviews provided a new layer of understanding:

The kids were devastated when the program finished.

*Clive, youth worker in an interview 17-06-06*

They didn’t enjoy the graduation ceremony, as they didn’t want to face the fact it was over. They had all lifted so much by attending the drama program, especially Dorak, who had not been engaged by anything else. He went downhill afterwards and got into some trouble.

*Naretha, youth worker in an interview 17-06-06*

I am an outsider. I am just doing my PhD, but it’s getting to be a much bigger project for me. I feel like everything is pretty complicated. I feel there is a responsibility here I hadn’t thought about.

*Journal 21-06-06*

It was important to give the young people an ongoing connection to people and relationships. I realized through the Pilot Project that these individual young people had the capacity to do more with their lives. I felt a sense of responsibility beyond the project:

Now I feel guilty that I am not there to continue the work with them, to stay with them to take them to the next step. I feel like the advantages have all been mine – I have my successful Arts project and my comfortable life in Melbourne, and can have lots of interesting conversations about the experience. What do they have? This thought plagues me and I feel bad about leaving them with nothing. Or did I?
I saw that my return visit was important, as it demonstrated that I cared about the young people and was not just another transient person in their lives.

**PREPARING FOR THE NEXT PHASE**

The Pilot Project opened up further questions for me about the young people and future projects. I asked myself: what do I need to do within the workshops to foster the participants’ capacities further? How can I ensure the young people explore their potential? Why aren’t these Indigenous Australian young people staying in mainstream schools? What is ‘participation’ from the perspective of these young people? What are these young people capable of in the workshops when given the chance?

I made a number of key decisions for my practice for my next Nungalinya project. I realized that planning is important, but full control as a practitioner is illusory.

I decided:

- To be flexible, reflexive and responsive to the context and the young people;
- To include a short video in the next phase as a factor to increase group participation;
- To conduct a more sustained project where the young people would attend and focus for lengthy periods;
- To work more closely with partners, e.g. Pat. Her insights and experience with the young people were essential;
- To include themes relevant to the young people’s interests.

In the next Chapter I discuss the first research phase in 2007, which was the longest period of research fieldwork.
CHAPTER SIX: BUILDING UNDERSTANDING

STAGE TWO: WAIST HEIGHT

Deciding to go deeper into the water involves a return to land, removal of layers and a fresh re-entry; it is now characterized by greater risk as you are more exposed to the elements. It is not a comfortable state. It is neither paddling nor swimming; it’s in between, a halfway mark. There is still the option of changing your mind and rushing back to the sand to get warm. In your heart you want to have the courage to go all the way, but your commitment stalls, you wait till you feel comfortable in the water, that the temperature is right, that there are no apparent issues with currents, sharks or other imagined dangers. All the elements are familiar; yet going deeper is risky, as you don’t really know what you’ll find. It is also more stimulating.

FIRST RESEARCH PHASE 2007 PART ONE

This Chapter is devoted to 2007 fieldwork, which naturally falls into two sections, which I discuss and analyse to enhance understanding of this important phase of my research. There will be a Narrative, Discussion and Reflections section for each part.

When I returned to the Youth Program in 2007 significant challenges confronted me, including building relationships with a new coordinator, new young people, new staff, and the involvement of a group of young people from Seaview High School’s Indigenous unit. As a researcher I was intent on understanding the meaning of participation for the young people in the applied theatre process as I felt there were many unanswered questions about my practice and the young people’s responses to it.

NARRATIVE - STARTING AGAIN

On 1 December 2006, funding for the Youth Program was guaranteed but sadly Pat and the young people had left Nungalinya. Shortly after Karuah was replaced with an Acting Principal. Just as footprints and sandcastles are easily washed away by the tide without a trace, it seemed all our efforts had been similarly erased. The thought of starting again was a daunting and lonely prospect until the appointment of Naretha as the new coordinator of the Youth Program:
Remember me I brought in a group of kids from Palmville for your workshop. I thought the drama workshop was a wonderful way in allowing kids to express themselves. Please give your thoughts on how you would like to work next year. I look forward to working with you next year.

Email Naretha 06-12-06

Naretha’s invitation confirmed Nungalinya’s sustained interest in our partnership and indicated Naretha’s willingness to build on the earlier project.

Just before my departure from Melbourne my employer asked me to take Arika, an Indigenous Australian student (in residence at Trinity College), to Darwin. This request felt like an imposition but after meeting Arika, who was 21 years old and keen to join me, I realized the benefits of her involvement in the research. I stipulated separate accommodation so I could have some personal space, however this did not happen, so Arika and I spent every day together.

Wall of Fame

On my return to the Nungalinya Youth Program in 2007 I walked into the youth space and saw the Wall of Fame. Seventeen large colour photographs that Pat had taken and displayed prominently on one wall around the heading: Wall of Fame. It was more than a year since I had been there and the display was a new feature. It was a proud proclamation and portrayed the achievements of the first group of young people with their confident faces and cheeky smiles watching over the workshop space. There were photographs of Pat, the two old textile artists, the young people and me. These photographs captured animated moments from the workshops, such as a large sculpture formed by four participants who had shaped their bodies and faces to represent a huge shark. The glee in their faces and the sense of fun and involvement in the pose was evident. Another photo showed the young people in mid concentration devising their script, surrounded by sheets of butcher’s paper covered in handwriting spread over the floor. Other photos included: the group posing on the cinema steps, in the troopie, on the couches, in front of the fridge, and elsewhere in the room. There was a strong sense of action and energy that seemed to burst out from the collection.

The Wall of Fame looked over us for the next few years. For me the photos were a reminder, an umbrella in the sand, marking out our territory, signaling a kind of ownership of the space, a sign to the new young people that anything was possible and that there was shelter in the workshop space.
A New Partnership in the Youth Program: Seaview High School.

Like Pat, Naretha in her coordinator’s role wanted to build numbers, relationships and opportunities for disadvantaged Indigenous Australian young people so she invited Seaview High School to become new partners in the Youth Program. This decision was made without my knowledge which underlined the difficulties I encountered with planning in this context. With this new partnership there were two distinct groups of young people who did not know each other who were there to participate in the applied theatre project. It was apparent from the first workshop that the Nungalinya group was different from the Seaview group.

Nungalinya Group – the Insiders

The eleven Nungalinya young people were older than the Seaview group, streetwise, and more diverse. The young people’s physical appearance was influenced by “gansta rap” style from Black American music and from AFL (Australian Football League); they wore baggy tops and jeans, shorts, jackets, hats with team emblems. Naretha described the young people’s various situations of homelessness and neglect and their parents’ drug and alcohol problems; they were victims of violence, involved in youth detention and court appearances, were constantly on the move between family, friends and the street, had no security.

There is no one to look after the kids. The kids are lost.

Journal 02-08-07

They looked tough, “cool” and hardened. At the start of the project Naretha articulated her hopes for these young people:

My feelings on the drama workshop would be building on the kids’ confidence which is quite lacking – some of them are from town camps so they’re quite shy and reserved and I’m hoping this’ll bring them out a bit more, building on their confidence and being a bit assertive.

Naretha interview 30-07-07

Seaview Group – the Outsiders

The six Seaview young people were part of an alternative Indigenous unit within a mainstream high school, and were slightly younger. Their appearance was neat and tidy with some aspect of a uniform in evidence, which contrasted with the Nungalinya group. In addition, there was a collection of 5-8 young men from Seaview and referrals from Youth Justice who participated in a landscaping project.
which ran concurrently in the Youth Program. These young men presented as sullen; a few were brain damaged; one was autistic; they spent most of their time outside but during their breaks they came into the youth space and often gathered on the side of the room and watched silently.

The Early Workshops

The first workshop was affected by the Seaview group’s late arrival and the fact that there were only two Nungalinya young people present, Nerida and Jannali. Right from the start these young women opted to walk away and observed from the sides of the room.

Jannali and Nerida didn’t feel comfortable with joining the group but were happy to sit on the computers with the occasional look and giggle at what the group were doing. At first the [Seaview] kids didn’t seem to be that interested, they were laughing and talking and didn’t seem to want to participate.

_Arika report, 30-07-07_

The opening warm up game that I initiated fell flat, as the workshop group consisting of young people, coordinator, youth helper and Seaview staff, struggled with it; after stopping to explain the rules several times I abandoned it. The Seaview group were lively, undisciplined, strong-willed and prepared to engage in workshop activities amidst lots of chatter, the offering of unsolicited comments and constant giggling and horse-play. Without warning the session ended abruptly with the Seaview coordinator interrupting and insisting the group leave to catch the bus.

At the end of the session the kids had come a little bit forward from when they first walked in the door. I believe we will see a change in their behaviour and character over the next few weeks.

_Arika report 30-07-07_

The video data shows that the Seaview young people did not acknowledge the presence of Jannali and Nerida in the room by turning heads or gazing in their direction. There was no apparent interaction between them even when I repeatedly tried to draw the young women into the activities. In the group photo at the start, the Seaview young people convivially grouped together whereas Nerida remained impassive, seated at a computer directly behind the group, and Jannali turned her whole body to the side and partially covered her face with her arm. They did this in preference to walking out of shot. There was a dynamic between the two groups that I did not understand.
Unexpectedly, as Jannali and Nerida were leaving, instead of heading straight for the door they made a point of walking over to me. This was the first time either of them had used eye contact or spoken to me.

Jannali: Good-bye Rosemary. I’ll join in next time when my mates are here.

Nerida: I thought what you were doing was funny.

Jannali said she knew a few of the young people from the Pilot Project:

They’re runamoks and I don’t hang around with them anymore.

Naretha described Jannali later:

She drank and got into fights, but seemed to stop at breaking the law. She’s not shy; she just felt shame [about joining in the drama].

Informal conversations recorded in journal 30-07-07

Two days later, I facilitated an unscheduled workshop for Jannali and five other young women from the Nungalinya group, who I met for the first time. Nerida was absent.

This group seemed to be taking the activities more seriously than Monday’s group; there were fewer laughs and trying to distract each other. With one activity they started doing it but then they stopped because they couldn’t quite see the point of the activity. We finished the session doing some scenes. Tinara started off, then Nama and Yirrigee joined in, they got into role as soon as they stood up. It was good to see they wanted to get into it. Rosemary started to point out that they had their backs to the audience, but they figured it out and moved accordingly. Nama seems to be the one in the group who wants to be involved the most. Jannali is the one in the group that doesn’t want to participate; she only wants to help out with the video. I have a feeling that once she builds up the confidence and sees how much the other kids are enjoying it and getting something out of it, she will want to join in.

Arika report 01-08-07

The Nungalinya group members were inconsistent in their responses to the drama activities, sometimes joining in, sometimes refusing. I was heartened by their presence in the space and planned to combine both groups in the scheduled afternoon workshop. Naretha commented that over lunch Tallara told her she had “loved the workshop”.

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Bringing the Two Groups Together – Building a Group Dynamic

I wanted to see if the groups could work together as their separation seemed to be a major hurdle for the project. I found the Seaview group easier to work with and more productive. With Arika’s help I managed to involve young people from both groups in the afternoon on the second day of the workshops. I tried a warm up exercise which involved alternating the raising of hands while sitting side by side. I used it as a bonding activity for the young people to build trust and to develop a positive group dynamic. My goal at this point was to keep the whole group participating in the workshop, as their cooperation and participation was essential. The following descriptions from my journal and Arika’s report present our different interpretations of this experience.

The Seaview crowd was late. Again. So we were left with barely 45 minutes for the session, though we stretched it to an hour. The fact that they were late meant the Nungalinya girls lost momentum and energy from their workshop. When the Seaview students arrived, the others fled outside to smoke and to show that they weren’t interested. I had to go outside to coax them to join in. Meanwhile two of the Seaview group had gone on a school excursion to the beach instead. Great. One of them was Yani who had been showing so much promise on Monday. There was a great deal of ‘angst’ coming from the Nungalinya girls towards the Seaview group. I had to work out a way to bring them together.

I did the hands exercise, which was a real risk. It brought all the taboos into play and forced them to touch each other. Nama, Jannali and Tallara were scared of being accused of being ‘gay’. Nonetheless they did do it. I also had Arika join in which helped.

Journal 01-08-07

Arika recorded her version of the same activity in her daily report.

We started off in the circle and I was asked to join the group. We went around and introduced everyone in the group. Rosemary wanted to try something that would be out of their comfort zone. We sat cross-legged with our left hand on our neighbour’s right knee and our right hand on the other neighbour’s left knee. It took us a few minutes to get going but once we did, the group did really well. This was one of the activities that showed they could work together as one group. Jannali joined us at the beginning of the session but later dropped out.

Arika report 01-08-07
The hands exercise was designed to force the groups to acknowledge each other; the fact that they did it showed me that there was a willingness to participate with each other. This was the first direct contact between the two groups. It meant the two groups of participants had to acknowledge each other’s presence in the workshop and cooperate. I persisted with the activities even though the young people were relatively detached in their participation. As a practitioner I felt they needed to work through some barriers and that this seemed the quickest way to help them relax with each other. After the warm up activities, the workshop began to slowly disintegrate as I experimented with drama activities that had been successful in the Pilot Project, which aimed to build cooperation between the young people while developing some theatrical skills.

Then I tried a mime improvisation, which did not work at all though some of them did give it a go. I then went to blindfold work, which had been a success last year. These kids found it hard but did eventually get into it. The paired trust work was too simple but it worked in that they did do it and enjoyed the fact that it was easy. Even though I felt they were resisting the exercises, I kept going, as I felt they needed to ‘go through’ the trust levels in order to progress. These exercises were meant to remove some barriers so we could get over some of their silliness.

Journal 01-08-07

I wondered whether the Nungalinya group stayed on task because of the presence of the other group. Was the Seaview group leading the Nungalinya young people? Was the Nungalinya group’s participation less about the activity and more about an opportunity to be involved?

Later in this workshop when the young people were devising a scene, as disorganized and chaotic as it was, there were moments when the cooperation and interaction between the different groups became almost seamless. I guided their focus by using the freeze/unfreeze technique to make sure the scene developed and from this position I could help them if necessary. Asking questions to progress the story enabled everyone to respond and consequently own the unfolding scenario.

Arika described the young people’s participation:

You could see the barriers start to slowly break. It was good to see them interacting with each other. The next scene was to try and create more interaction between them; it was in a police station. This scene was all of them wanting to be bad guys and no one wanting to be a cop, it was Tallara that was first to do something, she was the receptionist, so they moved a desk and chairs into the scene, ... Rosemary then had everyone in freeze mode and started off by defrosting scenes one at a time, so that
you had a story unfolding piece by piece. This activity showed that they are willing to and able to do this course/program. We have a long way to go but already I can see improvements and willingness to try in the kids.

_Arika report 01-08-07_

Arika’s perception of the workshop was surprisingly positive and seemed to be in complete contrast to my own response. From my perspective the workshop was close to chaos. I felt this was an example of my lack of experience in working with the young people and my belief that I needed to control the workshop elements and the direction of the activities within the workshop space. For most of the workshop I was disappointed in the young people’s responses, but the improvisation of a story seemed to ignite some positive cooperation:

In the improvisation there was evidence of structure, character, drama, and I told them to stop and would intervene with quick coaching questions – what do you think should happen next? What would make this more interesting? And they offered ideas including staging ideas. Where’s the audience? Speak up so the audience can hear you. In the middle of the last improvisation two official looking people in suits walked into the youth area asking for Naretha. Naretha was thrilled that the moment they walked in, the kids were doing their best work for the day, and so the VIPs were “impressed”.

_Journal 01-08-07_

I felt more comfortable in my practice when the young people were improvising a scene as the distinction between the two groups seemed to disappear when their focus was on creating the story. I was able to intervene as a practitioner and introduce some theatrical elements to guide their work towards skills development such as using eye contact, voice projection, facing the audience and building plot. It was all very hesitant and was held together by a willingness on the young people’s part to stay with it. The arrival of visitors mid-way through the workshop was my initiation into the need to be flexible within this applied theatre space. The officials from Canberra were there to inspect the Youth Program and watched the improvisation briefly before meeting with Naretha.

**Cancelled Workshops and Poor Attendance for Nungalinya Group**

Two days of cancelled workshops followed this combined workshop which was disappointing. The Seaview group was not scheduled to come so we set up extra sessions for the Nungalinya group, but Jannali and Nama were the only ones to come in. The day after that Naretha said that no one would be coming in at all.
She explained the young people had received their money, gone drinking and were “all hung over”, plus it was a long weekend. Naretha elaborated that Tallara and Yirrigee had gone missing and Amarina’s son had gone to hospital with pneumonia. Tallara was homeless and had been boarding with Yirrigee.

Naretha and I were partners in the applied theatre project, so grappling with the uncertainty of the young people’s participation in the Youth Program on a daily basis challenged my thinking about the project which I regularly expressed in my journal.

It is a difficult aspect waiting around for things to happen. I have to learn to be more patient and to settle into Darwin time and energy. You can’t put corporate punctuality and organisation into this program. Naretha’s energy ebbs and flows, sometimes working hard, other times sitting back. It comes of the challenge of working with these kids, sometimes they come, and sometimes they don’t. There is something wrong with all these adults sitting around waiting to work and to help these kids. All of us earned a living in this way around these kids. It feels like a waste of time and effort with little result. I counted the days left – out of thirty-six nights, I have spent twelve so far. I am a third of the way through the project. It feels like longer.

Journal 06-08-07

Naretha and Kim were also frustrated and disappointed and gave several warnings, but did not deny the young people ongoing access. Naretha redesigned the schedule so there were Seaview workshops which anyone could join and Nungalinya only workshops to enable the Nugalinya group to overcome their difficulties, as she felt they needed opportunities on their own.

**Decision to Separate the Two Groups**

In the first eight days of the project, I conducted six scheduled workshops, one unscheduled and five were cancelled. Nothing seemed to go to plan, despite the revised schedule. The daily challenge for me was to build trust with the young people while managing the two distinct groups. The barriers between the two groups remained for some time. The Nungalinya young people were reluctant to participate when the Seaview group was in the youth space. There were usually two or three staff accompanying the Seaview group; they would sit and watch or participate if required, so the arrival of 8-9 people for each workshop had a significant impact on the space. Each time the Seaview group arrived for a workshop, the Nungalinya young people scattered outside or to the corners of the room.
The unreliable attendance by the Nungalinya group made it difficult to conduct consecutive workshops. Occasionally a large group of Nungalinya young people would unexpectedly arrive and Naretha would ask me to facilitate additional sessions. This meant I needed to restate the aims of the research project and ask for each newcomer’s signed consent. Then, the next day, there would again only be one or two Nungalinya young people. I reflected on these challenges in my journal. In the following entry I refer to the changed schedule, hoping it might make a difference to the Nungalinya group’s participation.

Today is the start of the early sessions of girls only and then the combined session. I feel a sense of excitement and anticipation, adrenalin as if before a performance.

It is hard to hold on to one’s motivation in approaching the workshop, as you don’t really know what you’re going to find. How many kids, what is their state of mind, what is the dynamic between them, do they remember where we’re at, do they care? Are they interested in the drama? The group is much less predictable than last year …

Jannali is the only girl who came in today.

According to Naretha, after the long weekend the others were again “too hung over”. Naretha justified the young people’s drinking:

“There was a lot of distress in the community with the government cutting payments in half and taking control of their money.”

Naretha was referring to the Northern Territory Intervention that had begun on 21 June, which I refer to in Chapter One. How was I to interpret the young people’s responses to the applied theatre amidst all this confusion?

It’s almost a kind of game to guess what they’ll be interested in today. I need to get my power back over the workshop situation and to have the attitude of belief in the process, which has worked so many times before with so many other young people of all ages and cultural backgrounds.

It occurs to me that we’re all waiting for the kids to say ‘yes I’m interested’ and then we’re set. When this doesn’t happen, the adults become powerless and bereft of ideas, subsequently your energy and motivation drains.

However, Jannali did come in even though she was suffering a hangover.

Her hair was neatly done, she had clean clothes on, had manicured her toenails. She looked like she had made an effort to come.

Journal 07-08-07
Naretha took Jannali, Arika and I to a special lunch at the Indigenous unit at Charles Darwin University to hear a presentation by two old ladies who were victims of the *Stolen Generation*. The two speakers had been taken from their families as small children and moved thousands of miles from their homes and country. This removal process was state and federal government policy from about 1869 to early 1970’s for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were deemed in need of protection for a range of reasons. A number of people in the audience were crying as the women narrated their sad and traumatic stories for the first time. I felt privileged to have shared this experience which symbolised a developing trust in my relationship with the Indigenous women and increased my understanding about the complex challenges for Indigenous peoples in Australia.

We were late returning to the youth space and the Seaview group was waiting for us:

> Where have you been? Are we doing some more fun stuff today?

*Journal 07-08-07*

Jannali immediately retreated to the computers on the edge of the room and Arika tried to engage her by asking her to set up the tripod and camera. The contrast between the two groups was extreme.

Feeling frustrated and powerless in my practice, I wondered about the need for introducing consequences for the young people’s non-attendance, as would occur in other educational settings. Finally after several warnings Naretha cancelled the government allowance for a couple of the Nungalinya young people as she did not want to risk the Youth Program being closed down; the young people were not attending and yet receiving funding for participation in a full-time program. I did not notice any immediate impact as the numbers in the workshops did not improve.

**An Impromptu Workshop**

One morning Naretha invited me to come on the ‘pick-up’ and we drove into two different communities to collect the young people – standard practice for programs of this kind in Darwin. I saw at first hand the third world conditions of their houses and Naretha explained “most of them lived in filth and they didn’t have any furniture in their houses”\(^{13}\). I was shocked by the discrepancy between how they lived, and my expectations of participation within the drama workshops which

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\(^{13}\) Recorded in journal 08-08-2007
seemed worlds apart. Naretha wanted me to experience the reality of how the young people lived and to acknowledge the extent of their challenges to participate in any educational program. For these young people there was no room of one’s own, no books, desk, writing materials or computer. We returned to Nungalinya with Jannali, Tallara and Nerida.

Border Crossings and Developing Trust

This Nungalinya session I am about to discuss took place on the second day of the second week of the 2007 project. Naretha asked me to facilitate a workshop because the young women had come. The session was not in the timetable so I had nothing planned. Nerida was quiet, and the others were outspoken. We had met in the first week of the first workshop\textsuperscript{14} where Jannali and Nerida had sat on the fringes watching, not joining in. Jannali’s attendance in the youth space had been consistent, although she had only participated in one workshop, as did Tallara, and she had refused to participate in another four.\textsuperscript{15} When the young women did attend they usually kept physically apart as distinct individuals.

I thought of an exercise for three participants called artist, sculpture, clay, which requires touch, instinct, memory and courage. Execution of the task promotes trust while also developing creative skills. The artist is blindfolded, the person who is the sculpture forms a pose, and the clay waits on the side. The blindfolded artist lightly examines the pose of the sculpture with fingertips and then moulds the clay to be an exact copy of the sculpture. The task is simple and challenging. This exercise requires working together, acceptance and participation in three distinct roles. Collaboration requires trust. The young people have to trust me that the activity will not embarrass them, and I have to trust them to complete the exercise. For me it was an instinctive decision that I hoped would work, but it was also a risk.

Apart from the young women there was a young man in the room watching us. Burnum was enrolled in the landscaping project as part of his bail conditions. The young women made their own individual statements in the way they positioned themselves around me. There was little sense of unity other than the fact that we were all in the same section of the room.

\textsuperscript{14} 30 July 2007

\textsuperscript{15} 01 August 2007
I am kneeling sitting on the back of my legs folding a scarf. Tallara is to my left and has her arms and legs crossed sitting in a chair. Nerida sits on the floor to my right. Jannali lies on her stomach next to Nerida, feet towards us, head going away.

Nerida seemed the most attentive. It was a disparate collection of one white woman and three Indigenous Australian young women.

“Flick off the camera” orders Jannali who has sat up but moves back to lying down. Tallara laughs looking at Jannali. Nerida says nothing. The camera sits on a tripod and is there to record the session.

Jannali: “It’s alright. I don’t know what we’re gonna’ do”.

Rose: “I’m going to do another blindfold activity with you.”

Jannali: “Burnum, do you want to play with us?” Tallara looks towards Burnum. Nerida keeps her head down. I turn my head and invite Burnum who is out of camera shot. I then kneel towards Jannali with the blindfold in my hands “Alright!” Jannali has sat up facing me; she is smiling in a way that looks like delight. Tallara, still on chair, arms folded in front, smiles, Nerida watches, she does not smile.

I felt that I was being tested to a certain extent. I think Jannali wanted to do the task but was also testing herself. Tallara seemed to want to look uncooperative but was cooperating as she stayed in place. I took a risk.

I turn to Tallara “Put your chair away, Tallara” and turn to Jannali holding up blindfold. Jannali asks seriously, “What do I have to do with that?” She fixes her eyes on me. I reply: “I’ll tell you when I put the blindfold on. If Jannali has a go, then you both have to have a go as well – alright? Everyone has to have a go.” I stand up and walk to Jannali. Tallara and Nerida do not move, just watch. Tallara smiles a bit. Jannali lets me apply the blindfold.

My manner was directive but not controlling; my voice was calm and warmly encouraging. I needed to guide the activity so I was leading them and they were letting me do so. Jannali consented to be the artist by having the blindfold on. She had to wait until I managed the others for some minutes. Uncharacteristically, she was quiet and patient and made no attempt to remove the blindfold. This showed me her capacity for cooperation and leadership. Tallara was the first statue.

I am now directing my attention to Tallara and say, ”I know you want to be on the chair, but now you have to get off the chair”, she obliges and stands up and I take the chair away. She adjusts her top. She is wearing a black singlet with thin straps and black shorts that go to her knees and slip-on shoes. Nerida still hasn’t moved or spoken, just watched.
Tallara looked a little disconcerted. The chair was her security blanket. She stood arms folded, leaning on one side and maintained a wary attitude and a posture of slight defiance. Amazingly she did not leave though she appeared nervous.

... Tallara starts moving around, has unlocked her arms and is standing upright, she does a few nervous moves – she doesn't know what to do. She smiles broadly. “Ah, she’s not going to touch my arse!” Jannali has her head in her hands and giggles. She doesn’t do anything to the blindfold. “I don’t know so please help me,” says Tallara as she gets on her knees and begins to make a pose. Tallara and I eye contact each other and direct everything between each other. She does a little twirl with both her hands and holds her arms out smiling; balancing on one leg and one knee is down on the floor. She giggles.

She showed she was feeling uncomfortable but I pushed the level of her involvement by asking her to remove her shoes. Everyone else was barefoot. I saw this as another step to joining the group and participating collaboratively.

She says, “No that’s unhealthy” and I realize she’s worried about losing them, and says so. “Put them next to you.” Jannali: “C’mon, hurry up. I might get blind here while waiting for you.” Tallara removes the shoes, placing them beside her.

... Burnum calls out and Tallara responds, “she’s supposed to touch us and feel our shape but I’m like, no, I don’t want to be touched!” and makes a shivering gesture.

Initially all my attention had been on Jannali to establish the activity and to blindfold her; I had selected Jannali as she seemed to be the strongest of the three. Now Tallara required my full attention.

This was a familiar pattern with these students where each participant requested my undivided attention in a workshop. Partly they wanted the attention for its own sake, and mostly they wanted to get the activity “right” and not be shamed for “getting it wrong” in front of the others. I wondered if it recalled previous shaming experiences when they did attend school. I continued with the activity as no one had walked away which was positive; this was an intimate activity and forced them to confront taboos of closeness and touch in a non-threatening way.

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16 “Shame” in Aboriginal English has no exact equivalent in non-Aboriginal English. A complex mixture of embarrassment and shyness that can result from being singled out for rebuke or praise.
...Jannali asks, “you’re posing, one knee up, one knee down?” Tallara smiles broadly, “yes” and laughs losing the balance of her pose. She claps her hands together laughing, Jannali steps back and Tallara regains her position, laughing. Jannali laughs.

There seemed to be some genuine enjoyment and fun in the activity and they responded accordingly.

...Jannali is working quickly and has pulled Nerida (the clay) up and she is now with one knee on the floor and one knee up.

Jannali completed her role as the artist. It was now someone else’s turn to be blindfolded. This was the most confronting aspect of the activity as each participant had to trust the others; each cooperated by giving up control, knowing at any time the blindfold could be removed. The drama process required consent from the young women otherwise the activity did not work at all. There was a dependence on all of the young women and everyone knew this. At the same time, everyone who participated had to accept the rules of the game.

... “No, I’m not doing this,” says Tallara. “C’mon Tallara,” encourages Jannali. I say, “your turn next Tallara” and go over to her with the blindfold. She doesn't say anything but stands still to let me put the blindfold on.

I was not sure what I would have done had she refused. Her insistence that she did not want to do it did not sound absolute; I was not ignoring her, just taking a risk that what she needed was for me to show confidence in her that she could do it. By applying the blindfold I was showing this confidence.

Jannali runs over to the computers, leaving me, Tallara and Nerida. She takes some food that has been left next to a computer and comes back. Burnum walks near, stands and watches us. Tallara says, “this is going to be really hard for me!” Nerida is speaking so softly that the camera doesn’t pick up her voice. Tallara has checked out the whole pose of Nerida without hesitation. “I don’t know how I’m gonna do this because I just don’t want to touch her arse.” I direct her hands to the legs.

With some gentle guidance and encouragement Tallara completed the task quickly and easily. At no time did she attempt to remove the blindfold and walk away. Now it was Nerida’s turn. She did not have as much social confidence as the other two but her commitment to join in had been strong. She did not participate in the first workshop and had been absent ever since.

The exercise continues and they all have a turn at each role. Burnum walks past and comments on the video camera and makes jokes, but by this stage they all ignore him. He retreats to the computers along the wall and watches from a distance. Both Jannali
and Tallara wander off as I’m attaching the blindfold to Nerida, and I worry that they’ve left her. I call Jannali back to finish the exercise and she returns without comment, but continues a conversation with Burnum, who has started to more successfully distract the girls. Tallara rejoins us. Nerida completes the task and they all cooperate with her.

_video data 08-08-07_

**Some Significant Steps Forward**

This activity took seventeen minutes and there seemed to be good progress in terms of the young people’s developing confidence and ease at working together. They ended up being supportive of the challenges each one faced as the artist. Tallara in particular seemed to relax considerably. These girls seemed to enjoy me guiding each step of the way. It was an exercise designed to build trust and cooperation. But it also seemed to interest Burnum, an angry young man who usually did not cooperate with anyone.

Wanting to capitalize on their participation I began another activity also based on physical action, but Jannali and Tallara’s attention had gone. I picked up my notes looking for an alternative and Jannali recognized my yellow folder and quipped:

> “That’s where we went yesterday isn’t it Rosemary?” She tells Tallara “We went to the University yesterday and heard these stories two aunties told us, about the olden days, _Stolen Generation_”. Tallara and Nerida seem interested. Jannali had observed me writing in my folder while listening to the old women.

The energy behind Jannali’s question surprised me and the workshop turned in an unexpected direction as Jannali continued to recount the stories:

> “Poor things they had one big truck go and pick them up and told them they’d take them for a ride.”

Jannali wanted to talk about our trip to CDU¹⁷ and the others listened; even Burnum got involved. They sat companionably on the floor around me. I noticed Jannali’s voice sounded strong and authoritative, confident.

Jannali and Burnum start planning, “only me, Burnum, Tallara, Nama and Nerida, and Tinara if she comes in, have roles in it”, she declared.

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¹⁷ Charles Darwin University
They seemed to want to develop a script! The discussion continued. Conscious of the impending arrival of the Seaview group, I suggested we continue to capture Auntie\(^{18}\) Florrie’s story - one of the two women from the *Stolen Generation* who had presented at Charles Darwin University - the next day. The young people ignored me.

Jannali insists, “We could do both of them.” Jannali and Burnum are impressed with the fact that the ladies had never told their stories before, as they had been too afraid.

Jannali: “yeah she didn’t want to say anything and then when the grandchildren came along she started to talk”. Burnum and Jannali shout in unison: “she wanted to tell them!” Jannali continued to tell details of the stories: “Black mother, white father, and she was called a half-caste! They were scared of the nuns in their habits.” Suddenly, “Rosemary, that’s what you should do the film as!”

*Video data from workshop 08-08-07*

The *artist, sculpture, clay* activity had worked as a medium for all of us to build understanding and trust. Any one of the young women could have chosen to walk away or refuse to join in. This time, they chose to stay on task. However I was disappointed that when the Seaview group arrived for the afternoon workshop Jannali, Burnum, Tallara and Nerida retreated to the sides of the room.

For this workshop the Seaview group were particularly lively and energetic which created a good feeling in the space and a lot of noise. Though the Nungalinya young people sat on the sides, they began to involve themselves in the workshop activities. In the quick shapes physical improvisation I would call out a word and the group without speaking had to become that object as quickly as possible.

I call out “fish” and the Seaview individuals shout out a number of options at the tops of their voices, throwing themselves onto the floor, arranging their bodies into a giant starfish, giggling and chattering the whole time:

Darri, Myndee, Yani: “I’m the scales”, “I’m the tail”, ”let’s do a starfish!” “Marinna get in there!”

Darri: “Let’s see what a star looks like …”

Suddenly Tallara, who had been watching with a huge smile on her face, gets up from the computers, walks to the group on the floor, shouting at the top of her voice:

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\(^{18}\) Female relative of an older generation; term of respect.
“Wow that’s the biggest one [starfish] I’ve ever seen. I’m gonna step on it!” And she lifts her leg as if about to take a giant step onto the bodies beneath her, stopping at the last moment. The group bursts into laughter and Tallara walks away looking pleased.

*Video data 08-08-07*

Later in the workshop the Seaview group were developing a story about a student who finds a bag of one hundred dollar notes on cleaning detention in the school yard.

From the sides of the room Nerida and Tallara are watching the action, smiling, their eyes transfixed on the Seaview group. Jannali sits at the computers, smiling and watching. Burnum walks through the middle of the group, but no one reacts to him. There is much discussion about the money. Mid-scene we are discussing ways to make the story more interesting and how to develop the plot from here. Jannali gets up from her chair as if to walk away, her body heading in one direction, her head and neck twisted in the opposite direction, eyes fully focused on the group of actors. She continues walking, but does not take her eyes off the action. Shortly after, she returns to the edge of the room by walking right through the middle of the action again. Meanwhile the action continues:

Rose: What does she do with the bag of money?

Tallara shouts: She keeps it! (Laughing, not taking her eyes off the action). Jannali and Burnum laugh and nod in agreement.

Darri: What if she goes to the servo next door and discovers they’ve been robbed. See that’s my thinking.

Myndee: How does she sneak past the teacher with the bag of money?

*Video data 08-08-07*

At times there was so much shouting by the young people that it’s impossible to distinguish one voice from another. The Seaview group did not need suggestions as their ideas were flowing but they incorporated a few of the Nungalinya suggestions into their story.

**The Seaview Group’s Response to the Applied Theatre Workshops**

After our fourth workshop, described above, I handed out art diaries to those in the space and the Seaview group cheered excitedly. Arika observed:

The looks on their faces were as if they had found $1000.
I asked the young people to draw or write something in response to the workshops. Here are some of their responses:

I reckon playing with people who I don’t really know was a lot of fun! Doing activities that include no shame and imagination is very cool!

Yani

When I first started Drama I was really shame. But now I’m having fun. And I think Drama is cool and fun.

Marinna

There was a drawing of a girl with a thought bubble and the following words were written inside the bubble:

DRAMMA, FRIENDLY, FUN, 2 GOOD, ACTING, DEADLY, COOL

Darri

Another participant did a drawing of a girl with a big face and eyes. Written above her are the words “funny” and “maddog” and opposite is written:

In other words if I was ugly being here would make me feel like I’m beautiful!

Myndee

I felt the responses of the Seaview group reflected the energy that flowed from their chatty and giggling participation in the workshops. Their responses were a marked contrast to the participation by the Nungalinya group whose diaries I did not see again.

Following this period, there was progress as there were thirteen days of workshops with only two cancellations. The project’s future seemed to rely on the Seaview group’s participation.

One Step Forward and Two Steps Back

On the pick up the next day after the artist, sculpture, clay work, we collected Nerida, Jannali and her two-year-old sister; Nama, Tallara and Yirrigee refused to come. So this small group of two began to develop the Nungalinya script and Kim, the new teacher, shared her own experiences of the Stolen Generation. Nerida’s grandmother interrupted us and took Nerida away to get her pension money. Only
Myndee and Marinna from Seaview came in and we were informed that the two boys were discontinuing their involvement. The low number of participants from both groups was a dismal result. I felt like giving up.

Aaaargh it’s a nightmare! Disappointments a plenty today. I feel a sense of hopelessness about it all. It’s such a struggle to get things happening.

*Journal 09-08-07*

**Incident with Burnum**

Burnum arrived and added to my mood with incessant loud playing of mobile phone ring tones, alternating between manic laughter and a baby crying. He had been entertaining us with these for a few days now. Stressed by the poor showing of young people, my tolerance had worn thin and I politely asked Burnum to either switch his phone off or to take it outside. He became instantly enraged and began screaming abusively at me:

What’s fucking wrong with playing it? You can’t do anything around here since you’ve come fucking everything up, I’m sick of you fuckers …

Burnum stormed out of the building. I was shocked by his reaction as I felt my request had been reasonable. I sensed his outburst was not just about switching off the phone as his reaction was too extreme. However, it was an act of defiance and challenged my role and standing in the Youth Program.

I found him outside playing with a paintbrush and painting on the table and asked him why he was so angry; he said he was “sick of everything”.

I said to Burnum that I wanted him to get involved with the drama and that I was sorry he was upset. He seemed to calm down and he stopped swearing. I think he was surprised that I went after him, but did not yell or anything. He seems like a boy who is depressed and withdrawn. Later he returned to the space and was quiet in that he did not play the mobile tones again.

*Journal 09-08-07*

This confrontation with Burnum was a defining moment for both of us. I made it clear that there were limits to rude behaviour in the room and to the way I was spoken to. I think he was surprised that I spoke calmly and politely and listened to his problems. Immediately after this incident Burnum opted out of the landscaping project and joined the applied theatre project. It had been apparent to me that he was drawn to the drama activities. The landscaping project leader, Jack,
complained about Burnum’s lack of focus with his project but supported Burnum’s
decision to join the drama group. For the remainder of our relationship, Burnum
never once swore at me. He challenged me, but respectfully. I wondered how he
had made this leap so quickly and effectively.

Three weeks later Naretha reflected on Burnum’s subsequent development over this
phase of the research:

Burnum was an angry young man and in this short time he sort of sat back and he did
observe and he did chuck some ideas in but he was sort of a bit aloof about it. But in
the last couple of weeks he would like come in. Honestly he’s not as aggressive
towards us, he sort of watches what he says, and to me that’s fantastic. And I
struggled with him. And in this short time his attitude has changed, he’s much more
respectful. You know at times he does get those swear words out but he turns around
and says sorry! He’s apologetic and fair dinkum, I’m like, is this Burnum?

_Naretha coordinator interview 29-08-07_

At Nungalinya I felt I was treading a fine line between creating a secure place in the
workshops so that the young people wanted to be there without feeling threatened,
and providing a challenge where learning could take place and they could grow as
individuals. I felt their participation in the project was a risk but it also provided an
opportunity and gave them a sense of hope.

**DISCUSSION OF FIRST HALF 2007**

In my narrative account of the first half of this first research phase, I have selected
critical incidents to demonstrate three key areas of challenge that I faced in
developing my understanding as a practitioner and researcher in the context of the
Nungalinya Youth Program: (A) power relations in applied theatre partnerships; (B)
participation and the applied theatre process; and (C) early problems for practice.

According to Preston (2009) achieving genuine participation in applied theatre
projects is “complex and difficult”, because of the “competing ideological interests”
(p.127). The most glaring feature of this research phase was the contrast in
participation of the new Nungalinya group compared to the young people in the Pilot
Project. How could I explain the differences? How did the Seaview young people
individually vary in their participation in the project and what could I learn from
this? With a new coordinator as my partner, I was faced with more questions about
the meaning of partnerships and this was complicated by the involvement of the
group from Seaview. The participation and partnership issues forced me to adjust and adapt my practice and to rethink my research focus.

A. Power Relations in Applied Theatre Partnerships

The biggest challenge and a defining feature of the 2007 research phase was Naretha’s partnership with Seaview High School. This partnership reflected Naretha’s view of inclusivity and participation for Indigenous youth and was indicative of our different “power relations” (Preston 2009b). The partnership increased the complications and challenges of the project because Seaview was an organisation with their own agenda for their young people and they had nothing at stake in our project.

Taylor (2003) observes that “good praxis in applied theatre works towards joint partnership in which knowledge, talents and skills are shared” (p. 66). Unlike the shared agreements between Naretha and me, Seaview’s role was one-sided, characterized by a lack of punctuality and expectations that we would adapt to their schedules. They too wanted to maximize opportunities for their disadvantaged Indigenous students by capitalizing on Naretha’s resourcefulness. On at least two occasions the Seaview young people were given a choice of going to the beach instead of attending the workshops and such sudden changes in their timetable meant two young men were forced to quit the project. I received signed consent forms halfway through the project. All of these aspects created tensions and complicated conditions around my partnership with Naretha and the Nungalinya young people. Based at Nungalinya I found it annoying to be reliant on an outside group, with a propensity to dictate terms, and who seemed to have more support than we did. Yet the inclusion of Seaview young people provided a reliable source of participants for the project which we needed.

Power relations in the workshop space

My approach to building trust and relationships was challenged by the fact that anyone could enter the room at any time, and did so, even while I was conducting workshops. In my examples earlier, there was constant movement of people on the edges, inside and outside the workshop space. On any given day apart from Naretha, Kim, Arika and Nungalinya young people, there could be relatives, the landscaping group, the textile ladies, Nungalinya staff, Seaview staff and unexpected visitors coming and going, talking in the background and watching. For me having people watching from the side was distracting, intrusive and undermined the trust I was building with the group. I preferred total privacy in the workshop space, as it enabled me to control distractions, honouring the developing
relationships within the group. I believed that privacy enhanced the shared experience of taking risks in the confidence building processes. In contrast, in 2006 the Pilot Program was just beginning, and we seemed to have the space to ourselves most of the time.

At Nungalinya in 2007 I found that keeping control of the drama space was impossible. For Naretha, Kim, Arika and the young people this openness and flexibility within the workshop space was an integral part of the participatory nature of the project which promoted their understanding and dialogue with me as co-collaborators. Contrary to my views, the young people seemed to thrive in this openness and were not distracted. Naretha commented:

> What I did notice about the students, they were doing some of the mime stuff, like a kid standing in front of me, and he was doing a shopping scene or something, and he was doing that like I was not here. Like he shut me out, but it was in a good way because I wasn't a distraction to him. He wanted to do it and he was focused on that.

*Naretha, coordinator, interview 29-08-07*

Watching the workshops meant my partners developed understanding about my practice in this context and gave me feedback from their observations and helped unite the whole group. Being flexible about the way the space operated broke down some of the barriers between my project partners, the young people and me as the non-Indigenous practitioner. This approach to the workshops aided the collaborative style of applied theatre and forced a more meaningful partnership in the space.

Having other people in the room was also a safety net for the young people, who seemed to be comforted by the ready proximity of Naretha, Kim or the Seaview staff. The young people liked getting attention and the adults’ involvement. My project partners provided a symbolic and literal permission for me to be in the space with the young people. Naretha explained:

> We are quite selective you know on whom we have working with our children, because it does impact on them, because they’ve had lots of people come in and out of their lives and you know some may have been for the good but a lot of it is negative.

*Naretha, coordinator, interview 19-09-08*

This was an example of the respect Naretha showed the participants and me; in these words she is honouring the project and the processes involved. It was not possible for her, Pat or anyone to teach me everything about the context and young
people at once. Learning about the young people from Naretha was like being inducted into an alternative way of viewing the project.

**Building trust and understanding through relationships**

Harmonious and caring relationships are an element of wellbeing in Aboriginal health terms. Mobbs suggests that “being well means having harmonious social relationships with kin, with others who are not kin, and even with strangers” (1991, p. 289). Naretha and Kim aimed to develop positive relationships for the young people.

I feel most of these kids that we work with, they don’t have very strong relationships, they’ve tried but they’ve all been negative.

*Naretha coordinator interview 29-08-07*

Pat, Naretha and Kim wanted to provide an environment that was nurturing and emotionally supportive for Indigenous young people which included going on the pick-up and drop off. Building relationships outside and inside the workshops was needed as the young people tended to keep to themselves through a lack of trust in others. Naretha gave me feedback on my manner with the young people and how I conducted the workshop sessions.

I liked the way you wanted to sit around and have conversations. You really wanted to bring things out of them. And another thing I liked was [the participants going] she’s listening to me, she’s interested in me – and nobody’s interested from their perspective, nobody’s interested in me, nobody listens to me.

*Naretha, coordinator, interview 29-08-07*

**Trust issues and border crossings**

The **artist, sculpture, clay** activity began as a result of an unexpected request by Naretha to conduct a workshop for three. In this sense I was taken off-guard and it forced me to work with the young women who had shown little interest. The young women and I were challenged by Naretha’s request. Was my willingness to be spontaneous part of the reason that the young women responded to the activity? Prentki (2009c) likens the challenge of going outside one’s comfort zone in applied theatre to a form of “border crossings” which is ultimately empowering. This activity represented a border crossing for me with my practice, as much as for the young women with their participation.

According to Prentki, an individual’s personal journey within the theatre project can require more than one border to cross, “psychological, racial, sexual, sociological,
professional, as well as geographical” (2009c, p. 251). As in real life border crossings, the traveller sometimes leaves a place of safety where their identity is not questioned, to go to a world where this may no longer be the case. “Border crossings” is an apt concept to apply to my experiences with the young people at Nungalinya. It seemed that we were all entering into the building where the Youth Program was located and leaving behind our usual worlds, in favour of an exchange of knowledge, an experience where we relied on each other and had to learn new aspects of ourselves. None of us really knew what would happen each day. In this example of workshop practice, we were forced to trust each other.

**Ruptures in the process**

Being a partner in the project meant I had to exert some control in the context, to gain respect. Better managing the conflicting personal and professional demands meant I had to set some limits and boundaries, inside and outside the workshop sessions. This was particularly apparent in my confrontation with Burnum. Doing so was a risk, but one I felt that I had to take. My learning evolved through “ruptures” (Kuftinec, 1997) in the process. My response to Burnum in fact opened up a much more effective dialogue for us both. In listening to him, I was validating his feelings and pent up frustrations about his life. In this context of non-Indigenous artist and Indigenous participant, he was “heard” (Bishop, 1998). Our exchange opened up the possibility of trust and respect. This interaction with Burnum had the effect of changing our individual perceptions of each other. In reclaiming some of my own power in the context, I was modelling behaviours that contrasted with his expression of anger. His response to my calm but firm manner perhaps indicated that it was something fairly rare in his life.

**B. Participation and the Applied Theatre Process**

According to Taylor (2003) notions of participation, inclusivity and enabling of people are all central themes in applied theatre work and these were a central focus for me in this project. I was intent on every individual in the group being involved in the workshop processes through their active participation. Trust in the workshop process was an essential beginning for these young people. I found that participation for the young people was not just about what I introduced but how I introduced it. At one level ‘participation’ at first appeared to be about attendance, but it was also linked to building trust and relationships. Central to my understanding about the meaning of participation for these young people was the differences I observed between the two groups.
In the examples I have discussed above, the Seaview group appeared similar to the Pilot Project group in that they were keen to participate most of the time and seemed to enjoy the creative opportunities within the workshops, as demonstrated by their reliability and willingness to join in with every activity. Their personal responses reinforced this view. As a practitioner conducting the workshops, I looked for signs in participants that I was familiar with e.g. cooperation in improvisation, active participation through offering ideas, collaborating with group members, extending themselves through imaginative ideas, and body language that suggested positive interest such as smiling, dialogic interaction, willingness to stay on tasks and develop ideas.

However my experiences were different with the Nungalinya group as I grappled with their irregular attendance and inconsistent participation. Planned creative projects, staffing schedules, facilities and nurturing spaces had no impact unless the young people attended the sessions regularly. The young people’s participation was the cornerstone of the co-construction of knowledge that we hoped would take place in the applied theatre project and Naretha, Kim, Arika and I wanted the Nungalinya group to be involved. It was disheartening, as the Seaview group was reliable but the Nungalinya group kept my partners and me off balance and feeling powerless, as they oscillated in their responses to the workshops, participating one day, refusing the next.

The whole year to me I feel like I’ve been stumbling and stumbling, trying to work out where this program’s going. Our children have a lot of issues that really affect their participation.

Naretha, coordinator, interview 29-08-07

**Jannali and Burnum**

In order to understand the qualities of participation I encountered in the project I will focus in particular on Jannali and Burnum. My analysis of their responses enabled me to begin to understand ‘participation’ as a process. In contrast to the other young people in the Nungalinya group, Jannali and Burnum attended the sessions quite regularly; they did not want to participate in the workshops, yet stayed on the sides of the room. My relationships with Jannali and Burnum became central to the project.

**Relationships with practitioner**

According to Preston (2009b), “if genuine participation exists through co-intentionality, the relationship nurtured by the facilitator or artist is crucial and
therefore their sensitivity and skill in working ‘with’ participants and enabling
democratic ownership of creative mediums is key” (p. 129). In the example of the
artist, sculpture, clay Jannali was central to the activity, as her participation showed
a willingness to trust me. This was the most Jannali had offered since my arrival.
Her response to accepting the challenge of the blindfold clearly sparked the
involvement and cooperation of Tallara and Nerida and even engaged Burnum’s
interest. Completing the activity so that each young woman played each role was a
significant achievement in terms of their capacity to stay focused, to collaborate
with each other and to trust in the creative process and me. The activity seemed to
create a communicative space for all of us to be comfortable with each other which
had not happened before. It seemed significant that the Seaview group was not
there.

There was something powerful in our exchange where the young people allowed me
to blindfold them in such a trusting way. It was a tangible form of permission that I
understood as a practitioner. Was this the beginning of a dynamic and a creative
partnership between us? In thinking about participation through my experiences
with artist, sculpture clay I realised that the practitioner is vulnerable if no one
participates. Applied theatre relies on a reciprocal exchange between practitioner
and participants.

Within this new participatory space Jannali was able to reject my next idea and to
offer an initiative of her own. Jannali’s discussion about the CDU trip and the Stolen
Generation stories generated an interest I had not seen before in these young
people. I noticed that their body language showed a stronger interest in what was
being said in the way they sat around her and showed no signs of wanting to walk
away. Was it because of the story? Or was Jannali a natural leader? Or was it
possible that the earlier activity had helped create an atmosphere more conducive
to their involvement as they trusted me a little more? I sensed that had I not
facilitated a session for the three young women who had come in we would not
have made this huge step forward, as the exercise seemed to create a mood or
space for further communication.

Jannali’s initiative was not just about scripting the Nungalinya group’s film, but she
also cast it by naming some of the young people; she was including individuals even
though they were not there that day. Jannali was leading us all in fact, moving the
group forward in a positive way, getting others involved, encouraging me to stay
with them. Jannali acted as a gatekeeper to the participation of her peers. This
was an example of student-led learning. Naretha commented on how she felt the drama activities increased their participation:

I do think it’s about building their confidence and trying to work out, you know, where they fit, and this is a way to express themselves. And there’s no criticism on how they’re doing it.

Naretha, coordinator, interview 29-08-07

The artist, sculpture, clay activity had sparked a collaborative connection between the three young women which expanded to include Burnum and anyone else in the room. The Seaview students, who were more familiar with routine in an educational context, also showed that over time their involvement increased exponentially with their growing trust in the process.

**Observing from the margins**

It was surprising and disappointing after the breakthrough by Jannali and the young people that they refused to participate in the Seaview workshop. By participation I mean by being part of the workshop group, actively joining in with the development of ideas. The observation by bell hooks that the margin was a space where disadvantaged people make their ideas known and felt as a means to articulate their “sense of the world” (2009, p. 85) helped me think about and articulate a way of understanding the Nungalinya young people’s responses. At Nungalinya the margin was a metaphorical place where the young people flirted with attendance, commitment, reliability and participation.

I had assumed that the young people’s responses to the theatre project were indicative of their personal power within situations but my attitude did not recognise their underlying lack of trust, insecurity and need for cultural safety. The physical margin of the room was also where observation as a form of passive participation took place. It was a site of safety for some of the young people. It seemed to me the young people had the power to avoid or sabotage an opportunity, to walk away, or to not attend, and it was a power they chose to assert within the applied theatre project. When the Nungalinya group began to interact with the Seaview improvisation, albeit from the margins of the room, were they telling me they needed to participate on their terms not mine? Their comments and interjections showed they were really aware of and listening to everything that was going on.

Martin says that watching or observing is not a passive activity for Aboriginal peoples. What is important is to know “what to observe and when to apply the knowledge gained” (2003, p. 4). There was a significant amount of observation by
Jannali and Burnum throughout the 2007 project. Was observation a form of ‘participation’ in the context of the Nungalinya Youth Program? My previous assumptions when discussing participation was that it required physical involvement in the activities. Leaving the room, walking away completely, refusing to respond, were obvious signs of lack of participation. However, walking away and staying in the room, I found, could mean another form of participation i.e. passive rather than active participation.

Initially annoyed by the interruptions and yelling from the sides of the room, I thought the young people were flexing their muscles in a territorial sense, wanting to disturb the Seaview young people’s participation, a kind of bullying in the space by disrupting the workshops. Instead I found their comments did not seem to have a negative impact on the workshop participants in terms of the workshop process. Getting involved from the sides of the room opened up the involvement of more of the young people who I felt were assessing me and expressing shyness or reluctance to join in the workshop group. It was also about building their trust in me and challenging my commitment.

Rather than viewing their presence in the room as an obstacle and believing they were refusing to participate or were an uninvited audience, I realized there was an alternative more positive interpretation. The calling out and observing by the Nungalinya young people from the sides of the room operated as a kind of *simultaneous dramaturgy* (Boal, 2000), where the young people wanted to be part of the theatrical action from their position in the audience. They saw their comments and suggestions as being related to the main action; and the actors responded to their ideas. The improvisation or activity generally moved forward as a result of this kind of input and I discovered that it made the process more dynamic.

**Participation increased with ownership**

According to Taylor participants in applied theatre projects will “commit to situations when they feel they have some control over shaping and directing them” (2003, p. 33). In my previous experience as a practitioner, in order to build a good group dynamic, I found the workshop participants needed to experience both being a leader and a follower within the workshop activities. In terms of an improvisation, this means being an initiator of the action and a collaborator to help an idea work. In the workshop context at Nungalinya, I applied the same philosophy. Jannali’s initiative was evidence of her wanting to take ownership of the opportunity to make a film. Her sense of ownership seemed to ignite the interest of the others. In the
artist, sculpture, clay activity I ensured that each of the three young women experienced the leading of the process. I wanted each participant to initiate ideas and lead, as well as to accept ideas and collaborate.

You know you worked on who they are as individuals, but you put them together as a group. You listened to them, you asked them what their thoughts were on things like that and actually feel like you made them feel like they were important, and somebody was interested. And this has been a positive experience for them.

Naretha, coordinator, interview 29-08-07

According to Bundy (1999), “a healthy sense of self is only achieved when there is personal awareness of the I and Me positions and a balance between these positions as the individual encounters the world of the ‘other’” (p. 62). I felt the young people were unaccustomed to expressing their ideas in an educational context. I focused on building trust in the workshop processes, so they would comfortably offer ideas. Developing a sense of I was about developing agency so as to affect decisions within the group, for example, about what happened in the workshop, in the script, and the film. Equally I wanted the young people to respond to the ideas of others. I believed that until the young people expressed both I and me perspectives in the workshop, their communication and understanding remained limited. I realized this process was integral to our understanding of each other. In my case I learnt to collaborate and connect on the young people’s terms within the project and the workshops.

Attendance and time limits

Naretha and Kim were supportive of the young people but were powerless as they did not know how to motivate the young people to attend regularly. Any penalties they imposed would have no meaning for these young people. Cancelling the project might have disappointed us more than the young people. These attendance problems also challenged my deadlines for the project. I worried that it may be impossible to conduct the research within my schedule designed in Melbourne.

C. Early Problems for Practice

The impact of Seaview in the project

The Seaview group showed a positive commitment to the workshops through fairly reliable attendance. We started with a group of six, and four young women completed the project. Naretha identified these young people as having fewer problems compared to the Nungalinya group and observed in the following terms:
The kids from Seaview seem to be kids who are engaged in the school system.

*Naretha interview 29-08-07*

Naretha explained her perspective of the Nungalinya young people:

I think they look at themselves on a different level and that’s not the case but that’s their perception. I think it was too confronting dealing with another group when they were not comfortable in their own. Our children have a lot of issues that really affect their engagement – like their home life.

*Naretha interview 29-08-07*

My practice was challenged by the marked differences between the two groups. I had the same aims for this project as I would for tentative students anywhere when taking drama for the first time. In my professional world, success was gauged by the Quality of Teaching Surveys, the extent to which students attended and participated and how far I could take them in the expression of their ideas. Professionally I had aesthetic and academic expectations; I wanted the young people to produce something for an audience to enhance their acquisition of new skills. As a practitioner my interpretation of participation in applied theatre was linked to regular attendance, as this enabled students to achieve and to be a key part of the group throughout the creative process. At this stage I was still responding to the project from my previous assumptions about the value of ‘participation’ based on my prior experience.

*Maintaining commitment as practitioner*

The most important element in my practice was to not give up on the young people in this project and having adopted a reflective practitioner approach this enabled me to maintain and broaden my research focus so that it was more responsive to the context. I was learning about the nature of participation from the young people’s perspective. Instead of giving up on the Nungalinya group of young people, through my research focus I realized that day-by-day, in small incremental steps we were learning about each other. In their lives these young people moved around a great deal, their circumstances were unstable, so for them to focus and to commit to something required a certain amount of personal security. I was modelling commitment by returning to the space every day. I kept coming in with new activities, listening, and asking them to join in prepared to work with whoever arrived.
REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIRST HALF 2007

My main discovery during this phase was my decision to be more flexible and open within my practice and my thinking, and to trust my project partners, the young people and the applied theatre process that was underway. The research was enabling me to develop the following insights.

Flexibility and Control of Practice

I had to re-think my approach to practice and change my emphasis. The challenge then for me was to lead while at the same time be led. I understood that the young people would only commit to participate if they were given the space to lead the direction of the activities in the workshops. As a practitioner I found that I also had to balance being both leader and follower in the workshop space. Workshop interactions showed my inexperience at understanding the young people and their approach to participation within the group dynamic. The contrast between my perception and Arika’s revealed our different responses to the young people. As a practitioner I seemed to be more confident when the young people did the things I expected which resembled what I was used to seeing as full and effective participation. I had to move outside my comfort zone.

Once I was able to let go of the need to control the direction of the workshops or the belief it was possible to control them, I began to trust the process, to rely on the people around me. In this way I began to learn a different perspective as a practitioner and it was liberating. There were still goals to achieve, but these were developed through my relationships and connections; they were not dependent on me on my own with a folder of notes and a head full of outcomes. Like my Indigenous partners, my role was part of a more complex social context with important priorities.

There’s always so much going on and it’s a bit of a struggle to try and keep on top of everything, because it’s quite full on. Like one kid could be homeless one day and I have to go around and find out where she’s living, where she’s actually found accommodation.

Naretha, coordinator, interview 29-08-07

Research in this Context

While the small numbers made it more difficult to facilitate the drama workshops, the research continued to yield rich and interesting discoveries. The shared observations and reflections with my partners throughout the project were mutually
important as were our developing trust and new relationships. As I deepened my understanding of the young people and their cultural and social context through the discussions with Naretha and Kim I discovered small experiences that were positive. This reflected the importance of the collaborative nature of the drama project, and is part of working with communities with high levels of disadvantage and social marginalisation (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005; Martin, 2008).

THE SECOND HALF OF THE FIRST RESEARCH PHASE

I continue my discussion of the 2007 project, focusing on the final stage of the first research phase. This involves a commentary on the young people’s film making experiences, a discussion of the ongoing building of relationships and understandings within the applied theatre project, the implications for my practice and the developments in the second research phase.

I examine the young people’s varied participatory responses in the applied theatre project. The Seaview young people’s consistent involvement in the process was similar to my experience in the Pilot Project, which is what I had expected. Their reliable attendance demonstrated an enthusiasm for the project to the point of leading the development of their film script. In contrast, the Nungalinya young people continued to be unpredictable in their attendance and involvement in the workshops and filmmaking. With one or two young people on a daily basis it seemed impossible to build a sense of a group process.

I did not expect the Nungalinya young people’s response and found it difficult to manage in terms of my practice, as I did not know how to conduct workshops with such small numbers. Daily Naretha, Kim, Arika and I were stuck in a kind of holding pattern waiting to see if anyone from the Nungalinya group would come in. As a practitioner it was confronting as it felt like I had failed to achieve my goal of building a participatory space for the Nungalinya young people to express their ideas. I was challenged trying to understand the differences between the two groups, and what I needed to do as a practitioner to overcome the problems, as nothing seemed to work. It was like two different practices were required in the one workshop space, and yet, providing Nungalinya only workshop opportunities was ineffectual when only one or two young people came in.

In spite of these difficulties, we managed to produce two short films with the Seaview young people playing key roles in both films. Nama, Burnum and Amarina from the Nungalinya group also took part. We held a public presentation of the films on 24 August 2007, the last official day of the first research phase. My
narrative account and analysis focuses on these events in terms of the two groups and my discussion analyses their significance on the project and the research.

PART TWO: FIRST RESEARCH PHASE 2007

Divergent Patterns of Participation

The strange dynamic continued in the youth space with the Seaview group arriving, expecting to work and the Nungalinya participants fleeing to the corners, mostly refusing to actively participate, or worse not attending at all. The Seaview group’s attendance and energy became the mainstay of the applied theatre project as we developed the young people’s stories into two different films. Naretha, Kim, Arika and I found it frustrating with so few Nungalinya young people attending regularly, apart from Jannali, Burnum and Nama. Tallara, Nerida and Amarina were unreliable with outside factors continuing to impact on their participation in the project. It was not until the actual filmmaking and the final workshop sessions that Burnum and Nama began to join in with the Seaview young people.

The Seaview Outsiders Embrace the Project

The Seaview group maintained their position as visitors, as they entered the youth space and greeted Naretha, Kim, Arika and me, but did not interact with the Nungalinya young people nor become involved in the tensions and problems. I kept to the schedule and by week three the four Seaview young women were so enthusiastic about the opportunity to develop their own script that they did not wait till the next workshop at Nungalinya, but made their own creative decisions and kept me informed. They wanted to own their story and characters. Examples of the ways in which these young people took the initiative included: casting the roles, getting written permission from their Principal so that we could film some scenes at their school – near the canteen, across the road at “the shop”, at the bus stop, on the bus - bringing along a block of chocolate to share with each other, attending the workshop even though they had missed school in the morning.

They really got into the script writing; Rose had them engaged through the whole session. Yani showed up halfway through and her input was also good. I found it good to sit on the outside and watch Rose interact with these girls just treating them like she would anyone else, treating them as if they had just been at any normal school in Victoria. A lot of these kids aren’t used to having people more so adults treating them this way.

Arika report 10-08-07
I observed that the process of devising a script of their own was an exciting experience for the Seaview group and this marked a turning point for building trust between the young women and me.

   The drama project seems to be working for these four girls. They have come out of themselves so much since the start of the program. I feel like there’s a connection and an understanding between us.

   Journal 13-08-07

The contrast between the two groups was extreme as the Nungalinya young people struggled to be involved. On the first day of filming Mina returned from the pick-up with Burnum and Jannali. Nama was missing, Nerida had gone to a funeral, Yirigee was in court and Tallara said she did not want to come because she was afraid I would persuade her to be in the film. Naretha became more anxious about the Nungalinya young people’s poor level of participation in the project blaming the Seaview group’s involvement, which caused some tension between us. I was doubtful that anything could have made a difference as there always seemed to be outside factors that interfered with the Nungalinya young people’s attendance.

   We did the filming in the third week, and the Seaview young people spent most of the time at Nungalinya engaged in the applied theatre project. With few Nungalinya young people coming in, our attention focused on filming Waggin, the Seaview film. The first day was difficult juggling the Seaview group with no Nungalinya participants joining in.

   Working with the [Seaview] kids was hard work. I had to keep them focused while they kept being distracted by their mobile phones, ipods and general mucking around. They also rehearsed the first few scenes and did some good work. All of them wanted to write or draw in their diaries.

   Journal 13-08-07

   Today I was Yani, Me, Happy, Adventurous, Energetic. But I was also: angry because we didn’t get to film. But it was a cool day anyway!

   Yani diary entry 13-08-07

Yani made this entry in the morning before we had begun filming in the afternoon. It is noticeable that no one mentioned the Nungalinya young people at any stage in their diaries, as if these young people were invisible. This diary entry by Myndee
shows the Seaview young people’s developing excitement within the filmmaking process and the building of their relationships with each other:

Doing the filming was really fun and having ice cream! I’m glad we re-wrote the script because Darri helped.

*Myndee diary entry 13-08-07*

**Stories Reflect the Differences between the Two Groups**

The themes of the two films were revealing of the differences between the two groups. The Seaview film - *Waggin* - was a story about bored teenagers, experimenting with truancy and shoplifting at the local shopping centre and the consequences of being found out. Their story actually started at school in front of the canteen where they began a conversation about food, decided to go to the shop across the road, decided to skip school and catch a bus to the main shopping centre. Their story explored characters, showing a scenario of peer group pressure.

In the following commentaries the young women explained their interpretations of the characters they played in the films and insisted these characters were nothing like them in real life. There was a sense of excitement and ownership of their individual artistic decisions with their roles in the story that revealed a trust in their newfound abilities. They commented on their experiences of the filmmaking.

*I play Emily Rose. She’s like a really bad girl; she doesn’t like doing good things. She’s the leader of the group making them do what she wants them to do, instead of what they want to do. Very strong character, doesn’t do as she’s told, doesn’t respect what people want. I’ve liked everything about the film and making it and would love to do more if it didn’t take up my school time.*

*Myndee, video data, 15-08-07*

Myndee spoke confidently about her part in the story and easily articulated how she viewed the character Emily Rose. Myndee developed significantly since the first workshop, and had shown a capacity for leadership in terms of her willingness to embrace the risks within the creative opportunities.

Darri had been talkative from the beginning of the project but she became more settled in herself and developed strong friendships within the Seaview group.

*I play Krystal. Krystal’s kind of a mean girl, but she doesn’t want to get in trouble. She likes to follow cool people. Krystal is best friends with all of them, not too mean, not too nice. She’s nothing like me. I loved how we had to do scene after scene after*
scene, scene, scene, all the time. We went around walking to different places, making the script. I loved it [the filming]. Like we get to do things like you know is a new experience for me.

_Darri, video data, 15-08-07_

Even though the young women found it a challenge to talk to the camera directly, they were willing and able to express themselves unscripted. Each young woman described her role in her own words confidently differentiating her character from the others, which demonstrated a trust in the artistic process and in me. They were comfortable with including their own personal remarks.

I play Kathy. She is a follow the leader character, likes to question the group a lot. I don’t think we have any similarities with each other. I found it fun to play someone when I wasn’t really like that person. The best things about this week would have to be doing the filming, hanging out with people that I usually don’t hang out with and meeting other people. It’s been hard work doing most of the scenes all over again and changing it around to make it better, took a lot of brains to do that.

_Yani, video data, 15-08-07_

Unexpectedly one afternoon Yani’s mother phoned Nungaliny and thanked me several times for “giving Yani the opportunities”\(^\text{19}\).

Marinna was a quiet young woman and I had initially wondered if she would finish the project. She took a lot of risks with her involvement that showed me she developed trust in herself through the project.

I play Myra, she’s really shy and really scared to get caught, but she still went along. I really enjoyed playing the character because I wanted to play a shy person. I liked going along with the gang, didn’t find it hard work.

_Marinna, video data, 15-08-07_

The Nungalinya film - _When They Stole Us_ - was very different. As mentioned in the previous chapter the central idea stemmed from Jannali’s initiative. The script was based on the different stories of the two ladies who had made a strong impression on Jannali.

\(^{19}\) Journal 14-08-07
They [the old ladies] gave a talk about their lives including when they were taken from their families. After leaving their talk I felt a great sadness. So in the movie we made, we tried to make out the feelings of how the Stolen Generation ladies felt.

Jannali’s letter 25-11-08

When They Stole Us began with an acknowledgement of the two women:

We thank them for sharing a small part of their journey.

The story began in the bush where three Aboriginal children were taken while their parents were away gathering food. The children were offered a ride in a truck, which they excidedly accepted. The parents returned, could not find their children, and were grief-stricken. In a government office two white administrators discussed plans for the next collection of children from the desert.

Naretha and Jack played these roles as no one else wanted to, adopting non-Indigenous body language and attitudes. Naretha tied her hair back into a formal bun, wore conservative clothes and held a clipboard and pen in her hands. Jack was less formal in his appearance, but they both conveyed the image of people willingly delivering government policy in complete disregard for the devastation the practice was creating for Indigenous peoples.

“The children will be taken to the coast where their parents can’t find them. They’ll be better off there.” “Exactly.”

Other scenes included a bullying scene in a schoolyard where the white children chanted songs and slogans to the black children:

“God made them little niggers, made them in the night; God forgot to paint them white! You ate Captain Cook!”

Another scene in the schoolyard depicted a teacher talking to a group of children:

“Alright, who wants to play hockey?” Everyone raises their hands. The teacher asks: “How many of you have a hockey stick?” The white children raise their hands. The teacher turns to the Indigenous Australian children and says: “You don’t have one, so you can’t play. I’m sorry, that’s the way it is.” Downcast the Aboriginal children leave and go into the bush. They return with some branches. “Can we play now, we’ve got a stick?” The teacher is surprised by their ingenuity: “What can I say, you’ve got a stick, you can play.”
The film concluded with some text: “Fifty years later” and a long list of famous Indigenous Australians from the arts, music, sports and politics and this statement:

Indigenous peoples have more than survived, they’re succeeding.

Video data 16-08-07

Jannali did not participate in creating the final script, instead Nama joined me at the computer and, assisted by Kim and Arika, we developed a rough script. Burnum contributed the title *When They Stole Us* and designed a cover for the DVD.

**Nama Takes a Risk in the Seaview Film**

On the first day as we were about to film a scene for *Waggin* in the local shopping centre, Jannali and Burnum suddenly told us they were banned from being within one hundred metres of the Centre. They could not be in the film even if they wanted to, which partly explained their reluctance to be involved in the Seaview film. Nama was the only Nungalinya participant in the Seaview film, so Arika and Kim needed to be in it. Nama’s participation had required encouragement, coaxing, continual knockbacks: “no”, “I don’t feel like it”, “I don’t want to”, and a promise that she “wouldn’t have to say anything” before she agreed.

Nama’s scene depicted the gang members looking through their stolen booty in the house of one of the teenagers when there was a knock at the door. The group hesitated before opening the door to find the detective. The detective entered, followed by a furious shop owner. Unexpectedly, Nama embraced the role of detective and directed the Seaview actor-participants on the protocols of an arrest. Arika described the scene in her report.

This scene was the most funny to do. This scene took a lot of takes simply because they [the Seaview young women] couldn’t stop laughing half the time.

*Arika report 14-08-07*

Nama, as an authoritative detective, with an upright, steely posture, microphone to her mouth, said:

“This is detective Jane Neale from Seaview police station. I’m here to take you girls back to the station for some questioning about some stolen items!” There is emphasis and threat in her tone of voice, and then she steps to the side relating more details into her microphone. The four girls look shocked and pretend to be horrified at being caught.
Nama’s involvement with her character gained momentum and her ideas kept flowing, motivated by a desire to make the scene as convincing as possible. Nama was even slightly irritated by the Seaview girls’ inability to keep a straight face.

“Just remember what it feels like when you’ve got caught after stealing something. Haven’t youse ever been caught for stealing stuff?” she advised them.

In another scene, Nama, as detective, escorted the girls out of the police station warning them:

“I don’t want to see you girls back here ever again. Hope you’ve learnt your lessons. Take it easy.”

In an inspired moment Nama suggested we include the video footage of mistakes or ‘bloopers’, at the end of the film, which we did. The Seaview participants were delighted by Nama’s involvement, which was a complete surprise to us all. She created her own dialogue without any rehearsal and her characterisation of the detective enhanced the scene. It seemed like a startling transformation from the young woman whose participation had been erratic. Nama described her role:

I played detective Cara Neale. Found it was pretty good. I had to go in and bust the waggers and the stealers. Helped out the others because they [the Seaview girls] couldn’t keep a straight face. It was “Oi just do this!”

Nama, wearing dark sunglasses, nervously delivered her commentary to camera, but it was an achievement for us as she was the only Nungalinya young person to do so. At this point Nama seemed the most comfortable with the artistic processes and with her interactions with me. Afterwards, we began to observe some casual interaction between the two groups in the youth space.

Managing Conflicting Interests in the Project

The making of the Nungalinya film was fraught as there were tensions within the Youth Program from the ongoing poor attendance and participation by most of the Nungalinya group. Arika, Kim and I were excited working with the Seaview group, enjoying their energy and motivation. Naretha, unhappy with the situation, said that
the Nungalinya young people were not getting involved enough and blamed the presence of the Seaview group. Naretha changed the schedule so we could film the Nungalinya group early in the morning before the Seaview group arrived, hoping the young people would not back away as usual. This did not work.

Naretha insisted we postpone filming the Nungalinya film three times. I was ready to give up, but Naretha pleaded with me to wait one last time. The Nungalinya young people’s attendance was inconsistent; different individuals came in on different days so it was impossible to coordinate our planning for the film.

Naretha thinks the drama isn’t working, as the kids are not coming regularly. She thinks they can’t develop the levels of trust required, as they know I’m leaving soon. She said it parallels other experiences in their lives where they get support for so long and then it goes, nothing seems to last.

To finish my week, the Seaview coordinator unexpectedly phoned me in the weekend to say that the Seaview young women “had enjoyed the drama, but now found it boring.” The coordinator said that Seaview would have provided more
young people for the project but did not because of the expected numbers from Nungalinya. Seaview wanted to discuss future projects with me based at Seaview instead of Nungalinya. This conversation was disappointing as it seemed a breach of trust with the partnership I shared with Naretha and overlooked what the young women had gained from being involved in the project.

Arika, Naretha, Kim and I were deflated by this pronouncement by Seaview after all we had been through and the achievements of the young women. There was one more week to go with the final presentation planned for the Friday. We cancelled the Seaview workshops on the Monday. On Tuesday Naretha reported a conversation with two of the Seaview young people, which seemed to contradict the Seaview coordinator’s remarks:

Myndee and Darri go: “we wanted to be here yesterday – we love coming here!” And I was like, oh wow, and I said, “You know this is your space too, you’re more than welcome”. But that was fantastic and I do feel the drama actually allowed them, because that’s what they came here for, that they knew we were all here for the same reason.

Naretha interview 29-08-07

The young people’s responses meant that they did feel a part of the Youth Program and they did want to be involved in the project. The conversation showed Naretha’s generosity towards the Seaview young people and her commitment to the partnership with Seaview.

The Youth Program Hosts a Presentation

I thought that a presentation of the films would be enhanced with a small live performance at the start, particularly as the films were short. Nama, Burnum and the Seaview girls were keen to be involved. Their piece, devised hurriedly through improvisations and discussions, showed something of the performance skills they had acquired during the project using still image and movement.

The first rehearsal I thought went good but there were points where you could see that all they wanted to do was muck around and to any outside person this wouldn’t look like they had spent weeks doing a drama course. Rosemary told them why she thought they looked like crap and that if they did that tomorrow they would look really bad. They got into their starting points, they still had a bit of mucking around but it was a lot better this time. They then did another rehearsal with music and this was the best so far.

Arika report 23-08-07
The performance began with four figures covered in black, red and yellow cloths (the Seaview girls) and a masked figure (Nama) intriguingly removed each cloth as if awakening the figures. The four figures improvised and interpreted a variety of familiar settings through movement and stillness. They imitated people and activities such as in a shopping centre, at the show, or in a nightclub with each actor adopting a character and role for each location; one of the actor-participants called out the title of each scene. The performance finished with the four girls in a tableau with the masked figure. The performance represented a leap in confidence by the young people taking part. The four Seaview young women, Nama and Burnum had volunteered to be in the performance. Burnum participated in rehearsals but Nama performed at the presentation as Burnum had community service obligations. Performing in front of a live audience was a new experience for the young people and contrasted to acting in the film. The presentation consisted of this performance followed by the two films.

Unexpectedly Jannali and Tallara had both dressed up and appointed themselves as organizers and hostesses of the occasion and helped set up the youth space and prepared the morning tea with Kim and Naretha.

There was a buzz in the morning. The kids were pottering around doing their things – they did their rehearsal stuff, and even the guys that brought them over from Seaview, they were really excited about what they were going to be seeing. You could feel the energy there.

_Naretha interview 29-08-07_

In full view of the audience, as Arika and I were setting the actors into place beneath the cloths, inexplicably Jannali went past us to the computers for no apparent reason. Jannali had shown no interest in acting in the performance. She stayed behind us until we finished the set up and she returned to the audience just as the performance began. It seemed that Jannali wanted to be seen to be part of the whole project. I discuss Jannali and examine the continuum of ‘participation’ by the young people in my analysis in the discussion section that follows.

There was a large audience of staff and students from within Nungalinya and Seaview. The four Seaview girls and Nama rushed through their performance as they were very nervous, but maintained their focus throughout. Naretha expressed her delight that the audience was receptive to the performance.

My interpretation was they were like statues and the cloths over them kept them this way and then, Nama’s role, the masked character, the spirit bringing them to life. I
saw them (the cloths) as the Aboriginal flag colours. And they showed different things from our lives. We had a captivated audience. I loved it from the community end because I actually asked the students from the community. And they said “good, good, good”. And actually they’re not ones to really comment on anything. So that was a really good response from them.

*Naretha casual conversation 24-08-07*

Naretha referred to the “community end”, which were the people staying at Nungalinya from remote communities. Naretha valued their positive responses to the young people, and I think she hoped they would convey their responses to the Acting Principal and the College Board.

Arika’s report on the event conveyed the emotions aroused by the gathering for herself and the audience. She was excited that the performance by the five young people had gone so well. Both Naretha and Arika seemed to celebrate the experience of sharing with the community, and the sense of connection it provided. Arika and Naretha both seemed to feel a sense of fulfilment.

I couldn’t believe how many people had come to see and show their support of these kids and this program. The live performance by the girls was just outstanding, it proved beyond doubt that people can do anything if they work hard and put their mind to it. We then watched the 2 films. First *Waggin* and then *When They Stole Us*, which left most people in tears, speechless or both. It was great to see the looks on the older generation when they saw the younger generation wanting to do a play on the *Stolen Generation*, something that affects “all” Indigenous Australians past, present and future.

*Arika report 24-08-07*

The Nungalinya film *When They Stole Us* silenced the room. Naretha stepped forward and read the text aloud, sensitive to the literacy levels amongst the people watching the screen. It was a treasured moment for me to witness the young people’s films being shown to a live audience and tears rolled down my face watching *When They Stole Us*.

A hushed almost sacred atmosphere came over the audience; everyone’s attention was fixed on the film. Somehow the simplicity of it and the silence (we’d decided not to have sound other than dialogue), made the story even more powerful. Stark, real and tragic.

*Journal 24-08-07*
Naretha expressed her excitement about the presentation:

I was standing on the side and I looked around, just gauging the audience and they were just watching intently, and they were laughing at the kids and the kids were sitting in the middle, and it was really nice, because all the kids were sitting in the middle and all the adults were on the outside. It sort of had to me a community feel, like everybody was together, and the kids were giggling in the middle and the adults would look down and they’d go “oh wow”!

_Naretha interview 29-08-07_

Each participant in the project was given a DVD of the films, which was important as it meant the young people could share the experience with family and friends. Darri described her family’s response to the DVD:

My family was surprised and they wanted to watch it over and over again. I was in it and we were acting and we went to all sorts of places and they were laughing and just really interested in it all.

_Darri interview 17-09-07_

It was significant how her family wanted to keep watching the film. The DVD seemed to represent something important for them, as if they shared in Darri’s achievements. It is possible that the family members had not imagined the extent of Darri’s achievement until seeing the DVD. Yani expressed the excitement of her family seeing the DVD.

With my sisters they watched the film and they thought it was really good so my sister thought that she should be in like a drama thing to make up a film and everything. She thought it would be fun.

_Yani interview 17-09-07_

I think the young women liked being acknowledged for their achievement in the process through the shared moment of the family watching the DVD.

I nominated the four Seaview young women for scholarships to Trinity College’s Summer School Leadership program on the basis of their excellent participation throughout the project. This is a two-week residential course for young people with leadership potential, based on school performance and a willingness to engage in extra-curricula activities to a high standard. The course offers academic skills enhancement, fun, social experiences, and personal and leadership development for young people from Australia and overseas. The Seaview coordinator reported to us
on the girls’ participation in the Trinity program, which was their first trip to Melbourne.

They have all made lots of new friends and are engaging in all the activities with enthusiasm and energy!

*Email correspondence 11-12-07*

**DISCUSSION**

This phase of the research consolidated my approach as a reflective practitioner researcher, as the research gave me the means to enquire beyond attendance issues, unreliability problems and my lack of control in the workshop space. The research focus enabled me to build understanding about the meaning and importance of collaboration and partnerships in the project. The involvement of Naretha, Kim, Arika and the young people as co-collaborators in the project was pivotal. I felt less isolated and alone.

I no longer wrestle with the question of whether it would be better for an Indigenous person to do the work instead of me. It doesn’t matter what your background, what matters more is that the person is prepared to do the work believing in the people.

*Journal 19-08-07*

Central to my discussions with Naretha, Kim and Arika were the discrepancies between the two groups of young people, the nature of their involvement and engagement in the project and what this meant in research terms as well as project outcomes. The research was exploring how applied theatre might be a means for creating opportunities for Indigenous young people to participate and partner in creative projects in such a way that is meaningful in their lives. The notions of partnership and participation remained central to my analysis.

**Partnerships**

*Exploring possibilities*

Maintaining our focus on the Seaview young people’s work in the project was an opportunity for Naretha, Kim, Arika and I to develop a team approach, to work together, to explore the potential of an applied theatre project for marginalized Indigenous young people who maintained their attendance and participation. The Seaview group’s involvement meant the Nungalinya young people could watch passively and even participate as the workshops were held in the youth space. We still hoped the Nungalinya young people would actively participate. The public
presentation was a risk, as we did not know if the young people would perform and we could not anticipate the reaction of an audience who had not shared the creative processes with us. It also provided an opportunity for Naretha, Kim, Arika and I to claim our roles in the development of the young people, and to celebrate our partnership. The live performance united members of the two groups as Burnum and Nama had been involved. However it was apparent in the presentation that for the Nungalinya group there was not a similar sense of achievement.

The Seaview group was central to the project’s activities in the last two weeks despite the devastating impact their presence seemed to have on the Nungalinya individuals. The applied theatre processes enabled my relationships with Naretha, Kim and Arika to deepen as the creative project relied on our collaboration and shared meaning making with the young people.

I think I’ve got a really good team, we had the same vision basically, but I do feel that the drama came at the right time when it was able to pull it all together.

Naretha in 29-08-07

A tension remained within our partnership, as the central purpose of developing the Nungalinya young people was not achieved. The Acting Principal at Nungalinya did not attend the presentation and criticised the films for being too short. This created pressure for Naretha within the College and she had to justify the funding of the Youth Program and my role in the project.

Meeting the young people’s needs in the Youth Program

According to Brice Heath youth organisations serve as “family” for marginalized young people “meeting their needs and promoting their growth” (1993, p. 54), which explained why Naretha maintained the Seaview partnership, as she was committed to the applied theatre project and building an identity for the Youth Program. Naretha wanted to bring people together and the presentation symbolised a sense of community and social inclusion for the young people. The presentation was a culmination of the young people’s development for this stage of the project. Naretha expressed her sense of achievement, of belonging, of sharing between the young and the old people. She was pleased that Jannali, Nama and Tallara had participated on the day of the presentation because they wanted to be there.

I’ve worked in this college since January and you know I’m trying to have this place [the Youth Program] have a feel of ownership - that day I really felt it. Those kids from our program they came, they helped organise things, they were like “this is my place” and “I’m welcoming these people here”, and yeah, that was a fantastic feeling.
really do feel confident what the future is going to be now. I was questioning myself a lot, but now, on that day I could really feel, yep, this is it, so I know this will work, and I think the drama has helped me with that.

_Naretha interview 29-08-07_

Naretha quoted a respected elder, who had been in the audience: “it’s [the drama] building on their self-esteem isn’t it? We need to continue doing that”\(^{20}\). Naretha highlighted here what for her were signs of confidence, ownership, and the sense of the Nungalinya youth experiencing that they belonged within the program. The use of film gave the young people a public “voice”, but the processes of the applied theatre project built the young people’s capacity to claim that right.

**Participation and the Young People**

*Extending boundaries creates possibilities*

According to Brice Heath the “real and perceived boundaries that circumscribe a youth’s environment generate young people’s perceptions of themselves as human beings and as social participants and also establish perimeters for their understanding of possibilities and futures” (1993, p. 54). Within the workshops I found as the young people gained some skills through improvisation, creating dialogue, playing characters, it enabled them to take more social risks in terms of offering ideas to the group, speaking out, and their general involvement in the project became more active. Participation in the applied theatre workshops is then key to the experience of extending personal boundaries, a similar concept to border crossings (Prentki, 2009), which I discussed previously in Chapter Five. Participating in the workshops, the filmmaking and the presentation opened up new doors and extended young people’s visions of themselves and their futures.

The two groups’ films represented the different perspectives of each group and their responses to the project. I found it significant that both films explored issues of stealing, authority, trust and betrayal.

*The Seaview group contributes to the creative space*

Writing their script, acting in both films and performing the live piece meant the Seaview young people continued to flourish in the creative participatory space established through the workshops. The Seaview group discussed their script and approached the story as a creative fiction, exploring the fantasy and consequences

\(^{20}\) Interview 29-08-07
of truancy and peer group pressure. I had conversations with the young women about characters, acting, locations, building the story through film and other elements. The young people had fun developing their ideas which contributed to the creative space we were establishing through the project.

Naretha commented that there was a lot of support around the Seaview group and the timing of the project suited their needs.

They were ready to expose themselves out to you.

_Naretha interview 29-08-07_

Naretha noted Yani’s development from the beginning of the project and how participating in the workshops had increased her communication skills:

She was a shy girl and I’m just amazed where she is today, and I don’t think she was confident of speaking or getting her ideas across. But I sit and observe and she’s actually being able to sit in a conversation and put her view across and she’s not worried anymore. Before she used to sit back and just watch those other girls talk, but she’s actually part of the conversation now.

_Naretha interview 17-08-07_

The young people’s reflections supported Naretha’s observations of being able to communicate confidently and express themselves in front of the group.

Drama has helped me step out of my comfort zone and I want to do more about drama in the future. I didn’t really know that I liked drama and I did this and I did.

_Yani interview 17-09-07_

I’ve learned lots of drama and life lessons and all that. This is the best thing I’ve ever been to.

_Darri interview 17-09-07_

It made me realize don’t be shy just get up and do stuff you haven’t done before.

_Marinna interview 04-12-07_

**The Nungalinya group communicates through story**

For the Nungalinya young people there was more at stake with their participation in the applied theatre project which included their film. They found it more difficult to trust the applied theatre processes and to develop relationships with me knowing
that I was leaving. According to Nicholson “sharing stories change their ownership” (2005, p. 272). An important feature of the Nungalinya film was that the *Stolen Generation* stories were a community narrative, rather than an individual narrative, and the young people were exploring their identities in a broader cultural context. It was safe to explore this story as it was about elders from a previous generation. Their script *When They Stole Us*, introduced political, social and cultural connections that lie at the heart of Aboriginal Australia.

According to Weber-Pillwax, ”stories are not frivolous or meaningless; no one tells a story without intent or purpose” (2001, p. 156). The film dealt with a serious theme; it was an allegorical expression of the young people’s own struggles with dislocation, lack of continuity, a lifetime of broken promises, abuse and neglect. Consequently trust was a significant challenge for them. Their film revealed their preoccupation and identification with notions of family and loss, lies and betrayal and the consequences and devastation of this. Metaphorically, the voiceless Nungalinya young people wanted to explore important issues about their people. I wondered if the film was a metaphor for their feelings about the government Intervention, which was disrupting the lives of Aboriginal peoples in 2007. The story showed their feelings of insecurity and represented their Indigenous identity. Their film, the more difficult to make, delivered the strongest impact as it seemed to speak to the heart of the audience.

**Social and cultural negotiation**

For the Nungalinya young people their participation seemed to involve a form of social and cultural negotiation in the applied theatre space which they communicated through their oscillating levels of involvement and attendance. I think Jannali, Burnum and Nama in particular were interested in establishing the means to be authentically represented in the youth space. I will discuss this later in this Chapter.

I do think it’s about building their confidence and trying to work out where they fit, and this is a way to express themselves.

*Naretha interview 17-08-07*

Naretha, Kim, Arika and I were learning about what these young people needed to feel comfortable in the workshop space. I found it difficult to modify my existing assumptions about an effective applied theatre project and focused on the achievement of an artistic product of an acceptable standard as a measure of ‘success’ for the project and the effectiveness of my practice. I was accustomed to
young people performing to an audience as a sign of their achievements and their willingness to be part of a participatory project and wanting to share in the artistic decisions and processes. I viewed the Nungalinya young people’s oscillating responses as sabotaging the project as I believed they had not been involved enough to benefit from the drama activities. There was a sense of powerlessness as a practitioner in terms of being able to compete with what was happening in the young people’s lives away from the Youth Program and its impact on their capacity to attend regularly.

**Jannali and Burnum build trust in the workshops**

My focus on Jannali and Burnum continued throughout this phase of the project. I found it difficult to interpret Jannali’s wavering participation. For Burnum and Jannali, going to the shopping centre to film *Waggin* had serious consequences of being locked up or another court appearance; therefore they were effectively shut out of this activity. I recall standing in the youth space, everyone ready to begin and the look of disappointment on Jannali and Burnum’s faces as they announced they could not join us. I wondered what impact this admission would have on Jannali’s capacity to continue in the project. Their admission of official exclusion became a form of negotiation about their terms of participation in the project. Jannali withdrew for the remainder of the project and showed no further interest as an active participant in the filmmaking processes. For Burnum it was different, as he acted in *When They Stole Us* and began to engage with the Seaview group by joining in the warm up activities and the performance piece.

It was surprising to me that Jannali did not participate in the development and filming of the Nungalinya script. I think Jannali’s wavering involvement was her way of negotiating the participatory space on her terms. In recalling the comments by the young people in the 2006 Pilot Project, I wondered whether Jannali’s withdrawal was a way to avoid the pain of loss when I left. Yet despite her withdrawal Jannali wanted to be at the presentation, claiming her place behind the actors, and preparing the morning tea. Accepting my compliments about her contribution to the presentation, Jannali responded:

> Yeah that was good. I’ll do that a bit more often.

*Interview 29-08-07*

When asked if she had learnt anything from the project Jannali referred to the participation by the Seaview students.
From what I’ve seen of the kids it makes them braver and that – the kids that have been acting and all that. Yeah – they looked like they were enjoying it too. I don’t like acting, cause I never act in my whole life. I don’t like acting – it’s not my thing.

When asked if she would do anything differently next time Jannali replied:

I’d probably be brave enough by then. See what happens.

Jannali interview 29-08-07

**Expressions of integrity in the creative process**

Nama’s portrayal of the detective in *Waggin* showed a more serious attitude compared with the Seaview young women. For Nama the story was not make-believe and she wanted the arrest to be represented authentically. Inspired by her participation in *Waggin*, Nama had come in to be involved in filming *When They Stole Us* but she was alone that day which I found disappointing. Nama returned when the filming was finished.

From my perspective Jannali, Burnum and Nama revealed their integrity in the ways they responded to these critical incidents; instead of being obstructionist or difficult, they wanted to participate in activities on their own terms. Jannali, Burnum and Nama were beginning to communicate their emerging confidence in the process, negotiating their different perspectives of the project in the way they knew. Their responses showed they wanted to construct a space that allowed them to feel included.

**Building understanding about trust and relationships**

Naretha in her interview at the end of the project identified four key points to help me understand the Nungalinya young people’s participation in the project:

- The project was too short – “if it had been more long term”
- Involvement on their terms – “the focus on them alone” without Seaview
- Established relationship of trust – “they’re comfortable to open up to me”
- Long-term Relationship – “you’re still going to be there the next day”

The young people conveyed their lack of trust through their film and their oscillating patterns of involvement and attendance. They had had a lifetime of broken promises.
So many people coming in and out of their lives – we’re going to save you from everything, everything’s going to be fine – nothing changes. You could’ve been another person like that walking in, and promising things and then walking away.

_Naretha interview 29-08-07_

It seemed that the young people wanted to trust me and to take advantage of the creative opportunity; otherwise they would have walked away completely. The workshop space seemed to provide an opportunity for the young people to test and explore their own capacities for trust. For the Nungalinya young people it was more important to establish relationships and a place of safety before they could engage in the project and in doing so they contributed to the construction of a participatory creative space on their terms. Nama participated in the Seaview film after she had negotiated her terms of engagement.

When Naretha invited Seaview to join the applied theatre project she had not anticipated the impact of this decision on the Nungalinya young people. Naretha reflected on some signs of development through the young people’s contributions to the project, which marked the first stage of the negotiated creative space for these young people.

With Nama I think it’s brought her out of her shell. And I think she’s happy about taking that step. I think she knows she can push herself and she can achieve. Burnum came into it later on in the workshops and I think he blossomed out of that – his attitude has changed. It’s really noticeable and I don’t think I’m the only one commenting on it, even the other students have said that. Amarina brought her young son in and she didn’t hesitate [to participate]. And Jannali was involved in actually drawing up the script.

_Naretha interview 29-08-07_

The main difference between the two groups of young people was their differing needs for trust in the workshop space. The Seaview young people were able to come into the youth area, protected by three staff members, and participated for short workshop sessions. Over time, their involvement enabled the young people to develop skills for participation in the project and in doing so these young people became partners with Naretha, Kim and I in the construction of the applied theatre project. The Nungalinya young people were also exploring their own construction of a creative participatory space through negotiating their own needs for trust on their terms. Both groups of young people took risks in the emerging creative space and willingly became key informants in my research.
REFLECTIONS

Reflective Practitioner Research

My reflective practitioner approach enabled me to observe a kind of continuum of participation within the Youth Program space, with the Seaview group at one end and the Nungalinya group at the other. The Nungalinya young people did not adopt my model of how participation in applied theatre worked. These young people maintained their distinct identification with their group from start to finish. The Nungalinya young people’s responses were outside my experience, forcing me to consider alternative interpretations. For the Nungalinya group, the issues in their lives seemed to affect their regular attendance and involvement, a fact that increased my feeling of powerlessness as a practitioner and my dependence on my co-collaborators. However, my experience with the young people in the Pilot Project and with the Seaview group provided me with a different and more positive experience of working with marginalized Indigenous young people in applied theatre workshops.

The reflective practice was a tool that helped me record and document the responses to the workshop activities as they occurred and immediately afterwards, but perhaps what is more significant is that it was a tool to provide insight from a distance. My journal, the video data and recordings gave me a reflective space when I returned home. There was too much detail to take in as I lived and worked at Nungalinya, too much to understand and articulate in one project, in one year. I was committed to understanding the participation patterns of the groups of young people in the applied theatre space over a longer period, to analyse the points of similarity and difference, so that I could try to ensure that no young person was excluded from the creative processes.

Applied Theatre Practice

Instead of neatly closing off the project with a satisfying end the Nungalinya group kept my questions unanswered, kept me thinking about my practice. I was living and working in their context, attempting to increase their participation and engagement. I realised I had to find a different approach within my practice. In 2007 I was goal focused; I wanted the young people to feel a sense of achievement through the production of a tangible product and I needed to see a result, a creative product. From this perspective completing a finished product meant the project was over. Yet the Nungalinya group’s faltering pattern of participation suggested they
were operating from very different priorities. Was it their way of asking for more time, another opportunity and to see the applied theatre project in a different way?

**Trust**

At the end of the project Arika commented on my practice:

> It’s like you’re sort of in a box and there’s nothing else exists outside this box, it’s just what you’re working on.

Initially I interpreted her observation as a compliment for my concentration and focus while managing the workshop space. I later realised Arika was encouraging me to go outside my comfort zone “box”, to broaden my vision, to trust myself and the young people.

Using swimming as a metaphor Arika compared my practice with:

> Swimming in the deep with a lifeguard or surfboard at hand.

Arika encouraged me to trust my capabilities, just as I had trusted the young people in the live performance.

> I think it’s sometimes good to be thrown into the deep end without some rescue equipment.

Arika said Nama, Myndee, Darri, Yani and Marinna achieved in their performance because

> They knew you trusted them to do it.

*Arika interview 24-08-07*

Arika, an accomplished swimming teacher, occasionally gave me backstroke lessons in Darwin so her metaphor was personally meaningful. Arika provided the basis for the development of my practice for the next project: more trust in the young people and myself.

In the next Chapter I will discuss the final research phase and the developments in the applied theatre project in 2008 with a continuing focus on the participation of Jannali and Burnum from the Nungalinya group.
CHAPTER SEVEN : SECOND RESEARCH PHASE - CONSOLIDATION

STAGE THREE: OVER YOUR HEAD – SWIMMING

It’s a show of confidence plunging into the water, immersing the whole body; there is a sense of adventure and exhilaration in the action. You have consciously released all the barriers in your thinking and committed yourself completely to the experience. This act of abandoning the neat pile of clothes on the sand is liberating, as you have acclimatized. You no longer feel exposed to the elements but mingle with them.

My movement from waist height to deeper water was built on an emerging understanding of the relationships between the applied theatre project and the Youth Program, my partnerships with Naretha, Kim and our reliance on the young people. Naretha, Kim and I worked collaboratively and we found our direction in the applied theatre project through understanding the patterns of the young people’s participation and responses.

SECOND RESEARCH PHASE 2008

In 2008 I took the plunge without “rescue equipment”, aiming more than ever to trust my project partners and the young people. I realized that the applied theatre work was about sharing our backgrounds and resources and less about me coming in as an expert. Instead of being an outsider from Melbourne University, they knew me as Rosemary from Melbourne who liked being with everyone at Nungalinya, Darwin. We became more comfortable with our relationships.

As a sign of a more relaxed attitude and confidence in our partnership, Naretha and I made decisions to expand the applied theatre project. There were two pivotal decisions I made: I wanted to invite Indigenous performer Tammy Andersen to Nungalinya and given the time restraints I thought we would do a live performance. Naretha demonstrated her commitment to my initiative by paying Tammy’s costs out of her budget when my funding application was unsuccessful. Without consulting me, Naretha purchased a new video camera for the Youth Program so we could make another film. Naretha’s decision was a good one as I used the camera both to record the workshops for my research and we made another film. Naretha’s involvement with the project showed her continued commitment to our partnership and collaboration in the applied theatre project.
I wanted Tammy Andersen to perform her one-woman show *I Don’t Wanna Play House* at Nungalinya so the young people could meet a performer who had achieved national and international acclaim through the telling of her story which is the basis of the performance. Naretha invited Seaview and other organisations to Tammy’s performance.

**Risks with my Practice and the Project**

Although the way I structured the workshops was similar to the previous phase of the project I incorporated new activities and was open to changing my plan depending on the young people. In Melbourne I packed the least amount of luggage and planned workshops for the first week only, with a sketch outline for the second week. I wanted to be open to the young people and made the decision to take a risk and respond spontaneously to the participants during the workshops. There were more elements out of my control than ever before. I was bravely heading into the deepest water.

As noted above, I invited Tammy to perform and facilitate a workshop, as I thought the young people would enjoy working with an Indigenous artist and I wanted to create new opportunities for them. I did not know Tammy very well, having met her only briefly after seeing her performance in Melbourne a few months earlier. Her inspirational show was an account of her abusive and disadvantaged childhood which depicted an individual’s capacity to survive and thrive against the odds. Her storytelling skills and characterisations were highlights for me in the performance.

Naretha was anxious about the content of Tammy’s show, not wanting to upset anyone at the College, especially the Principal, all of whom would be attending the performance. One of my first tasks was to meet the new Principal – Dr Guy Ambrose - and warn him about the serious and confronting content in the show. I suggested we provide an opportunity for questions and discussion after the show. Guy, who was enthusiastic about the Youth Program, responded with the idea of providing lunch. This was a generous offer and demonstrated his support for the initiative of bringing Tammy’s performance to Nungalinya. It showed great trust in our applied theatre project that he endorsed this public event, knowing very little about us. It was a huge milestone for Nungalinya to have Tammy’s show performed in their midst and the Principal described it as “a privilege”. 
Re-acclimatising to Nungalinya

After long flight delays it was Friday evening when I arrived at Nungalinya with a throbbing headache. Naretha had waited to give me keys to my accommodation and the Youth Area and a security pass. Nama was with her and we shared a warm reunion. My accommodation was a little fibro structure, without air-conditioning, and the only light was a fluorescent strip. There was a kind of fence around it with a gate to an open courtyard. Along two sides of the structure were five doors and behind each door was a narrow room - one had a toilet, another a shower and basin, a kitchen and two had beds in them. The windows were wooden slats. It didn’t feel very private. It was close to the youth building which I could access either by taking a raised pathway or by going across the dry bushy ground which teemed with bull ants and insects, across the decayed basketball court and through the green grass around the youth building.

Suffering from the heat and renewed culture shock, I felt despondent and resentful about the accommodation and the new challenge loomed large in my imagination. I had had nothing to eat or drink so needed to go out to find some supplies. Heading back to the cabin I was ‘held up’ by a frightening large bird which sounded like a lizard hissing at me. The discomfort of this first night made me want to escape back to Melbourne. Tammy shared the accommodation when she was there. Daily we had ants crawling over our clothes, our beds, our food, our washing space and our toilet. Giant cockroaches inhabited the kitchen. Things rustled in the bush outside in the early morning and at dusk and at night there were animal screams that sounded human. There were no power points.

The cabins were part of the huge College property. There were also administration buildings, a dining room, a dormitory and other houses for the Principal and visitors in residence. The grounds were massive and a challenge to keep under control. There were bushy areas, brown dead grass areas, green areas, lush tropical plants and cared for gardens amongst thirsty areas of dust. With the fence boundary, it felt like a world of its own. We needed to lock up all the time. It was not secure as the doors were flimsy and the windows were open slats. The Nungalinya exterior gates were locked at night and twice I was locked out. Nonetheless I grew accustomed to staying there, inexplicably adapting to the character of Nungalinya, its simplicity and defiance against impossible odds.

The Youth Space

I’m in the Youth Program building and it’s 3.45 Sunday afternoon. It’s hot. I notice a number of changes since last year. The space feels better. There are new curtains –
tie-dyed, they look more Indigenous and in keeping with the cultural energy of this place. Naretha and Kim have reduced the bank of computers to four, so they no longer dominate the room. They have moved and set up serious workspaces for office administration and teaching preparation. There is also a wall of shelves full to overflowing with art supplies and materials for creating and making. In the middle of the large space are four tables pushed together. The couch and arm chairs have moved to the far corner facing the TV and DVD player. There are more white boards with notices. The fridge and food bench are still along the far wall. There is a new energy about the place – it feels like a greater commitment to education and working and finding interests for the participants. Dare I say it; it feels more like a school? Despite the ordered chaos, it feels more organized. No space is empty.

*Journal 07-09-08*

The physical changes in the room heralded Naretha and Kim’s ownership of the youth space. Kim described the changes in the Youth Program since 2007:

This year we seem to be more busy. It seems like we’ve got a lot more support throughout the College. They’re a lot more aware of what we’ve got. We’ve got a new Principal at the College too who seems to be a lot more supportive too. He lets everyone know how supportive he is. So it’s really great so it is getting there.

*Kim interview 19-09-08*

There seemed to be evidence of a more ambitious approach with a proliferation of signs and brochures announcing initiatives and programs for Indigenous youth from mental health programs, apprenticeships, TAFE courses, personal development, health and lifestyle - many Indigenous-based initiatives. Naretha had cancelled the Seaview partnership and employed two new male teachers. The Wall of Fame remained. There was less clear space for my workshops but I did not mind.

I went to the youth area fired up to conduct my first workshop only to find that Monday was an administration day so there were no young people. I had not been informed. It meant losing a day but enabled me to meet the new non-Indigenous teachers: Mick and Ted. With increased enrolments Naretha had hired Mick to teach Science and Mathematics and Ted to teach English. I wondered if the men would adapt to Naretha and Kim’s approach to the young people. Both men were often absent for various reasons and Kim and I were suspicious but felt it was inappropriate to comment on Naretha’s staffing decisions. Naretha had hoped these teachers would mentor the young men. She told me Ted was a drama teacher but we quickly discovered he was not a teacher. I felt the presence of
Mick and Ted in the room was another element to manage, especially as none of the young people knew them. Occasionally I included them in the warm ups and other activities. Ted was willing to manage the video camera and encouraged the young people to assist him. Unfortunately his initiative sometimes interfered with the young people’s involvement in the workshop activities. Ted did not seem to understand the nature of applied theatre processes.

**The Nungalinya Group in 2008**

The group of young people had grown and the space seemed to have shrunk. This fact alone instilled a feeling of confidence in me. It signalled that this was a space where good work happened. The young people vied for attention as in previous years. They also struggled to concentrate at times because of drinking or drug taking the night before. Yet their attendance was more consistent than in the previous phase which showed a greater commitment to the drama project generally across the group. There was evidence of change. I realized how much I had also developed since 2006 as I was more aware of the difficulties of the young people’s lives but I was less emotionally burdened by this, realizing that this context did not necessarily define their potential.

There were thirteen young people: nine young women, four of whom were pregnant, and four young men - the largest Nungalinya group I had worked with so far. Jannali, Burnum and Nama had returned, as well as three others who had briefly attended in 2007. I spent two full days facilitating drama workshops with the young people before Tammy’s arrival. We began by 9 am and worked till 12.30 and after a lunch break continued to around 4 pm. This marked a significant change in focus and commitment by the young people compared to 2007. There were still individuals who wandered off but this was now the exception. There were two levels within the group – experienced participants and new arrivals. The experienced young people took immediate ownership of the workshop process through their leadership. They led the way in the activities, confident and focused, modelling behaviour for the rest who tried to keep up. It was as if they did not want to waste any time.

**Jannali and Burnum**

Jannali’s change in attitude and quality of participation were noticeable as she offered to read the consent form out aloud, collected the signed forms and led the first ball game. Occasionally she berated the group and demanded they “do it properly” when a couple of the girls dropped the ball. Burnum also found ways to
improve the group’s delivery of the ball: “let’s move away from the fans”; “I’ll go in the middle”. These young people created a positive energy through their suggestions and participation during the activities; all I had to do was guide and follow.

In the following video data from the first day, the group had just improvised a scene “at the airport” and were now exploring “in the bank”. They were engaged in planning the action.

The group are spread around as different characters e.g. customers, bank tellers, and bank robbers pretending to be customers. Girra has left the scene and is fiddling with the camera and tripod. I tell him to leave it and to join in. I am trying to give instructions about what I want them to do. A few students stand waiting in position, most are talking at the tops of their voices. It isn’t clear that the scene is going to work. I persist – “It’s a normal everyday scene in the bank, they are dangerous criminals and you have to be surprised when the bank is held up”. Jannali has gathered some props and directs one of the girls; “You can be the bank manager over there if you like.” There is lots of side talking, which means it’s hard to deliver instructions. The side talking was about the action – “you lie down on the floor and go like that”.

I think there is a problem as there are too many lined up standing in the queue for the teller. There are two tellers. I say so. Jannali directs them to stay there: “No, they wait there until the teller says “next please”. She completely understands the action. They see it better than I do. The girls in the line wait patiently. One of the would-be bank robbers gets a weapon to help act his part. “No, don’t use a real knife, just a pretend knife, OK, it could cause an accident,” I warn and he puts back the knife.

I slowly count to ten during which they acted a normal everyday scene; on 10 one of the “bank robbers” tells everyone to get on the floor. The “customers” scream and get on the floor, with smiling faces. It is not being taken seriously. Nama, who has just arrived, walks through the middle of the scene carrying shopping bags. After another chaotic attempt Jannali gets annoyed because “people aren’t doing it properly”. The scene completely breaks down as one girl throws a pillow at another, a tag game erupts, and some sit on the floor ignoring me.

Burnum says, “we want it to be organized so we can do it all by ourselves”. He is directing me to step back, and steps in front of me to take over: “you go back over there, OK?” he directs one of the group. I support Burnum, “Let’s make it more organized.”
Burnum finds a cardboard box and says, "when the money comes out you put it in this. This is a hold-up," directing with his right arm he is telling the actors what has to happen. His voice is strong and commanding, not threatening. He is showing his commitment to the activity. They seem to respect him. His relationship with me is like a partner taking charge, almost as if he’s got frustrated with my too soft approach. There has been a significant shift in Burnum’s behaviour.

*Video data 09-09-08*

This activity was deceptively simple but significant in terms of establishing some basic rules of working in a group. Most of these young people were unacquainted with each other so this was a way of developing a connection and building a relationship and simultaneously learning the language of theatre. Their cooperation in building a convincing scene was a necessary foundation for later work.

In the early sessions the new teachers joined in, particularly for the benefit of the young men in the group. Active physical games became a feature of the warm ups due to the enthusiastic responses of the young people. It was exhilarating and hilarious as we played in competitive teams. This helped build a unified group and introduced our applied theatre approach to the new young people and the teachers. I called on the teachers’ assistance in blindfold trust activities and some of the early improvisation work where I divided the group of young people into smaller groups, each one with a teacher.

There was an evident sense of daring in these early workshop sessions. This came from a combination of factors: new young people, new staff, a smaller space, bigger numbers, and my decision to trust the group of young people and the process. There were times where it was so hectic and lively with all the young people screaming, demanding attention at once that I thought we were not going to get anything done.

There are days where it feels like it’s like a child care centre but you know most of the time we have those same thoughts too like what the hell am I doing here? I’m not achieving anything what the hell is this?

*Naretha interview 19-09-08*

**Live Performance at Nungalinya**

Tammy Andersen performed *I Don’t Wanna Play House* on the third day of the project in the heart of the College - the dining room, the only place large enough
for her performance. It was a cavernous room with a concrete floor. Burnum and I prepared for the performance which was a fairly challenging task as it meant moving and stacking tables and chairs, moving pot plants and other items to clear a performing space. I was grateful for Burnum’s offer of assistance and he took over most of the cleaning, lifting and preparation, anticipating what needed to be done without me saying anything.

The impact of Tammy’s performance went beyond my expectations. Having Tammy at Nungalinya was really important as it gave the young people a sense of what could be done through drama. To have the show performed in the dining room, with the whole of Nungalinya College in the audience, plus visitors was significant. The performance extended the young people’s thinking about the possibility of human beings overcoming negative experiences in their lives.

Both Nama and Jannali seemed impressed with Tammy’s capacity to share the most personal and tragic details from her childhood through the voices and mannerisms of a series of characters. In this way Tammy was both actor and storyteller and the story was equally funny and sad. Jannali recognized this paradox.

It was good. I loved it. It was I can say that her expressions like they were funny, but the expressions she was doing wasn’t really funny, yeah because what she went through it’s a sad story. It was all good. I liked the way how she put her story out.

Jannali interview 18-09-08

Nama’s response to the performance mirrored her own interest in playing a role authentically and Tammy’s skill to transition from character to being herself. Nama subsequently played the leading role of Sally in the young people’s film *Hiccup*.

There was no word to describe it, she was just so awesome and when she finished acting she didn’t have like a formal introduction about herself, she just sort of went bang straight into her acting. So when she was finished she was just a totally different person like and to me that was crazy. She just blown me away she’s that awesome.

Nama interview 17-09-08

For the Principal, the performance allowed him to see the young people and the Youth Program’s goals with the applied theatre project in a new light. He valued
the underlying positive message of Tammy’s show and understood why I had wanted to bring her to Nungalinya.

Part of the fact of the message was that in spite of all the confronting things that happened to her the play did not display bitterness. And I think her responses to the questions afterwards and the interaction that she had with the students were about that message: you are more than what is done to you.

*Interview Principal 19-09-08*

Tammy stayed for a few days and joined in with the drama workshop sessions; she facilitated a storytelling workshop that involved drawing on large sheets of paper as she conducted the group through various images and memories from childhood. It was clear to me that the young people were attentive in the workshop but there was something that held them back from really embracing the opportunity of working with an Indigenous artist which I did not expect. Several young people threw their drawings into the bin refusing to discuss them and one of the young men spoke to Tammy privately. The young people did not want to share their stories and became withdrawn so her session ended abruptly. I had not anticipated this reaction as the young people had been so excited by Tammy’s performance and the fact that she was spending a few days at Nungalinya.

**A Critical Incident**

The flat mood amongst the young people did not augur well for the afternoon session. There was a lot of pressure to develop a script; Naretha wanted the young people to make another film and there was this expectation in the group, as Ted had been encouraging the young people to use the camera to film the workshop sessions. I retreated to my room and tried to think of a way to re-engage the group. I felt stressed as I had expected Tammy’s workshop would lead to something that the group was interested in. Ted did not think we could do anything with the young people as he said “they had switched off”.

The workshop I am about to discuss was our seventh workshop and it was day four of the project. I returned to the youth space with an idea. I set up three locations using whatever objects I could find as props. The first location was a kitchen with a table and chairs, bread in a plastic bag, a can of coke, empty beer can, butter and a knife; the second was a troopie (large four-wheeled drive vehicle), with two rows of chairs with sunglasses, an esky (a portable cool pack) and a map; the third was an office with a small table and chairs, a phone, a file, paper and pen. In an excited voice I said that on the word “go” they had to
choose one of the locations, make up a scene using the props and the location, and they had five minutes to do so. After five minutes they had to present their ideas to the group. Then they would rotate to the next location. They did not choose groups but each individual had to go to each location. I blew a whistle to begin and they rushed to a location and began discussing and improvising around the objects.

We had a tentative beginning with the first group. There was a scene with some girls in the troopie. Oola is driving and Tarana is a passenger, holding the map, wearing sunglasses pretending to be a tourist and looking into the distance, giving directions. Suddenly, Oola and Tarana pretend to crash: “Boom”. “Yeah finish”. “That was a kangaroo we hit”.

As they saw what other groups had created, their ideas began to be more detailed. I had a discussion after each scene before they moved to a new location. There was good cooperation between the young people and no hesitation in changing locations. As the young people’s confidence with the activity grew so did their exploration of character and dialogue. Finally I suggested they make a story by connecting the three locations. Suddenly the young people could not stop talking and offering ideas and a script started to take shape. The following description and analytical notes from a selected section of the video data shows how the young people’s participation in the workshop unfolded.

You could see Oola and Tarana setting up the tables and chairs. Likewise Burnum and Girra were organizing their next scene and they decided it was a car not a troopie, moving the idea forward in a direction they wanted. Over in the kitchen, Tinka, Jannali and Kresta were planning their scene as well. Each girl had taken up a position as if they knew already what to do, yet it was completely improvised. The girls began.

Kresta: *swaying slightly and in a loud voice* “Hi sis. How ya been? Come down to the beach with us and drink?”

Jannali: “No, we have to make the lunches and get these kids ready for school eh.”

Kresta: “What about you sis?” to Tinka.

Tinka: “No, I’m going to work”.

Kresta: “Oh, c’mon, just come”.

Jannali was pretending to drink tea at the table, completely in role.
Kresta: “Oh c’mon sis, I’m fucking ...” she stopped and reacted.

She seemed to shock herself at her clear level of involvement in the character in the scene.

Jannali: presumably not wanting to interrupt the scene stood up still in character “I think you better go.”

I think she used the swearing as a factor to build tension and an excuse to remove the drunken woman from the house.

Yindi called out: “See you wrecked it by swearing!”

She had obviously been enjoying the process and seemed annoyed by Jannali’s intervention, expecting us to censor the dialogue. Swearing by these young people was uncommon around the staff; this showed their level of respect and control in the Youth Program. Yindi had been asked to leave in 2007 for bad behaviour; her attitude was more positive in 2008.

Ted, the teacher, intervened: “No it’s just practising”. This reassured the group and they immediately continued.

Tinka: “You have to get up sis and get out”.

Jannali: “You need to go” looking at mobile phone

Tinka: “You have to go.”

Kresta: reluctantly and defensively got up and banged the table - she left with a can of beer, giggling.

Jannali: “We don’t want no drunks here.”

The next location was in the “office” which the girls had turned into a police station. The phone rings.

Oola: “Someone answer the phone.”

She was unsure of how to start and was shocked that the phone rang. Jannali had phoned using a mobile. This choice was very much in context. Tammy intervened, her voice in character as the operator: “Oola in the red t-shirt you have a call on line one”. Oola smiling reached for the phone. Tarana pretended to be writing something at the desk.

This was the beginning of making a connection between their ideas. They were improvising.
Jannali: *from the kitchen group on the phone* “I’ve got a young girl here making a disturbance at my house.”

Oola: “We’ll contact the other guys (police in car) and they’ll be there shortly.”

Jannali pointed out that she needed to ask for the address. Oola laughed.

Jannali: *annoyed at the interruption called out* “that was a practice, let’s do this again” *she was still in position as if talking on the phone.*

Oola: “So what’s the address?” *she took a pen to write and looked efficient, more in role.*

Jannali: “5 Cohen Street Wagaman.” *then added* “and you’re supposed to ask the name too!”

Jannali had adopted the role of director, wanting to make the scene authentic in its details and to encourage the other members of the group to do this too.

Oola: “And what name is it?”

Jannali: “Abby Cummings.”

They laugh. She used the name of Kresta’s family member.

Jannali: “Oh thanks for your help.”

Oola now talked to the car crew; she made the noise of static in her throat and pretended to hold a small microphone from a two-way radio.

Oola: “There’s a disturbance at 5 Cohen Street Wagaman. There’s a young girl named Kresta Abby Cummings” *more prompting from Jannali.*

Oola’s voice was difficult to hear, as she spoke softly. Burnum intervened. He and Girra were waiting in the car location and had been closely following the dialogue waiting to get involved.

Burnum: “C’mon speak up!”

Jannali: “Address?”

Jannali is getting more involved with directing.

Oola: “Yes I did say the address.”

Kresta: “Urgent matter.”
In the role of director Jannali is also prompting Oola with the dialogue to increase the tension.

Girra: “A domestic matter.”

Kresta was taking on a director’s role as well. They were increasingly engaged in the story and all of them wanted to make it as authentic as possible. They were role-playing a story that was familiar to them. A kind of competition developed about giving each other the best advice in terms of acting and dialogue details. All the young people were contributing to make the drama authentic while also focusing on the dialogue and action in their own scenes. There was more prompting from Girra and Burnum to speak up.

Oola: “Gotcha over and out.”

Oola: “then you go to the place” Oola repeated with a stronger voice.

Oola: “We’ve got a report at 5 Cohen Street Wagaman. The name is Kresta Abby Cummings and she is running amok and can the car please go and arrest her.”

The focus moved to Burnum and Girra. Nama, Jannali and others joined in with ideas for the next bit of action. Girra and Burnum also made suggestions. They were working out ways to develop the story and everyone seemed keen to act.

Burnum and Girra, in the roles of policemen knocked on the table, as if outside the door of the kitchen location. They had come to the house.

Jannali: **opened the door and reported**  “Kresta Abby Cummings is drunk making a nuisance of herself; she’s gone wandering down the street.”

Tinka: “Just take her away or something.”

Jannali: “Thank you for your help.” **Burnum and Girra left and headed back to the car.**

Naretha was in the background watching with a big smile, pleased with what she saw. The girls called out more suggestions. Burnum and Girra returned to the car in character. You could see Burnum thinking and wanting to say something but the girls talked over him. Ted intervened unnecessarily: “off to the park now”.

All these scenes were being played out in the small central space in the middle of the Youth Program area. Each location was next to other groups but the young people acted as if they were in their own distinct locations and nothing detracted from their concentration. There were the simplest of props at their disposal. This story had clearly captured the imagination of the whole group. There was a high level of cooperation between the young people within each group and respect for other
groups. They showed an innate understanding of story and character development. The participants had taken control of the drama. It was their story, not ours.

Burnum from the police car: “There she is.” then they got out of the car.

Another scene had been added – the park. The drunken woman was lying down on the grass. She cried out.

Kresta: “Don’t touch me!” She waved her arms around in a shooing away motion.

Jannali offered more suggestions. Everyone’s focus was on playing out the story.

Kresta: “What you mob want eh?”

Burnum: “You come with us please!”

Taking the can of beer away from her, they led her away and got into the car and attached seat belts. Jannali offered advice about putting her in the back and Burnum reminded her that it was a car, not a wagon. Both boys looked and acted as a team. Burnum was driving. They all knew the correct protocol of an arrest, right down to the details of the vehicle used, and the actions the police would most likely take. We were caught up in their story and wanted the young people to continue their improvisation.

Jannali: called out suggesting the next step, using a derogatory tone “Take the drunken smelly thing and lock her up.” They giggled and continued.

Burnum: out of character “What am I supposed to say now?”

Ted intervened and said, in an encouraging voice, “just make it up, you’re doing good, Burn”.

Burnum: “This is the lady who … paused, giggled, suddenly self-conscious about creating his own dialogue, continued “making a drama at the house at …”

Video data 11-09-08

The group had been working all afternoon on this without a break. No one showed any lessening of interest. Providing a simple idea and a clear structure gave the young people the opportunity to tell their stories. It was as if the props and locations were a trigger that ignited the involvement of the whole group. By giving them something solid the young people knew where they were and they felt free to create familiar characters that made sense of these places. The young people were so focused in this period of the workshop that there was little need for my involvement and no one left the room. Ted filmed their first attempt to
combine the three locations and played it back to them and they asked, “can we work on this tomorrow?”

When the participants had the confidence to take full ownership of their improvisation and turned it into a script for their film, I felt there was an evident development in their partnership in terms of the applied theatre project. They were cooperating, listening and responding, working as a team, collaborating on their ideas through the extended improvisation while leading us in their direction for the project.

Naretha, Kim and I had been waiting for this moment of seeing Jannali, Burnum, Nama and the other young people lead the project with their creativity and ideas. The early struggle had been worthwhile, allowing the young people the time and space to find their way, through chaos, a cacophony of voices shouting ideas at once, losing focus, coming and going, entering and exiting from the applied theatre project, while building trust in their relationships and the processes in the workshop space. Ted had tried to control the direction of the project which had been intrusive to my management of the open participatory space. Sometimes when I called a break he offered alternative activities. He did not understand the young people’s needs and responses and I realised how far I had come in my understanding of the context. Ted thought the young people were incapable of taking us forward, until the improvisation when he saw:

Something magical happened and the kids took ownership... BANG ... suddenly all these kids were saying this is important to me and this is what I want.

*Ted teacher interview 18-09-08*

I discuss the significance of this critical incident in more detail in the next section. The improvisation formed the basis of the script for the young people’s film *Hiccup*.

**Hiccup**

There were three main locations in the film: a kitchen, a police vehicle and a police station and lots of roles for different actors. *Hiccup* traced the story of a woman called “Sally”, who was in a bad state, drinking and causing trouble for her family, living in the park with other drinkers who the young people called “long grassers”, until her life hit rock bottom and she was locked up. Sally’s sisters encouraged her to get help for her problems. Finally Sally turned her life around,
stopped drinking and got a job working for the government helping young people find employment.

One hot day during the filming Jannali unexpectedly left Nungalinya taking some of the young people with her. In 2007 this would have been a disaster but in 2008 there were enough young people to substitute for some of the roles, and we were able to complete a successful day’s filming. The sense of cooperation within the group was strong and their commitment to finish the film did not waver; it was as if their contributions to the project mattered to them. The next day Jannali came to apologize for leaving. Thereafter she was collaborative in the way she wanted to be involved in every aspect, including making props and painting sets. Determined to have an acting role in the film, Jannali invented a police officer in charge of arrests, a central character in the final scenes.

I regretted the drama the other day that acting, cause I left. I don’t know why I left. I wasn’t just in the mood for acting.

*Jannali interview 18-09-08*

At the end of the project we had a film screening and the Principal, various Nungalinya staff, and all the young people were there. Each young person took his or her own DVD copy home.

**The End of the Project**

I wanted to reward Girra and Nama as they had been pivotal with the acting and technical sides of the filmmaking processes. Girra, the youngest in the group, who was barely literate, had proven to be an excellent film editor and actor. He embraced the responsibilities of his roles displaying a maturity and leadership beyond his years. Nama had excelled in the role of Sally, creating her own dialogue and inspiring the others with her acting. I wanted to give them something and Kim suggested I take them shopping. Initially they seemed happy about my offer, however I realized my mistake, as the young people were uncomfortable with me spending money on them. Finally Girra suggested I buy a camera to enhance their use of the computer which they could all access and so they could communicate through Skype.

On the basis of their attendance and input into the project Jannali, Burnum and Parri were offered scholarships to Trinity College to the Young Leader’s Program. After my departure the young people attended a youth night at Corrugated Iron Theatre where their film *Hiccup* was screened to a new audience.
DISCUSSION

Within applied theatre practice Nicholson argues that rather than giving participants a “voice”, the practitioner is creating “spaces and places” for the participants voices to be “heard” (2005, p.163). In 2008 it seemed that the applied theatre project had created a space within the Youth Program where Naretha, Kim, the young people and I all gathered and communicated in new ways. The applied theatre project occurred in the middle of the youth space which was an interactive place where games were played, people got to know each other and ideas were expressed. Over the three years I had been coming to Nungalinya the drama project was the point of connection for us all. In the second research phase, the partnerships and relationships I shared with Naretha, Kim and the young people had deepened considerably. My discussion of this phase centres on how I came to interpret ‘participation’ as a reflective practitioner researcher.

The 2008 project consisted of two halves: in the first week, we had the early workshop sessions, Tammy’s performance and the critical incident - the turning point moment of their improvisation. In the second week we made the film Hiccup. In my analysis I see these two parts as an effective way to focus my discussion of this phase of the research. My discussion is divided into two main sections: the first section (A) focuses on building a participatory space in the first week including transition to participation which acts as a bridge between the two parts; and the second section (B) focuses on the nature of the participation in the second week.

A. Building Participatory Space through Applied Theatre

I have found that building a participatory space incorporated the following key elements: relationships, establishing trust, cultural safety and flexibility in my practice.

Cultural safety

According to O’Connor (2008), the applied theatre process provides “safe and structured environments” where teachers and students can discuss and explore answers relevant to their own contexts. In terms of the context of the youth space at Nungalinya, this notion of a safe space (Hogan, 2008; Donelan & O’Brien, 2008) is similar to the concept of cultural safety. Williams (1999, p. 213) defines cultural safety as: “an environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people; where there is no assault challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared
respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together”. Naretha and Kim acted as gatekeepers to the Youth Program as I discussed in the previous chapter. I was learning through the project how to build a safe participatory space with these young people. According to Bin-Sallik cultural safety is a form of empowerment that enables individuals to “contribute to the achievement of positive outcomes” (2003, p. 21).

Tammy explained how she thought the applied theatre in the Youth Program was significant for the young people:

They come here because they want to change and to do something good with their lives. They wouldn’t come here if they didn’t want to. They feel safe here.

*Tammy interview 10-09-08*

Tammy’s involvement in the Youth Program was in the third year of the research partnership. The relationships that had developed since 2006 were central to the increasing sense of cultural safety the young people experienced in the applied theatre project.

**Relationships**

In 2008 Naretha, Kim and I found our relationship as partners was seamless. We did not explicitly discuss our shared vision. We had developed an ease between each other, knowing how to work together. Naretha explained her sense of our “ongoing” relationship in its third year:

The thing is when I’m actually communicating with you or sometimes you ring up and you’re talking to the kids or when you email them. Oh Rosemary I’ve just emailed her so they know you haven’t just gone away. Rosemary’s still there. The thing is we’re not working with each other every day. It’s Kim and myself but when you come in, it just flows.

*Naretha interview 19-09-08*

Naretha emphasized the importance of our communication between projects which maintained my connection with the young people and the Youth Program.

In 2008 I relied on my partners and the young people a lot more than I had in the earlier project. We had a core group of committed young people.
Established relationships

My relationships with Jannali and Burnum were pivotal to the 2008 project as they acted as gatekeepers for the rest of the group. In adopting the role of leaders Jannali and Burnum showed a distinct shift in attitude in their capacity to manage the applied theatre workshop space. It was noticeable from the first workshop how Jannali and Burnum took the opportunity of this second project to fully embrace the roles of partners in the project. I regarded Jannali’s decision to read to the rest of the group the research Consent forms and her assistance as I outlined the project and the research as significant.

In the first improvisation Jannali and Burnum expressed frustration with the young people who were new to the project and began to direct them, offering ideas and dialogue. They were reflecting, questioning and participating in the creation of the scenes and seemed comfortable in the creative process. It was even evident that Jannali and Burnum wanted an opportunity to direct the scene without my intervention.

My experience of the two phases in 2007 - 2008 suggests that participation for these Indigenous young people builds over time, so that rather than interpreting ‘participation’ as present or absent, it occurs across a continuum. Their unstable living circumstances did not change for Jannali or Burnum across the two years, and yet, their attendance and participation within the project moved from inconsistent attendance and passive involvement to full attendance and active participation. Their increased participation suggests that as their relationships with Naretha, Kim and me, their familiarity with the process and their role in the project developed, so their involvement in the workshop space became more active in terms of leadership and ownership of the creative work. This sense of ownership or responsibility was evident when Jannali came to me to apologise for leaving the filming and showed that she felt her role in the project was important to her. Her apology also showed her increased trust in our relationship.

I used the workshops to get to know the young people and to develop a sense of teamwork, cooperation, concentration, focus and motivation for the project. The workshops were a means for us to build understanding into our work together. Sometimes the real learning that took place occurred incidentally to the perceived focus, as “an important by-product of the dramatic experience” (Bolton, 1986, p. 262).
Tammy reflected on what she saw as the role of the workshops during this first week.

> It’s the personal development, got them listening to each other, and shared some personal stories about their lives and family. Then you’ve got them working. It’s been fantastic to watch them blossom in five days. They’ve gone from being shy to being excited, to ownership. You haven’t forced anything on them. You brought them a piece of theatre. Over days and time you’ve had a nice easy approach without forcing anything on anyone.

_Tammy interview 14-09-08_

Tammy’s comments signalled my emerging trust in the young people and the process, allowing them the space and time to find their way within the workshop activities. Significantly, making the film was their initiative.

**New relationships**

I incorporated the new teachers who were now involved in the Youth Program into the early workshop sessions; I saw this as an effective strategy to develop the young people’s skills quickly, as I asked the teachers to participate in the small group activities. Mick, the new Maths teacher, commented on how his involvement in the workshops worked as a means for his relationship building.

> By being just an observer really and a helper throughout the last couple of weeks, has enabled me to get to form relationships. You’ve got them to open up to yourselves but to the rest of the staff here as well and we’ve benefited from it as much as the kids.

_Interview Mick teacher 18-09-08_

This may also explain why Burnum, Jannali, Nama and others were so cooperative and helpful in this second phase of the project. They had experienced working with me before and they were now comfortable with our relationship in the workshop space.

**Building trust**

According to Hughes and Ruding (2009) applied theatre projects can be a way of assisting young people as they make the transition into adulthood by “reinforcing protective factors (cognitive skills, creative and imaginative capacities, personal and social skills) and tackling risk factors (lack of access to engaging educational opportunities or positive adult role models)” (p. 218). The first improvisation I set up was not static; it was interactive and forced each individual to think about his
or her body in space and time. It did not draw on overly personal material; the young people could devise generic characters and there was no pressure to be “creative” or “clever”. The activity did not have an obvious cultural or gender bias. Banks are places with a clear purpose and atmosphere. No one had trouble finding a role to play in his or her first attempt at group improvisation. There was no pressure to be anything in particular; the scene was fictional but drew on a realistic situation. The scene required cooperation from members of the group to work. This made it perfect for practising improvisation skills as no one individual had to stand out. I felt that improvisation skills were a way to build cooperation within the group.

**Control and freedom in practice**

According to Nicholson one of the challenges of working creatively in applied drama is “negotiating the apparent openness of the drama experiences and the relatively regulated world of the ordinary and everyday” (2005, p. 127). In the early improvisations these young people were learning to control their actions within the situation of the drama while simultaneously experiencing the freedom of expression it offered. Even though Jannali and Burnum were leading the group, as in the improvisation in the bank, the young people still engaged in horseplay, throwing pillows, touching objects in the room and becoming distracted in the space during workshops. Occasionally an individual would walk away but with so many more people in the room than in previous sessions, it was not easy to leave the workshop as it seemed more fun to be involved.

Learning about commitment, teamwork, listening to others, being heard, creating energy within the creative process was not easy. The seeming chaos of their responses needed to come first because this was a learning phase for these young people and for all of us. The young people’s behaviour was the result of my open-ended teaching style, giving space for the young people, letting them lead with the ideas, rather than me taking control. I was allowing them the space to find their voices. Ted describes his negative impression of early workshops that for him lacked direction.

I think all of us working with the kids felt at times ‘is this really going to happen’? Is this what they want?

Ted interview 18-09-08

The young people were at different levels of participation, with Jannali and Burnum being more experienced, and other young people involved in the project for the
first time. There was diversity in individual responses. This is why I identified the notion of a transition to explain the young people’s shift from building a sense of security in the workshops, to actually leading the action. For many this transition occurred between the first and second week but each individual had their own pattern of feeling secure in the workshop processes to the point of wanting to initiate and lead some of the action.

**Exploring ideas**

According to Atkinson ”many children do not have all the opportunities to help them meet their potential” (2007, p. 8). I found the applied theatre project gave the young people a space to try out their ideas as they did not know what they were capable of and when they felt comfortable in the drama processes, they worked in a focused way. There was a marked difference in this phase from the Nungalinya group in 2007. Tammy’s observations on the drama project in the first week:

> You’ve helped them find creative ways to tell personal stories. They’ve come in every day with respect – clean, polite, no drugs and no alcohol. They learnt how to work in a team. It wasn’t there in the beginning. I’ve been thinking about it overnight, what you’re giving these kids is hope, opportunity, trust, the ability to trust, it’s hard to trust.”

*Interview Tammy 15-09-08*

Tammy compared her relationship with the young people with my approach and role as a non-Indigenous teaching artist and reflects on the value of the project in terms of the young people. For Tammy the value for the young people was because I was different and offered them a different perspective.

> I felt the same when I came into their space. I was an equal. They didn’t judge me, because we all had an understanding of the same world. They see you as a different figure – you’re their teacher, you’ve come from an educated background. It’s taken time and energy to get that trust. You earned their trust. You made a promise and kept it. You’ve been consistent. You believed in my work and me, and you brought me into their space. They had no idea what they were in for. It [drama] gives them a voice. It’s a powerful tool.

*Tammy interview 12-09-08*

Their sense of inclusion in the applied theatre project was important to these young people; it gave them a sense of being part of something and having a place
to go. The young participants felt connected to Nungalinya. Naretha commented on the differences between the 2008 group and their experiences in 2007.

I think this year’s program has really evolved from last year. Whereas last year our kids were actually reluctant to you know participate because there was another group of kids. This year they were comfortable to step outside their boundaries to explore a bit about being creative in their thinking, about expressing themselves in a different way.

_Naretha interview 19-09-08_

**B. Participation in 2008**

*Working together and staying focused on task*

The young people’s participation in the workshops described earlier was a form of social meaning making. In marked contrast to the previous phases of the project the young people stayed in these sessions; they did not wander away, they continued to stay connected with what was happening, they made offers of help, they wanted to take responsibility, and they participated fully in the creative activities in preference to anything else. This level of sustained focus by the Nungalinya group was not evident in 2007. Significantly Jannali and Burnum were leading the group from the first workshop.

*Aesthetic engagement*

According to Bundy significant learning occurs through ‘aesthetic engagement’ in drama; this offers opportunities for workshop participants to “see the human world in which they operate in a new light.” Bundy argues that “the experience of aesthetic engagement consists of three key characteristics: animation, connection and heightened awareness” (2003, p. 1). She also argues that participants need to experience trust “on multiple levels” for aesthetic engagement to occur.

In the critical incident described above the young people were fully focused on the developing story; they were connecting to the artistic process and were excited by their own animated contributions to the unfolding story. I have identified their responses here as a form of aesthetic engagement. However, for the young people at Nungalinya, to reach this point required a building of the capacity to participate at this level: developing relationships, cultural safety, and building trust in the workshop processes. In addition to these three elements that I discussed previously, there were other factors that also contributed to their capacity to participate fully such as the collaborative process and their interest in developing and owning their story.
Collaboration

In 2007 the making of the films required the staff to play key roles in front of the camera and behind, otherwise the films could not have been completed. In 2008 all the actors in the film were the young people who also took on roles behind the camera. There was a noticeable development in terms of the group’s teamwork and cooperation. The film project was a collaborative effort in every sense of the word. This collaboration began to emerge during the critical incident described in the narrative, where other young people apart from Jannali and Burnum led the action. The young people embraced the workload of the whole project:

This year has been the best because the kids really were involved in all aspects of it. From developing the script, but also the editing stuff, even creating the props, painting up the police sign and all that. And they all had input in it. I think the kids loved the whole thing.

*Naretha interview 19-09-08*

The kids put in a lot more this year. Even though we’ve got different and we’ve got a variety and a lot coming in and out. But we got a fair bit out of them. I think they really enjoyed it. This time we did it in only two weeks.

*Kim interview 19-09-08*

Naretha explained how she saw the collaborative effort work when the team relied on each other and gave the young people room to take ownership of their film:

When you look at it we actually drew on their knowledge too ... they knew how to edit actually I don't think we could've got through if we didn't use the kids to develop that stuff. There was way too much and they really got in there when it was needed.

*Naretha interview 19-09-08*

Naretha, Kim and Burnum affirmed that the collaborative effort was recognized alongside a degree of ownership of the work. The young people felt a strong sense of worth and confidence from their contributions. In reflecting on his contribution Burnum said:

Probably if you want to make another movie or something like I feel I can organize things and you know help do it.

*Burnum interview 18-09-08*
The fact that film as a medium rather than live performance increased the young people’s participation was significant. The film making pushed me “out of my depth” so that I needed to rely on everyone in the group. Naretha, Kim and I found the skills we needed from within the group to assist with all the necessary technical and artistic tasks in order to make their film. Two new young men in the group, Girra and Derain, discovered capacities in themselves they had not known about. Naretha described the developments she observed in terms of the group’s participation in all aspects of the project.

Developing the props they sat down, they were painting the butcher’s paper up. There was this liveliness in the room; this energy and Derain like blew me away. He struggled to engage anywhere. And his comment was “I’ve never done anything like this before, I like it.” He looked at learning in a different way and it was in a fun way. His mother said, “he loves it with youse – I haven’t seen my son go to school in two years. He gets up in the morning and he comes. He’s happy”.

_Naretha interview 19-09-08_

**Stories and identity**

According to Martin “stories give identity” to Indigenous peoples, as through stories people feel a connection and a sense of belonging. The meanings and messages within a story are a means to “teach, admonish, tease, celebrate, entertain, provoke and challenge” (Martin 2002 in Atkinson 2007, p. 14). Through the story in the film the young people were exploring notions of respect, accountability and responsibility. I sensed that Tammy’s story expressed in her play with its message of hope and possibility had influenced the group’s story, _Hiccup_.

Atkinson (2007) explains that for Indigenous peoples finding their stories of relatedness are necessary to understanding their sense of themselves when seeking healing from layered traumatisation. In the young people’s film _Hiccup_, they created a main character, Sally, who was drunk and violent. Through their story the young people wanted to show that it was possible for Sally to change and redeem her life, rather than to be defined by her experiences. Kim commented on the different emphasis in the script:

> What I liked about it was the more positive things they wanted in it rather than negative. And we talked about outcomes on different things and how they wanted positive.

_Kim interview 19-09-08_
The Principal commented on the positive theme after seeing the film:

> Even the name *Hiccup* that is a great choice of name because it has the double meaning. To be able to get to a place where the shaming is that you have to live with is a hiccup. It’s something that you go beyond and it doesn’t define who you are or where you’re going.

*Principal interview 19-09-08*

According to Atkinson, “the creative arts allow us to transform our pain ... art is healing” (2007, p. 13). O’Connor’s Everyday Theatre project on child abuse allowed students to “think about, reflect on and talk about their own stories by investigating the story of someone else” (2008, p. 197). This important distinction meant that the participants were distanced from the central narrative which in turn provided a necessary protection for students to reflect and feel deeply about the theme and issues but to do so “in a protected manner” (p. 198). This was similar to the Nungalinya group’s experience in the creation of their film *Hiccup*. The young people at Nungalinya were resistant to sharing their personal stories in Tammy’s drawing workshop but they were passionate about developing a personal story about Sally in their film. I encouraged the young people to introduce characters and locations as storytelling devices which provided a protective distancing from their own situations and increased opportunities for everyone to take an acting role. Kim engaged the young people in discussion about Sally and what the young people wanted her to experience in their story.

Through their film script the young people were exploring their own lived experiences as they explored themes of healing, restoration and survival. This was a meaningful story to them that represented their struggle; it was not about shame and disgust.

On seeing their film *Hiccup*, the Principal commented on the age of the participants and how the drama workshop impacted on their sense of themselves.

> They don’t feel at home in their society and they don’t feel at home in their bodies and they don’t feel at ease in their gender. They got a lot against them and drama is a way that at some level can touch each of those dilemmas. I think one of the things that works with drama is this notion that once you can see that by actually taking on that role you can do things that you couldn’t do any other way.

*Principal interview 19-09-08*
His comments reflected the broader aims of the applied theatre project to give the young people the means to build their sense of themselves, to explore their ideas and to find their own voices through this. The Principal made the point about exploring identity through role and referred to the kinaesthetic benefits of embodied learning in drama that enabled the young people to take on a range of different roles and perspectives so that they could see the world in new ways; it opened new possibilities.

**Power sharing and collaboration in research**

Bishop (1998) believes that the end result of research is the “reciprocal interactions” between researchers and researched; with Indigenous people it is about power sharing and collaboration without the researcher imposing on the people. As such the personal element is intricately involved in the research process.

Bringing Tammy to Nungalinya was my personal statement about how much as a practitioner researcher I cared for the young people and my desire to give them another Indigenous narrative performance. Tammy came with her personal stories, using the notion of performance as a tool for change. For Nicholson (2005) the context and ownership of autobiographical stories lies in the power of the narrative to effect social change; this builds relationships of trust and reciprocity between the applied theatre practitioner and the project participants. Through the script and filmed performances the young people had an opportunity to express themselves; they showed through their main character an initially flawed individual who proved herself capable of change and of leading a productive life.

**Reciprocity**

Atkinson (2008) writes about the principle of reciprocity as involving giving, sharing and growing. A developing reciprocity described the relationship between Naretha, Kim, the young people and me as our mutual interdependence evolved over time. Within the applied theatre project there was a sense of reciprocity in the partnership between Naretha, Kim and I as we respected each other, we listened to each other and we put ourselves out for each other. This also explains Nama and Girra’s reluctance to be paid for their participation. They wanted recognition in their roles in the project as co-directors, as equals, and as such, did not need a gift. Participation for these young people involved collaboration and authentic representation of their ideas.
REFLECTIONS

Long Term Commitment as Researcher

According to Fredericks (2008), when working in Indigenous contexts “if there is no long-term commitment from individuals to making some real changes then such changes are unlikely to happen” (p. 5). It was the long-term commitment to the project of my partners that enabled my reflective practice research to proceed and my understandings to deepen. Naretha, Kim and I wanted to continue our project into the third year, to build onto our understandings from 2007 and to explore possibilities with developing the potential of the young people.

And each time you come back we’ll be that step higher achieving in where we want to go with these kids.

* Naretha interview 19-09-08

Workshop Space

As a practitioner in 2006 and 2007 I wanted to clear the physical space for my workshops, as I found the clutter – the furniture, the distractions, the additional people – created a barrier to my practice. In 2008 the workshop space was the most cluttered, the most confined and the most crowded and yet, for me it was the most liberating and creative in terms of my practice. Through my analysis of the data I have realized that I created more “space” for the young people by accepting the physical clutter, rather than moving it away. Metaphorically the clutter was also in my thinking and vision. In 2008 I trusted the young people, the process and the space without needing to change anything.

Applied Theatre and Communicative Space

Through the applied theatre project the Nungalinya young people preferred to control, direct and shape their ideas into a film, a “form of cultural performance” (Nicholson, 2005, p. 56). Reflecting on the example when the young people take ownership of their story that became their film, I recalled Tuhiwai Smith’s (2005) central elements for research in Indigenous contexts. I realized the workshop space provided the young people with the opportunity: to represent themselves authentically, to weave and develop their own story, to situate, place and contextualize their story. This workshop space, this open communicative space (Habermas, 1997), provided a framework for listening to the young people’s voices. They were making sense of their lives through this creative process, and the applied theatre created the opportunity for these key elements to occur.
CHAPTER EIGHT: BUILDING INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTICIPATION

PLACE - TWO WORLDVIEWS, ONE PARTNERSHIP

At Trinity College the gardens are a masterpiece of carefully tended cultivation, seasonal blooms, perfumes. Every aspect you care to explore arrests the gaze from its unique sculptural pieces to its perfectly placed garden seat. The central bulpadock, a large open green grassy area which in centuries past was where the cows grazed is now a playground for a ball game, a place to lie and study, to enjoy a meal on a balmy evening, or a place to share a quick conversation on the way to class. There is a strong feeling of community about the space. It is elegant, refined, cultured and cultivated. There is a sense of history; on one edge stands the Chapel, grand and old world style; there are the large buildings for residential accommodation, the oldest buildings not out of place in an English village. It is rare to see anything out of place; occasionally a coffee mug is left behind. There is a sense of order and correctness.

The gardens around the buildings at Nungalinya College vary from lush tropical clumps of plants to dry uninteresting brown patches. Some are trimmed and tidied, some overgrown. Nowhere do you see a manicured lawn or garden bed. It is quite haphazard in parts; there are signs of someone taking care for a while, signs of plantings and design, but mostly it’s random. The variable weather patterns of the dry or the wet have the most significant impact. There are huge towering frangipani trees, clumps of birds of paradise, tropical flowers that usually sell for $10 a stem in the cities down south, trees for bush medicine, lime trees, grassy areas which constantly need cutting. The pathway connects the administration building with other parts of the College, but it is only a rough guide. It doesn’t go everywhere; it doesn’t go to the youth area. The path restricts your movement as it rarely provides a direct route to your destination, so most of us clamber overland, sometimes on the path, sometimes on the rough ground. The path is the most comfortable, but the slowest. A phenomenal amount of bird life, insects, and creatures inhabit the grounds. There is a sense of wilderness and challenge.
Central to my study was the need to negotiate a pathway between two vastly different worlds and a space to accommodate a two-way relationship. In the first chapter I reflected on the meaning of place and throughout this report are references to the physical spaces around me as I tried to find my place as a practitioner and an outsider within it. I find myself at the end of the report, in an in-between place.

In these journeys where we each put our Self at risk as we undertake, in theatre, research or process drama, exploration of the space where we meet the claims of the other culture as well as our own, we rarely come back to the place we started from.

*Greenwood, 1999, p. 15*

Like clothes that have shrunk, my former identity as a practitioner no longer fits. My experience at Nungalinya was transformative, and as a result of my own change, new understandings have been distilled. In this three-year study I aimed to understand the engagement and participation of approximately forty-five Indigenous young people across three applied theatre projects while building trust and collaboration with my Indigenous co-collaborators in their context. I wanted to know what motivated the young people’s participation and how applied theatre could be used to construct a participatory creative space for Indigenous young people. As a result I found that the relationships I established with both my partners and the young people were integral to the young people’s levels of participation and involvement in the projects. Furthermore, I developed a new understanding about my roles as practitioner-researcher within the projects and the relationships from an Indigenous perspective necessary for the work to flourish.

I begin my discussion with framing the key role of the practitioner because it was in this role that I first encountered the genesis of the creative dialogue. The next key element was learning about partnerships and relationships, which framed my understanding of the real world context of the young people. Developing an understanding of these two key concepts enabled me to begin to understand what was required to construct a participatory creative space for Indigenous young people.

**REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER ARTIST**

**Dismantling Assumptions**

I arrived at Nungalinya with a large suitcase of props and resources ready to apply my best practice skills and intentions to the workshops and a video camera to
record what happened. Building the conditions for the young people’s participation required me to straddle our two worlds but initially I did so from my Melbourne perspective, directing the project as if I had authority and a dominant influence over the workshops.

In 2006 and 2007, the Nungalinya young people did not adopt the model I introduced and thus began a progressive process of the dismantling of my assumptions and beliefs about my applied theatre practice. My previous experience of conducting workshops across the fifty-three different nationalities represented by my students at Trinity was not applicable. I had to find alternatives within my practice to accommodate very different cultural, physical, social and material circumstances relevant to the young people in the Youth Program. However, what I found went beyond my practice and enriched my worldview and extended me as a practitioner.

**Learning to Trust My Partners**

When I thought things were disorganized and chaotic I tried to take control, as if wanting to change the Nungalinya garden into the Trinity landscape, believing this was the best approach. From my non-Indigenous perspective this was a challenge, as I was used to someone (me) being overall director, producer or boss. I had unconsciously reverted to my pre-existing assumptions and it took me time to relinquish the belief that I should take control.

**Accountability and Power Sharing Processes**

According to Donelan and O’Brien (2008) the challenges of working with Indigenous young people are complicated by “the complexities and sensitivities of the cultural relationships” (p. 6), a view shared by Worby and Rigney (2002). The fact that the project was based on a joint partnership triggered a meaningful process of accountability and obligation that required me to be more flexible personally and professionally. This new relationship required a “means of knowing that denies distance and separation and promotes commitment and engagement” (Bishop & Glynn, 1999, p.103). Working with my Indigenous partners was not a question of a power struggle, but of having to learn a new way of working that was appropriate for their context.

**New Understandings of Relationships, Partnerships**

According to Tuhiwai Smith Indigenous communities hold an alternative way of knowing about themselves and the environment that has managed to survive assaults of colonization and its impacts (2005, p. 101). One of the tangible signs of
my adaptation to the context and my willingness to relinquish control was my ever-decreasing need to bring a suitcase of props on return visits to Nungalinya.

The combination of research and theatre processes generated another kind of partnership “concerned with dialogue, praxis, participatory exploration and transformation” (Cahill, 2006, p. 62). As a reflective practitioner researcher I was aware of the relationship between my focus as an artist and my focus as a researcher, both generating meanings. I put away my folder of workshop plans to allow this applied theatre process to find its own path, allowing Pat, Naretha, Kim and the young people to lead the way. When the recording device for my research (the camera) became a tool for the young people’s ownership and involvement in the Pilot Project, this act encapsulated the dynamic of this new partnership.

**Deep Immersion in the Context**

I sought to “let go of preconceived ideas and prejudices to remain fully attentive” to my partners and the young people, thereby “disallowing the dominance of the self” (Bishop & Glynn, 1999, p.126). I became involved in the world of Nungalinya socially, physically and emotionally, as I was living in their community. I developed a new understanding of ‘participation’ and of artistic, social, community space, constructed through negotiation and agreement from within shifting relationships with the young people and my partners.

**Role of Reflective Practitioner Researcher in Facilitating Active Participation**

As a reflective practitioner researcher I found the ongoing act of research gave me a means to distance myself from the daily activities, as I tried to better understand what was happening within my practice; it was a lifeline to keep me afloat in the most difficult times.

**A State of Abeyance**

According to Bishop the researcher in an Indigenous community needs to be “quiet/silent” (1999) and attentive so that the people without a powerful voice have the time and space to tell their story. Such a position is respectful and means the researcher is reducing the dominance of the self, becoming fully attentive to the other people. “Attentiveness in this sense as in a state of abeyance means that the researcher is waiting and willing to participate, and that their agenda, concerns and intents do not swamp the voice of the research participant” (p. 126). The collaborative sharing and participatory relationships prompted me to listen,
understand, earn their trust and with their guidance create a participatory space on their terms.

The need to privilege Indigenous perspectives and to respect the public nature of the workshop space provided me with access to multiple perspectives about the projects and the research across the three years of my study. Through varied and extensive data collection including video footage of the young people in the workshops, interviews with my Indigenous co-collaborators and my research assistant, responses by the Principals, other staff and external youth workers I documented and represented a wide range of voices from many of those who observed and participated in the creative practice.

The formal imperative of my PhD made me more accountable to the partnerships and forced me to reflect and think at deeper levels over a long period. The research created space for my thinking when I felt overwhelmed; it enabled me to respond to the context, and to listen to my partners and the young people. Had I been a visiting artist conducting an artistic project I may not have made the same discoveries.

The discussion that follows examines my discoveries from doing the research: my learning about an Indigenous context through partnerships, and how I came to define participation, creative practice and space. I conclude this discussion by proposing some guidelines for participation or engagement by Indigenous young people based on my research as a reflective practitioner within this applied theatre project. Finally, I articulate a set of questions for possible application of applied theatre in other contexts.

PARTNERSHIPS IN CONTEXT

Creating Space for the Participants through Relationships

According to Nicholson (2005) equity and social participation are “driving forces” for applied theatre practitioners who need to create “spaces to enable participants to be heard” (p. 161). The Nungalinya young people were streetwise and had developed survival techniques to cope with the instability in their lives which meant they were initially distrustful of me and defensive in the workshop space. The young people had finely tuned attitudes and postures that seemed to me to be dismissive or derisory but I discovered that this was not necessarily the case. The disadvantages they experienced in their lives did not define these young people but sharpened their resilience and capacity to manage unfamiliar situations.
“Testing the limits” was a form of self-sabotage the young people used to push me to give up and “to replicate a familiar pattern” (McAvinchey, 2009, p. 280). I found that collaboration with the Nungalinya young people took more time and energy than I had anticipated, the opposite of the quick results I had assumed. In the 2007 project there was insufficient time for me to build their trust. The focused, organised and outcome driven approach I was used to taking with projects made it difficult for the Nungalinya young people to find their point of access to the applied theatre processes and to me as their teaching artist. In 2008 the stronger bonds between Naretha, Kim, the young people and myself and my acceptance of the realities of their lives enabled the young people to lead the direction of the project.

**Cultural Safety**

Cultural safety is a collaborative philosophy, which empowers individuals in the group as it “enables them to contribute to the achievement of positive outcomes” (Bin-Sallik, 2003, p. 21). The skills of “listening, storytelling and sharing” are “fundamental cultural tools” (Atkinson, 2007) and essential components of a relationship. Cultural safety is about “shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together” (Williams, 1999, p. 213). Pat, Naretha and Kim were the gatekeepers to the Youth Program, and as such were the arbiters of cultural safety. They privileged Indigenous knowledge, voices, experiences and reflections (Rigney, 1999b, p. 17) throughout our partnership, which was pivotal to the young people’s participation and my understanding. These key principles resonate with the processes of applied theatre.

**Negotiation and Collaboration**

I began our collaboration through the negotiated official partnership between Nungalinya and Trinity Colleges but over time our relationships required deeper levels of trust with increasing obligations. In order to achieve our goals of building participation by the young people, Pat, Naretha and I had to explore new pathways and new ways of working with them. The applied theatre projects fostered a “joint partnership in which knowledge, talent and skills” were shared (Taylor, 2003, p. 66).

Living in Nungalinya I was dependent and reliant on my partners in practical ways, and this made asserting myself difficult. It seemed paradoxical that I was invited to the Youth Program based on my theatre expertise but what was needed was something else.
Redefining Partnerships through Dialogue and Reciprocity

Wilkinson & Kitzinger describe the power issues in applied theatre projects as the facilitator needing to engage in “dialogue rather than monologue” (2009, p. 92). I had to understand my position in our partnership and the need for power-sharing processes (Bishop & Glynn, 1992) suited to an Indigenous community. I tried to be attentive to everything my partners and the young people shared with me (Bishop, 1999, p. 102). To pursue our goals we maintained “an ethical and transparent stance” (McIntyre, 2008, p. 13) that eventually developed trust and reciprocal relationships between us.

Regular Communication in Multiple Forms

Commitment to the partnership meant regular contact, communication and connection over a long period (O’Brien & Donelan, 2008, p. 127). I maintained regular phone and email contact with Pat, Naretha and Kim, but this form of communication was not a priority for them. There were problems with shared understanding and communication from a distance. We discussed plans at length in one phone call and when I next spoke to them there were changes. However it was in the applied theatre projects where the partnerships were tested and where we developed understanding because it was “based on relationships and action” in the context of Nungalinya (Kennedy, 2005, p. 2).

Characteristics of Partnerships in an Indigenous Context

In summary, I propose that there are characteristics of partnerships in an Indigenous context which I discovered as an applied theatre practitioner researcher. I identified the following behaviours, attitudes and understandings that are required for building a participatory creative space for young Indigenous people within an applied theatre project.

In Indigenous contexts the applied theatre practitioner needs to:

- Begin with an invitation from Indigenous leaders, a community initiative;
- Adopt a flexible attitude towards process and relationships with Indigenous partners;
- Understand that Indigenous partners may exercise the prerogative to change plans at any time in response to circumstances without consultation;
- Be willing to develop relationships based on dialogue, collaboration and shared participation throughout;
• Undertake deep immersion in the context;
• Ensure regular communication between visits, using multiple modes of communication.
• Allow for the time required to earn trust and understanding between partners;
• Build relationships based on connections, re-evaluations, negotiated meanings and active seeking to reach agreements;
• Accept that reciprocity, accountability and mutual obligation are key expectations;
• Accept that renegotiation will be required with changes in circumstances, priorities and movement of stakeholders.

PARTICIPATORY CREATIVE SPACE

The notion of a participatory creative space requires an understanding of three key concepts: (A) participation, (B) creative and artistic practice and (C) construction of a creative space.

A. Participation

Participation was “negotiated and choreographed as encounters” (Nicholson, 2005, p. 45) between the artistic practices of drama and film, the collaborative construction of a communal and culturally safe space and the street knowledge of the participants. The applied theatre workshops provided the framework for the developing relationships, and the space to explore the potential for change, which was instigated and owned by the participants (Watson, 2009, p. 47).

According to Martin participation is a process of ongoing critique and reflection, “dialogic and reflexive”, which is “transforming and transformative” (2008b, p.10) between artist and participants, teacher and students. The key for the practitioner in this joint teaching and learning exchange is to foster democratic ownership of the creative medium. Processes of inclusivity and enabling of people to take control over their lives within the parameters of the project are “central principles of applied theatre” (Taylor, 2003, p. 38). I found that achievement of these principles contributed to the young people’s willingness to participate. A sense of belonging came from being needed within the project in the Youth Program and “respect built up through accountability and consistent attitude” (Brice Heath, 1993, p. 24).
Schechner describes a drama workshop where participants meet and work together as a “community for the time being” (2003, p. 280). At Nungalinya my partners and the young people were building a community not just for the workshops, but also beyond the workshop space and this did not end when the workshops finished. A deeper sense of belonging to a community derived from shared interpretations of experiences and sharing each other’s values through stories. The group was at “the centre of the dramatic action” and the context of their lives was incorporated “directly and indirectly in their work” (Wootten, 1982, p. 182). According to Manley and O’Neill, when young people’s ideas are valued and celebrated, this overcomes feelings of “distrust and alienation” (1997, p. xiii).

**Redefining ‘participation’**

I observed that participation by the young people ranged along a continuum from peripheral participation to active participation. The process was not straightforward as their involvement in the project had to accommodate other challenges in their personal lives; this often meant there was considerable oscillation. I recognised that just being at Nungalinya was a commitment by these young people. Like other young people Jannali and Burnum’s acts of participation involved several stages.

I identified ten steps along a continuum that built towards young people’s active participation in the project. I categorized the stages of participation as: Peripheral, Marginal, Embodied and Active.

**Peripheral participation**

1. Coming to Nungalinya, getting off the streets

2. Entering the Youth Program building, meeting people, watching, listening, and going outside to smoke and talk, or do something else.

3. Exchanging eye contact and speaking to me as the applied theatre practitioner; observing a whole workshop.

**Marginal participation**

4. Interacting with video camera, looking through the lens, holding the camera and moving around the room filming other people. Watching and observing from the sides of the room.

5. Observing from the sides of the room during workshops, changing viewing positions, engaging in other activities such as looking at the computer, not
observing, physically crossing the workshop space several times during workshop activities. Refusing to join in, despite repeated encouragement.

Embodied participation

6. Calling out from the sides of the room, interrupting activities, speaking over the top of other participants, introducing humour, wanting to be heard from the outside.

7. Choosing to join in the active games and blindfold activities.

8. Staying in the workshop after the warm up has finished.

9. Beginning to initiate ideas and collaborate with others, contributing to group processes.

Active participation

10. Demonstrating focus and commitment, being cooperative, responsive, taking risks; willing to create ideas with the group; showing a sense of belonging and responsibility towards others and the creative process.

Focusing on owning the story. Not leaving the activity until an official break.

The comings and goings in the project by the various groups and individuals seemed to be part of their process of developing trust. By accepting all these patterns of participation including the stages of peripheral and marginal participation, I found that many of the young people were eventually drawn in to the creative action.

B. Creative and Artistic Practice

The creative practice

Sinclair (2005) describes the process of finding a way to communicate ideas between artist and stakeholders through creative theatre practice as building a “vocabulary of experience” (p. 327). The applied theatre projects were the means through which my partners, the young people and I communicated and developed understanding from our different perspectives. Over the three years there was the need for continual re-negotiation and re-evaluation and reflection by all of those involved, which sustained and deepened the communicative opportunities and built this shared vocabulary of experience.
The young people’s responses and involvement in the project were a catalyst for our “living dialectical process” (McIntyre, 2008; McTaggart, 1997). This collaborative approach contributed to the creation of a participatory space because the young people acted as “co-providers” and were part of the “solution” (Cahill, 2008).

**Redefining applied theatre practice**

Coulter writes about the demands on the artist-facilitator when working in projects with ‘at risk’ young people.

> It was not as simple as the love of arts-based programs leading to high participation; it was the artists’ knowledge of, and skill and willingness to work with the challenges that made a significant difference ... highly skilled, displaying multiple roles of friend, mentor, sibling, parent, counselor, teacher, rule enforcer, negotiator and artist.

*Coulter, 2008, p.78*

My applied theatre practice was an instinctive, creative means to focus energy and to relate to the young people which began with a series of creative workshops and finished with the production of a film. The key features of my practice included the use of games and team activities, open-ended improvisations and story making opportunities, and a willingness to change plans without notice. I had to be confident as a leader and a follower. I drove the momentum to complete a finished product while being empathetic to the young people’s varied responses to the project. Central to my practice was the decision to commit to being directly involved with the Youth Program over a three-year period and beyond.

**Characteristics of creative practice**

I have found that the applied theatre practitioner needs to approach their practice in Indigenous contexts by including the following:

- A flexible approach to conducting workshops;
- Active building of relationships and community over a long period;
- Providing the opportunity for participants to create new narratives of self;
- Offering film as a medium for storytelling;
- The achievement of tangible outcomes.

**Flexible approach to conducting workshops**

We had a daily, weekly or monthly workshop schedule, which changed constantly. The length of workshops expanded and contracted according to attendance, the
levels of participation and what else was happening in the Youth Program or the young people’s lives.

**Active building of relationships and community**

Games gave the young people permission to play in the workshop space. The whole notion of teamwork requires a group to work effectively together with shared responsibilities within the action. Members of the team are clear about their roles in the game, which builds personal commitment to the group outcome. A successful team becomes a small community, united through the shared experience of the game.

The young people responded to games in significant ways; they enjoyed the purposeful competitiveness as an opportunity to display physical skills. They never cheated, were always fair, trusted the format and accepted the rules. As a strategy for building confidence in the drama processes, games achieved several outcomes: the focus was on connection with the team: games were non-verbal, spontaneous, quick, with no time to dwell on inner thoughts; they involved risks; the physical and kinesthetic engagement they required promoted confidence and relaxation.

You’ve got them working as a team. Help them think of other challenges. I loved the encouragement they developed in the team games. It wasn’t there in the beginning.

*Tammy Andersen interview 15-09-08*

**The opportunity to create new narratives of self**

I found non-prescriptive and open-ended improvisations and story making opportunities developed a sense of cooperation and shared meaning making; they enabled the young people to explore meanings relevant to their own lives. If the young people wanted to explore the story of a gang involved in violence, as occurred in the Pilot Project, then I did not impose an alternative story. I saw my role as encouraging the telling of their stories not mine and I honoured their artistic choices. According to Hughes and Howard practitioners “need to champion students’ stories” by learning to “hear what they are able to tell us about their involvement in the arts”; this values their work, artistry and life experiences (2008, p.119). At every opportunity in the creative process I invited the young people to have input, validating their worldviews and ensuring the storybuilding was meaningful to them.

This often meant that the participants chose a community narrative rather than an individual one. *Hiccup* in 2008 was a meaningful community narrative of struggles
with alcohol; it was not about shame or disgust but about an individual who is capable of turning her life around and redeeming her situation. The young people responded to a two-way learning process, and took the opportunity to teach me (and others) about their world through their stories. This identification with a multiplicity of narratives in drama had the potential “to wear away fixed narratives of self and other” (Nicholson, 2005, p. 74) and generated new insights, building opportunities to express their experiences of achievement.

According to Nicholson drama is “composed of bodies and voices in space” and as such the “physical embodiment of knowledge and understanding is integral to the art form”. The aesthetic and physical dimensions of drama “engages all the senses” (2005, p. 57). I found the young people were completely absorbed by developing their stories, engaging physically and mentally in the developing process, reminiscent of Marshall’s notions of synaesthesia, “the engagement and blending of all the senses in the acts of both creating and interpreting meaning” (2004, p. 311). Through these theatre processes the young people created new narratives of self and new possibilities by “contesting the old stories that have held problems in place” (Cahill, 2008, p. 21).

Nama brought her own story into the Seaview fictional story. The fact that Nama who had been a potentially powerless victim when police acted on her in her own life, played the detective scene in Waggin meant she reversed the social roles of her life experiences. Nama’s authentic portrayal of the detective created a new pattern. By enacting the role of the police detective, she reclaimed her story, shifting her identity from the victim and in doing so she interrupted her own life narrative.

The “context and ownership of autobiographical stories, the power of narrative and relationships of trust and reciprocity” (Nicholson, 2005, p. 157), which occurred during the applied theatre project, were important factors in the community meaning making. The young people, telling alternative stories from different perspectives, disrupted dominant social narratives and gave them an opportunity “to speak their truths into public life” (McIntyre, 2008, p. 12). They were building representations of their world in taking on different roles which they had created in their stories.

In the film When They Stole Us the young people wanted to honour and understand that story by retelling it. As young people they inherited the big cultural narratives of Indigenous Australia. In the project they chose to recreate the Stolen Generation narrative which has an ongoing impact on their lives and make something new out
of it. The narrative was important to re-tell in their own way as demonstrated by Amarina who brought her four-year-old son to be “stolen” in their film *When They Stole Us*. The young people’s retelling of the story meant they were in control of disrupting this powerful narrative. In their films black people play the white characters. The young people chose to play “the other” so they had the power to disrupt the normal social narrative.

**Film as a medium for storytelling**

Having developed some understanding of teamwork and collaboration through the games and their early improvisations, the young people’s interest seemed to flow into the film work. The process of making a film promoted shared power relations with each person’s contribution being a form of personal agency powered by the group. Making a film relied on teamwork, cooperation, collaboration, commitment, shared control, and confidence. The fact the young people preferred film to live performance meant that I too stayed outside my comfort zone; we were on an equally inexperienced footing. When the young people played numerous roles and tasks in the filmmaking process they began to witness “the variety of perspectives that power any situation” (Taylor, 2003, p. 92). Filmmaking opened up the possibility of new skills and connected them to their own capacities, especially as they realized their contributions were worthwhile through the repeated public screenings of their films.

**Tangible outcomes**

Brice Heath (1993) coined the term “visible victories” (p. 59) for young people who have rarely achieved in their lives and have proof of a personally meaningful experience. Similarly in the *Risky Business* project, the participants “valued achieving something tangible as an outcome of their involvement in a program” (Donelan & O’Brien, 2008, p. 69). I found that the production of a tangible outcome was important for the young people’s understanding of the creative process and provided proof of their capacity to commit to a project, collaborate with others through a variety of roles and bring something to completion. Bruner’s description of “agentive self” (1996, p. 35) as one of the foundations of self-esteem underlines the importance of the tangible product for the young people at Nungalinya.

The benefits of teamwork in the filmmaking process were demonstrated by the commitment they showed to finishing the film and their sense of achievement.

This [making of the film] has allowed them to build onto their confidence and ability “I can actually do drama. I can actually produce. This is what I’ve produced - the DVD”.
The production of DVDs as a result of the applied theatre projects and their public screenings heralded the achievements of the young people and provided opportunities for “increased connectedness with peers, family and the community” (Donelan & O’Brien, 2008, p. 75).

The connections they’re making with each other but also the positive sense, “yeah that’s me on screen and I’m proud of that”.

Principal 19-09-08

There is a lot of movement in Indigenous families and a DVD is permanent and portable. The young people could own the DVD both in content and hard copy. The Principal of Nungalinya, Dr Guy Ambrose, emphasised the importance of producing the DVD:

Everything I’ve been learning so far about Aboriginal languages and the structure of languages emphasizes the concrete moment and the tangible is a really key thing.

Principal interview 19-09-08

The young people continued to watch the films. In a telephone conversation in 201021 Naretha said that there were 17 students in the Youth Program watching the four DVD’s. She reported the students watched these DVDs in preference to the commercial DVDs on the shelf, as “young people their own age in similar circumstances had made them”. They provide a symbol of hope.

C. Construction of a Creative Space

The Youth Program at Nungalinya provided a sanctuary for the young people where it was safe to be something other than their street-wise identity and where they could feel part of a group (Brice Heath, 1993, p. 56). Without a discrete drama space I had to adopt a different understanding of what it meant to create a “safe space” for participatory drama processes. In 2006 and 2007 I believed it was important to create an open, aesthetic physical space in the youth area to best facilitate the workshops. I also wanted to demarcate the workshop space as being different from the rest of the youth space. However, the young people fled to the sides of the room where the clutter was located. This was safer and a place from which they could negotiate their terms of participation in the project. The young

21 Recorded 12-03-10
people’s actions developed my understanding of a participatory continuum, which I integrated into the notion of participation in this context.

The young people’s need for openness was not about the physical space but about finding out what was possible for them within the metaphoric creative space of the workshops. The young people were constructing a safe participatory space that went beyond the boundaries of the workshops. The space the young people created was porous, accommodating the real world and the imagined worlds of the workshop. The cluttered workshop space literally and metaphorically provided shelter and safety for the young people to explore their creativity and to participate in the shared meaning making processes. Anyone could observe the workshops and the various doorways meant there were lots of exits and escape routes for young people not inclined to actively participate. It was acceptable to be on the edges of the room as well as in the centre of the room. Within this alternative use of space the young people expressed their own power through narratives and meanings relevant to their lives, transforming what I considered the “margins” into “a space of radical openness” (hooks, 2009, p. 80).

Through adapting the applied theatre aesthetic space to suit their needs the young people showed me an alternative model of participation and what they had to offer from within this space. From being a struggling experiment, located in its own building on the edges of the College, the Youth Program space became a stage and a showcase of potential and possibility. People attended performances and film screenings and the events became a shared success, a cause for pride for the Indigenous peoples in the wider College and outside communities.

BUILDING ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

According to Martin (2008) participation for Indigenous people is linked to “agency” and the sense of empowerment that comes from belonging in a group and ownership of their ideas. I found that by 2008 active participation by the young people was occurring in the workshops. When the elements of context, partnerships, relationships, and participatory creative space combined the young people actively participated in the project.

This year these kids were comfortable to step outside their boundaries to actually explore a bit about being creative in their thinking, about expressing themselves in a different way.

_Naretha interview 19-09-08_
Nama celebrated her sense of achievement and involvement in the whole process as a joint partner in the project.

It’s teamwork. It’s not something where you can just do by yourselves and I of course was more than happy to help you step by step. There were a couple of people from last year’s film pitched in as well like myself, and it’s good to see some new faces in there which was good and it all turned out really great.

Nama 17-09-08

From my research I propose the following elements for building active participation by Indigenous young people in the creative space.

- An atmosphere of trust between participants and facilitator;
- Cultural safety established by Indigenous partners and the young people;
- Opportunities for individual responsibility, cooperation and connection;
- Opportunities to identify a diversity of roles within a collaborative process;
- A sense of belonging in the project for all participants;
- The freedom to observe and for all individuals to choose their place on the participation continuum;
- A period of time to allow reflections and observations to germinate;
- A sense of agency or ownership for participants within the space.

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

With its limited facilities and stretched resources the applied theatre project over the three years had a positive impact on the lives of the young people who attended the workshops within the Youth Program. Based on my experiences at Nungalinya I am left with some unanswered questions.

What kind of re-integration model would help transition these Indigenous young people back into school or further education? Does this model of active participation link to other kinds of participation in other areas of education for Indigenous young people? Further research is needed to develop training programs that transfer the positive learning of this small-scale project into a practical model for use by large, urban, mainstream institutions. Would the principles in this project be applicable to an urban mainstream setting for Indigenous young people?
This study raises questions about the capacity of struggling communities to support and sustain innovative projects like this one, and to provide ongoing research regarding Indigenous young people and their reengagement with educational and training opportunities. My original research question asked: to what extent might applied theatre, as a creative practice, positively impact on Indigenous Australian students and extend their capacity to engage and succeed in further education and training? This requires further research.

Despite significant and sustained development over a six-year period, consistency of staffing, an amassing of resources, skills, partnerships, programs and increasing enrolments, Nungalinya College closed the Youth Program in December 2011 because of a lack of funding. This program was the only one of its kind in Darwin giving marginalized Indigenous youth culturally supportive opportunities to reengage with education and to develop an achievable vision for their futures. Ten young people from the Youth Program received scholarships to Trinity’s Leadership Course, including a young woman in December 2011. These young people dared to imagine a different future through experiencing a sense of new possibilities. How can we create opportunities for marginalized Indigenous young people who have no support to achieve their potential and for whom mainstream education has already failed?

**EPILOGUE**

Kevin Rudd, former Australian Prime Minister, in his Sorry speech spoke about the “healing of the nation” and introduced a metaphor of a “bridge” based on “real respect” to symbolise a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Patrick Dodson encapsulated the partnership differently:

> Unless the engagement and dialogue between us [Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples] is premised on the concept of “the listening heart” then our relationship will remain out of balance and our endeavours will be doomed.

*Dodson, 2007, p. 29.*

These images represent two different worldviews, just like Trinity and Nungalinya.

If Indigenous research began with Dodson’s notion of a “listening heart” what would the research look like? I suggest it would begin with an invitation, the project would be collaborative, and the partners would share and participate in dialogic and
reciprocal processes, with the non-Indigenous partner prepared to listen and to be led, responsive to new meanings about relationships that emerged through deep immersion in the Indigenous context.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Appendix B: Plain Language Statement & Consent Form

Appendix C: Draft Scripts for Films
   - Just Another Friday Night
   - When They Stole Us
   - Hiccup
Appendix A: Interview Questions

Let’s Act Now

Interview questions:

At the beginning of the workshop program

- Have you ever participated in a Drama program before?
- What are you interested in learning in this program?
- Do you want to ask any questions about it before we start?
- How many years have you spent at school?
- Did you like it? If so, what did you like? If not, what didn’t you like?

At the end of the workshop program

- Did you enjoy all or part of the program?
- What did you like most about this program?
- What if anything did you like less?
- Do you think you have learned anything from this program?
- How might you make use of what you have learned in this program?
- Would you attend another program if you had the chance?

Each of those questions will then be followed up by the researcher, according to the answers, seeking more data about

- Their level of engagement with the program
- Times when they were fully and less fully engaged
- What elements of the program held their attention best
- What they will take from the program
- Whether they are motivated to do more

The chief researcher will be undertaking the interviews. The interviews will take place with supervision by the Indigenous Project Officer, Youth Workers and other relevant adults. No responses will be solicited or recorded containing information of a confidential or compromising nature, or that would contravene university ethical guidelines.
Appendix B: Plain Language Statement & Consent Form

Plain Language Statement

Let's Act Now - identifying strategies for helping Indigenous students engage and succeed in further education and training.

Principal Researcher:
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Other Researchers:
Dr Kate Donelan - 03 83448354 k.donelan@unimelb.edu.au
Prof John O'Toole - 03 8344 8339 j.o'toole@unimelb.edu.au

This research project is at the level of PhD.

Let's Act Now is a Drama workshop program based at Nungalinya College, Darwin. The aim of the project is to train young Indigenous people in theatre techniques to build confidence, communication skills and cultural competence, necessary to cross the divide that currently separates them from other non-Indigenous Australians who succeed educationally.

The workshop program will be similar to the Pilot program held in Darwin. Using a theatre workshop structure, I will experiment with different approaches, which promote confidence, improve cooperation, highlight team building, stimulate creativity, develop trust, improve speaking and listening, and generally create opportunities for positive self-expression. The length of the workshops will vary between 2 – 4 hours daily over a period of three months.

The kinds of activities include: mime and movement tasks, dance, improvisation and acting techniques, learning about using space, timing, voice projection, warm up games, small group work, storytelling and devising scripts for performance.

Participants will be observed and videotaped during the activities. Photographs may also be taken to record significant performance moments. Participants will be interviewed for 20 minutes at the start and end of the project and there will be audio recording taken. Participants will also have the opportunity to keep a diary where they can freely comment on the work. The videotapes will be strictly confidential to the research, and no segments will be used publicly without the full permission of all participants.
Appendix B: Plain Language Statement & Consent Form

The privacy and cultural protocols of all participants will be respected – recorded material of all kinds will only be scrutinized by the researcher, will be kept stored under lock and key at the university, and will be destroyed at the end of the project.

The Project has received approval by the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee. Involvement in the project is entirely voluntary and participants are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.

Further information is available from the research team listed above, and we would be happy to answer your queries. If participants have any concerns about the conduct of this research project they can contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, the University of Melbourne, ph: 03 8344 2073; fax 03 9347 6739.

Thank you for participating in this research.
Appendix B: Plain Language Statement & Consent Form

Let’s Act Now - Consent Form

I give my permission to participate

Let’s Act Now: Identifying strategies for helping Indigenous students engage and succeed in further education and training.

Led by Rosemary Blight (rblight@trinity.unimelb.edu.au), Dr Kate Donelan (k.donelan@unimelb.edu.au), Professor John O’Toole (j.otoole@unimelb.edu.au)

I understand that Let’s Act Now and the University of Melbourne Artistic and Creative Education Program in the Faculty of Education, are carrying out this project investigating ways of engaging Indigenous students in further education and training. The eventual aim is to design ways for Indigenous students to succeed at a rate equivalent to non-Indigenous students in mainstream education institutions.

I agree to be observed while the activity is taking place, which will be videotaped, and at the beginning and the end to take part in a brief discussion that will not last more than 20 minutes. The discussion and interview will be audio taped. If the workshops have led to the production of a performance, script or short film, the researcher may also wish to record or document these. I understand that my involvement in the project is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time, and free to withdraw any unprocessed identifiable data previously supplied.

The privacy of all participants will be respected - recorded material of all kinds will only be scrutinised by the research team, will be kept stored under lock and key at the university and will be destroyed at the end of the project. This letter of consent will be retained by the research team, and will only be applicable to the activities nominated.

Participant’s name ................................................
Signed by ...........................................................
Date ...............................................................
Appendix C: Scripts for Films – Rough Draft

Just Another Friday Night...

[Image of handwritten script pages on the floor and scattered around]

[Image of a table with a laptop and a cup of coffee]
Appendix C: Scripts for Films – Rough Draft

When They Stole Us...

This film is an adaptation to be based on the
stories from Aunty Flavie Nicholls and
Aunty Maria Tomlins, survivors of the Stolen Generation.
We thank them for sharing part of their stories with
us.

When They Stole Us.

Copyright – Nungalinya College

Scene one  The desert. Life is perfect.
Kids playing, mum and dad go out to look after animals.
Sound FX laughter.

Scene two
A truck arrives and a man jumps out:
“Heh you kids wanna go for a ride? Hop in!”
Kids: “Yeah, heh great!” Kids jump into truck.

Scene three
Parents return. Kids are nowhere to be seen.
“Where are my kids?” Searching

Scene Four
Parents devastated. Neighbour says:
“They took my kids. Yours gone too.”

Scene five
Government office. Two civil servants talking.
“We rescued 80 half castes from around Alice Springs and relocated them to
Croker Island, so their parents won’t find them.”
“They’ll have a better chance there”.

Scene six
Appendix C: Scripts for Films – Rough Draft

Women grieving

Scene seven

NSW – city buildings, traffic

At school kids teasing the ‘stolen generation’

“You ate Captain Cook”

“God made them little niggers
Made them in the night
God forgot to paint them white”

Indigenous kids try to hit the whites. They look sad.

Scene eight

At school – hockey game.

Sports teacher to kids:

“You can’t play unless you’ve got a hockey stick!”

Kids left alone, seen walking into the bush.

Scene nine

Kids return with branches.

“Can we play now, we’ve got our sticks!”

Scene ten

50+ years later.

2000 Olympics – Kathy Freeman, Nova Peris, Patrick Johnson, Kyle Vandeerkype

1993 AFL Grand Final – Year of Indigenous People
Hiccup...

Scene 1 Kitchen.

A drunk women enters and says,

"Hey sis, you two want to come down to the beach and drink with us?", 

Sis says" no, we going to make sandwiches for them kids and take them to school",

Drunk says, “Can you make me a feed too?”,

Sis 2 Says “No, you have to leave this house”,

The drunk starts to get upset and bangs on the table,

Sis 1:" You have to leave now", (while pushing her out the door).

The Drunk: “bugger, all of you don’t love me no more”.

Sis 1: Hello, there’s a drunk women causing disturbance on the front lawn.

Police: What’s the name, what’s the address?

Sis:..........800 Patterson St, Nightcliff

Police: We’ll get someone over there right away/

Sis 1: Thank you.

Police: We have a drunk and disorderly in 800 Patterson St, have we got someone who can check the house out?

Squad Car: We’ll check it out

At The House

Police Knock :” Where is she, What happened and what’s her name?”

Sis 1:”She’s left and is down the street, in the park.

Police:” All right then, we’ll go check it out”.

At Park.

Drunk: Sally Lying drunk in the park out of it.

Police: “Come on, get up”.
Appendix C: Scripts for Films – Rough Draft

Police take groog off her and tip it out.
Police put her into wagon and take her to lock up.

At police station
Police arrive and constable gets out the drunbk woman’s file- is a known offender

Sarge: Where did you find her?

Police: In the Wagaman Park.

Constable: She has breached patrol.

Sarge say to drunk: have you been drinking?
Const: Have you taken any drugs?
Sally: No

Sarge: How much have you had to drink?

Sally: 2 casks.

Sally: Take her to the wtch house and keep her overnight till she sober up.

2 police on patrol go past her sisetrs house and decide to advice htem what happened.

Sisters: Might as well go and get her out.
Script for film – NUNGALINYA

Police put her into wagon and take her to lock-up.

Police station

Police arrive and constable 1 gets out the drunk woman’s file – is a known offender.

SARG: Where did you find her?

POLICE: In the Wagaman Park

CONSTABLE 1: She has breached parole.

Sarg says to drunk woman: Have you been drinking?

CONSTABLE 1: Have you taken any drugs?

SALLY: No

SARG: How much have you had to drink?

SALLY: 2 casks.

SARG: Take her to the watch-house and keep her overnight till she sobers up.

Police on patrol go past her sister’s house and decide to advise them what happened.

SISTA 1 & 2: Might as well go and get her out.

SISTAS 1 & 2: and take her home for feed, sleep, clean-up and lecture her.

SALLY: I know it’s about time I clean up my act.

SISTA 1: You need to get back on track and get back to work.

A WEEK LATER –

Sally is back working behind a desk, dressed clean and neat.

The End
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