THE EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN ONE ALL FEMALE DRAMA CLASSROOM
- A CASE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the experiences of adolescent girls in one all female drama classroom. It is underpinned by contemporary educational and sociological philosophies which argue the education of adolescent girls needs readdressing in terms of the gender appropriateness of curriculum planning and implementation. Central to the focus of this research is the issue of gender, and how adolescent girls need educative experiences which empower and enfranchise them to make informed decisions about their own lives. This study argues that educational drama as a learning discipline, provides a powerful medium for adolescent girls to consider and assess their own lived gender realities.
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In memory of Evelyn Cecila Lee
STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed:.............................................................

Date:........................................
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Preamble

In the last decade, the issue of ‘gender’ has become a much debated, often complex, and certainly contentious subject of educational academic inquiry. A new focus on the powerful influence that gender has on learning in our classrooms has meant in particular, a reassessment of traditional pedagogic approaches to the teaching of girls. Spurred by the women’s movement which gained momentum in the 1960’s, enquiry into how we teach our adolescent girls has meant for educators, a new awareness of the social and educational forces which govern the way girls learn.

In education this is a relatively new phenomenon, but the wider issue of gender has been the focus of rigorous discourse across both sociological and scientific disciplines for some years where it has been defined and described in terms ranging from genetic biological determinism, to that attributed to social learning and enculturation. In moving the spotlight onto the educational arena, educators are finally addressing traditional ideologies of schooling which have tended to favour the male scholastic experience over that of the female.
In striving to define what it meant by gender here, this research favours those perspectives which interpret gender as a socially constructed symbolic creation capable of changing over time, and actively dependent on interactions in the social world. (Wood 1994)

Social learning theorists such as Albert Bandura (1977) argue that through continued interaction with the social world, gender categories are continually constructed and maintained as individuals adopt socially specific behaviours and attitudes deemed appropriate for their particular gender. More simply, what individuals are shown and believe to be the ‘truth,’ becomes the lived reality. In the past, gender stereotypes have often been significantly upheld and promoted through institutional frameworks such as education where established gender roles and attitudes have been reinforced through powerful attitudes and perceptions of the appropriate gender roles. Indeed such an emphasis on the prescribed social roles of both males and females has resulted in an ideological orientation in traditional education which has been strongly skewed towards the career paths and intellectual development of young males, and the domestication of young women.

Significantly a woman’s world has been traditionally relegated to the realms of the home and family where they have typically modelled themselves as nurturers and care-takers. The opportunity to be heard has often been silenced by socially constructed ideologies which have firmly established a woman’s role as somehow gender inferior to that of her male counterparts. According to de Beauvoir (1953), women have
never constituted a closed and independent society, but rather have formed an integral part of a larger group which has been traditionally governed by males. Yet the important role women play in everyday society has been historically narrowed and compartmentalised into those associated with the family and the home. Their intellectual and creative potentials have often been stifled by educational and institutional frameworks which have failed to challenge women to look beyond familial domestication, to other dimensions of learning and knowing.

In sociological research alone, there has been a notable absence of studies conducted on women’s lives and experiences. Bernard (1981) argues, ‘the male world has been observed, studied, researched, analysed and interpreted with a minimum recognition of the female world with in fact, hardly a glance in its direction.’ (p.13) As a consequence, young women in particular have often moved through their educational lives without confronting sufficient challenge to cognitively and creatively explore the multitude of potentialities which exist for them in their personal, academic, and working lives.

In recent years this has changed. Post-structuralist feminism with its emphasis on the multiplicity of truth and meaning, has been highly instrumental in challenging traditional patriarchal ideology that only one universal reality exists - that of the male. The lives of women have become the focus of a myriad of feminist research (e.g. Gilligan 1982, Blackman 1989, Alonso & Koreck 1989, Lykes 1989) which takes as its
essential framework, the urgency to highlight not only the oppression of women in Western society, but to document authentically, women’s voices existing cross-culturally in an array of societal contexts.

In particular, contemporary feminist scholars such as Spender & Sarah 1980, Oakley 1981, Gilligan 1982, and Belenky 1986 have argued that the female experience has been significantly limited by sociological and cultural frameworks which have historically negated the importance of their voices as artists, decision makers, and leaders.

The important emphasis of this research is the exploration of female ‘voices’, described by Brown and Gilligan (1992) as the ‘pathway that brings the inner psychic world of feelings and thoughts into the open air of relationship where it can be heard by oneself and others.’ (p.21) In allowing space for these voices to be heard, women are able to reveal and explore the ideological assumptions which govern their lives and in turn, pursue alternative dimensions of growth and communication.

For adolescent girls in particular, this space to be heard is often absent altogether. Indeed as Pipher (1994) points out, adolescent girls have long been ignored in psychological and sociological study - much to their detriment. Yet importantly, adolescence represents a significant passage for girls in terms of gender development and perception:
Adolescence poses problems of connection for girls coming of age in Western culture and girls are tempted or encouraged to solve these problems by excluding themselves or excluding others .. by being a good woman, or by being selfish .. (Gilligan, Lyons & Hanmer 1990, pp.9–10)

Additionally de Beauvoir (1953) argues that, ‘young girls slowly bury their childhood, put away their independent and imperious selves and submissively enter adult existence ... (in adolescence) girls stop ‘being’ and start ‘seeming’. (de Beauvoir in Pipher 1994, p.21–22) Whilst de Beauvoir acknowledges the impossibility of fashioning women into copies of men, she argues that sociological equality between the sexes would result in alternative and fulfilling modes of self expression in the individual.

Pipher (1994) contends that for young women, adolescence is a time of marked internal development and cultural indoctrination where minds are both shaped and oppressed by the society in which we live. Adolescent girls are being trained to be what culture prescribes for them, rather than what they themselves want to be. As Pipher points out, education has often let girls down, particularly those who are gifted and artistic, through its active promotion and maintenance of stereotypical attitudes about academic selection and suitability of curriculum subjects for girls.

More than ever, education plays a monumental role in shaping and stimulating the imaginative, cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and social
development of our young women. Maxine Greene (1978) argues that the continued imposition of traditional gender roles on young women make them falsify their sense of themselves and negate any feeling of empowerment in the process. For Greene, education is the vital agency through which adolescent girls can move beyond these lived gender realities in order to reassess their world. In particular, she advocates, ‘an intensified awareness of women’s own realities and the shape of their own lived worlds,’ in the learning experiences of all women. (p.219)

Of ultimate importance for Greene is a learning environment which,

..provides openings for a sense of agency where work is concerned, as they present the possibility of varied callings for both males and females. We need to allow for aspirations of unprecedented kinds..where there is ambivalence towards, and confusion about work in the classroom, openings cannot but be closed.. (p.253)

Greene (1978) asserts that the ultimate and most pressing task for contemporary educators, is to provide stimulating learning contexts which enable our students to make decisions intelligently and authentically for themselves. Learning experiences must equip students with the conceptual tools, the self respect, and the courage and conviction, to choose what they consider right for them in their adolescent lives.

Greene’s provocative words reflect many of the fundamental concerns of this study: Does drama offer opportunity to the girls to explore beyond their own lived gender realities? What are their daily drama
experiences? Is there a space for ‘aspirations of unprecedented kinds’ to emerge and be explored? How do girls perpetuate their own gender identities in the drama classroom? Are girls challenged in the drama classroom to learn beyond what they know, and indeed, do they have a desire and courage to take up that challenge? What effect would a female researcher have on the girls’ attitudes and behaviours in the drama classroom over an extended research period?

As a learning medium, drama allows a dynamic space where interaction between the real and the fictitious occurs through the active collaboration and negotiation of the participants. The power of the dramatic medium for students is the opportunity it awards them to explore issues and ideas within the safe confines of a dramatic framework. As Cecily O’Neill (1995) argues, in the dramatic world students are:

*free to alter their status, adopt different roles and responsibilities, play with elements of reality, and explore alternate existences... (they can) slip the bonds of (their) identities and participate in other forms of existence.*

*(p.151)*

Rob Shields (1991) in arguing the significance of the ‘theatre space’ for its participants, provides a useful description which can be transferred to the dramatic space in which our students work and perform. Shields describes the theatre as ‘a discourse of space’ where the interaction of ideas, symbol and language, works to reveal notions of truth, reality and
causality. (in Tait 1994, p.131) In the drama classroom, students manipulate and explore the same elements which shape the theatrical artistic experience, in order to form, present, and respond to dramatic action.

Participation in drama and theatre process, allows students to engage in what Augusto Boal (1979,1990) terms a ‘politics of imagination’ – the potential to envision alternative realities for their own group or society through the use of dramatic reflection and distance. Through participation in drama activity students can move beyond one-dimensional levels of cognitive, aesthetic, and affective learning as they discover the multiplicity of meanings and ways of knowing that exist in their own classroom.

Nicholson (1995) stresses that one of the key concerns for reconceptualising the importance of gender in drama practice, is an acknowledgment that dramatic genre is not ideologically neutral but is multifaceted and multivocal. She argues that female students must be encouraged to make, perform, and interpret drama with an understanding that genre, form and content, combine contingently and with historicity, to create dramatic meaning. (p.23)

The capacity of the dramatic mode to reveal ideological and symbolic meaning through the actions of the participants, meant that as a researcher I was often able to draw ideas, questions and hunches from what I saw represented in the girls’ work, and validate this later with
them in interviews and more informal discussions. Like a painter or a playwright, both roles I felt I embraced during the research process, I endeavoured to observe closely the natural context in which I was emerged in order to describe and analyse what I saw and heard authentically and explicitly. It was the creative collaboration within the drama classroom which allowed that authentic space to emerge over time.

Active involvement in drama awarded this group of adolescent girls continued opportunities to engage in a cooperative learning space where they could create their own dramatic narratives in ways which transcended gender segregation and limitation. It allowed and invited valuable aesthetic moments to critically deconstruct and reshape gender stereotypes and expectations, not only of their own sex, but of their male counterparts also.

Participation in drama helped to reveal the authentic stories of these young women by creating an arena where their voices could be heard freely and naturally. It provided creative experiences for them to respond to the ‘inner life of their imagination’ (Chandler 1980) whilst exploring the world on their own terms. Indeed it allowed, as Virginia Woolf wrote, a world, ‘bared of its covering and given an intenser life.’ (Woolf 1957 in Greene 1978, p.222)
The Researcher’s Voice

During the last five years as a tertiary drama educator, I have been a privileged guest in many drama classrooms in Queensland schools. In my role as co-ordinator for student teachers majoring in drama, I have observed a great many drama lessons in both single and mixed sexed classrooms. Moving from classroom to classroom, I became particularly fascinated by the behaviour and interactions of adolescent girls in drama lessons, as compared to that of young men.

As a drama educator interested in the way students approach and form drama activity, I noted that the ‘modus operandi’ for ‘all female’ drama classrooms was in many ways quite different to that observed in all male classrooms. There were of course many similarities observed in the classroom behaviour of both males and females - the insecurities of youth, the strive for acceptance, fragile self-esteem, and predominately, the anxiety of assessment performance. However, it was a growing interest in the differences in female interaction and attitudes within an all girls’ drama classroom that ultimately became the driving force behind the formulation of this research.

From the point of view of a female drama educator, I was passionately interested in the way drama enabled adolescent girls to develop socially, personally and academically, in a classroom context. I was curious about what was actually happening in the classroom when the teacher was busily involved in the teaching process. What sub-text was at work in the
girls’ behaviour and attitudes – what was not actually being seen or heard? What dynamics were active in the interpersonal relationships of the girls during their lesson time?

As a result, I made a choice to discuss, observe, and document, the classroom lives of a group of adolescent girls over one semester in order to find out about how their ‘adolescent female realities’ informed, or were informed by, the dramatic work they experience and create. In choosing an all girls’ drama classroom, I felt the experiences of the girls would be heightened and authenticated more acutely by an absence of male students. I considered it important that the ‘voices’ of the girls be free from restrictions which may have altered their natural relationships with each other.

A firmly held belief that young women’s lives are important sites for both sociological and educational study was the significant underlying assumption for this research. Contemporary feminist work gave impetus to my assertion that the educational lives of females need urgent investigation and reassessment. This study is grounded in a contention that the educational drama experiences of adolescent girls need privileging in relation to contemporary educational discourse and curriculum planning which has been traditionally orientated towards the academic lives and experiences of young males.

As a female researcher and educator I position myself from a feminist perspective in terms of advocating equality and opportunity in
education for adolescent girls. I champion educational practice which challenges traditional and stereotypical notions of learning and development for females in our schools. I acknowledge that the educational lives of adolescent girls are as important as and complementary to, that experienced by males. Whilst our young male students also have their own stories to tell, it is the voices of young women that I privilege in this study in a hope that their educational profile may be raised where it has long been in the shadows of their brothers.

I advocate equality between men and women, and believe that the education of girls must enable them to recognise and value their own talents and strengths, celebrating their differences from young males in a way which is proactive and empowering. I believe that research grounded in feminist ideology must allow for the everchanging multivocal experiences of our young women, and should not prescribe to academic rhetoric which cannot be transferred and applied to everyday pedagogical practice. In short, my aim here was to conduct research which would allow the girls themselves to inform future drama practice and curriculum planning, and to work with me essentially as co-researchers in my quest for gender ‘truths’. Indeed, throughout the journey their realities shaped the research narrative, and their voices weaved the stories.

As these ‘stories’ unravelled over time, the study encompassed not only the ‘drama’ stories of the girls, but also those stories associated with
being an adolescent girl in the nineties. Slowly, a sociological profile began to emerge which was important for me not only in order to understand the girls themselves as individuals, but also for the opportunity it awarded me to gradually deconstruct and consider some of the motivations behind their choices and interactions in their weekly drama activities.

Interestingly, it was not only the stories of the girls which gave substance to the study, but also the emergence of my own story as a female drama researcher. As the weeks unravelled, my own researcher position was challenged and shaped by the girls’ changing responses to me, as well as those changes which occurred often quite unexpectedly, inside me. My relationship with the girls and their changing responses to my role in the classroom, form a complete chapter in this research narrative. My stories, juxtaposed with those provided by the girls, reveals a journey which was at worse, frustratingly demanding, and at best, a most enlightening and satisfying experience! It was for me, in the words of Adrienne Rich, (1980) the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction. (p.35)

**Organisation of the Study**

This chapter has outlined the educational and sociological philosophy in which this study is grounded. It has established the conceptual framework which underpinned my research journey, and highlighted the essential foci of the case study. Chapter Two provides an overview
of literature which focuses on the evolution of gender as feminist and sociological study; gender play and the adolescent female; the education of females in Australia, drama as an educational medium, and current research into gender and drama education.

Chapter Three explores the epistemological and methodological frameworks of the study itself, and provides an overview of the research context and participants. It comprehensively describes the research analytical process, examining the implementation of ethnographic case study methodology, analysis and synthesis.

Chapter Four analyses the ethnographic research journey through a narrative representation of the case study period. It privileges the voices of the female students and their experiences and relationships within the drama classroom. It specifically documents the journey in terms of their recorded attitudes, behaviours and responses, over the six month research period.

Chapter Five honours the researcher's voice, in an analysis of the ethnographic journey and the related experiences of the participants and the female researcher. This chapter is precisely concerned with the changes in both my own and the girls’ responses, from the first day I began work as a researcher in the classroom, to the final evening of field work documentation.

Chapter Six will summarise and critically discuss the experiences and responses of the students and the researcher, highlighting important
findings and implications for the teacher of girls in a single-sex drama classroom. Possible directions for further study into this area will be considered, with questions posed for future investigation into the curriculum planning, teaching, and participation of girls in educational drama.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter seeks to provide an overview of the historical development of ‘gender’ as an area of study and enquiry. Undoubtedly, Western social-scientific and educational theories of gender are diverse in their complexity and theoretical perspectives, and it is not the intention of this chapter to explore and analyse comprehensively contemporary feminist theory and debate.

What is important here is an acknowledgment of the existence of historical and cultural constructions of gender specifically that of the female, and their relationship to the way adolescent girls are educated. Significantly, it is these considerations which underpin and inform the philosophical foundation on which this research is based.

A brief introductory discussion on the evolution of gender in terms of the women’s movement will punctuate analysis of traditional perspectives of female play and behaviour, the importance of gender in drama theory and pedagogy, and current research into gender in drama education.
Recontextualising the Feminine

In the eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), in her now classic text *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, scrutinised traditional hegemonic views of female roles in Western society. Her radical stance was the result of changed Enlightenment perspectives about the moral relationship between man, woman and God which had been the main ideological thrust of Medieval and Reformation intellectual debate. (Connell 1987) Debate challenged the idea that God had established a set moral path for men and women to follow, and questioned why such gender arrangements should continue to prevail. The onset of the French Revolution accelerated the debate in both France and England and the demand for ‘the rights of woman’ gained significant momentum. (Connell 1987)

Wollstonecraft’s emphasis on the distortion of the development of women’s moral character was linked to what she saw as the oppressive conditions under which women lived in English society. In particular, she argued that the development of women’s moral characters was attributed to their broad education in society, and thus radical reformation of the educational system was needed. Opposed to French philosopher Rousseau’s doctrine that women should be educated to serve men, Wollstonecraft advocated education as a path for women’s ultimate liberation declaring, ‘I do not wish them (women) to have power over men, but over themselves’. (Wollstonecraft 1792 in Lees 1993, p.151) Wollstonecraft’s view was further supported by other early
socialists such as Robert Owen, who called for not only educational reformation but radical economic reform as well.

Following in the early nineteenth century, the Utopian socialist movement promoted the ideals of sex egalitarianism, and the works of August Bebel and Fridrich Engels were instrumental in providing revelational discourse on gender relations. (Connell 1987) In time, these early arguments were further challenged and broadened by other influential scholars such as social scientist Charles Darwin, and psychiatrist Sigmund Freud. Their quest to overturn traditional views of theologians and moralists about the spiritually determined order of men and women’s roles, heralded a new direction in the explanation and study of gender behaviour.

Both Darwin and Freud argued that the behaviour of both sexes was linked to scientific phenomena and genetic and biological determinism. Their work though significant, is far too complex to consider in detail here. It is important to note however, that Freud’s emphasis on psychosexual development and gender behaviour, was to be the catalyst for further social and psychological debates of the 1920’s and 1930’s on gender roles and the relationship between the sexes.

In the 1930’s, the introduction of the term ‘social role’, and the notion that society promoted specified and unyielding gender roles, became the popular focus for academic discourse. Cultural anthropologists such as Mead and Bronislaw, extended the complexity of the gender debate by
exploring the relationship between social structure and sexuality in an attempt to highlight the responses of differing cultures to gender development. By 1940, the terms ‘sex role’, ‘male role’, and ‘female role’ were in common use, and the work of Komarovsky and Parsons heralded a new focus on the functional theory of sex roles and the cultural representations which surround them. (Connell 1987)

The work of Simone de Beauvoir (1953) in The Second Sex, was a progressive and monumental piece of feminist work which synthesised the question of gender relationships and the subordination of women through hegemonic patriarchal practice. The significance of de Beauvoir's assertion was its emphasis on the centrality of patriarchal power in gender relationships, both in and outside of the family unit. For de Beauvoir, the female was always the insignificant ‘other’ in a society built on infrastructures of male control and dominance, and as a consequence, became the silent and oppressed voice.

As a result of de Beauvoir's contention, the women’s movement was to gain tremendous momentum in the following decades. A number of issues became the centre of rigorous feminist discourse and debate, most notably the nature of femininity, the power relations between women and men, the socialisation of children, and the dynamics of power. (Connell 1987, p.32)

In the 1960's and early 70's, liberal feminists argued that gender differences were a result of differential socialisation and inequality in
women’s access to power and resource. Liberal feminism, one strand of feminist thinking, stresses women’s absolute parity with men, and bases its ideology on universal truths. (O’Grady 1996, p.65)

Radical (or cultural) feminism on the other hand, champions women as men’s superiors, criticising men for being emotionally inferior, aggressive instead of expressive, and incapable of maintaining any kind of relationship. (Fillion 1996, p.12) They argue that women are labelled as the ‘weaker’ sex, only because it is a masculine yardstick by which we are measured. The third strand of feminism, the Materialist perspective, views women as class oppressed by material conditions and social relations. This strand specifically spotlighted questions concerning race, class, and sexual preference. (O’Grady 1996, p.65)

These feminist ideological stances were to underpin much of the gender debate which was to follow into the ensuing years, and many literary sources from that time are saturated with passionate arguments for transformation and reassessment of the current social and cultural frameworks. Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1974) called for a radical change in women’s identity and expectations within society, whilst in 1970, Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch,* ‘exhorted women to reject every institution and assumption about their lives.’ (Susan Mitchell 1995, ‘The Australian’ October 1995)

In the 1980’s, Carol Gilligan argued that women do speak in ‘different moral voices’ – whilst men’s moral code is based on abstract principles
of justice, a woman’s communicative code stresses compassion and empathy. Gilligan believes that many of the social and cultural problems which women have faced, stem from traditional psychological gender perspectives which stress the universality of women’s lives and responses. Gilligan suggests that a woman’s way of knowing and responding is directly linked with the way she defines herself in terms of a nurturing self image and her associated personal relationships. For Gilligan, a redefinition of the way women are viewed is essential for celebrating and understanding the way women work within relationships. Influenced by Gilligan’s work, Belenky (1986) investigated not only the way women ‘speak’ about themselves, but the ways they cognitively ‘know’ their world. Of primary concern to Belenky’s study is the way the family and the school have both promoted and hindered women’s holistic development.

In the nineties, new work by Kate Fillion (1996) proposes that women themselves wield power in their own gender relationships in a way that can oppress each other just as deeply and destructively as men are said to do to women. Fillion believes that women have become so entrenched in societal expectations of how they should behave, that they have become fundamentally dishonest with each other. As Fillion contends, because women have been told for so long they are the ‘intimacy’ experts, they find it difficult to accept that they experience anger, envy and competitiveness towards their female friends and colleagues. As a result, ‘(women) try to deny these feelings, and tend to
express them (towards each other) covertly..and dishonestly..(as they)
tell lies, often confused with support.' (Fillion 1996, pp. 21–23)

Consequently, in order to deal with the gender values that women still
face in a modern world, Fillion contends that females must first learn
how to communicate effectively and freely with their own sex before
they can deal with patriarchal oppression. As Fillion writes:

_We (women) need to abandon the politics of sexual terror,
with its false oppositions, and develop a politics of error, in
which we allow ourselves and other women to make
mistakes. For women, progress requires dispensing with the
notion that we are men's opposites - and one another's
duplicates, psychologically and sexually...we must learn to
view our differences not as threats to our solidarity but as
the best protection of our collective power to choose._
(pp. 343–344)

Fillion stresses that women in general continue to perpetuate the gender
myths of the past by accepting that ‘difference’ means powerlessness,
and they somehow must continue to be the morally superior, sensitive
and empathetic beings that research shows them to be. Furthermore,
she argues that the modern sexual script still does not allow females to
see themselves as they really are. Adolescent girls even in the nineties,
are receiving cross messages about themselves from the media,
academic, and educational arenas, that inform them that certain kinds of
gender behaviours and images are more acceptable and attractive than
others.
For Fillion, self determination for young women can only grow through self knowledge - a knowledge that transcends traditional societal and cultural messages about female roles and attitudes. Such attitudes and values about females, and the ideological messages transmitted through their everyday experiences, begin at a very early age when girls first begin to play and recognise they have a place in this world. Traditional perceptions of ‘feminine’ behaviour, have governed the way girls learn about themselves and the way they communicate with others. A myriad of research into the way girls play and relate to each other, continues to alert us to the powerful influences social and cultural practices can have on the development of females.

*Just like a Girl: Perceptions of the Feminine – Childhood Play.*

Ann Oakley (1972) argues that the process of gender enculturation begins early in a child’s life. In particular, specific gender roles are revealed through the way children interact with each other through gaming and dramatic play activities at home, in the playground, and the school context. In defining ‘play’ as a conceptual understanding, Whiting and Whiting (1975) describe it as an expression of culture.

Indeed, what is reflected in the often simple playful antics of a child, can be in fact an important indication of the way the child perceives themselves in terms of cultural and gender identity. Whilst this argument remains the centre of debate for many gender theorists, studies on
children's play and development (Piaget 1962, Lever 1976, Thorne 1993) have predominately revealed that girls and boys do play and communicate with each other differently. In general, girls and boys have been observed to present different ideas of relating to each other in play situations, they make decisions about play structures differently, and they do choose different kinds of objects as their focus for play.

Maccoby (1988) and Libby and Aries (1989) observe that the play of girls and boys differs essentially in two ways – the style of the play, and the modes of social influence on the play. Stylistically, boys have been described as being more boisterous in their approach to game playing, whilst girls although still active, have tended not to show the rough and tumble noted in the boys' play. Girls have been found to be far less aggressive, encouraging turn taking, and are often more likely to show agreement with each other, encouraging others to speak in turn.

Whilst boys have been documented as being more frequently competitive and pushy in their play, girls have been seen to use high levels of verbal reasoning to persuade each other. Girls have been observed to more often make suggestions to each other in a game rather than openly confront individuals, and overall tend to reach decisions through consensus. Such behavioural patterns in play have been described by Rubin (1980) in terms of 'boys are a band of rebels (whilst) girls are a band of confidantes.' (p.107)
In an investigation of gender relationships between Australian preschool children, MacNaughton (1995) found that 90% of girls spend most of their time in the homecorner of the preschool classroom. There girls indulged in storylines largely of a domestic nature, whilst in other areas of the room, the boys chose to create stories with 'adventure' bylines and 'superheroes'. In the girls' games, MacNaughton found that 'mum' was a significantly important figure in the domestic narratives, and that the child who played 'mum' was given a greater deal of power in the game, acting as director, producer, and writer of the storylines. Girls often resisted the participation of boys in the homecorner because they believed the boys 'messed up' or 'got it wrong'.

Additionally, MacNaughton observed that the boys would not defer to the 'mum' figure in the game and would try to gain power in the storyline with an increased level of physical activity. When the boys were 'allowed' to enter the homecorner, they tried consistently to introduce 'superheroes' into the domestic storylines and this was resisted strongly by all the girls. (pp.5–7) MacNaughton interprets the behaviour of the girls in terms of gender power over the boys:

"Girls gained power as 'mum', and this was one of the few storylines in which the girls could do this. For the girls, life was easier when they maintained the domestic play space as their own. For the boys, the moment they entered into domestic storylines, they lost power. (p.10)"

groups, and often in private places. Within a game itself, girls seem to stress co-operation, collaboration and sensitivity to the feelings of others. It appears important to girls that the interactive process of a game is given priority over the final product. The games themselves often lack external structure and girls will often talk amongst themselves in deciding what happens next. Quite often in girls' games, there is a lack of specified goals, rules and roles, and the girls may well change the rules as they go.

Piaget also observed that girls are more pragmatic in their approach to the rules of gaming, displaying more tolerance than boys. There is a greater willingness to make exceptions within the game itself, and there is a greater openness to reconcile themselves to innovations in the game structure. (Piaget cited in Gilligan 1982, p.10) For girls, rules are largely linked to procedure rather than strategy. As Lever (1976) observes, ‘traditional girls’ games, like jumprope and hopscotch are predominately turn taking games where the nature of competition is indirect - these turn taking games do not contain contingent rules of strategy as in sport games; rather they are regulated by rules of procedure.’ (pp.478–7)

Oakley (1972) argues that even these early traits in young girls’ play patterns, are linked to a process of cultural learning where the child somehow understands at a deep level, the need to conform to socially accepted ideas of gender stereotyping. (p.52) The development of learned appropriate behaviour modes in children’s play is linked strongly by social learning theorists to the influence of others in the
child’s life. Maccoby (1988) contends:

_Social behaviour ...is never a function of the individual alone...it is the function of the interaction between two or more persons...there are certain important ways in which gender is implicated in social behaviour - ways that may be obscured or missed altogether when behaviour is summed across all categories of social partners._ (p.260)

This behaviour seems to be reflected particularly in the way children make choices about objects of play. In early childhood, boys have traditionally selected toys symbolising physical and mechanical activity (car, trucks, aeroplanes), whilst girls have chosen toys related to the domestic interior, reflecting domesticity, nurturance and aesthetic adornment. In terms of gendered play, Maccoby contends that children themselves ‘contribute to their own social encounters’ through their play and indeed, that childhood itself can be, ‘a gendered culture in its own right.’ (1988, p.266) This form of ‘gendered culture’ is actively maintained in childhood through the use of children’s language as both boys and girls learn how to act and converse with each other in ways they learn is most socially appropriate for their gender.

Children learn how to signal their intentions with appropriate language, as well as respond in a manner which can obtain certain desired goals. Females tend to use language related to articles of dress, personal adornment, colours, aesthetic appraisal and domestic things, while males show a preference for words describing activity and adventure, science and machinery and outdoor activity. (Terman and Cox Miles cited in
Even in early childhood, girls learn that connection to others through oral communication is an important part of their identity as females, and three and four year old females are more likely to choose the telephone as an object of play than are male peers. (Connor & Berbin 1977, Bowlds 1985, cited in Belenky et.al.1986)

It is in middle childhood that girls have been observed to avoid group games in preference to games which mimic primary human relationships. More intense role playing becomes important. Lever (1976), refers to this developing trait as a need for girls 'to be' in gaming - a sense of being immersed in the game in an emotional as well as physical sense. This would indicate a notable change in gaming style for girls from the more superficial 'fun' type activity, to those games which become more meaningful and complex in form.

As girls move towards adolescence, their perceptions of self as well as their understanding of their place in the world, significantly begins to affect not only the way they 'play', but the way they fundamentally communicate with others. In moving into adolescence, girls bring with them the lessons of the past as they enter one of the most demanding and challenging transition periods of their lives - it is a time when their own gendered identities can be often fractured or shattered on a journey which can be fraught with seemingly insurmountable difficulties.
The Adolescent Girl

Seeking to perceive and respond to their own as well as to other’s needs, adolescent girls ask if they can be responsive to themselves without losing connection with others and whether they can respond to others without abandoning themselves. (Gilligan 1986, p.250)

The adolescent stage of a girl’s life can be filled with immerse difficulties and conflicts, as well as punctuated with great joys and exuberant highs. It is often a roller coaster ride where the individual girl can be seemingly happy for days on end only to quickly fall to the depths of despair over the most menial of problems. She is faced with everchanging perceptions of who she is and what she wants to do, and is constantly seeking to explore ways to be accepted amongst her peer group whilst trying to survive school, familial and societal pressures. The choices a female makes in adolescence has serious implications for the rest of her life, and the gamut of decisions faced can result in confusion and depression as she struggles to make the right decisions. (Pipher 1994)

The very essence of the word adolescent, derived from the Latin, ‘adolescere’, meaning to ‘grow up’, alerts us to the difficulties a young girl faces at this important passage through to adulthood. Pipher (1994) describes adolescent girls as travellers in time, far away from their native home in search of solid ground. They are neither adult nor child yet they are often told to ‘grow up’ in view of foolhardy behaviour, whilst being told they are not old enough to enjoy the fruits of adulthood.
Simone de Beauvoir (1953) believed that adolescence is a time when girls suddenly realise that men have a great deal of power in their world, and that to have power of their own, they must be objects of pleasure and adoration for the men in their lives. She writes, ‘young girls slowly bury their childhood, put away their independent and imperious selves and submissively enter adult existence. (de Beauvoir in Pipher (1994), p.21) It is at this time of their life that ‘girls stop being and start seeming’ as they strive to take on a myriad of personae in order to be accepted in a variety of social and school contexts. (de Beauvoir 1953)

Pipher (1994) argues that adolescent girls have long been given messages about their feminine persona which require them to work extremely hard in order to please everyone. Not only have they learnt to be evaluated on the basis of appearance, but they have learnt contradictions: achieve but not too much; be polite but try to be yourself; be feminine but also act like an adult; be aware of your cultural heritage but don’t ask questions about sexism. (p.44)

**The Emotional Self**

Traditionally, females have been described as highly emotional creatures, tearful and more fragile, less objective than males in decision making, and highly expressive in the way they relate to others. They are said to show a great deal of sympathy for others and are known to show interpersonal empathy in times of trouble and conflict.
Studies of adolescent behaviour (Collins and Harper 1983, Johnson 1993, Pipher 1994) have observed that the adolescent girl presents a figure of intense emotional complexity which teachers and parents alike battle with day after day in an attempt to understand what is happening in young girls’ hearts and minds.

Adolescent girls often experience depression and anxiety for reasons teachers and parents cannot always identify. They display moodiness and tearfulness, are highly sensitive to criticism, and become exceedingly resentful towards adults if they feel they are being treated like children. (Collins and Harper 1983) Negative comments about their appearance or bad assessment marks, can have a devastating effect on the adolescent girl’s emotional state. As Pipher (1994) notes, ‘girls’ emotional immaturity makes it hard for them to hold on to their true selves as they experience the incredible pressures of being adolescents in the 1990’s.’ (p.58)

Teenage girls are perpetually concerned with their body images, their hair and their clothes, and it is often a source of frustration to them that they don’t somehow fit the images they carry around in their heads of the ‘perfect’ teenage girl. Although it can argued that boys too suffer anxieties about their ‘masculine’ appearance, it is adolescent girls who form the highest statistics for psychological disorders linked to the body, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Boys are a major focus of concentration for young girls, and they preen themselves for school dances and outings with meticulous and often obsessive attention.
They may talk excessively about diets, clothes and make-up, and are highly critical of themselves. (Pipher 1994)

In terms of sexuality, adolescent boys generally learn about the sexual act before they associate it with romance, love and commitment. In contrast, research suggests that girls work from the reverse process where romance and love is emphasised first before the sexual act. (Gagnon and Simon 1973 in Thorne 1993) For many adolescent girls, relationships with boys and how they appear physically, become focal points in their everyday lives, and as Anyon, (1983) McRobbie, (1979) and Thorne, (1993) argue girls may use cosmetics, discussions of boyfriends, provocative dressing and other forms of exaggerated ‘teen’ femininity, to challenge adult, class and race based authority in schools.

Significantly, adolescent girls establish their own frameworks of sexual correctness for their own peer group. They will readily pass sexual judgements on each other labelling each other as ‘cheap or promiscuous’, particularly if the girl in question is not popular or will not attempt to ‘fit in’ with the accepted peer group. However, they are also just as likely to defend a girl to their masculine peers if the girl is otherwise acceptable to the hegemonic female group. Fillion (1996) contends that the traditional ‘sexual script’ that says ‘nice girls don’t’, causes adolescent girls a great deal of difficulty in a time when sexually they are curious and responsive. Indeed, she argues that it renders girls powerless, when realistically they can have unparalleled opportunities for real power and freedom of choice.
Peer group acceptance is one of the most important influences in the adolescent girl's life. As she strives for independence, peers take precedence over the family’s previous nurturing role. Peers become like a new family unit, in which the girl feels she has more control, more acceptance. The need to be accepted by other girls is paramount to her well-being and happiness. She will strive to take on behaviour which is accepted by the group, and will take on appropriate social attitudes and roles as established by the group. (Collins and Harper 1983)

It is with peers that girls gossip about families, boyfriends and the like, and in some ways, peers form various ‘secret clubs’ which outsiders are not privy to. Indeed it is peers who validate the decision making of the individual, as well as offer support for their independence. Unfortunately for teenage girls, peers can also be destructive to their emotional growth when acceptance is not forthcoming from the peer group. Girls can be totally ostracised and become the object of ridicule if they don’t fit the group’s friendship criteria. (Pipher 1994)

Kate Fillion (1996) argues that in the teen years, although boys are important to adolescent girls, fundamentally girls care more about their relationships with their ‘girlfriends’ than those with boys.

*Girls frequently develop wild crushes of a nonsexual nature on each other; the keenest memories of social triumph in adolescence tend to centre not on boys but on winning a trophy friend or being chosen as the confidante of an idol. (p.42)*
Adolescent girls realise that to be excluded from peers on any number of grounds, is an unpleasant and incredibly lonely experience, and Fillion (1996) notes that girls come to understand very early that they must be ‘nice’ to each other in order to ensure continuing acceptance. She argues that girls have learnt from childhood that their own sex group also has the power to make their lives difficult. Extending on this, Pipher (1994) observes that adolescent girls are ‘at risk of becoming the biggest enforcers and proselytizers for (their own) culture.’ (p.68)

They will often ostracise other girls for not living up to accepted standards of femininity which they so readily absorb from popular culture. Girls who are too attractive, not attractive enough, too confident or too aggressive, suffer at the hands of other girls who ‘play’ inside the perimeters of feminine acceptability. As Eichenbaum and Orbach (1988) argue:

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\text{(In females) difference cannot be allowed and it is experienced as dangerous and threatening, and invokes feelings of abandonment .. the unspoken bargain between women is that we must all stay the same. If we act on a want, if we differentiate, if we dare to psychologically separate, we break ranks. (p.89)}
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In a recent ethnographic study of girls' friendships both in and outside of the classroom, Vivienne Griffiths (1995) observed that girls need and value the sense of togetherness which is so evident in female friendships. Although she noted girls frequently have ‘fall outs’ over one issue or another, she observed that in time girls return to their original
friends. Additionally Duck (1983) argues, that as a direct result of cultural pressures which stress women should be relationship oriented, girls’ affiliations are strongly characterised by intimate sharing, private knowledge, trust and loyalty. It is for this reason Duck contends, that the pull towards intimacy and self disclosure is much greater for girls than it is for boys.

‘Girls’ Talk’ – The Language of the Feminine

In 1940, Susanne Langer wrote of ‘discourse communities’ as a sharing within specific groups, of a communicative symbol system with distinct encapsulated semantic meanings. William Labov (1972) extending on Langer’s idea, defined what he called ‘speech communities’ – a defined sharing of communicative norms and practices clearly understood and utilised by a specific cultural or social group. Building from these concepts, Johnson (1989) argues that men and women possess two distinct gendered speech communities which have specific meaning and form for each group. In an investigation of communication patterns of males and females, Deborah Tannen (1990) observed that communication between the sexes is very much like cross cultural discourse, prey to a clash of conversational styles and form.

Women are described as being far more able to ‘give more’ in conversation, more capable of ‘rapport talk,’ (Fillion 1996) and are upheld as experts in self disclosure and intimacy. Women are said to share their feelings, fears and problems about their daily lives with each
other in ways which foster connection, support and understanding. (Tannen 1990) Conversely, men are traditionally described as being more controlled and less intimate in their conversational styles. According to Stewart, Cooper and Friedley (1986), female conversation reflects ‘who they are’ in life, whilst men’s talk is usually related to task and power situations, reflecting more ‘what they do.’(cited in Anderson and Gluck from Gluck and Patai, 1991, p.31)

In feminist work involving the interviewing of females, Gluck and Patai (1991) found that eye contact between women is significantly important in their communication patterns. Females will often make direct eye contact, nod and gesture towards other women during conversation even if they themselves don’t speak at all. Additionally, simultaneous speech between females is common, where individuals will often begin or finish sentences for each other as they ‘collaboratively construct accepted personal and female cultural identities.’ (p.32) There is often a great deal of mirroring, tilting of heads and smiling in an almost ritualistic engagement of encouragement and nurturing.

Fillion (1996) contends that much of women’s communication style is the result of gender cultural constructs which informs females that they are better, more empathetic communicators and listeners than males. Ironically this sets up communication patterns for women which leads to a form of powerlessness, as they learn to offer appropriate, but perhaps not always honest feedback, to their female friends and peers.
(Pipher 1995) As Carol Tavris (1992) points out, women’s expressive style lulls women into believing that rather than take affirmative actions for their problems, it is better to simply ‘talk about it’ with other friends. In her study on children at play, Thorne (1993) observed that girls’ talk is very much linked to intimacy and empathy. Sharing secrets is common practice, and girls will often comment on each other's physical appearance, particularly hair cuts and clothes.

For adolescent girls, communication appears to offer the opportunity for establishing equality and intimacy in small private groups, and to discuss issues which generally focus on personal and affiliative concerns. Specifically, Maltz and Borker (1982) observed that girls often use speech in three main ways:

• to create and maintain relationships of closeness and equality
• to criticise each other in acceptable ways
• to interpret accurately the speech of other girls

(cited in Anderson and Jack from Gluck and Patai, p.30)

In the adolescent years, the language of the youth is culture specific. Words become part of an adolescent dialect, where words such as ‘cool’ and ‘rad’ are used to express emotion and attitude. These kinds of adolescent jargon are often imaginative, cheeky and clever, and give the girl a form of cultural status in her own peer group. Conversation is often of a gossipy nature and discussion can be quite shallow, but these sessions are enormously important in establishing the young girl’s
identity, allowing her to express opinion, be responded to, and voice her problems to herself and others. (Collins and Harper 1983)

Amy Sheldon (1992) comments that girls in group conversations often use a form of ‘double voice style’ which masks self assertion of the individual in an effort to maintain harmony. She argues that this style of communication is a result of gender prescriptions which tell girls they should be harmonious and egalitarian. (in Thorne 1993, p.106) For the adolescent girl, these kinds of learned female communication styles are often perpetuated and maintained through both societal and educational frameworks. The school, and more specifically, the classroom, has in recent times been strongly criticised for its contribution to gender stereotypes and the disenfranchisement of girls.

_Educating Girls – The Silent Voices_

In recent times, feminist scholars have argued that traditional education of women in the Western world has prepared them not for the transition into the public sphere of work and career, but rather specifically for that of the private domain of home and family. Educational training for the public sector of life intended exclusively for young men, has resulted in the ‘masculinization’ of schools and school curriculums (Nicholson 1994 in Stone 1994) and the ‘invisibility’ (Spender 1982) of adolescent girls as individual voices in the classroom.
Spender and Sarah (1980) contend that women have learnt not only to lose in their fight for academic success, but indeed also ‘how’ to lose. Through their experiences, they have learnt ‘(to accept) the masculine man is one who achieves, who is masterful: the feminine woman is one who underachieves, who defers.’ (Brewster in Spender & Sarah 1989, p.80) Historically, educational curricula has been inherently gender biased which has seen girls relegated to inferior positions in relation to boys in Australian society. (National Action Plan for the Education of Girls, 1993)

As a result, girls at school have become what Walkerdine (1990) describes as ‘performers’ used to dramaturgical metaphors, that have signalled that life is a performance in which females must act out a series of gender based roles. Traditional myths about ‘poor’ academic performance by girls compared to boys, have convinced adolescent girls that they do not have enough intellect to succeed in any field they may choose. (Walkerdine 1990) As Walkerdine argues:

*Girls are not always weak and dependent, but appear to be engaged in a struggle with the boys to read and to create situations as ones in which they are powerful.. the school, as one of the modern apparatuses of social regulation, not only defines what shall be taught, what knowledge is, but also defines and regulates both what a ‘child is’ and how learning and teaching are to be considered. (p.32)*

Leder and Sampson (1989) argue that more than a century of schooling in Australia has still not produced equally valuable outcomes for girls in
terms of gender equality. Indeed, they contend that schooling has been a significant contributing factor in the construction and perpetuation of negative stereotypes associated with being female in Australian society. Such stereotypes have resulted in girls developing narrow and limited concepts of femininity which in turn have impoverished their educational existence. (in National Action Plan for the Education of Girls, 1993)

In co-educational classrooms, girls have been subjected to a form of sexual harassment from boys which has often been masked as friendly teasing between the sexes. Such ‘teasing’, has often resulted in girls’ passivity in the classroom, a lowering of self-esteem and self worth, and a low incidence of risk taking. A further consequence of this form of sexual harassment is that girls rarely acknowledge their academic success, talent or worth, and often develop unrealistic and negative images of their self and bodies. (The National Plan for the Education of Girls, 1993)

Vivienne Griffiths (1995) in an ethnographic study of adolescent girls in a co-educational school, noted that gender stereotyped attitudes were still prominent in the modern classroom. In her observations she found boys got away with misbehaviour far more often than did the girls, dominating lesson time, and demanding and receiving more attention from the teacher. Griffiths argues that school is a significantly important arena for the social, personal, and academic development of girls because of the friendship networks it allows girls to form:
School is a place where girls can meet and make friends. School provides the means of reinforcing friendships, because of the daily contact both in and out of lesson. Even in the most formal of lessons, some kind of interaction between friends (can be) maintained albeit in a muted or covert form. (p.178)

In particular, Griffiths notes that subjects which allow girls comfortable social interaction between friends (e.g. drama), are highly favourable learning contexts. As Griffith argues, ‘the strength and support which girls can give each other, needs to be capitalised on rather than undermined and fragmented.’ (p.179) In additional research work conducted with girls using drama as a method of research, Griffiths (1984) found that the value of shared experience and collective support in an all girls’ environment, was paramount in allowing the girls ample opportunity to explore their own identities through the dramatic form.

Further research on co-educational classrooms (Stanworth 1983, Mahoney 1985, Clark 1989, Spender & Sarah 1980), concluded that girls learnt to pay lip service to boys in the classroom, suppressed their own academic and personal achievements, and negated their own positions of power. Spender (1982) argues that single sex classrooms are important because they allow girls to be released from deference to boys, to express safely their own life experiences, to develop some autonomy, and to build confidence without messages that they are unworthy.
Educating girls to effectively and positively communicate and work with each other is most often realised through single-sex classrooms by the sense of community it fosters. As Barrie Thorne (1993) writes:

Solidarity among women, .. as a primary form of bonding, has been crucial to women’s struggles for equality with men ... I believe that bonding among girls, when enacted out of shared respect and a spirit of support, can be a powerful force not only for surviving within but also, potentially, for challenging conventional gender arrangements and female subordination. (p.171)

Importantly, even without the presence of boys in a classroom, adolescent girls are often unaware of their potential for success or of the gender inequality that surrounds them. As Wrigley (1992) points out, adolescent girls have not yet experienced intense conflict associated with equal opportunity for women in society. They have not yet entered the competitive job market, nor experienced serious relationships with men in which they may face choices associated with the subordination of their own ambitions for the good of a family unit. In such a ‘Pollyanna-ish’ world, Wrigley suggests that adolescent girls may well think equality has been won and sexism a thing of the past.

Pipher (1994) extends this argument stressing that what adolescent girls will say about gender and power issues, depends strongly on how they are asked about them. She contends that most adolescent girls if asked if they are feminists, will vehemently deny they are. Indeed, for adolescent girls, feminism is a ‘dirty’ word somewhat akin to
communism or fascism. Indeed, they will often reject any association with the movement in their own adolescent world. Pipher points out however, that if they are asked if they believe in equality for male and females, they will often categorically state they do.

The gender empowering classroom therefore needs to be a learning space where girls can explore their own femininity in terms of understanding what equality really means, and how best it can be achieved in their lives. For adolescent girls, feminism often represents something they cannot and will not subscribe to; a movement which questions their relationship with those they are most excited about - young males. Classrooms need to offer adolescent girls spaces where they can ‘fashion’ rather than simply ‘find’ their female voices, whilst exploring and shaping narratives of emerging self. (Maher & Tetreault 1994)

In respect to the absence of boys in the classroom, Kenway and Willis (1986) warn that although this can be advantageous in terms of academic success for the girls, ‘it does not mean that girls shed attitudes which lead them to participate in their own oppression.’ (p.130) Indeed, Kenway and Willis argue that without the ‘ordinary everyday unromantic presence of boys (in the classroom), girls (can) develop an image of boys..which is romanticised and glamorised.’ (p.130)
According to Kenway and Willis, the key to successful education of girls in a single-sex school, is the raising of gender consciousness about perceptions of both themselves and their male counterparts. The classroom has the capacity to provide an environment where girls should be challenged to explore the realities of life – those realities experienced in the adolescent years, as well as those already faced by thousands of women in the greater Australian society.


The National Action Plan for the Education of Girls (1993), states that current curriculum reform requires a fundamental reworking in terms of the valuing of girls’ knowledge in school curriculum planning. Amongst its recommendations for educational planning are:
• confront dominating, disruptive and harassing behaviour
• ensure all students can take an active part in class discussions, express feelings, and take risks without fear of being considered to be ‘wrong’
• encourage students to compete against themselves rather than against others
• encourage students to support each other in their learning (p.25)

Maxine Greene (1978) advocates a learning environment for females which offers grounding in self-esteem and self-awareness. In arguing about the ‘lived realities’ of females she writes:

(without grounding) they live at best in a kind of negation. They are not self conscious enough, self reflective enough to undo the work of socialisation; their personal development is necessarily frustrated; they are submerged in their roles .. if women are in touch with themselves .. they have a ground against which to consider the mystifications that work on them, the inequalities that prevail ..(p.218)

Exposure to educational activities which offer opportunities for girls to engage in conflict resolution, personal support and encouragement, small group work and assertiveness training, is paramount for the personal, social, spiritual and academic development and growth of young women. As Pipher (1994) argues, there is an urgent need for girls to have a more ‘public space’ in our culture where they are celebrated as interesting and unique human beings, and education must seek to provide a medium through which girls can uncover and investigate for themselves, the depth of their own self importance and worth.
Furthermore, Pipher believes that in order to grow into healthy women, adolescent girls need to see reflections of themselves in all their diversity; as workers, as artists, and as explorers. In particular, through her work with adolescent girls, she documents the power of role-playing and improvisation as an artistic learning medium in which to explore decision making and conflict resolution. Pipher observed that initially in the role-play work, the girls were giggly, passive and compliant in their responses to the content. However as she continued the work over time, she noticed a distinct change in the girls towards self-assertiveness and confidence as they took more and more control of the role-playing process.

It is by affirming the talent and worth of our young women that Pipher sees hope for the future of girls in our culture. In particular, schools must take the responsibility for adolescent girls, ‘to structure all the social and emotional turmoil they are experiencing’ (p.290) by providing educational experiences which seek to empower and inform them about their world. Furthermore, ‘schools need to be structured in ways that validate and nurture strengths in female students’ (p.290) whilst also teaching them about the dilemmas that young men face and the importance of gender equality. Ultimately however, education must seek to give young women an active voice where once they were silent!
Gender, Drama, and Education

Historically, the presence of women in dramatic activity and performance has been minimised or silenced altogether by hegemonic patriarchal influences in artistic endeavour, theory, and practice. From the Greek tragedies and comedies, to the works of Shakespeare and Chekhov, women have predominately been delegated to minimal roles on stage, or portrayed as shrewish, manipulative, passive, or love stricken creatures awaiting salvation from a capable and fearless male protagonist.

In focusing on drama as theatre, Wandor (1987) contends that the exclusion of women as performers from religious drama, Greek drama, and the Western stage, has not been an accidental oversight. Women appearing in the significantly public sphere of the theatre was historically viewed as inappropriate and improper, and female characters required in any performance, were subsequently played by men. Wandor argues that despite some exceptions (e.g. prehistoric ritual drama and Commedia Dell’Arte), the tradition of theatre has been an imaginative world largely created and controlled by men. As a result, the majority of traditional theatre scripts and dramatic performance, (both of which form major components in contemporary educational drama programs) have been largely representational of a male dominated world.
As a visual communicative medium, the significant potential of drama and theatre to transform metaphorically its audience and participants both cognitively and affectively, should not be underestimated. Peta Tait (1994), points out that the theatre is indeed an important social space in which the performative nature of cultural and individual identity is explored. The audience is actively subjected to specific images and symbolic representations through the dramatic manipulation of text and characterisation, often in ways which are subversive and highly gendered in nature. Wandor (1987) extends this view in writing:

*The nature of the dilemmas, the motivations and the relationships all take on different aspects according to whether the central character is male or female. The gender of a character defines not only his or her biological sexual characteristics, but also implies imaginative and social assumptions about his/her personality, power and place in the world. Gender is one of the fundamental imperatives in the imagination creation of the world on stage.* (Wandor 1987, xiii)

Additionally Tait (1994) argues, that ‘form’ in theatre performance conveys meaning to an audience because it ‘shapes, orders, and privileges depictions of social experience.’ (p.26) As Scott (1992) adds, this experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward, and is always a culturally political experience. (p.37)

Tait writes not only on the importance of symbolic form and sub-text in theatre, but also its significance in the kind of dramatic form, explored, shaped and presented by students in educational drama. She stresses the
strong symbiotic relationship between educational drama and theatre, claiming there is no separation between audience and performers in educational drama if indeed the students present their work to each other.

It is in this way then, that students are capable of perpetuating or challenging dominant cultural and societal ideologies such as gender roles and associated expectations. Of particular importance, is the role language and discussion plays in group devised classroom drama. Tait maintains that ‘the opportunity for the students to find their own language in discussion, becomes an important part of connecting the drama to their lived (gender) experience.’ (p.29) She supports the view of Smart (1991) who argues that we must consider how language reproduces meanings of difference and dominance in our everyday experiences. (in Tait 1992)

Tait is critical of traditional drama education in claiming that for too long, theoretical discussion of the social experience of gender in drama, has been given only ‘cursory attention’:

..educators writing about drama methodologies for teaching and learning, barely recognise differences based on gender, and most strategies for implementing drama complicity ignore the impact of the social experience of gender on conceptual frameworks. (p.25)

Tait’s accusation is levelled at traditional pedagogical and theoretical practice in drama education both in this country and overseas. Her
argument is not a solitary one, with more and more drama educators exploring and researching the implications of gender across all sectors of teaching and learning. It is to these issues that this discussion now turns.

_Educational Drama – Reassessing Perspectives_

_The Nature of Educational Drama_

In a position paper prepared by the National Association for Drama in Education in 1991, educational drama was described as a group experience which allows participants to ‘project (themselves) into the shoes of another in order to discover how and why that being may perceive the world, and behave.’ (p.2) Through this form of dramatic ‘play,’ students are given opportunities to explore selected contexts of human behaviour which they can control, alter and shape at their own discretion. (p.2)

More precisely, Dorothy Heathcote (1984) argues that educational drama allows the student to isolate life events, to compare the experiences of the past with those of the present, and reflect on actions and decisions made both inside and outside the dramatic event. For Heathcote, drama must bring about a process of change shaped by the participants who interact and negotiate with each other within the dramatic form. This then is where the power of learning lies.
O’Neill and Lambert (1982) argue that the most significant learning which occurs in drama is the development in the students’ understanding about human behaviour, themselves, and the world they live in. Drama enables the student to break from familiar modes of learning and communicating, to alternative and creative dimensions of meaning and knowing. As O’Neill (1995) contends, drama is a way of thinking about life which generates and embodies significant meaning and raises questions about our humanity.

Gavin Bolton (1986) adds that the strength of dramatic activity is that it ‘draws directly on the world for its substance’ and that ‘(students) can learn about themselves through the potency of a dramatic moment.’ (p.82) For Bolton, (1992) one of the key outcomes of engaging in the dramatic process is to essentially ‘see something differently,’ or to ‘disturb the known’. (p.16)

Bolton stresses that the dramatic creative process is about discovery, where students actively ‘unpack meaning through the use of spontaneous play–making.’ (p.16) It is this capacity of drama to allow students to discover new dimensions of meaning as highlighted by Bolton, that offers such potential for gender education inside the art form itself.

For drama educators, the issue of gender and its effect on curriculum and program planning is a relatively new concept in academic discourse. Indeed, it is only in the last decade that we have seen growing
and spirited debate about the importance of gender in the drama classroom (e.g. Griffiths 1984, Tait 1992, Dean 1994, Nicholson 1995, Fletcher 1995) appearing in professional educational publications such as Australia’s National Association for Drama in Education journal.

To appreciate why gender has become an emotive issue for many contemporary female drama practitioners in this country particularly, it is useful to consider the origins of what is now known as educational drama but which for many years came under the auspices of `speech and drama.'

**Early Influences**

Contemporary educational drama in Australia can be directly traced to the early speech and drama movement established traditionally as an curriculum area in middle class girls’ schools. Interestingly, this was one subject area which was dominated by women both inside the school system and in private tuition. Paradoxically however, it was this very dominance by women in speech and drama which eventually resulted in a new educational drama movement significantly promoted and steered by a contingency of strong male voices - notably in Queensland, John O’Toole, Brad Haseman and Peter Lavery.

It is well worth noting that in the crucial founding years of educational drama (the 1970’s in particular), the first three Queensland Association for Drama in Education presidents were indeed male. This was not a coincidence but rather a deliberate educational attempt to lure more
boys to do speech and drama as a school subject. Whilst it might seem incredible that a subject so traditionally dominated by women might now be accused of marginalising female voices in classroom practice, the picture becomes clearer when we consider the politics of patriarchy which have historically governed and structured our educational system.

Schools have had a long tradition of males in administrative roles as policy makers and school principals. It is not surprising then that male educators should have taken the helm of speech and drama as a curriculum subject and shaped it to attract male students in ways which privileged dominant cultural ideals of a male reality. The ultimate result was classroom drama experiences which largely promoted role plays and improvisations with strong male themes, archetypes and attitudes. Such male dominance was evident not only in the development of Australian educational drama, but on an international level as well. It to to these considerations that we now turn.

In England, drama pioneer Peter Slade (1954) describing the relationships between drama and play, spoke in terms of impersonation and role-play as a ‘warm and sticky treasure which helped some panting little ego to experience being king.’ (p.23) In his most famous work Child Drama, Slade’s role-plays are notably structured around ‘masters’ and ‘princesses’, ‘William Tell’, ‘Robin Hood’, and the like. Similarly, Gavin Bolton (1992) has also traditionally favoured units highlighting male archetypes – ‘Joseph and his Brethren,’ ‘The Silver Sword,’ and ‘Robin Hood’. As Nicholson (1995) writes, Bolton’s role-plays predominately
feature, ‘adventures, journeys into the unknown, riots, and violence.’ (p.31) She argues:

_The very choice of these themes indicates an acceptance of masculine culture; pioneering brave adventures into the heart of darkness to visit tribes or the wild west, a concern with colonisation, dominance and acts of aggression .. there is an embarrassed reference to girls, who are encouraged to take male roles, such as miners, explorers and footballers .. (p.31)_

Whilst Peta Tait (1992) argues that girls do need to sometimes become ‘adventurers’ in drama gender roles in order to broaden their perspectives of gender behaviour, she contends that boys must also be offered roles which invite an exploration of domesticity and nurturance. Indeed, drama work should not prescribe exclusively to one way of knowing nor one way of conflict resolution. Tait is influenced by social learning theorist Bandura who writes, ‘when exposed to diverse models, observers rarely pattern their behaviour exclusively after a single source, nor do they adopt all the attributes of preferred models.’ (in Tait, p.28)

Tait (1992) advocates drama programs which do not necessarily reverse stereotypical gender roles, but instead ‘question the portrayal of active and passive roles.’ (p.28) Errington (1992) extends this view in arguing that the power of drama as a socially critical learning medium is two pronged. In deconstructing the dramatic form:
(students) can make useful connections between the social construction of the dramatic illusion and similar constructions wrought from life .. if drama is created in specific, illusory ways, to what extend is society constructed with similar falsehoods? (p.52)

In an analysis of past journal issues of the Australian National Association of Drama in Education, there is notable emphasis on role-plays and improvisations which favour male archetypes and attitudes. As an example, Bruce Burton (1990) explores the experiences of historical explorers Burke and Wills, through an extended role-play. Whilst the class involved comprises both male and female students, there are no female parts for the girls to play. Indeed, they are relegated to taking the parts of the men (certainly if this did not happen, there is no mention of it in the article) and consequently, must construct a ‘reality’ in the process from a gendered point of view counter to their own. This focus on male archetypes and heroism, presents only one perspective for all participants – both male and female.

Brian Edmiston (1994), documents a workshop conducted with a group of eleven year old students on Medieval life where there was an emphasis on the heroism of knights fighting fierce dragons alongside the apparent helplessness of the damsels. In the course of the action, the students themselves selected the dominant discourse of male heroism as pivotal to the role-playing, and Edmiston himself reports, that the students did not question the dominant patriarchal ideology about heroism.
As there was no initial challenge to the students about alternative narrative structures, the dominant patriarchal ideology remained unchecked. As Edmiston observes, it wasn’t until he entered the drama as teacher-in-role in the form of the ‘Medieval king’ and challenged the perceptions of the group about ‘heroism,’ that the students indeed told him that both males and females could be knights, as well as heroes!

Kathleen Warren (1990) in an article titled *Can we do a play about Superheroes?*, discusses the fascination of the young children in her class with superheroes in classroom roleplays. Warren writes that the leading characters chosen by the children were all powerful hero type figures, and ‘superheroes’ who were female were almost non-existent. Interestingly, despite Warren’s observations of the children’s preferences to superheros who were male, she then goes on to document further role-plays conducted in her classroom on ‘Ninja Turtles,’ ‘Ghostbusters,’ and ‘Volton and his blazing sword’ – all of which offered the girls minimal opportunity to explore different kinds of female role models.

In a recent monograph published by the National Association for Drama in Education (Taylor 1995), the work of David Booth is highlighted. Of note is a storydrama adapted from a book called *The Expedition*, a tale about a band of marauding soldiers who invade an island and experience a multitude of adventures as a result. The workshop conducted with both boys and girls, has a strong element of male heroism and ‘boy’s own adventures’.
Although the girls are encouraged to take strong leadership roles by Booth, the dramatic context privileges play elements such as aggression and battle, which are most familiar to the boys in the class. To be fair to Booth, one of the more independent girls does choose to take a significant leadership role in this drama. However, I would strongly argue that the planning and implementation of dramatic experiences must be contextualised in the lives of both male and female students rather than drawn, as in this case, from the expected gender play stereotypes of the male world.

By his own admission in the monograph, Booth has strong views on the ability of the girls to work in the drama:

*I work strongly, because I am always short of time and the boys respond immediately ... traditionally in drama, the boys work the first half hour and the girls work the second half, and if the drama is poor in the first half hour then the girls never enter ... the girls will take the stance that is nice and neat but they won’t handle problems initially.* (pp.40&42)

The work of Dorothy Heathcote and Cecily O’Neill has also been recently criticised by feminist scholars (Fletcher 1995, Nicholson 1995) for perpetuating drama practice entrenched in patriarchal notions of universal truths and one-dimensional realities. Helen Nicholson (1995) argues in view of Heathcote’s doctrine of ‘dropping to the universal’ (see Wagner 1976) in role-plays and improvisations that such a concept promotes the exclusivity of universality, claiming a true or authentic self
which is essentialist and phallocentric. Indeed, Nicholson criticises this approach for not addressing the multiplicity of voices including that of the female, which exist in our drama classrooms.

This notion of universality in dramatic play is further challenged by Fletcher (1995) in a critique of O’Neill’s recent work. In a workshop entitled *The Seal Wife*, O’Neill is accused of facilitating a dramatic experience which worked to ‘maintain a patriarchal status quo, and perpetuate the universal values belonging to a specifically masculinist dominate culture.’ (p.26) Fletcher maintains that O’Neill as facilitator, structured the dramatic action in such a constrained way that not all participants were able to pursue alternative views of the seal wife’s oppression at the hands of her fisherman husband:

> O’Neill’s own predetermined values determined the content of the pre-text and hence the “engendered” themes, and that this, in conjunction with the activities shaped by O’Neill, then constrained the social roles that developed and consequently upheld the “types” that she claims are transcended. (pgs.28–29)

Fletcher further argues that the primary learning experiences for young people in O’Neill’s ‘Seal Wife,’ is that society offers them a gender specificity that negates the subjectivity and importance of the feminine. For Fletcher, drama can only be a powerful and equitable learning medium when the subjectivity of each participant is validated, not only within the practice itself, but also through the theoretical dimensions from which it works. Tait (1992) extends this viewpoint in arguing that
if drama educators do not challenge the authority of the male voice in drama practice, students will accept this as representative of normative values within the classroom, and the exclusion of female voices will continue.

Discourse on drama practice and the exclusion of women’s voices in such work, continues to be a contentious and provocative issue in contemporary drama practice. In response to criticism of O’Neill’s work, Dunn (1996) contends that drama practitioners need to ensure that in working with participants in drama, there is a balance between concern with the dramatic structures themselves and the issues raised within them. Indeed, marginalisation of our female student voices may occur even without our knowledge, suppressed by constraints of time and lesson objectives.

**Drama Research and Gender**

In the last decade, research into drama education has gained tremendous momentum both in Australia and internationally. There has been an urgent and often passionate response by drama educators at all levels of drama practice, to reassess and reconstruct traditional views of drama as a ‘soft option’ for student learning and development.

The promotion of drama as an integral art form and an effective learning medium, has underpinned a new direction in curriculum theory, planning, and implementation of drama in Australian schools.
Post-modern rhetoric has alerted educators to the multiplicity of viewpoints and possible dimensions of learning and artistic endeavour available to us, and as a consequence, research in drama is now a diverse and multi-layered field of study.

In Australia alone, research into classroom practice (Donelan 1995, McDonald 1993, O’Mara 1995, Dean 1994, 1996, McLean 1995) has been active and on-going. As diverse as it has become however, there has been a deficit of case studies into classroom practice which highlight the sociological and educative importance of gender. Slowly however, this situation is now being addressed by a number of drama researchers interested in observing and documenting the effects gender has on the choices and participation of students in dramatic activity.


In Australia, Edward Errington (1992) conducted research within the Deakin Drama–Gender Project at Deakin University, which endeavoured to observe student reactions to gender issues in their dramatic experiences. He observed that students were reticent to move outside the gender roles they had developed over the years and in particular, the
girls feared that their femininity would be undermined if they assumed traits traditionally perceived to be attributed to males.

However, Errington found that as the female students were exposed to more and more role-play opportunities, many of their perceptions of gender began to change, with a greater sense of power and responsibility demonstrated actively within the dramatic process itself. Errington concluded that the female students needed an opportunity ‘to enact their own stories of gender discrimination without the contemporary constraints of teacher practices with predetermined ends.’ (p.55) For many of the students, a change in consciousness about gender identity had emerged only after engaging within the dramatic form.

For her doctoral thesis on the social construction of gender in classroom interaction, Pam Nilan (1995) spent six months with a Year 9–10 drama class. The major task for the class was to write, rehearse and stage their own play, with Nilan playing dual roles of teacher and researcher. She observed that the girls were unwavering in their convictions to structure the play as a romantic soap opera, insisting the leading men be the ‘strong silent type’ and the focus of a melodramatic love interest. Nilan writes:

*In creating masculine characters, both the boys and the girls created stereotypes .. (which) conformed to the stereotypes in the forms of popular culture that adolescent*
prefer .. Fiona who insisted that the play's heroine be very sweet, demure and passive, wasn't remotely like that! (pp.1-4)

Peta Tait (1992) documents recent work with tertiary students where gender issues were explored in relation to traditional theatre texts (e.g. Shaw, Brecht, Ibsen). She found that whilst the males were reticent to look at gender relationships in the plays, the females were enthusiastic. Despite this eagerness of the females however, Tait observed that their initial responses in the work were subdued, inhibited by the male opinion in the class. Throughout the work, the females needed to be encouraged and challenged to overcome their perceptions of powerlessness in order to make the dramatic experiences worthwhile and meaningful for them.

Vivienne Griffiths (1984) in a feminist research project on adolescent girls, used drama as a means of exploring the girls’ adolescent gender experiences. Griffiths, a drama educator and actor, argues drama is a significant learning medium for young girls to learn about themselves without the constraints other school subjects impose. She argues that the collective nature of drama work is one of its greatest values for educational and feminist research. In her own research, Griffiths argues that the collective dramatic experience of the work, allowed the girls to explore and express common female experiences freely and honestly.

Secondly, Griffiths stresses that drama offers a voice to those girls who might ordinarily be ‘silent’ in other classes. Private and inarticulate
feelings which might otherwise not be expressed in interviews or group
discussions, can be readily expressed (either verbally or non-verbally)
through the dramatic experience. For Griffiths, this opportunity is
pertinent for adolescent girls who ‘are not often asked to reflect upon
their own experiences or consider them important.’ (p.515)

In the role-plays documented by Griffiths, the girls articulated powerful
statements of emotion about unfair treatment that they felt they
received in the social arena in regards the rights of boys and ‘going out’. 
Girls who were previously silent in discussions, became far more vocal
and authoritative in the improvisational work. Of note was what
Griffiths termed ‘moments of intensity’ in scene work, where important
relationships were emphasised by the sub-text and non-verbal
elements in the improvisations. Of particular significance were the
‘power relations between mothers and daughters, or moments of
closeness between friends who had shared a confidence.’ pg.515)

Importantly, Griffiths found that the concrete nature of drama and its
dependence on direct experience as a starting point, challenged the girls
to go beyond stereotypes and pure ‘acting’ to exploring their own
knowledge of what it means to be adolescent girls. Griffiths reports that
in the initial stages of the role-play work, the girls displayed what she
calls ‘taken-for-granted frameworks’ for structuring their role-plays.
Characters were one-dimensional and stereotyped, and the dramatic
narratives predictable and simplistic.
As the drama work continued however, Griffiths found the girls began to demonstrate more in-depth multi-faceted characterisation and develop narratives which reflected true experiences of their own adolescent sub-culture. Griffiths maintains the changes occurred through the natural progression of the girls learning in drama, and was not the result of interventionist discussion on her behalf. (p.516) Griffith’s work lays an important foundation for this research into adolescent girls in the drama classroom. In building on the findings of Griffith’s case study, this work hopes to enrich and expand on how drama affects the everyday classroom lives of adolescent girls, and how we as drama practitioners could be better equipped to provide educative experiences, which are both relevant and evocative.

Dean (1994) conducted a study into the ‘school drama production’ in three single-sex schools (two female and one male). The focus took two strands - the advocacy of drama as an art form through the school production, and the opportunity this offered in addressing gender issues. Dean found that students in the all girls’ school expressed a number of concerns about staging productions, with and without boys. A number of respondents commented that they were ‘shy’ with male students because they felt the boys dominated rehearsals and the production in general, although as Dean wrote, the girls felt ‘they could have done with boys to help move the heavy scenery!’ (p.28)

Other girls commented that female parts in plays often represented the female as helpless compared with the stronger male parts, and that on
of girls felt they would like to work with males in a play production so they could ‘stop pretending’ to be males in roles which are assigned to them in all female drama classrooms. As one female respondent explained, by offering drama productions where both male and female students work together, ‘all voices are represented’ in the effort. (p.28) Dean argues that the value of combined school productions should not be ignored in single sex drama classrooms for, ‘the combined schools’ production in the single sex school offers a real opportunity for students to consider their gender and their place in the real world.’ (p.28)

Of worthy mention are research studies (Donelan 1991, McLean 1995) not specifically devoted to the issue of gender, but which incidentally document its significance in the inter–relationships of the students in drama activity. Donelan (1995) in an ethnographic case study conducted in three primary classrooms, observed that the classrooms were ‘a world in which the boys, voices, behaviours, attitudes, and energy levels, dominated classroom interactions.’ (p.39) In one log entry Donelan (1995) writes, ‘I found the domination by the boys and the restricted opportunities for the girls in the classroom hard to tolerate.’ (p.39)

In another instance Donelan states, ‘The boys’ domination and lack of commitment to the tasks make me feel irritated .. Does L (the teacher) realise the gender imbalance? (p.42) Donelan’s data reveals a strong preference by the girls to ‘play’ as mothers and babies in the dramatic role–plays, whilst the boys saw themselves as wizards, big brothers and
‘the fonz.’ Girls were often relegated to specific roles by the boys which they accepted passively. As Donelan observed, ‘Matthew grabs the wand in triumph .. Matthew brings the new wizard to the centre of the circle (Nicole has succumbed meekly)’ (p.92)

McLean (1995) also documents profound gender stereotyping and sexist attitudes in role play work undertaken by a senior drama class of mixed sexes. She writes,

As I looked over the video tape of this discussion, I was alarmed at some of the entrenched sexist attitudes from both male and female students..what I discovered was that the sexist attitudes that had been assumed in role plays and presented satirically, were attitudes that were deemed acceptable from both boys and girls in the class. (pp.117–118)

McLean further notes, the role plays were framed by traditional attitudes and sexist language which the girls did not challenge. In one role play, the ‘police officers' referred to the women as ‘lovey, darlin, and sweetheart' without any censure on the part of the girls. As McLean points out, the ‘idea that women could make any impact on their community lives' simply didn’t occur to the girls in the drama class. (p.119) In an attempt to contest these entrenched gender values in the classroom, McLean provided opportunity through the drama work for the students to be actively challenged to explore new meanings about traditional gender frameworks. In reflecting on this process she believes, ‘that by the exploration of feminism and patriarchy in the classroom
they had been offered a model from which to unpack other frameworks between men, women, love and power.' (p.119)

Drama research and specific gender study projects such as those of Griffiths, Tait, Errington and Nilan, serve to remind us of the importance of linking theoretical and pedagogical drama practice to the cultural and social experiences of the adolescents we teach. As Tait asserts, ‘drama education must strive to explore and redefine gender identity to challenge rigid role divisions and the way the social experience of gender produces different attitudes towards problem solving, moral, and ethical dilemmas.’ (pp.25–26)

Providing adolescent girls with the opportunity to explore their social and cultural experiences through dramatic action, allows them freedom and flexibility to investigate alternative realms of knowing and being. Young women must be granted a space where they can collectively discuss and create text and performance on their terms and in their own creative ways, not to divide them from their male counterparts, but to enrich their own independence and understanding of themselves as women. The opportunity for females to assess their differences and explore their similarities to males, is paramount to the educational, social, emotional and personal development of our female students.

Nicholson (1995) writes that drama education can encourage students to regard the art form as offering the potential to not only reflect reality,
but indeed to rewrite it. As Kenway and Willis (1992) add, girls need to be given access to imaginary worlds in which new metaphors, new forms of social relations, and new patterns of power and discourse are explored. (in Errington 1992) Drama educators must offer their students as Hornbrook (1989) argues, dramatic experiences, which ‘equip them with the means to interpret the world in which they live.’ (p.96)

In particular, our female students must be challenged to look beyond what they know and experience in their everyday lives, and then decide for themselves, the alternatives they will choose. Only in this way can we offer an aesthetic education for adolescent girls which will encourage them, as de Beauvoir (1953) wrote, to ‘be’ rather than to ‘seem to be.’

If we as drama educators are to find answers to how best we can offer adolescent girls drama experiences which serve them effectively for making sense of their own lives, then we must start by carefully examining drama classroom practice itself. Field based research offers one of the most powerful methods for investigating and deconstructing the pedagogical frameworks from which we work. It allows the researcher access to the participants’ classroom; to witness and be part of the ordinary and extraordinary moments which make up their lives; to document that which may have gone unobserved or unacclaimed. Indeed it is as Dillon (1990) describes, what frees and liberates us ‘from seeing things as they are, to seeing them as they might be!’ (p.334)
Summary

This chapter has highlighted some of the progressive developments of gender as an educational and sociological area of enquiry. From the early women's movement, to more recent research into the educational experiences of females, the issue of women’s ascribed roles in society has been a complex one. What is clear is that the study of females is a relatively new phenomenon. The experiences of women, and how they communicate and relate to their wider social and cultural contexts, has become an important area for academic research and educational reform.

This study seeks to provide insight into the adolescent realities of one all female drama classroom. What indeed is happening with young girls in the classroom? How accurate and valid are the interpretations of previous studies about adolescent girls? What voices do the girls use to describe their own experiences? The journey which follows hopes to honour some of these questions in an attempt to reveal to the reader, a more authentic portrait of the adolescent female.
CHAPTER THREE

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Like scientific research, our research in drama demands careful observation, generalization, and the expression of results in a community of educators. Like science, the study of drama requires detail and precision and will emphasise certain fundamental processes. Thinking creatively and critically, solving problems, constructing knowledge, ‘reading’ results and developing productive theories, are as essential for development in the arts as in the sciences. (O’Neill 1996, p.138)

An Epistemological Perspective

This study is concerned with the experiences of Year 11 adolescent girls in one drama classroom in an all girls’ Catholic college. It seeks to explore the classroom drama activities of these young women’s lives, give them ‘voice’ (defined here as the opportunity to be heard as females, to articulate gendered feelings and values freely, a means of self expression, [adapted from Maher & Thompson Tetreault 1994] to describe their own perceptions and understandings of the work they do, and highlight the diverse needs and interests of young women in one drama class.

It is a study driven by an assumption that young women’s lives are inextricably interwoven with established cultural and social concepts of
gender roles, and in turn, many of these learned intuitive gender behaviours significantly affect their daily classroom interactions. It is a study committed to improving educational understanding about the needs, behaviours, attitudes and interests of young women in one drama classroom, in order to inform the pedagogical and philosophical practice of drama teachers in all girls' drama classrooms.

This study has drawn from cross-disciplinary feminist and sociological theory and discourse in establishing an epistemological framework and works from the following assumptions:

- Gender is an important determinate of the behaviour and attitudes for students in the classroom. Stereotyped concepts and traditional assumptions binding the sexes to separate roles is now seen to limit the potential of both girls and boys during schooling. (Leder & Sampson 1989)
- Gender identities, divisions, groups and meanings, are all produced actively and collaboratively in everyday life. (Thorne 1993) Gender is not something that is passively developed. Gender is not simply a case of ‘is’, but rather a case of something that is ‘done’. (West & Zimmerman 1987)
- Females are worthy of academic research: their lives are important. (Reinharz 1992) In researching the experiences of females, we actively open up a ‘space’ in which their needs and interests can be addressed.
- In the classroom, dramatic play can be both a liberating
and oppressive learning medium for our female students; there is a degree of agency through the manipulation and interweaving of established dramatic forms into the students’ personal narratives. Ultimately, students are constrained by the ideological limits of what they know, and what they understand. (Nicholson 1995)

The focus question ‘What are the experiences of young women in one drama classroom?’ was further framed by the following sub-questions:

(1) How do young women relate to each other in the drama classroom?
(2) What do young women ‘do’ in the drama classroom?
(3) What do young women want to do drama about?
(4) How do young women perceive their experiences in drama?

Each sub question was extended by specific foci (the reader should refer to Figure 1) which enabled me to deconstruct comprehensively the observations, interview transcripts, questionnaires and journal, with greater analytical depth and clarity. Figure 1 gives a clear overview of these foci, framing them within the methodological approach used to gather information from the group.
Obtaining Information

Sub-Question 1
How do adolescent girls relate to each other?
- Relationship between adolescent girls in drama class
- The language used by young women
- Modes of communication between adolescent girls

Sub-Question 2
What do adolescent girls ‘do’ in the drama classroom?
- What behavioural modes are evident?
- How do adolescent girls participate in ‘making’ drama?
- How do they work together in groups?

Sub-Question 3
What do adolescent girls want to do drama about?
- What are their interests in drama?
- What choices do they make?

Sub-Question 4
How do adolescent girls perceive their experiences in drama?
- Do adolescent girls consider drama worthwhile?
- Do they enjoy what they do?
- What do they dislike doing?
- What would they add to or change in the drama program?

Focus
- Relationship between adolescent girls in drama class
- The language used by young women
- Modes of communication between adolescent girls

Sources of Information
Sixteen Year 11 Girls in an all girls’ drama classroom in an all girls’ Secondary Catholic College in Brisbane

How?
- Participant Observation
- Class Journal
- Group Interviews

Obtaining Information
When?
- Twice a week - two lessons @ 40 mins & 1 1/2 hr
- Throughout Semester
- Regular Monday lunch sessions (20 min) throughout Semester 1

Research Question: What are the experiences of adolescent girls in a drama classroom?

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH DESIGN

FIGURE 1
Choosing a Paradigm

In research you must be a good listener to the ‘voices’ - to bear the text and the resonances made, even if at the time they don’t seem to make sense... (Cecily O’Neill, Unpublished Lecture, Griffith University Institute of Drama Education Research, July 1995)

In choosing an appropriate research paradigm, I was reminded of Cecily O’Neill’s words illuminating the importance of ‘listening’ to the voices of those being researched - the need to not only observe young women in an educational research setting, but also to listen intensively and extensively to the kinds of discourses at work in the drama classroom. There was a need for a methodological framework which would be both focused and flexible enough for me to gather a rich cross section of data using a variety of qualitative methods.

Importantly there was a need to become as much part of the girls’ classroom culture as was possible, immersing myself naturally in their drama world - observing, pondering and questioning without being too intrusive. In view of these requirements, a descriptive case study using qualitative and ethnographic techniques of methodology was chosen. The main aim was to gather, to consider and analyse as much data information as possible over a period of one semester, using the following methods:
Importantly, I wanted to become an integral part of the ‘female adolescent culture’ of the classroom, but needed to make a decision on how close I could become to the research participants. One of the most essential means of collecting methods in the field, the ‘participant observer’, allows ongoing and intensive observing, listening and communication with the focus participants, whilst remaining involved in the field context. (McCormack 1991)

As a research method, the participant observer role allows the researcher to probe deeply into the culture being observed, whilst analysing intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitutes the life cycle of that group. (Cohen and Manion 1989) Additionally, the participant observer mode allows the researcher to obtain quality observations in a natural setting where it is more difficult for the participants to consistently ‘mask’ what is really going on. (Smith 1978 in Borg & Gall 1989, p.392)
Wolcott (1988) describes three distinct styles of the ‘participant observer’ role: the active participant (one who has a job to do in the setting as well as the research), the privileged observer (someone who is known and trusted and given easy access to the context) and the limited observer (someone who researches, observes, asks questions, and builds trust over time). (p.194)

The need to both observe the young women in the classroom but also to work actively with them at times, led me to straddle dual roles of the more passive or limited observer, and that of the active participant. The changing of these roles was determined by the needs of the class from week to week, alongside decisions made by both the classroom teacher and myself about the appropriateness of me taking specific class lessons. Such a constant variation in researcher roles is not uncommon in an ethnographic context as the researcher’s need for clarification and analysis grows and narrows. As Spradley (1980) notes:

*The role of participant observer will vary from one social situation to another, and each investigator has to allow the way he or she works, to evolve. But as your role develops, you will have to maintain a dual purpose: You will want to seek to participate and to watch yourself and others at the same time.* (p.58)

As discussion in Chapter 5 will reveal, the handling of these dual roles was not without tension. Whilst striving to maintain a professional stance I was also powerfully drawn into the intimacy of the participants’ world and this in itself, presented a number of problems for me in
maintaining an authentic stance whilst collecting and analysing data. I was constantly reminded of the word of Glazer (1980) who writes,

_A researcher must become deeply involved with (their) material and allow it to absorb (them) while remaining emotionally vital enough to step back and perceive the contours of the data. It is a rigorous, affective exercise demanding emotional reserves and critical perceptiveness._

_(in Ely 1991, p.113)_

**The Case Study as Methodology**

The case study has been defined as a ‘bounded system of study’ (Smith in Stake 1981) or an ‘instance in action.’ (MacDonald and Walker 1975)

As a research style, Skilbeck (1983) argues that the case study ‘is the key factor in the revitalisation and democratisation of educational practice and knowledge.’ (p.18) On the value of the case study as a research method, Yin (1991) adds:

_(the case study) is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and which multiple sources of evidence are used. (p.23)_

For the purpose of this study I particularly like the definition of Wiersma (1991) who describes the case study as one ‘characterised by an investigation of a single group, event, institution, or culture.’ (p.422) John Carroll (1996) also provides an excellent overview of the use of the case
study in drama research. Carroll points out, that the case study is particularly suitable for study in drama classrooms because participants in drama,’create a unique set of social relationships that become a single unit of experience capable of analysis and study.’ (Carroll 1996, p.77)

Additionally as in the case study, where to make sense of what is happening the whole context needs to be closely observed, the drama classroom provides a learning microcosm where, ‘the whole creative sequence needs to be studied, (in order to make sense of the dramatic process) not just aspects of it.’ (Carroll 1996, p.77)

The case study was specifically chosen for this research, because of the freedom and scope it gave me to readily access the drama classroom of a single group – adolescent female students. It afforded me an opportunity to observe and work within the classroom without being excessively intrusive into the daily experiences of the girls.

I considered the focus drama classroom a distinct cultural sub-group (female adolescents of the age group 15–16 years old) characterised by certain identifiable behaviour modes, values, and conceptual understandings of the world. Indeed I anticipated that these ‘modes of knowledge and understanding’ would be somehow reflected in the girls' dramatic experiences, as well as in what the girls themselves revealed to me through the research questionnaire, class journal and group interviews.
In my initial planning, I was guided by the principles of case study methodology as identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

- The case study allows for a reconstruction of the participants' constructions (emic inquiry).
- The case study is an effective vehicle for demonstrating the interplay between inquirer and respondents.
- The case study provides the 'thick description' so necessary for judgements of transferability.
- The case study represents an unparalleled means for communicating contextual information that is grounded in the particular setting that was studied. (pp.359–360)

Significantly, the need to ground the participants’ experiences in an educational setting was important. How the girls worked, interacted and responded in the drama classroom, was paramount in understanding the adolescent female culture in a communal learning context. The case study approach allowed the emergence of the girls’ own 'voices' to be documented over time in a learning environment which encouraged collaborative learning and freedom of expression. In writing on the importance of research which explores and reveals the voices, experiences and lives of women in general, Berenice Carroll (1976) asserts:

*Theory must remain at best hypothetical, at worst unreal and barren, (unless we have detailed) case studies and surveys dealing with the experience of selected groups of women in diverse cultures and time periods.* (p.xii)
The argument for educators to become more accountable for their classroom practice and actively confront traditional curriculum pedagogy has gained momentum in the last decade. O’Mara (1995) argues for the growing need for classroom teachers to gain new knowledge of the way students work in drama - the urgency for a ‘transplanting of epistemology’ from academic frameworks of theory and knowledge to the grassroots of classroom practice. O’Mara (1995) notes in her own case study work, that students themselves possess significant insight into their own practice in an educational context which can in turn inform the planning of drama curricula.

O’Mara’s observations are pertinent in a time when teachers are besieged by curriculum and educational policy changes and students are pushed to emotional and physical limits as they pound the assessment treadmill. As drama practitioners, we must be constantly aware of what the interests and needs of our students are, and how they are best served through our pedagogical practice. As Taylor (1994, 1996) writes,

*To be an arts educator is to be a reflective practitioner. Both give birth to ideas: both search for a medium to express and honour their vision. (1994, p.7). to interrogate the truths that (we) daily confront and imagine what is possible in education, what is not possible, and what might be. (1996, p.54)*
In response to Taylor’s statement, it is important to note that the focus of this study cannot claim to be that of true reflective practice. As I was not evaluating or investigating my own teaching practice within a drama classroom nor directly investigating the practice of the classroom teacher, the study could not be termed reflective practice. However the ultimate aim of the study was to illuminate and document the experiences and attitudes of young adolescent females in a drama classroom with the intention to ‘give birth to ideas’ to both my own and others’ drama practice in the future.

I envisaged the final analysis would inform and enlighten drama teachers of adolescent girls, urging them to assess their own drama programs in all girls’ schools, and consider innovative ways of enriching the learning experiences. As the girls would be reflecting on their drama experiences in the questionnaire, journals and interviews, I saw the study as providing reflective data for the classroom teacher as well as the researcher.

Stenhouse (1982) contends, that descriptive case studies of any kind provide documentary reference for the discussion and assessment of educational practice. (in Burgess 1985, p.267) I see this as one of the most important functions of this case study. The data collected and the insight gained from observing and documenting the ‘authentic voices’ of these young women, can only serve to improve practice and program planning in girls’ drama classrooms. In choosing an all girls’ educational context, I believe the girls were given a more liberating opportunity to
explore and investigate their own gendered realities than what they may have experienced if males had been present.

Significantly the case study offers a powerful method for highlighting the needs and interests of our female students, as well as evaluating the gender appropriateness of the drama program for an all girls' drama classroom. However I would hasten to add that this study attempted to document the experiences of fifteen to sixteen year old girls in an everyday drama classroom in order to essentially highlight their interests, needs and experiences. It was never my intention to evaluate the drama program which currently exists in the research school, but rather to make the data available to the classroom teacher for her own future evaluative purposes.

**Ethnography as Research**

The desire to collect data which would give me a deep insight into the way young women experienced drama, was best achieved through the use of ethnographic techniques. As a qualitative research approach, ethnography allows the researcher intensive immersion in the cultural lives of the participants where they can come to know their world from the inside, and understand the social phenomena involved in their everyday lives. (Ball 1982)

Effectively, ethnographers strive to put themselves in the ‘place’ of the research group through a process of “verstehen” or empathy, (Smith
in ‘to see life through their eyes as well as our own.’ (Ely 1991) The ethnographer not only observes and records what is seen, striving for what Geertz (1973) terms,’thick description’ of data, but also becomes intensively involved in ongoing processes of analysis, interpretation and explanation. As Allen, Benner and Diekelmann (1986) point out, as ethnographers endeavour to determine why participants act and respond the way they do, they are drawn into the realms of insight, empathy and negotiated agreement. (in Mienczakowski, Morgan and Rolfe 1993,p.12)

As a site for ethnographic research, the classroom offers what Louis Smith (1969) calls a notable cultural microcosm and social system, rich in diverse data for the educational practitioner. (Smith in Donelan 1992) Referring specifically to research in the drama classroom, Kate Donelan (1992) argues that drama practice and ethnography share common assumptions and processes because:

*Ethnography like drama is based on the human capacity to empathise, to imaginatively project into a situation, to identify with another's point of view. Writers about ethnography describe the process of conducting participant observation in terms that are familiar to us as drama educators. (p.42)*

Drama practitioners are well aware of the need for constant and active observation of students as they engage in dramatic action. The need to reassess and restructure processes in terms of student cognitive and emotional maturity is paramount to any drama teacher’s everyday
planning. Every dramatic experience is unique in form and idea, and students’ choices and approaches vary from one classroom culture to the other. Importantly, participation in drama allows each student the freedom to explore the multiple dimensions of meaning that make up their school, family and personal lives, whilst at the same time negotiating dramatic action and form.

As an educational learning medium drama is everchanging and dynamic, requiring research methodology which is both flexible and varied. As Hamilton (1991) argues, ‘drama requires a research methodology which takes cognisance of its dynamic form. It is not a static thing for objectification and measurement, rather it is a fluid, changeable form.’ (p.3) Donelan (1992) adds that ‘the participant in drama and the ethnographic researcher share a common state of mind, in that both need to be involved and detached in order to ‘maintain a dual perspective towards the culture being studied.’ (p.43)

Additionally O’Neill (1996) argues that drama offers a ‘laboratory’ of rich possibilities for the researcher. She writes,

*Drama provides a tight structure or paradigm for human behaviour, an experimentally controlled example of human interaction. People are segregated in a space, sometimes a theatre, sometimes a studio or classroom, where human behaviour can be displayed and manipulated through metaphor, repetition and exaggeration. (p.142)*
In combining classroom observation with other qualitative methodology, I worked to gather data over one semester which would be diversely rich in its description of the girls’ activities, attitudes and behaviour. I acknowledged the need to observe the girls’ work in drama over an extended period which would allow me access to their changing experiences both inside and outside the dramatic action. The need for diversity of method and prolonged engagement in the field is the key to quality ethnographic research. As Agar (1980) argues, ‘people have different sides of themselves that they display under different sets of circumstances making it essential to see group members in different situations, not just during a brief interview. (p.70)

**The Research Group**

The study was conducted in the drama classroom of sixteen Year 11 girls (approximate age group 15–16 years of age) in an all girls' secondary college. At the time of the study, the school had over 550 students across the class levels 8–12. In its current ‘Mission Statement’, the school is described as having a genuine concern with the development of excellence in each student (academically, physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually), as well as a nurturance of strong gospel values. In particular, the school seeks to empower students as young women who can live responsibly, justly and reflectively in society.

The school promotes the Arts as integral learning areas, and in addition to music and drama, boasts an instrumental music program which
provides opportunities for learning musical instruments and participating in bands and ensembles. Extra-curricular opportunities include debating, public speaking, choir, musicals, drama, 'Tournament of Minds' and photography. The school was selected as a research site because of the strong elements of community I have witnessed there in my time as a practicum supervisor of university drama students. I have been impressed with the co-operative nature of the girls and their apparent enthusiasm for learning, and felt my study would be well suited to the goals and aspirations shared by the school and parental community.

The research group was of a homogeneous nature consisting of sixteen girls (all fifteen to sixteen years of age) predominately of Anglo-Saxon decent. The participating group had not done drama in the school before as it is not offered at the junior level at this point in time. However, a number of the girls had done outside drama performance work, and some were involved with theatre groups or ballet performances. Some of them attended live theatre productions, but many admitted they never went to the theatre at all.

The group was an enthusiastic and friendly cohort with a delight in drama and this attitude was expressed many times during the taped interviews. The drama teacher who for this study will be known as Carol, has taught drama for some years and is committed to excellence in her drama teaching. She strives for new ideas and is constantly trying to upgrade her knowledge about the new drama curriculum implemented
in all Queensland drama classrooms in 1996. Carol was interested and enthusiastic about the case study being conducted in her classroom and I considered her a warm support throughout the research period.

**The Methodological Process**

The most important considerations in my selection of methods for data collection were that they should be both flexible and varied enough to allow a realistic and diverse record of the girls' activities over one semester. Additionally, I wanted to be able to triangulate material thoroughly and consistently to ensure a reliable analysis of data was made, using not only my own observations and interpretations, but also that of the classroom teacher and the students as well. In view of these criteria, a multiplicity of qualitative methods were chosen.

As Figure 2 illustrates, there were multiple data collection methods used to ensure information was valid and reliable. All interviews were either recorded on video or audio tapes, and written responses such as the journal and the questionnaires, enabled students less comfortable with face to face interviews, to have another mode of response to the questions asked. (see exemplar Appendix A) Data analysis was ongoing, with field note documentation, transcription of audio and video tapes, and questionnaire and journal analysis, providing vital information which over time was categorised by identifying common links or thematic elements in the data.
FIGURE 2

CLASSROOM CONTEXT
SITE OF CASE STUDY

Questions posed

Focus: What are the experiences of adolescent girls in a drama classroom?
  ➔ How do they relate to each other?
  ➔ What do they DO in the process of 'making' drama?
  ➔ What do they want to do drama about?
  ➔ How do they perceive their experiences in drama?

Data collection

- Field notes
- Classroom observation (Audiotaped)
- Log
- Small group interviews (Videotaped)
- Class journal 'Voice text'
- Class questionnaire

On going analysis

Data analysis

- Translation of field notes into log data
- Analysis of log
- Transcription & analysis of interviews/audiotape /videotape
- Analysis & interpretation
  Journal & questionnaire

Triangulate data

Final Analysis, Discussion & Conclusion

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Eisner (1991) argues multiple data types function both to foster credibility, and to enable the researcher to put ‘pieces together to form a compelling whole.’ (p.111) Similarly, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) contend that the use of multiple data collection methods contributes to the trustworthiness of the data as the more sources that are tapped for understanding, the more believable the findings. McCormack (1991) stresses the researcher’s need to strive for trustworthy and ethically sound data in arguing:

*The entire endeavour must be grounded in ethical principles about how data are collected and analysed, how one’s own assumptions and conclusions are checked, how participants are involved, and how results are communicated.* (p.93)

**Classroom Observations**

Classroom observations were conducted twice a week over one semester from January to July 1996. The first observation period was a regular fifty minute drama lesson, whilst the second was a double period of one and a half hours. As a researcher I played dual roles in the classroom, both observing and occasionally teaching the girls. As both, I took copious field notes of the classroom activity which then were later compiled into a more detailed log book. (see exemplar Appendix B.) In the later stages of the study, I transferred the compilation of field notes to my laptop computer which I used in the classroom regularly. This proved to be a more effective mode of note-taking, as it allowed for
quicker and more concise recording of classroom activities as well as almost immediate analysis.

**Field Notes**

From the moment I entered the field context (i.e. the drama classroom), I endeavoured to document as much as I possibly could about what I heard, observed and thought. These field notes recorded initially in a small note pad (and later onto the laptop computer), were the important foundation for the log book which was to shape the principal body of research data. The importance of taking copious notes in the field is reflected in the words of Lofland and Lofland (1984):

> "the complaint of the novice investigator (or the boast of the professional) that 'he (sic) didn't make any notes because nothing important happened' is viewed in this tradition as either naive or arrogant, or both. (p.46)"

Cognisant of the need to record consistently comprehensive notes – to strive for ‘thick’ descriptions of what was happening, I jotted down as much as possible in my classroom observations as well as what I learnt from more informal interviews and discussions with the students. The girls did not seem disturbed by my notepad, and as I tried to make the jottings as inconspicuous as possible, I generally gathered notes of sufficient quality for log book translation. The note book was carried everywhere throughout the course of the study and became an important ‘written memory’ for me. As previously stated, as the girls
became more relaxed with my presence in the classroom, I began to take notes on my lap top computer which I found allowed me to make faster, more comprehensive observations.

**The Log Book**

In defining the essence of the ‘log book’, Ann McCormack (1991) describes it as a ‘personal dialogue about moments of victory and disheartenment, hunches, feelings, insights, assumptions, biases, and ongoing ideas about methods. (p.69) Fundamentally, the log book unfolds as a ‘cohesive history’ of the participants’ lives, allowing intricate and detailed data to be unravelled throughout the research journey. (Ely 1991) I found both these definitions to be significant for me throughout the case study, referring to them often to ensure my jottings were comprehensive and focused.

Field notes taken during each classroom observation were translated into a formal log book. I considered this the most essential recording document for research data in the study and thus I treated the entries with great respect. The log book was also regularly informed by the informal videotaped interviews and classroom journal to give it a greater scope for analysis. Each line of log entries was numbered for quick cross reference and easy documentation of statements, and page margins were left to enable me to make important keypoints in ongoing analysis. (see exemplar Appendix B) As the research progressed, I categorised a number of themes which became the focus of log entry analysis:
• drama activity (DA)
• interpersonal communication (IC)
• classroom behaviour (CB)
• personal responses (PS)
• attitudes (A)
• adolescent talk (AT)

Within the log, my own ‘observer’s comments,’ (Bogdan and Biklen 1982) were bracketed and typed in bold in order to define clearly what were personal reactions and reflections to what I was witnessing in the classroom, and what were direct observations of classroom activity. Importantly, these comments allow for a simultaneous juxtaposition of the researcher’s direct observations with an analysis of that data. As I progressed in the study, I viewed these comments not only as a form of intimate ‘musing’ about the minute by minute activities of the girls, but also a monitoring of my own development as an ethnographic researcher.

The log book was kept as a confidential and private document between the classroom teacher and myself and all names were changed. At regular intervals, the classroom teacher gave feedback on the entries and in this way, data was analysed for trustworthiness and authenticity. Each weekly log entry was accompanied by an analytic memo – an important adjunct to the field notes, described by McCormack (1991) as ‘conversations with oneself about what has occurred in the research process.’ These memos are direct reflections on the researcher’s log itself, but are also
considered to be a significant part of the log in terms of what it can tell us about the ongoing process. These analytic memos acted as ongoing documents for my own reflection and assessment about my role as researcher, themes I needed to investigate further, or other notable ‘musings’ about the research process. (see exemplar Appendix B.)

**Small Group Interviews**

Over the period of study (one school semester), all of the girls in the focus drama classroom were interviewed. The interviews took place during lunchtime sessions and were recorded on videotape and later on audiotape. Each session was transcribed as part of log material, providing essential ‘live’ data on the feelings and attitudes of the girls themselves. (see exemplar Appendix, B) To lessen the stress that can come with individual interviews, I asked four to five girls at a time to volunteer to be interviewed each selected Monday during the semester. This seemed to be the best method as the girls were willing to come together rather than alone.

At times, some of the girls agreed to be interviewed only if they could come as a team with their friends. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) comment that interviewing more than one person at a time can prove extremely useful to the researcher for, ‘some young people need company to be emboldened to talk; and some topics are better discussed by a small group of people who know one another.’ (p.64) I found this to be the
case with the majority of the girls during the research and continued the practice throughout the semester.

In making my decision on how I would conduct the interviews, I was strongly influenced by the work of Ann Oakley. Oakley (1981) is strongly critical of traditional interview methods where the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewed remains detached and professional. She views this as the representation of a hegemonic masculine paradigm based on ‘objectivity, detachment, hierarchy and “science”’, (p.38) and in response, she champions research involving women that opts for a more open and responsive relationship between the researcher and the participants.

Oakley (1981) asserts that in interviewing women, we are documenting important accounts of their own lives and giving them ‘voice’ in society about what it means to be female. (pp.48–49) If we are to encourage women to talk openly and honestly in an interview situation, they must feel empathy with the female researcher knowing that they are free to ask their own questions about the research. This was the approach I chose to take in my work with the young women in my case study, and as a consequence, the interviews were generally comfortable and very relaxed. In inviting the girls to ask me questions or to discuss their anxieties about the interviews, I found they were released from the perceived tension of having to ‘perform’ for me in front of a camera.
Initially there were eight key questions that I asked the girls in order to give them some focus during the interview. At times I found that the girls’ responses, or indeed lack of them, dictated I rephrase or redirect the questions altogether, but in general I strove to be flexible in my questioning. I deliberately linked the interview questions to those in the questionnaire issued later in the semester to the class, in a hope that those girls who felt more at ease writing than talking, would possibly expand on the questions at a later date.

The key interview questions were:

1. Could you describe yourself?
2. Why did you select drama as a senior subject?
3. What do you think drama offers young women in school?
4. What do you think of drama in an all girls’ classroom?
5. What issues do you think are important in drama for you to investigate as a young woman?
6. What activities do you like doing in drama?
7. What don’t you like doing?
8. If you had the chance, what would you include in drama class?

In videotaping the interviews, I was able to scrutinise the girls’ responses – both verbal and non verbal, in a way that enabled me to see beyond my initial reactions to what I ‘thought’ I heard the first time. (see exemplar Appendix B) It was on further analysis of the videotapes that I was really able to hear and appreciate what the girls were actually
saying. In translating the videotapes into written form, the messages and nuances in the girls’ speech became clearer and ultimately more meaningful. As Mehan (1993) points out, when we listen to and look at life closely, which is what a videotape of film record enables us to do, we see and hear a different version of social life than is otherwise possible.

On completion of each interview, the girls were invited to view the video and discuss with me what had been said. This was an essential way to ensure that my interpretations were correct, and allowed the girls to expand or clarify on the points that had been raised during the taped interviews. As the semester progressed, I interviewed the girls on audiotape gaining further responses and clarification about the former interviews. These interviews expanded to discussions about the previous work the girls had done in drama as well as their feelings about the processes that they had experienced in order to shape dramatic presentations during each drama unit. The interviews were kept informal and relaxed in an effort to encourage the girls to speak freely and honestly about their experiences in the drama classroom.

**The Class Journal**

At the beginning of the case study, I explained to the girls that a general classroom journal would be available for them to write entries about their experiences and reflections in drama class. I deliberately did not ask them to keep personal diaries for two reasons. Carol, the class drama teacher had already requested the girls keep a personal journal as part
of their assessment process. I considered it an unfair burden to impose another personal journal task onto them. Additionally, as Carol offered access to the personal diaries if I so desired, I considered I would certainly have enough written data to analyse.

Secondly and most importantly, I was interested in collecting what I termed, ‘a communal voicetext’ - I wanted the girls to somehow record their own uncensored ‘voices’ through a communal textual mode. They were encouraged to read and comment on other entries in the class journal in an effort to activate a textual discourse between the girls on their shared experiences in drama. To enable them to feel free to do this, I stressed that names did not have to be given at any time in the journal. Importantly, no one was urged to write an entry unless they absolutely wanted to, and the girls were asked to pass the journal to each other freely when they felt they had written enough. (see exemplar Appendix A) Carol was not invited to read the journal entries during the research period to ensure the girls continued to feel free to write whatever they felt without any perceived fear of reprisal.

I felt this ‘voicetext’ was an extremely important data source for what it could reveal to me about the girls’ thoughts and feelings about drama. It short, I saw it as a form of an historical record about this class over one semester compiled and owned by the girls themselves. Additionally I felt the communal nature of the journal would allow many of the girls to express honest reactions to their drama experiences through an unthreatening communication medium. Roslyn Arnold (1994) writes,
The journal...at a simple level can provide a record of events from the writer's perspective, at more complex levels, (it) invites deeper reflections on the significance or worth to the writer of private feelings or responses...students feel safe to make disclosures...in the knowledge that such disclosures will be treated sensitively and may provide material for understandings and insights about one's self and others. (pp.18–19)

To ensure the journal did not become lost, Carol and I monitored its whereabouts on a daily basis and I checked it at regular intervals for analysis and discussion.

**Data Analysis**

Analysis of data began from the first day I commenced research in the classroom. It became almost a religious ritual for me each evening to carefully thread my way through copious field notes of that day's classroom experience, and try to make sense of my often frantic jottings. It was an exciting but daunting process where the sheer volume of data collected frequently threatened to overwhelm my enthusiasm and passion for making sense of what I was seeing and hearing.

To overcome the possible inertia that sometimes sets in when one is faced with a seemingly impossible task, I approached the analysis slowly and thoughtfully, very much in the vein of what Lofland and Lofland (1984) terms a 'steady plodder.' I found this approach allowed themes and ideas to emerge gradually in the data, enabling me to apply 'thinking
units’ or ‘framed sorting files,’ (Lofland & Lofland 1984 in Ely 1991, p.143) to the gathering information. Eventually I identified a number of themes (listed previously in this chapter) which provided the essential analytical framework for all my data interpretation.

As I worked through every field note and transcript, I highlighted pieces of information which struck me as being important to the analysis in the margin at the side of the page. Words such as ‘self esteem,’ ‘interpersonal conflict,’ ‘communication patterns,’ were common descriptors which allowed me to categorise efficiently emergent themes. The final analysis of the data was conducted by arranging field notes, interview transcripts, journal and questionnaire responses, into thematic categories through a laborious but extremely effective cut and paste procedure. This allowed me to highlight those sections of data information which were pertinent to the final discussion on research findings. (see exemplar Appendix B)

**Data Reporting**

Interpreting the stories which emerged from my data was a consideration I thought long about. I wanted to transport the reader along a narrative journey which honoured the girls’ own voices, as well as my own. As Garner (1991) points out, the writing of a qualitative narrative is indeed telling a tale. (p.169)
In using a form of storytelling in qualitative reporting, the writer and reader can engage far more powerfully with the material in a way which transcends the traditional method of simply presenting the ‘facts.’ Witherell and Noddings (1991) argue that ‘story fabric offers us images, myths, and metaphors that are morally resonate and contribute both to our knowing, and our being known.’ (in Ely 1996, p.184)

In particular, Van Maanen (1988) identifies three distinct styles of ethnographic writing most commonly used in qualitative work – realist, confessional and impressionist. Realist tales provide a direct, matter of fact form of narrative which privileges what happened with the participants. Confessional tales tend to focus more closely on the experience of the fieldworker than on the culture studied, whilst Impressionist tales are fleeting accounts of moments of the fieldwork which are highly personalised and descriptive and carry elements of both the realist and confessional modes of writing. (in Ely 1991, p.171)

My desire to tell a tale which included both the experiences of the girls, and my own response to them as a researcher, prompted me into adopting an Impressionist style of writing. I wanted a narrative which was descriptive and personalised, but maintained professionalism and credibility as a piece of qualitative research. I found the Impressionist mode the most rewarding way of realistically portraying what had happened in the classroom but which still allowed for a degree of creativity. To ensure the narrative enabled the reader to be part of the research journey with me I employed a variety of ‘narrative devices,’ (Ely
1991) such as snapshots and vignettes which allowed more insightful and colourful descriptions of the group to emerge.

**Trustworthiness of Data**

*Being trustworthy as a qualitative researcher means at the least, that the processes of the research are carried out fairly, that the products represent as closely as possible, the experiences of the people who are studied. (McCormack 1991, p.93)*

The qualitative researcher must be unwaveringly scrupulous in the ongoing collection and analysis of research data. The chosen methodological framework must be flexible and comprehensive enough to allow the researcher to analyse meticulously and validate thoroughly the immense volume of data often associated with qualitative research.

Throughout the process, the researcher must strive to continually reassess their own position, to ensure a consistent and honest recording and interpretation of data. As Hammersley (1983) reminds us, the researcher must always remain in some way detached from the field work; there must be some social and intellectual distance for when all sense of being a stranger is lost, critical and analytic exploration of the data is jeopardized.
Additionally, whilst the analysis of data must reflect an attempt to identify common threads and shared experiences, it is equally crucial to ensure that the multiple perspectives of participants are acknowledged and considered. The use of a variety of methodological approaches can help such multiplicities of knowledge and points of views to be honoured authentically throughout the analytical process.

Taylor (1996) highlights the work of Richardson (1994) who describes the rendering of truths and trustworthiness in research data as a ‘crystallisation of ideas.’ As Taylor writes, ‘Richardson rejects positivist and neo–postivist ideas of truth, validity and falsification, and confirms the importance of struggle, ambiguity and contradiction.’ (p.44) For Richardson, crystallisation deconstructs the traditional idea of validity, and provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. (in Taylor, 1996, p.44)

In choosing the case study as a method of research, I knew the data would be unique to the classroom context chosen for the study. Aware of the seemingly intangible nature of qualitative inquiry and the dilemma of imposing individual value based interpretations on data analysis, I chose therefore multiple data collection procedures. This allowed careful reading and checking of data via video and audio tapes, classroom journal, log book and class questionnaires.
Peer Support and Checking

The consistency and intensity of classroom observations and group interviews alongside the documentation of the girls’ responses in both the journal and the questionnaire, allowed me to analyse and question the data systematically for internal validity and consistency. In order to further maintain credibility in my analysis and interpretation of data, I enlisted the regular support of a drama colleague as well as the classroom teacher. I considered this paramount in checking for consistent, honest appraisal and representation of the data.

Both peers were willing to discuss my observations and interpretations on a regular basis and I found this to be an important element in my analysis work. Their ongoing critical and honest appraisal of my work ensured my position as researcher remained balanced and honest in relation to my interpretations of collected data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) comment on the value of this kind of peer debriefing in writing:

“.the process (of peer debriefing) helps keep the inquirer ‘honest’, exposing him or her to searching questions by an experienced protagonist doing his or her best to play the devil’s advocate. (p.308)”

Member Checking

The girls themselves were enlisted in regular ‘checking’ on data collected in group interviews through informal group screening of the
video interviews. Subsequent discussions allowed them to validate what they had said and further clarify my interpretations where necessary. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ‘member checking’ is the essential key to research credibility in qualitative studies such as this:

*Credibility is a trustworthiness criterion which is satisfied when source respondents .. agree to honour the reconstructions; that fact should also satisfy the consumer.* (p.329)

Garner (1991) points out that the value of member checking lies in its capacity to reveal interpretative problems in the data, as well as in its role to act as an important medium to establish trust and collegiality between the researcher and the participants. (p.167)

**Constraints and Considerations**

It is acknowledged that the scope of this case study was constrained in that the field work took place in one girls’ drama classroom in a single Catholic girls’ college over a period of one semester of approximately sixteen weeks. Indeed, it is noted that the research cohort of sixteen girls accounts for only a small representation of young women in drama classrooms in this country. Additionally whilst I endeavoured to document rigorously the everyday experiences and attitudes of girls in the research classroom, the study did not have scope to investigate the effect of familial, religious and ethnic influences as variables in the girls’ activities and attitudes in drama.
Furthermore, the study did not seek to explore whether Catholicism had any significant effect on the attitudes and drama experiences of the research group. I considered this factor in the girls' lives far too complex an issue to address within this study, but acknowledge that this may have been a varying factor in the girls' behaviour and experiences in the drama classroom.

In respect to time frames, the study was conducted over one semester in the girls' overall Year 11 drama experience. Given the changing nature of the drama program alongside the possible natural maturation in the girls' overall development, it is acknowledged that they may have presented different behaviour and attitudes in Semester two.

The level of participation by the girls and their responses in the interviews, questionnaire and class journal, may have been coloured by their perceptions of what they felt I wanted to hear and see. However, in selecting a multiplicity of methods for data collection gathered consistently over time, greater credibility and reliability of the girls' responses was assured.

In collecting data, the researcher must be ever aware of the personal values and perceptions that they bring into the field. There must be an ongoing effort to balance 'between the development of empathy and the pursuit of a distanced, non-judgmental stance.' (Friedman 1991, p.113) Lloyd and Duveen (1992) argue that when we become ethnographic
observers of students, we are in constant jeopardy of allowing our own perceptions of social gender representations to affect our descriptions. Sara Lightfoot (1975) adds:

..in observing girls, we must be careful not to let our recognition of sexual categories influence and shape our observations so that we become prisoners of our own preconceptions. (p.137)

In immersing oneself in a classroom over a long period of time, the researcher runs the risk of ‘identifying so strongly with members, that defending their values comes to take precedence over actually studying them.’ (Wood 1986, p.34) The constancy of identification with the participants, and the unique closeness established through the ethnographic process between researcher and participants, has important implications for field work observations and subsequent analysis of data.

Smith (1983) urges the ethnographer to engage in continued self-examination particularly in times of ‘heightened awareness’ during the observation process. She argues that the emotional reactions of the researcher to what they see and hear in the field, is an important element for understanding and validating documentation of data.

For Smith, the researcher must be rigorous in distinguishing between emotions that are generated from the observed situation, to those that may be self-generated and biased. (in Jansen & Peshlin from LeCompte
1992, p.705) This view is extended by LeCompte (1987) who believes that the quality of qualitative study is greatly enhanced by the researcher's acknowledgement of the power of subjective values and influence on the study. The researcher must strive for what LeCompte terms, 'disciplined subjectivity' where they must continually examine their own responses to field situations in view of the behaviour and attitudes of the participants. (p.43)

Agar (1980) concurs with the former views in arguing that the qualitative researcher should strive to uncover subjective biases, and deconstruct them as part of the research methodology. Indeed the researcher's own ethnographic journey should be documented faithfully in order to assess and validate the observations and conclusions made in relation to the emerging data. As Agar writes:

*As you choose what to attend to and how to interpret it, mental doors slam shut on the alternatives. Whilst some of your choices may be consciously made, others are forced by the weight of the personal and professional background that you bring to the field. (p.48)*

As a female researcher working in an all girls' drama classroom, there were certain tensions and considerations in my work which need to be noted here. The very fact that I was a female endeavouring to gain information from a gendered culture I was a part of (i.e that of the feminine), meant that I needed to be aware of my own established feminine perceptions, my own constructions of a female reality.
Concepts such as the female’s tendency towards emotionality and that females were better, more empathetic listeners, were considerations I needed to keep in check during my field observations and analysis of data.

The very real possibility that my own gendered experiences as a female could significantly colour my observations and interpretations of the activities of my female participants, persuaded me to enlist the critical assistance of my colleagues who listened to, discussed and read my observations and interpretations with honest and insightful appraisal.

The regular interviews and discussions with the girls themselves, also worked to ensure I was able to confirm or rethink many of my hunches or perceptions about their activities and attitudes. In terms of my own emotional and professional responses to my experiences in the field, I was careful to monitor the field notes and interviews for evidence of subjective interpretations. In all of the logs I was disciplined in identifying my own responses through the use of ‘observer comments’ which I bracketed in bold.

**Ethical Considerations**

Before the study formally began in the classroom, I met with both the school principal and classroom teacher about their concerns for the well-being and protection of the girls privacy during the study. They placed very few demands on me other than the usual code of
confidentiality in changing the girls names in the study and ensuring the girls were never put under pressure to participate in the research.

The girls were given forms, (see Appendix A) granting permission to partake in the research study, which were signed and returned to me before I began work in the classroom. An accompanying letter to parents outlined who I was and the nature of the study, and invited them to telephone me if they had any queries about the research itself. At all times during my work with the girls, I explained to them what I was doing and ensured they understood what was being asked of them. Before any videotaping began, I explained the procedure to the girls and asked their permission once more to use the tapes in my study. They seemed to respond positively when they knew exactly what was going to happen, and I felt this was important to the success of the entire research study.

During the period I taught the girls, Carol would contact the parents explaining the nature of the task, the requirements of the unit, and any texts we might be using. Parents were invited to comment at all times about any concerns and reservations they may have had in respect to the work I was doing with the girls. Importantly however, the girls themselves were given the opportunity to comment on what I was doing in the classroom. They were considered in many respects ‘colleagues’ in the process and throughout the research no matter how difficult this sometimes became, I endeavoured to keep this relationship an ongoing and active one.
At the conclusion of my field work, the parents and the girls were given letters - the girls received a hand written, more personalised letter from me thanking them for their participation in the research study. The parents received a more formal letter (see Appendix A) advising them that the classroom research was at an end and that the work would be documented and discussed in the form of a major thesis. Additionally at an end of term performance which parents attended, I addressed them at the beginning of the evening explaining the research, the assurance of confidentiality, some of the findings, and issued an invitation to them that they could contact me to discuss the thesis or read the final product.

The following chapter marks the beginning of the narrative interpretative journey. Chapter Four traces the field experiences over the sixteen weeks I spent in the drama classroom with special emphasis on the girls’ own stories, attitudes and responses to interviews, questionnaires and informal conversations. Both Chapters Four and Five are introduced with cameo snapshots adapted from my field logs which work to invite the reader to become an integral part of this most enlightening classroom narrative journey.
SNAPSHOT

My field notes in this first week, look sketchy, but I am aware of letting myself treat this week as 'The Grand Tour' a la Spradley (1980). Despite a previous conversation with the girls the week before about my role in the classroom, they seemed suspicious and distrustful of me the first day. They eyed me intently, and I felt very much like the 'stranger' in the classroom. On the whole, the class seemed more quiet and unnatural than I suspected they would normally be, but I smiled on regardless. I am struck as I watch on this first day by the behaviour of the girls whose actions and behaviour seem very much like my own at 16 (or is this my imagination?). There is an air of 'nothing much affects us' whilst also a contradictory atmosphere of insecurity and extreme self-consciousness. The girls seem to have many sides to their personae and I find this fascinating. I ask myself how many roles the girls are actually playing at this stage in the drama class – I myself, am feeling as if I am playing a multitude of roles; researcher, woman, teacher, friend. One of the most significant things for me today is the kinds of communication the girls are exhibiting – there is whispering at times, seemingly secret conversations between only two or three of them, whilst at other times, there is more public communication where everyone seems to be throwing in a comment or two. These all seem important to the girls in offering support one way or another to each other...I decide to wait patiently for next time when I hope more will be revealed to me about this small cultural network.

(adapted from Analytic Memo #1)
CHAPTER 4

INSIDE THIS DRAMA SPACE –
PORTRAIT OF A CLASSROOM.

*Description should transport the reader to the scene, convey the pervasive qualities or characteristics of the phenomenon, and evoke the feelings and nature of the experience... (Ross 1988 in Ely 1991, P170)*

*Establishing Voices*

Beginning my research journey amidst the staring eyes and questioning faces of my adolescent participants, I became acutely aware of the powerful stories which would unfold before me. Rather like the artistic and intellectual journey which evolves through the writing, design and production of a theatrical play, I metaphorically became the scriptwriter, director, designer and critic, of a naturalistic tale shaped by the classroom lives of one group of female drama students.

These young women were to become the essential important ‘players’ of the piece – shaping, changing and evaluating their own work along the way, as they worked with me as co-directors and dramaturges of their own classroom artistic and personal journeys. As the weeks passed, I was continually challenged by the evolving sub-text of their voices and behaviour, and as the work developed, they too, began to delve deeper
into the scripts of their drama lives, exploring and questioning the masks they often wore in their daily drama activities.

This first stage of the journey reveals something about these ‘players’ – their attitudes towards themselves, drama, boys, and the drama class they work in. Their authentic voices shape the dialogue between the researcher and the reader in a narrative which strives to honour and validate the responses and experiences of the research journey. In understanding something about the quintessential adolescent nature and perceptions of the girls themselves, the reader is afforded a far greater insight into the significant changes which occurred in the classroom over one semester.

**Images of Self**

One of the most significant early observations of my work in the classroom, was the seemingly ‘adolescent typicalness’ of the girls who made up the research group. There appeared to be a comfortable sense of ‘belonging’ pervading through the general atmosphere and female community of the classroom environment. The girls appeared average everyday Australian teenagers full of both enthusiasm and angst, all doing drama for the first time at a relatively crucial time in their senior schooling.

Many of them in both the interviews and the questionnaires, were strong in their confirmations that they were indeed, ‘typical fun-loving’ girls.
For most of them, there was nothing unique about them in relation to others, and many of them shared and expressed the same kinds of attitudes and values about being a teenager. Their voices help shape the story:

Regina, who is bright and talkative, often anxious about her performance in class, describes herself as someone ‘who likes having alot of fun and going out with my friends.’ (Transcript 1, Line 3)

Karen, strong and independent, who confesses loving to be the ‘centre of attention’ (Transcript 1, Lines 24–25) comments thoughtfully, ‘Um. I like to think of myself as an individual and that I like doing things everyone else my age likes - going out and being with people...I just like performing..I hate myself. Too plain!’ (Transcript 1, Lines 5–6, 26 27)

Meg, presenting a paradox of traits - sometimes loud and confident, but often self-conscious and critical of her appearance comments: ‘I like going out with heaps of my friends. I like to be the centre of everything!’ (Transcript 1, Lines 17–18) Jane, who is softly spoken, gentle and introspective, responds with, ‘I'd describe myself as a friendly loving, person, um I work hard with my school work..I think I've got potential.’ (Transcript 2, Lines 2–3)

Louise, who is always unsure if she has the right to a point of view, adds, ‘Well, I think I’m a normal teenage girl - having lots of fun...I like to go out and socialise and everything.’ (Interview Transcript 2,
Lines 7–10) Gail, bright, articulate and animated, nods at Louise smiling, 'Well, I’m like Louise – normal!' (Transcript 2, Lines 11–12)

Other girls who did not put their names to the questionnaires,(see exemplar Appendix A) described themselves in terms of ‘creative and motivated,’ ‘determined to succeed,’ ‘outgoing, up-to-date and funloving female,’ ‘bottled up, loud, quietly confident,’ and ‘normal and happy, but surprisingly complex and complicated.’ Whilst only eight of the sixteen girls returned the questionnaires (many of them simply ‘forgot’), it was obvious that the majority of the girls considered themselves to be normal teenagers who placed significant emphasis on having fun.

What was particularly striking about the way the girls described themselves through the questionnaires and the interviews, was the enormous importance they placed on friendship, and the need for fun in their lives. This seemed to take precedence over any other value in their lives. As Margaret commented when asked about what was important to her, it is essential for her to have friends that she gets along with. (Transcript 3, Lines 125–126)

This was strongly supported by Susan and Robyn who added that having fun with LOTS of friends, is what kept them from ‘having a nervous breakdown’ from parental pressure. (Transcript 3, Lines 124–133) For Regina, Karen, Cathy and Meg (Transcript 1, Lines 251–257), it is friends, family, and ‘things that happen in real life,’ (Regina, Transcript 1, Line 252) which influence the kind of dramatic work they do.
Ultimately, it was the importance of having ‘fun’ with friends which led many of the girls to choose drama as a subject in the first place, and this was constantly obvious in the discussions we shared about choosing drama as a curriculum subject in the senior school.

**Choosing Drama – A Space for ‘Letting Go!’**

*Drama for me, is my chance to escape...drama is an opportunity to break free, forget embarrassment, act myself. (Journal Entry 1)...Drama always gives us a chance to try new and unusually exciting things and if embarrassment is left at the door, everybody is at their most creative. (Journal Entry 10)...Studying drama allows me to see the world through a somewhat ‘new’ set of eyes. (Journal Entry 13)*

The girls predominately expressed a strong interest and enjoyment of drama as a learning subject because it was ‘fun,’ and allowed them to be themselves in a space which was different to other subjects. This emphasis was strongly evident in the early days of their drama experiences as I frustratedly documented their lack of commitment and focus in the drama classroom where talking and socialising seemed more important than the work Carol (the classroom teacher) was trying to develop. On one occasion I mused:

*I believe that the girls at this age are not totally sure about themselves, let alone about why they have chosen drama as a subject. I think in*
In the early developmental stage, the girls did not settle easily to work which focused on developing movement skills for the first assessment unit. ‘Performing,’ and the chance to express oneself through ‘acting,’ was considered another important reason for choosing drama, and this indeed was what the girls wanted to do! The chance to ‘become someone else’ through role-play and characterisation, was significant for the girls as a way of hiding behind their real personae...

Cathy, talented and passionate, explains that if people laugh at you whilst you’re acting, it simply doesn’t matter. (Transcript 1, Line 36). Karen, who strikes me as being a loner in this class, explains honestly, ‘I just like performing, and I like acting all different roles because I hate being myself...too plain!’ (Transcript 1, Lines 26–27)

Gail who is intense about learning in drama, equates performing with ‘letting yourself go,’ and being ‘a bit different,’ (Transcript 2, Line 21-25 & 32) whilst Louise describes drama as the opportunity to, ‘let ourselves go and have fun...’ (Transcript 2, Line 35) Robyn, shy and
reticent to be interviewed at all, admits that she initially did drama as a relaxation activity. (Transcript 3, Line 15), but now sees it is as ‘getting up and getting rid of any fear and embarrassment.’ (Transcript 3, Line 32)

The interviews, questionnaires, and my personal memos validated the importance the girls placed on self expression and the need to ‘perform,’ to enable them to explore and express themselves in role. I was constantly fascinated by the fact that the girls expressed a real need to get up on stage and ‘act,’ - to adopt other ‘masks’ within the safe confines of the fictitious, yet, they strongly and constantly informed me how drama allowed them to really let their ‘natural’ selves emerge and be seen and accepted.

Comments in the questionnaires included, drama allows you to ‘be yourself,’ ‘without worrying about what others think,’ ‘helps your confidence and self esteem,’ as you explore, ‘different types of people though different character roles.’ The girls viewed ‘being yourself’ in drama as being realised through suspending disbelief in role-playing and characterisation in performance and presentation. The awkwardness they exhibited in early drama activity was surprisingly hidden when the girls got to do some acting or performing work.

This apparent paradox is undoubtedly what makes drama so uniquely powerful as a learning medium - as a space which provides the opportunity for adolescents to explore the essence of themselves and
others through fictitious roles, situations and conflicts. In entering the aesthetic creative space, the adolescent female is liberated from her persona being gazed upon directly by her peers, but rather is empowered instead to explore her ideas and values more deeply through the safe confines of dramatic action.

As time evolved, the vital function drama played in developing the fragile self-esteem of these young women became more and more evident. As I reflected in the early days of field work:

Many of them lack confidence in their abilities, and it is difficult for some of them to put their ideas and feelings into words. The fact that Carol perseveres with movement skills seems to be helping the girls to move beyond their insecurities and doubts. (Analytic Memo #4, Lines 27-31)

An acute sense of ‘self’ and maintaining an appropriate and acceptable outside appearance to their peers, seemed to lie at the heart of the problems evident in the early days of drama activity. As the reader will learn, the movement unit was a difficult proposition for the girls. They wanted to perform on stage, not explore symbol and metaphor through movement. They were so focused on how they looked and what they couldn’t do, that often their work was immobilised and fragmented:

They are extremely aware and concerned about their own bodies and find the movement activity quite difficult at times. There is a great
deal of readjusting of skirts and blouses and more focus seems to be on their personal appearance than on the quality of the work. They seem at times, uncomfortable and clumsy in their efforts. But I do notice that drama seems to be allowing them to ‘voice’ their difficulties and innermost feelings, and Carol will often be besieged with ‘whingeing’ comments about their personal appearance and their fears of looking ‘stupid’ and ‘foolish.’ (Analytic Memo #3, Lines 19–26)

In the absence of boys...
drama in an all girls’ classroom

The emphasis the girls placed on female friendship, linked strongly to the way they viewed their all girls’ drama classroom. There was consensus amongst the girls that there were many advantages of being in an all girls’ drama classroom due to the lack of pressure of having males ‘watching’ them.

You worry about what the guys think...and you don’t want to get up and act... (Karen, Transcript 1, Lines 45–46) (with boys) I’d be shy and intimidated... (Susan, Transcript 3, Line 59)...Cause boys like to laugh at you at this age... like they’ll mimic you... (Robyn, Transcript 3, Lines 61 & 64)... I think in a drama class, they (boys) think they have to keep up with their macho image and that they would pick on us for being girls, and we wouldn’t be able to express ourselves as girls... (Margaret, Transcript 3, Lines 66–68)
The support framework which the girls provided each other through friendship networks, appeared to be the essential component for a comfortable and effective learning environment. In this classroom, I witnessed an enduring network of friendships and camaraderie which appeared ongoing and genuine:

Margaret comments that in the absence of boys, the girls are much more open with each other. For Margaret, it is OK to make a fool of yourself in front of your girlfriends, but this is a different matter in front of boys. (Transcript 3, Lines 82, 99–100) Susan agrees that the girls really ‘know’ each other as girlfriends and this is the foundation for class congeniality. Susan points out that girls act totally different when they are with boys. She comments that everything becomes ‘bigger’ about a girl’s actions when boys are around. (Transcript 3, Lines 83, 94, 95 & 98)

Susan’s point was illustrated further on in the semester when I walked with some of the girls to pick up dinner on the night of their final performance. I was intrigued to watch two of the girls react to a group of males playing football in the street as we moved in a group down the street rehearsing lines together for the evening’s presentation:

Suddenly, there is a group of boys playing football in the middle of the street. The non-verbal of Gail and Regina seems to change - they begin to laugh, throwing their heads back and speaking even more loudly. They pick up their pace...we pass by the boys with little incident,
but Gail and Regina are quite excited now and swing back into saying their lines with great gusto. (Field Log 26, Lines 47–55)

During the interviews, many of the girls expressed agreement that it is indeed important to impress boys, and that having them in the drama class would have hampered their capacity to be ‘themselves,’ and to be both creative and comfortable enough to experiment with different dramatic forms. Boys were described as a distraction both sexually and emotionally:

Karen explains that if you have the ‘botts’ for a boy in the class, it would difficult to get up and perform for fear of them laughing at you. (Transcript 1, Lines 49–50) Karen comments, ‘girls don’t want to move because, say Jo Blob or someone who’s up the back of the room watching and you think, aw, he mighn’t like me!’ (Transcript Audio 2, Lines 99–100)

Gail adds that it would simply be ‘embarrassing’ to have to perform in front of boys particularly when you are attracted to them, whilst Louise points out that girls would be so busy trying to impress them, (boys) that drama work would be compromised. (Transcript 2, Lines 80–89) Robyn explains that they would be constantly thinking about which boys are watching them, and what are they thinking about them. She adds that boys would make ‘snide remarks’ about the girls’ work. (Transcript 3, Lines 66–67)
Meg puts this particularly well when she comments, ‘you can sort of be dags in the drama room when you are with all girls. With boys, you'd always be consciously thinking bow you're acting..doing your hair before each drama class..I'd find myself talking to them more than working.’ (Transcript Audio 2, Lines 98–102)

For Susan, the presence of males would make her ‘shy and intimidated,’ because as Robyn adds, ‘boys laugh at you at this age.’ Susan goes on to comment that boys will tease you about anything that you do, and that she is ‘afraid of how guys would treat you afterwards (after a performance)’ (Transcript Audio 2, Line 73)

Margaret explains that in a drama class, boys think they have to keep up with their ‘macho image’ and as a result, pick on the girls. She is strong in her conviction that this would result in a situation where ‘we (girls) wouldn’t be able to express ourselves as girls.’ (Transcript 3, Lines 57–68)

Of vital significance to the girls, was the opportunity afforded in an all girls’ classroom to be accepted without fear of embarrassment by the others. Liberation to be oneself and not have to impress male peers, was deemed a strength of the all female drama classroom. In the interviews, many of the girls expressed that working only with girls afforded a greater independence to them than may be possible if there were boys in the class.
Whilst some of them pointed out that girls can also ‘pull each other down’ from time to time, they agreed that on the whole, girls offer each other important encouragement and support that a male couldn’t. However, not all of the girls agreed with the absence of male voices in their drama classroom. A number of them expressed the opinion that to have some male input into the drama class would widen their knowledge of other gendered perceptions of drama. A number of them argued that one big performance a year with other drama students, including boys, would be advantageous to their development and give them the chance to hear a male point of view.

There was strong suggestion that the girls would be interested in doing some playwriting with boys about the issues that concerned them most, such as relationship conflicts between the sexes, and authority clashes with parents. As Marg argued, in dealing with these kinds of ‘typical teenage’ issues in drama, it would be possible to ‘bring the skeletons out of the closet,’ and look at them honestly and openly. (This view was strongly represented in Transcript Audio 4, Lines 203–224, Questionnaires 4 – 8, Transcripts Audio 3, Lines 101–102, 112–113, Audio 2, Lines 91–92, Audio 1, Lines 113–117 & Lines 169–172, Audio 4, Lines 81–82, 88–92)

The question about boys in the drama classroom was discussed with me informally and unexpectedly by Toni, initially one of the most resistant of all the girls in the classroom, on the last night of my fieldwork.
As we walk, Toni tells me that she doesn’t think it is a good idea that there are no boys in the school. She feels that it is a disadvantage in some ways for all of them. She tells me that it would be better to have the boys’ point of view in the drama work. Jane agrees but is less forceful about the idea... (Field Log 26, Lines 87–91)

My field notes continued to affirm the centrality of boys in the lives of the girls despite their absence in the drama classroom. There were many occasions where my observations revealed both covert and more open classroom conversations about boys and relationships:

They giggle and tell me happily that the school dance was ‘fantastic’, but some of them got into trouble for being too close to some of the boys and were sent to the ‘cool off’ room – they think this is hilarious. Everyone laughs and as each one denies her ‘intimate’ involvements with the boys! (Field Log 24, Lines 33–38, and Field Logs 9, Lines 34–37, 24, Lines 33–36; 26, Lines 23–27)

As the semester moved on, the girls revealed quite honestly to me that even though there were no boys in their drama classroom, young males were still an intense focus in all their lives and indeed could affect their relationships with each other:

...Where boys are concerned, there is apparent jealousy amongst the girls about who has a boyfriend and who hasn’t. One girl tells me that many of them feel worthless not to have a boyfriend and they feel they
are undesirable and ugly. I asked them if they must have a boy to feel good and they protest to me that this isn’t so. But what they are telling me, belies what they are really saying. (Field Log 14, Week 8, Lines 84–89)

Thus it seemed to me that the girls’ notable self-consciousness in the drama classroom, along with their obsession about how they looked, was explicitly linked to their developing awareness of the opposite sex. The chance to discuss this in the drama classroom was for many of the them, the first time they had been able to acknowledge and explore their sexuality openly. My continued observations of them (as the next section highlights) convinced me that they really enjoyed being female and were not yet caught up in the feminist movements of the past or present. Boys were important and necessary to them!

**I enjoy being a girl.**

One of my key interests during the study was the way the girls perceived their place in the world as females. I was keen to evaluate whether they themselves believed they needed to explore the social and cultural status of women in Australian society in order to understand themselves more comprehensively. My subsequent questions in the interviews about women’s studies and feminism were often met with disinterest, frustration and at times, hostility.
Initially the girls simply did not want to shape specifically dramas about women’s roles and social identities. They were insistent that they were not interested in feminism nor deconstructing their relationships with males through drama. Others felt that the women’s movement had gained equality for them and that it really didn’t concern them as adolescents. Although this attitude was to change somewhat later in the semester when they began to work with text, (the reader should refer to the last section, ‘Six Weeks at Hotel Sorrento’) I was intrigued with their reactions in the early days of the interviews:

*Toni reacts strongly to my suggestion in the interviews about the advantages of doing plays about women in drama. She comments that she feels defensive about ‘all this women stuff!’ and that she believes in equality and finds ‘man haters’ a bit much to bear. (Transcript Audio 3, Lines 109, 117)* Louise believes that ‘we are a lot better off than we were with all the women’s rights..we’ve got what we wanted..there’s more to do but.’ Jane adds that she doesn’t think ‘anything could really come of it’ if they studied women in drama. (Transcript 2, Lines 153–160)

*Gail is strong in her conviction that, ‘concentrating on women’s studies (in drama) is kinda sexist in itself - we should concentrate on everything, not just male or female.’ (Transcript 2, Lines 161–162)* For Margaret, the focus on women in previous years has been, ‘..taken too far in some circumstances..we get a little bit sick of it.’ (Transcript 3, Lines 207–208)
Robyn agrees with her friends adding, ‘I reckon some of those feminists go overboard - like wolf whistling..I think it’s flattering.’ Margaret and Susan support Robyn’s views: ‘I love it (being whistled at),’ and, ‘To me it feels like I’m being noticed!’ (Transcript 3, Lines 213–217) All of the girls agreed in this instance that they would indeed ‘wolf whistle’ back at the boys, especially as Robyn exclaims, ‘He’s got a cute butt!’ (Transcript 3, Lines 218–220)

Meg expresses strong advocacy for equality in saying, ‘Sometimes we take it for granted because men need equality too - everybody needs to be equal - you know equality for men needs to be looked at as well.’ (Transcript 1, Lines 221–222) Karen agrees that drama should address gender issues but, ‘It depends how heavy it is - cause some feminism is totally over the top..some of it is quite reasonable.’ (Transcript 3, Lines 218–219)

*Shared Conversations and Intimate Moments*

The absence of the boys in the drama classroom seemed to create an atmosphere between the girls of intimacy and mutual support. However this intimacy did seem to have specific boundaries. Whilst I did note an overall easy and warm manner shared by the majority of the girls, certain behaviours seemed exclusive to specific friendship pairs and triads who remained constant companions throughout the semester. A few of the girls, (although this was the exception) did not invite intimacy nor extended it to their classmates.
It did seem important to the majority of the girls that this intimacy was continually perpetuated in the classroom through shared conversations, seating and grouping arrangements, as well as through other forms of physical contact such as hugging and lighthearted punching. As field notes document, this behaviour was commonplace throughout the research period:

*Eye contact is strong and the girls smile and nod at each other as they move from group to group during the role plays. They show strong empathy with each other and the non-verbal is distinct – touching of hair, giggling and smiling, brightened eyes, open gestures, lots of agreement with nods and smiling – gesticulation which is large and expressive.* (Field Log 20, Lines 11–15)

*I see Gail put her arms around two of the girls in her group and they happily accept this gesture and smile as they listen to Carol.* (Field Log 9, Lines 100–101) *Sandra is then surrounded by girls who stroke her and speak quietly to her telling her not to cry.* (Field Log 7, Lines 25–26) *Two of the girls lie on the floor and begin to tostle with each other.* (Field Log 5, Lines 10–11) *I notice a number of the girls touch each other – some put arms around each other.* (Field Log 12, Lines 75–78)

Over the weeks, it became obvious to me that this intimacy and sense of collaboration was what allowed the girls to communicate so well during the forming and shaping periods of their dramatic work. The need for
support and inspiration from others was essential to the ‘making’ of the dramatic experience for these girls:

..this group tell me that they find working on their own difficult and preferred the support of their friends..they seem very strong on this point and this is obvious in the way they support each other's suggestions and ideas.. (Field Log 14, Lines 61-64) (Further documentation in Field Logs 19, Lines 87-92; 24, Lines 50-52, Analytic Memo #9a, Lines 14-18, Analytic Memo #1, Lines 18-21)

What became significant for me over the weeks, was the way the girls always sat in the same friendship groups. Although they all co-operated with each other in their daily drama activities, it was evident that seating arrangements were an integral part of establishing comfort zones in the drama classroom:

I hear Ruth say to someone, ‘Can I sit here?’ and the girl nods positively. As she takes the seat, one of the girls asks Susan where she is going to sit. Ruth is then asked to move and sit beside another girl and she does so. (I note this is a kind of ritual with the girls when they come into class. The dilemma of friends sitting near friends seems very important to them and appears to set the tone for the entire lesson). (Field Log 8, Lines 15-21 and evident in Field Logs 2, Lines 10-14; 16, Lines 68-73; 9, Lines 55-73; 3, Lines 7-10; Analytic Memo #5, Lines 19-23)
At times however, the girls’ friendships were tested and challenged as tension arose during more intense drama rehearsals:

As the girls get more intense about their work, I see some tension rising between them - they begin to argue about whose music is too loud, and who needs the tape recorder next...this causes great conflict between the girls and they look to me for some comment...one of them makes a comment that they are all a little stressed out at the moment over assessment, but none of them seem willing to make amends and they work without speaking to the other. (Field Log 15, Lines 40–45)

Such disagreements were short lived however, and the girls were soon back chatting with each other amicably. It seemed essential to them to have the support and approval of each other. As noted in my memos, ‘..they still look to each other for support and nurturance, and spend a good deal of time, chatting with each other and boosting each others’ seemingly fragile egos.’ (Analytic Memo #5, Lines 5–7)

Of vital interest to me was the fact that although the girls seemed to be comfortable and secure in their friendships, they displayed difficulty in class in critically analysing the work of each other for fear of ‘rejection’ or ‘alienation’ from their friends. They did not seem to trust the friendships enough to survive the rigours of artistic analysis and interpretation. My log notes:
They go on to say that petty jealousies between them do come into the drama classroom and at times, this affects who they can work with successfully. They comment that girls are not able to deal with competition well and there is a certain amount of jealously which results from someone doing well over others. One says to me that I have probably noticed they find it hard to criticise each other in drama performance, (Field Log 14, Lines 86–90) whilst another confirms that when you criticise your peers, you run the risk of alienation and displeasure from them. (Field Log 14, Lines 94–95)

Hence it became clearly apparent during the study that the girls found it much easier to support each other with their work than enter into critical analysis about it. When some of the girls did attempt (under Carol’s guidance) to critique performance work, it was often punctuated with apologies and hesitancy. (documented in Analytic Memo #5, Lines 12–15, Analytic Memo #7, Lines 19–24, Log 25, Lines 83–88) Indeed it seemed vital for the girls to remain loyal to each other at all times and this strong sense of community was noted time and time again:

The other girls offer warm support and encouragement as each girl finishes her piece. There is clapping and positive comments from almost all the girls and there is obvious camaraderie amongst them today. Each girl seems to support the other, and on the surface, the girls seem to be banded together. There is very little criticism of any of the work we have seen today. (Field Log 17, Lines 46–52)
This was to change in time however as the girls were slowly supported and encouraged by both Carol and I to look at the performances as dramaturges and directors, rather as teenage girls criticising their peers’ work. (documented in Analytic Memo #7, Lines 24–27, Log 25, Lines 88–93, Analytic Memo #9). Slowly they came to realise that drama was not just a place for fun, but rather a learning medium with enormous potential for them to analyse their own adolescent world.

As they became more aware of the power drama held for them to scrutinise their lives, I discussed with them what kinds of issues and themes they felt they would like to explore through dramatic work. What the interviews and the questionnaires revealed was a strong advocacy of issues which dealt with their teenage lives. Universal issues such as poverty and war, were of minimal interest to the girls. Instead they wanted to look at issues which affect teenage girls of today – suicide, drugs, jobs, Aids, relationships, and the education system. (Questionnaires 1, 4, 5, 6)

Many of the girls commented that they wanted to explore where they were going in their own lives after the senior schooling years were over. As Karen remarked, she wanted to look at, *what ya gunna* (sic) *do after school - like two years you depend on for the rest of your life which is really scary!* (Transcript 1, Videotape, Lines 176–178) Others echoed her sentiments many times during our discussions. Meg added that she keeps changing her mind about her life career and *if she had done drama earlier it might have helped her make better decisions.* (Transcript 1, Videotape, Lines 184–187).
The girls overwhelmingly agreed that they wanted to explore their lives and relationships through performing and script work. They wanted to write their own plays which dealt with typical things like a relationship between a boy and a girl, and relationships with parents. 

(Transcript, Audio 4, Lines 209–222) When I asked a number of them why they wanted to write their own plays, their responses were interesting:

When you write your own plays, you can put what you think about certain things. (Robyn). Six of us once wrote a play... a soap opera actually. (Kris). It was more a story... about a rock band... (Toni). It featured chicks fancying guys, we loved doing it, we wanted to do it, and it was relevant... (Kris). Because we made up the characters, we could have a bit of ourselves in them... (Toni) 

(Transcript Audio 3, Lines 161–190)

The girls felt passionately about performing in their own plays. They wanted to do drama about issues that were ‘typical,’ ‘relevant,’ and ‘happening now,’ to them. It was important to them that the drama work allowed them to explore areas of conflict in their lives. Whilst they initially were unsure about the relevance of the first drama unit in movement and metaphor, (highlighted in the following discussion) it was this work which revealed many of the struggles and conflicts the girls were facing in their classroom and personal lives.
The first unit of the drama program was one on movement and mask where the girls' assessment task was to interpret a stimulus photograph through the use of creative movement. Carol felt this was an easy way to introduce the girls to dramatic metaphor and symbol through the use of a non-verbal medium. Importantly, the form allowed relative autonomy through the use of mask, and Carol structured simple movement activities which would ease the girls slowly into the dramatic form.

However in the early days the girls seemed to find the tasks tremendously difficult. They were acutely focused on their body images, criticising constantly their lack of 'style' or 'grace', and they were often giggly and unfocused. My observations often noted the initial problems in the movement exercises for many of the girls as being linked to self-confidence and self-esteem problems:

..there seems to be an enormous amount of self-consciousness which hides the ability of the girls to really 'make' and 'create' drama work. They are very aware of each other, and they awkwardly work with movements that are stiff, controlled and tense. This improves as the music continues and the girls realise noone is really watching them. (Field Log 12, Lines 35-43)

and..
Carol then asks them to stand in front of the classroom mirrors to continue the exercise, but with them isolating their own body parts. There is groaning and comments about them not wanting to see themselves in the mirror. One or two of them stand well behind where they can’t possibly see themselves, and Carol is careful to position them where they initially can’t see their actions. (Field Log 13, Lines 30–35, Documented also in Logs 11, Lines 47–49; 8, Lines 42–45; Analytic Memo #3, Lines 20–23)

As the unit progressed however, I saw the girls risk-taking, dramatic understanding and self-confidence, begin to profoundly develop and mature. This was an extremely exciting time for me as an educator. Their approaches to forming the dramatic movement piece became insightful and often passionate, and the direction of their work became more focused and experimental. In exploring music and possible interpretations, I was constantly fascinated by their choices, which were often surprising and unexpected - so different from the introductory weeks of drama.

I became intensely interested in the interpretations the girls made in relation to the music and photographs they worked with in the early weeks of the unit. They told me that it is paramount that they themselves select the photograph for the movement piece instead of having the choice imposed on them by the teacher. They insist it is important to them that they have the opportunity to create personal meaning for their dramatic performances and select a photo that ‘speaks’ to them in some way. (Field Log 14, Lines 127–129)
I was particularly struck by the ‘darkness’ of the themes they chose to explore, not just as individuals but as a whole. They seem focused on themes of entrapment, oppression, and struggle – ongoing difficult struggles with parents, boyfriends and girlfriends, dominated their interpretations. They seemed full of angst and uncertainty and this seemed to prevail throughout the unit. As my field notes document:

..(they) tell me that many girls in the class are having personal struggles which are affecting their lives in significant ways..they tell me there are family breakups, problems with authority, struggles for independence..at the centre of most of the problems..(Field Log 14, Lines 69-74)

This prevailing sense of adolescent struggle that I was witnessing throughout their rehearsals, was exemplified most acutely one morning when both the group and then Susan became very emotional and highly tense:

*Tension and tears begin. I am astounded by this sudden change in the behaviour of the girls. What has happened? Susan is in tears which deteoriates into sobs - her partner is away and she has had no rehearsal. She sees this as a major catastrophe and begins to cry more. I try to console her, but to no avail. On pressing her about what is really wrong, she tells me, it is life in general..several classmates rally around her, soothing her, and telling her it will be alright..(Field Log 22, Lines 41-47)*
It seemed that many of them were facing complex struggles in coming to terms with being an adolescent. In one activity where a pair had to work together in interpreting the use of large rope in a movement piece, the girls were asked by Carol how they saw the relationship between the pair. Their choice of words fascinated me: hate, love, jealousies, lies, power, age, sister/brother, man and woman, enemies, hurt, loneliness, fear of the other, bridge, bound, strength, moving apart, distance. (Field Log 12, Lines 126–129, Documented also in Field Logs 14, Lines 37–69; 12, Lines 123–140; 10, Lines 115–122, Reflection pieces exemplar, Appendix A and Analytic Memo #7, Lines 14–17)

Interestingly, not one girl saw the rope as a security device protecting from harm or harnessing them to safety. It seemed increasingly evident to me that at the heart of the issues which concerned the girls, lay an intense awareness of their own developing sexuality alongside a blossoming desire for independence, self-expression, and acceptance. Even in their most intense moments of exploring selected issues through the dramatic form, it became clear to me that their need to express themselves independently and aesthetically, still hinged critically on the approval of others.

..I wander down to the other group..I am interested in what I see. The girls are doing a sensual and provocative piece of movement – very much like a striptease. They are straddling chairs, using provocative arm and hand movements..I ask them about it and what happens next is extremely interesting. One of the girls very defensively asks why
they can't they interpret the music differently - does it have to be necessarily romantic in the sense they had just seen one group do? I had not made any negative comment at all! (adapted from Field Log 10, Lines 98–104)

What was most telling about this incident, is that the girls interpreted my adult teacher interest as disapproval. When later the girls performed this piece to the class they had, much to my disappointment and horror, changed it to be a more ‘suitable’ and ‘demure’ interpretation for Carol and me. Later, when Carol asked them why they had changed the work, they commented that they thought I had been censoring their ideas because I had chosen to ask them about it.

They had felt they could ‘get into trouble’ (Field Log 10, Lines 124–126) for interpreting the music as they had, and thus had compromised the original piece for something less provocative and impacting. It was a meaningful lesson for me about the fragility of their confidence in themselves and their artistic visions, as well as a warning to be more cognisant about how I communicated with the girls in my role as researcher participant. The tremendous impact and influence of the drama teacher on the students’ artistic work was made painfully clear through this experience!

Despite such observations of the girls’ struggle to find a sense of balance during this unit, the changes which I saw in them was startling. As
observed in my notes on the day of assessment, the girls’ dramatic work had profoundly progressed from the first weeks:

..watching them in their assessment was a highlight of my work so far. Their development in drama is evident – they are beginning to manipulate the elements solidly with evidence of thought and understanding on their behalf. Their work was deeply moving at times, reflecting a deep thought on the struggles of life. The girls seem to be moving beyond their initial lack of depth in approaching work together. (Analytic Memo #9, Lines 6–14)

Not only were the girls now more willing to take more risks (albeit with much encouragement) and to move beyond their skewed perceptions of their body images, but they were beginning to explore themselves critically both as artists and individuals in new and multidimensional ways. As one girl so succinctly wrote in the journal: ‘drama has allowed me to see beyond a simple structure on a page and to be creative and further than the obvious. Nowadays, I find myself not focussing on what is directly before me, rather to see the ‘unseeable.’ (Journal Entry 13)

**New Voices – ‘Six Weeks at Hotel Sorrento’**

The last unit of the semester required the girls to study the Australian play *Hotel Sorrento* by Hannie Rayson, and to perform for assessment, a selected scene with two or three of their peers. The girls had long
expressed their desire to perform in front of an audience, and so here Carol offered them the chance. Surprisingly despite their passionate desires to work with script, when the girls were finally given the play to read, Carol was met with some resistance. The girls’ experiences with plays had been limited to reading them in English, and judging by their responses, these had not been memorable experiences:

*Cathy looks directly at me in the interview when I ask her about the play, ‘Hotel Sorrento.’ She comments honestly, ‘At first I thought, oh great! We HAVE to read a play! Cause normally, they’re REALLY REALLY boring.’ Karen interjects, ‘Like the ones we read in English...so boring!’ Most of the girls agreed on this point, stressing that the oral reading of the play in English without dramatic interpretation, has destroyed any enjoyment they may have initially gained from the experience.

But interestingly, as the girls read more and more of the play the comments changed. Karen now commented, ‘It seems very good. It’s very casual. It seems very realistic. I was expecting Romeo and Juliet...’ whilst Cathy excitedly expressed, ‘..I read the first couple of pages and said, Oh Cool!’* (Transcript Audiotape 1, Lines 178–184)

*Meg agreed that the play was a significant change for the better with her comment, ‘It’s one of the better books (plays) we’ve had to read..some of the other books we’ve had to read, we’ve thought, why the heck do we have to read this book? This is totally pointless!* (Transcript Audiotape 2, Lines 134–136)
Although the girls had been previously resistant about not gearing drama work specifically towards ‘gender’ issues, the female characters in the play clearly affected them. The female roles seem to represent some form of realism connected to the girls’ own personal and social lives – jealousy, anger, hopelessness, failure, and betrayal, and it was these traits with which they identified most strongly. In discussing one of the key characters in the play (also called Meg), Meg protested to me:

_The way she treated people you know, writing the book about them and not asking anyone, it’s just common courtesy to say, ‘Can I write about you?’ The whole family. I feel she betrayed them... I think it’s easy for me being the character of Meg, I can seriously relate to (her)... she changes a lot during the play and so do I. I can be really sweet, or I can say, I hate you so much – you know be a real bitch._ (Interview Transcript, Audiotape 2, Lines 130–132 & 154–161)

What was memorable about the work of the girls during this unit was the progressive development they made in terms of the way they understood the female characters in the play and the dramatic processes they followed in making the performances meaningful and effective. The journey to this end point was not always easy however, and it was during this time that Carol allowed me to work intensely with the girls on exploring the role of women in Australian playscripts.

As noted, the girls were at first unsure about how they felt about the women in the playscripts studied and quite often this led to spirited
discourse and debate in the classroom. One of the first experiences I offered them was to work with the play *The Removalists* by David Williamson. This features an abused wife Fiona who decides reluctantly to leave her husband Kenny. Fiona is strongly encouraged by her overbearing and somewhat promiscuous sister Kate who treats her with very little respect. On deconstructing the play with the girls after a reading session, I was surprised and delighted by their passionate and interested responses, so different to the beginning of the semester:

*Most of the girls are shocked by the powerlessness of Fiona and see her very much as the victim in the piece. They are quick to tell me that they would just ‘leave him,’ or take him on at his own game. They hurl abuse verbally at Kenny as their comments go back and forth across the room. Others reject those comments saying that this would not be easy in the case of abuse in marriage where you have little options. They enter into a heated discourse saying that THEIR ‘mums’ would just tell their dads to forget it and walk out. (Field Log 21, Lines 62–69)*

In challenging the girls to explore further the plight of Fiona ten years down the track through a polished role-play, I am surprised to see that most of the portrayals of her are negative. Although Fiona has left Kenny and moved on, she is crippled with guilt and displacement. She lacks any kind of real liberation and emancipation. In light of the girls’ reactions, I reassessed my approach for the next experience with a view to giving them an alternative portrayal of a strong female figure with high status.
My decision was to step into role assisted by the girls in a conscious effort to invite them to consider options to the stereotypes they were so familiar with. The result was gratifying:

*I choose a strong female who is the second wife of Kenny and it is interesting to see how the girls react to my interpretation. As I finish the role-play, they clap and cheer and tell me how good it was, and they seem genuine in their compliments. They talk about the strength of my character and are approving of her handling of Kenny who is suddenly put in a position where his status is lessened by the equally obstinate female.* (Field Log 25, Lines 128–133)

Again I saw the need to challenge the girls to think more deeply about the characters in the plays, and invited them to take part in more improvisations which this time incorporated techniques from Boal’s ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ (e.g. still images and thoughttracking – See Boal, 1979). It was after observing the girls’ work with these strategies in such dynamic and interesting ways that I realised for the first time that their ability to form and shape drama had changed. Their work was no longer static, but instead had evolved to greater dramatic and personal depths allowing them to have a much stronger ‘voice’ in the classroom:

*They add thoughttracking to the characters which is insightful and challenging. Whilst some (still) lack confidence, many of them begin to take risks, a number of them are beginning to become bolder and braver about making the drama work for them. They appear to be*
realising their own strengths for creating work. (their roles) are animated and serious in what they are doing and they begin to defend and quarrel in role about the role of men and women in a marriage. the girls comment on how much they learnt from the activity. (adapted from Field Log 19, Lines 138–152)

The girls were no longer passive and apologetic about the work they were doing, and although their confidence was still tenuous at times, they began to take control more actively for the creative work and to impose their own significant meanings into it. As I noted during one session, the girls, began to realise their own strengths for creating work of special dramatic quality. they are becoming bolder and braver about making the drama work for them. (Field Log 25, Lines 140-142)

Their communication with each other became purposeful, and their dramatic focus was heightened and focused through their continued work with each other. There was less a need for either Carol or I to direct their energies into the dramatic process as they seem to have taken control of this themselves:

They move into the work swiftly and with a new confidence, and don’t seem to notice me moving about the room. They negotiate easily and well with each other, listening to each other’s suggestions without interruption, and generally moving props around with understanding and clarity...
Some of the girls choose to write their character analysis in more depth, whilst others are enthusiastically working through the script offering commentary on each other’s work. There seems to be a silent agreement amongst them to co-operate as much as possible, and I see very little conflict in their interactions. The girls are all actively involved in the preparation of their work.

Some of them question me about possible character changes as I move about the classroom, but I offer them suggestions as co-director, rather than the ‘all-knowing’ teacher. This seems to work well, and I notice the girls begin to take more risks with the work and to challenge me too about my perceptions of the female character. (Field Log 24, Lines 48–67)

What was most significant about the way the girls began to work, was the confidence and vision that the acting roles seemed to endow them with. The intensive deconstruction of the characters with the girls by Carol and myself alongside the continuing challenge to look beyond one dimensional interpretations, resulted in even the most reticent girls finding faith and direction in their efforts:

I am struck by the confidence of two of the girls who have always lacked confidence in their work...the role-play has given them strength and confidence, and they handle the work they are doing with surprising insight and perception. I am intrigued to observe how these two girls, who appeared so shy and passive in class, have
suddenly taken on personae which are so different from their natural ones. (Field Log 24, Lines 78–83)

It was in the last days before assessment that I identified a number of important themes emerging from the work the girls were doing with Hotel Sorrento. Most significant were four main elements which seemed to underpin the development in the girls’ work over the semester:

- the need for strong collaboration between the girls throughout the drama processes.
- the need for continued encouragement of the girls’ artistic work, and the necessity to challenge them to move beyond their initial one dimensional perceptions of people and events, in order to explore and establish a multiplicity of meanings and understandings in their dramatic work.
- the growing confidence of many of the girls, resulting from an active engagement with script, characterisation, and performance modes of dramatic learning.
- a significant development in the girls to trial critically their own and others’ dramatic work, reshaping and reworking when necessary.

Indeed, there was a notable move from the early part of the semester’s lack of risk taking and low self confidence, to bolder experimentation with dramatic form and process. (adapted from Field Log 24, Lines 89–95)

Despite some lack of confidence in some of the girls’ efforts, it was in the performance work that I finally saw them begin to realise their own
potentials, and to negotiate and shape dramatic meaning in ways which were highly significant to them and their own adolescent lives. It was the final performance evening which showcased just how far the girls had come in both their personal and dramatic development. Indeed as Chapter Five will reveal to the reader, it was the most memorable and emotionally impacting experience of my field work with the girls. For the girls and Carol, it was unequivocally the ‘tour de force’ of the semester’s work.

It became an evening where the girls’ commitment and focus to their work was tested through a measure of their ability to rehearse under pressure and co-operate with each other as the scenes were run consecutively and without a great deal of preparation. Whilst the girls themselves expressed anxiety about their ability to perform the work they have worked on for so long, I also saw a confidence in their work which had been absent before:

Watching them rehearse, behind the mask of the characters, the girls seem to have gained enormous confidence. They have really ‘owned’ the characters they have worked on for six weeks. Lines are secure, and the characters possess depth and variation. Indeed, I have been surprised by the progress in their work - the tension in the scenes has been particularly significant, there has been an air of comprehension in the work which they did not seem to be capable of earlier. (Field Log 26, Lines 151–157)
Not only was the development in the girls’ work significant for me on this night, but also the level of support which they all seemed to offer each other. As each group presented their piece there was a:

*Sigh of relief from each of the girls, and although theirs is over, they quickly take a seat to watch their peers have their turn. There appears to be a great deal of support tonight. When Gail came running in earlier, almost beside herself with distress because her shoes had not arrived for tonight’s performance, she is comforted by several of the girls who rally to the fore. ‘You can have my shoes – they’ll fit,’ is the response I hear from one of the girls, and the others are quick to tell her everything will be alright. (Field Log 26, Lines 163–170 & 190–191)*

The response of the girls to support each other was not new to me, but their absolute commitment to the work they were doing and their striving for excellence in it, had not been evident in the early days of my observations and work with them. It was as if they have somehow been given permission to voice their own feelings and find their own meanings in the characterisations of the three women in the play – Meg, Pippa and Hilary.

This had been ultimately realised through their engagement and manipulation of the dramatic form, and through Carol’s refusal to allow the girls to ‘drift’ through the drama work without challenging discourse about the play’s sub-text and multi-ayered female characters. It was a
challenge they had been given and which they met with surprising
vigour and understanding.

I end this part of my narrative journey with a final vignette reflective of
this last performance night. I believe it illustrates powerfully just how far
the girls had come in finding their own voice in the drama work that
they do. It encapsulates the sense of empowerment that drama had
allowed the girls to embrace through their performance work. In it the
female characters developed by the girls, were not stereotyped nor
predictable, but given dimension and scope as individuals with voices
which were both powerful and complex:

_Gail and Regina are focused so intently that the scene seems real._
_Their eye contact is strong as they listen and respond to each other
intently. The parents have gone silent – of this much I am aware. I am
overwhelmed by the sheer immersion of the girls in the roles – the
empathy and emotional attachment of the girls in the roles cannot be
denied. They are expressing to each other their sorrow at how much
they have grown apart, but the anger is alive and almost tangible in
the room. They are both crying but they are playing out the roles! The
tension is perfect, the moment precise. ‘CUT,’ calls Carol. There is a
moment of absolute silence as we all look at each other._ (adapted from
Field Log 26, Lines 172–186)
Summary

In reflecting on this part of the girls’ own journey in the drama classroom, I am reminded of my original metaphors of researcher as playwright, director and critic. There can be no doubt that my own journey did begin this way, but it was to evolve gradually and metamorphose to a position where the girls themselves moved away from their roles as only ‘players’ in my piece, to important co-directors, writers and critics in the dramatic narrative which shaped my research.

The establishment of their own female voices was slow and often laboured, and as my memos document, my own frustration at their seemingly lighthearted attitude towards the early drama work, was equally matched by their own emerging frustrations about who they were as young women, and how drama could help them express such feelings.

As the semester progressed, it became obvious that drama was allowing the girls to explore alternative aspects of themselves and others, to trial new ideas, to accept that their voices were each unique and important, and to see, as one girl wrote, the world through a new set of eyes. (Journal Entry 13) From the initial movement unit where the girls were often overcome with feelings of self-consciousness about their bodies and dramatic abilities, to the final work on the stories of three women in Hotel Sorrento, my observations continued to reveal that the girls were changing in a multitude of ways. Many of these have been documented and discussed in this chapter.
This was as much evident through the way that they worked with each other, as it was through their relationship with Carol and their developing alliance with me. Their need to empathise and to connect closely and consistently with each other as females, became an essential part of the way they related to me throughout the term of the field work.

As the girls allowed me to move closer into their adolescent female world, as inquirer, sometimes as teacher, but often as ‘big sister,’ my role as researcher began to merge strongly with my own feminine sense of ‘self.’ The girls began to relate to me on a multiplicity of emotional levels, sometimes indifferent but more often close and intimate.

I observed that their behaviour towards me depended on how positive they felt about themselves on any given day, and how much trust they placed in me as I worked with them in the drama classroom. This too was dependent on the girls’ often fragile relationships with other authority figures such as their parents and teachers, as well as what had happened in the classroom with Carol in the days that I did not visit.

In many ways, my very ‘strangeness’ to the classroom eventually allowed their natural voices to emerge and be heard, and thus it is to this part of the journey we now turn in an attempt to understand their adolescent ‘female realities’ more comprehensively, and to hear the emerging complexity of their voices more clearly.
The night is cloudy, rain is drizzling down by neck and back as I move towards the classroom. This is the night the girls have been preparing for – the performance of ‘Hotel Sorrento,’ for their parents. I wonder what kind of a state the girls will be in. I remember the past weeks with their growing anxiety and escalating concerns about ‘will it be alright on the night?’ I have met the teacher Carol as I have come in through the door. She looks weary. She laughs when I ask if it has been a difficult week. This is an understatement! In her usual way, she rallies to the fore and makes me feel comfortable and welcome. She knows this is my last night for field work. She knows I am feeling a little vulnerable myself. She knows I am feeling loss at leaving my ‘adopted girls’ after one semester of regular participation in their drama classes. We talk briefly as I move toward the drama room – she expresses her regret that I am leaving and thanks me for providing comfort and support to her during the semester. I feel a great deal of satisfaction and sadness. Door opens and there they are, in full flight. Props erect, costumes on, frantic line swapping. They see me and eye me quietly. I have been missing for two weeks whilst they had exams. Is this distrust again? Suddenly, one calls out, ‘Hello Miss Lee, haven’t seen you for a while – how are you?’ I smile, confidence restored, and I move into the room. They ignore me and continue on with their rehearsals. All of a sudden, they turn to me – the ‘big sister’ again. ‘Is this O.K. – would Meg really do this do you think?’ ‘I’m not in my character – this is awful!’ ‘What do you think?’ I give encouragement, and suddenly my researcher skin is shed, as I step into the roles of nurturer and director. They begin to joke and laugh with me again. Someone has a ‘Dolly’ magazine. Focus is lost as they all crowd around. This is for my benefit I’m sure. ‘Look at this babe Miss Lee.’ I take a look. He is a babe, and about fifteen. The girls are ecstatic, swooning over the pectoral muscles which seem to pulsate up off the page. ‘He looks like a poofter!’ exclaims Karen. Screeches from the crowd! Turn about – I move them back into rehearsal and remind them of the task at hand. They seem to fall back into the work with very little difficulty. They have come so very very far – these bright young women who have provided the narrative for my research journey. I smile broadly and leave them to the work. They don’t need me any more!

(Final Field Log July 1996)
CHAPTER FIVE

A STRANGER IN THEIR MIDST –
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNEY

Much of qualitative research involves prolonged engagement in the lives of other human beings, going beyond the superficial mask of public impression and entering a highly personal realm of private thoughts, secret passions...It makes sense, then, that emotional responses such as closeness, identification, sympathy, and warmth would be spontaneously elicited in the researcher. (Friedman 1991, p.112)

This chapter, a new part of the journey, aims to transport the reader along a further ethnographic narrative which highlights, unravels and explores many of the ‘observer’s comments’ (Bogdan & Biklen 1982) - important musings documented throughout the entire research period, which marked my developing journey as an neophyte ethnographer. It is these progressive reflections, alongside everyday classroom observations, which provide further insight into the behaviour and attitudes of the girls, and the ways these in turn affected the changing shape of the ethnographic process.
Reflections

Entering into the research classroom for the first time, I felt positive and focused. Whilst I was not indifferent to the difficulties that may lie ahead of me as a neophyte qualitative researcher, I felt that I had a clear vision of the work I was to do, and could deal with whatever challenge confronted me. Both Carol the classroom teacher, and the school principal Linda, had been welcoming and co-operative. As ‘gatekeepers’ to the school environment, they were wholly supportive and accommodating, and more than just a little excited at having me work with the Year Eleven drama group.

Over time however, I was faced with a gamut of changing emotions, perceptions, and doubts, both as a researcher, and a female. In my naivete, I did not anticipate nor expect that these feelings would have such a profound effect on my work in the classroom and my growing relationship with the girls. The very nature of the drama classroom, a space which offers liberated and collaborative learning, meant for me that field observations could never be static, nor my physical presence remain unobtrusive. There were everchanging and dynamic ‘happenings’ within the room which invited my constant and active attention and sometimes, unexpected involvement.

Educational drama, with its interactive communicative mode of learning, invites strong empathy and disclosure from its participants, and consequently I often found myself unwittingly drawn into the female
worlds of my adolescent participants, both as critic and confidante.
As a result, it was at times difficult to maintain professional objectivity
about what I saw happening in the classroom. My field notes reflect:

*More and more, I find I am being drawn into the group by the girls
themselves - they tend to come to me more, and seek ideas and
affirmation. This poses a dilemma for me as the researcher. I am no
longer impartial...the girls are becoming closer to me every time I
enter the classroom...they seem drawn to me as another female and
look to me for encouragement and guidance. There seems to be great
empathy being established here. (Field Log 15, Lines 22–29)*

I was reminded of what Atkinson (1990) describes as the ‘ethnographic
tension’ which can be experienced by the researcher as they grapple
with the emerging contrast between the ‘self,’ of the participant
observer, and the ‘other’ of the observed. I was to confront and reflect
on this dilemma many times throughout my field work. On one such
occasion I wrote:

*I need to be careful about dominating their (the girls) work with my
perspectives. Their familiarity with me now has led to the line between
researcher and participant being almost completely erased. I need to
constantly remember that in imposing my views on the girls, I am in
fact inadvertently manipulating their natural reactions. As a female I
could impose my ideological views on the girls. It is a difficult and
fragile role I play! (Field Log 23, Lines 68–75)*
Feminist sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1978) argues that when women study other women, they tend to act on a ‘nurturing impulse’ which is often reciprocated by the participants. (Hochschild in Reinharz 1992) As the days progressed, there were many incidents where the girls looked to me for counsel and support, and I found myself willingly responding to their needs:

_As Susan leaves, the girls tell me life is very stressful at the moment for all of them. I try to make light of it, but in many ways this position I am in now, is a difficult one. Is this part of my work here? Certainly all my so-called female traits—empathy, sympathy and sensitivity, seem to be coming to the fore now, and instead of telling her to pull herself together, I listen and offer my support._(Field Log 25, Lines 51–57)

However, there were also days when I felt so immobilised by what Wolcott (1975) refers to as ‘ethnographic fatigue,’ that I felt utterly detached from the girls. I was despondent, exhausted, convinced that nothing significant was happening in the classroom. Consequently, I became discouraged and frustrated:

_The constancy of the observations, the intensity of analysis, and the general energy it takes in getting to the school is beginning to take its toll on me as a researcher. The ever increasing need for me to find meanings in the data renders me exhausted, and each time I enter the field, I wonder if there is too much data for me to deal with, too_
Each day brought new changes. My status in the classroom evolved constantly as my relationship with the girls developed and grew. This was as much a result of my own developing role as a researcher, as it was from the trust and support that the girls endowed me with over the semester period. Lofland and Lofland’s (1984) proclamation that on completing qualitative work, ‘You are not the person you were when you began,’ (in Ely 1991, p.192) became more meaningful to me as the data unravelled and my analysis progressed. I kept this thought firmly entrenched in my mind, as I observed my own research role change and evolve.

**Establishing a Presence**

In the first few weeks of the field work, I encountered both suspicion and indifference from the girls. Although Carol and I had spoken at length to them on my first visit about my work in the classroom, it was obvious that the girls were not sure whether I was a teacher, a spy, or a friend. Whilst a number of them were friendly enough, I knew that I was like the ‘new girl on the block,’ and would need to pass through some kind of initiation period before they would trust my presence in the room:
I sit and watch the girls as they wait for the teacher. They are in a close bunch - quietly talking, legs gangly, some crossed. They eye me a little suspiciously. They look at my pen and note pad and I realise this may be causing concern...nearly everyone has a band on her face, touching or leaning on their band...eyes dart from face to face...some whisper to each other. (adapted from Field Log 1, Lines 10–22)

and,

Despite a previous conversation with the girls about my role in the classroom a week before I officially arrived, they did seem suspicious and distrustful of me on the first day. They eyed me intently and I felt very much like the ‘stranger’ in the classroom. On the whole, the class seemed more quiet and unnatural than I suspected they would normally be, but I smiled on regardless...there is an air of ‘notbing affects us’ whilst also a contradictory atmosphere of insecurity and self-consciousness. (Analytic Memo #1, Lines 4–10. Also similar documentation in Field Log 1 and Field Log 2, Lines 1–9)

I realised quickly that the girls awkwardness was not just with me, but with the new processes they were encountering in the drama classroom. As Chapter Four documents, their responses to drama were immature, often punctuated with embarrassed giggling and childlike behaviour. This evoked in me enormous frustration, and often I wanted to interject in the process. My responses to the first days of field work reflect my feelings:
I was struck by the role play they did today with its stereotypical and melodramatic characters. There were no questions about the validity of the characters, and the plot, although lightweight, was unchallenged by any of the girls in the debrief. (Analytic Memo #2, Lines 13–18). I am still frustrated by their lack of quality in the work. (Analytic Memo #5, Lines 1–3).

and...

It is difficult for me to keep quiet when I know that they are doing the wrong thing – I know they are aware that I can hear them and I see much of their behaviour as trying to impress me; showing off how worldly they really are. As a researcher, I realise that I am privy to their world whilst being an adult in my own, and this is a strange feeling. (Field Log 9, Lines 73–80)

I needed to remind myself continually that the behaviour and attitude of the girls should remain the focus of my objective enquiry, but there were times when their indifference and resistance to the work I was doing, did affect me on a personal level. On many occasions, I (found). I (was) jumping in too much and trying to extract the information from the girls as if I (was) pulling teeth. I (needed to) relax and steady my focus. (Field Log 25, Lines 101–103)
responded as female adolescents. In particular, it was their reactions to the interviews and the journal, which became significant field data. It was the journal which proved to be a difficult task for the girls from the start.

Despite their anonymity in the journal, and a promise that it would be read only by myself and not Carol, there remained resistance to writing down their personal feelings about the drama. This fear seemed to stem from a number of factors. The girls were simply sometimes unsure about what they felt about their experiences in the drama lesson, and found it hard to express themselves reflectively. There was also an element of distrust in what would be done with the reflections, or what I would think of their honest responses:

_She (Susan) comes to me on the way out and asks me what I ‘want’ her to write in the journal, and I tell her gently that the journal is about ‘her’ and her feelings about what they are doing in drama class. She seems to understand this, but I get the distinct impression, that she is feeling a little unsure about whether to trust me with some intimate information._ (Field Log 21, Lines 80–84)

This hunch was later confirmed in one of the interviews when several girls revealed to me that the girls found writing in the journal difficult because of their fear of my scorn or disapproval. Margaret explained, _‘(We are) more worried about what you are going to think, if (we) write the wrong thing that you’re not asking for. Like if (we) write_
down (our) true feelings, (we) worry about what you are going to think of (us).' (Transcript Videotape 3, Lines 197–199)

I now strongly believe that this lack of trust in allowing me to see their ‘real’ selves, was linked closely with the early weeks of work where the girls were not at ease in exploring dramatic form other than at a very superficial level. I am convinced it was not because they lacked the intellectual or creative abilities to do so, but because they lacked trust, not only in Carol and me, but in themselves and their peers.

The girls had established early ideas about what was ‘right’ and what was ‘wrong,’ in terms of performance and interpretation, and this conception which lay at the heart of their classroom behavioural ideology, prevented them from being liberated through the dramatic work they did in the early weeks of the semester:

They are watching each other carefully here and their body language appears uneasy and quite closed. They are however, prepared to give it a go. Carol asks the girls to explain what they are. They are apologetic about their choices and Carol gives ample encouragement. One girl says she is sorry that her shape wasn’t easy to interpret. (I am interested in the fact that the girls will assume they are ‘wrong’ if their choice does not ‘fit’ the interpretation of the teacher.) (Field Log 2, Lines 45–51)
I became increasingly aware of the power the drama teacher possesses in the drama classroom to either empower or destroy dramatic efforts and visions. On a number of occasions, the girls turned to me for assistance, and as my notes document, I was often reminded of my high status role in the classroom:

There are number of times during this lesson when the girls turn to me and make comments about the programs, and I find I am being drawn in more and more to the conversation. I remind myself that any comments I make can influence the reactions of the girls and I pull myself up on this, determined to be more the observer for the remainder of the lesson. (Field Log 17, Lines 65–70)...I try to remain absolutely neutral in my expression so they do not think I approve or disapprove of their behaviour. (Field Log 9, Lines 79–80)

It was the experience of obtaining interview data where I first became acutely aware of how my reactions affected the girls' responses to the process. In the early weeks, I became progressively frustrated by the difficulty I faced in getting the girls to actually turn up for the scheduled sessions. Despite making solid appointments with them on a weekly basis, they often ‘forgot’ to turn up on time.

Whilst the girls were all eager to be interviewed, they seemed to get carried away with lunch time activities instead of remembering their commitment to me. They would often run in ten minutes late, hair flying and full of contrition that I had been kept waiting. Initially I reacted
negatively (although this was held in check from the girls) to what I considered as irresponsible behaviour:

The girls were costing me valuable time in not meeting their interview commitments, and I wondered if this was an indication of their perceived worth of discussing the value of drama in their school lives. On one such occasion (also documented in Chapter 4) I reflected, I believe that the girls at this age are not totally sure about themselves, let alone why they have chosen drama as a subject. (Analytic Memo #4, Lines 8–9, Also documented in Analytic Memo #4, Lines 1–14, Analytic Memo #6, Lines 1–5, Field Logs 9, Lines 1–19; 6, Lines 1–8; 24, Lines 1–8)

Importantly, it was my own developing empathy with the girls as young women and my own eagerness to explore issues with them, which led me to this feeling of initial disappointment. What I realised over time, was the girls’ responses were typical of their attitude to school procedure (Carol confirmed this in Field Log 7, Lines 11–12 and Analytic Memo #4, Lines 6–7), and my research work represented to them yet another part of daily classroom administration.

To the girls, I represented another authoritarian figurehead who wanted to know all about their private thoughts and feelings - they were unsure and certainly unbalanced by my initial presence in their school lives, and did not know if they wanted me to know too much about them. It wasn’t until some weeks into the interviews, that they realised that I had
a genuine interest in their work in the drama classroom, and that the information they shared with me was confidential.

My ultimate goal for the interviews was to provide a relaxed and supportive space which would honour the authentic female voices of the girls by inviting them to speak freely about their drama experiences and award them the opportunity to ask me questions if they so desired. As the semester continued, this approach allowed a slow transition for the girls from discomfort to acceptance, and from silence to disclosure. By the final interview, I realised that the girls’ behaviour had told me much about the way they in fact viewed their own world:

Today I conduct my final interview with the last of the girls. As always they are late and I have sent for them via another student. I am no longer annoyed by this as I was in the earlier part of the research. The girls are simply forgetful – they tell this everytime they arrive late. It seems that they become preoccupied with the bustle and bustle of their peers running off to lunchtime activities – having an interview with me slips their minds. I accept this as an observation of their adolescent priorities rather than a lack of commitment towards our work! (Field Log 24, Lines 1–8)

**Quests and Questions**

As the semester progressed, I observed a significant link between the quality of the drama work the girls were producing, and their changing
attitudes and responses towards me. As they matured and relaxed, their work became far more thoughtful, artistic, and multi-layered. The laughter and nervousness evident in their behaviour towards each other and Carol, was replaced by more serious contemplation about the shaping of their dramatic work and a notable higher level of risk taking became evident:

*I notice that whilst there is still some lack of confidence..a number of them are beginning to become bolder and braver about making the drama work for them. They appear to be realising their own strengths for creating work of special dramatic quality..the roles are animated and serious in what they are doing and they begin to defend (their interpretations of role). (Log 25, Lines 139–149 and also documented in Analytic Memo #9, Lines 7–12)*

Although the trust level and self-confidence of the girls was still fragile, there was a new strength about their work, with a greater tendency to allow Carol and me into their personal zones. Indeed, they began to view me in a variety of ways. I was no longer just a stranger in the back of the room, but someone who co-worked with them as artist and teacher. As I reflected, *I am aware of my changing roles inside the classroom..they have taken me into their ‘group’ more and more as the weeks go by. (Field Log 16, Lines 4–7, and also documented in Field Log 15, Lines 21–30 & 54–62)*
I became someone they could talk to informally about their lives, their dreams and their struggles both inside and outside the classroom. I documented many occasions where they communicated informally and naturally with me:

*They are talking incessantly to me. One is carrying around a rose which she tells me her boyfriend has given her. She is thrilled. The rose is wilting but it is apparently a symbol of great importance to her...*(Field Log 17, Lines 16–18). *When I tell them I too went to an all girls' school, they begin to bombard me with questions...* Were you a rebel? Were you one of the goodies? Were you a loser? I tell them I was one of the ‘goodies’ and they laugh. **(Field Log 26, Lines 92–94)*

I became akin to a ‘big sister’, as well as a co-artist, facilitator, and researcher. This affected me in the most surprising way. I realised with both satisfaction but also some hesitation, that I was feeling a tremendous sense of attachment and empathy with the girls. This had happened almost without my knowledge, but certainly enriched the trust relationship with them that I had slowly tried to establish. This realisation became an important part of my data, marking my own personal journey throughout the research:

*The strongest feelings are beginning to emerge in me about my relationship with the girls - I am feeling more and more a part of their culture and see them treating me somewhere between a friend and a teacher. Their trust in me is now more than obvious and they*
confide in me at times like a sister... It is a liberating and incredibly rewarding experience. I wonder if other ethnographers have reached this moment of realisation? (Field Log 19, Lines 30–38 and also documented in Field Log 26, Lines 20–29 & the complete Field Log 28)

Through their own creative work in the drama studio, the girls became empowered to explore more confidently, alternative realms of meaning whilst also allowing me to share in the experiences. Importantly, within the lessons I facilitated, I was able to challenge them to look more closely for dramatic and personal meaning in their work, and although I questioned how far I could go in my role as a ‘visitor’ in the classroom, I felt a responsibility to provide appropriate challenge to the girls whenever possible. When exploring the script Hotel Sorrento towards the middle of the semester, I asked them to consider the actions of the character Meg in the play. I documented their responses:

Initially, the responses are superficial and the girls react with comments such as she’s ‘mean,’ ‘opinionated,’ and ‘arrogant,’ because she demands attention from everyone. In probing further about Meg’s life, the girls begin to see more depth to her personality and begin to discuss the complexity of her character. When the girls are first challenged about why they think Meg is such a ‘bitch’ (their words), they are momentarily put off balance. In pursuing the issue with them, they begin to realise that there are more ways of seeing things than just one way, and they enter into the discussion quite readily. (Field Log 22, Lines 97–101)
Interestingly as I continued to work with the girls on this play, I noticed they began to trust me enough to earnestly and openly discuss their responses to the characterisation. What excited me was their growing ability to challenge their own dramatic work, actively teasing out the layers of meaning and reshaping the dramatic form when necessary. Their growing awareness of themselves as young women was undoubtedly heightened and enriched by this unit on *Hotel Sorrento* as they continued to reflect on, and confront their own adolescent perspectives of female stereotypes. (Field Log 19, Lines 48–62) The girls themselves gradually expressed surprise at what they were learning about the women in the play:

_The significant point I am hearing from the girls is the layered personalities that the female characters represent. The girls are drawn to the strength in one of the characters, and frustrated by the 'accepting' nature of one of the others...they remark that quite often women are better at biting their tongues rather than confronting the focus of their dilemmas. They tell me it is extremely hard to confront their female 'sisters,' but in the play, it is a welcome release for the character when she finally 'explodes' in the last scene. The girls really like this..._ (Field Log 22, Lines 73–81)

During one of many informal conversations with the girls about the female roles in the play, they expressed anger and disbelief that ‘Meg’ could have had an affair with her sister’s late husband. A number of them viewed the act as selfish and irresponsible, and were generally
unforgiving of Meg’s behaviour. Gail argued that women, ‘need to stick
together, to be honest and truthful’ about their relationships with each
other. (Field Log 19, Lines 12–16) In challenging them further to look at
why the affair may have taken place, I noted:

I am interested to hear the other girls comment that perhaps there
was another reason for the affair that (they) don’t know. (Field Log
19, Lines 16–20) They begin to talk openly about the changes in the
characters and what they feel about the elements of the female
personalities in the play. (Field Log 23, Lines 60–62)

Whilst my teaching sessions with the girls were fruitful, I was conscious
that my own perceptions of female stereotypes and roles needed to be
kept in check. I was ever aware that whilst the girls were developing a
greater understanding of the potential drama held for exploring and
reshaping cultural meanings and values about women, it was paramount
that their development was guided but not dominated, by my role as
facilitator in the drama lessons. On one such occasion, I reflected:

I am aware that I am in danger of pushing a distinctly feminist line
here, and I am not sure that the girls don’t also pick up on this, so I
pull back here and let them run with the conversation. It is not my
intention as researcher (or teacher) to intervene actively in these
informal discussions, with my own value system about women. I do
not want the girls responding with what they see as appropriate
answers for me. (Field Log 19, Lines 20–25 and documented in Field
Log 16, Lines 48–52 and Lines 28–33, 31–33)
It was this fine balance between researcher, teacher, and female, which was eventually questioned and challenge by the girls themselves. As they became more familiar with me, my research became a topic of intense intrigue for them. Where once they had accepted my presence in the classroom without question, they now demanded to know exactly what I was doing. My notes tell the story:

The girls’ relationship with me has changed, moving from one where they distrusted my presence to one where they come freely and ask questions about the research. Their interest seems genuine, moving me to be honest in my discussion about my work with them, talking freely about their queries and curiosity. For the first time, I am feeling that I am seeing more of the real side of the girls in both their personal responses, and in the work they are doing. (Analytic Memo #9, Lines 2–6 & 18–20)

And,

A number of them come and sit beside me and begin to ask questions about what I am doing. Their questions range from: ‘Do you write about what we do?’ ‘Do you use our real names?’ ‘Do you write what you think?’ to, ‘How long is the work?’ and ‘How long have you been writing it?’ I decide to answer their questions honestly. They seem fascinated by what it is I am writing each time I am in the classroom. (Field Log 17, Lines 18–28. Also documented in Field Log 24, Lines 8–13)
Other times, they viewed me very much as the teacher coming to me for advice and ideas. There were many times when I was, ‘besieged by girls asking me how to make their work better.’ (from Field Log 15, Lines 54–55) As the semester progressed, my field notes often reflected my changing role in the classroom:

...I am surrounded by a number of them who want to talk about their performance with me – what could they do better, could the music have be different? (adapted from Field Log 16, Lines 76–86) There are many times during this lesson when the girls turn to me and make comments. and I find, I am being drawn more and more into their conversations. (Field Log 17, Lines 65–67) It is interesting to note that as one or two girls approach me, several more come up and stand there almost as if they want to speak to me too. (Field Log 23, Lines 58–62)

Whilst I was gratified that the girls were sharing with me many of the decisions and difficulties they confronted as they worked through the dramatic processes, I was conscious of maintaining a careful balance between my contribution in the classroom as researcher participant, and that of Carol’s role as the drama teacher. It was Carol’s unswerving co-operation and support of me which enabled the communication between myself and the girls to continue to be so open and relaxed, and I firmly believe that all of us working together collaboratively was an important factor in contributing to the richness and diversity of the research experience.
Carol’s rather ‘silent’ role in the entire research process was crucial. It was her incredible capacity to allow me into the classroom without any sense of competition for the girls’ affections, which enabled them to move so much closer to me as the months passed. Carol was open to learning new ideas when I worked with the girls and she often remarked to me how beneficial it was to have me in the classroom as a sounding board for her own drama practice.

Despite the fact she knew that I was not observing her personal drama style or pedagogy, she was keen to discuss the girls’ work with me whenever possible. It was undoubtedly my ongoing analysis of the girls’ work in the drama which assisted her to consider their needs more carefully and plan more effective learning experiences:

As I leave, Carol and I discuss the lesson and I comment on how interesting the girls’ initial reactions to the play’s characters are. Carol agrees, commenting that the play seems to be opening opportunities to really deconstruct different aspects of women’s lives with the girls. We find this both very exciting and I look forward to seeing what they do in the next lesson..(Field Log 18)

The girls themselves expressed in the questionnaires that it was Carol’s presence as classroom teacher which made for an enjoyable and warm learning environment. As one wrote, the best thing about being in the drama class was all girls and we are all friends, and our teacher doesn’t act like she is superior to us! (Questionnaire 3) Another added,
that it was the people, that is, the girls and the teacher, which made the drama class a great learning space. (Questionnaire 4)

My conviction that it was the strong support offered by Carol and the girls to each other during the semester which was responsible for the growing maturity I witnessed in their drama work, was substantiated on the last night of my research work. It was on this night that the girls presented to an audience of parents and family friends, their selected scenes from the play we had worked on for six weeks – Hotel Sorrento.

This finale was the pinnacle of the girls’ ultimate leap of faith in their own abilities to interpret and create a dramatic piece which was a product of both individual and collaborative creative minds and efforts. Not only did they finally understand what it meant to create and respond to dramatic form, but they did so with very little assistance from Carol and I, depending predominately on each other throughout the artistic process for support and feedback. Indeed, it was their co-operation with each other that allowed the final performance evening to run so smoothly:

*All of a sudden, the quiet is broken by groups of girls streaming in excitedly through the door. ‘I’ve got the milk!’ ‘Ob good!’ ‘I bought the Milo,’ are yelled over the top of my greeting... these are the props for their rehearsal. Their enthusiasm is contagious and I feel as excited as they are. Work begins feverishly! Girls begin rushing around the classroom setting up for their scenes. There is a great deal of*
co-operation and collaboration going on - discussion is loud and focused. (Field Log 25, Lines 20-25)

In many ways, this marked the beginning of their own creative journeys where they could explore, challenge, and illuminate their own adolescent female realities through their work in drama. For me however, this was the completion of my own research journey, and it was a surprisingly emotional and gratifying experience as I watched the girls perform work which was dramatically outstanding and aesthetically powerful for audience and students. It is to this last phase of the research that this narrative now turns.

**Finale**

In ending this journey, there are two major considerations which frame the final narrative. First, there is the significance of the girls' performances in terms of their own developing female voices in drama throughout the semester. Their growing abilities to ‘speak for themselves, and to bring their own questions and perspectives to the material’ (Maher & Tetreault 1994, P.18) was demonstrated in the final performance evening, through work which was paradoxically both poignant and uplifting in its precision and depth.

Secondly, my relationship as both researcher and co-artist with the girls was undoubtedly at its strongest and also most vulnerable on this last night of the field work. Indeed it was on this night, that the girls felt most
able to disclose intimate feelings and thoughts to me about the work they had been doing on *Hotel Sorrento* without fear of censor. As a result of their informal and relaxed communication with me, I too began to 'wade in a little deeper' into my participants' world, allowing me to interact openly with the girls as we prepared the classroom for performance.

In describing this changing relationship with the girls, I draw on the term ‘emphatic understanding,’ first coined by psychotherapist Carl Rogers, and used by Meador and Rogers (1977 in Ely 1991) to explain the developing, often intimate relationship, which may occur between researcher and participant. When this occurs in a research situation, the researcher is able to go beyond simply ‘understanding’ the words of the participants, but indeed, to essentially ‘step into their shoes.’

For a drama educator, this idea of ‘stepping into the shoes’ of someone else is well understood and indeed employed everytime we enter into the dramatic process. This move towards a strong empathetic relationship with my adolescent participants, became almost a natural and necessary progression for me in order to comprehend and appreciate their choices and behaviour in the drama classroom. In response, the girls allowed me to become almost ‘one of them’:

*I feel as if I belong in this class now – there is a sense of ownership of the girls' work which was not there before, and I feel very close to the girls tonight. They smile at me quietly, knowingly, as if I am privy to*
their anxieties and concerns. Carol too, has asked me to work with her in ensuring the entire evening goes smoothly. I am researcher and participant, teacher and sister. (Field Log 26, Lines 119–124)

As I observed the girls shaping and rehearsing their work for the final performance over these closing weeks, I once more identified a causal dynamic between their images of self, their creative abilities, and the emerging maturity in their drama work. As their confidence changed and grew, their work metamorphosed from superficial and awkward, to meaningful and multi-faceted. There was undoubtedly a sense of developing empathy not only with their peers and myself, but also with the roles they were scrutinising and making their own.

What became obvious, was an developing understanding in the girls themselves about the possibilities and advantages of the drama teacher being both artist and co-worker with them in the classroom. This was particularly heightened by their relationship with me as I worked with them in the performance unit. Whilst still hesitant at times about my status in the classroom, they began to trust their own instincts. This is well illustrated in the last field notes, when I replaced a sick student who could not perform. Her group was one of three, and I needed to negotiate urgently with the two others Gail and Regina, about the blocking of the scene:

Things are a little difficult at first because both of them find it hard to relate to my ‘Hilary’ role. Gail tells me sbe can’t bounce off one of my
lines - she is honest in her response and tells me that the line is not how she has previously interpreted it. I try again and this time, we seem to mesh. Regina tells me a little passively what she wants me to do, but her confidence grows as we continue to rehearse and she tells me finally with a smile, that she is beginning to ‘relate to me’ well in the scene. I sigh with relief. (Field Log 26, Lines 98–105)

and,

It seems important to them to collaborate actively and to continue to reshape the scene when appropriate, and they seem far more able to challenge me in regards my interpretation of the character than they were in the earlier part of the semester. It is important for them that the characters are presented as the girls see them – Gail often comments to me about her anxiety that ‘Meg’ isn’t quite right, and she and Regina continue to share discussion as the rehearsal moves on. (Field Log 6, Lines 107–112)

When the performances began, it was me who was biting my lips and praying that I didn’t ‘mess up’ (Field Log 26, Line 172) for the girls' sake. I need not have worried however, as the girls became highly focused and assured. They appeared to be moving Carol and I along with them instead of the other way around, and they all moved in perfect synchronisation as they changed props and prepared for each scene. They smiled briefly at their parents, but had little time for smalltalk.
It was my own scene with Gail and Regina which exemplified the power of drama to change and enrich the girls’ aesthetic and personal development. Although all the girls’ performances had been excellent, it was this last scene which seemed to gather all that the girls had learnt over this semester and present it in an explosive and moving finale. Although segments of this last field observation have been highlighted in Chapter 4, I now document the piece in its entirety:

..I am struck by the emotion at work in the scene – Gail and Regina are focused so intently that the scene seems real. I am drawn in from a ‘stand in’ position, to really being Hilary – the girls’ actions demand it! Their eye contact is strong as they listen and respond to each other intently. I look at the girls in the final minutes of the scene, there are tears running down their faces. My own eyes widen. I am blown away by what is happening here..

The parents have gone silent – of this much I am aware. I am overwhelmed by the sheer immersion of the girls in the roles – the empathy and emotional attachment cannot be denied. The girls are improvising, expressing to each other their sorrow at how much they have grown apart, but the anger is alive and almost tangible in the room. They are both crying, but they are playing out the roles...the tension is perfect, the moment precise. ‘CUT’ calls Carol...there are lots of ‘that was SOOOOOO good’ from the other girls...it is obvious the audience has been moved by the experience...
I stand and watch in awe at these young women, so capable of so much depth of emotion and understanding. Where are the nail biting, hair twirling adolescents that I have observed over the past six months? I stand and look at them and they look back at me. They are pleased with their work and it shows... (Field Log 26, Lines 174–195)

Observing the girls after the performance further illustrated just how important their mutual support and teenage friendship is to the drama classroom. They were extremely pleased with their performances, although somewhat unsure of what Carol and I thought about them. What was more significant for me however, was the value they placed on the support they received from each other. They hugged and laughed for several minutes after the performances, and congratulated each other in what seemed, genuine and warm tones.

Interestingly, the gamut of emotions they displayed after the performances was full of contrast and colourful variability:

They are now laughing and crying all at the same time. The emotions are spontaneous and sincere. It doesn’t take long for them to revert to normal, as a few minutes later, they are changing madly into their clothes, and talking excitedly and furiously with parents about the presentations. (Field Log 26, Lines 195–199)

I end this narrative journey with my own reflections of my last night in the field. This was an evening of enormous contrasts for me as researcher.
- tremendous relief to be finally leaving the field after an exhausting six months; sadness at parting from a group of participants who had become important to me; and an onset of anxiety at the thought of deciphering and sorting a mountain of ethnographic data!

I knew however that the time was right to leave, that I had accomplished what needed to be done (Bogdan & Biklen 1982) here in the field. The story was ready to unfold in a new and exciting way. I was surprised at the emotion I felt as I left that night to begin this stage of the journey. Carol was saddened by my departure expressing her gratitude for enriching the classroom drama environment for the semester, and extending an invitation to return to see the girls’ progress at the end of the year. My field notes best end this chapter as they clearly express my sentiments:

*I close a journey which has been one of the most enlightening and powerful experiences of my professional life. It is a difficult moment as I drive away from the school, and I am overwhelmed by the sheer depth of my own emotions. There can be no detachment in work such as this - it will silently, and sometimes violently, touch your soul in ways never thought possible. It will shake you out of entrenched apathy, turn your thoughts around and upside down, and demand some kind of response. But from all of this comes change - change which will hopefully inform, inspire, and enlighten the researcher, and ultimately the reader, to reassess the reality they have taken so much for granted!* (Field Log 26, Lines 211–220)
Summary

Both Chapters Five and Six have described a research journey grounded in the classroom experiences of one group of adolescent girls. Chapter Six in particular, has focused on the specific relationship which developed and evolved between the girls and myself during our work together. It has highlighted the changing personal and interpersonal dynamics not only for myself as researcher, but also for the girls as they realised gradually their value as co-artists in the drama classroom.

The following and final chapter of this work, will synthesise the richly diverse data gained through the observations, interactions, and written responses of the research group. Additionally, it offers recommendations for drama practitioners of all female classrooms with a hope that future practice will acknowledge and privilege the importance of providing adolescent girls with an aesthetic learning environment which is both empowering and liberating.
 CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND SYNTHESIS

What could you possibly learn by studying us?
What would happen if what was inside us were to enter the world? (Carol Gilligan 1990, pgs. 2 & 4)

This research has taken as its focus, the experiences of adolescent girls in one single sex drama classroom. It has been a narrative journey through which the girls own voices have helped shape the discussion and provided the essential framework for ethnographic enquiry into one group of adolescent female behaviour and relationships.

Conceptually this study has been underpinned by philosophies related to gender, drama education, and feminist theory. The assumption that young women's academic lives and their individual and collaborative voices are important to drama research and pedagogical practice, has provided the epistemological structure from which the study evolved and developed.

The study's pivotal question, 'What are the experiences of young women in one drama classroom,' was further framed by four focus sub-questions:
(1) How do adolescent girls relate to each other in the drama classroom?

(2) What do adolescent girls ‘do’ in the drama classroom?

(3) What do adolescent girls want to do drama about?

(4) How do adolescent girls perceive their experiences in drama?

**Philosophical Influences**

At the heart of the study’s essential vision lay the conviction that research into adolescent girls in the drama classroom, is a neglected area. A strong interest in the argument that *dramatic play can be both a liberating and oppressive learning medium for our female students* (Nicholson 1995), gave impetus to my own belief that drama could somehow empower and enfranchise the authentic female voices in our classrooms, if the appropriate learning structures were provided.

In terms of educational drama, my quest as researcher and drama practitioner was informed by current educational ideology which questions how much drama practitioners acknowledge the influence gender may have on the work of our students. This was particularly highlighted in Chapter Two, where discussion focused on recent drama research into gender issues such as that of Peta Tait (1994) who suggests, *educators writing about drama methodologies for teaching and learning, barely recognise differences based on gender.*
Additionally, I was strongly influenced by feminist philosophy such as that of de Beauvoir (1953) who argued that at adolescence, girls stop ‘being’ and start ‘seeming,’ and Pipher (1995), who adds some forty years later, that adolescent girls have long been given messages about their feminine persona which require them to work extremely hard in order to please everyone.

Importantly, this study stressed the essentiality of the girls own ‘voices’ as key elements in the ethnographic process and subsequent data analysis. Indeed, it was the attitudes and behaviour of the girls in the drama classroom and not the practice of the teacher, which constituted the focus of the study’s enquiry.

Embedded in the study’s philosophical framework, were other vital questions I hoped would be clarified and answered: What kinds of voices did these girls already possess in this classroom? Were their voices liberated and confident, or were they suppressed by institutional structures and/or adolescent anxieties and gender insecurities? How much did drama contribute to the girls’ overall personal and interpersonal development? As Chapter Three noted:

Drama offers a voice to those girls who might ordinarily be ‘silent’ in other classes. Private and inarticulate feelings which might otherwise not be expressed in interviews or group discussions, can be readily expressed through the dramatic experience. (Griffiths 1984)
Findings and Recommendations

The research cohort were an inexperienced drama group. Most of the girls had never done drama before, and although the Year 11 drama program demands a high level of aesthetic competence and theoretical knowledge of drama form and process, the girls’ dramatic understanding and maturity was relatively underdeveloped. Many lacked confidence in their abilities to create their own work, exhibiting poor self images and self esteem. Although Carol the classroom teacher was unyielding in her efforts to encourage and nurture the girls forward in the new dramatic work, initial lessons were filled with their struggling efforts to come to terms with the freedom drama offered them to explore themselves and their world through a creative medium.

Finding

Key Concepts: Trust, Self Esteem, Self Confidence

Adolescent girls can experience high degrees of difficulty in expressing themselves confidently and freely. Their ways of knowing about themselves and their world, appears to be directly linked with the way they define themselves as females in relation to others. (Gilligan 1982) This can result in voices which are often suppressed by fragile self esteems and low self confidence. Adolescent girls’ emotional immaturity makes it hard for them to hold on to their true selves as they experience
the incredible pressures of adolescents in the 1990’s. (Pipher 1994) The drama classroom can become a space where the insecurities of youth may well be challenged as the young girl is confronted with discovering her ‘creative’ self.

Discussion in Chapter Four revealed that many of the girls considered themselves ‘too plain’ or ‘stupid’ in terms of how they appeared to others. As a consequence, many of them exhibited a preoccupation and anxiety about what others thought of them. Although the girls appeared to always support each other in class and there was no evidence of any negative comments about each other’s body images during the research period, the early weeks of drama were fraught with the girls’ anxiety about looking at themselves in the drama room mirrors, or showing work to each other.

In the early stages of their drama work, they were constantly worried about their body images and how they would look in the final movement piece. In my notes there were frequent observations throughout the Movement unit, which documented that the girls were extremely aware and concerned about their own bodies and seemed uncomfortable and clumsy in their efforts. (Analytic Memo #3 & Field Log 12)

Pipher’s (1995) assertion that adolescent girls have long been given messages about their feminine persona that they should present a specific acceptable ‘image’ to others, was clearly observed in much of
the girls' behaviour throughout the Movement unit. Field notes revealed a great deal of readjusting of skirts and blouses, and a reluctance to have uniforms revealing more than was comfortable. The teacher Carol, was often besieged with comments about their personal appearance and their fears of looking stupid and foolish. (Analytic Memo #3)

There was evidence to support Pipher’s (1995) claim that adolescent girls are perpetually concerned with their body images and this becomes a source of frustration as they try to fit the images they carry around in their heads of the perfect teenage girl. During the interviews with the girls, many of them agreed that they are extremely self-conscious about themselves in drama due to images presented to them in the media. Gail received unanimous support when she commented: All this emphasis on supermodels - (it) really angers me - its almost impossible to be a particular height, and weight! (Documented in Transcript 2, Lines 340–354) The girls concurred that drama issues could well address ‘what real body images are,’ in order to support the difficulties they were facing as female adolescents.

Chapter Four highlights field incidences where the girls’ initial lack of self confidence and assurance, resulted in a rigidity in their drama work to the point where creativity was suppressed and stifled. There appeared to be a strong sensitisation amongst many of the girls that their efforts were never good enough or simply ‘not right’. This affected their participation in the early weeks as they stiffly participated in the
movement work, much to the frustration of both Carol and I who believed that the girls were quite capable of quality drama work. As I reflected:

*It is not as if they cannot do this – the more and more I see the girls, the more I realise that they are not totally immature in their approach to drama. Instead, there seems to be an enormous amount of self-consciousness which hides the ability to ‘make and create’ drama. They are aware of each other, and they awkwardly work with movements that are stiff, controlled and tense. This improves as...they realise that (no one) is censoring the choices they make.* (adapted from Field Log 12, Lines 36-43)

Interestingly in early interviews with the girls, many of them wanted to use drama as a place to be ‘different’ or ‘not yourself.’ It seemed that they wanted to escape behind the mask of performance, and were somewhat disappointed when they realised that the movement unit would require them to use their own bodies and personal interpretations of the assessment photographs in front of everyone else.

In Chapter Four, Karen’s comment that she *likes performing...because I hate being myself...too plain,* (Transcript 1, Lines 26-27) and Gail’s assertion that performance lets her be a bit different, typifies the girls’ attitudes as to why they chose to do drama. As I considered this over the early weeks of research, I was reminded of Pipher’s (1994) contention that the everyday pressures of the wider world, makes it harder and
harder for the adolescent girl to hold on to her authentic self. As Chapter Four discussed, the drama classroom seemed to provide the girls with a space where they were able to release a great many emotional traumas related to self that were otherwise held in check in other classes.

As Collins and Harper (1983) observed, negative comments about (the adolescent girl’s) appearance or assessment marks, can have a devastating effect on her emotional state. This claim was particularly exemplified in Chapter Four, where I reflected that the girls’ abilities to express themselves independently and aesthetically, seem to hinge on the approval of others. The slightest criticism albeit constructive from Carol and I, was met with frustration, and at times for some of girls, resignation and defeat.

In Chapter Four I reflected on an important incident, where a group of the girls changed an innovative dramatic interpretation of the theme from ‘Romeo and Juliet,’ to one more stereotypically ‘acceptable,’ after my enquiries about their work were perceived as disapproval and censure. The piece changed from the original sensual almost strip-tease interpretation, to a very romantic and extremely predictable piece of work. Later in the day, the girls had commented to Carol that they had felt they could ‘get into trouble,’ by continuing with their particular initial vision for the piece. (Documented in Field Log 10, Lines 124–126)

Reflecting later on what had happened, the full impact of the influence I had on the girls was to unsettle my field work for days to come.
I realised that because I had asked the girls why they had interpreted the music the way they had, (perhaps my error of judgement in posing such a question), they interpreted my query as disapproval:

*Carol tells me later after questioning the girls, that they took this to mean I disapproved. They were so sure that I would tell them they had no right to do a striptease as their response, that they could not handle my (query) and saw it as sheer disapproval: whereas I was actually very impressed and did not want to impose my view onto them. (Field Log 10, Lines 104–110)*

Other discussion with the girls on the lack of journal entries, disclosed a fear in them of getting the journal reflections ‘wrong’ for me. (Transcript Videotape 3.) There was an ongoing concern about what I thought about their personal reflections and comments on their drama experiences. As a result, some of them dealt with this by not writing anything in the journal at all. This disappointed me initially, until I realised that in order for the girls voices to be freely expressed, I needed to acknowledge their difficulties in taking chances with me at this stage of the research.

In previous comments (see Chapter Five) I argued that I suspected that the lack of self trust and the need to do everything the ‘right’ way, was strongly linked to the girls’ self confidence and entrenched traditional gender expectations that females don’t take risks, but rather try to please those around them. This was not just a hunch. It was validated by the
The girls took some time to believe in their own creative impulses and ideas. I noted throughout the field work that even after weeks of working on their presentations, they frequently had days when they could not trust their own judgements about the movement piece:

*The girls seem quite tense today, and I have a number of them tell me they don’t feel they are ready (for assessment). One tells me very stressfully that she doesn’t think her interpretation is satisfactory and may not suit Carol and I. I notice this (attitude) with a number of the girls – that they are not sure whether their interpretations are suitable, and they continue to look for affirmation from me. (Field Log 15, Lines 6–10)*

Fillion’s (1995) conviction that women need to *develop a politics of error, in which (they) allow themselves and other women to make mistakes*, was well exemplified by the girls’ anxiety about not being right or acceptable in the creative choices they made in the classroom, even in front of their female peers.

Their rigid belief that they might be ridiculed or ostracised for making mistakes in drama, seemed to immobilise the artistry in their work and hamper their abilities to think laterally and creatively about the work they were doing with Carol. As a later finding reveals, the more they
were encouraged to take risks in a safe and supportive learning environment allowing themselves and others to make mistakes, the more their latent creativeness came to the fore.

**Recommendation**

Teachers of adolescent girls in drama need to structure learning experiences which allow them to develop, not only a strong sense of collaborative, democratic, and supportive learning, but a respect and acceptance of individual talents and limitations. Adolescent girls need to be shown their own worth through a celebration of individual and group talents.

Teachers must strive to provide a liberated and challenging drama environment which encourages girls to appreciate that risk-taking and mistakes are a part of the human condition. Through continued exposure to forming, presenting, directing, responding, and reviewing, theirs and others' dramatic work, young women are offered important options for empowerment in their educational and personal lives.

Drama can offer girls the opportunity to scrutinise and explore their perceptions and understanding of what it means to be female. Opportunities need to be provided where girls develop trust in their own capacities to change and reshape their gender realities and to explore and express common female experiences freely and honestly.

(Griffiths 1984)
Finding

Key Concepts: Peer Friendship, Acceptance, Shared Experiences

As I observed the girls more intensely, I realised that they most feared what they looked like in front of each other because of the enormous importance they place on acceptance within friendship groups. This appeared to be the key to harmony in the classroom. It was their peers who gave the girls the impetus to strive further in drama, and made the class worth coming to.

They saw each other as providing a wall of strength and support in all areas of the drama learning, and it was the negotiation between group friends which often ensured the final product came together smoothly. I observed a strong need for them to communicate collaboratively and freely within the drama classroom in order to maintain friendship hierarchies and the spirit of what they described as ‘own sex’ acceptance and support.

Friendship was of the upmost importance for their personal well being in the classroom, and drama was a space for ‘fun’ learning with strong fraternity infrastructures. As Chapter Four highlights, it was the importance of having fun with friends which led many of the girls to choose drama as a subject. Many of them considered it was the close network of friends in the class which prevented them from having ‘nervous breakdowns’ from pressure exerted by parents and other
societal influences. (Documented in Interview Transcript 1, Lines 124–133 and 251–257)

What I observed most strongly, was that the girls really seemed to need these friendship networks in order to form and shape their drama work successfully [see Chapter Four]. Assessment groups were often made up of friends, and in class activities, the girls would often gravitate towards specific friendships groups to work in. Until Carol began insisting that the groups keep changing, the girls would naturally select the same friends time and time again.

It was their dependence on the collaborative support and encouragement of the group which gave them impetus and direction, and allowed an overall feeling of harmony to prevail in the classroom. (Documented also in Field Logs 14, 19, 24, Analytic Memos #9a, #1) Lever's (1976), Macoby's (1988), and Tannen’s (1990) observations that girls tend to play and socialise more intensively within small group networks, correlated with my conclusions about the value of the group for the girls' decision making processes. Co-operation, collaboration, acceptance, and empathy between the girls, were notable elements of the way they worked inside and outside the dramatic process.

However as the semester progressed, I began to see an inherent contradiction in what the girls were telling me about the freedom drama gave them to be themselves with their friends, and their belief that they had to maintain acceptable images in front of each other in the drama
classroom. My initial confusion over this incongruity in their attitudes slowly changed, as I began to realise that the images that they tried to create were often those which society promoted as most favourable for adolescent girls. Once more, this was tied to body images and self-esteem. Indeed there was a complex relationship between the alliances the girls seemed to have in the classroom, and the influence these had in exerting pressure on them to conform to certain ideals and standards.

Griffiths (1995) writes, that school is a place where girls can meet and make friends...school provides the means of reinforcing friendships, because of the daily contact in and out of lessons. Peers become like a new family unit, in which the adolescent girls feels she has more control and more acceptance. (Collins & Harper 1983) Ironically however, peers can also be destructive to an adolescent’s emotional well being if acceptance from the hegemonic group is not forthcoming. (Pipher 1995). The importance for the girls to ‘fit in’ into specific friendship groups, was one of the most significant observations of the field work.

Field notes document a number of instances where distinct seating arrangements seemed to work to establish comfort zones (see Chapter Four) within the drama space, and these arrangements appeared to set the tone for the entire lesson. (Field Log 8, Also documented in Field Logs 2,16,9,3,23 and Analytic Memo #5) This seemed to be a necessary ritual for the girls in order for them to begin
the lesson comfortably and confidently. They would hurry into the classroom and reserve seats for each other even when they were seated in a circle on the floor.

Yet again, in spite of these intimate displays of loyalty, I noted a disparity in the way friendships were conducted. Although the girls cherished the friendship networks in the drama classroom, it was these same valued friends who could, in a show of fickleness, create tension and conflict for each other. Indeed it was these same friends who the girls were frightened of looking ‘stupid’ in front of. Often, any disagreements were over issues I considered trivial matters, but which were obviously important to the girls.

Significantly, the girls always banded together in selective groups during these times of conflict, and it seemed clear that alliances changed and wavered dramatically from time to time. I reflected:

*At times, I see fractures in the group which are not due to disagreements over form or process, but more about possessive issues over space, friendships, properties. There is more disagreement amongst two more groups because one group has told another to be quiet. This causes great conflict between the girls. The atmosphere is tense and frantic and the girls work without speaking to each other.* (Field Log 15)

Surprisingly however despite these tensions, I noted that by the end of the session, *the girls had all gathered together in another part of the*
room where they freely chatted about their movement piece (adapted from Field Log 15) Vivienne Griffith's (1995) observation that ‘fall outs’ between girls is short lived because of the immense value they place on their friendships, was validated through such incidents recorded in my field notes throughout the semester.

‘Making up’ appeared to an integral part of their friendship modus operandi, and as earlier discussion highlighted, part of the reason for this does seem to lie in the difficulty many girls confront in asserting themselves in the face of adversity. For example, my observations document the difficulty many of the girls experienced in offering each other any kind of critical advice or comments about their dramatic work.

I found this was not just a case of inexperience with dramatic form and stagecraft, but more a case of the girls not being willing to upset an established and intrinsically understood code of friendship. Eichenbaum and Orbach (1988), Pipher (1995), and Fillion (1996), concur that individual differences between adolescent peers is at times not well tolerated, and those girls who dare to be more independent or outspoken, can suffer ostracism or ridicule from the others.

As I did not witness any concrete evidence during the research period of any girl being deliberately ostracised by the others, I spoke to the girls about why there never seemed to be any notable debate or discourse of disagreement during the drama activities. Eichenbaum and Orbach’s
(1988) claim that the unspoken bargain between women is that we must all stay the same..or we break ranks, was confirmed by the girls.

Fillion’s (1996) argument that girls come to understand very early that they must be nice to each other in order to validate each other, was substantiated a number of times in discussion with the group. Indeed, it seemed to link causally with their strong need for acceptance and their obvious lack of risk-taking in critiquing and reviewing others’ drama work in the classroom.

In pursuing this issue further with the girls, one told me that I have probably noticed they find it hard to criticise each other in drama performance, whilst another confirmed that when you criticise your peers, you run the risk of alienation and displeasure from them. (adapted from Field Log 14, Lines 14, 94–95, Refer also to Analytic Memos #5, #7, and Field Log 25) Indeed as Fillion (1996) writes, in criticising female friends, you run the risk of being disliked and left behind.

Despite Carol’s constant encouragement for the girls to put forward as many innovative ideas as possible, in the early weeks of drama they seemed content to accept a status quo situation where they all drifted along with each other, often without anyone taking the lead. Often they were prepared to settle for stereotypical scenarios in their drama work, rather than take artistic or personal risks.
One girl’s comment, that females are not able to deal with competition well, and there is always a certain amount of jealousy which results from someone doing well over others, (Field Log 14, Lines 85–89) was affirmed by others in the interviews and discussions. A number of them remarked during one informal sharing session, *it is extremely hard to confront fellow ‘sisters,’ (about important issues) and that quite often women are better at biting their tongues than confronting the focus of their dilemmas*. (Field Log 22, Lines 77–80)).

Pipher (1994) concurs with Fillon’s (1995) claim, that girls have learnt through gender enculturation that females are generally strong empathetic communicators and they should as a consequence, offer their friends willing ears and comfortable comments rather than challenge and disagreement. They have learnt not to take affirmative action in asserting what they believe is right, but rather opt for whatever maintains the friendship status quo.

As my data further notes, Carol’s early efforts to have the girls critique each other’s aesthetic work, were often punctuated with apologies and hesitation from the girls that they had an opinion to offer. (See Chapter Four. Documented also in Analytic Memos #7, #5, and Field Log 25) This became a notable early pattern in the girls’ responses in the drama classroom, and often affected their abilities to help reshape dramatic work as a class.
I hypothesise that the infrastructures of friendships and the specific gender codes which governed those structures in the classroom, were contributing factors in the girls’ early difficulties in approaching the dramatic work freely and creatively. My observations continued to support a hunch, that whilst friendships were obviously genuine amongst many of the girls, this was often dependent on ongoing conditional alliances.

**Recommendation**

Within an all girls’ drama classroom, the importance of friendship hierarchies is acknowledged as an essential driving force behind collaborative harmony and productivity. It is one reason drama is so attractive to young women. As Griffith (1995) argues, *the strength and support which girls can give each other, needs to be capitalised on, rather than undermined and fragmented*. (p.179) However, girls need to be empowered to use the strength of their friendships for encouraging and supporting each other to do the very best they can, both inside and outside the drama classroom.

*The drama classroom can become an importance space for girls to maintain strong bonds. This bonding among girls, can be a powerful force not only for surviving, but for challenging conventional gender arrangements.* (Thorne 1993) The collaborative nature of drama means such friendship bonds can be utilised positively for meaningful group experience and communication.
In drama, girls should be encouraged to work through the art form in order to understand themselves and others more honestly and comprehensively. There is a need to establish the drama space as a genuine and open learning environment which promotes spirited dialogue and debate about the drama work of individuals and groups, and exposes students to a multiplicity of ideas and ideological meanings.

**Finding**

**Key Concepts: Communication, Intimacy, Empathy**

Within these friendship networks identified as important infrastructures of adolescent girls’ daily lives, are specific identifiable modes of communication, *strongly characterised by intimate sharing, and private knowledge*. (Duck 1993) These modes of communication feature high degrees of empathy and intimacy.

In particular, communication and participation in drama, allows significant close physical contact between the girls and an opportunity for intimate conversations and personal disclosures that other subjects inhibit. For many of the girls, this kind of communication is an essential part of the way they make sense of their world and *collaboratively construct personal and female cultural identities*. (Gluck & Patei, 1991)
In Chapter Four I noted, that many of the girls displayed ongoing patterns of intimate behaviour throughout the semester. This interpersonal communication was characterised by significant displays of physical bonding such as hugs, stroking and wrestling, whilst conversations were punctuated by strong eye contact, large gesticulation, nodding, and smiling. (Documented in Field Logs 7, Lines 25–26; 9, Lines 100–101; 5, Lines 10–11; 12, Lines 75–78).

In particular, Gluck and Patai’s (1991) observation that strong eye contact between women is an important element in communication patterns, was clearly evident in the girls’ interactions during the ongoing group work. Field logs revealed that strong eye contact accompanied by nodding to signify strong negotiation, was often part of more intimate conversations the girls shared during lull times in the drama lesson, or before the lesson actually began. It also featured prominently during rehearsals times and when the girls were planning and shaping drama performances. (Documented in Field Logs 20, 21, and 23)

As Chapter Four documents classroom conversations were varied, ranging from snippets about boys and relationships, to what each girl was doing on the weekend or wearing to the school dance. Distinctly, many of these conversations appeared to depend on high degrees of intimacy, empathy, and disclosing of personal secrets. (Thorne 1993)

Fillion (1996) highlights the common description of such female exchanges as ‘rapport talk.’ Whilst Fillion’s discussion makes a point of
arguing that women’s talk has been stereotyped as being characterised by high levels of rapport and intimacy, my observations found that indeed in this classroom, this was the case. For example, one field log reads:

_There is strong eye contact between the girls and they speak in abnormally bigger pitched voices than (usual). (Field Log 9, Lines 82–83)_. One girl’s comments that she has dye on her shorts, and she is excitedly asked if she is dyeing her hair. (Field Log 3, Lines 13–16). The girls are chatting earnestly in small groups—again much of what they are saying is of a personal nature...they lapse into conversation about Triple J (radio station), ‘The Simpsons’, and someone’s brother. Everyone is nodding, listening and giving support and encouragement. (Field Log 9, Lines 55–58, 93–97)

Despite Fillion’s claim (1996) that this rapport talk is predominately more ‘gossipy’ than empathetic in nature where conversation is often derogatory about men and sometimes each other, there was evidence that these adolescent conversations were most often about daily happenings, emotional traumas, upcoming events, and aspirations for the future.

Whilst males did feature in the conversations, the girls viewed them not as adversaries, but indeed as objects of desire and excitement! Whilst such conversations may be generally described as possessing elements of gossip, at age sixteen, the girls genuinely seemed to be more
concerned with advising and comforting each other about daily happenings, than talking about males disparagingly. This may well alter as the girls’ life experience and sexual relationships change and develop.

Interestingly, there was evidence to suggest that the girls did consider that it was natural and appropriate for them to communicate with each other with high degrees of nurturing and empathy. Duck's (1983) claim that social expectations govern female perceptions that they should be ‘intimacy experts,’ capable of copious amounts of empathetic listening and nurturing of their friends, was alluded to in the girls’ own views on the way that males and females supposedly react to each other.

Whilst the girls' conversations with me did not expose that they felt any sort of conscious pressure to conform to specific gender stereotypes, their answers did reveal particular established stereotypical ideologies about gender behaviour. When asked if boys encourage and communicate with each other the same ways as females, the girls replied that boys encourage each other with a slap or a pat, whilst girls tend to give each other hugs. (Transcript 3, Audiotape, Lines 92–95) Others commented that boys are ‘more closed up’ than girls, and don’t openly express themselves the same way. (Transcript Videotape 1, Lines 54–55)

The girls argued that the movement piece they had just done would not be suitable for boys. Only boys, ‘a bit feminine’ would be inclined to partake in this kind of drama, whilst the more ‘egotistical’ males would be resistant. As one pointed out, male ballet dancers were all ‘a bit
feminine’ although she conceded that would also have to be ‘very strong.’ (Transcript Audiotape 2, Lines 47–61)

I found the girls’ own obvious stereotyping of what was appropriate for males and females in drama very interesting. In effect the girls were, as Maccoby (1988) argues, actively maintaining a ‘gendered culture’ not only through the ideas they espoused, but also through the language they used to describe their perceptions. Although they insisted that boys themselves would consider the assessment too ‘girly’ for them, the girls considered it was indeed a ‘feminine’ type of assessment which was best suited to them. When asked if boys could handle the piece, they hooted with laughter!

In terms of the girls’ relationship with me, Chapter Five highlights notable changes in their attitudes towards me as the semester progressed. Not only did they begin to disclose more intimate details about themselves to me, but I also found myself moving towards a more empathetic relationship with them where my own intrinsic response to nurture and protect them, affected the way I worked with them. Strong elements of trust began to emerge, which in turn affected the girls’ level of disclosure with me.

Smith (1983) stresses that the key element of effective ethnographic practice, lies in the capacity of the researcher to put themselves in the place of the participant through a process of “verstehen” or empathy. Margot Ely (1991) refers to this more precisely, as being able to see life through the participants’ eyes.
Whilst in Chapter Three I noted my concerns about my own female perceptions somehow ‘colouring’ the data, this became in fact an advantage for me in order to gauge the argument that women were by nature, more empathetic. I was able to place myself in their shoes very easily, because of my intimate and encultured understanding of what it means to be female.

I actively scrutinised my field notes to analyse how much empathy was being developed between myself and the girls, and when this was happening. (Documented in Field Log 15) As the weeks progressed, I continued to explore the developing data which revealed (as the last finding highlighted) that much of the girls’ communication was dependent on high levels of intimacy and empathy. As time went by and the girls lost their distrust in me as a stranger, they began to treat me as a confidante, and at times, a sister and a mother figure.

Interestingly I found myself responding to them in kind, often without a cognitive acknowledgment of what was happening in the moment. On one occasion I wrote, *more and more, I find I am being drawn into the group by the girls themselves - they are becoming closer to me every time I enter the classroom..to me it has happened quite naturally, without any effort from me.* (Field Log 15, Lines 21–26)

This unfolding intimacy and element of trust which developed between the girls and myself, gives weight to Oakley’s (1981) argument that for female participants to find their own voice in work such as this, they
must feel empathy with the female researcher knowing they are empowered to be ‘part’ of the research process. I found this to be absolutely true in the work I did with the girls. Disclosure did not come until they felt they could trust me and until I was accepted on their terms, into their adolescent fold. Most importantly however, this element of developing trust enabled us to work more effectively as co-artists in the dramatic process. It opened up channels of creativity which had previously been closed by the absence of any secure relationship between myself and the girls.

**Recommendation**

Drama offers adolescent girls an excellent learning space for close and meaningful communication. Learning experiences and overall objectives in any drama program in an all girls’ drama classroom, should seek to provide students with ample opportunities to explore and deconstruct what it means to communicate as a female in terms of gender expectations and cultural traditions.

Adolescent girls enjoy working closely with each, and indeed, appear to work most effectively when they are able to communicate freely and collaboratively with each other. This should be harnessed in the drama classroom as a possible way to celebrate female voices in a liberated, supportive environment. As Brown and Gilligan (1992) stress, in allowing a space for female voices to be heard, females are able to
reveal and explore ideological assumptions which govern their lives, and in turn, pursue alternative dimensions of growth and communication.

Finding

Key Concepts: Liberation, Co–Artistry, Gender Equality, Acceptance.

Whilst the girls expressed overwhelming support for learning in an all girls’ drama classroom, they also commented on the need for some gender balance in their drama work throughout their school experience. Indeed the advantages of working in a single sex classroom can be enfranchised and extended, by allowing girls to celebrate their own female voices whilst still working artistically with their male counterparts.

Pipher (1994) writes, that schools need to be structured in ways that validate and nurture the strengths in female students, whilst also teaching them about the dilemmas that young men also face, and the importance of equality. Whilst the young women in this study acknowledged that males in the classroom would have some negative effect on their work and attitudes, they also recognised the need to sometimes have the opportunity to explore the male perspective in the dramatic process.
As Chapter Two noted, previous research into co-educational classrooms (Stanworth 1993, Mahoney 1985, Clark 1989, Spender & Sarah 1989, Walkerdine 1990) claim that in mixed sex schools, girls tend to pay 'lip service' in deference to boys, often at the expense of their own academic and personal achievements. Walkerdine (1990) argues, girls often put on a 'performance' in the mixed sexed classroom, as they play out a series of gender appropriate roles inculcated over years in society.

Questioning the validity of these claims in the nineties, I pursued this particular point with the girls during the interviews. Using my observations of their apparent awkwardness and self-consciousness in the first movement unit as a starting point, I spoke at length with them about their feelings about not having any boys in their drama classroom.

Chapter Four documents strong support by the girls for their single sex drama classroom which appeared to be again causally linked with the important emphasis they placed on peer female friendship acceptance and support. What became obvious was their overwhelming concern not to look 'like a fool' in front of anyone. They considered that to make a fool in front of one’s girlfriends was bad enough, but to do so in front of boys was unspeakable. (Transcripts Audio 2 & 3)

They held tightly to a belief that although they wanted to maintain a certain kind of ‘cool’ image with their female friends in order to be accepted, this did not matter half as much as the image they wanted to
project to boys. It seemed to be that they firmly accepted that they
would be forgiven by their female classmates for appearing less than
cool in drama work, but would be utterly socially rejected if this
happened in front of males. This appeared to be linked to a growing
awareness of their own sexuality.

This specific point was explained rather honestly by one of the girls
who remarked that *(we) can sort of be dags in the drama room when
(we) are with all girls, (but) with boys, (we'd) be always conscious
(about) how (we're) acting..doing hair before each drama
class..talking more than working.* (adapted from Transcript Audio 2,
Lines 98–102)

For many of the girls, it was this sense of liberation without the fear of
embarrassment (see Chapter Four) they felt in the presence of boys,
which made their participation in this drama classroom a worthwhile
experience. As several girls remarked, boys tend to ‘laugh at you at this
age,’ and ‘pick on girls,’ and ‘make snide remarks about girls,’ to uphold
their macho image. (Transcript 3, Lines 57–68)

A notable link to the girls’ self esteem and perception of self, was their
relationship to boys in terms of how attractive and desirable they
appeared to them. Success with boys seemed to carry with it a
significant status position. On one occasion I noted, *one girl tells me
that many of them feel worthless not to have a boyfriend and this can
be the basis of peer jealously in the classroom.* (Field Log 14, Lines
The girls felt that the continued presence of boys in the drama classroom would exasperate this kind of competition and undermine the support and egalitarianism that existed in this all girls’ classroom.

The pressure to impress the boys and be ‘attractive’ at all times during the drama activities, were some of the reasons the girls articulated in their responses for their preference to work in an all girls’ drama classroom. Griffith’s (1995) argument that curriculum subjects which allow girls comfortable social interaction with each other (and without the interaction of boys), are highly favourable learning contexts for them, strongly resonated in many of their reactions. The shared experience and collective support she speaks of, was described by these girls in terms of ‘comfort,’ ‘sameness,’ and ‘familiarity.’

*The National Plan for the Education of Girls* (1993), notes that girls in co-educational classrooms are often subjected to a form of sexual harassment from boys masked by friendly teasing and banter. Over time, this can result in lowered self-confidence, heightened negative body awareness, and reduced risk taking. Whilst I noted all of these elements in the classroom in the early part of my research work even in the absence of boys, many of them began to disappear as the girls’ confidence and trust in each other changed and developed. This may not have happened if there had been boys in the classroom, but it was beyond the scope of this research to explore this consideration.
As mentioned, the girls expressed how the boys’ ‘teasing’ would disconcert them in units which focused on movement and the body. They felt it would not be possible to ‘roll around the room’ trying to express themselves when boys were present. Most of the girls felt their bodies were simply not the perfect teenage image, and this would be highly embarrassing for them in front of males. ‘Smart’ remarks and teasing from the boys, were viewed as some of the biggest drawbacks of a co-educational drama class.

Whilst the girls conceded that they too tease boys, it appeared that it was often the ‘language’ of the teasing alluding to sexual references and gender stereotyping, which was deemed most offensive. I was shocked in one interview to hear that boys would sometimes still refer to the girls in blatant derogatory terms (Interview 4 Videotape 4) just to ‘show off’ to their mates. Despite my challenge to the girls that this may be exaggerated, they insisted that this still happens in their social interactions with males at other school functions such as dances etc.

Kenway & Willis’s (1986) argument that single sex classrooms can also sometimes result in girls contributing to their own oppression, is worth consideration here. Previous discussion has noted the girls’ preoccupation with concerns about how the boys perceive them in terms of physical attractiveness and ‘feminine presence’. The girls themselves expressed how undesirable it is to look like a ‘fool’ in front of boys. Certainly it seems that as an earlier finding highlighted, this unquestioned need to cultivate particular feminine images of
acceptability even with all female peers, did not initially allow the girls to bridge the gap between constructed societal images of the perfect female, and self acceptance, independence and personal empowerment. Therefore even in the all female classroom, it appeared that the girls exerted their own considerable pressure on each other to conform to certain images and ideals.

What is pertinent here, is that despite the girls’ preference for single sex learning, they communicated an earnest desire to work with boys in drama on some level during the year. In particular, they expressed an interest in doing some playwriting with boys as well as sharing a production of some sort, possibly one they had co-written. Whilst the girls acknowledged the strong advantages of working in a single sex classroom for most of the year, they appreciated the value of possible opportunities to explore male approaches to drama for a concentrated period. In this way, they felt that gender issues which were contentious, could possibly be ‘brought out of the closet,’ and explored collectively. (Marg – Transcript 4, Lines 203–224)

The girls felt strongly about doing some acting with boys, possibly through collaboration on a selected playscript. They considered it fruitless to try to emulate male characteristics on stage themselves, and felt it necessary for their dramatic growth and understanding of character development that they analyse how boys approach the dramatic process. Dean (1994) advocates such a collaborative drama approach for single sex schools arguing that it ‘offers a real opportunity for students to consider their gender and place in the real world.’ (p.28)
McLean (1995) also documents the benefits of collaboratively working to confront gender issues through the use of dramatic action. As Chapter Two noted, McLean’s research work with senior students revealed entrenched and unquestioned gender stereotypes throughout the role play work. Through the dramatic deconstruction of the issues at hand, McLean was able to challenge the students to find their authentic voices by addressing the gender imbalances in their initial choices to portray males and females in the role plays.

Whilst there was no opportunity to explore how the research participants might have reacted to working with males in drama during the semester, it can be assumed that the girls would have possibly benefited positively from the experience. Certainly, they thought it important that they ‘get a different perspective’ (Transcript Audio 1 &3) of how males see their world, and what males ‘would do with a piece of assessment.’ (Transcript Audio 4)

In response to the girls’ comments that they often felt inadequate or foolish in front of boys, I had made a decision that I would pursue the area of women’s studies with them. It had always been Carol’s intention to have the girls explore and perform Hotel Sorrento by Australian playwright Hannie Rayson, for the last assessment piece of semester. Carol felt that as the play focused around three sisters, it was an excellent starting point for considering women’s voices in a way which would be most culturally familiar to the girls. I agreed enthusiastically
with her, eager to explore three very different women of substance, and was sure the girls would feel the same. However, this was initially not the case!

Using the upcoming work on the play, I broached the subject of feminism and women’s studies with the girls in the interviews, and was met with both resistance and hostility. Pipher’s (1994) claim that for adolescent girls, feminism is almost a ‘dirty’ word, was undeniably vindicated by the girls’ reactions. As Pipher correctly observes, the girls were strong on ‘equality’ for men and women, but not interested in supporting what they saw as radical ‘man haters.’ (Toni – Transcript 3)

As Chapter Four noted, the girls did not think that the women’s movement and the associated struggle for women’s rights were of any concern for them as adolescents. Most of them agreed that women are ‘alot better off than they were before,’ (Transcript Video 3) and that ‘nothing could come of it’ (Transcript Video 2) if they were to look at women through drama. Similarly, they felt that women’s studies is ‘sexist in itself’ (Transcript Video 3) and that the whole women’s movement has been ‘taken too far..and (they) are sick of it.’ (Transcript Video 3)

However, despite their apparent disinterest in the feminism movement itself, the need for equality between men and women was stressed by all the girls. As one explained, sometimes we take it for granted because men need equality too – everybody needs to be equal – you know equality for men needs to be looked at as well. (Transcript Video 1,
What was obvious, is that despite the girls' claims that boys teased them and made 'snide' remarks about them, at this age, they really LIKED boys. Again, an incongruity was evident between the frustration and anger the girls felt when the boys made fun of them, and their obvious desire to please them. Boys were a necessary and important part of their lives, and I derived from my discussions with them that they simply did not want to hear arguments about patriarchal oppression and the burning of bras. Yet what they did want to talk about, was possible ways drama could help explore equality for both sexes in contemporary society.

Whilst they advocated the need for equality, they denied any real problems existed, and did not take easily to my initial discussions about the difficulties women still face in Australian society. This was an issue I would have like to explore further with the girls, but did not have the scope to do so. Wrigley (1992) argues that adolescent girls have not yet experienced enough conflict associated with gender equality, to seriously appreciate the difficult plight of women still in contemporary society. She asserts that many young girls live in a 'pollyanna-ish' world protected from outside gender inequities. To what degree these girls existed in such a 'pollyanna-ish' world was not able to be fully explored in this study, but I suspected that they were only just beginning to discover the importance of gender in their lives.

What is evident, is that the girls did acknowledge that boys can intimidate them in a variety of ways, but they would still like to work
with them in drama in some capacity. I don’t believe this was a simple case of deference to males as ‘superior’ beings, but a genuine interest the girls have in learning more about drama.

**Recommendation**

Adolescent girls in all female drama classrooms need opportunities to work with their male counterparts as co-artists at some point in their senior drama program. This would allow for a more realistic, deeper understanding and exploration of gender relationships, attitudes and expectations not available in the everyday experiences of the single sex classroom. Whilst many single sex girls’ schools do already collaborate with boys’ schools for the school musical or classical play production, more diverse opportunities to write, direct and produce student devised performances, would award students richer opportunities to discover gendered artistic perceptions and approaches to the wider world.

**Finding**


Drama experiences for adolescent girls need to be linked with their current interests and concerns. *In order to empower young women to make conscious and appropriate choices in their lives,* they
need to explore and understand what is happening in their everyday relationships with friends, family, and boys. The girls were strong in their convictions that drama needs to ‘speak’ to them in terms which they can relate to and in ways which affords them artistic freedom of choice.

Issues which related to their own adolescent struggles underpinned many of their dramatic interpretations, particularly in the Movement unit. Over time it became clear that in forming and shaping the semester's work, the girls constantly drew on matters which were emotionally and socially pertinent to them. They expressed a continuing desire to write and perform their own playscripts which dealt with issues problematic to them in their present lives. A desire to ‘perform’ was one of the most distinct reasons they wanted to be in drama - in many ways they felt that being in role empowered them to explore personal issues without running the risk of overt individual exposure to others.

Pipher’s (1994) assertions that adolescent girls are caught in everchanging perceptions of who they are and what they want to do with their lives, resonated strongly throughout the field work period. During the interviews, and sometimes through informal conversations, the girls told me that they wanted to look at issues in drama which directly concerned them in everyday life. They were aware of the struggles and difficulties they were facing as adolescents, and felt that drama could provide them with a critical space to explore such issues. I
witnessed this happening quite incidentally in the early work of the semester, and was both moved and disturbed by the complexity of the girls' feelings and responses.

As Chapter Four notes, the girls' interpretations in the movement piece were filled with pathos and struggle. Themes of entrapment, oppression, familial conflicts, and breakups with boyfriends, saturated the interpretation of the dramatic work. The angst in their work was almost tangible, and on asking them how they saw their own work, they told me honestly that life was full of struggles for them at this time, and this somehow reverberated through the dramatic work. (Documented in Field Log 14, Lines 69–74)

In one instance, Meg explained that in interpreting the dramatic movement piece, she used her own life – not her whole life, but bits and pieces of it, to try and show how she felt about it through movement. (Transcript Audio 2, Lines 33–34) Marg’s explanation on why conflict was so much a part of their interpretations, was simple – because it happens in our lives at the moment, it kinda (sic) reflects that. (Transcript Audio 4, Lines 60–61)

I would suggest that the girls' strong desire to perform scripted plays, was linked to their changing adolescent perceptions of self and the transition to adult roles. As Chapter Four notes, they felt that the chance to become someone else through scripted role-play, was a way to try out new things without being laughed at. The girls equated this with ‘letting
themselves go’ and ‘getting rid of fear and embarrassment,’ and often commented that they couldn’t wait to do work with plays.

Importantly, they insisted that ‘acting’ in drama, was far more than just getting up on stage and saying lines. Jane described it as a chance to let yourself grow and to look at your feelings. Gail was passionate in her response that is kinda (sic) like art, like a painting - it’s another way of expressing how you feel. (Transcript Video 2, Lines 62–72) It appeared that as the semester progressed, the girls regarded drama as a medium for analysing life’s conflicts and celebrations in ways which allowed them an ongoing adolescent safety net and support system.

In order to find the ‘real’ to release their own voices, they paradoxically needed to don the mask. In this seemingly complex behaviour of exploring their real conflicts within the secure framework of role-play and characterisation, they were:

\[ \textit{free to alter their status, adopt different roles and responsibilities, play with elements of reality, and explore alternate existences. To slip the bonds of their identities, and participate in other forms of existence. (O’Neill 1995, p.151)} \]

This paradox where the individual is able to explore the real whilst working inside the fictional, is what Boal (1979) refers to as ‘metaxis’ - the ability to hold two worlds in our minds at the same time as we explore, create, reshape, and respond to dramatic meaning. The girls themselves knew intrinsically, that in order for them to know themselves
more profoundly, they needed to work and reflect both inside and outside the dramatic medium, constantly deconstructing the juxtaposition of the real and the fictional.

Their own insistence that they be involved in drama work *which gives them the opportunity to create personal meaning about what is important to them*, (Field Log 14, Lines 127–129) constantly reminded me, that what we as adult educators see as appropriate for learning in drama, may in fact, be neglecting the most important issues in adolescent girls lives. As I continued to talk to the girls, I found myself asking daily how drama can be empowering if learning does not first start with what the girls know? This is what I believe they were inadvertently telling me throughout the semester.

As the words of Maxine Greene (1978) remind us, it is ultimately education which will liberate young women to move beyond their lived gender realities. Her advocacy for education as an agency to provide an ‘intensified awareness of women’s own realities and the shape of their own lived world,’ resonated in the girls’ own words as they expressed the need for drama experiences which are relevant to what is happening in their adolescent world. As the next finding highlights, when we begin with what girls do know and then challenge them through drama to extend their thinking about themselves as women, new dimensions of knowing and learning are made possible.
**Recommendation**

Whilst endeavouring to offer everchanging intellectual and creative challenges to young women, drama planning must first acknowledge and reflect the immediate needs and interests of our students. This is important not only for the social and emotional health of the girls, but also to ensure drama can act as an agent for transformation and cognisance in their lives.

In planning effective drama experiences, we must look first to the lives and interests of our female students. We must strive to investigate the cultural and social realities of these young women, and plan drama experiences which will enfranchise them to make sense of all they are struggling to understand. We must enable them to be immersed in the creative through the provision of aesthetic education which resonates with elements of their teenage lives.

At the same time, participation in drama must offer them new ways of understanding issues they may not have previously considered or been interested in. Drama education must continue to offer challenge to our adolescent girls about traditional gender roles and societal expectations in order that they will never be passive recipients of knowledge and dominant ideologies in their adult lives. In this way, we empower them to make appropriate and effective life decisions as they continually assess and evaluate their place in society as females.
Finding

Key Concepts: Empowerment, Transformation, Understanding.

Drama offers a voice to those girls who might ordinarily be silent in other classes. The collective dramatic experience allows girls to explore and express common female experiences freely and honestly. These opportunities are pertinent for adolescent girls who may not often be asked to reflect upon their experiences and consider them as important. (Griffiths 1984)

Working in the dramatic medium became both transformative and empowering for the adolescent girls in my research group. Through continued challenging work in the drama classroom, the girls were offered important alternatives for making life choices which actively engaged them to consider the multiplicity of meanings available to them. It gave them opportunities to not only explore their own lives through an artistic form, but to effectively ‘rewrite’ them if so desired. (Nicholson 1995) More importantly however, they began to recognise these opportunities as a valuable chance to scrutinise all the issues they felt were important in their lives.

From initial awkwardness both personally and interpersonally during the drama activities, the girls began to exhibit notable changes in their
abilities to create multi-faceted role-plays and more complex dramatic interpretations. Over time, I witnessed conversions in their abilities to engage in the ‘politics of imagination’ - to envision alternative realities for their own group through the employment of dramatic reflection and distance. (Boal 1979, 1990) Their work, no longer one dimensional and simplistic, took on artistic structure and form which was both mature and insightful. They moved from positions of anxiety and uncertainty, to those which enfranchised them to administer control over the dramatic form, confidently choosing and interpreting the directions and ideas that would best suit their artistic needs and interests.

Chapter Two highlights the research work of Vivienne Griffiths (1984) of adolescents girls in a drama classroom. Griffith documents that initial role-play work with the girls was both one-dimensional and stereotyped with dramatic narratives both predictable and simplistic. She argued these responses were the result of ‘taken for granted’ social frameworks, ideas, and images, the girls ideologically believed reflected the real world they lived in. Griffiths identified a lack of challenge and an absence of alternative interpretations in most of the early work she observed during her work.

These ‘taken for granted’ frameworks were strongly evident in the initial drama work observed in this study. As many of the girls had not had any experience with drama before, their first attempts were fraught with simple storylines and superficial characters:
I was struck by the role play they did today with its stereotypical and melodramatic characters. Even the girls had a laugh at the reactions of the key players, but they still accepted it as good drama. There were not questions about the validity of the characters, and the plot, although obviously lightweight, was unchallenged by any of the girls in the debrief. There was a willingness (or perhaps they knew no better) to allow the role play to stand as it was. (Analytic Memo #2, Lines 13–18)

Carol, ever aware of the need to widen the aesthetic experiences of the girls and the vital importance of connecting role play experience to their own lives, continued to offer varied opportunities to explore the possible alternatives of their female lives. Script, improvisation and performance, formed the basis of this work, and was highly effective in allowing the girls to find their own female voices without excessive teacher intervention. The weeks building to the girls' final assessment piece, became an invaluable opportunity to extend the girls dramatic and collective understanding about gender issues embedded in much of the work associated with the play being studied, Hotel Sorrento.

It became essential for Carol to attend carefully to the kinds of aesthetic experiences the girls were being confronted with during the script work. It was obvious that they could cope with deeper levels of textual analysis and interpretation, but needed to be guided to higher levels of
analysis and synthesis. The continued work on extension scripts, and the determination of Carol and I not to accept superficial interpretations and one-dimensional characterisation, resulted in drama work which was satisfying and full of ‘moments of intensity.’ (Griffiths 1984)

The continued need for the girls to be exposed to alternative ways of interpreting the characters in the play, is reflected in the following observation:

Carol continues to probe the class in order to extend the characterisation and concentration. This seems important to the group - the continual challenging and reframing of questions and ideas. Carol continues to challenge them using appropriate language and symbol to exemplify the points...over the weeks, the girls have become more and more performers and artists in their approach to their work. The giggling and embarrassed wringing of hands has begun to minimise, and in their place, a greater intent and understanding about the dramatic form. (Field Log 20, Lines 18–22 & 34–47)

In Chapter Five I noted that in working with the girls on the play Hotel Sorrento, they initially reacted to the female characters with strong and unyielding opinions. Those female characters who had chosen significantly independent paths and exhibited equally independent and often contentious behaviour and attitudes, were described by the majority of the girls as being, ‘mean; ‘bitchy;
‘opinionated,’ and ‘arrogant.’

As the days progressed and I deconstructed the lives of these fictional adult women with the girls more precisely, they began to not only view the actions of the women with greater clarity and consideration, but also to interpret their roles in the performance with increased depth and sensitivity. I considered this a major breakthrough, and was excited to see the powerful effect drama was having on these girls.

There had been a definite ‘leap of faith’ from an initial position of distrust and uncertainty, to one where the girls recognised and acknowledged their own control over the dramatic form in the classroom. Hornbrook’s (1989) argument that drama needs to equip (students) with the means to interpret the world in which they live, resonated in the growing impetus of the girls to take what they knew from their own lives, and compare and contrast this knowledge with new modes of meaning stemming from their classroom dramatic work. Indeed as Errington (1992) also observed in drama research on gender, the girls’ perceptions of gender began to change, with a greater sense of power and responsibility demonstrated actively within the dramatic process.

As Chapter Four reflects, the girls began to realise their own strengths for creating work of special dramatic quality - they (became) bolder and braver about making the drama work for them. (Field Log 25, Lines 140–142) Working within the dramatic form slowly enabled even
the most silent of the girls to find their own voice in a way which was both affirming and empowering. There was a strength and confidence in their work which had previously been missing in the early weeks.

One girl's journal entry encapsulated beautifully the significance of what had happened when she wrote, ‘normal’ people were transformed into something new, even magical, and I was left astonished at just exactly how much (the work) changed the aura of people...drama helps me to understand people and why they do things a lot better – it opens my eyes and challenges me to see more than what appears to be there..

(Journal Entry 10)

The girls' ownership of the dramatic form, the clear vision of how the characters should be approached in the final performance, reflected a seachange in the girls’ work, not only in personal terms but in their understanding of the aesthetic framework in which they were working. They began to question their roles as young women, only when they realised they could do that without a distinct feminist line being pushed by either Carol or myself.

The importance of precisely guiding our students towards new dimensions of knowledge and learning made explicit through the dramatic form, whilst still enabling them to have input and control over what they are creating as co-artists, was something I had always passionately promoted in my work preparing my university students for
drama teaching. Enabling students to use drama as an artistic medium for enlightenment, tolerance, and adolescent understanding, surely lies at the heart of the work we do in drama education.

For students, immersion in the form can only occur when they feel an uncompromising faith and freedom in the creative classroom environment they work in. I contend that this remains one of the most important missions of the drama practitioner. This personal steadfast belief and espoused advocacy became even clearer to me in the final weeks of the field work when I wrote:

_They (the girls) believe that their drama work is somehow reflecting their (adolescent) problems, and I tend to think this is very true. If drama is able to do this - to somehow act as an agent for students to explore innermost problems and then ‘act’ them out in some way, then surely we are doing an important job for developing our youth. I am constantly reminded that we must continue to offer them work which allows them to do this...it seems that if we are to be effective educators, then we must keep giving girls the opportunity to reflect,analyse, and then ‘represent’ through dramatic action... (Analytic Memo #8, Lines 19-23 & 52-56)_

As noted in Chapter Five, the final performance evening of the girls’ drama work for Semester Two was a meshing of new forms of self-confidence, developing competence with the dramatic form, and surprisingly insightful interpretations of the female roles from Hotel
Sorrento. Not only were the girls fully immersed in the roles that had been working on for six weeks, but they were able to clearly articulate why they chose to approach the dramatic work in the ways that they had. I return to my field notes documented in Chapter Four to paint the final portrait of how far the girls had travelled along the journey:

Watching them rebearse..the girls' seemed to have gained enormous confidence. They really 'own' the characters they have worked on for six weeks. Lines are secure, and the characters possess depth and variation..I have been surprised by the progress in their work - the tension in the scenes has been particularly significant, and there has been an air of comprehension about the work which they did not seem to be capable of earlier...

An aesthetic experience really seems to be happening here - as I look at the girls in the final minutes of the scene, there are tears running down their faces..the parents have gone silent. I am overwhelmed by the sheer immersion of the girls in the roles - the empathy and emotional attachment cannot be denied...the tension is perfect, the moment precise..a moment of absolute silence as they look at each other. (adapted from Field Log 26, Lines 151–157 & 176–186)

**Recommendation**

Drama is a powerful and transformative agent of learning. My field work crystallised what I had always believed - that students who partake in
drama as a school subject can become significantly empowered to illuminate their own adolescent lives in order to assess and shape the values and cultural mores by which they live.

Virginia Woolf’s (1957) argument that women need distinct spaces in which their world can be ‘bared of its covering and given an intenser life,’ (in Greene 1978, p.222) provides a most apt description of the changing dynamics of the all female drama classroom in which my work took place. I am also reminded of the words of Shields (1991) highlighted in Chapter One, who describes the uniqueness of the ‘theatre space’ as one where the interaction of ideas, symbol, and language, works to reveal notions of truth, reality, and causality. Indeed, the contemporary drama classroom can become such an important theatre space when students attend to the aesthetic dimension of the dramatic form, manipulating and shaping the elements of drama as they strive to make sense of present and past cultural and historical frameworks.

The latter finding affirms that adolescent girls’ attitudes and perceptions can be changed through their work in drama. It is sometimes a slow and laborious journey, particularly for those students who experience drama for the very first time in the senior school, but it is a journey worth taking. Adrienne Rich (1980) speaks of women’s journeys to knowing themselves better as ‘acts of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction.’ (p.35) Drama, with its capacity to mirror and expose lived realities, allows the textual tapestries
of our lives to be explored, deconstructed and shaped, in ways which can challenge and change ‘old' ways of seeing and knowing.

Such claims were confirmed and echoed many times by the girls themselves during the semester as they were confronted with new and provocative pieces of dramatic interpretations and possibilities. It is my belief, that acts of ‘ideological confrontation’ can only be achieved when the drama educator meticulously facilitates and activates dramatic experiences for female students which enable them to scrutinise, analyse, and evaluate, their own lived adolescent realities first hand through the dramatic form.

Drama educators in all girls' classrooms, have a responsibility to provide a space which enables girls to consider the ‘whole picture' of their gendered lives and adolescent perceptions, without fear of censure or ridicule. Whilst realistically drama programs may not completely reverse traditional gender stereotypes, they can assist adolescent women to ‘question the portrayal of active and passive roles' in our society, (Tait 1992, p.28) and in turn, make more intelligent and informed decisions about life choices. In order for drama education to be genuinely transformative for our female students, we must ensure that aesthetic education is never a passive medium of learning in our schools, but rather a highly provocative and challenging interactive experience through which students may be, in some way, changed.
**Conclusion**

This study sought to honour the voices of adolescent women by examining and highlighting their behaviour, attitudes and interests in one drama classroom. In beginning this research journey, I expressed in Chapter One, a strongly held belief in the importance of young women’s lives in educational and sociological study. I championed educational practice which actively challenges traditional stereotypical notions that girls have specific gender life roles to perform, or have limited stories to share.

In particular, I wanted to explore more deeply if drama could change the perceptions of young women about themselves and their world, if, as Greene (1978) writes, ‘aspirations of unprecedented kinds,’ might be witnessed and experienced through participation in the drama classroom. I positioned myself from a liberal feminist perspective (discussed in Chapter Two) using methodological approaches which I hoped would invite the girls to reveal something about themselves to me without fear of reprisal or invasion of their private teenage realities.

I was strong in my convictions that the stories of these girls would be told, not only through my own research narrative, but through the authentic voices of the girls themselves. Whilst at times I became frustrated with the everchanging dynamics of the relationship between
myself and the girls when a sense of ‘treading water’ prevailed as I waited for trust to grow and develop, in time, the communication became richly informative and diversely interesting.

The research was successful in opening up dialogue between myself, Carol, and the girls, and this proved significantly important in allowing the group to value their worth as adolescent women in this drama classroom. It effectively exposed the difficulties many of them faced in attempting drama for the first time in a senior classroom, and did offer opportunities for them to explore the dramatic form in a safe and supportive environment. Whilst the findings suggest there is still much work to be done in the teaching of girls in terms of elevating self concept, gender perceptions and self confidence, it was affirming to reveal that continued work in drama did actively empowered the girls to move beyond initial one dimensional perceptions of their world, to those which were more complex, multi-faceted, and provocative.

The ‘aspirations of unprecedented kinds’, of which Greene speaks, were clearly forming and developing in the girls’ work as they co-created and shaped their dramatic pieces. As I noted throughout former discussion, this was not a smooth process, but one which came from consistently challenging opportunities provided by both Carol and I throughout the semester. As the girls’ difficulty in writing in the journal revealed, they needed to know that their artistic choices were supported, embraced and appreciated by us all. Indeed, providing a safe learning environment where the girls can learn to respond to each others’ work in positively
critical ways, whilst also valuing the uniqueness of their own contributions, became one of Carol’s missions for future work in drama across all sections of the school and as this study ended, Junior drama was introduced for the first time.

The essential need to help girls to respond to each others’ dramatic work in ways which further bond and not fracture existing friendship frameworks, is paramount to future planning in all female drama classrooms. Girls need to learn that true ‘sisterhood’ comes from unconditional acceptance from one’s own peers, where truthfulness and tolerance allows the creative potentials of each girl to be developed and embraced.

The obvious importance adolescent girls place on female friendship, alongside high levels of interpersonal communication, suggests that drama is one of the most valuable academic subjects girls can be exposed to. Most of the girls chose drama for this reason. However, those contradictions apparent in the findings between the girls’ desire to participate in drama so they could ‘be themselves’, and their expressed anxiety about still conforming to the peer group, clearly needs to be investigated further.

Additionally, the tension between the girls’ preference for their single sex drama classroom, and an accompanying desire to sometimes explore the male view in drama work, needs to be addressed more closely. How
do we provide girls the freedom to fully explore their gender possibilities in all girls drama classrooms, whilst still offering them valuable opportunity to work as co-artists with male drama students?

Clearly, this study revealed there is immense value in girls working together in a single sex learning context. The daily immersion of young women in an all female learning environment awards them rich opportunities to address freely issues and views about growing up as adolescents, but as the girls themselves pointed out, the absence of male voices in drama performances, narrows the richness of the creative experience.

This study suggests, that even in the ‘feminist classroom,’ there is a need for balanced learning which includes some opportunity to consider the male perspective. I contend that young women can only understand themselves more comprehensively, if they are awarded opportunities to consider the greater world context in which they must live and work. Only in this way, with a spotlight on the tensions and conflicts which may be faced growing up female, can girls fundamentally begin to make their experiences in the drama classroom, more meaningful and realistic.

Whilst this study firmly advocates the significant educative value of the all female drama classroom, it acknowledges that the true pursuit of knowledge in this post-modern world comes from exposure to a multiplicity of learning, knowing and creating. In noting the specific
interests expressed by the young women in this study, this knowledge needs to include that of the adolescent males’ perspective of dramatic artistry.

O’Neill’s (1995) argument that drama enfranchises students to alter their status, identities and responsibilities as they play with elements of reality, is a significantly important consideration for the all female drama classroom. In order to make sense of their gendered identities, girls must be able to distance themselves from them, to bracket the real from the fictional, to peel away the layers of what has been accepted as truth, and to decide for themselves what is beneficial and empowering in their own lives.

Indeed, this should not mean the exclusion of young men’s artistry, but rather a balancing of drama learning opportunities which invite girls to work with young males on projects which are planned and co-managed by the students themselves. As Dean (1994) concludes, combining both male and female schools for drama productions, offers students important opportunities to consider their gender and place in the real world.

Additionally, drama program planning should reflect attention to both past and present cultural and social contexts realised through a rich array of playscripts, including those specifically dealing with women’s changing role in multicultural Australian society. Girls should be given the opportunity to create and perform their own scripts grounded in the
context of their own adolescent realities. In providing drama experiences which tap into the adolescent world, we ‘equip (students) with the means to interpret the world in which they live.’ (Hornbrook 1989, p.96)

Whilst traditional drama practice may have been unknowingly guilty of positioning the male perspective as the accepted hegemonic one in dramatic role–play and improvisation, contemporary practice can seek to equalise such an imbalance. Nicholson and Tait’s criticism of the historical development of a patriarchal drama pedagogy, alerts us to the need to honour all voices in our drama practice. This is well heeded. However, I would hasten to add that whilst young women need a space to express their own voices, they also need to consider how those voices can be utilised effectively in the company of their male co-artists.

Drama educators of young women have a continuing responsibility to raise questions about gender roles, expectations, attitudes and oppression, not only in the wider community, but in the classroom as well. We need to evoke in our students active and healthy enquiry into their own gender values, and those values they are most likely to encounter later on in life.

If drama is to be transformative, to shape and change the lives of our female students, then they must be offered challenge and possibilities.
Let the feminist drama classroom be one which invites all voices to be heard, celebrates the power and uniqueness of the adolescent woman, allows her to explore other realms of meaning with liberation and scope, lets her explore with confidence her differences and commonalities with her male co-artists, and encourages her to consider that in the real world, as in the dramatic space, anything is possible. I finish with the words of Cecily O’Neill who so aptly reminds us:

If drama is a mirror, its purpose is not merely to provide a reflection that confirms our existing understanding. It must be used as mirrors often are, as a means of seeing ourselves more clearly and allowing us to begin to correct whatever is amiss. It is not merely an instrument of reference, but also a place of disclosure...an act of discovery...our acknowledgment of our humanity and our community, first in the drama world, and then in the real world... (O’Neill 1995, p.152)

**Future Directions**

This research has focused on the experiences of adolescent girls in one drama classroom. Whilst some questions in terms of the gender needs, attitudes and behaviours of this focus group have been answered, a great many more have been raised for consideration. Future study in this area would undoubtedly enrich our understanding of the needs of adolescent girls in single sex classrooms and the ways drama educators can best plan for their learning. In particular, future work in this area, might pursue the following areas of inquiry:
• an investigation into the ways drama education can enhance the development of gender identity in adolescent girls across a number of single sex drama classrooms in a variety of school contexts.
• research into the implementation and success of gender specific drama programs contextualised for the particular needs of respective all female drama classrooms.
• research into the effects of males and females from single sex drama classrooms working collaboratively in planning drama experiences for specific combined assessment purposes.
• investigation into the long term benefits of studying drama education for adolescent girls throughout Years 8–12 of their schooling.

Future investigation into the education of adolescent girls can only serve to inform, extend and enrich our knowledge of the importance gender plays in all areas of educational teaching and learning. It is my hope that this research will activate discussion, contemplation and further inquiry, about both the teaching of adolescent girls in single sex drama classrooms, and the implementation of drama programs for young women across both junior and senior sectors of the secondary school. If this can happen, if our female students can in some way be advantaged and empowered by reflective and proactive discussion about effective learning for girls in drama, then my journey has been a most worthwhile one!
BIBLIOGRAPHY


THE EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS
IN ONE ALL FEMALE DRAMA CLASSROOM
– A CASE STUDY

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Volume Two

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Tracey: You've done an assessment on movement - how did you find that?
Karen: Bizarre (everyone laughs) Weird.
Tracey: You found it weird. Why?
Regina: I'd never done anything like it before.
All: Yeah
Regina: I thought drama was ..
Karen: (Interrupts) Like fitting a picture to movement was strange.
Tracey: Did you like it. Did you think it was useful?
Karen: Yeah
Regina: I liked it!
Karen: It was strange because we spent so long and then it was over.
All: Yeah
Regina: It was good performing it: to finally see the creation was a feeling of accomplishment.
Tracey: That moment when you finally did it gave you a sense of satisfaction?
All: Yeah
Tracey: Up to the point when you actually performed your creation, did you think it was a waste of your time?
Karen: Sometimes
Tracey: Can you elaborate on your answer?
Regina: Um, I thought it was really good that you had to really look into the piece and think about it - what it was saying to you.
Tracey: Right. And that's not something you do in other classes?
All: No
Cathy: Like sometimes you can look at a picture and think, isn’t that pretty - like you know, you can get a whole story from it.
Tracey: Right
Regina: I got frustrated when I couldn’t think of something and I’d look at the picture and would see - there’s a tree with sap pouring put and I’d get frustrated and think - who cares? You know! but as I could put meanings together, I feel better about it.
Tracey: Did you get anything out of it for your personal or dramatic development?
Karen: Yeah a little, it showed us that when you look at things, you should look at it more indepth to see what's inside.
Tracey: O.K. Right.
Regina: It makes you more aware of yourself and what you can do with your body.
Karen: Yeah if you're talking, like acting, it can get covered up, but when you're moving, it tends to stand out.
Regina: You really have to think about what your body is doing.
Karen: Yeah, you have to be more aware.
All: Yeah
Tracey: So, it's more a symbolic thing for you. Do you think it's changed you in any way?
Regina: It didn't change me I don't think
Cathy: What do you mean?
Tracey: Well after you did it, most of you said you looked beyond the one dimensional appearance of things to layers of meanings. Did you go away and feel anything fantastic?
Regina: When I looked at Cathy's I felt I did. I thought, that's really expressing.
Cathy: Well, I did mine and um, it's sort of about what's happened to me - like I've been hurt and everything and I brought that into it and I thought what would I do...
Karen: It got on to a personal basis..
All: Yeah
Tracey: For you it was a personal journey?
Karen: It didn't mean to, but it happened.
Tracey: It happened incidentally?
All: Yeah
Karen: You could just tell what people have done by the way they moved - like some people might move really powerfully and strongly - like they've been hurt and they're standing up. And other people move freely and wave their arms around a lot - like I'm carefree, I haven't got a worry in the world and it kinda shows a bit of them.
Tracey: Did you feel your sense of privacy was invaded in any way by your having to get up and do this kind of movement. Did you find such a solo act difficult as compared to working with a group of girls?
Cathy: I don't know. I liked it because I know if I do it by myself it's going to be a test of my ability and I don't have to worry about have you got this? Have you don that?
Karen: And if anyone stuffs up...
All: Yeah
Karen: Yeah, cause if you've stuffed up, it's like, OK, I've stuffed up, but if it's
someone else, like you say, they've ruined the whole thing

Regina: I also thought it was better because you could do whatever you wanted anyone saying, `I didn't like that.'

Tracey: Drama is about working in groups, collaborating, decision making.

Karen: It is in some pieces, but in things like that it tends to be personal, so you don't really want other people ..

Cathy: And wasn't the idea of it? Like you had to write the whole thing on your personal idea.

Tracey: Would that kind of assessment be appropriate for boys, do you think ..?

Karen: Aw could you imagine boys going la, la, la ..

Regina: Guess it's cause guys are more closed off generally speaking..

Karen: They would think it was wussy.

Tracey: But girls don't think it's inappropriate in any way?

Karen: For guys?

Tracey: For you

Karen: Yeah, we don't mind at all

Tracey: If you had boys in this classroom, do you think there would have been alot of resistance to that piece?

All: Yeah, definitely

Tracey: So for girls in an all girls' classroom, certain things in drama are just tailored to you. What about being a girl in an all girls' classroom. Are you being disadvantaged in some way?

Regina: I think that what guys think is also important and in that respect we are, but we are also able to express ourselves easily, and noone is going to go ..

Tracey: That sense of, I'll use the word, harassment, as some of the girls used the word, because boys called them names or boys made them feel ..

Karen: And not just that, girls don't want to move because they like, say Jo Blob or someone who's up the back of the room watching and you think, aw he mightn't like me!

Regina: It's like running around in black tights ..

All: Exactly, Yeah ..

Tracey: Do you think boys feel the same with girls watching them?

Karen: Yeah, girls would do exactly the same.

Tracey: It really is no different

Regina: Yeah, but guys have different views on things, different ideas
Karen: It depends on the guys
Regina: Yeah it does
Tracey: Do you think that’s important?
Regina: I think it would be sometimes interesting to do things with guys and get a
different perspective of things - how they see things.
Cathy: Yeah, I rather do acting with guys
Karen: Yeah, then they can get into a male role and understand it. But in a
movement piece like that, it wouldn’t work
Tracey: So are you saying in a way, that yes, there are some disadvantages, but in
another way, you have complete freedom?
All: Yeah
Tracey: OK, so on assessment day, do you look at other girls’ work and say, ‘Oh,
that’s gross, or do you feel a sense of support, do you feel everyone supports each
other’s work?
Regina: I felt really bad for you (to K) when your tape wouldn’t work
Kate: Yeah
Regina: I felt really bad cause if I was up there nervous, ready to go and my tape
doesn’t work, aw...
Tracey: There are friendship groups in every class...
Karen: But some people tend to .. if there’s someone you don’t like up there
Tracey: Do you find on the whole, that girls are supportive of each other?
Karen: On the whole, yes. They’re more accepting.
Tracey: So, this idea that girls are really bitchy towards each other is true?
Karen: Yes definitely - but this class is particularly good.
Cathy: It’s really good cause we’re all from different groups and none of us are
really close friends and we like to do our own thing and you know...
Tracey: Drama is a lot like playing - do you feel a sense of play?
Karen: Yeah, like when you play dress-up and you want to be doctors and nurses.
Tracey: Do you think that’s important for you to do still?
Karen: Aw not to play but to .. it makes it more enjoyable.
Regina: Yeah, I’ve just had chemistry - drama’s excellent to release tension
Tracey: Right. It’s fun, yes. Do you take anything with you about the art form of
drama?
Karen: There’s just things in it, that I never thought were in drama, like that
whole thing on movement. I’ve never seen that. I’ve seen acting and stuff but all
that movement...
Tracey: Right. How did you approach ‘making’ in the drama?
Karen: Like we got ages before we had to do it. And I looked at it and then put it away for about a month. I thought about it now and then, I started doing it.

Tracey: What steps did you follow in the process?

Regina: As soon as I saw my picture, I thought, yeah, I know a piece of music for that picture. I'd just been listening to it and I thought that piece of music is really good for that picture.

Tracey: What about the movement. How did you put that together?

Regina: I listened to the music and tried to think about what the music was saying me.

Karen: You pick the music and then you do the movement to fit in.

Regina: I picked my music and I sort of knew, I had ideas about what I wanted to do and I listened to my music and I got the beginning and I got the end - I'm the kind of person who gets the end and then I know what I am going to do and I thought, I'm going to be fine.

Tracey: And did you take the elements of drama into account?

Regina: No. I just thought I needed to use space and big movements.

Tracey: It happened naturally? Do you see drama a little more as an art form than when you first came in?

All: Yeah .. it's not just acting

Tracey: You are doing `Hotel Sorrento'. It is a play about women. How do you feel about doing a play about women rather than men?

Regina: I think it's better doing a play about women because that's who we are!

Cathy: I've tried to act in men's roles before and I just couldn't do it but I think it's important to look at men too

Karen: I'd rather do somethinkg with 50-50 and then you can choose. You've gotta understand men as well as women

Tracey: Did you think we can understand men in the dramatic work we do?

All: No, no way

Karen: You can understand the characters

Tracey: Are you enjoying `Hotel Sorrento'?

All: (There is mumble of no, haven't read it, to yes!)

Karen: It seems very good. It's very casual. It seems very realistic. I was expecting Romeo and Juliet thing, but it's really casual

Cathy: At first I thought, oh great, we have to read a play cause normally, they're really really boring.

Karen: Like the ones we read in English ... is so boring

Cathy: Yeah, and with this it's like I read the first couple of pages and said, `Oh
Cool!

Tracey: So it's relative?

Karen: It's just like a book. People's names and characters

Tracey: And can you identify with the characters?

Karen: Yeah, at first I got really muddled up because of all their names

Tracey: Any other comments before we finish the interview?

(There is silence from the group except for their heads shaking. They seem content with what they have said. I finish the interview with a warm thanks to the girls)
Interview Transcript (Audiotape 2) May 1996

Tracey: Girls, you've just done an assessment on movement - what are your reactions to what you just did?

Louise: I didn’t really like it!

Tracey: Right. Why didn’t you really like it?

Louise: Cause I don’t like doing that kind of thing - I’d rather the acting side of drama.

Tracey: You didn’t enjoy that?

Meg: Like when I look at a picture, I see the picture - I don’t see little stories init - you know?

Tracey: Hm

Louise: And writing down the movements as well - describing how we made the movements was really hard, cause I’m not a dancer..

Tracey: But not being a dancer .. did the assessment piece help you to see anything differently about making meaning in drama?

Louise: A little bit .. not alot.

Tracey: Right .. Susan?

Susan: I like it!

Tracey: Because you are a dancer or because you got something else from it?

Susan: Because I got something from it.

Tracey: What did you get from it?

Susan: Um, I got that moving your body expresses so much - excluding language and everything, it says everything basically.

Tracey: Right. You found it easier than verbalising?

Louise: I find verbalising easier.

Meg: Yeah, you get act how you want and get across what you wanna say.

Tracey: Did you find using the body to portray a message hard for you personally?

Susan: It was challenging ...

Meg: It was hard to actually get the other people you were working with to express what you wanted and they didn’t know what you wanted.

Tracey: When you were putting that together - when you were looking at the photograph, trying to find a story, did you draw from your personal experiences to make that story - how did you form the idea?

Meg: I sort of used my life to try to bring a little bit - not my whole life ..I just took parts of it and tried to think how I felt then.

Tracey: So were the stories fairly personal over all?
Susan: My wasn’t, but a few were .. but the meaning I put to my picture, I could see a little .. like I put my meaning as reaching out for whatever is there .. and you’re always discovering things ..

Tracey: Do you think assessments like that help you in your personal life, or help to make drama more interesting?

Louise: Oh it didn’t do anything for me ..

Meg: It just put me under stress ..

Tracey: So you wouldn’t want to do that again?

Louise & Meg: No!

Tracey: O.K. How would you see boys reacting to that assessment?

All: (a gasping is heard)

Meg: Oh they wouldn’t do it. That’s girly!

Susan: Oh, my cousin he’s a real boy .. no not a girl boy .. he does dance, he love it ..

Louise: Actually, on Mother’s Day, my cousin’s cousin - he’s a boy - I could see him doing that! A bit feminine!

Tracey: So that’s the element you think it would show - a feminine ..?

Louise: Yeah .. he’d do music and drama

Tracey: Right .. you think that’s more feminine assessment?

Louise: No .. I said .. he’s a bit feminine, I could see him doing it.

Tracey: Right.

Louise: Like you know male ballet dancers - they do seem a bit feminine ..

Tracey: Right

Meg: Not all of them but a majority of them .. alot of men are egotistical.

Susan: Yeah they’re macho .. cause ballet dancers are supposed to be the strongest people both mentally and physically

Tracey: That’s interesting.

Susan: Yeah, and alot of them do think that way.

Tracey: Um huh. O.K. What if you had boys in this class?

Louise: I think it would have been alot harder .. I wouldn’t have like to do my piece.

Tracey: Why not?

Louise: It’s embarrassing and ..

Tracey: Why is it embarrassing ..(they look unsure) - your answers are not right nor wrong .. I’m just curious .. having been sixteen myself and thinking the same thing, you are telling me now .. why is it that women find it embarrassing to do those kinds of things in front of males?
Susan: You’re afraid of the guy .. treating you.. afterwards (M: Yeah!)
Louise: Yeah, and things like that .. cause you might be .. I don’t know .. you go out with guys, but with our girlfriends, sort of, we’re just friends with them ..
All: Yeah
Tracey: How do you think girls are supposed to act in front of boys in say, a drama class. What images are important to you?
Meg: I wouldn’t change - personally I get on with guys way better than I get along with guys, I mean, girls sometimes seem so pathetic it’s not funny - I go .. how could I be one of them? So it wouldn’t really affect me at all ..
Tracey: Why are girls pathetic?
Meg: I don’t know .. it’s like .. she’s a bitch to me!’
All: There is inaudible mumbling and nodding at the comment just made.\ Tracey: Do you think being in an all girls’ drama class is a good or bad thing?
Louise: Well, we haven’t been in a class with guys.
All: Yeah
Louise: When I went to St.Anthony’s - I haven’t been with a co-ed class since Grade Five.
Tracey: Right
Louise: I think it is an advantage to be with both girls and guys .. so you get two different points of view.
Tracey: Yes, but given what you’ve just told me .. doing a movement piece for example .. are there some things you’d feel limited in doing?
All: Yeah!
Meg: Yeah, you wouldn’t feel you wanted to be as open as you are .. you’d be thinking - oh, am I doing this right, do I look good while I’m doing it?
Meg: You can sort of be like dags in the drama room when you are with all girls.
With boys, you’d always be consciously thinking how you’re acting .. doing your hair before each drama class ..
All: Giggles and nodding
Meg: I find myself talking to them more than working
All: Yeah
Tracey: Right. So the last assessment you have mixed feelings about ..
Meg: No, I wouldn’t sort of say, let’s do that again.
Tracey: So acting seems to be the favourite ..
Meg: It’s alot easier to do than expressing through movement ..
Louise: Yeah, but I think the assessment coming up will be a challenge - getting into your character.
Tracey: When we were talking about characters the other day - did you begin to see the characters were more complex than you first thought?

All: Hm, definitely

Susan: Like compared to what I thought of Hilary and Pippa, to what N & J thought, it was totally different.

Louise: Yeah, they thought of Hilary being really nice and protective and everything.

Susan: And I don’t know who really she was.

Tracey: Do you think it is important to be doing these kinds of things in drama?

Louise: Definitely, because what you see isn’t what other people see, and especially if you are being marked on that character, you’ve got to know what that character is about.

Tracey: Right. But is there a right characteristic for some of those roles?

Louise: There is - in the writer's mind.

Tracey: Yes, but what about your mind?

Louise: If we are being marked on it, it is.

Tracey: Well you are being marked on presentation, and it is the interpretation of your character ..do you remember when I questioned someone’s comment on Meg being a ‘bitch’? I asked you why you thought she was.

Louise: Well her behaviour was bitchy..

Meg: The way she treated people you know .. writing the book about them and not asking anyone ..it’s just common courtesy to say, ‘Can I write about you?’ The whole family, I feel she betrayed them.

Tracey: What do you think of the women in the play? Is it a good play?

Meg: It’s one of the better books we’ve had to read .. some of the other books we’ve had to read, we’ve thought, why the heck do we have to read this book? This is just totally pointless.

Susan: I think this would be good to see as a play.

Tracey: Do you like the fact it’s predominately about women?

Louise: Yeah

Tracey: It’s a woman’s play ..

Louise: It’s alot easier to understand .. I mean if you were reading a book based on men, you’d sit there going - that’s great, why do we want to know that?

Louise: Yeah we can’t really relate ..

Tracey: So do you relate to any of those women?

All: Yeah.

Tracey: In what way?
Susan: Not myself (Louise:Yeah), but I can see alot..

Louise: Well, I wouldn’t run off with my friend’s husband!

Tracey: Well, what about the fact that Meg took the blame for that affair when she didn’t. Do you think that’s a female trait?

All: Yeah

Meg: If it was a guy - it would be - `It wasn’t me, go away.' I can’t see any of the guys I know saying, `don’t worry, I’ll take the blame for it.'

Tracey: So getting into character - if I was your director and I ask you about your preparation - how are you going to make the characters your own?

Meg: I think it’s easy for me being the character Meg .. and part of the time I can seriously relate to Meg.

Tracey: Why?

Meg: I don’t know - she changes alot during the play and so do I - my attitudes, the whole think about me - the people I’m talking to, I can be really sweet, or I can say, I hate you so much - you know be a real bitch.

Tracey: Is that being a real bitch?

Meg: No but I mean ..

Tracey: But men get away with that kind of thing - I mean what about Edward in the play? He has his moments too.

All: Yeah

Tracey: Do girls your age really want to look at women’s issues in plays - is that of interest to you or ...Do you think it’s a good thing to do?

Meg: I’d rather do that than read a book.

Tracey: You said before you thought it was good to do things on women in drama because it was more applicable to you?

Meg: Yeah. Hm. I don’t know .. it’s easier to understand .. you know going through (the play) you know what they are talking about and going through .. just easier to know and just relate to what’s happening.

Tracey: A lot of them are grown up women - do you relate to any of the things you see in the play?

Meg: Well, there was one point where one of them drank her mother’s foundation, and I remember when I was a little kid, I drank a whole bottle of panadol, a bottle of perfume, I ate dog biscuits ..

Louise: Ah, that’s the reason you turned out like this!

Meg: Yeah! I would climb up all these shelves, and anything that was red, I would drink. I drank a whole bottle of food dye because it was red. I drank it!

Tracey: These kinds of things in the play make you think, `yes, I can relate to
Meg: Yeah, you laugh at it and think, oh, we’ve all done that some time.
Tracey: So play’s are like a mirror of life?
Meg: Especially this one - it seem realistic..
Louise: Even though we can’t relate to someone running off with our husbands, we
can relate it, someone might go off with a friend .. a boyfriend. Even though that’s
not our husband, we can relate to that.
Tracey: Yes, so young women don’t feel any differently, when they lose their
boyfriend?
Louise: No, not really.
Meg: I mean, the boyfriend means as much to us at this stage, as the husband
does at that stage.
Tracey: Hm. I guess boyfriends are pretty important at 16.
Susan: Not to me! I don’t have one.
All: (There is some playful teasing here from all, but S is adamant about her not
needing a boyfriend at this stage.)
Susan: I don’t want one! I mean I like guys (Meg: What happened to John?) Oh,
that was ages ago! I don’t have time for guys.
Tracey: So how did you react to the affair in the play?
Louise: I thought, how could they have done that to their sister?
Meg: Yeah well that happened to me in Grade 9, my best friend went off with my
boyfriend and I was upset, but we’d been going out for a long time, and it was
falling apart anywhere, but .. I was really upset. A husband and wife is really
close.
Tracey: There are other dimensions of meaning?
All: Yeah
Tracey: What about your confidence in drama. Has it built up during the
semester?
Meg: Yeah it really has!
Louise: Yeah, we don’t care about what other people think now - we’re drama
students - we can be dags!
All: Yep!
Meg: Top of the world!
Louise: Great and improving!
Susan: Yeah you know how before I said I don’t mind being myself!
Tracey: Well that’s one good thing drama has done for you - given you
independence. Anything else it’s done for you?
Susan: I think people do still affect me if they are close to me, but I don’t worry so
much about strangers..

Tracey: Well drama is not a fix-it subject but rather a subject where you can work
with others using dramatic action to hopefully make sense of your world..

All: nodding and agreement.

Interview finishes and the girls return to have their lunches. They leave happily and thank me for
the interview. They seem relaxed and content with what has just occurred.
Tracey: Can you tell me about what you think about the last assessment?

Kris: We got to learn what music was saying to us.

Tracey: Well, it was really a photograph wasn’t it? Did you think you got
anything out of it or was it something you really wouldn’t want to do again?

Robyn: It was O.K. - it was hard - it made you feel something.

Tracey: That comment that it made you feel something - I guess that’s something
in drama we do look at - putting feelings into action. At any time during that
assessment did you think you got something from that assessment?

Robyn: Yeah - some bits in peoples were really good and other bits seemed really
out of place - like they just put it there because there wasn’t anything better to do!

Tracey: Do you think that affected the form?

Robyn: Yeah

Tracey: Do you think assessments like that are useful?

Kris: Yeah you get to see what works and what doesn’t work so if you did another
one, you would know what you are doing.

Tracey: How did you put it all together - how did you approach doing that?

Kris: Well first we put our photograph together and then we looked for music.

Tracey: How did it come together though - did you each offer an opinion?

Robyn: Yeah, we did what we thought went well and went yay or nay - whether
we like it or not.

Tracey: Did you have any conflicts with that?

Robyn: Yeah (they all laugh) We sometimes argued about it - one would say yes
and the other wouldn’t.

Tracey: How did you cope with those problems? All those different ideas?

Kris: Oh, the one who yelled the loudest won. (they all laugh)

Toni: Yeah, once we calmed down, we thought well - we looked at whose picture
it was and what they felt comfortable with. The picture was supposed to be about
how it made them feel.

Tracey: And that was important? Is it easier to form dramatic action with other
people?

Kris: It’s easier to put it all together, but with the `tension’, you wonder if it is
better to do it by yourself .. But once you got it, it was good.

Robyn: Cause if you are only by yourself, you only have to make it up for one
person, but when you are with three people, you’ve got to make up three different
parts.
Tracey: Hm. Were you embarrassed at any stage by the work you were doing?
Robyn: No it was fun.
Toni: I don’t get embarrassed in this class.
Tracey: You don’t. Why? What’s good about this class?
Kris: Cause when you walk in .. it’s like Mrs.A says .. you walk in and you leave it all out there, type of thing.
Robyn: Like, we do stuff in here that you usually don’t do in a classroom outside.
Toni: Like, you wouldn’t crawl around the floor in other classrooms and stuff like that. You just feel you can do it in here but you can’t do it in other places.
Tracey: Right. Has it changed your life in any way being in a drama class this year? Has it changed anything about you at all?
Robyn: Well that’s it’s not so bad to do things in front of the other people in the class like ..
Toni: Being able to do what you want .. (in the activities)
Tracey: Right
Robyn: We’ve got to know other people - other people you know but you wouldn’t talk to, cause you sit in your own little group.
Tracey: And you said this is an accepting class?
Robyn: Yeah, it’s a pretty nice class, everyone’s pretty cool.
Tracey: Are girls easy to be in a classroom with - all girls?
Robyn: Yeah, I think so
Kris: Depends if you get along with the other people - you can be so different to other people.
Toni: Like sometimes - do you mean if there were guys in the class?
Robyn: It depends on what the guys are like.
Toni: Yeah - like sometimes guys are easy to get along with - if they are not childish.
Tracey: Given that if you had guys in this class, do you think you could have done that assessment as easily?
Robyn: Yeah, like rolling around on the floor and that - you be thinking, what are they thinking? They’d be making slide remarks and stuff.
Tracey: Do you think boys would have done that assessment?
Robyn: They would have done it, but they wouldn’t have tried their hardest.
Toni: I think certain kinds of people choose drama - like you’re not gunna someone who’s ..like if a guy wants to do drama, it’s cause he really wants to..otherwise he’d be too embarrassed.
Tracey: What do you think drama does for you being in an all girls' class - what is good and what isn't?

Robyn: You don’t get the experience of working in drama with the boys and that's different..

Kris: Like I've got male friends - they just do things different.

Tracey: Do you think guys have more opportunity in the classroom?

All: We've never had that experience

Tracey: (rephrasing) Do you feel guys are better than you in any way?

Kris: I don't think guys are better than me.

Tracey: Do you think that has something to do with being in an all girls' school?

Robyn: I think so yeah, cause you learn alot of independence being in an all girls' school.

Tracey: Do you think that girls give each confidence and encouragement, or do you think girls try to pull each other down?

Toni: They do both.

Tracey: They do?

All: Yeah

Tracey: On a scale 1 to 10 do you think that girls are more encouraging with each other than guys are?

Robyn: Guys encourage each other in different ways.

All: Yeah

Robyn: I think they encourage each other with a slap or a pat, or things like that, while girls give each other a hug..

Tracey: Right. The play you are doing now is about women. You are playing women. How do you feel about doing a play all about women,

Toni: It's O.K.

Robyn: Yeah, I actually would have played one of the men's roles.

Tracey: Why is that?

Robyn: I don't know - I think it would have given me another perspective. Like you can play a girl easily but you couldn’t exactly slip into a guy's role without like, sort of...

Tracey: But is it better to be exploring women in drama in an all girls' school?

Kris: Well it's easier to have four women on a stage in an all girls' school.

Tracey: Let me word it another way - does it expand your understanding of yourself as a woman by doing this play?

Robyn: Different personalities of women.

Toni: I just get a bit defensive about this all women stuff.
Tracey: Yes, I'm just interested though what being in an all girls' drama classroom means to you as opposed to having boys in the classroom.

Kris: Well, it's better than primary school cause I didn't feel comfortable with the guys, but now if I was in co-educational, I think it would be easier to get on with them, cause you realise it's pathetic to do some things.

Tracey: Right. T, can I just ask you about your comment about getting defensive about all women's issues, because it is an interesting comment.

Toni: O.K. um, I believe more in equality, I find full on feminists...like man haters.

Tracey: What about the new wave of feminism which says women are equal - different perhaps but equal?

Robyn: There are some feminists out there who are a little bit...they go too far.

Tracey: Alright, let's ask one more question - do you think it's important in drama class to be looking at women's studies in plays.

Toni: Yes, it gives us a look at women in society.

Tracey: You don't have to answer this to please me - remember that. Do you think it is important, or you really don't care.

Robyn: I don’t really care whether we do it or not.

All: Yeah

Tracey: Can you summarise what the most important things are that you should be doing in drama?

Robyn: Keep learning something different.

All: Yeah

Kris: Yeah, like you know you get up in class to do a talk and everyone gawks at you and says, 'Oh what a mess up!'

Toni: It helps you when you leave school - it teaches you about life skills.

Tracey: So when you come into drama class you are released from all those stresses outside.

All: Hm

Robyn: It's certainly different to any other class. You forget about things.

Tracey: Are there any issues that you would like to look at drama in the next six months, that you haven’t?

Kris: I'd like to make up our own plays.

Tracey: O.K.

Robyn: I'd like to look at some modern plays - playwriting and stuff like that.

Tracey: Why are you so interested in plays?

Robyn: Well, you get to see movies every day on the television, but you don't get
to see plays all that often.

Tracey: Right.

Toni: You can see if you actually act it.

Tracey: So you want to role-play and act?

Toni: You want to see if you can do it too.

Tracey: O.K.

Robyn: It's not every day you pick up a play out of the library - you're more likely to pick up a romance or a science fiction.

Tracey: What do plays do for you?

Toni: It gives you the chance to be someone else.

Tracey: O.K.

Kris: Even when you are watching them, you can still understand that character.

Tracey: Do you think that when you get up to act, you do become someone else?

Is it easier to get up and act than do a movement?

All: Yeah

Tracey: Why is writing your play so much fun?

Robyn: When you write your own play, you can put what you think about certain things.

Toni: Yeah, you can make up your own person.

Kris: Six of us wrote a play once

Tracey: What did you write the play about?

Kris: A note opera actually (they all laugh)

Tracey: Why a soap opera - was that attractive?

Toni: It was more a story acutally - about a rock band.

Tracey: A rock band. What were the main focus points?

Kris: The lead singers - chicks fancying guys. (they laugh) We loved doing it - for all of us, we wanted to do it, and it was relevant.

Toni: Because we were making up the characters we could have a bit of ourselves in the characters.

Tracey: So if you were to write a play now - what would you write a play about?

Toni: Right now - it would be pretty morbid.

Tracey: Morbid?

Toni: The dark side of life really.

Robyn: I'd write something about a person who does stupid things sometimes.

Kris: A rock band!
Tracey: Would you write about great romances?
Kris: Oh God no. (they all laugh)
Robyn: I mostly would yeah!
Toni: I mean real love is hard!
Tracey: Is love and boyfriends still on your mind at this stage?
All: Yeah!
Tracey: Would you like to do something in drama about that?
Robyn: Yeah.
Toni: Not the real mushy stuff.
Kris: No, breakups and heartbreaks.
Robyn: Yeah, how people feel about it. Not like Mills and Boon.
Tracey: Alright, thanks girls we will leave it there for today.
Interview Transcript (Audiotape 4)  May 1996

Tracey: You completed an assessment on movement a few weeks ago now - what did you think about that assessment - do you think it was worthwhile?
Marg: Personally no, I enjoyed the assessment thoroughly, but I think that maybe it would be best to swap them around - do the one we did then now.
Tracey: Why is that?
Marg: Um, cause I think it was a little bit difficult for a student who have never done drama in their lives, and they weren’t sure what the teacher was looking for - just to come in and have to totally formulate your own piece with little outside assistance - that wasn’t what we were expecting at all - we were expecting more like the `Hotel Sorrento’ thing like what we are doing now, rather than that movement.
Tracey: Right.
Gail: I agree totally with what Marg said - but I thought it was sort of worthwhile - added a new element to drama, the formation, the creation ..
Marg: That was good.
Tracey: Did it challenge you?
Gail: Yeah.
Marg: Definitely.
Tracey: In what way?
Marg: Um, originally when we went in there, I saw it was a bit of a dance even, and I thought, `Oh my gosh, you’ve got to be a dancer’, but once you really get into it, um, I don’t know, you do see drama as different, like before I hadn’t seen drama as anything like that movement, and you realise there are different elements of drama.
Tracey: Right.
Marg: And not just acting..
Gail: What’s different is that we had to..it’s not very verbal communication, it was just all through our bodies..and that was very interesting.
Tracey: Did it teach you anything. Did you get anything else out of that assessment?
Marg: Yeah.
Marg: Like long term, or just..
Tracey: Long term..short term.
Gail: Short term it just added a side to drama we really didn’t know about.
Marg: What about what you just said (to Gail) about not using our voice, sort of thing, like now, like now when we do get a chance to use our voice, we use the
added movement and facial expression, more exaggerated.

Gail: In our presentations we will be more aware of our actions now I guess.

Tracey: So the symbolic became more powerful?

Gail: I guess that's why maybe she (the teacher) put it first, so we could see the movement side of it.

Marg: That's true.

Gail: Everybody knows how to move..

Tracey: The sub-text almost of what the body says?

Gail: Yeah.

Tracey: Were there any moments during the assessment that you thought, `wow this really moved me,' or you got something powerful from watching someone else's work, or in your own work?

Marg: Um, I thought it was really good how you could see a story unfolding through movement, sort of thing, now when you look at a piece you look beyond the simple, and see that there is some kind of story that goes with it..

Gail: Yeah.

Tracey: What kinds of personal things do you think alot of the girls brought to that assessment?

Gail: I think alot of the times it was conflict - there's almost a good and a bad.

Marg: Yeah.

Tracey: Why do you think that was, because that did run strongly through everybody's work?

Marg: Because it happens - in our lives at the moment, it kinda reflects that in a way.

Gail: Like parental..

Marg: Yeah!

Gail: Adolescence being.. you know..

Marg: Ups and downs..

Gail: Yeah.

Tracey: So, do you think it was useful at all for looking at that side of life?

Gail: Well the more you reflect on it I guess, the more you think about..

Marg: At the time, you don't really think about it..

Gail: Yeah. I think we really didn't get enough time during the formation of it..

didn't feel like.. I could have done with another couple of weeks.. cause I think we spent too much time on..

Tracey: The Laban techniques?

Gail: Yeah.
Marg: And the body system.
Gail: I think that should have been shortened and we should have spent more time..
Marg: Especially on the justification for what we did..like the written stuff.
Tracey: O.K. If you had boys in your class, do you think that unit would have gone along the same way?
Marg: It would have been interesting to see what kinds of things they did with it, but then again, I don’t think it could have been as open..
Tracey: Do you think you would have been intimidated by their presence?
Marg: Yeah.
Tracey: Why is that do you think?
Gail: I guess it’s just the age we’re in - trying to impress them.
Tracey: So do you think boys would have been an advantage or a disadvantage there?
Gail: If they had been in our class?
Marg: I’d also really like to see if a boy was given that piece of assessment what they would do with it. I think that would be really interesting.
Gail: You could get alot of them who would have the attitude that we do - like I can’t dance.
Marg: Right. Yeah!
Tracey: O.K. With the assessment you are doing now - how do you react to that?
Gail: I think it’s really good.
Marg: Yeah I love it too, but it’s really hard to sort of, um, to do it differently to what we’ve done in the past, like we’ve never actually had to get into our characters in the past, we’ve always had to, like in English, get up and just read the lines, and never really felt like you are the characters.
Gail: Yeah, now you wonder, why is she saying that?
Marg: There’s so much more meaning rather than getting up and reading it..there’s so much that comes into it, like this one word has so many meanings.
Gail: Yeah, why is she pausing, why is she doing that..
Tracey: Have you been challenged by that?
Gail: I think I have..I’m just trying to go back and say, well maybe this is why she did such and such now..
Tracey: Have you learnt anything about women do you think? Has that been significant that it is a play about women?
Gail: I think I have, kinda relates..as you get older..I think what they would do
now..like the affair thing..could happen now, but on a much smaller version..but
amongst our generation.
Marg: I think maybe that's not exaggerated like..cause that is based on what could
happen in our life..that kind of thing is going on, so you realise that it could quite
possibly happen to us..
Tracey: So in a way, it's like a practice for what could happen in your female life?
Marg: Well, I hope not in some ways.
Gail: Yeah

Tracey: How have you prepared for this particular assessment?
Gail: I'm still preparing by going back and saying, well why is she saying this? I
just keep going back through all the different scenes that Meg is in and kinda of
relating why is she saying this, how is she saying this.

Tracey: Are the characters more complicated than you would have thought?

Gail: Yeah
Marg: Definitely. There is so much that builds up..like what they say..when you go
back and you read through the play, you learn so much more about the characters.
Gail: I mean I just find that one character can be, um, really hard and really soft
all at the same time, and I think that's difficult to master that in the performance,
and I think we probably won't have enough time again.

Tracey: Just on that, do you think that they are typical female characters? In the
past some Australian drama has portrayed the men as being very strong, and the
women being the underdogs - do you see that here?
Marg: In this one I think they aren't - I mean we've got Meg, who is a really full
on successful woman, and I think that is so like a woman...(inaudible)...like it's got
the housewife and it's got the successful one, and the one that travels, so I think
that it does give a wider variety of women and doesn't stereotype them.
Tracey: Right. So you think they are fair representations that Hannie Rayson has
painted for you?
Marg: Yeah

Tracey: So you like the many layers of meanings that the characters bring with
them?
Marg: Definitely

Tracey: How have you found working in the class up to this point?
Marg: I think we need to spend more time getting into our character, like in the
beginning I thought we had a whole lot of time, but now, I think, `oh my gosh, we
are running out of time - better not waste it', - we wasted the time on other things,
and I would have like more time on actually getting into our character and
discovering more about them..as a whole class, we haven’t actually looked at the
characters.
Tracey: What about some of the stuff, I did with you on ‘The Removalists?’
Marg: Yeah, I think that was a really good introduction, just the idea of getting
into the roles and discovering that there are alot of different characters you’ve got
to play and you actually have got to become your character and not just read the
lines.
Tracey: Right. What about the girls in this class themselves?
Gail: Most of them are good, but I think there a couple who shouldn’t be doing
drama.
Tracey: Right.
Marg: I’m lucky because I’m with Cathy, and we work really well together, even
though we don’t think exactly the same, we are always able to talk about it and
justify why we say things we do.
Gail: Yeah like my group too, like right now, we’ve going through it, going
through it, and saying, ‘hang on, you wouldn’t be standing there, now let’s do
that again.’ Yeah, I like my group.
Marg: It’s good because they want to work too, it’s not just you, it’s got to be a
two way thing.
Gail: I know one girl who is with one group - and one of them is always away,
and the other one is not really willing.
Marg: Yeah and it’s not fair in that way, that she can get assessed like the others,
cause it does matter, like you just can’t get up and be a star performer, it’s got to
work as a group.
Tracey: Do you think girls work well together without any boys to break the
pattern?
Gail: Oh yeah, it works.
Marg: It helps to get rid of any embarrassment, and do whatever we want, I don’t
think some of the girls would be..I wouldn’t be the same if there were boys in our
classroom.
Tracey: In what way?
Marg: Um, like now we go jumping around the classroom and do whatever, and
you would say things without thinking ‘Oh gosh, such and such is going to say
whatever.’ And if there were boys, you would be so conscious of what they might
say and what they might think, that you wouldn’t..
Gail: Yeah, You’d be conscious of what you are going to say, what you are going
to do.

Tracey: Do you think the boys would feel the same way.

(Laughter)

Gail: Hm..

Marg: I don’t know. What do you think? (to Gail)

Gail: Not as much as the girls I don’t think.

Marg: They probably wouldn’t show it, but deep down inside they would.

Tracey: Do you think in a way, boys have some kind of powerful image over you?

Is important what the boys think of you?

Marg: It is. Yeah I suppose they would be thinking, that they know that they have

this control over us.

Gail: Yeah. Cause when there is a guy you worry.

Tracey: Do you think it would be useful to work with boys in a school production?

Gail: Just for the experience, I mean, gosh we are in Grade 11, another year.

Marg: You have to learn how to get out there and work with them.

Gail: It’s a disadvantage really being in a girls’ school.

Marg: Yeah, one day we are going to have to do it, and we are going to be put in

that situation, and we will all clam up, when everyone else is gunna be

themselves.

Tracey: Just to finish up - is there anything that you haven’t done in drama that

you would like to do?

Marg: I think maybe one big performance, not just with our class, like the Rock

Eisteddfod, a whole variety of people, even boys just like a group together where

you get a lot of different people.

Gail: Actually making up something!

Tracey: Playbuilding?

Gail: Yeah

Marg: Where we make up our own characters and write our own play.

Tracey: What do you think you would write about?

Marg: I think typical things that are happening in our lives at the moment - like a

relationship between a boy and a girl.

Gail: Yeah, like why do girls act like this in front of guys?

Tracey: Right. What sort of characters would feature. Would romance be a strong

element?

Gail: Just various things - everything’s changed and..like I said to my mother..I

gave to this dance and had a brilliant time...she said, ‘Did you dance with any

one?’ and I said, ‘No’ and she said how could you have a good time..but I really
did have a brilliant time...just dancing around without dancing with a guy. She just couldn’t comprehend that!

Marg: Even like relationships with parents and that, you want to bring out and bring the skeletons out of the closet.

Tracey: Did you dance with girls?

Gail: Oh yeah - in a big group. It’s good fun.

Tracey: We’ve all done that!

Gail & Marg: Yeah!

Tracey: So they are the kinds of things you’d be most interested in? Would you make the work like soap operas?

Marg: I’d like to make it realistic.

Gail: Yeah. Soap operas are so boring— they have so much exaggeration in them.

Tracey: Alright, thank you girls.

(As the bell is ready to ring, I terminate the interview here)
Interviews Transcription 1  February 1996 (Videotape)

(The girls are little tentative to begin with as they are not sure what is expected of them. I assure them that there are no right or wrong answers and they should simply speak from their hearts if possible).

1 Tracey: Tell me a little bit about yourselves.
2 Silence. The girls look from one to another. One brave soul (Regina) begins.
3 Regina: Well, I like having a lot of fun and going out with my friends. I like doing acting and performing.
4 Karen: Um. I like to think of myself as an individual and that I like the same things everyone else my age likes - going out and being with other people.
5 All that kind of stuff.
6 Tracey: OK
7 (Karen is a little embarrassed here and drops her eyes, then she looks to the others who haven’t spoken)
8 Cathy: Um, I sort of shy about new people I meet (They all share a giggle here) but...yeah I have ambitions I’d like to fulfil in my life because I am a very ambitious person. I really love drama because it gives a chance to pretend to be something else and forget about society in a way. You know...act.
9 Tracey: Right. I’ll ask you a bit more about that in a minute - all of you.
10 (Cathy looks to her left towards the next girl as she finishes her sentence softly)
11 Meg: Um. I like going out with heaps of my friends. I like to be the centre of everything. I like to be open with everything I do (she smiles widely). I do drama because it allows me to be loud whenever I want to be.
12 Tracey: And is that important to you?
13 Meg: Yeah. I’m always loud and mucking around and stuff.
14 Tracey: Why else do people do drama? (There is silence here as the girls digest the question)
15 Karen: Well, I’ve done drama for since I was like...six, but I haven’t done it for the last two years now because we’ve moved. But um, I just love it being the centre of attention. I mean - ah, just look at me! I never get stage fright - I just like performing and I like acting all different roles because I hate being myself.
16 Too plain.
17 Tracey: Why do you hate being yourself?
18 Karen: I just want to be other people sometimes...like she said (she glances at Cathy) you just let go of reality for a little while. (The girls echo with a yeah)
19 Regina: Yeah, it gives you the chance to be totally different people...(Karen
Karen: Yeah, and no one will laugh at you.

Tracey: And you think people laugh at you?

All the girls: Yeah... sometimes.

Cathy: It doesn’t matter if it’s you acting.

Tracey: What do you think drama offers young women? You’re in a class of young women and I think this is fairly important. (I have imposed a value here - I realise this later in the video analysis) What do you think?

The girls ponder on this question but no one answers, so I rephrase.

Tracey: Does drama give you the chance to look at things that as young women that you may not get if you were in a co-ed classroom?

All the girls: Yeah

Meg: Yeah, in a co-ed school you sort of... (Karen finishes the sentence)

Karen: You worry about what the guys think (all girls agree with a yeah!) and you don’t want to do... don’t want to get up and act... you know you might have the hots for somebody in your drama class and you’re too scared to get up.

Tracey: And you think that’s important?

Karen: Yeah, Yeah. Like you can just get up and if they laugh at you it doesn’t matter cause they’re just girls not guys.

Cathy: Yeah, you don’t have to impress them (girls) as much.

Tracey: So, tell me a little bit more about that - how are girls different when they perform in front of than boys?

Meg: They’re (boys) a lot more closed up about it - um they don’t want to sort of, um, express themselves, um, be as loud as... (Regina interjects)

Regina: It depends who the boy is. (All the girls agree with a yeah)

Karen: (laughing) If it’s someone you go, ‘yuk’ about, then you don’t care, but if it’s someone you totally like, then that’s a bit different.

Tracey: That seems to be important for girls your age - what the boys think?

(The girls all nod and smile, but make no more comment)

Tracey: So, doing it in class with girls enables you to be more yourself?

All the girls: Yeah!

Tracey: What sort of things do you like to do in drama class which you think is or are important for young women?

Regina: I really like doing plays (Karen interjects)

Karen: Actually getting up and performing. (All the girls agree)

Karen: Sometimes I’ve found when I’ve done drama in other places outside of school, they carry on with a lot of other stuff you don’t want to do - like
speech and all that kind of stuff, and you just want to get up and perform - cause I know how to talk loud and project my voice - all I have to do is learn my lines. I want to show you what I can do. You don’t get that chance sometimes - they do too much fiddling around.

Regina: Yeah, like drama games.

All the girls: Yeah.

Karen: I just want to get up and perform.

Tracey: Why is performing so important?

Karen: (whispering) Look at me!

Tracey: Is that so important? Is that important to all of you?

Cathy: Yeah, it’s really good.

Karen: It gives you a buzz.

Cathy: Yeah, when you do something good and you get a good mark and everyone sitting there and not (she makes a scene rolling her eyes and putting her head down to signify a bad performance) and everyone saying, `Oh Wow!' Like..you achieved something excellent. (All the girls agree with nodding)

Tracey: Right.

Meg: Yeah and people come up to you and say, `Wow that was really good.'

Tracey: Marks aside - which is very hard to do when you’re at school - what does drama do for you other than get you to an assessment point? What else does it do for you as a young woman?

Meg: It helps me open up..and become more confident with myself..you know if I get good remarks about how I perform, then I’m going to open up and do it more.

Regina: It doesn’t really matter what you do cause you know in drama, everyone is just being different people and stuff like that, so it doesn’t really matter if you’re stupid.

Cathy: You learn to analyse people, and work out why that person is smiling or you know.

Karen: Intelligence hasn’t got anything to do with it - if you can get up and express yourself clearly then, you know - you don’t have to be smart to pass drama.

Tracey: You think that’s the case - you don’t need any intellectual skills to pass drama?

Karen: Oh you know you can’t be..(everyone giggles) You know read and write..

Cathy: You’ve got to have good observation powers and all that, you know.

Meg: It’s not sort of saying you have to study for it - you have to learn your lines and learn how to write an actual play.
Tracey: You talk about drama being performance - or at least that’s the part you enjoy - but drama can be all kinds of things, - it can be (pause) role-playing in groups where you don’t perform for anyone, - how do you feel about that?

Regina: They’re fine.

Karen: Yeah the game we played last lesson was unreal.

All the girls: Yeah!

Regina: Some of the other school work is stressful - it’s (drama) fun

Karen: Yeah, and it’s kind of like an ice-breaker as well when you don’t know many people in the class.

Regina: Yeah drama’s really good like that.

Tracey: Was it really important for you to finish that last game?

All the girls loudly: Yeah!

Meg: We’d worked on it for so long - for over half an hour, and Mrs A. says, ‘Do you want to stop it?’ and everyone says ‘NO - WE WANT TO FINISH IT!’

Tracey: Do you feel if you’d had boys in your class, the same kind of thing would have happened?

Karen: No - we’d would have been like, ‘Oh No, they’ll see up our skirts.’

(All the girls laugh at this as they nod their heads)

Meg: Boys germs you know!

Tracey: Then, is it easier to be in pairs and get into groups with ‘girlfriends’ in drama - it’s not that threatening for you?

All the girls: Yeah

Tracey: Alright - what kinds of issues - world issues or societal issues do you think are important for you to look at in drama. (The girls are silent - clearly this question is a little too complex for them at this time) What would you like to look at in drama if your teacher said ‘Right, you put a drama program together’.

Karen: What do you mean like a ... world issues? (Karen shakes her head and I decide to rephrase as the girls are confused)

Tracey: Well world issues like might be a little too big for you - what concerns you in your own world, your own backyard? (Again, I am met with silence) For example, would you like to look at pop music in drama?

Meg: Oh if you wanted to look at pop music you would do music.

Tracey: Alright. Well what interests you? Boys interest you, you’ve told me that.

(They all laugh) What concerns do you have which you would like to look at in drama?

For example, some people do drama about ‘Aids’. (The penny seems to drop here as Meg nods her head in understanding)
Karen: Racism. That would be good cause Australia is a very multicultural country has been for a long time and I think that's important for kids to come to terms with particularly for kids around our age.

Tracey: And you think that's important?

Karen: Yeah.

Cathy: Yeah and I though everyone knew about 'Aids' and how it was transmitted but the stuff that I've read .. well people just don't know. Have no idea.

Karen: Yeah and if can express issues like that through drama, people tend to listen a bit more.

Tracey: Why do you think that's the case?

Karen: Because you are giving it to them in a way that they can grasp it - like if they're reading it in a book that people can get 'Aids' by la la la, they forget it - but if they see it up on stage acting it out, they're gunna listen. (There is general agreement amongst the girls word being thrown in about it being more entertaining etc..)

Meg: Yeah I don't like reading, I mean I can sit down and watch a video and learn it off by heart - you know I can watch it over and over again but I don't want to read a book more than once.

Karen: Like heaps of kids when they've got to do a study on a book usually go and get the movie cause they can interpret it better.

Meg: Yeah I mean if you have some actions with it and even if it's funny, you can, oh I don't know remember it more. You think oh such and such did this and that was really funny, but when you think about what it was that actually came across..

Cathy: Yeah a movie's more visually stimulating, like acting, there's colour and movement.

Regina: Yeah it makes it more real, you can actually see what's happening.

Tracey: OK anything else comes to mind. What concerns you? What are your concerns as 15, 16, maybe 17 year olds. What concerns you today that drama might be able to help you with?

(The girls are silent again looking to each other for an answer here - I realise they find this line of questioning difficult, but I want to push on)

Meg: I suppose work...

Karen: Yeah sort of around our age, um, end of school (a general yeah), university, OP'S - like what ya gunna do - like two years you depend on for the rest of your life which is really scary. (Yeah!)

Tracey: Right. So life issues such as work and assessment and the stresses
involved today in being a young woman in this society. Not knowing where you are going. That kind of thing?

(They all nod grimly - this has hit home to them)

Meg: Yeah last year I thought I had my mind set on something and it's just totally changed - I can't do what I want to do and I'm still thinking about what I want to do and I've already chosen my subjects so now it has to fit in - so it's a bit limited now. So if we have drama earlier, it might have helped.

Tracey: You think it might have helped?

(A general yeah)

Tracey: What do you think about not having drama in the junior school?

Meg: I think we should.

The girls seem very adamant on this point. Karen crosses her arms.

Tracey: Why?

Karen: Because they should. They (the juniors) should be able to do the same subjects as in the senior school. As well as a lot of other subjects the senior school offers.

Regina: Most schools have drama in junior - then they're doing more things when they get into senior.

Karen: Or they might have other things like music and drama in one - and have performance, or something like that.

All the girls: Yeah.

Tracey: And you think that's important?

Meg: Yeah, especially if you want to do drama in senior - like you pick your subjects now for next year, but in the junior school you can change your subjects after one semester and if you realise you don't like drama, you have to stick with it.

All the girls: Yeah.

Tracey: Uh Huh.

Tracey: So they are the main kinds of issues that interest you. I'm interested in what you think about gender issues. (This is very value base and I realise that in saying this, I am setting up the girls to enter into an area that interests me - they may never have brought this up themselves) I'm interested in what you think about young women and young men - there's been a lot on women's rights and men's rights - what are your opinions on this kind of thing?

The girls are silent on this for a few seconds and I rephrase the question.

Tracey: Do you want to look at this kind of thing in drama?
Meg: I think we should..(Karen interjects)
Karen: It depends how heavy it is - cause some feminism is totally over the top.
Some of it's quite reasonable
All the girls: Yeah
Meg: Sometimes we take it for granted because men need equality too - everybody
needs to be equal - you know equality for men needs to be looked at as well
Tracey: So more general issues on men and women would be important to you?
All the girls: Yeah!
Tracey: What sorts of things don’t you like to do in drama? You think - oh I don’t
really want to do this in drama. (The girls raise their eyes in thought)
Meg: Um - writing. I really don’t want to do anything that involves heaps of
writing. I did drama to act things out
Karen: Yeah, and also, alot of that, oh, what do you call it, stuff that you do, um,
not like we were doing the other day - not that kind of thing - speech and
pronunciation and all that kind of thing.
Tracey: Functional communication?
Karen: Yeah that kind of thing. Like we are big girls now, we can talk properly.
(The girls laugh and all agree)
Tracey: So - you want to DO?
Karen: Yeah we want to get in their straight away and get right into it
Tracey: You all talk alot about acting and performing - what else do you like to do
in drama. What are other activities you like to do and you think you learn from?
Karen: Like movement - all that kind of stuff
Regina: Doing role plays - when you are in groups, it’s good to work together as
a team.
All the girls: Yeah.
Meg: Improvise things - say you're up on stage and there's a big production and
you forget your lines - if you learn to improvise, you can use that.
Tracey: What influences you in your role plays?
Meg: Well for me, if I've kinda heard something and thought, wow that's really
good, if I can think back and remember that, then I can do a role play on that.
Tracey: What sort of things influence you - can you think of anything?
Meg: I don’t know.
Tracey: Television programs perhaps?
Karen: Society in general.
Regina: Things that happen in real life.
All the girls: Yeah.
Tracey: Such as?
Regina: Friends and family.
Tracey: So they're important.
All the girls: Yeah.
Tracey: Are there any shows on television that you would say influence you?
Karen: Yes sadly, Melrose Place and things like that. (The girls all laugh)
Tracey: Do you all watch Melrose Place?
All the girls: No.
Tracey: But a lot of young women do?
All the girls: Yeah, religiously.
Tracey: You don't think that they are real life?
Meg: Oh yeah, I can just see someone standing outside a building saying 'Oh no,
it is going to blow up!' Yeah sure.
Cathy: 'Party of Five' is a bit better - more based on real life.
Tracey: Do you go to the theatre a lot?
Regina: Yep!
Tracey: And what kind of theatre do you like?
Regina: Oh I like...(Karen interjects)
Karen: Oh I just saw 'West Side Story'
Regina: I love musical theatre.
Karen: I didn't like it.
Regina: I didn't either.
Tracey: Why didn't you like it?
Regina: It was boring.
Karen: It was too... it was too... over the top - all... (she makes an operatic sound)
Regina: It was just really boring.
Karen: And like the Puerte Ricans had blonde hair..
Tracey: And so you don't think it was realistic?
Karen: No, not really.
Regina: And I didn't like the people who played the parts.
Tracey: Why not?
Regina: Especially the lead girl. I didn't like her voice - she sang too operatic.
And I don't think she played the part well.
Karen: It was like very opera, like good voices but they sounded very average
Tracey: Right
Karen: Music was way too loud.
Regina: Yeah
Karen: You could barely... it was way too dramatic

(I direct the questions to the other girls trying to draw them in to the conversation)

Meg: I haven’t seen any live theatre - only in Grade Five - that was the last time
and I can’t remember it.

Tracey: OK last question - what are some of the problems you encounter working
in an all girls’ drama classroom?

Karen: Well it’s really annoying when people just laugh at you

All the girls: Yeah

Karen: Like you do your best and you think like cause you’re acting and you’re
acting some gumby role or something and you’ve got to make a fool of yourself
and it’s not you and they know that’s not your personality and you’re being
somebody different and they laugh at you... and you think...(she puts her hands out
in a confused fashion)

Cathy: I think some people forget it’s just a role in a way

All the girls: Yeah

Karen: Yeah some people don’t want to do it because they’re embarrassed like
Mrs Anderson said the other day, put on an angry face, and everyone just
goes...(She glances from side to side)

Tracey: Do you think that’s the thing that you don’t want to look like a fool?

All the girls: Yeah (They all nod)

Tracey: And that’s very important how you feel about yourself at this age?

Karen: I just wish that sometimes everyone would just leave all that kind of stuff
outside. They would come in and not worry about what everybody thinks about all
the time.

Tracey: So... you are talking about self esteem, maybe that’s an issue you’d like to
look at?

Tracey: Any last comment about drama?

Regina: I think it’s really cool!

(The girls all laugh and I terminate the interview. They seem relaxed and comment
that it was easier than they thought it would be and that they enjoyed being
involved. The girls hurry off to lunch laughing together and I am pleased with
the way the interview went)
Field Log 1 Week One. February 1996.

It is hot - one of the hottest days we've had and I struggle through a group of girls outside the room. (I realised I am dressed inappropriately. I am far too professional in my attire and I stand out against the uniforms and the teachers more casual and cool dress sense.) Despite the heat, they are in a tight cluster. (I'm feeling a little on show at this moment) “Is this the drama room - the back of it perhaps?” I asked. One girl answers with a positive and they move to let me in. (I'm feeling totally out of my depth wondering how a researcher should act here - where to sit - what to say. I know if I say too much, I may become too familiar too quickly. I realise at this point I am really an intruder here.) I sit and watch the girls as they wait for the teacher. They are in a bunch - quietly talking, legs gangly, some crossed. They eye me a little suspiciously. They look at my pen and note pad and I realise this may be causing concern. I put it aside. The teacher arrives and asks them all to move into the classroom. As they feel the heat, I hear one of them say, “Oh Gross!” in response. They sit, hitching up their dresses slightly, legs crossed - almost all of them. I sit too, only to have one of them sit beside me and say, “Hi I’m Gail”. She eyes me in a friendly open way and I tell her I’m Miss Lee. (Should I have been so open back?) The teacher asks all the girls to form a circle so that they can introduce themselves to me and tell me why they have taken drama this year. (I am unsure whether this is the best way to approach the first meeting, but as I need to explain why I am here, I let this flow) The girls appear shy at this point and most answer with the same response that drama is fun’. (I feel they are giving the teacher and myself the answer they think we want - I nod and smile but I am already frustrated) The teacher continues to discuss the expectations of this drama class and I watch the girls closely. Many of them continue to sit with their legs crossed. Nearly everyone of them has a hand to their face, touching or leaning on the hand, biting nails. Their eyes dart from face to face, some whisper to each other. Carol, the teacher begins to talk about emotion and empathy in drama and uses the example of when we cry. The girls all nod. (I’m struck by the use of language here in realising the girls understood exactly how it feels to cry over something lost - would the teacher have used the same example with boys?) Then, Carol uses another example about a boyfriend - the girls titter and giggle and make eye contact with each other. Again they nod understanding. Carol asks the girls about an aspect of feeling and one of the girls replies with a muffled response. Carol comments, “Don’t talk in drama with your hand across your mouth.” The girl drops her eyes...
and demurely replies, “I’m sorry”. Carol continues to talk about the use of language and begins to explain how ‘talk’ is different for the young and old. She asks the girls what word is now modern for something that is really good, and the girls all reply ‘Filth’. (I notice at this point the girls are really attentive - something has changed in the class - they are seemingly more relaxed and open. Carol has reached them on a level they understand) The bell rings and the girls shut books, uncross legs and wait to be told to move. They seem to have forgotten about me and file out past me without the suspicion they first viewed me with. (I’m unsure as to whether I’ve been too open but decide to do what I feel is best for this particular class) Carol seems pleased with what has happened and I leave furiously scribbling down snaps of what I have seen and heard.
The night is cloudy, rain is drizzling down by neck and back as I move towards the classroom. This is the night the girls have been preparing for - the performance of their `Hotel Sorrento,' for their parents. I wonder what kind of a state the girls will be in. I remember the past weeks with their growing anxiety and escalating concerns about `will it be alright on the night?' I have met the teacher Carol as I have come in through the door. She looks weary and tired. She laughs when I ask if it has been a difficult week. This is an understatement! In her usual way, she rallies to the fore and makes me feel comfortable and welcome. She knows this is my last night for field work. She knows I am feeling a little vulnerable myself. She knows I am feeling loss at leaving my `adopted girls' after one semester of regular participation in their drama classes. We talk briefly as I move toward the drama room - she expresses her regret that I am leaving and thanks me for providing comfort and support to her during the semester. I feel a great deal of satisfaction and sadness. Door opens and there they are, in full flight. Props erect, costumes on, frantic line swapping. They see me and eye me quietly. I have been missing for two weeks whilst they had exams. Is this distrust again? Suddenly, one calls out, `Hello Miss Lee, haven't seen you for a while - how are you?' I smile, confidence restored and I move into the room. They ignore me and continue on with their rehearsals. All of a sudden, they turn to me - the `big sister' again. `Is this O.K. - would Meg really do this do you think?` `I'm not in my character - this is awful!' `What do you think? I give encouragement, suddenly my researcher skin is shed, as I step into the roles of nurturer and director. They begin to joke and laugh with me again. Someone has a `Dolly' magazine. Focus is lost as they all crowd around. This is for my benefit I'm sure. `Look at this babe Miss Lee.' I take a look. He is a babe, and about fifteen. The girls are ecstatic, swooning over the pectoral muscles which seem to pulsate up off the page. `He looks like a poofter!' exclaims Karen. Screeches from the crowd! Turn about - I move them back into rehearsal and remind them of the task at hand. They seem to fall back into the work with very little difficulty. They are meticulous in their efforts to ensure the scenes are appropriate - they chop and change the properties, arranging and rearranging. Costumes are taken off and put back on. I hear one exclaim that she is not going outside looking like `this' - she looks quiet ordinary to me, only her dress is that of a much older woman. This is her point. Carol has promised them that they could go down to the local `Kentucky Fried Chicken,' and `Hungry Jacks,' before the parents arrived. A couple of them
begin to moan about being hungry and ask me when they can go and get
something to eat. I tell them I don’t know, but I will go and ask Carol. When I
find Carol, she is burdened by paper work she is trying to sort out before Monday.
I offer to take the girls down to the shops and she is grateful. The girls think this
is a bit of fun, and we set off down the road as the sky threatens to open up over
our heads. I begin to moan this time - I don’t want to get wet. The girls seem
unperturbed! We are half way down the road - two walk with me - Jane, who has always had a close relationship with me throughout the semester, and Toni, who has been quiet and reserved with me up until the last few weeks. Regina and Gail surge ahead, rehearsing VERY loudly as we walk down the street. I think they are showing off, but I am not so sure in the end. They seem incredibly focused on the task. Suddenly, there is a group of boys playing football in the middle of the street. The non-verbal of Gail and Toni seems to change - they begin to laugh, throwing their heads back and speaking even loudly. They pick up their pace. Jane and Toni continue to walk beside me at the same rate, but they show interest in the boys, and smile as I make a comment about my memories of young men and my teenage years. Toni remarks that they will probably `go after me,' and I laugh and say I am old enough to be their mother. We pass by the boys with little incident, but Gail and Toni are quite excited now and swing back into saying their lines with great gusto. The girls remark to me they have really enjoyed doing `Hotel Sorrento,' and that they have learnt alot about themselves doing it. I try to extend the conversation about this, but they are on to me, and don’t give me any more information - they are not in the mood to be `interviewed' tonight. They seem to want me there as a confidante, but not researcher. (I know that all the while I am collecting data - in the classroom, on the walk, in the shop. I think the girls know this still, but tonight they seem to demand a different relationship from me than in the previous weeks. I feel a little like an intruder at this point, knowing that I am still in researcher mode, but wanting to be `part' of the girls’ social world tonight. I realise this is not possible when Regina, left alone with me at the chicken shop, turns on her heel and leaves me in pursuit of the others who are scattered at different shops buying their dinner. She does not want to be alone with me. I feel somewhat disappointed, but understand her discomfort. I continue to be sensitive to two things - that I must continue to keep some form of distance between myself and the girls, but also to allow them to see I am interested in what they are doing as both a researcher and another female. This is a difficult juggling act, and at times, I want to throw away the researcher hat, and remain the `big sister.' This
seems to work very well with the girls. My empathy with them has worked far
better than the original detached mode I began with! In one of the shops, I
realise Toni is not buying any food. I ask her if she has any money, and she tells
me she doesn’t. I offer to buy her some food and she is a little overwhelmed
telling me it would be very kind of me to do so. I can only assume that tonight
she is short of pocket money, so without any further questions, I buy her some
chips which she eats eagerly. She smiles at me and thanks me again. On the way
back to the school, the girls are very relaxed and chat to me about where they live
and how long it takes for them to get to school. Regina and Gail however, make 82 little
conversation as they are still immersed in the lines from their play: They are
facing a dilemma. The third member of their team is sick, and I am taking her
place. They are unsure of how I will fit in to their scene which has been rehearsed
for weeks. They are a little tense and anxious, and I try to assure them it will be
alright. I don’t know if they believe me as they fiercely rehearse their lines as they
briskly walk up the street towards the school. As we walk, Toni tells me that she
doesn’t think it is a good idea that they have no boys in the school. She feels that
this is a disadvantage in some ways for all of them. She tells me she thinks it
would be better to have the boys’ point of view in the drama work they do. Jane
agrees, but is less forceful about the idea. She quite likes the girls’ class. When I
tell them I went to an all girls’ school, they begin to bombard me with questions
about what sort of girl I was. ‘Were you a rebel? ’ ‘Were you one of the goodies?’
‘Were you one of the losers?’ I tell them I think I was one of the ‘goodies’ and
they laugh. Obviously, the status demarcation lines in the school are important to
their understanding of social position in the school. I want to pursue this further
but we reach the school and the girls are anxious to continue their rehearsals. Gail
and Regina and I begin to rehearse their scene together. Things are a little difficult
at first because both of them find it difficult to relate to my ‘Hilary’ role. Gail
tells me she can’t bounce off one of my lines - she is honest in her response and
tells me that the line isn’t how she has previously interpreted it. I try again and
this time, we seem to mesh. Regina tells me a little passively what she wants me
to do, but her confidence grows as we continue to rehearse and she tells me finally
with a smile that she is beginning to ‘relate to me’ well in the scene. I sigh with
relief as I feel the girls’ performance may be hampered by my presence. The girls
are keen to continue to rehearse and I am impressed by their commitment to the
task. It seems important for them to actively collaborate and to continue to reshape
the scene when appropriate and they seem far more able to challenge me in
regards of my interpretation of the character, than they were in the earlier part of
the semester. It is important for them that the characters are presented as the girls see them - Gail often makes comments to me about her anxiety that `Meg' isn't quite right, and she and Regina continue to share discussion as the rehearsal moves on. Despite my assurances, both Regina and Gail seem quite tense about the presentation that is about to happen.

Slowly the parents begin to arrive - they drift in quietly, looking awkward as the girls are still in rehearsal. Daughters casually say hello - it seems like suddenly having their parents there puts a new perspective on the behaviour of the girls. The girls seem a little more tense, and most of them are a little off hand at this point. I smile at the parents feeling more at ease then I have originally. (I feel as if I belong in this class now - there is a sense of ownership of the girls' work which was not there before, and I feel very close to the girls tonight. They smile at me quietly, knowingly, as if I am privy to their anxieties and concerns about tonight. Carol too, has asked me to work with her in ensuring the entire evening goes smoothly. I am researcher and participant, teacher and sister.) Suddenly Carol tells the parents that she has some last minute preparation to attend to and that I will be talking to them for a few minutes about my work in the classroom. (I am caught unawares and eye the parents with my own nervousness. These people don't know me, but they have allowed me to work with their daughters for an entire semester. I switch back into the formal researcher role. Before me are about fourteen parents who look as awkward as I feel. They smile at me, willing me to go on. They seem receptive and accepting. As I tell them what I have been doing in the classroom, they nod supportively, telling me they would like to read my work on completion. They are generous with their encouragement and interested in the results. Their faces watch me intently and seem to hang on every word - no doubt they are curious about the work I have been doing here. I notice that it is the women who make direct eye contact with me and nod in affirmation or understanding as I discuss my work. The dads, whilst listening, drop their eyes and heads. I don't believe this to be a sexist judgement - this is really how it is happening. I watch the dads for some time trying to catch their eyes. Most of them show interest, but are less able to give me the same kind of empathy that the mums seem to be giving me. At the end of one of the aisles, a son, brother of Karen, sits with his father. He too seems to find it a little awkward sitting there listening to me talk about the girls - one his sister. Perhaps he is feeling a little lost himself. As I finish my talk to the parents, I ask myself - how much do I know about their daughters that they don't? How much insight have I gained in this time with the girls? Perhaps the parents are wondering this themselves!)
At last Carol returns and it is time for the presentations. The girls seem composed
and in focused, but I know they are highly nervous and anxious. They know they
will receive an intervention during the play scene from either Carol or myself.
Some of them have commented that they are worried they may not handle it, but I
have great confidence that they will. Watching them rehearse, behind the mask of
the characters, the girls’ seemed to have gained enormous confidence. They have
really ‘owned’ the characters they have worked on for six weeks. Lines are
secure, and the characters possess depth and variation. Indeed, I have been
surprised by the progress in their work - the tension in the scenes has been
particularly significant, there has been an air of comprehension in the work which
they did not seem to be capable of earlier. I believe they feel this themselves by
the enjoyable they have expressed to me during the unit. Each pair takes their
turn. Parents’ eyes are firmly glued to their own and others’ daughters. As each
gamut of emotion is expressed, some of the parents nod in delight at their
daughter’s work, others seem surprised, but pleased. I am amazed at the
excellence in the girls’ work - they handle each scene with sensitivity and
understanding, and the interventions are dealt with exceptionally well. As each
finishes, there is a sigh of relief from each of the girls, and although theirs is
over, they quickly take a seat to watch their peers have their turn. There appears
to be a great deal of support tonight. When Gail came running in earlier, almost
beside herself with distress because her shoes have not arrived for tonight’s
performance, she is comforted by several of the girls who rally to the fore. ‘You
can have my shoes - they’ll fit’, is the response I hear from one of the girls, and
the others are just as quick to tell her everything will be alright. This seems to be
the pattern of the night!
Finally it my group’s turn. I hope I don’t mess it up! As we begin, I am struck by
the emotion at work in the scene - Gail and Regina are focused so intently that the
scene seems real. I am drawn in from a ‘stand in’ position, to really being
‘Hilary’ - the girls’ actions demand it! Their eye contact is strong as they listen
and respond to each other intently. An aesthetic experience really seems to
happening here - as I look at the girls in the final minutes of the scene, there are
tears running down their faces. My own eyes widen. I am suddenly blown away
by what is happening here!
The parents have gone silent - of this much I am aware. I am overwhelmed by the
sheer immersion of the girls in the roles - the empathy and emotional attachment
of the girls in the roles of Meg and Pippa cannot be denied. The girls are now
improvising from the point where the intervention was introduced - they are
expressing to each other their sorrow at how much they have grown apart, but the
anger is alive and almost tangible in the room. They are both crying, but they are
playing out the roles. The tension is perfect, the moment precise. `CUT!' calls
Carol, as the girls reach the allocated time for performance. A moment of absolute
silence as we all look at each other. Suddenly, there is a round of delighted
applause, and it is obvious that the audience has been moved by the experience as
well. There are lots of `that was sooo good!' from the girls, and Carol comments
amazed that she has goose bumps from watching that scene. I stand and watch in
awe at these young women, so capable of so much depth of emotion and
understanding. Where are the nail biting, hair twirling adolescents that I have
observed for the past five months? I stand and look at them and they look back at
me. They are pleased with their work and it shows! They are now laughing and
crying all at the same time. This is no act. The emotions are spontaneous and
sincere. It doesn't take long for them to revert to normal, as a few minutes later,
they are changing madly into their clothes, and talking excitedly and furiously with
parents about the presentations. They seem to have forgotten this is my last night
with them and many wish me goodbye with big smiles, but no apparent loss. This
is the way it is with these young women, and I am not disappointed with them. A
few of them do wish me goodbye and tell me they hope I will return to see them
in Semester Two. I assure them I will see them again, but I don't know when.
They smile and nod, and then are on their way. Carol is madly cleaning up and
tells me not to worry about staying - a number of the parents are remaining to talk
with Carol about the work they have seen tonight. They are obviously delighted
with the performances, and I decide it is time for me to take my leave. I walk
slowly out with Gail and her mother who is expressing how much she enjoyed
seeing the girls work. Gail is highly relieved, all smiles, shaking her head in
amazement that she made it through without dying! So am I!
I wave goodbye as I reach my own car, and without any more fuss, I close a
journey which has been one of the most enlightening and powerful experiences of
my professional life. It is a difficult moment as I drive away from the school, and
I am overwhelmed by the sheer depth of my own emotions. There can be no
detachment in work such as this - it will silently, and sometimes violently touch
your soul in ways never thought possible. It will shake you out of entrenched
apathy, turn your thoughts around and upside down, and demand some kind of
response. But from all of this comes change - change which will hopefully inform,
inspire, and enlighten the researcher and ultimately, the reader to reassess the
reality they have taken so much for granted!
I have become angry with the girls this week because they have not been turning up for the interview as planned. I want to really tell them what I think, but I am constantly aware of my role as researcher and feel that to reprimand them would in many ways taint the data that they are giving me. It seems more important to them to share the lunch time with their friends than to turn up for an interview with a perceived `middle aged woman'. Their lack of responsibility is part of their behaviour and Carol tells me it is something the school continues to struggle with. I believe that the girls at this age are not totally sure about themselves, let alone about why they have chosen to drama as a subject. I think in many ways this is the strength the subject has - the drawcard is that drama is alot of fun to the girls. They have not thought about it in detail as being a great learning medium. This very fact is why I think they will learn so much in drama because they least expect it! One of the girls who was supposed to come for the interviews is most apologetic and I believe that they are not doing this on purpose. She has been in some kind of trouble at the school dance and is not really willing to give the interview. I think she thinks it is some kind of conspiracy! I notice in class how the girls all rally around her when they realise she is upset over the incident at the dance. They all titter to her about not worrying about anything despite the fact she has broken the rules. This seems to monopolise alot of the first few minutes of the lesson I have been watching. I am also fed up with the lack of interest in the journal - I am having a very hard time in getting the girls to pass the journal on. In probing further with this, the girls tell me that some of them are perhaps frightened of what I might think of their comments. Ah, there's the rub! I deal with this by stressing once again that their comments are not for Carol the teacher's information, but mine - and their names are not necessary!

I notice this week that the challenge Carol is giving the girls in interpreting work for a dramatic forming task is not easy for them. Many of them lack confidence in their abilities and it is difficult for some of them to put their ideas and feelings into words. The fact that Carol perseveres with movement skills seems to be helping the girls to move beyond their insecurities and doubts. As I watch the girls, I notice there are number of them who are quite independent and seem to know what they want to do. I wonder though if they are as confident as they seem to be or if it is for show.

Generally, I am a little frustrated in this early stage of the research, but remind myself that this is the time when nothing seems to make any sense!
The girls are beginning to gain confidence in the work they are doing on movement but I am still frustrated by a lack of quality in the work they are preparing. The girls are giving more and more interesting answers about interpreting the pictures for their movement assessment, but at times this theory seems hard for them to put into practice. They still look to each other for support and nurturance, and spend a good deal of time, chatting with each other and boosting each others' seemingly fragile egos. The girls have accepted me in the classroom and the journals are moving around. The interview are continuing and the girls (when they make it to the interview!) are generally co-operate and interested. They tell me drama is a subject in which they can really relax and be themselves, but I wonder about this as I watch the array of roles they seem to take on in the drama classroom every day. There seems to be right now, a resistance to really become one team offering constructive criticisms on the work of each other, is something they just can’t seem to do at this stage. It is always punctuated with apologetic comments and soft wording and this frustrates me a little. However, I notice the girls are gaining confidence in their work and their taking is becoming more and more frequent. Communication is still of a high level with each other and the girls continue to affirm and generally support each other throughout the drama class. I see distinct kinds of rituals when I come into the class - girls seem to `bar' seats for each other until Carol arrives. There is a move to keep two or three seats for `beloved' friends and others are excluded to the perimeters. This seems to be a chief concern for them each time they enter the classroom. I am struck by the negative themes they keep coming up with in terms of interpreting work for the dramatic classroom. They seem quite focused on themes of fear, death and confusion. When I tell Carol of my concerns, she tells me she is not surprised - these areas seem interesting to them at this age because of their curiosity. Perhaps this is all it is. Again I notice the girls' enthusiasm for play in the warm-up activities. They seem to be able to have quite a deal of fun when the requirements are less challenging, but I convinced they are just as capable of doing more complex things. This I am yet to test in the coming weeks.