“I didn’t like it, I prefer Musicals”

The Lived Experience of the Drama Teacher in the Contemporary Secondary Suburban School

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Katrina Wood
Abstract

This research explains and describes Drama teachers’ lived experience of teaching Drama in contemporary schools. The case study method generates ‘rich descriptions’ of four Drama teachers’ lived experience set in the contexts of their schools. This is framed within a critical paradigm that suggests there is a politics that informs what can be learned in Drama and how it should be taught. Drama teachers’ work is influenced by those discourses concerned with control and cultural reproduction constituted within power relations. This research employs three landscapes to describe and explain the Drama teachers’ lived experience within the powerful constraints in schools. Critical discourse analysis was used to reveal how Drama teachers confront, contest, accept and/or resist these powerful spaces that many believe influence their work and shape their professional identity.

Some of the findings and literature reveal that Drama teachers believe Drama offers something unique in school and often use it as a vehicle to raise awareness about social and cultural conditions that they believed were left unexplored in school. Although Drama teachers see the subject of Drama providing alternative pathways for their students, they are constrained by dominant assessment systems that fail to recognise the embodied learning experiences of students. Three core themes emerged as central to the Drama teachers’ lived experience. These include - 1) performative cultures are powerful in shaping how Drama teachers know their work, students, and schools, 2) negotiating professional identities are complexly constructed, and 3) Drama is often understood as a unique and transformative subject for students but its potential can be constrained in schools.
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Chapter One – Introduction & Literature

Drama educators and researchers have aspirations for Drama to be a transformative subject that promotes critical learning experiences. This is because it offers students opportunities to engage in the exploration of important social, cultural and political issues, interrupt taken-for-granted assumptions, and places lived experience as central to learning. Despite being recognised as important for improving the outcomes of ‘at risk’ students (Ewing, 2010), and creating rich learning environments (O’Toole, 2002), Drama is not considered a significant curriculum area by policy-makers (Gibson & Ewing, 2011). Politicians and policy-makers in Australia claim that successful educational outcomes of students depend on the management and regulation of teachers (Ball, 2003) through high-stakes testing (Thompson & Cook, 2012). These new reform movements in education discourage authenticity in teaching (Cranton, 2006) and condition students and their teachers to accept that their value is only tied to the economic needs of the government (Apple, 1999). Despite the wider claim that as an Arts subject, Drama has the power to transform personal and social conditions it is becoming less important in the Australian educational context (Ewing, 2009). This qualitative case study seeks to understand Drama teachers’ work in the changing context of 21st century Australian schooling where a successful education has become driven by numeracy and literacy.

The current educational landscape in Western Australian secondary schools is shaped by the national agenda for improving competency in numeracy and literacy for all students which has produced a program in schools called the Australian National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). This also includes a website through which these results can be accessed by the public called My Schools. According to Thompson and Cook (2012, p. 572), “NAPLAN and My Schools claim to promote the efficient use of resources through the most effective arrangement of subjects” that have the benefit of reducing “the ‘waste’ resulting from poor teaching” and improving the education of all Australian children. These claims produce a distrust of teachers (Connell, 2009) which impacts on their professional

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1 The ‘Arts’ represents the five stand-alone subjects each with their own curriculum. These include Dance, Drama, Music, Media Arts and the Visual Arts. The Australian Curriculum Assessment Reporting Authority (ACARA) state that “each subject in the Arts is unique, with its own discrete knowledge, symbols, language, processes and skills” (2011, p. 6)
identity and conduct in schools where they begin to align themselves with the wider beliefs that ‘good’ results underpin ‘good’ teaching (Thompson & Cook, 2014).

Western Australia is currently preparing for the implementation and delivery of a national Australian Arts curriculum where the importance and value of Drama is being both considered and challenged. Drama Australia\(^2\) claims in a recent letter to the Review of the Australian Curriculum (http://www.dramaaustralia.org.au), “after five years of consultation and development, in July 2013 the Australian Curriculum: the Arts was published, affirming the value and significance of Arts education for Australian children”; however excluded them from further consultations after a decision to recommend that Music and Visual Arts “should be mandatory” and subjects such as Drama should “be elective”. This strategy demonstrates a hierarchy within the Arts and also contradicts claims that all Arts subjects should be considered significant and valuable. Efforts to establish Drama as important and of value in the current Australian educational context seem conflicted.\(^3\)

Despite the ongoing attempts to emphasise the importance of Arts subjects, Ewing (2010) states that the new curriculum continues to privilege traditional subjects which emphasise literacy and numeracy. O’Toole (2010) suggests that the disprivileging of Arts in schools stems from long-held beliefs steeped in a poor relationship between Arts and education. This history perpetuates the disempowerment of Drama teachers through a continued lack of access to quality professional development, investment in large-scale research, and dominance of traditional academic subjects (O’Toole, 2010). There are also claims that reinforce the emphasis on specific aspects of Drama learning while ignoring others. This is informed by long-held discourses that position the Arts for highly educated and elite persons. This tends to marginalise the view that Drama can support disadvantaged students (O’Toole, 2010). Drama educators and researchers are continually positioned as needing to justify the existence of Drama in schools. This led O’Toole (2010) to argue that Drama teachers are forced to continually struggle for status and recognition.

\(^2\) Drama Australia “represents Drama teachers, academics, applied theatre workers and theatre in education practitioners at national Arts and curriculum forums and in national and international peak associations” (website accessed Oct 2014).

\(^3\) The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) states that there was a decrease by 1% in Arts spending during the period of 2012-2013. The insignificance of Drama in schools could be shaped by the wider Australian context which undermines the value of Arts in culture.
This thesis is organised around the belief that Arts subjects such as Drama have the potential to challenge the dominant social and cultural norms. This is because Drama reconnects students and teachers to more embodied ways of knowing that are transformative and empowering. Fiske (1999, p. 12) claims that “the arts transform the environment for learning” by changing school cultures, renewing teachers, and improving learning conditions. The word ‘transformative’ implies “fundamental changes at personal, relational, institutional and global levels” (Tennant, 2005, p. 103). Gibson & Ewing (2011, p. 69) claim that Drama has “power to transform learning” because it “helps teachers change traditional classroom discourse structures to enable students to engage in meaningful exploration of important themes and issues”. Changing traditional discourse structures in school can promote empowerment that as Leigh and Maynard (2004, p. 36) state means “people perform better when they have a sense of their own power”. This could be the reason why ‘at risk’ students have been known to transcend their academic status through engagement with Arts subjects. Drama provides opportunities for teachers to challenge traditional discourse structures that may be limiting their students because Drama engages lived worlds through aesthetic encounters that allow “educators to find and create new spaces for personal, pedagogical, and social transformations” (Slattery & Dees, 1998, p. 46).

Drama can empower students because it re-directs attention away from right or wrong answers to what is authentic. Cranton (2006, p. 29) describes ‘authenticity’ as “a genuine expression of self within a community” and one that “maintains a critical perspective”. Therefore Drama can engage a more holistic approach to learning and teaching because it promotes the value of self-knowledge as central to knowing the world in which we live. However, Drama and Drama teachers’ work are produced through discourses that Moore (2004, p. 31) claims can “constrain our actions, limit our understandings, force us into subservience to the agendas of dominant social groups”. This can lead teachers to accept the marginalisation of their transformatory work. Currently Drama continues to perpetuate stereotypes and stigmas that limit its potential to engage critical and embodied learning experiences that are transformative and empowering. This raises questions about how Drama teachers negotiate, work with, and can overcome these constraints.
Drawing on inter-related theorising of personal, social, and school landscapes, and framed through dominant discourses of the context, this research describes and explains the complexity of teachers negotiating discursive fields as Drama teachers in Western Australian state and private secondary schools. Underpinned by a critical paradigm, this research seeks to reveal the lived experience of Drama teachers in school and the risks and challenges they face. To foreground teachers’ voices, four Drama teachers were interviewed from four different state and private schools. Interviews engaged teachers in dialogue and reflections about teaching and learning Drama. Transcripts were analysed through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), to uncover relationships between Drama teachers’ professional identity and dominant discourse.

**Background to the Study**

As a student in high-school I enjoyed Drama mostly because it allowed me to learn socially and express my individuality, something I felt was often not available in other school spaces. However, the pressure to academically perform well in other subjects coupled with the onset of epilepsy prompted my premature departure from school. After a few years of work in hospitality and coming to terms with my condition I enrolled at university as a mature-age student and successfully completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in Drama Studies. I studied dramatic literature, acting, play-writing, voice and movement that required me to perform, write and direct performances, interpret plays and write essays. These experiences were transformative and empowering in ways that were not fostered in school. After an inspiring and motivating three-year degree immersed in the world of Drama where I did well academically, I was offered a place in the Honours program. However, I decided a teaching qualification would guarantee secure employment and support my desire to travel. There was some hesitation in making this decision because many of my university teachers were encouraging me to pursue an acting career. Despite their belief in my ability I thought Drama teaching was a secure career option and that I could make a difference to the schooling experience for students. I opted out of an acting career and settled for Drama teaching instead.

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4 In this research, I have adopted the term ‘landscape’ to frame the Drama teachers lived experience. Landscape spaces include the historical, social and political dimension of schools and the histories of Drama teachers, including how they understand, and perform, their personal and professional selves.
After five years of full-time teaching I became disillusioned and drained with meeting the extra-curricular demands for entertaining school productions, the ways in which Drama was considered subordinate to administration and the demands of parents, and those wide expectations for me to commit to the school vision. This denied me any personal or social life external to my work in school. I was frustrated that Drama remained a low priority subject and the main reason students chose it was to have fun, despite the increased academic demands of the subject which is a continued theme in this thesis. In Western Australia, Drama had recently become a subject that contributed to students’ university entrance score. This change in policy tended to change the way that teachers delivered the course with a greater emphasis on writing and assessment. This was often frustrating for students who wanted Drama to be a practical subject.

Although there were changes to the Drama curriculum to raise its academic profile, Drama teachers seemed to be treated by students in a more informal way. For example, students tended to behave in a less formal way around me and say things like “Drama is different” and “you’re different”. I also encountered behaviour from parents on parent/teacher interview evenings that suggested they thought Drama was low status and I was not as important as other teachers because I taught a ‘soft’ subject that lacked academic rigour. Drama teachers were often considered rebellious by other staff members because they avoided staff meetings to attend to rehearsals for productions the school expected as part of their extra-curricular program. Teaching Drama also gave teachers the opportunity to ‘hide’ away in their theatre space to avoid interacting with other staff members. I had expected Drama teachers would change traditional teaching expectations because Drama was different; their ‘classrooms’ had no desks or chairs, students often wore different clothing, and behaved spontaneously, often in unrestrained and noisy ways, and could explore taboo issues such as sexuality, infidelity, murder, suicide, and discrimination. However, as a Drama teacher I found I was in a state of constant conflict as I had to compromise my honesty and integrity to meet the expectations of being a Drama teacher. I came to understand that teaching Drama in a school is shaped by the school culture which is, in turn, shaped by the wider social, historical and political discourses that frame schooling. There were complex interactions at play between what I ‘knew’ as valuable and what was ‘expected’ of me as a teacher.
One example of this is the way the public performance is constructed, and often expected to align with school values and the requirement to entertain. Bresler (1998, p. 10) suggests that schools often use Drama to promote “values, norms, and conventions of schooling” where “intensity, passion, and ownership are marginalised” through “diluted, superficially decorative, and entertaining” public performances. For example, one year I chose to direct *The Insect Play* (Capek Brothers, 1920) because I thought it provided students with a great opportunity to explore the human condition preoccupied with dynamics of power, subordination, and living as a negotiation between past and present. That year, I noticed the students were engaged and enthusiastic as they attempted to understand the play’s deeper meanings and embody those ideas in their performance. For me, this was authentic teaching and learning where both the teacher and her students were respectful of each other’s interpretations which were arrived at through a negotiation of self-knowledge and text. When the principal of the school came to view the production, she commented; “I didn’t really like it, I prefer Musicals”. This comment emphasised that within schools, powerful forces tend to view Drama as a subject that should entertain and ‘promote’ the school. The opportunity for students to engage in thinking through complex social and cultural issues was not valued. In this instance, dominant expectations limited transformatory potential because Drama was positioned as light entertainment.

My personal experience of Drama teaching is important in how I understand the lived experience of other Drama teachers. The Drama teacher’s lived experience, which encompasses both their personal and professional life histories, is always embedded in a contextual landscape. Olsen (2008, p.18) proposes, that “a teacher’s ways of knowing are inextricably linked to his or her lived experience(s)” and concludes that “epistemologically speaking, who one is as a person affects who one is as both a learner and a teacher”. Therefore, as a researcher, an important consideration is that lived experience suggests “the whole person always acts inside a unique setting” (Olsen, 2008, p.19). Drama teachers’ knowing is linked to their lived experiences and lived experience informs how teachers engage in Drama with their students and schools.

The Drama teachers’ lived experience of teaching Drama in a school “is only grasped reflectively as past presence” (Manen, 1990, p.37), therefore through the act of conversation with the researcher these Drama teachers have the opportunity to reflect on
their experience in ways they would be unlikely to encounter in the act of teaching. The bracketing of my pre-conceived notions and reflection on what I experienced as a Drama teacher forms my orientation as a researcher for this study. The reflective process is important in raising conscious awareness to the issues and trends facing Drama teachers in their schools.

The current climate in schools is shifting teachers’ focus away from attending to the needs of students to deal with “new contractual accountabilities” (Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005, p. 564) that are impacting on their motivation, creativity (Robinson, 2009), commitment to the organisation, and job satisfaction (Day & Kington, 2008). Alongside these changes, according to Ewing (2010, p. 5) there is also a wide movement towards “the realisation of the potential for the Arts to foster the development of creativity and imagination and to facilitate social change”. However, this raises questions about how Drama teachers can facilitate change if they are expected to focus on more structured forms of learning in line with what is being mandated and assessed.

This research asks Drama teachers how effective they believe Drama can be for transforming dominant constraints in schools that limit students’ awareness of their potential. Linsdeth and Norberg (2004) state that discourse is both constraining and productive. They claim “we may engage in discourse with enthusiasm, we may suffer under our participation in them; we may work against them or step out of them” but that “it is not in our power as individuals to change them” (p. 148). This suggests that Drama teaching is enmeshed within these discourses both on an active and passive level. Drama teachers who engage actively are considered aware of the dominant discourses that shape their practices which may lead them to consciously act in ways that challenge and/or accept dominant constraints. For Drama teachers, a passive engagement in discourse can be both deliberate and/or unintended. However, active engagement usually pertains to challenging dominant discourse negotiated through their unique context. There are certain practices in schools that determine what is “valued and not valued” and “permitted and forbidden” embedded in discourses that govern the language used in schools and the ways people interact (Allen, 2004, p. 20). For Drama teachers, negotiating these discursive practices informs the
positions they enact and the possibilities they enable for transformation around what is ‘valued’ and ‘permitted’ in the contemporary educational context.

Literature Review

The current educational landscape

... it is time for schools to resist systemic impulses to make them producers of human capital and claim their role as transformative institutions of human possibility. (McGregor, 2009, p. 345).

Teachers’ work in schools is dominated and shaped by a wider political, cultural and social climate. According to McGregor (2009, p.345) “global capitalism has placed education at the forefront of national competiveness, and governments have responded with education policies primarily designed to serve the needs of the market”. In his discussion about ‘neo-liberalism’ Apple (1999, p. 9) claims that ‘neo-liberals’ “are guided by a vision of the weak state” where “what is private is necessarily good and what is public is necessarily bad”. Therefore greater control of schools is required to demonstrate efficiency and competitiveness. High-stakes testing and standardisation are considered effective ways to promote competition and assess performance. However, for students this is problematic because they become commodities “under the guise of preparing them for future employment” which destabilises democratic educational objectives (McGregor, 2009, p. 351). Students in schools are being conditioned as “the kinds of individuals who will help to optimize the economy” (McGregor, 2009, p. 345). According to Down (2009, p. 52) “the message is clear, schools must be put to work and more closely hitched to the shifting imperatives of the global market”.

This creates what Apple (1999, p. 14) terms a “sense strategy” which changes the ways teachers view themselves, and their work. Apple claims that part of this strategy is the withdrawal of the state where “all people are to act in ways that maximize their own personal benefits” (p. 14). Teachers are led to believe that they have greater autonomy and independence in decision making (Ball, 2003); however they must produce results that are in line with dominant expectations, and are subjected to a new sense of vulnerability through increased isolation (Cattley, 2007; Gratch, 2000).
The current educational landscape creates conflicts for teachers as they struggle with policy initiatives that seem mis-aligned with their students’ needs (Day et al, 2005). This can cause decreased job satisfaction and agency (Day & Kington, 2008), high stress and burn-out (Travers and Cooper, 1996), teacher de-skilling, decentralisation and job intensification (Sachs, 2001), increased isolation and vulnerability for pre-service teachers (Cattley, 2007; Gratch, 2000), and a loss of morale and commitment to the workplace (Sachs, 2000).

Ball (2003) coined the phrase ‘performativity’ to explain how teachers struggle in this context. For Ball (2003), performativity is a form of “terror”; that describes a new ‘culture’ emerging that changes the ways teachers identify with their role and their students. According to Moore (2004) performativity can be historically situated, with examples tracing back to the Victorian era. These Victorian examples include a curriculum that emphasises numeracy and literacy where notions of the ‘good teacher’ can be located in terms of reaching “appropriate standards in a small number of ‘basic’ subject areas (or rather, to ensure that they do sufficiently well in tests to ‘indicate’ that they have reached these standards)” (Moore, 2004, p. 44). Moore (2004, p. 45) further suggests that education is historically iterative where the past influences the ways current policies align with the future yet current policies don’t “pay any attention to past failures”. These failures include the problems with what is considered ‘good teaching’ such as “rote learning, memorisation and uncritical regurgitation” (Moore, 2004, p. 45). The problems that emerge with re-inventing education could be because “most reform movements focus on the curriculum and the assessment” rather than learning and pedagogy (Robinson, 2009, p. 235).

Performativity influences “the way that the self is constructed through acts of language or knowing” (Thompson, 2010, p. 416) where teachers internalise struggles “and set the care of the self against the duty to others” (Ball, 2003, p. 216). Performativity could be considered discursively produced through the neoliberal ‘sense strategy’ (Apple, 1999) which has changed the way teachers understand wider expectations of their work, making the labour process less visible. Therefore performativity remains immune to challenge.

For Drama teachers, performativity and the current reform movements have the potential to undermine the personal and professional values teachers have come to develop and know throughout their lives as a person and a teacher. In order to understand more about
Drama teachers’ perceptions of self and their work in the school landscape, this literature review examines teacher professional identity theories and what is already known about Drama teachers’ work and lives. In addition to this, I also review literature pertaining to dominant views surrounding curriculum and the ways Drama teachers are known to negotiate this area of their work.

**Curriculum and Drama Learning**

... *we must now articulate for those who control the gates, the purse strings and the curriculum why the arts is needed and what in particular Drama education does to support the academic, social and emotional growth of young people.* (Anderson, 2012, p. 11).

Drama teachers’ lived experience of teaching Drama in school is shaped by the curriculum, which informs how Drama is taught and how students learn. As previously discussed, the current educational context is influenced by a dominant and powerful neoliberal agenda which is changing teachers’ work and student learning in Drama. For Symes and Preston (1997, p. 81) the primary purpose schools exist and that teachers are for is “the transmission of knowledge”. This transmission is informed by four philosophical stances on the curriculum that compete and coexist with the current policies being promulgated. These four philosophical stances are useful to this study because they help frame how learning in Drama is understood and produced in schools. These stances inform Drama teachers’ work within the landscapes and contribute to the tensions that exist for them. Table 1 provides descriptions of the four philosophical stances and examples of how they might be engaged in Drama.
### Table 1: Symes & Preston’s Four Philosophical Stances on Curriculum

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<th>4 PHILOSOPHICAL STANCES</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>DRAMA CURRICULUM</th>
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| LIBERAL                  | • Conservative  
                         • Strives to maintain elitism  
                         • Reinforces a one-size-fits-all approach  
                         • Supports subject hierarchy and emphasises control and discipline  
                         • Fails to acknowledge differences in gender, race and culture | Drama would provide adjunct support in the form of building confidence and presentation skills for those who are expected to maintain powerful positions within society |
| INSTRUMENTAL             | • Promotes a vocational agenda  
                         • Emphasises the importance of employment and wealth creation  
                         • Fosters a competitive culture where assessments and success are determined through measureable outcomes | Drama would be seen to develop desirable workplace qualities such as the ability to work in a team, confidence and presentation |
| PROGRESSIVE              | • Prioritises encounters with self-knowledge related to the quest for personal meaning and identity  
                         • Emphasises personal creativity and self expression | Drama learning would be experimental, discovery focused and personal |
| EMANCIPATORY             | • Aligned with critical pedagogy  
                         • Resists cultural hegemony  
                         • Seeks to engage communities in a transformative agenda through acknowledging differences and embracing “new initiatives critically and reflectively” (p.73) | Drama would promote cultural diversity, collaborative learning and seek to interrogate the status quo  
An emancipatory stance underpins a transformative teacher in Drama |

In Drama, an emancipatory perspective promotes critical learning through attending to cultural differences, engaging collaboration and interrogating of the status quo. Symes and Preston (1997) identify that a “transformative teacher” (p.282) is one who values emancipatory education. The transformative teacher creates a classroom that values mutual respect “where the limits of possibility are exploited to the maximum and to the advantage of the disadvantaged, to those who are earmarked to lose in the educational system” (Symes & Preston, p. 283). Although some argue that Drama is well placed to provide transformatory opportunities for learning (Fiske, 1999) and that Drama teaching can be
transformative (Anderson, 2012), the Drama teacher may struggle to find support for engaging the emancipatory stance because it resists the dominant expectations.

Progressive stances can work alongside the emancipatory in Drama because they place self-knowledge as central to learning which supports alternative ways of thinking about self and other(s) in the world. Progressive stances reject the kinds of “preselected knowledge packages” often associated with a liberal and instrumental curriculum (Symes & Preston, 1997, p. 71). Progressive stances may regard the liberal and/or instrumental focus on high-stakes testing in literacy and numeracy detrimental to the individual creative and personal needs of students. This is because a competitive agenda that values quantitative results competes with discovery learning and therefore may be considered by Drama teachers counterintuitive to Drama. These philosophical stances shape wider perspectives towards learning in Drama and inform how Drama teachers negotiate their professional identities.

For Drama teachers, Drama teaching does not judge learning as a “completed entity” (Sikes, 2003, p. 42). Viewing learning as a completed entity tends to “simplify the complexity of learning and mislead the public to assume that standards provide legitimate uniform grade level expectations – which they do not” (Sikes, 2003, p. 42). The curriculum in schools is generally thought to focus on the end product which is a result of learning particular skills which is demonstrated through assessment. This view of learning constrains Drama experiences because it is not dynamic and disregards “wholeness” (Sameshima, 2008, p.31). Anderson (2012, p. 85) claims that Drama learning “…does not always conform to an outcome, aim or objective”, therefore Drama teachers must find alternative ways to tackle the philosophical stances that may dominate the curriculum and choose one that supports “that learning is social, relational, and embodied” (Bresler, 2004; Henry, 2000; Laidlaw, 2001).

**Success and Deficit Discourse**

Success is often viewed by schools in terms of academic achievement. Academic achievement is constructed through ‘explicit knowledge’ which is the knowledge “given to teachers, they ‘deposit’ in the children” and that “those who accept the deposit (of knowledge) become rich” or succeed in school (Allen, 2004, p. 123). Students and teachers are therefore positioned within this power knowledge matrix to favour this knowledge
where success in school may undermine the lived experience of students. This view of success is enacted through the Drama curriculum. Accepting and/or resisting explicit knowledge has consequences for the ways success is constituted in Drama and how teachers and their students see themselves as successful. Success is discursive because it shapes student behaviour and interactions with teachers to produce outcomes that reinforce the dominant expectations of school. Hence, a successful student is one that follows the rules as constructed through discourse. However, for Drama teachers, academic achievement may not necessarily be aligned with embodied success in Drama. This is because learning in Drama involves “affect and cognition, personal knowledge and action, and Being” (Henry, 2010, p. 50) which is different from academic learning and therefore does not sit well within the dominant framework of achievement in schools.

Working alongside the discursive production of success in school are discourses of “the deficit thinking paradigm” which “posits that students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies” (Valencia, 1997, p. ix). Deficit discourses shape the values and beliefs around success and act to take responsibility away from the state. According to Valencia (1997, p. 5) “a modern form of educational oppression, driven by deficit thinking, is high-stakes testing”. For example, assessment is often the outcome that determines whether students are considered successful or not. Polesel, Rice and Dulfer, (2013, p. 642) claim “that testing can structure the educational experiences of students in ways that limit the development of the range of skills and literacies needed in the modern world”. Testing compromises “the quality of the learning experience” for students in school because teachers tend to focus on skills required for success in tests and marginalises subjects such as Drama (Polesel et al, 2013, p. 642). This approach narrows the educative vision and marginalises Arts subjects such as Drama that have been found to produce positive outcomes for ‘at risk’ students (Ewing, 2009). While policy-makers and governments tie good education to competency in literacy and numeracy, students’ “broader social and personal development” can be neglected (Polesel et al, 2013, p. 643). The subject of Drama then is being shaped by these new policy ensembles which change the ways it is taught in the classroom and the overall learning experience for students.

Some of the implications of a rigid and prescribed curriculum undermine the success students may experience in Drama as more embodied ways of knowing are not rewarded in
Robinson (2009, p. 83) claims that “doing the arts as distinct from writing about them is not part of the rationalist view of intelligence” and consequently “the arts suffer from low status”. This view of intelligence in school is “superior to feeling and emotion” and positions Drama teachers and their work as low status (Robinson, 2009, p. 39). The conception of instrumental and skills-based knowledge increasingly prominent in schools often keeps subjects such as Drama on the periphery of the curriculum and renders students subordinate to academic subjects.

The experience of learning in schools has evolved from a “preoccupation with the disconnected” which produces “monolithic curriculum, regulated learners, and predetermined learning products” (Latta & Buck, 2008, p. 315). In schools, this preoccupation has produced students who believe their worth is tied to how well they endorse school values which are played-out through behaviour (Thompson, 2010) and how well they perform in assessment, and for teachers how “immersed” they are in their schools (Connell, 2009, p. 11). A preoccupation with the disconnected has produced knowledge of what ‘good’ teaching looks like which is often connected to how well teachers adapt to the reality of others and in so doing suppress their ethical and creative selves (Greene, 1978).

Authentic learning in Drama draws on lived experiences of students and explores emotional processes as part of learning which competes with quantitative measures of facts and skills that dominate schools (Wales 2009, p. 276). Sameshima (2008, p. 31) believes that “the tradition of formal schools has severed the body from the mind” and that this severing has helped produce “the disembodied teacher” who can be considered a “mindless conduit of transference”. Sameshima (2008, p. 31) claims teachers need to take charge of the curriculum and must “address personal wholeness by reconnecting the curriculum with self by connecting mind and body; and second, by integrating self, as a learner in the teaching process”. When viewed from this perspective teachers shift from seeing themselves “as not just the giving-teacher, but also as a receiving-learner in process” (Sameshima, 2008, p. 31).

Drama educators and researchers claim that Drama is positioned well to support society’s emerging needs; however do so within a system that privileges mainstream academic subjects where low-achievers are disadvantaged (Ewing & Gibson, 2011; O’Toole, 2010; Anderson, 2012). Drama may have the potential to transform the status of marginalised students and offer them alternative ways of thinking about and achieving success. However,
perspectives around success are dominated and shaped by the neo-liberal agenda that competes with and challenges students’ and teachers’ values and belief system (Ewing & Gibson, 2011; Ewing, 2010; Fiske, 1999). Drama’s transformative potential is limited within the discursive framing of success as schools continue to privilege academic learning over embodied learning.

**Teacher Professional Identity**

*The teaching profession is dramatically strengthened when teachers understand who they are, know how their experiences have shaped their ideologies, and find and acknowledge their place of contribution in the broader context of the educational setting. (Sameshima, 2008, p.34).*

Drama teachers’ understanding of their self and professional identity are influenced and shaped by the dominant discourses that influence how teachers adjust to their school culture to be recognised as a teacher (Thornton 2013, Maclure 1993). For the purposes of this thesis, I adopt Mockler’s (2010, p.519) frame of ‘teacher professional identity’ which is “used to refer to the way that teachers, both individually and collectively, view and understand themselves as teachers”. Professional identity in the current context is shaped by performativity.

Sachs (2001, p. 153) states that the current situation facing schools is producing a dominant “model of professional identity” where teachers “identify with the efficient, responsible and accountable version of service”. Under this scheme, Sachs (2001, p. 153) claims that “bureaucracies encourage” teachers to “demonstrate compliance to policy imperative and perform at high levels of efficiency and effectiveness”. One example of this is the introduction of Level 3 Teacher reward scheme, where teachers are encouraged to demonstrate their efficiency through documenting their contribution to the delivery of high performance outcomes. Being judged a Level 3 Teacher is rewarded through increased salary and responsibilities. This works to reinforce certain expectations of the school system such as the demand for increased accountability and commitment. The Level 3 certification constitutes what is ‘good’ teaching and is an aspirational goal for many teachers because it reinforces their worth through increased income. This appearance of improved status works to reinforce to teachers the kinds of behaviours and practices that are considered ‘good’. This also highlights the level of “distrust of teachers” that has
emerged in the shift to privatising education (Connell, 2009, p. 217). Neoliberals believe that teachers’ are “anti-competitive monopolies” (Connell, 2009, p. 217) that require regulation and new systems that shape their professional identities more in line with their dominant agenda, as Ball (2003, p. 218) claims these “new modes of description” are producing “new possibilities for action”. Sachs (2001, p. 149) identifies the kind of discourse shaping professional identity is “managerialist professionalism” which is “being reinforced by employing authorities through their policies on teacher development with their emphasis on accountability and effectiveness”.

These practices have to be understood within wider policy shifts and normalisation, according to Ingvarson (2010, p. 46) “in 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a set of reforms focused on teacher quality”. Many of these rewards schemes aimed at improving teacher quality fail to address “diversity of specialist fields in the teaching profession” (Ingvarson & Rowe, 2008, p.63) thus ostensibly re-producing forms of standardised teaching that reduces it to a system of measurable outcomes that often sit uneasily with subject specialisation. This reinforces and perpetuates the hegemonic structure of schooling where differences in subject disciplines remain unrecognised.

Maclure (1993, p. 311) suggests an identity lens is useful “as an organising principle in teachers’ jobs and lives”. She states that identity “can be seen as a kind of argument – a resource that people use to explain, justify and make sense of themselves in relation to others, and to the world at large” (Maclure, 1993, p. 311). Therefore school expectations could be considered a contributory factor in shaping Drama teachers’ identity. Costello (2005, p. 20) claims “our identities are like icebergs. The large bulk of them lies invisible to us below the surface of consciousness, while only a small part of them are perceptible to our conscious minds” therefore suggesting that it is difficult to identify how Drama teachers make sense of themselves and their work because they are vulnerable to, and implicated within, the discursive practices in the school landscape. Costello (2005, p. 20) states that individuals possess “unconscious assumptions about the way the world works” that are shaped culturally and socially. For example, those with privileged positions in society form assumptions of the disadvantaged which perpetuate their marginalisation and benefit the privileged groups (Costello, 2005). It seems then that the ways teachers perceive themselves informs how they adjust to the school culture which could mean having to
compromise some aspects of their self. This adjustment shifts depending on “context, time and place” (Chong, Ling & Chuan, 2011, p.30). For example, a teacher would respond differently when placed within a different school culture depending on how that environment interacts with their unconscious assumptions. It appears that teachers tend to emphasise parts of their schooling experience that influence their pedagogy and attitude towards students, while ignoring others. This could highlight that an identity lens has its limitations in revealing how teachers make sense of themselves and their work. The personal landscape may provide a more complex view of Drama teachers’ work within school which incorporates the ‘self’. Thornton (2013, p. 24) claims that “the word ‘self’ is used to represent the singular, individual and holistic identity” therefore “the individual is considered to have one self and not many selves in this usage”. Thornton (2013, p. 25) states that the ‘self’ has many identities “both personal and professional in nature, which contribute to a deeper sense of self”. When viewed from this perspective identity seems layered where a peeling away reveals a matrix of experiences that are also complexly related to one another, “with the ‘self’ representing the most resistant but also the most stable level of identity”, therefore teachers’ identity can change while teacher self does not (Thornton, 2013, p. 24).

Moore (2004) examines three dominant ‘good’ teacher discourses in education that inform teachers’ professional identity. The first is the ‘charismatic subjects’ who believe ‘good teachers’ should be enthusiastic and inspiring educators who help care about their students’ well-being and success in life and school. The second ‘good teacher’ discourse is the ‘competent craftpersons’ who believes good teachers must have sound subject knowledge, be organised and prepared for lessons in order to manage student behaviour and produce successful outcomes. The third ‘good teacher’ discourse is the ‘reflective practitioner’ who believes good teachers improve their practices through evaluating lessons and results.

Table 2 lists the main characteristics of these ‘good teacher’ discourses extracted from Moore (2004).
### Table 2: Moore’s ‘Good’ Teacher Dominant Discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOMINANT DISCOURSE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| CHARISMATIC SUBJECTS | • Good teachers are passionate, energetic, enthusiastic, inspirational and encouraging.  
                      • Want to make a difference and help underperforming/underprivileged students do well  
                      • Emphasises personality rather than technique  
                      • Is a carer, nurturer and role model  
                      • Good teachers are ‘born’ rather than ‘made’ |
| COMPETENT CRAFTPERSONS | • Good teachers have sufficient knowledge to teach effectively  
                      • Are effective planners and classroom managers  
                      • Highly organised and prepared |
| REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONERS | • Works alongside sometimes in opposition to competent craftsmen discourse  
                      • Good teachers evaluate their practices  
                      • Improve their planning and management skills.  
                      • Teachers’ reflections are based on improving the quality and effectiveness of their work  
                      • Reflections take into account lesson effectiveness, test scores, what was learned and how to improve. |

This research supports that notions of what is considered ‘good’ teaching and what ‘good’ teachers do is shaped by the dominant discourses of the ‘good teacher’. These discourses are useful to this study because the “image of the ideal teacher” (Moore, 2004, p. 53) influences the ways Drama teachers position themselves in relation to their students, the curriculum, and their school. These ideals may restrict opportunities for teachers to ‘see’ and experience alternative modes of being that are empowering and transformative. As Moore (2004) claims:

> The universal ‘good teacher’ is neither the only nor always the best way to promote positive, constructive, classroom-based learning (indeed, for many people it may prove to be one of the worst ways), and that while we can (and indeed have a duty to) render our teaching more successful and productive, in order to do so we must resist allowing certain dominant discourses of teaching to narrow our ambitions and horizons (p. 12).
In many ways aspiring to be a ‘good teacher’ could compete with an emancipatory or transformative position because being ‘good’ could mean following rules and engendering compliance. Therefore the ‘good teacher’ is less likely to interrogate the dominant assumptions that shape what is ‘good’ and this position may disrupt an engagement with alternative discourses.

According to Zembylas (2003, p. 112) identity formation is connected to emotion and therefore teachers must go beyond what’s “appropriate behaviour” to challenge “the hegemony of certain rules or norms”. Teachers’ performativity and wider notions of ‘good’ teaching becomes internalised and then enacted. As Zembylas (2003, p. 112) states:

Teachers learn to internalise and enact roles and norms (for example, emotional rules) assigned to them by the school culture through what are considered “appropriate” expressions and silences. Teachers’ attitudes and actions are, in turn, rooted in the ways that they perceive the world and life in general.

As seen here, there are discursive practices in the school culture pertaining to what’s considered ‘good’ teaching and appropriate behaviour. As Zembylas (2003, p. 112) states “teachers must perform themselves in line with these familiar identities, or they risk being seen as eccentric, if not outrageous” For Zembylas (2003), these types of restrictions contribute to isolating teachers and vulnerability as a result of those identities that they are called to perform. Teachers will accept these rules rather than challenge them because challenging them may lead to their marginalisation (Zembylas, 2003). This presents a dilemma for Drama teachers because ‘good’ Drama teaching is connected to risk-taking and challenging dominant assumptions (Wright & Gerber, 2009) therefore marginalisation may be considered “normal”. The discourses that emerge from the discursive practices around emotional performativity produces teachers who’s competency is disconnected from who they are and more in line with policy expectations (Smyth, 2001).

For Ball (2003) it is very difficult for teachers to resist the new forms of control that shape their work because it is happening through a conditioning process claiming that:

The new roles and subjectivities are produced as teachers are re-worked as producers/providers, educational entrepreneurs and managers and are subject to regular
appraisal and review and performance comparison. We learn to talk about ourselves and the relationships, purposes and motivations in these new ways (p.219).

Teacher professional identity is shaped by emerging discourses that are informed by the wider policies and expectations for accountability and effectiveness that many believe is disconnected with the needs of teachers and their students. These disconnected perspectives are informed by notions of success where competition, commitment to the workplace, and quantifiable results shape a new teacher professional identity where competing discourses emerge as teachers negotiate this new terrain of their work.

**Drama Teacher Professional Identity**

According to Neelands (2007, p. 49) there are cultural and historical assumptions that inform an expectation for arts experiences to be transformative; “there is a long tradition of ascribing personal and social transformation to Drama and other kinds of ‘artistic’ experiences”. In Drama, a character in a play often experiences some form of transformation and this is shaped by the different theories that inform Drama. Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* was influenced by the work of Paulo Friere and where he used the theatre to promote social and political transformation. He encouraged actors to deepen their understanding of themselves and their world using theatre as a means for personal and social change. Boal (1999) suggests that learning about self and the world through theatre is paramount to transforming a society. He claims theatre “…should help us learn about ourselves and our times. We should know the world we live in, the better to change it” (Boal, 1999, p. xxxi). As students engage in learning about these historical underpinnings Drama teachers begin to accept the discourse that Drama is more about transformation than subordination. Bresler (2004) claims that the disembodied framework in schools dilutes “powerful emotion context” which disregards lived experience as central to Drama learning. These outcomes of Drama learning demonstrate the perpetuation of hegemonic discourses where students are treated uniformly and bodies are controlled, as Bresler (2004, p. 100) states “teachers have to mind the bodies to mind the rules, and principals are responsible for minding teachers to mind the bodies”. Some of the rules that are embedded in this disembodied framework include that students must raise their hand to speak, sit in

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1 For the purpose of this research, 'Drama' involves the study of literary genres that inform plays and scripts including various theories that inform performance, while 'Theatre' refers to the actualisation of Drama where actors use visualisation, their voice and body in the performance space (Cohen, 2003).
seats, avoid interrupting, maintain physical boundaries, walk in lines, and are the subjects of ongoing surveillance (Bresler, 2004, p. 100). Drama teachers must establish new rules around the nature of space and bodies because Drama classrooms are void of desks and chairs. The empty theatre space supports discovery and embodied learning because Drama teachers can push physical boundaries that encourage their students to explore stylised movement, walking, talking, and adopting the physicalisation and/or voice of someone or something other than themselves.

Although Drama teachers can experience some sense of liberation from the constraints of rules around bodies, their understanding of ‘good’ Drama teaching seems limited because of the official expectations imposed “by educational policies and to a lesser extent the prescribe demands of the curriculum” (Kempe, 2009, p. 424). According to Wright and Gerber (2004, p. 60) a key factor of competency for Drama teachers is “the feeling of being brave in taking risks” in order to extend “the student learners beyond the norm”. What this suggests is that competent Drama teachers may perceive successful Drama teaching depends on their ability to challenge the status quo; however, competency does not imply travelling beyond the norms of expectations. Competency does not suggest then that “taking risks” to extend students “beyond the norm” is transformatory or empowering. However, if Drama teachers operate beyond a competency framework they may find themselves in spaces where their desire to promote transformatory opportunities for student learning, is in conflict with the rules in schools. According to one drama teacher in Wright and Gerber’s study (2004, p.60) Drama teachers require “a variety of strategies to contend with situations whereby students’ needs and administrative needs clash”. This indicates that how Drama teachers perceive aspects of their work depends on an ability to challenge dominant values in schools that inhibit their work. However, as I have argued this would depend on Drama teachers’ negotiation of dominant discourse and understanding this remains limited within a competency framework.

Paulz (1998, p. 30) who explores Greene’s ‘landscapes of learning’ (1978) within education, suggests that it is through the process of education that teachers and students are “often required to ignore the meanings they have made of their own lives in favour of the ‘official’ knowledge”. So while Drama teachers may “take risks” to “extend their students beyond the norm”, there are constraints that exist in the landscape that may confound teachers’
attempts to prioritise “students’ needs” and question dominant views or “normalising practices” (Allen, 2004). For Greene (1978), an engagement with the arts provides teachers and students with the potential to examine the constraints in schools that render them powerless. However, constraints in schools also inhibit the expression of art and shape what can be explored and to what extent (Bresler, 2004).

Conclusion

This literature review highlights that Drama teachers’ work is changing to adapt to the new policies being promulgated and these changes impact on how they negotiate their professional identity, their pedagogies, relationships with students, and what aspects of Drama learning become more intensified. Accountability, efficiency, and a commitment to the dominant demands for success in numeracy and literacy are problematic for a Drama teacher who has come to know and understand Drama, and teaching, as a creative, expressive, and relational subject that embraces individualism and transformation.

Drama teachers’ work in schools is complexly interwoven and informed by three dominant spaces and these include their personal, professional and school landscape. These landscapes provide a framework for understanding their experiences as both a learner and a teacher that have informed the way they enact their position in schools. Their work in school is often produced through participation in discourse and informed by the self grounded in their history as a learner. Revealing these complexities is important in understanding more about how Drama can be transformative in schools and why this is vital in the current climate, and why all students should have access to subjects that potentially restore hopefulness for their futures.
Chapter Two - Methodology

Overview

As explored in the literature review, Drama is a critical learning area that can be transformatory and empowering. However, the current policy climate undermines this potential through engaging sense strategies and policy ensembles that shape ‘good’ teaching and what knowledge is the most important for academic success. This influences the ways teachers view themselves and their work creating conflict as they struggle between resistance and compliance to the new policy initiatives that impact on the transformatory potential many see as central to Drama.

A critical lens attends to “the political and ideological contexts” of Drama teachers’ lived experience where their work and the way they operate are examined within the underlying politics and ideals schools reinforce (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003, p. 28). These politics shapes how students come to know themselves as learners and how teachers should behave. Teachers’ work often involves reinforcing the dominant values that often conflict and compete with their own. Cohen et al (2003) state that critical theory proposes:

Not merely to understand situations and phenomena but to change them. In particular it seeks to emancipate the disempowered, to redress inequality and to promote individual freedoms within a democratic society (p. 28).

This small-scale qualitative case study engages critical theory because it highlights the marginalisation of Drama teachers’ work in schools and makes a case for the importance of Drama as a subject in the current changes. These changes have the potential to disempower students through high-stakes testing and a back-to-basics curriculum which compete with the holistic learning experiences of Drama. Critical perspectives seek transformation through raising awareness of the issues that inform Drama teachers and their students’ marginal status in the current climate. Critical perspectives also underpin how this research examines the relationships between the Drama teachers’ personal and professional lives negotiated within performative cultures. The term ‘landscape’ is used to frame the Drama teachers lived experience. ‘Landscape spaces’ include the historical, social and political dimension of schools and the histories of Drama teachers’ including how they understand, and perform their personal and professional selves.

23
Olsen (2008) proposes, that “a teacher’s ways of knowing are inextricably linked to his or her lived experience(s)”. Lived experience is embedded within the personal, professional and school landscape which is informed by Olsen’s (2008) epistemological assumptions that the Drama teacher as a “whole person”, operates within a unique setting (p.19). Therefore the interpretative framework for this study supports that lived experience is complex and contextually bound. Five “building tasks” were selected from Gee (2011) to work as a taxonomy to frame lived experience. After transcribing the interviews I selected each one of Gee’s building tasks in order from 1 – 5 to isolate each Drama teachers’ personal and professional experiences. I then was able to identify the links between these experiences, the school, and wider contextual landscape.

**Research Design**

Case study methods provide an “in-depth understanding of a single or small number of “cases”, set in their real-world context” (Bromley, 1986, p. 1). Case studies see the lived experience of each of the four Drama teachers as unique, individual and contextual (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003, p. 181). The aim of case study is to “portray ‘what it is like’ to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and ‘thick description’ of participants’ lived experience, thoughts about and feelings for, a situation” (Cohen et al, 2003, p. 182). Each of the four Drama teachers represents an individual case that generates rich descriptions of lived experience within the critical frame. The case study method has been employed “to produce an invaluable and deep understanding – that is, an insightful appreciation of the “case(s)” – hopefully resulting in new learning about real-world behaviour and its meaning” (Yin, 2014, p. 4).

To facilitate this, interviews were used as the primary source of data collection, using a three-staged framework informed by Seidman’s (1991) phenomenological approach where participants are guided to reflect on their experience through story and open-ended questions. The use of personal story is central to understanding lived experience embedded in the personal, professional and school landscapes. According to Ellis and Bochner (1992, p. 79) “…telling a personal story becomes a social process for making lived experience understandable and meaningful”. Drama teachers’ stories provide insight into how they negotiate the landscapes that shape their professional identities.
School Sites

The research site for this study involved three Western Australian public secondary schools and one private secondary school where Drama was an elective subject. Table 3 outlines the schools’ ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage) value, average household income of the school suburb’s residents, total number of students including attendance and student composition, the median house price and location. According to My School (ACARA) ICSEA was created “to enable fair comparisons of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test achievement by students in schools across Australia”. These data are relevant to this study because critical theory is informed by the assumption that students’ successful educational outcomes are related to the economic status of families which includes the average weekly income of residents in the suburb occupied. The composition of students highlight the schools’ educational demographic and likelihood of them pursuing academic or vocational pathways thus supporting the assumption that socio-economic status impacts on educational outcomes of students in school.

Table 3: School Sites Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATA*</th>
<th>STOCKMAN SHS</th>
<th>PALM TREE HIGH</th>
<th>ST. ANNE’S</th>
<th>WOOD HALL COLLEGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICSEA Value</td>
<td>960-970</td>
<td>910-920</td>
<td>1190-1200</td>
<td>Data not reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>&lt;$1,450</td>
<td>&lt;$1000</td>
<td>&gt;$1,650</td>
<td>&lt;$750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>590-600</td>
<td>600-610</td>
<td>1000-1010</td>
<td>1000-1010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBOTE*</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET*</td>
<td>120-130</td>
<td>280-290</td>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>0-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median House Price</td>
<td>$460,000</td>
<td>$540,000</td>
<td>$1.5 million</td>
<td>$530,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to Perth</td>
<td>Over 20km</td>
<td>Over 20km</td>
<td>Under 10km</td>
<td>Under 10km</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note. Data from My School accessed 13/6/14, with exception of Median House Price, from REIWA.

6 Language Backgrounds Other Than English (LOTE)  
7 Vocational Education and Training (VET)
**Stockman Senior High School**

Stockman Senior High School is an independent public suburban secondary school that promotes cultural diversity. In a recent newsletter and brochure the school claims to provide a variety of alternative pathways for non-academically oriented students with an emphasis on music and sport. The school’s ICSEA value is below the state’s average and is its average household income. However, despite its socio-economic status Stockman Senior High School maintains good attendance within a varied population which includes 20% LBOTE and 8% Indigenous students.

The school claims in these documents to have attracted high numbers in recent years due to its focus on accountability and community involvement. On the second page, the principal writes about improving the school’s image and status through presentation, organisation, planning and high performance. Improving wide community appeal has increased student numbers through rigorous marketing that highlights the school’s academic, music, and sporting achievements. High community involvement reinforces the collective approach to issues such as competitiveness and bullying as part of the school’s mission.

**Palm Tree High**

Palm Tree High is a secondary public school with a low socio-economic status and ICSEA value that is less than the average. It has a small student population with comparatively high VET enrolments and Indigenous population. Within a school newsletter, it states that success can be cultivated through a variety of pathways with a particular emphasis on its vocational educational outcomes.

**St Anne’s College**

St Anne’s College is an independent girls’ school located within 10km of Perth city. The school’s ICSEA value is the higher than the state’s average as is its average household income. St. Anne’s is located in a wealthy Perth suburb with a high socio-economic demographic that fosters high academic achievement and community involvement.

St. Anne’s College promotes student-centred learning and fosters a high-achieving culture with a socially serving conscience. This was evident in a recent school brochure which included articles and photographs pertaining to academic excellence, holistic education,
sport, art, leadership, community service, history about the school uniform, and past student achievements and careers.

Wood Hall College

Wood Hall College is a public independent school for adult learners who want to pursue university pathways through improved academic standing. Located about 10km of Perth city it has a large student population of around 1000.

Wood Hall College promotes a less formalised approach to learning which caters well for adults or recent school leavers whose main goal is university entrance. The college is connected to two Western Australian universities with an emphasis on commerce, engineering and health sciences. The school website promotes cultural diversity and wide support for English and Non-English speaking students. Wood Hall College caters for varying ability levels in adult learners who are returning to school in the hope of improving their career options predominantly through academic pathways.

Participants

Four Drama teachers were selected for this study using purposive sampling. All teachers taught Drama on a full or part-time basis in their school. Three were experienced teachers and one was a mature-age graduate teacher.

The following participant profiles have been developed from the interviews.

1. Markus has been employed as the Drama teacher at Stockman Senior High School for less than three years. He has over 10 years’ experience teaching Drama and is involved in amateur and semi-professional theatre. He considers himself both an actor and a teacher as he also participates in theatre outside of school. Markus suggests he was a low achiever at school who enjoyed the security of the Drama classroom and friends. As a teacher he believes Drama offers something unique to low achieving students in school. He believes performances are an important opportunity for low achievers to showcase their abilities and potential in school.

2. Rachel is employed part-time as the Drama teacher at Palm Tree High where she has been teaching for less than four months. She is a mature-aged graduate teacher and
single mother whose semi-professional portfolio includes playwriting, lighting and stage managing. She is a reserved and quiet teacher who avoids risk-taking, enjoys kinaesthetic learning and working collaboratively with others. Rachel is a caring teacher who believes her organisation skills and enjoyment of working with children compliment teaching. Rachel struggles with low self-confidence and finds the mainstream students at her school confronting, belligerent and lackadaisical. She prefers working with students with learning disabilities who she claims are less threatening and more responsive. She believes Drama offers something unique in the curriculum in that it provides students with an opportunity to work together exploring their emotions, body and voice while having fun and being creative. She believes mainstream students are ungrateful and preoccupied with socialising and resisting authority.

3. Rose coordinates the Arts department at St Anne’s College. She is an experienced teacher who has been employed at the school for over 20 years and also a single mother of teenage children. As a learner at school and university although a confident performer she believed she was not attractive or good enough for an acting career. Rose suggests Drama teaching provides her with the opportunity to offer students exciting learning opportunities that improve their confidence, widen their perspective of the world, deepen their understanding of relationships between people and provide a safe space for sharing stories that inform learning in Drama. Rose is both a subservient and authoritarian teacher where maintaining control is paramount to organising school productions, while also acquiescing to the needs and demands of the wider school community including their requests for last minute room changes, quantitative results, dazzling performances, and high standards. Rose believes her passion for Drama and teaching keep her motivated and committed to the wider school expectations despite her low energy and lack of enthusiasm at times.

4. Bonnie has been employed at Wood Hall College for over 20 years as the Drama and English teacher. As a learner at school she was shy and often avoided risk-taking activities. Bonnie was confident at English and enjoyed the intellectual engagement
of journalism and literature at university. Bonnie believes Drama provides opportunities for students to connect with each other and learn about each other’s lives and cultures while building confidence that other subject fail to harness as well. Bonnie believes the Drama classroom should be warm, inviting, fun and energetic where students feel comfortable taking risks which lead to personal success.

**Instruments**

Interviews were used as the primary instrument for data construction. These interviews were informed and shaped by three landscapes. The landscapes framed the Drama teachers’ lived experience informed by the current educational landscape and critical theory.

The interview questions were developed from a set of overarching questions that explored the perceptions Drama teachers have of their work, themselves, and their role within the school as shaped by the three landscapes in which they are enmeshed. These are the main questions that underpinned the interpretative framework and lived experience of the Drama teacher -

a) In what terms do Drama teachers define who they are and what they do?

b) What leads Drama teachers to teaching?

c) How do Drama teachers see themselves in the Drama classroom?

d) How do Drama teachers see themselves in the school environment?

e) What factors do Drama teachers believe contribute to the success of Drama in schools?

The three landscapes that informed the research questions and underpin lived experience are outlined in the figure below.
The professional landscape (PFL) comprised of the Drama teacher’s experience of becoming a teacher, it includes pre-service training and professionalisation as part of this training. The school landscape (SCL) was embedded with discourses that control and influence teachers’ work. This landscape includes the norms and expectations that shape the Drama teacher’s work which is embedded in the discourses that have evolved through the history of institutional practices. The personal landscape (PSL) was embedded with the Drama teacher’s personal history. This landscape embodies Drama teachers’ own experience of being a student of Drama; an important consideration that shapes the understanding of Drama teachers’ approach to student learning in Drama.

The landscapes attempt to conceptualise the “distinction between ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ levels of society” that shape Drama teachers’ values, beliefs, ideology, pedagogy and epistemology (Travers, 2001, p 112). All of these landscapes feed into the lived experience of Drama teachers and support Olsen’s (2008, p. 18) epistemological assumption that “who one is as a person affects who one is as a teacher and learner”. The three landscapes underpin the perceptions Drama teacher have of their work and how they come to know teaching and learning.

**Figure 1**: The relationship of the three landscapes and Drama teacher lived experience
The open-ended and semi-structured interview framework was divided into three parts that would address each of the three landscapes. Part 1 focused on the Drama teachers’ personal experience of being a learner or student of Drama. Part 2 focused on specific accounts of teaching Drama to students which included work on school productions and classroom teaching using story-telling to access the Drama teachers’ experience. Drama teachers were asked to “reconstruct” the details of their daily work, in particular focusing on relationships with their students, staff and parents. Emphasis is on their experience rather than their “opinions” regarding their work (Seidman, 1998). Parts 1 & 2 were conducted in interview 1 and aimed to establish a context for life history which was interwoven between the personal and professional landscape.

Part 3 focused on the Drama teachers’ positioning in school. It included questions pertaining to Drama teachers’ perceptions of good Drama teaching, what students learn in Drama, and the school’s expectations. This was a reflective stage that allowed Drama teachers the opportunity to ascertain meaning from their experience and reinforce their interpretation and understanding of the nature of their work. Having already established a personal history in Part 1 and 2, Part 3 “…addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life” (Seidman, 1998, p.12). This interview addressed the political environment within the school landscape and helped reveal the tensions that exist for Drama teachers between the three landscapes.

Table 4 outlines the three part interview sequence and what teachers were interviewed and when. The teachers were interviewed individually at their school in an isolated space. Each Drama teacher was interviewed twice over the Term 4 period in 2012. In total 12 interviews were conducted and 8 hours of audio data were generated.

Interviews were audio-recorded with a Dictaphone and three were transcribed by the researcher and nine by an external transcription service. Interview transcripts were analysed and interpreted using five tools from Gee’s (2011) approach to critical discourse analysis.
In addition to interviews, I collected documents that provided information about the school culture and how Drama was being marketed both on school websites and in newsletters, brochures, and annuals. This contributed to the understanding of the norms and expectations of Drama underpinning the school landscape that Drama teachers negotiate.

Data analyses

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used to analyse the data as it provides researchers with a framework to uncover hidden meanings embedded in discourse. I have used CDA as a framework to uncover how Drama teachers understand themselves and how this links to their work as a teacher within the three landscapes outlined. This is aligned with the critical paradigm that seeks emancipatory action through “freeing people from the grip of false ideas by making them aware of the social institutions that have caused them to think in this way” (Travers, 2001, p. 111). Discourse considers that the language teachers’ use and the ways they interact in schools are enmeshed in power relations that serve the economically powerful (Travers, 2001). Teachers are often unaware of how they reinforce the status quo and marginalise minority groups (Linsdeth & Norberg, 2004).

CDA supports researchers “to uncover power relationships and demonstrate inequities embedded in society” that shape Drama teachers’ work and Drama in schools (Rogers, 2004, p. 34). The CDA framework was developed to “describe, interpret, and explain such
relationships” along with identifying the historical practices that shape “how social roles are acquired and transformed” (Rogers, 2004, p. 33).

Drama teachers’ work is enmeshed in the discursive practices that inform their active and/or passive engagement in schools and this influences the transformatory potential of Drama teaching. The Drama teacher has been constructed through power relations and historical practices that shape schooling and Drama. Their experiences as teachers and learners reveal some of the practices that they are complicit to where their negotiation of lived experience produces a professional identity. This knowledge is important in order to understand more about how the current reform movement changes the way that Drama and Drama teachers are produced and helps reinforce and/or subvert claims about its’ transformatory potential within the contradictory and competing spaces of schools. Awareness and understanding of the discourses that shape experience and the construction of Drama teacher are central to transforming teaching and learning in Drama.

There are 5 “building tasks” or areas of critical discourse analysis outlined by Gee (2011) that were applied to the data. These areas filtered the data into a framework that described the Drama teachers’ lived experience within a critical paradigm informed by the literature. This framework assisted in describing and interpreting the practices informing Drama teachers’ work in school and shaping their identity.

The five building tasks that were selected from Gee (2011) are outlined and discussed below:

1. Professional Identity
2. Relationships
3. Politics
4. Connections
5. Sign systems and knowledge

These five building tasks were selected because of their significance to the Drama teachers’ lived experience and relationship to the three landscapes within the critical paradigm. The literature on professional identity formation, the current landscape of schools, and what is
already known about Drama teachers set in the critical paradigm was important in constructing this analysis framework so that links could be made between the landscapes that underpin lived experience. The building tasks are useful in revealing the nature of the current climate and how a negotiation between this and lived experience constructs and produces the Drama teacher.

**Building Tasks**

Here I outline the conceptual information pertaining to each building task in relation to the research. The application of these concepts will be explored and outlined in the following table and diagram. I have used Gee’s term “tool” to each of the areas outlined as tool signifies the application of concepts to individual areas and this separating of information is important in understanding how lived experience is unique and similarly inter-connected.

1. **Professional Identity**

As explored in the literature review, a new “model of professional identity” is emerging where teachers identify with the efficient and accountable terms of service (Sachs, 2001). Drama teachers’ construct a professional identity that is shaped by the current professional landscape. This construction is informed by these new conditions of service as constituted through performativity which informs “the ways they both individually and collectively understand themselves as teachers” (Mockler, 2010, p. 519). A discussion that engages Drama teachers’ early descriptions of self, works to reveal attitudes and beliefs pertaining to their work in school. These are useful in understanding how the Drama teachers position themselves in the school what discourses they are negotiating. The purpose of this tool was to establish a context that would connect professional identity, relationships and politics in order to build knowledge of the Drama teachers’ lived experience.

2. **Relationships**

According to Gee (2011, p. 114) “we use language to build relationships with other people and with groups and institutions”. The language Drama teachers use pertains to a specific time and place which helps to recognise them as a certain type of person constituted through power relations. In the case of schools, Drama teachers are part of discursive practices that engage or disengage them with other members of the school community in
certain ways and not others. Drama teachers’ relationships with students, other teachers, principals, administration, and parents are informed by the personal landscape.

Drama teachers reveal how their own personal experiences as a learner are connected to how they relate to their students, staff and other members of the school community. It is through the relationships tool that Drama teachers reveal their wider engagement with the discourses that shape schooling such as the discursive practices or rules around assessment, curriculum, success, learning and knowledge production.

The particular categories of the relationships tool is informed by Wales’ (2009) notions of ‘subjectivities’ which reveal how Drama teachers perceive themselves in relation to others. Wales (2009) suggests that addressing subjectivities attend to the subtleties of experience which are embedded in emotions. An examination of relationships included the ways Drama teachers describe students, and their feelings associated with the rules around knowledge production, comportment and behaviour, values and beliefs.

3. Politics

In schools, Drama teachers engage in politics through curriculum, organisation of classroom space, the structure of time, assessment and relationships. These spaces of Drama teachers’ work are embedded in the school landscape and so shape lived experience. Drama teachers’ values and beliefs around how success is cultivated in schools, how time, assessment and space are structured are related to power and inform their pedagogical and epistemological assumptions.

The politics tool is informed by the critical paradigm as it is concerned with identifying how power is reinforced in schools through various political structures. As outlined by Gibson and Ewing (2011, p. 31) education fails to address “inequitable schooling outcomes” while it continues to privilege certain subjects, value particular assessment strategies, credential students, and structure learning. Drama teachers’ engagement with politics helps to reveal how power is constituted in Drama to reinforce and/or weaken the discursive practices that produce these schooling outcomes.

The politics tool contributes to the realisation of how Drama teachers’ reproduce and/or disregard the discursive practices that shape Drama and their understanding of their place
in the current climate thus highlighting contested and/or contradictory spaces. Drama teachers’ realisation of the discourses they are complicit to are central in order to emancipate from inequitable schooling outcomes.

4. Connections

The first three tools were examined as independently from one another as possible in order to highlight the significance of their interconnectedness and the complexly interwoven nature of the landscapes. As stated in the literature review, Drama teachers have a way of organising themselves to adjust to school culture and the CDA connections building task helps to identify the ways they do this and why. This revealed some of the tensions Drama teachers negotiate and the discourses that serve schools and the production of knowledge.

For Gee (2011), how people identify themselves is closely interwoven with how they relate to others and so identity is informed by relationships and relationships inform identity. As all relationships are constituted through power the politics tool is connected to professional identity and relationships. All three of these areas are inter-connected and inform each other so the connections tool begins the process of synthesising the information gathered independently to produce a more holistic understanding of the Drama teachers’ lived experience.

As seen in the relationships tool subjectivities are related to professional identity because perceptions, feelings and the ways Drama teachers express themselves help reveal how they identify who they are. Drama teachers’ attitudes and beliefs are related to their emotions identifiable through the ways they express and/or oppress themselves. Their responses are shaped through politics where there are rules that normalise and shape the expression of emotions. These rules are constructed through power relations and embedded in school culture where Drama teachers learn what’s appropriate and what’s not (Zembylas, 2003).

The connections tool highlights the holistic and unique nature of lived experience through articulating and synthesising the interconnectedness of Drama teachers’ professional identity, relationships and political engagement in school.
5. Sign Systems and Knowledge

Gee (2011, p. 91) states that “...different sign systems represent different views of knowledge and belief”, the sign systems and knowledge tool helped reveal that Drama teachers’ individual views represented part of a group or subculture. McLaren (2003, p. 210) suggests that “subcultures are involved in contesting the cultural “space” or openings in the dominant culture” and that “individuals who form subcultures often use distinct symbols and social practices to help foster an identity outside that of the dominant culture”. Therefore, Drama teachers’ identify themselves in distinct ways that constitute them as a subculture within the dominant culture. However, this research maintains that the lived experience although unique can also be representative of a collective experience belonging to Drama teachers. The sign systems and knowledge tool highlights the significance of particular signs that the Drama teacher uses as relevant to their particular journey as a learner and educator, central to their lived experience, and indicative of the subculture they inhabit in schools.

Gee (2011, p. 91) claims that “sign systems are important to the people who participate in them” where they identify a deep commitment and affiliation to their group”. Drama teachers privilege and dis-privilege sign systems and knowledge and this informs the ways they see themselves in the school and their students. Gee (2011) outlines that the sign systems and knowledge tool is related to politics “since constructing privilege for a sign system or way of knowing the world is to create and offer a social good” (p. 91). Drama teachers’ sign systems highlight what social goods they promote and how they think schools should serve society.

The sign systems and knowledge tool helped reveal some of the competing discourses around teaching and learning, the possibilities for Drama to transform the status quo, and the constraints around teaching and learning within the current climate. All Drama teachers attach particular meaning to a sign system that is unique and dependent on context. Although their interpretations are individual they are bound in socially and culturally collective experiences where roles are constructed and constituted through power relations and language that leave them complicit.
Building Tasks Application

Table 5 outlines the focus of each CDA tool that was applied to the data to build an understanding of lived experience. Table 5 demonstrates the process of synthesising the information gathered from the tools to formulate findings and explain the Drama teachers’ lived experience.

**Table 5: A Toolkit Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CDA TOOLS</th>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>LANDSCAPE LINK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY</td>
<td>Descriptions of self as a learner and a teacher</td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELATIONSHIPS</td>
<td>Descriptions of students and other school members</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICS</td>
<td>Descriptions of curriculum</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Descriptions of success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Descriptions of space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Descriptions of time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONNECTIONS</td>
<td>Linking of professional identity, relationships and politics.</td>
<td>Personal Professional School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGN SYSTEMS &amp; KNOWLEDGE</td>
<td>Identification of repetitive words/phrases and what they mean linked to connections.</td>
<td>Personal Professional School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synthesising comments and overarching findings revealed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first three tools were examined independently from one another. This phase was important in order to subsequently identify the connections between each of these areas and the landscapes. The ‘connections’ tool enabled links to be made between these three areas highlighting the complexity of teachers’ personal and professional experiences and how they shift and organise themselves according to their schools’ expectations and culture.

**The Process and Findings Formula**

Figure 2 shows how the tools of professional identity, relationships and politics and connections are represented using cogs in a machine. They are both isolated and interconnected when in operation. The cogs inform each other and are realised as connected signified by the larger “connections” cog. The sign systems and knowledge plane is seen to highlight the background of the machine as it informs the operation of all individual cogs.
both independently and cohesively. Just like cogs in a machine all are activated and/or deactivated and dependent on interaction and reaction. This representation highlights that lived experience framed using the CDA tools are complex, interconnected and mutually informed where all parts are important in establishing a holistic view.

**Figure 2**: The building tasks process

The sign systems and knowledge tool took into consideration what connections were made and began an examination of the language Drama teachers use in repetition where they “represent different views of knowledge and belief” (Gee, 2011, p. 91). For this building task I began isolating particular words and/or phrases that were used repetitively throughout the transcript. These words and/or phrases began to construct information pertaining to particular values and beliefs informing the teacher’s view of teaching and learning Drama within a school. I used the sign systems and knowledge building task in isolation to identify the individual Drama teachers’ attitudes to teaching and learning and then worked towards synthesising the information to locate commonalities that would highlight a shared language and view of the world belonging to the Drama teacher.
The privileging of particular sign systems worked toward identifying the Drama teachers’ view of how Drama is produced in schools and what they believe is important for students to learn and teachers to teach. The sign systems and knowledge tool completed the final phase of analysis which supported synthesising findings that enabled the Drama teachers’ lived experience of teaching Drama in the contemporary school to be produced and understood.
Chapter Three – Case Studies

This chapter reveals the four Drama teachers’ unique experience of teaching and learning Drama, the politics that shapes their work, and how they make sense of themselves and others within the current educational context of schooling. The Drama teachers’ context is described and explained within the five building tasks - 1) professional identity, 2) relationships, 3) politics, 4) connections and, 5) sign systems. Under each of these headings, I have extracted information pertaining to the descriptions of these tasks outlined in the methodology. This in-depth analysis of each case supports that “contexts are unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance” (Cohen et al, 2003, p. 181). The following descriptions of these four Drama teachers’ experience have been extracted from the interviews which engaged teachers in a conversation about their experience as learners and teachers of Drama. These descriptions “strive to portray ‘what it is like’ to be in a particular situation” (Cohen et al, 2003, p. 182), in this case teaching Drama in the contemporary secondary suburban school within the current context. These Drama teachers’ “thoughts about and feelings for” teaching and learning Drama in school are also important in revealing the context of their situation and how they negotiate this (Cohen et al, 2003, p. 182).

CASE 1: Markus

Professional Identity

Markus works as a Drama and English teacher at Stockman Senior High School and has been employed there for less than three years. Markus believes despite his personal efforts to maintain a strong Drama program, numbers are declining and an on-going position for him is uncertain. He believes this is due to a lack of promotion by careers advisors, the school’s overall emphasis on other subject areas, and a lack of support from other teachers.

As a student, Markus “failed school” because “some awful things happened”. After spending some time in the workforce Markus was motivated to pursue a teaching career and decided that “more” could be done in schools to make a difference to the outcome of education for all students. For example, he says:
I realised this is what I really wanted to do, there were bigger pictures here, much more that could be done.

Markus recognises himself as unique and Drama as his place of belonging, he says:

I don’t fit a stereotype, in any way, shape or form. I’ve never done that since I was a kid. I don’t go out of my way to be outlandish but I just don’t fit into pigeonholes.

For Markus, Drama provides belonging for all kinds of students where uniqueness is supported and celebrated. Markus believes as a Drama teacher, Drama provides opportunities to transcend “stereotypes” and find a way to “fit in”, he comments on his own high school days:

The Drama space, the Drama room, the Drama friends were my security so there’s always been that, they’ve always had a nice place and memories in my heart.

Markus believes Drama is unique and his work involves justifying its importance in school, he says “I think there’s something that Drama offers that no other subject in a school can offer, that’s why I’ve always fought fiercely for my position in the school”. Markus sees the institution of school as disempowering and that Drama helps students realise their potential, he says “kids think they can’t do… and then can do”. He is resistant to the status quo and finds ways to challenge dominant beliefs and values in school.

Markus suggests he is isolated in his goal to do “more” claiming that “others don’t see the benefit in the same way”. He believes “a good Drama teacher has a holistic approach, not only in the field of Drama and theatre but where it fits into the bigger pictures of the world”. His own experiences as a student have shaped his beliefs around learning claiming: “I don’t learn very well by sitting down at a book, like Maths and Science wouldn’t be my subject”. These experiences have informed his work as a Drama teacher where he prefers “…teaching and learning, shoes off running around in a classroom”.

Markus believes success in Drama is not only about achieving objectives and outcomes; it is about experiencing a transformation in some way, he says “there needs to be a sense of growth”; however suggests that the school system does not promote transformative learning because it is difficult to quantify.
For Markus, passion is required to teach Drama well. He sets himself apart from other teachers in the school claiming they could not bring to the subject what he brings, which is life experience, the opportunity to harbour fond memories of a student’s time at school, a sense of belonging, tolerance, and transforming stereotypes that limit potential.

Markus positions himself as a non-conformist who has to fight for his position in the school, defend low-achievers, challenge a superficial curriculum failing to examine “the bigger pictures” and a system that fails to encourage students to “be who they are”.

**Relationships**

Markus’ relationships with his students are shaped by the “bigger pictures” he is motivated to explore. He believes his work involves confronting students’ marginalisation in school and uses Drama as a vehicle for transforming their perspectives and status.

Markus believes Drama is distinct from other academic subjects as it transforms the limitations associated with failure in school and that he is positioned well to offer different perspectives of self as a learner. He states:

> I think it allows a sense of freedom. They are not sitting at a desk for a start. There is less structure. There is no right and wrong in my subject. It’s a very beautiful grey area. I think that just helps them realise that it’s okay to make mistakes and mistakes are learning experiences.

Markus believes Drama develops “self-worth” and “self-image” and rates student “growth” as the most important indication of success in Drama. As a Drama teacher, he believes that the values he has come to know and develop around success are undermined and disprivileged in school. He says that in school Drama success is “hard to pass on”. He claims:

> There are no quantitative results at the end. With Maths they were a Level 3 at the end and they have done all these tests that I can show you. Here are their marks and their growth. Here is this Drama student and they have come in with low self-esteem. How do I know that? It’s just my perception. Here’s this kid walking out the other end proud of who they are and developing a sense of self-worth and self-image.

> You can’t show that. I think they just need to show more support and give me the benefit of the doubt. I am a Drama teacher. My professional judgement should be enough. But
unfortunately, you can’t run a school like that. There needs to be this process. There needs to be documentation.

Markus believes performances provide opportunities for students to transform stereotypes produced through discourses of the deficit and success. Performances “show” students’ success in Drama and also provide a forum for positive feedback and reinforcement for Markus. He says on the annual school production night:

Everyone that came, came away with; it was nice to see Joe who I’ve got in my class who is a proper pain in the bum doing this amazing stuff with you. It’s good to see that I can see another side to this kid and realise that he’s different.

Markus believes Drama acknowledges facets of students’ lives that are taken-for-granted in school and for there to be spaces that value “being”. He says:

In the grand scheme of things yeah sometimes it doesn’t mean that much to some kids but some kids just need that outlet, not necessarily even as creative expression sometimes they just need to be around people that are being creative, I don’t have to think, and I can just be.

Interestingly, Markus perpetuates anti-intellectual discourses around Drama learning where creativity is distinct from thinking and being is distinct from thinking. In particular, “thinking” seems to have negative connotations for Markus, while creativity and “being” are positive and more aligned with Drama learning.

Markus’ relationships with students are informed by his early descriptions of self as a “high-school failure”. Markus identifies with low-achieving students and those considered “different”. He safeguards their achievement within his own framework for success where growth and transformation of the students’ perspectives of themselves and their world underpin the model. Markus positions himself as a transformative teacher where he promotes active leadership and participation in social and cultural issues with his students.

Politics

Interviews with Markus seemed to focus on three areas of politics; curriculum, space, and success. For Markus, the curriculum limits students’ awareness of “the world” and as a Drama teacher his work depends on his ability to challenge, critique and inspire students to interrogate the limitations of what they know.
Markus’ classroom space engenders its own political stance where isolation has its advantages and disadvantages which Markus both privileges and dis-privileges. I shall discuss some of the emerging ideas around the positioning of the Drama classroom within the school.

Markus promotes his own growth model for success where students “excel” in Drama if they “walk out a different person” at the end of the year. He believes Drama does not do well in “league tables” and that failing Drama is not that important “in the grand scheme of things”. He sees Drama as transformative where low-achievers can develop the self-confidence to overcome stereotypes that limit and marginalise, however he must confront the dominant assessment system which overrides him.

**Curriculum**

Markus believes that the curriculum should develop students’ critical awareness of “the world” and the “bigger pictures”. For Markus “you can’t teach Drama by the book” unlike “Maths” where “you can open a textbook, day 1, Term 1, the last day of Term 4 you can shut the book”. Markus believes Drama teachers should “love Drama” and want to “tap into other questions” to “transform the school with what they do... sees the benefit in what they are doing”. Markus suggests Drama teachers should go beyond the boundaries of curriculum to interrogate “the bigger pictures” and see that productions play a large role in bringing these insights to the fore. He states:

> Make it public. Stop doing it... well, you’ve got that funny little room at the back corner of all the schools with no windows and its all dark and strange noises appear from there and nobody really knows what goes on inside. You need to open it up as much as you can.

Markus claims that “the Drama kid” in school is the one who doesn’t fit in and Drama provides them with protection and belonging, he says:

> You realise that it gives them a sense of belonging within the school fabric. Every kid is good at something and they have got to find their little hidey hole within the school. It’s important, I think, for the Drama kid to find theirs because as I said, quite often those kids tend to be the ones that don’t fit in anywhere.
Spatial

Markus’ Drama teaching space is a large old building towards the end of the school isolated from other classrooms. The space provides Markus with the opportunity to “see a different side” of the students. He says the Drama classroom “…is a no end environment, it’s a big old ended block”. Markus describes this space as private and a place where he and his student can be “who they are”. Noises are heard from passers-by, others do not really understand what happens in there unless it’s made ‘public’. Markus feels a sense of wider misunderstanding from others, he says:

…the school quite often looks that they are just all down there playing trees and running around wearing dresses and crap like that... you’ve got to open the doors, because from the outside that’s what it is.

This presents a dichotomy for Markus in that the classroom provides a safe place for students to be self-expressive and challenge dominant views that shape their perspectives of themselves and their world; however public performances expose students and their teacher to the wider school community where they become vulnerable to criticism and expectations that threaten the security they have come to know in the Drama classroom.

Markus comes to know his position in the school through the curriculum hierarchy that dominates how teachers assess, the value of their subject in the grand scheme of academic success, and the learning space. Markus passively accepts the low academic status of Drama and claims he is content if the student changes in some way, despite this not being recognised as valuable in the system. The teacher’s view of success in Drama is in conflict with the wider systemic position on academic success which dominates. For Markus, the Drama teacher adopts a complacent attitude toward academic success in Drama within school and this normalised practice perpetuates the marginalised state of Drama in schools.

Connections

Markus’ “high school failure” has shaped his views and values around success and failure in school and underpins his vision for the students he teaches. Markus believes that Drama provided him a place to “fit in” in school as a student. As a teacher, he claims to be an outsider in the school and “that other people don’t see the benefit” of his work in the same way he does. This sense of feeling different to the majority contributes to his isolation and
perpetuates his resistance, something that is reflected in other facets of school life such as his isolated classroom, the texts that “have something to say” about the “big things” rather than “be good to your neighbours kind of thing”.

In his work as a Drama teacher, Markus believes performances are an opportunity to promote his growth model for success and confront the dominant discourses around achievement in school. Markus sees his role in school as serving his students’ well-being and developing the potential he believes is unattended to in school. This belief helps him justify the extra hours he works on performances because he “cares”, believes “it’s important”, and wants to provide places in school that are “fun”, “enjoyable” and promote “happiness”.

Markus’ vision to teach students “about the world” and seek texts that encourage “awareness” of “social issues” is connected to a belief that school limits the knowledge available to students. Markus claims to deliver “more” than a superficial curriculum through his repetitive use of the words “bigger pictures” and “the world”.

Markus believes a sense of belonging is important in school and this is connected to his own experience as a student. His own experience as a learner of Drama in school and university shape his perception that Drama “is important” because “some kids” need “an outlet” or a place in school to “exist”. These values and beliefs are informed and inter-connected with his own high school experience as a Drama student.

Sign Systems and Knowledge

Learning and Curriculum

Markus engages in contradictory spaces of learning where his open view conflicts with his need for order and discipline. He says, he teaches “about the world”, “awareness”, “bigger pictures”, that supports self-discovery, “self-expression”, “freedom”, and spaces for the students to “fit in” and be “who they are”; however, he also expects students to learn certain skills such as “standing up on stage”, “learning to get along”, “writing”, “constructive criticism”, and interrogating “texts”. Markus dichotomises success which is informed by his conflicted view of learning. He says:
Those kids that come down and see Drama as a bird subject. I am just going to fly through this at school. I am just going to kind of play around a bit, act the fool, have a laugh, do this, do that... not doing assessments, not attending exams. That’s how you fail.

As far as metaphorically failing Drama it’s being closed minded.

Markus positions Drama as a unique and powerful subject that offers students the opportunity to develop a deeper sense of self he feels is missing in school. He compares Drama to other subjects such as History, Maths, Science and English claiming they are not “expressive subjects” that “allow a sense of freedom” because of “desks”, “structure” and a focus on “right and wrong”. Markus views Drama as special and distinct from other subjects because it allows students a type of freedom in thinking he believes is often controlled and suppressed in traditional learning areas.

Markus exercises an emancipatory vision both inside and outside the classroom space. When discussing performances, he promotes the entertainment and fun aspect of Drama because he believes this is what others connect to, thus compromising the transformatory potential he values. The emphasis on entertainment evokes a superficial view that creates complacency in Markus, he comments:

So all the feedback from parents was really positive and that’s the kind of feedback that I got from most parents...was that it was fun. Would I have liked more from them? Maybe. But as long as they are happy and their kids are happy it’s all I care about.

Markus finds his own values often conflict with different school spaces where he finds himself making compromises to fit in and exercise his emancipatory vision. His use of performances to highlight the unique way students learn in Drama is often harbourd by an expectation for fun and entertainment. He uses resistance as a way of re-claiming a sense of power lost in the struggle to quantify student achievement and accept the way schools undermine and control Drama learning.

Bigger Pictures

Markus repeatedly talks about how teaching and learning Drama involves exploring the “bigger pictures”, “the world”, “social issues”, and “fitting in”. As a mature-age student at university he felt frustrated working with younger students because they had “immature
ideas” and did not share his goal which was to “create bigger things”. Markus also uses the terms “bigger picture” to describe getting to know others’ lives surrounding Drama work and how this is important in order to develop “tolerance” and “acceptance”. For Markus, the “bigger picture” is also the lived experience. For example, he states:

...well, that's sort of what Drama's about really, the bigger picture, it's all about human story, it's about our journeys, over lives, our stories.

Markus comes to know his position as isolated; however enmeshed in the underlying discourse that dictates how and what students should learn within a liberal context. The students’ success or failure is complexly driven as the Drama teacher negotiates open and ordered views of learning Drama. Markus attempts to overcome some of the dominant positions others form around student success through providing opportunities to perform and promote Drama’s transformatory potential. However, as he has discovered others’ views are limited and superficial thus reinforcing Drama’s status and positioning in school. This position also reinforces the anti-academic status of Drama in schools and highlights the on-going struggles Drama teachers will inevitably face. Markus faces many contradictions in school as he struggles to teach students about the “bigger pictures” and the discipline of Drama which defines their success and limits it within “the grand scheme of things”.

**CASE 2: Rachel**

*Professional Identity*

Rachel is a mature-age graduate student who has been teaching Drama at Palm Tree High for less than four months. She identifies herself as a “kinaesthetic” learner who “discovered” her passion and skills through being involved in “shows”. She says:

I had done Drama at high school as well and we did quite a few shows and that was probably the first place that really... it came through to me... this passion that I had. I discovered I was quite good at organising.

Rachel’s passion involves “backstage roles rather than in the limelight”. She believes that Drama provides her with the opportunity to have “fun”, and work “with other people” where they come together to be challenged on their “views” or “issues”. Confronting her
insecurities about performing is challenging as a teacher where back stage roles mask her vulnerabilities. She says:

I don’t think I’m particularly amazingly talented at acting. I think the movement side I’m pretty ok at. But yes, definitely, being in front of other people... being in the limelight because I am quite a shy and reserved person putting myself out there was definitely challenging.

For Rachel, good Drama teaching involves understanding the “the skills” of Drama and being able to “transfer” this to the students which involves making activities “enjoyable” and accessible. Rachel talks about having low self-confidence and expresses moments of defeat during her time teaching Drama. She claims most of her learning has been “on the job” and through “making mistakes”. These “mistakes” included having too many high expectations for the students at the school. She says:

I feel like I’ve made a few mistakes actually... starting off with the bar too high because I came in knowing that these kids had no experience being in Drama. When it came to performances I could see that I had underestimated the really basic stuff. That was a big learning curve.

Rachel comes to know her position in the school as both valued and under-valued within the various discursive practices and compromised as she struggles to meet her high standards for performance and confront the students’ resistance and lack of experience. With no collective support she remains isolated in her attempts to raise the profile of Drama and get students motivated to learn.

**Relationships**

Rachel’s relationships with students are precarious as she encounters conflicts within social groups, “teenage hormones”, personal problems, their low expectations of Drama, and resistance to teachers. She struggles with low self-confidence and a belief that as a recent graduate her inexperience is a disadvantage in the school. She is often easily positioned as the “bad guy” who competes for status and threatens to interrupt the students “agenda” to socialise and have fun in class. For Rachel, Drama is a “discipline” where “fun” is produced through skills and training and these beliefs conflict with the students’ expectations. She comments:  

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...we’ve got all the boys and then there’s the girls, and all this tension between them. It’s all good but it’s all to do with teenage hormones. They are all performing for each other but they have this agenda that they are just here to have fun. So when we do hit on these things that it’s about discipline they’ll go, it’s about fun.

I just don’t think they get discipline. I think it’s partly to do with age, partly to do with the fact that some of them are only in the class because their friends are in the class and because they think that it is a nothing class.

Rachel suggests the problems with students are cultural and systemic. She comments:

...it is a bit of across the board at this school; this lack of regard for education. In a way I can understand it because I think education should have evolved to suit teenagers a little bit better by now. But at the same time I think, well, what a shame. There are all these other people dying to have these opportunities that these kids have got and they’re just throwing it in the gutter like it doesn’t matter.

Although Rachel wants to use Drama to provide students with a different “space in education”, her work involves controlling their behaviour which often competes with these goals and her personality. She says:

I get frustrated at myself because I’m the kind of person who really doesn’t like confrontation and I don’t like butting heads. You have to but I will try and avoid it. I think the kids have worked this out so I think they play me a bit.

I do generally follow through and I am pretty consistent but I’ll be very careful about the fights that I choose to fight because there is the potential to lose a lot of those kids very quickly.

Being “liked” is important for Rachel’s survival and progress with the students. Rachel sees her relationship with students as an on-going site of struggle that is shaped by their problems, their view of education, and wider cultural and systemic issues. Students view Drama as low status, superfluous to their other subjects, a bit of fun, and a place to socialise. Rachel is positioned to fail in her attempts to get the students learning Drama if her expectations are not aligned with theirs.
Rachel believes many of the challenges she encounters as a Drama teacher in her school are due to her inexpeirement and the “long” absence of Drama in the school. She says:

They used to have Drama here about 12 years ago but they haven’t had Drama for a long, long time. I think they have wanted to get it back into the program for a long, long time but they haven’t had anyone to do it. It’s been very challenging because I’m a graduate and because the kids don’t have experience...

Rachel is reserved about her many struggles, hoping her situation will improve with ongoing experience. With no established Drama department, and her decision to remain silent about her various struggles she operates in isolation as a Drama teacher. She says:

I think everyone just assumes that I’ve got it under control and that it’s great. Only the people I talk to know that I’ve been struggling and ... I’m such an independent person that it’s hard for me to say that I haven’t been supported. There is no one in the school who knows this stuff.

Rachel reflects on her isolation with ambivalence as she believes it resonates with her “independence” but perhaps also leaves her feeling vulnerable and incompetent without the support of a like-minded community.

To others she is “doing a good job” but to herself she is “making many mistakes”, this highlights the conflict between her own and the school’s expectations. Rachel’s expectations of herself include the ability to engage students in a mutually motivating environment; however this depends on a range of factors she believes are beyond her control such as the apathetic approach to learning at the school. Rachel believes “they” fail to understand the nature of her work, whose motivations to introduce Drama are more about students “engaging in creativity” because “it ups your chances in all aspects of life and education”. This highlights a conflict between what the Drama teacher knows and believes, and what the school wants for its students. Rachel is expected to support a political agenda which undermines the nature of her work and contradicts her understanding of the role of Drama in school.

Rachel suggests the school supports her in her work as a Drama teacher by providing her with a “budget”, a “great space” and by “talking” to problem kids. This perceived support
from the school only further contributes to feelings of isolation, insignificance of her subject area and acts to emphasise the expectations of learners and teachers. These discursive practices have produced a deficit view of resistant students and Drama as well placed in keeping those students under control. Rachel often believes she is responsible for getting the support she needs with the students, she comments:

If I’m having problems with kids or particular kids there are all these processes that they will come in and they will talk to the kids. But that comes from me. I’ve got to first bring that to the fore. They’ve given me this great space. They’ve given me a budget. But there is no one floating around who has any experience, I think, or any desire to be involved. So in a way I am a bit isolated but it’s a problem in the micro. In the bigger picture if I need help they are there.

Although Rachel has experienced much resistance she believes Drama has the potential to transform a school if there is a collective “cultural change”, she comments:

It’s the culture and the way people will treat each other because they’ve worked together. They’ve built up trust. There’s a new sense of boundaries. There is no need for put downs or... I think it’s a cultural change where there is no need to belittle people or to big-note yourself because everyone is walking the same ground and it’s safe. I suppose it’s safe to try something new or to throw yourself up on the stage all on your own in front of the whole school and no one’s booing or hissing you. Everyone’s congratulating you for being courageous. That’s what I would like to see happen.

**Connections**

Rachel’s “shy” and “reserved” disposition disempowers her work as a Drama teacher at Palm Tree High where the students are rote learners, anti-authoritarian, have no “sense of boundaries”, and view Drama as a site for socialisation and “fun”. For Rachel, Drama is a “discipline” where learning “basic skills” underpin “disciplined fun”.

Rachel is isolated in her struggles to maintain order in a chaotic learning environment that is perpetuated by the students’ low expectations of Drama in school. Rachel encounters many conflicts connected to her tendency to “avoid confrontations” and need to be “liked” as part of her survival. She refers anti-authoritative and disruptive students to other members of
staff, further acting to expose her insecurities around confrontations, need to be “liked” and be their “friend”.

Rachel must confront the negative stereotype produced in the school that the teacher is “the bad guy”. This requires her to relinquish her “reserved” and “shy” disposition in order to have the control she needs to create “disciplined fun” in Drama. Rachel’s romantic view of schooling as a place where there is “trust”, “a new sense of boundaries”, “no need for put downs”, “everyone walking the same ground” and “everyone congratulating you for being courageous” conflicts with her experiences as a teacher where she encounters “real people” with “real issues” which are “very in your face”.

*Sign Systems and Knowledge*

**Learning**

For Rachel, Drama is a “discipline” that involves developing certain “skills” that will prepare students for “shows” which involves “taking risks”, “creativity”, “imagination”, and challenging audiences’ perspectives. These pre-conceived expectations of Drama shape the way she identifies with teaching and when the classroom presents a different reality she has to make shifts and compromises to accommodate the “real issues” she encounters. During her short time of teaching Drama at Palm Tree High she has come to understand that the students learning in Drama involves having “structure”, “repetition”, “fun”, chaos, conflict, “nothing constructive”, and that “the social peer pressure was larger than the desire to be able to develop a skill”.

**Making mistakes**

Rachel identifies that teaching has been very different to what she had “envisaged”. She talks about the “reality” of teaching involving “moments of chaos” and “lots of failures” where her high expectations or “standards” were challenged. For Rachel, the various conflicts she encounters with students, her own insecurities and expectations are not easily resolved and inform her choices as a teacher. The “long” absence of Drama in the school contributed to the students “lack of knowledge” in Drama where their inability to be imaginative, collaborate, and take risks highlighted a different side to teaching.
Rachel’s internal conflicts of giving up and trying to succeed emerge out of her own expectations and insecurities coupled with the different side of teaching she encounters. She believes some of her mistakes included assumptions around students’ prior knowledge. Her realization of the students’ inability to use their imaginations beyond what they were exposed to in film or video games was concerning, as were the ways they collaborated where socialization and peer dominance inhibited the creative process. During the practice of teaching, Rachel realized that she would need to prepare the students for learning Drama before performances could work.

**Fun and Discipline**

For Rachel, “fun” is connected to being engaged, motivated, and immersed in Drama. Rachel is concerned by the students’ expectations that Drama is “fun” as she believes the “fun” in Drama comes from being “disciplined”:

> We get the job done but it’s enjoyable because we can take it in places... no other subject in this school will cover some of the things that we will do. But at the same time it is totally learning.... total discipline”.

Rachel believes that Drama is a “discipline” like “any other subject” where certain conditions must be met and discourses around “fun” need to be addressed and challenged as they seek to undermine her work as a Drama teacher and disempower Drama’s potential as a subject.

**CASE 3: Rose**

**Professional Identity**

Rose coordinates the arts department and teaches Drama at St Anne’s. Her role includes managing staff, directing annual productions, organising and conducting overseas tours during school holidays, and teaching Drama classes. She has been employed at the school for over twenty years. She is passionate about teaching and supports the school’s vision to produce independent and high achieving young women.

Rose says that she “was always the Drama queen at school” and “always determined to be a teacher”. Although she enjoyed participation in productions at school and university, often taking lead roles, she “knew when it came to acting” she was “good” but not “outstanding”
or “gorgeous enough” for an acting career. She believes her choice to become a Drama teacher meant she could combine both her passion for Drama and teaching. For Rose, this was an attainable option and a realistic career decision that was aligned with her personality and skills.

As a Drama teacher, Rose dichotomises her pre-service training into Drama and education. She highlights some of the differences she encountered between learning about Drama and learning about teaching:

Yeah, so the one year course was as much as I could handle of an education unit. I don’t know whether it was because I went to a different university for my teacher training... it was a different approach, they had exams... and they insisted that their teaching of education was done in this really boring old fashioned people sitting in rows and kind of learning from books.

Rose claims her teacher training was superfluous where “you kind of had to spend all your time mucking around... it just didn’t do it for me”. In contrast, she says she was “immersed” in her “subject” of Drama that was aligned with her learning style and supported a balance between theory and practice:

I loved the whole course, it was absolutely amazing. It was very hands-on and practical. It was designed around not only learning and different theory behind different practitioners but you also actually did all of those you learned about. The course was really well structured and there were lots and lots of opportunities for performance.

She believes teaching is an act of service and describes her role as one of “giving”. When discussing the need to perform in front of students Rose suggests performing can be self-indulgent and although a necessary part of her job, her focus is always on serving the students’ needs as learners. She says:

I love to perform, I mean like all Drama teachers I’m a big fan of performing and I’m happy to perform in front of them and they love it but I have a really clear sense of I’m the teacher and you’re the students and I’m here to teach you. I’m not here to show off to you.

For Rose, Drama teachers are a source of inspiration to their students where performing serves to demonstrate and motivate. She believes that Drama teachers need to show
students that they have mastered the craft of performing but that the emphasis is always on student learning. For Rose, teachers should maintain boundaries between performing and teaching. For example, she says:

I think they need to know that you can act and that you can perform as well... but you don’t need to be showing off. It’s like a Science teacher you know doing amazing experiments out the front, yes they can do it but they don’t need to do it all the time, it’s about them learning.

Rose suggests “Drama is about not just the task but it’s about people” and “relationships between people and how we negotiate our way through the world with one another”. She believes good Drama teachers are “passionate about their students”, “their subject” and “have to want to be on the cutting edge”. She believes good Drama teaching serves students and addresses workplace need by producing them with:

The confidence and the ability to work with others, to present themselves with articulation and believe in their own abilities.

Rose believes Drama assists in cultivating an image that is appealing to prospective employers. She says:

You don’t have to be an actor to be taking Drama. You have just got to be a person who is going to be presenting themselves. They all have to go to job interviews.

Rose also supports vocation discourses where Drama teachers “give up their time to do it and to be with their kids”. She encounters conflicts between addressing her own learning needs and her role as a Drama teacher. She suggests the success of Drama in school depends on “teachers who are keen on growing and learning”, “want to go to PD opportunities and try new things”, “be a bit mad”, and “passionate”. However, she is time-poor where much of her learning is on-the-job because as she argues Drama teaching is a giving and self-less profession:

You have to love kids because it’s all about them. It’s all about their development and what you are doing and that feeling of, they’ve gained something from it.

I think I learn while I’m educating as well but it’s very giving, you give an awful lot of yourself particularly in Drama, you give so much.
Rose positions herself as a likeable all-knowing teacher who maintains control through order and discipline. She believes Drama teaching is an act of service where student needs are prioritised and teachers are subordinate to those needs. She believes Drama serves both academic and non-academic students by supporting them to create a positive self-image. She compartmentalises her work where teaching is distinct from directing and performing. She believes that to be a successful Drama teacher she must make her work the priority and accept that the extra hours she works are part of the job.

**Relationships**

Rose claims her students “love Drama” and are “beautiful girls”. According to Rose, Drama students are “confident”, “speak their mind”, and “out there kind of girls”. She says, “I think that’s what Drama does. It makes girls... because girls in particular can hold back”. Rose uses Drama to uphold the school’s wider vision that confident girls become successful women.

Rose sees her role as “giving” and passively accepts wider school expectations. She says, “…you have so many expectations on you at a school like this, so you’ve got to be on top of your game”. Rose believes good Drama teaching involves “keeping up with [students]” and “being cutting edge” because students are technically savvy and often evidence teachers’ claims with their laptops. Rose says students should “have control over their own work” and is “quite passionate about kids creating their own work on things that they are interested in”.

Rose suggests parents’ expectations of their daughters are often unrealistic and sees her work involves showing “what the kids actually are like” because “not every kid is going to be top of the class” she says, “regardless of how good I am or how much I do with them”.

Rose’s relationships with students are shaped by the wider expectations for her to deliver good results. Although Rose sees value in directing plays and extra-curricular activities such as international trips in developing confidence and independence, it is the classroom work that is considered to have the overall greatest impact on student achievement in Drama as a subject.
Politics

Success
For Rose, St Anne’s College has high expectations, she says:

...in a school like this they expect a lot. They expect technical brilliance. They expect incredible performances. You have a lot to live up to all the time.

Rose believes the school expects her to prepare students well for academic success coupled with being a “star” which competes with her own aspirations for students:

I always find it really uncomfortable when they’re trying to push me for results. And I know in a school like this that’s what you gotta do. So I think it’s about each kid cos they’re not all going to be Meryl Streep... hardly any of them are...

Despite the school’s emphasis on academic achievement and “results”, Rose sees Drama as a vehicle for cultivating self-esteem where power and confidence serve students well:

My thing’s always been to create the next confident, articulate, powerful young woman who can walk out the door and take on the world.

Spatial
Rose indicates that the classrooms allocated for Drama in her school are shared spaces. This is often disruptive to her lessons and requires her to be flexible and cooperative. She comments:

We have beautiful classrooms that we are always getting thrown out of because they are open spaces and they are always being taken over for guest speakers, meetings and special learning days... whatever.

For Rose, the Drama learning space should promote a sense of equality amongst teacher and students. She says:

...we’re all on the same level in we all sit in circle and I sit on the floor with them... we are all in it together I guess is the best way to describe my teaching. It’s really hard if you don’t have a room where you can sit in a circle or close. The environment is important, I think.

Rose believes she’s “lucky” and that “the school’s supportive in that they do give me and my department an allocation of time to put on productions” and because “they have built
another space”, “nice new dance studio” alongside “an amazing big theatre as well”. The building spaces highlight the emphasis on productions and reinforce the demand for excellence. The other attractions that the large and “beautiful buildings” have is “a theatre arts assistance”, an “admin and costume person”, which for Rose, reinforce that the school is “supportive” and “do value what we do”.

Time
Rose suggests that “time is really the biggest thing” and being “busy” is part of teachers’ work. She says:

I’m always rushed off my feet, but most teachers are I s’pose.

A lack of time prevents Rose from cultivating new skills, she comments:

I think your own learning is really good to use, don’t have any time to do that now but you know like PDs and workshops and conferences and stuff which is always amazing, I’m a big fan of those.

Rose dichotomises “time” in inside and outside spaces: her work as a Drama teacher in the classroom involves ‘giving’ and professional development opportunities outside of school ‘receiving’. She suggests teaching Drama is demanding and leaves little time for personal and professional development. She comments:

I think I learn while I’m educating as well but it’s very giving like you give an awful lot of yourself particularly in Drama you give so much.

With the pressure to attend to wide school demands, Rose’s ongoing professional development is compromised where she passively accepts that her learning remains on-the-job. Rose is positioned to accept that professional development requires additional time, and although regenerative and affordable it is considered superfluous to her work as a Drama teacher.

Connections
Rose says she was a “Drama queen” at school but “not gorgeous enough” for an acting career. This informs her work as a Drama teacher as she perceives Drama both a site for “Drama queens” and the more socially reserved where all students can learn to present well
for job interviews. Rose believes that image is important and that Drama helps cultivate the confidence required to present oneself successfully in the world.

Rose believes that performing in front of her students is important so that they can see Drama teachers “have mastered their craft”. However, this presents her with a contradiction because although a demonstration of competence, performing in front of students could undermine her work as a teacher. She believes an important distinction needs to be made between a mastered craft and “showing off”. Rose denies herself of professional learning opportunities to build on her craft claiming her work as a teacher takes precedence. Rose repetitively claims that teaching is a “giving” profession and this seems to inform decisions around attending to professional development needs.

Rose’s belief that she was not “gorgeous enough” highlights some of the feelings she has around her own image and is perhaps connected to her need to demonstrate her competencies as a performer. For Rose, Drama transforms students’ self-confidence through performing in front of others; however her own feelings that performing is self-indulgent suggests she sees Drama as both a site for transformation and disempowerment.

*Sign Systems and Knowledge*

*Learning*

Rose believes that students’ are more motivated to learn in Drama when they are interested and tasks are “relevant” and “important to them”. She believes her teaching must “keep up with them” and strive to be “cutting edge”. She says:

> I am a big fan of YouTube and so I make sure that I am with them for their… previously I would have probably read handouts and done more talking to the board kind of stuff. Now they are so used to looking at stuff. Their phone is with them all the time and they’re visual learners. I try to incorporate that more in my teaching. I think they learn they find it relevant and they find it important to them.

Topics such as “body image and their self-esteem”, “animal cruelty”, “poverty”, “Facebook”, “sex”, “murder”, and “motherhood” all emerge as “relevant” to student learning in the Drama classroom.
Teaching

Rose believes good Drama teaching prepares the students for a life beyond school equipping them with skills such as “the ability to work with others, to present themselves with articulation and confidence and belief in their own abilities”. Rose believes she acts a “guide” for students “giving them the techniques and the understanding of the big picture”.

Rose talks about how her role as a Drama teacher involves “showing” and “giving”. The necessity for students to see Rose as experienced and all-knowing involves “occasionally performing a monologue”, however maintains “it’s about them learning”. For Rose, “guiding” involves “giving” them the skills through demonstration. Rose believes her role involves serving students through scaffolding tasks, addressing variations in ability levels, addressing interests, relatedness and relevance. She says:

I try really hard to tailor what they are doing to their level and their interests and give them the opportunity to do what they’re passionate about.

CASE 4: Bonnie

Professional Identity

Bonnie is the Drama teacher at Rocky Hill College who has been employed there for over twenty years. She believes organisation and enthusiasm are central to engagement in Drama classes. Her commitment to teaching is driven by her students’ progress and transformation through learning Drama.

In her earlier years, Bonnie had no intention of becoming a Drama teacher. She was the “shy-kid” who “hated school” and avoided the limelight. Her studies included journalism and literature followed by a Diploma in Education in preparation for English teaching.

For Bonnie, a caring classroom environment builds positive teacher/student relationships and is something that resonated with her during her pre-service training. She says:

I think it was the Director General that came and gave a talk... this is the only thing I remember at university, nothing else stuck. He said ‘you have to go into a classroom and make every kid think, that you care about them and they’re number one’.

And so how I translate this is, the nerdy kid who sits up in the corner that everyone ignores, I give him a nickname that he’ll like.
After her university training, Bonnie claims she developed her skills to teach Drama on-the-job where she believes the students “were filling in the gaps” between curriculum and practice. She believes her strengths were with the theoretical component of the course and her practical skills developed through student observation. She says of her early experience learning to teach Drama:

I just swatted up and researched and looked at the kids, who were really very talented, and they taught me even though they didn’t know they were teaching me.

Bonnie suggests Drama teaching required her to confront her fear of performing, take risks and acknowledge the gaps in her own learning. For example, she says:

The scary thing for me being the shy kid, who never did try, was that I realised at times, I was going to have to demonstrate.

So for me it was learning how to do that without freaking out. Realising that I was the most inexperienced person in the room as far as practical Drama.

For early career teachers, Bonnie highlights the “possibilities” associated with inexperience. She describes young teachers as risk-takers and mature teachers as reticent:

When you’re young you see the possibilities not the problem... so as a young teacher, I did amazing things, because I wasn’t scared of what might happen.

She believes there is a “need” for risk-taking in teaching and that as a mature teacher she is more cautious. For Bonnie, mature teachers focus on surviving where risk-taking requires energy best spent on maintaining reserves. She comments:

So I think that’s why we need young teachers. Where a lot of our teaching staff are getting burn-out. We don’t do the out there stuff, we do the safe stuff.

Bonnie’s reflections on her past highlight that staying ‘safe’ means less ‘burn-out’; however the tendency to focus on survival compromises progress and innovation. Bonnie believes teaching Drama is “fun” and aligned with her “bubbly” personality and love of “positive interaction”. As a “shy-kid” who “hated school”, Bonnie is the caring teacher who works to include the outcast through creating the caring classroom that is fun while resisting wider school discourses that shape and emphasise academic learning void of innovation.
**Relationships**

For Bonnie, being well liked and maintaining a good rapport with students underpin good Drama teaching. She believes making all students feel welcome and “safe” are important because there is a tendency in school “to put too much energy into bad kids” where the “little nerdy guy” gets “ignored cos everyone knows he’ll get on with it”. For Bonnie, students in Drama should get along and be mutually respectful of differences. She believes Drama is different in comparison to other “disciplines” because it engages conversations about each other in ways other subjects may not. She says:

They leave within the first day with friends in that room that they can sit at lunch time with.

Now in Maths or different disciplines, I’ve had kids say three, four months later, they don’t remember the Maths teacher’s name, and they don’t know anyone else in the room.

Bonnie suggests her students choose Drama as “light relief” from their academic subjects and this depends on her making classes “fun” and “enjoyable”. She over prepares for classes to keep students interest and maintain energy. She believes appealing to the girls’ sense of style or “teasing the boys” and “enjoying a bit of chaos” encourages students to participate and think of Drama as fun and inviting. Bonnie engages gender stereotypes as a way of connecting with students. For example, she comments:

I think it’s up to me to come in every day, looking like I wouldn’t be anywhere else in the world.

I bounce in the room, and I’m happy. I always start with chitty chat... and if some of the girls are wearing a nice dress, I say ‘whoah I like your dress’... and the boys you’ll tease them about something.

After many years of teaching, Bonnie believes there have been changes in the way students approach their education where complacency is a normalised practice. She also believes the students’ lack of “commitment” inhibits Drama work and can “destroy a lesson”. She says:

This generation of kids has a real commitment problem, you know, responsibility. They don’t see that they have to stick by something. You know, they’re the click and go, click move on, do this, do that. So if something else comes up, like if they know there’s an assessment on,
they will think nothing of having the day off if they don’t feel well or they’re tired or something else.

So they don’t think all my group’s relying on me.

Maybe it’s a generational thing.

For Bonnie, Drama classes should embody enthusiasm and a collaborative vibe where students “bounce through the door”, makes friends beyond the classroom, and respect each other’s cultural and religious differences.

**Politics**

**Spatial**

Bonnie has endured many changes to her classroom space over the years, often occurring without her consent or knowledge, only acting to further highlight Drama’s positioning within the school. For example, she comments:

> Originally I had a theatre with curtains, lighting, staging, and green-room... massive set-up. It was a pig-sty when I took over, and I was told I had to clean it up. So I did, with one of the care-takers. I used to pay him in banana cakes.

> And so we turned that into a really great place and then without even consulting me, the Principal decided he was turning that into more classrooms, because it was a big area. So didn’t even know, they’d sold my curtains, sold my lights, sold everything off to other schools. I was probably one of the last people to know that that had gone.

Although Bonnie became resourceful at locating and creating new classroom spaces, the repetitive overtaking of ownership by the “powers that be” left her feeling disempowered and defeated. The only source of retaliation was a reluctance to teach Drama for “a couple of years”.

**Success**

Bonnie believes despite being supported by those who value Drama as “a nice place to be” that is “fun” and “enjoyable”, the school prioritises the subjects that promote academic achievement and competition. For example, she says:
I actually think, if they were asked, the powers that be, is Drama successful here? They would say ‘yes’ because I know that they get great feedback... but... is it important in the big picture of Maths, Chemistry, Science? No.

Bonnie promotes the interpersonal achievements of students as being the highlight of success in Drama. For example, she comments:

So my thing is that I’m going to give people confidence, make them happy. We have damaged souls.

I had a boy a couple of years ago. Best Drama student. He had some kind of illness, probably a well-being illness. He came back a couple of years later into the room and he was a shell of who he used to be. And he said ‘I’ve come back for you to make me well again’.

For Bonnie, Drama provides a space for students to “laugh and play” that is paramount to rehabilitating “damaged students who have come back as mature age”.

Bonnie believes that students select Drama for “light relief in the day”, a place to express their “creative side” and “have a bit of fun”, rather than its potential to land them a university placement as there is a “limited recognition of practical work now” with more emphasis on “analysing” associated with “writing detailed essays”. For example:

Kids who are good at Drama traditionally don’t want to do the writing. They don’t want to analyse, they don’t want to be writing detailed essays. They want to be up doing.

The move away from the practical nature of the subject, Bonnie believes “has killed off numbers in a lot of schools” coupled with the idea that unless students can be successful with both the written and practical components of the course “it’s hard to score well in it”. Bonnie suggests the “My Schools” website eliminated Drama so that it does not impact on the overall school result “because the kids [who cannot write well] aren’t going to score well in Drama Studies”. In the wider macro environment of education, this reinforces the low status positioning of Drama within the curriculum and students’ decision to prioritise other subjects that are aligned with their academic needs and pressures to perform well.

**Connections**

Being the “shy-kid” who “hated school” and “never did try”, Bonnie sees Drama as a site that supports the utopian values she promotes where everyone is accepted and nothing bad
happens. This highlights her belief that school is a site of disempowerment that neglects the social and emotional needs of students. Bonnie suggests good Drama teaching “makes a difference” and attends to the social and emotional needs of students. She says:

Many of the students when you talk to them are bullied at school or socially isolated or have had a crisis and they come into Drama and they, for the first time, are accepted.

Bonnie sees Drama as a site for transformation where students can:

...stop judging, they stop having stereotypes about people so when they go into other classes they are more tolerant of the other kids, their cultures, their beliefs and when they go to other classes they are not scared to put their hand up and they will participate and not sit there like the nude in the corner.

Bonnie suggests that a sense of belonging is connected to participation and transformation and Drama is the central site for a change in perspective. Bonnie privileges the lack of surveillance and attention on Drama where she has license to exercise her emancipatory vision in the hope of building her utopian values that will extend beyond the Drama classroom. She says:

In some ways I respect the school. They’ve never hassled me to do a production and I really do respect them for that because everything now is about show and tell and make yourself look good PR [Public Relations].

I’m very lucky. No one challenges why I do it and no one wants to look over my shoulder while I do it so I’m given respect and free range really... without any pressures.

Bonnie’s belief that shyness is connected to disempowerment in school informs her work as a teacher where she sees her role returning a sense of self that is otherwise taken-for-granted and suppressed. For example, she says:

Giving them some self-worth back if they are a bit damaged or a bit shy. They make a contribution and kids laugh and clap and cheer, I think that’s great.

...they learn some things about themselves... I think the best thing is they learn to give things a go; not to be scared.
Bonnie sees Drama as a learning environment that engages both teacher and student. She sees herself as both a learner and a teacher using Drama to engage all of her students, make them feel safe and encourage them to take risks. For Bonnie, Drama encourages “the shy-kid who never did try” to see themselves in a different way.

**Sign Systems and Knowledge**

**Teaching and Learning**

Bonnie believes teaching is a “privilege” because her students are adults and have given up work to go back to school. As a teacher she wants to promote belonging and cultivate mutual respect of differences such as “age”, “race” and “religion”.

Bonnie believes that she can change the ways students perceive themselves and their abilities through using Drama. She says her students have “damaged souls” and that she wants to “give people confidence” to make them “happy” and “well again”.

Bonnie emphasises the social and emotional aspects of teaching where her work can focus on “fun”, “light relief”, and “entertainment” that is free of the kinds of “discipline” associated with subjects such as “Maths”.

Bonnie believes “respect for other people’s ideas, self-confidence and self-esteem so that they are empowered” are some of the most important things students should learn in Drama. She believes Drama does not “have to be about academic aspirations” and “that it does its job within the time and place it’s in”. The “job” being to transform student outcomes by making them “well again” and “changing the way they feel about themselves”. She believes that Drama “can transform a kid who has always felt like an outsider” and provide them with “the confidence to get up and give it a go”.

For Bonnie, Drama at Rocky Hill College is not a “discipline” but a subject “for people who have had a big break in their schooling or had a very dysfunctional schooling” where it “gets them back into education”. As a teacher, Bonnie believes Drama provides her with some enjoyment in her day. For example, she says:

> I teach subjects where there’s truckloads of marking... so what’s in it for me? It’s an instant thing. A bit of light relief from that so for me I think it just breaks up my life a bit so I’m not always marking and doing intense stuff.
Bonnie sees teaching Drama as reciprocal in nature where the teacher learns from her students and the students learn from their teacher. Although she expressed a preoccupation with quantitative results in the school, she was able distance herself from these wider expectations and focus more on practical work.

Bonnie believes Drama provides students with an opportunity to embrace the differences in each other that are often subject to exclusion in other school spaces. These beliefs are connected to and reinforced by her own schooling experience where she sees school as a limiting place for students and Drama as an opportunity to transform some of these limitations in the ways students see themselves and each other.

These cases reveal the different lived experiences of four Drama teachers. Critical discourse theory and analysis have been used to explore the way in which teachers resist, accede to, and generally engage with the language and discourse of official policy as they navigate their “professional identities”. These four cases reveal that the Drama teachers’ experiences are unique, complex and contextually based. This is discussed in the following chapter in relation to the main themes and literature.
Chapter Four – Discussion

I began this thesis with my story as a Drama teacher. These experiences shaped my early understandings of Drama teachers’ work in schools. In other words, my experiences provided me with a perception of Drama teaching informed by my own unique and complex learning and teaching in schools. This research has underscored the impact that differences in perception that Drama teachers hold about their work is a complex exchange. This is because differences in perception are produced through multiple interactions between lived experience and institutional discourses. This chapter reveals three areas that have emerged as central to the experience of teaching Drama in the contemporary secondary suburban school. These are – 1) the impact of performative cultures, 2) the complexity of negotiating professional identity, and 3) transformatory potential of teaching and learning in Drama.

As discussed in Chapter One, ‘performativity’ is a term coined by Ball (2003) to explain school cultures and discourses that promote competition and rewards for teachers who are efficient and productive. Ball (2003) describes performativity as a ‘culture’ that changes the ways teachers identify with their role and their students. Moore (2004) argues that performativity is shaped by historical discourses, and one effect of this is to create a subject hierarchy where literacy and numeracy are atop the chain and subjects such as Drama appear less important. This is often communicated through testing as only those subjects (and knowledges) ‘valued’ are tested. Furthermore, testing is an important strategy that demonstrates whether teachers and their students have reached a set of standards that compete within the global market. The ‘good teacher’ is identified through three dominant discourses that inform teachers orientation with what is ‘good’ teaching and learning (Moore, 2004). Moore (2004) states that these three dominant ‘good teacher’ discourses are 1) charismatic subjects; understood as a teacher who cares, is enthusiastic, inspirational and relies on personality more than technique, 2) competent craftpersons; understood as an organised, skilled, knowledgeable, and efficient teacher and 3) reflective practitioners; understood as a teacher who improves their practices through evaluation and reflection. These four Drama teachers demonstrate how they engage in these dominant ‘good teacher’ discourses in the section of this chapter titled Negotiating Professional Identity.

In the four cases, Drama teachers negotiated performative cultures and expectations in different ways and these informed how they enacted their position. Markus is aware of the
wide limitations around how schools position students as successful or not. He enacts a position of resistance that helps him reinforce more transformatory ways of teaching and learning. He is less concerned about improving his status as a teacher and more concerned with how well he will be recognised as confronting the limitations of deficit and success discourse. In opposition to Markus, Rose enacts a position of compliance where she aligns herself with the school’s vision to produce excellence. Rose believes that her role is to serve students and not herself. She is rewarded for her efforts in the form of “beautiful buildings”, and extra “theatre staff” which reinforces to her that her compliance is of value. Rachel believes that she has greater autonomy and independence; however this often produces a sense of vulnerability. The school withdraws its commitment to attending to her struggles as a new teacher and consequently Rachel is left feeling incompetent when she asks others to help with student resistance. Bonnie has been denied of a teaching space for Drama classes; however has the freedom to avoid assessment and performances. She believes that this grant of freedom is worth finding her own classroom space. Unlike Markus, Bonnie avoids being seen as resistant and non-compliant.

I would argue, and the findings support, that for these four Drama teachers, Drama is a critical learning area, in that it has the potential to challenge dominant social and cultural norms that undermine authentic and embodied learning experiences. In the words of Boal (1992, p. xxxi), “we should know the world we live in, the better to change it”. School limits knowledge and discourses of success and deficit frame beliefs around what is successful. Drama expands the confines of knowledge production in school and therefore cultivates transformatory potential.

In a performative culture, schools tend to focus more on academic achievement which can disregard critical and embodied learning experiences. As these four teachers’ experiences attest, the implicit expectations for excellence in academic achievement constrained creativity and neglected holistic approaches that recognised the complexity of learning. Performativity left Markus dissatisfied with what he could achieve as a teacher and what students could experience as learners. Rachel internalised her struggle with student resistance in order to be seen as competent and efficient. Rose believed her commitment was important in order to maintain her privileged position and worked hard to meet demands for excellence; however she felt creatively deprived. Bonnie used Drama as relief

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from “large volumes of marking” associated with English teaching; however often struggled to meet expectations for her to be a “bubbly” and “energetic” Drama teacher. As a researcher, I found that what I experienced as a Drama teacher was not entirely unique, although the ways I negotiated these spaces were in some ways similar and some ways different.

There were a number of specific similarities and differences that emerged from the interviews. For example, there were similarities with Rachel’s experience of a lack of understanding in her school around Drama knowledge that tended to produce students’ lack of seriousness for the subject, and Markus and Bonnie who struggled to reinforce the written work. Rose was different in that she tended to accept that school performances should be entertaining and appeared to miss opportunities for questioning and interrogation of dominant social and performative expectations. In a number of ways, the Drama teachers appeared to accept the low status of their subject in a number of ways, possibly because it helped them to resist expectations for competition that they believed inhibited Drama learning.

The stories that these four Drama teachers give voice to intersect my own experiences all the way through this thesis. For example, I have always believed that Drama teaching involves contesting the low status view and finding ways to promote its transformatory potential, in many ways similar to Markus. Like Markus, I was considered a “high-school failure” and this experience shaped my desire to change the ways students perceived success. Although I had many similar experiences, I left teaching. However, the four Drama teachers I interviewed chose to stay for various reasons. In the case of Markus his commitment to teaching involved a “fight” for his students’ right to experience “growth”; however he was often perceived by other teachers as oppositional and defiant. Bonnie was driven by a desire to help “the nerdy kid” experience spaces of belonging and acceptance. For Rachel, teaching involved becoming a friend to the students. This often involved relinquishing her high expectations for Drama to transform the well-established culture of resistance and lackadaisical attitude that students have towards learning. Rose saw herself as “lucky” and was willing to relinquish her own desires for professional development and creative expression in order to keep up with the demands for excellence to reinforce that she was grateful for her position in the school.
The commitment to teaching for these four Drama teachers sometimes involved compromising their own values and needs in order to meet that of the school. This was important to their survival; however these compromises also had consequences for them that they had to negotiate. Their own schooling experience and awareness of taken-for-granted assumptions in schools tended to inform how these compromises manifested. Markus was compelled to find ways to support low-achievers and this was intensified by wider expectations to produce quantitative outcomes that he believed dichotomised students as successful or deficit. This was connected to his “high-school failure” and need to feel accepted for reasons other than academic ability. He had to negotiate a distancing from staff in order to engage students in his transformatory agenda. Changing students perception of their self and other(s) was more important that being accepted as a ‘good’ teacher. Markus was aware of taken-for-granted assumptions around knowledge production, success and deficit discourse; however did not clearly articulate a relationship between these and his own high-school experience. As described here, Markus’ ability to locate and defend low-achievers in school are what Moore (2004) describes as historically and socially contextualised and produced. This is because students can only be known as a “high-school failure” through the ways success is valued in the historical and social context of school and for Markus this remains unchanged and unchallenged. His own experience as a failed high school student informs his undertaking as a transformative teacher who uses the Drama performance to change how students experience success.

For Rachel, an early preference for “back-stage roles” manifested into avoiding confrontation with students. This reinforced to her that it was her fear of confrontation that was limiting her from becoming a ‘good teacher’. Rachel was aware that students were conditioned as rote learners who saw Drama as “fun” and “a place to socialise”; however rather than challenging these status quo assumptions, shifted her practices to accommodate their conditioning. These actions were informed by her belief that ‘good teachers’ should “be their friend” to show that they care.

Rose believes that it is a privilege to work in a well-resourced school. However, she remains unaware of how these assumptions prevent opportunities for oppositional discourse that can be transformative and empowering. Her early experiences as a talented actor who was “not gorgeous enough” seem to suggest that drama teaching for Rose was a secondary
career choice. Rose tends to compromise her passion and self-care to “keep up” with the demands of her school. However, interestingly despite placing the school’s needs before her own, Rose has managed to hold her position there for over twenty years and maintain a high level of commitment and involvement. Rose tends to be less questioning and more compliant, enmeshed with the school’s culture and expectations. This degree of compliance may have helped her long-term employment and general satisfaction with her role in the school. Compared to the other three teachers, Rose is the most supportive of her school’s vision and acts in accordance with its values.

Bonnie believes that schools neglect and ignore students’ needs for social inclusion and belonging. She believes introverted students are disadvantaged and Drama helps their “personality start to emerge” and gives all students “the opportunity to become themselves and feel safe and happy”. Bonnie believes that introverted students’ potential is compromised because they are ignored through an unspoken expectation that “they will just get on with it”. She works against feelings of “burn-out” to maintain an enthusiastic disposition which supports the introvert to feel welcome and take-risks. Bonnie’s own transformation from an introvert into an extrovert reinforces her belief that confidence and risk-taking is better than being “the shy-kid who never did try”. For Bonnie, ‘good’ Drama teachers should act “bubbly” to facilitate all students’ participation and build their confidence.

These four Drama teachers identified that their own personal experiences as a learner in school, and the culture of the school in which they work, are enmeshed and inform the way they teach, the relationships they form with others and what they see as important in schools. These beliefs are produced through the interaction between their personal experience and those productive institutional and cultural discourses. This interaction is productive, shaping how they perceive themselves as teachers, Drama, and their students.

**Performative Cultures**

**Dominant assessment systems undermine Drama learning**

Performativity changes teachers’ professionalism, shaping it through discourses and practices of accountability, effectiveness, and competition. One specific example is the ways that dominant assessment systems in schools limit Drama learning because they undermine
“personal knowledge and being” (Henry, 2010, p. 50). Assessment becomes a contested space for Drama teachers that they actively resist, oppose, justify and comply with in various ways within the context of their performativity. For Markus, assessments impede “growth” and disrupt exploration of “the bigger issues”. For Rachel, the school’s low expectations around achievement produce a lack of emphasis on assessment. According to Rose, there is a wide emphasis on academic achievement that she complies with, while for Bonnie, assessments undermine Drama learning because of the emphasis on “written-work” which has “killed off numbers” in Drama. For Markus and Rose assessments are connected to “quantitative results” that reinforce their commitment to dominant expectations. For Markus, assessments create anxiety for students that fail to demonstrate their “growth” in the subject. For Rose, assessments are important as evidence that she is meeting expectations for excellence.

Bonnie does not teach Drama as a university entrance subject because it fails to compete in the academic arena of the school. Students choose the subject for developing “self-esteem” and “self-confidence” where “it’s all practical”. Bonnie says “it’s just brilliant to teach because you haven’t got that big black exam hanging over your head” and so students “come in and do it because they want to do it for no other reason”. The absence of assessment creates a very different teaching experience compared to Markus, Rachel and Rose. Bonnie is not constrained by assessment and privileges the freedom that she has to focus on “practical work” and her utopian vision. She says “I’m different to high-school” and that her “situation” allows her to “empower” students and give “them some self-worth back if they are a bit damaged or shy”. The lack of emphasis around assessment provides Bonnie with the freedom to promote practical learning over academic learning.

Markus believes schools are limiting students’ potential and feels frustrated that subjects such as Drama are not embraced for cultivating this potential. As a Drama teacher, who wants to engage in authentic teaching, he is isolated in his efforts to confront deficit discourse. Markus uses the Drama performance to demonstrate to the school that students’ “growth” is more important than outcomes that are incongruent with Drama learning. Markus is what Mockler (2011, p. 525) identifies as a “politically aware teacher” who identifies more with opposing dominant discourses embedded in the neoliberal regime than with the “technical aspects of their role” that include preparing students for assessments.
Markus does what Mockler (2011, p. 525) suggests is pushing the boundaries “beyond what works” and this is encapsulated in his repetitive phrases of wanting to teach “the bigger pictures”. His isolation helps him to interrupt “discourses which threaten to undermine the critical and democratic dimensions of education” (Mocker, 2011, p. 525). As a political teacher Markus has a strong sense of self and professional identity which informs his active stance and “realisation of the broader transformative aims of education” (Mockler, 2011, p. 525). Performance becomes the “public” display of low achievers transcending the constraints of stereotyping produced through deficit discourse. For Markus, the constraints around assessments produce an activist approach where performances become central to the display of student achievement in opposition to the narrow, performative emphasis on standardised testing which limits the ways students can be seen as successful. Markus’ struggle with performativity produces an active stance that is public and oppositional, informed by his own schooling experience as an isolated and low achieving student who struggled with acceptance and belonging.

Rachel suggests that Palm Tree High “assumes” she has “everything under control”. However, her ongoing struggle with student resistance and the wider misunderstanding of Drama often conflicts with expectations for her to improve their “chances” of employment. For Rachel, assessments in Drama are less important than promoting “fun” and “enjoyment” in school. Drama is perceived as improving the overall morale around learning in school. Rachel’s lack of discussion around assessments and emphasis on student behaviour highlights that her struggles with performativity are more about controlling behaviour than meeting expectations for assessment. The wider view that Drama will improve student behaviour by making learning “fun” and “enjoyable” increases Rachel’s isolation. This is because her own knowledge of Drama as being a “discipline” that requires commitment is challenged. Rachel’s comment that “no one in the school knows this stuff [the discipline of Drama]” is indicative of how performativity competes with what Drama knowledge is valued in school. For Rachel, performativity produces isolation and a departure from what she has learnt as valuable knowledge in Drama. Drama learning in this context is shaped by the wider assumption that “education is unquestionably student-affirmative” which places the needs of teachers subordinate to the needs of students (Paulz, 1998, p. 33). In this case, Rachel needs the school to understand the “discipline” of Drama and
accept that she will not be able to transform the long-established culture of “put-downs” and resistance to teachers by using Drama to make learning “fun” and “enjoyable”.

Rose expressed a preoccupation with quantitative results and demands for “extra tuition after school” to assist students in achieving excellence. She claims that it is important to retain proof of results when discussing students’ progress to parents. Rose says she feels “uncomfortable” with the school’s “push for results”. This is because the results tend to present a narrow view of her students’ achievement in Drama that disregards their individuality, she says

Parents and the school are keen on their students getting the best results they possibly can... they would really like it if they were getting, you know, exhibitions and top of the state. I just talk through it, negotiate it, talk about what the kids actually are like.

The wider expectations for “brilliance” demands that Rose commits to the school in ways that deny her of time to pursue professional development needs such as “watching professional theatre” and getting “inspiration from other works”. She says

I can’t complain. I am really lucky but I would like more time.... in a school like this they expect a lot. They expect technical brilliance. They expect incredible performances. You have a lot to live up to all the time.

Rose believes the school is worth committing to because compared to “other schools” her role is a privileged one. She upholds the belief that teaching is “all about them [the students]” and less about her. However, this assumption that ‘good’ teaching should be student-centred constrains her ability to engage students critically in Drama. As Moore (2004, p. 31) argues “discourses will constrain our actions, limit our understandings and force us into subservience to the agendas of dominant groups”. Examples of how ‘good teacher’ discourses constrain Rose are captured in her repetitive comments that teaching is more about “giving”.

Rose says teaching involves “tailoring what [the students] are doing to their level and their interests”. However, by positioning herself in this way she limits opportunities for alternative discourse. An example of this can be seen through her discussion about a recent Drama lesson where students engage in a group-devised performance about “poverty”.
Rose says the students chose the topic and their “message”; “that people who are poor are in it together and that they are their own community”. Rose says that she did not understand what their “message” was about and this contradicts her claim that teaching involves ‘giving’ “[students] skills and techniques to understand the big picture”. This is because she does not engage them in a critical way that may address their taken-for-granted assumptions around socially and economically disadvantaged people. Rose’s belief that her teaching practices must always yield to her students, limits opportunities for critical learning. Rose negotiates the discursive production that ‘good’ teaching involves ‘giving’ by focusing more on what students want. This position prevents oppositional discourse that could act to confront issues around social inequality.

Rose’s performativity is the most in line with dominant expectations for academic achievement out of all the Drama teachers interviewed. At St Anne’s, Drama supports the school’s vision for globally competitive students. This is encapsulated in Rose’s comment; “the Principal is very keen on us being international woman of the world and also put yourself out there kind of thing”. Drama is complicit with these expectations because it is presumed to offer students the confidence necessary to perform well in school and at “job interviews”. For example, Rose reinforces that extroverted students are successful because they are confident, and introverted students need Drama to become “out there”. This categorisation of students reinforces a liberal stance to education that promotes a one size fits all approach (Symes and Preston, 1997). Rose aligns herself with the liberal philosophy as she categorises students in order to isolate the strong performers from the weak. This helps her identify and attend to their deficiencies where she uses Drama to transform the introvert into an extrovert. Rose complies with the assumption that extroversion is ‘better’ and fails to interrogate that this view ignores differences in the population and does not support alternate ways of being successful.

For Bonnie, Drama is valued for building confidence and self-esteem rather than academic potential. Bonnie believes the emphasis on “academic aspirations” and the “limited recognition of practical work” has “killed off numbers [in Drama] in a lot of the schools”. Bonnie claims that students in other schools who are good at Drama are less inclined to do the written work and so are disadvantaged because of this. This suggests that there is a wider view that ‘good’ Drama learning is now connected to competency in writing. Bonnie’s
distance from the wider constraints around assessments tends to produce greater freedom as a teacher which changes her experience of ‘good’ teaching and performative expectations. For Bonnie, ‘good’ teachers find ways through text and performance to engage students in confronting wider issues of cultural and social intolerance. The school’s wider view that Drama serves students’ social and emotional needs more than academic needs works well for Bonnie to exercise restraint from writing, promote practical work and use Drama to change a wider view that learning in school is disempowering. It seems that the lack of expectation around assessments in Drama tends to create less structure around sense-making opportunities. This works well to provide Bonnie with greater opportunities for experimentation which is often missing from traditional ‘good teacher’ discourse.

The politics around success in Australian schools is positioning Drama teachers to submit their knowledge of Drama in favour of quantifiable knowledge. For Markus, Rachel and Bonnie working harder to achieve better results is problematic for Drama teachers who see student deficiencies as systemic and cultural where a collective responsibility is needed in order to address them.

Performativity impacts on the way assessments are delivered by these four Drama teachers and this is negotiated through their school and personal landscape. Rose reinforces that she must prove herself against criteria and have “stuff to back it up”. Markus’ performances to “show” others students “growth” is a form of resistance, Rachel and Bonnie’s marginal status benefits them because the school’s low expectations for results from Drama means that they are under less pressure to perform academically. Drama teachers encounter different expectations for performativity in their schools. However, all are subject to what Ball (2010) claims are structured “values and purposes” where “the potential for inauthenticity and meaninglessness is increasingly an everyday experience for all” (p. 223).

The desire for relationship conflicts with expectations around performativity

The quality of relationships are important for these Drama teachers and this often involves caring about students’ social and emotional development more than their academic development. Markus cares about how students are judged by others in the school and preserving well-being. For Rachel caring about students’ “personal lives” outside of school is important in order to encourage their participation in Drama. Rose cares about “[students’]
development” and opportunities for “empowerment” through school performances. Bonnie cares about students’ social and emotional well-being and wants to make “every kid feel special”. Ball (2003, p. 224) claims that performativity re-structures the ways teachers ‘care’ in the context of teaching and learning. Teachers and students “are expected to ‘care’ about performances” but not each other (Ball, 2003, p. 224). This is a ‘sense strategy’ that works to prevent interrogation of success and deficit discourse by positioning teachers to accept explicit knowledge over embodied and lived knowledge. ‘Caring’ about students then becomes ‘caring’ about their performance rather than their selves. Performativity then changes how teachers understand ‘caring’. The following section demonstrates how performative cultures in schools can interact and inform teacher/student relationships through examples from Markus and Rose.

Markus claims that other teachers “don’t see the benefit [of Drama] in the same way” he does and that “Drama has never been fully respected in [his] school”. For Markus, this is because it does not contribute to “league tables” in the same way other subjects do. Markus suggests that Drama develops “a sense of self” where students can express “publicly without a sense of fear or retribution or bullying”. Markus cares about providing all students with opportunities to overcome the limitations of discursive practices that shape how they are perceived as successful. He believes “every kid is good at something” and there must be subjects in schools that provide opportunities for the students “that don’t fit in anywhere”. Markus reinforces Fiske’s (1999, p. 12) findings that “the Arts reach students who are not otherwise being reached” and that “the Arts connects student to themselves and each other”. Markus embodies the ‘charismatic subjects’ ‘good teacher’ discourse who works to ‘save’ students from the wider limitations of deficit discourse. However, he maintains a balance between work as a teacher and artistic development as a performer. In this sense, Markus is able to overcome the limitations of the ‘charismatic subjects’ where teachers’ “technique” may be compromised if there is an “over reliance on personality” (Moore, 2004, p. 66). This is because he engages in theatre outside of school as a form of inspiration, personal and professional development. This enriches his work as a Drama teacher where he is able to maintain a healthy balance between teaching and life. Markus cares about students overcoming school constraints but he also cares about his own personal development enough that teaching does not ‘take over’ his life. Markus overcomes the
kinds of constraints around teacher/student relationships that are constituted through performativity because care as a teacher extends to care of himself.

In contrast to Markus, Rose neglects her own needs in order to attend to student needs and maintain productivity. She says “you have to give up your time to be with your kids”, and this often involves “running from one thing to the next”. For Rose, there is never enough “time” to “keep up” with ongoing demands for “brilliance” in all aspects of public and academic performance. The consequences of this for Rose are that her lessons become “less impressive” and “performance work can suffer because you don’t have the time to think about it”. These kinds of pressures change what areas of teaching Rose focuses on and in her case she must be seen as competent, competitive, responsible and accountable. Rose does what Ball (2003, p. 216) claims is a consequence of performativity, she “sets the care of the self against the duty to others”. As seen here these kinds of consequences impede her professional development as a Drama teacher because the lack of “time” prevents her from being re-inspired in order to maintain a healthy balance between teaching and life like Markus. Unlike Markus, Rose is enmeshed in the performative culture of St Anne’s which makes it difficult for her to attend to student relationships in the same way he does. This is because “time” constraints compete with her needs as a teacher and person. In Rose’s case, putting the students before her own needs compromises the quality of their relationship and tends to foster a kind of resentment that is unspoken and underpins her work.

The Complexity of Negotiating Professional Identity

The four Drama teachers were unaware of how their personal histories as students informed their attitudes and values around teaching and learning although I saw this as clearly connected. As a Drama teacher, Markus positions himself as a critical educator where he resists privileging the knowledge valued in school and makes attempts to transform discourse around achievement. Markus is critical of the low status of Drama and how his students are judged in the school. This is connected to his own experience of disempowerment as a student in school. Markus’ early experiences as a learner in school shapes his position of resistance where he adopts a role as a “transformative teacher” with an emancipatory vision (Symes & Preston, 1997, p. 283). Markus’ experience of being a failed student mediates his work as a Drama teacher and his desire to transcend some of the deficit discourses circulating schools. Markus’ desire to explore “the bigger pictures” and
promote his growth model of success is connected to his own “self-narrative” which informs all facets of his work (Sachs, 2001).

Markus aims to be a transformative teacher who works to create a classroom that values mutual respect “where the limits of possibility are exploited to the maximum and to the advantage of the disadvantaged, to those who are earmarked to lose in the educational system” (Symes & Preston, 1997, p. 283). The public performance he organised for his “very low achieving boys” is an example of his desire to promote the “growth” of disadvantaged students. Markus is driven by emancipation where his underlying objective of “more to be done” governs his work and is his “transformative agenda” (Symes & Preston, 1997, p. 283). This transformative agenda interacts with the charismatic subjects ‘good’ teacher discourse and allows him to confront limitations around ‘good’ teaching by engaging in emancipation. For Markus, the ideal teacher is someone who supports students “that don’t fit in anywhere” through engaging them in discussions about wider cultural and systemic issues that shape their world. These actions are informed by his own high-school failure and displacement which produced a desire to help “change people’s perceptions” of themselves.

Markus suggests that to be a ‘good’ Drama teacher “its got to be in your blood” where there is “a fire inside”. Markus exemplifies Moore’s (2004, p. 66) claim that ‘good’ teaching for the charismatic subject is “innate” where the “teacher owes success to personality traits that are, within the person’s ‘essence’”. As a ‘charismatic subject’, Markus wants “to help underprivileged, underperforming students to do well” and this is mostly “achieved in unconventional, contingent ways that are partly carried out for the benefit of the teacher” (Moore 2004, p. 58). As an example, his use of the public performance to help low achievers transcend stereotypes results in disappointment when his efforts go unnoticed by other staff. Markus embodies the ‘charismatic subjects’ discourse and yet is also a transformative teacher. This is because he “partly overcomes” the limitations of this good teacher discourse because he positions himself within “emancipation” engaging “students critically and productively with the world” (Moore, 2004, p. 73). In this sense, Markus’ professional identity is produced through the ‘charismatic subjects’ discourse that mediates his work as a transformative teacher.
Bonnie reinforced belonging in her classes and this was connected to a sense of isolation and boredom she felt as a student in school. For Bonnie, schools are judgemental places that produce “stereotypes” and as a teacher responds by “empowering” students and “giving them some self-worth back”. Bonnie’s professional identity is rooted in both the ‘charismatic subjects’ discourse and that of the ‘competent craftpersons’ and therefore conflicted (Moore, 2004). As a charismatic teacher she emphasises caring with an “over reliance on personality and under reliance on technique”; however also, emphasises the ‘competent craftpersons’ who believes in proper preparation for lessons that are “interesting, accessible and well thought out” (Moore 2004, p. 76). In her discussion about how she ‘fell’ into Drama teaching, she rejects that teachers are ‘born’ (charismatic discourse) and supports that teachers are ‘made’ (competent craftpersons discourse) (Moore 2004, p. 76).

Bonnie’s professional identity is negotiated through contradictory spaces of teaching constituted within these ‘good teacher’ discourses. As an example, her “bubbly personality” and shyness, energy and tiredness inform how she enacts her position. She recalls her students asking her why she is always “happy” to which she responds “I’m not always happy but I have to act happy”. The expectation that ‘good’ Drama teachers should be “fun” and create “energetic” classes “where there is a really healthy, happy, vibrant atmosphere in the room” produce a suppressed sense of self where she often internalised her true feelings. Bonnie’s “image of the ideal teacher” (Moore, 2004) then seems to restrict opportunities for her to engage in authentic teaching which involves “a genuine expression of self” (Cranton, 2006, p. 29). Bonnie’s belief that shyness is disempowering and that she must work against these feelings to be ‘good’ is informed by her own experience as “the shy-kid who never did try” in school. This informs her work as a Drama teacher who believes that paying attention to the “nerdy kid in the corner” will somehow encourage them to be more forthcoming and confident. For Bonnie, the ‘good teacher’ discourses described here limit potential for authentic teaching because they compete with her understanding of how ‘good’ teachers should act.

Rose believes that she was an unattractive but talented actor at school and university. This experience produced a belief that she was a better teacher than performer. Rose emphasises the importance that image and “talent” play in a successful career as an actor.
These beliefs interacted with the school culture to produce her professional identity. Rose claims that Drama cultivates “confidence” and produces “out there” students. She acquiesces to the discursive practices and hegemonic structure of the school where it is reinforced that girls need to present and speak well to be considered successful. Rose claims that the demands of the school outweigh her professional development needs. She negotiates these demands by investing her time and energy into school productions that she believes provide her with opportunities to “direct” which are aligned with her “passion” and skills. However, school productions often produce internal conflict around a lack of “time” for other things. Rose often describes her work as a teacher involving “not enough time”, “rushing backwards and forwards”, “keeping up with them”, “kids learning”, being “top of your game” and the need to substantiate results with “written work”. She over-emphasises her “love” of teaching which works well to suppress her desire for more “time” to focus on her own development as a Drama teacher. Her sense of failure as an actor and choice to be a teacher was something that she was constantly negotiating and working to suppress in order to accommodate the needs of the school. The school’s expectations for her to balance these demands tended to produce a departure from creative pursuits such as being affiliated with amateur theatre outside of school in a similar way to Markus.

Rose neglects her own needs and remains enmeshed with the school culture that reinforces teachers as subordinate to parents and the institution. She believes that although she must be flexible with ongoing last minute room changes, prioritise the school needs over personal and professional needs, is vulnerable to over work and long hours, produce and justify competitive “results”, she is supported by the school and must work hard to maintain her position to be worthy of this support. The school neglects Rose’s need for professional development as it promotes a competitive agenda that teachers need to “keep up with”. This agenda influences how Rose identifies with her role, Drama and her students. Rose has difficulty disrupting the dominant agenda that inhibits critical learning and authentic teaching because there is “not enough time” to “think” about other things. The discursive practices around “time” shape how Rose understands her role as a teacher which in this case is ‘busy’ and therefore demonstrates her worth as a productive teacher.

In the case of Rachel, who identified as being a “shy” learner with strengths in “backstage roles out of the limelight”, the students’ resistance to teachers became a constant struggle.
This required her to negotiate her reserved nature in order to become the authoritarian and confrontational Drama teacher necessary to cope. Rachel tends to exemplify the ‘reflective practitioners’ ‘good teacher’ discourse who evaluates their practices, improves on their planning and management skills, through practice, reflection, and discussion with other teachers. As an example, she says becoming a ‘good teacher’ involves both “practice” and “making mistakes”;

I think training, practice, reflecting on how lessons have gone or your programme went and making all the adjustments that need to happen. And also, conferring and talking to people who are out there and who are doing it.

Moore (2004, p. 102) claims that the ‘reflective practitioner’ discourse, although not as valued as other ‘good teacher’ discourse in teacher education, has power in “exploring the nature of teaching and learning processes”. This can also promote deep reflection in a qualitative way that reveals how the “social world is constructed by people” (Moore, 2004, p. 102). This promotes a dialogue between the teacher and their understanding of the wider cultural and systemic issues that may limit Drama’s transformatory potential within their school. Although Rachel feels ill-equipped and inexperienced when dealing with the students, she is sympathetic to the wider issues that shape how they think about teachers and schools. She says “in a way I can understand [the lack of regard for education at this school] because I think education should have evolved to suit teenagers a little bit better by now”. Rachel encounters a conflict between her own belief that Drama has the potential to transform the school culture of resistance and how futile this might be.

Rachel negotiates her professional identity through reflecting on her own practices and the wider issues that shape her work. This position tends to direct the problems of the school away from the deficiencies of the teacher. As captured in her comment, “I want it to be a fabulous thing here and because of inexperience and lack of prior knowledge with all the kids, these things add up to it not being nearly as good as it could be”. This tends to alleviate her from taking full responsibility for the school’s expectation for Drama to improve the morale of students. However, she compromises her own knowledge of Drama in order to accommodate the level of students.
As a Drama teacher Rachel maintains that learning by “discovery” empowers students. However, she must negotiate their conditioning as rote learners who see Drama as “a bit of fun”. As seen here, Rachel’s early experiences as a discovery learner are enduring and inform her pedagogy. However, as a Drama teacher she must negotiate the culture of resistance students have towards teachers. This produces a conflict between her belief that Drama involves experimentation and discovery processes that involve trust and risk-taking and the students’ strong resistance to teachers.

These four Drama teachers negotiate their professional identity in different ways that are complexly interwoven between their schools’ performative cultures, dominant discourse, and their own experience as learners in schools. As Apple (1999, p. 9) has argued “education is a site of struggle and compromise” that these four Drama teachers can attest. Their struggle to maintain their position as a Drama teacher in their school often involves compromising their own needs as people and as teachers. In the case of Rose, her need to perform as a productive and competitive teacher compromises the transformatory potential of Drama. However, in the case of Markus, his need to be a transformative teacher often compromises the support of others. For Rachel, being seen as competent and coping is more important than Drama “being a fabulous thing”. She compromises her own knowledge of Drama to accommodate the needs of students. For Bonnie, her need to be seen as a “fun” and “energetic” teacher often compromises authenticity in teaching which inhibits critical perspectives.

**Transformatory Potential of Teaching and Learning in Drama**

For Boal (1992, p. xxx) the study of Drama and theatre is “the art of looking at ourselves” and “a form of knowledge” that “can also be a means of transforming society”. This statement suggests that learning in Drama and change begins first and foremost with the self; however in schools as discussed here students’ and their teachers’ selves are constructed through participation in discourse which shapes how personal experience is mediated in the learning environment. If we are to consider Drama as a transformative medium that is powerful in changing lives and perceptions then “creating coherence between discourse and practice” is essential in order to overcome constraints in schools that can marginalise the disadvantaged, perpetuate vulnerability and isolation, compartmentalise, promote one worldview that holds supremacy over others which is
disempowering and disrupts a desire for learning that is grounded in openness to consider possibility (Friere 1998, p. 15).

According to many researchers Drama is transformative in that it can transform school cultures, change disadvantaged students’ perceptions of themselves and their abilities, foster preparedness for change in an ever-changing world, uncover taken-for-granted assumptions, and connect students to themselves and others in more meaningful ways (Neelands 2007; Anderson 2012; Ewing & Gibson, 2010; Fiske & Edward, 1999; Robinson, 2009; O’Toole, 2002). However, as discussed in this thesis, when mobilised within the constraints of contemporary 21st Century schooling the potential for transformation is limited because of the ways discourse permits and forbids certain ways of acting that often go unnoticed and unchallenged. For Doyle (1993, p. 2) “unless we can somehow identify and examine these constraints, educators will always be bound by them” where “getting trapped in the surface of schooling” restricts the “possibilities that lie beneath them”.

Despite the current reform movements producing new teacher professional identities which privilege efficiency, accountability and discourses of professionalism that impact on their relationships with students, their own personal lives and ambition, commitment to service, intensified working conditions and morale, Drama teachers have demonstrated that although they find ways to reclaim their power through Drama, they have different understandings and definitions of its transformatory potential which is often grounded in school culture.

Bonnie believes Drama “can transform a kid who always felt like an outsider” that it is the quality of the teacher/student relationship that creates a cultural shift in students’ “thinking about themselves”. For Bonnie, transformatory potential in Drama is less about artistic endeavour and more about personal transformation occurring at a micro-level. She believes this depends on the teachers’ capacity to connect with students and promote inclusivity. These ideas are connected to her self-narrative as a “shy-kid” who “hated school” and training as a teacher who adopted the belief that she must act to “make every kid feel special”. Bonnie identifies transformatory potential as something connected to the teacher’s ability to “build up warmth and relationship” rather than the artist who creates change through performance which is more dominant in Markus.
Contrary to Bonnie, Markus is macro focused and believes transformatory experiences depend on the Drama teachers’ ability to “go out of their way” and “open up” the “funny little room at the back corner of the school” so others can “really know what goes on inside”. For Markus, the transformatory potential of Drama depends on the teachers’ negotiation of dominant constraints around knowledge. Performances are also transformative because they explore “big issues” and encourage audiences to question and create change in their communities. Markus’ expressions of transformatory potential are connected to his professional identity as an activist teacher who uses Drama as a form of emancipation from school constraints. He sees his position central to cultivating transformation of dominant beliefs around academic potential in school.

Rachel claims that transformatory potential of Drama in her school is connected to her “idea” about “embracing everyone” where there is “not just one way... one path” but a “massive branching out tree” with “lots of different opportunities”. Rachel sees school as limiting potential in the same way Markus does; however believes positive change is embedded in a collective approach rather than an individual one. She is less optimistic about her capacity to create change and more dependent on the institutions capacity for leadership in wider systemic and cultural issues. Rachel must negotiate the contradictory position she finds herself within where creating change is possible through Drama but not possible within her school. Rachel believes that transformation depends on the school; however the school believes transformation depends on “increasing arts as a general discipline to transform the culture of the school” which only acts to further ‘responsible’ Rachel as the individual who must deliver. This tends to reveal a dilemma for the ‘reflective practitioner’ who has come to believe ‘good teachers’ improve teaching practices by attending to their own deficiencies, which can tend to diminish a consideration of “the nature of teaching and learning” (Moore, 2004) within the wider school context. The belief that Drama will “up chances” for students to achieve signifies that transformation at Palm Tree High is connected to performativity and Rachel is beginning to align herself with this.

Rose believes Drama transforms students’ perceptions of others and promotes freedom of expression, she says “it’s about their feeling of empowerment; that all students can actually do anything, be anyone” and “experience life from somebody else’s perspective”. However, as seen in her example about her students exploring ‘poverty’, Rose does not challenge
taken-for-granted assumptions around views of the socially disadvantaged. Transformatory potential is informed by teachers using their critical awareness (Greene, 1978) and in Rose’s case this is limited due to her lack of understanding around wider social and cultural issues and long-term commitment to the school’s culture. Rose’s perceptions around transformation are directly linked to the culture of St Anne’s that is enmeshed in discourses of the socially and economically disadvantaged and powerful. These beliefs restrict Rose’s understanding of transformation and ability to contest dominant spaces. Rose’s emphasis that “teaching is about [students]” tends to restrict her capacity for critical engagement that could confront some of the contradictions that limit Drama’s transformatory potential.

As seen through Markus, transformatory potential of Drama is produced through risk-taking, maintaining his involvement in outside-of-school artistic communities, and public performances. This highlights that transformation is mobilised through action and awareness. For Bonnie, transformatory potential in Drama involves attending to the students’ social and emotional dynamics in the classroom and less about a critical examination of self and involvement in the world. Rose maintains that Drama transforms students perceptions of the world although this is restricted and mobilised within the school. Markus and Rachel are ‘collective’ in their approaches while Bonnie and Rose are ‘individual’.

Drama teachers’ understanding of transformatory potential in linked to Boal’s (1999) statement that the study of Drama involves “looking at ourselves” and “society”. This is reflected in the statements of Rose who says “Drama gives students opportunities to experience life from somebody else’s perspective”, and Rachel who believes Drama can “affect how [others] view that issue”. Bonnie also echoes Boal’s sentiment when she claims Drama promotes tolerance and respect for other cultures, and Markus who claims Drama explores the wider issues that often shape and limit our understanding of the world. The transformatory potential of Drama was something that these four Drama teachers were constantly negotiating within their schools. Their different ways of negotiating this terrain was informed by the school’s different performative cultures and the Drama teachers’ understanding and interaction with Drama knowledge as learners themselves. The pervasive infiltration of performative cultures often inhibits the Drama teachers’ ability to contest dominant spaces required to liberate their students from the constraints of knowledge
production and deficit and success discourse, as seen through Rose. This is because more holistic approaches to learning are not valued as can be seen through the structure of the assessment system. The transformatory potential that many see possible in subjects such as Drama are therefore dependent on teachers taking a critical stance to education as seen through Markus who is able to create spaces for oppositional discourse such as the public performance. As Markus attests, for some Drama teachers, although there are constraints around knowledge, learning and achievement constituted through sense strategies, many possibilities exist in schools to re-claim a sense of power.

Limitations, Implications and Future Research
This study explored the lived experience of four Drama teachers. The limitations of the study included the small sample. However, in order to allow a broader description of lived experience to highlight the complexities associated with teaching and learning in Drama, the Drama teachers’ different school cultures were important as were their varying degrees of experience. This study acknowledges there are many other stories of Drama teachers within a variety of Western Australian contemporary schools, and additional themes, my interpretation is limited to these four case studies.

The pre-categorisation approach to the data analysis was employed so that my personal experience as a Drama teacher could be isolated from context and allow me to incorporate the literature. However, while this framework worked well to extrapolate material pertaining to professional identity formation and links to dominant discourse, the ‘building tasks’ can impose constraining limits on the analysis that a more emergent approach could explore.

This thesis provides a view of Drama teaching that is different to previous studies in that it addresses the complexity of Drama teachers’ work and how transformatory potential can be compromised in Drama. This is different from the literature that often promotes the transformatory potential of Arts subjects in schools as being important and used to justify its existence in the curriculum.

As a researcher, I have explained and described how these four Drama teachers navigate the complex domain of teaching in schools and their professional identity. I can therefore claim that Drama teaching for these four Drama teachers is a complex undertaking in their
school that is enmeshed with their own experience as learners, performative cultures and their understanding of how these cultures impact on their work. These four Drama teachers make compromises that allow them to operate in schools as a Drama teacher; however this often compromises transformatory potential and opportunities for authentic teaching that engages critical perspectives. As seen through Markus, there are possibilities to engage students in a critical discourse that can be empowering and help them to transform perspectives around achievement. An exploration into how teachers negotiate their professional identity and performative cultures within other subject areas could provide educators, researchers and policy-makers with a more transparent view of how the current educational landscape may limit the potential of the dominant agenda to improve the numerate and literate outcomes of all Australian children.

Conclusion

Discourses in contemporary schools are influenced by a model of education that supports “the interests of global capitalism” (McGregor, 2009, p. 356), where schools tend to “reinforce old hierarchy subjects” (Robinson, 2009, p. 235). These policies promote literacy and numeracy that support rationalist goals for learning and assessment. If subjects such as Drama are considered valuable and significant why are Arts subjects “and the students who excel at them” being pushed “even further to the margins of education?” (Robinson, 2009, p. 146). The political and social expectations for students to contribute economically denies that education is complex because of social, cultural, racial and gendered differences. There are limitations around discourses of success that are disempowering and marginalising Drama students their teachers’ work. Subjects such as Drama have the potential to transform how success and knowledge is produced in the complex landscape of contemporary schools and Drama teachers are positioned well for this.

The current reform movements discourage quality relations between teachers and students where resistance emerges in order to engage students in more meaningful explorations of important themes and issues many believe central to learning Drama (Wright & Gerber, 2004, Wales, 2009, Henry, 2010, Neelands, 2007). As expressed through Markus, Rose, Bonnie and Rachel, Drama engages “human lives” and “human stories” where relatedness and trust are central to Drama teaching and learning. Drama teachers negotiate both personal and professional identities within dominant discourses which inform the way they
adjust to school culture to be recognised as a Drama teacher (Thornton, 2013; Maclure, 1993). The lived experience of the Drama teacher is complex because discourse and their own histories influence how they negotiate their professional identity often producing varying degrees of resistance and compliance in schools.

As a researcher I can claim that these four Drama teachers’ lived experience of teaching Drama in a secondary school is unique and dependent on the context of their life history, professional identity and the culture of the schools they work in. The struggles they encounter produce internal conflicts that shape their professional identity which often compete with their values on learning and teaching. These struggles are ongoing for these Drama teachers while they continue to “fight” for hope and maintain the belief that their work makes a difference to the schooling experience of their students.

These Drama teachers’ conceptions of self have been constructed through discourse, as Ellis and Flaherty (1992, p. 64) claim; “we become not what we have learned to call our true selves but that which the various discourses in which we participate define as or make thinkable as a self, or a true self”. Drama teaching for these Drama teachers are “the products of the discourses through which we speak and are spoken into existence” (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p. 64). With this view in mind, Drama teaching is a construction and Drama teachers have been constructed through participation in discourse. To summarise the epistemological assumption, what is possible to know about Drama teachers’ work and how they perceive themselves is constructed through discursive practices that produce performances, self-regulations and powerful truths that reinforce normalising expectations.

As a researcher I support Smyth’s consideration that by introducing programs that shift the focus from student-centredness to “teacher-centredness” built around “life history” could become a powerful source of knowledge for teachers that “could provide the first significant loosening in entrenched positions” (Smyth, 1987, p. 131). As explored through Smyth (1987, p. 131) and reinforced by this study “teachers want schools to be different from the way they are” and this “potential” highlights transformatory ambition. As some of the Drama teachers have demonstrated there is struggle in achieving this vision as the school and neo-liberal context produce competing expectations which changes the ways they interact with students where “their attempts to respond in personally satisfying ways” are constrained
(Smyth, 1987, p. 131). There is hope for Drama teachers in schools who connect to their lived experience and life histories as a powerful source of influence on their work.

Transformatory potential of Drama depends on Drama teachers’ interrogation of the dominant discursive practices that shape their work and limit the possibilities in Drama. As identified through Markus, Bonnie, Rachel and Rose, Drama is transformatory when it changes perception of self and others and this is their claim to the value of their work in schools.
References


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Appendix 1 - Interview Questions

Interview 1

Part 1: Teacher as a student of Drama

Prompt questions:

- What sorts of things did you enjoy about learning Drama?
- What were some of the things you found challenging?
- Did you study Drama or Drama education at university?
- Tell me about why you chose to teach Drama.
- Tell me about some of the performances you were involved in. Did you perform? Work as a member of the production team? What were some of your strengths?

Part 2: The teacher of Drama

Prompt questions:

- Tell me about the last lesson you taught. What worked? What didn’t?
- What gets in the way of you doing a good job?
- Tell me about both a successful and difficult rehearsal.
- How do you become a good Drama teacher?
- What are some of the things you feel passionate about teaching Drama?
- What sorts of things do you like and dislike about teaching Drama?
- How does the school support you in your work?
- What frustrates you the most about being a Drama teacher in your school?

Interview 2

Part 3: Drama in school

- What is good Drama teaching? What is good Drama teaching in your school?
- In your opinion, what are some of the most important things students should learn in Drama? What is good Drama learning? When do students learn best in Drama?
- What do students learn in Drama in your school?
- What special contribution do you think Drama teaching makes to learning?
- Tell me about the last school production you were involved in? What was your role? What sort of feedback did you receive on the production? What sort of feedback did you receive personally?
- What contributes to the success of Drama in schools?
- How can Drama be transformative in schools?
- What does a thriving Drama culture in school depend on?
- What could your school do more of that would support you in your work?
## Appendix 2 - CDA Toolkit Summary

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACHER</th>
<th>PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY</th>
<th>RELATIONSHIPS</th>
<th>POLITICS</th>
<th>CONNECTIONS</th>
<th>S/S AND KNOWLEDGE</th>
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<td>High-school failure</td>
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<td>School disadvantages low achievers</td>
<td>Own high-school experience informs emancipatory perspective, values and beliefs connected to achievement at school.</td>
<td>Drama is transformative</td>
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<td>Transformative agenda</td>
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<td>School system disprivileges growth model</td>
<td>Own high-school experience informs emancipatory perspective, values and beliefs connected to achievement at school.</td>
<td>“Bigger pictures” questions status quo. Drama exposes wider institutional discourses that limits and marginalises low achievers.</td>
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<td>Growth model of success</td>
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<td>Drama has low surveillance, provides security and belonging to those in need</td>
<td>Own high-school experience informs emancipatory perspective, values and beliefs connected to achievement at school.</td>
<td>Drama is transformative</td>
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<td>Rejects stereotypes</td>
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<td>Work hard, get ahead success model</td>
<td>Shy disposition disempowers</td>
<td>“Bigger pictures” questions status quo. Drama exposes wider institutional discourses that limits and marginalises low achievers.</td>
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<td>Artist and Educator</td>
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<td>Drama supports confidence building and self-esteem.</td>
<td>Need to be liked connected to survival and self-doubt</td>
<td>Drama is a discipline, fun, organised chaos.</td>
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<td>Teacher who saves and repairs</td>
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<td>Emphasis on vocational training.</td>
<td>Unrealistic expectations connected to pre-conceived romantic view of schooling</td>
<td>Mistakes involved confronting high expectations and student resistance</td>
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<td>Drama used as dumping ground for bad students</td>
<td>Teaching is caring through persistence and acceptance.</td>
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<td>Rachel</td>
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<td>Students are critical and self-motivated learners who love Drama</td>
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<td>Loss of creative aspirations linked to burn-out</td>
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99
Bonnie

- The shy-kid who hated school
- Transformed low confidence through Drama
- Sees Drama as practical, fun, not serious, not a discipline.
- Organised and efficient
- Resilient, social and saving

- Promotes relatedness
- Values transformatory potential of Drama
- Believes Drama is fun and not serious or academic
- Low surveillance and low expectations of Drama
- Drama success is seen as distinct from academic success
- Drama operates independently from other subjects
- Drama is different and has no designated classroom space
- View that shy and introverted students are disempowered connected to own school experience
- Need for Drama to be open and remain exclusive linked to hating school as a student
- Drama develops confidence, promotes tolerance, is transformative, collaborative and relational. Teaching is political, saves damaged students, exhaustive, relentless, relational and reciprocal.