Does site-specific, community theatre create change in an educational framework and how is this change demonstrated?

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February 27th, 2019
This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge; the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or any other purpose.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

27/02/19

Signed ………………………………… Date …………………………………
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the effects of a large-scale, site-specific, community modelled arts production called The Journey, staged within a New South Wales public High School in July, 2012. The purpose of this research is to answer the question: Does site-specific, community theatre create change in an educational framework and how is this change demonstrated? The experience of staging this production and its immediate legacy has provided evidence of the potential of the arts as a tool to improve student engagement, teacher satisfaction and the community perception of schools and their inhabitants. The findings chapters in this thesis consider the perspectives of the staff, student and community participants; examining their views on self-development and the development of their school and community, pre and post The Journey production.

The theatre model which informed The Journey is based on Freire’s model of education or “conscientization” proposed in his 1970 text Pedagogy of the Oppressed. This model rejects what Freire calls “banking education” (which presumes participants are empty vessels like “piggy banks” that need filling); and instead draws on the existing knowledge and skill base of the participants to encourage authentic learning and critical thinking. The predominant themes that emerge in this thesis are derived from the central finding that The Journey had a positive effect on its’ host school and that it is the model of community theatre which was responsible for the constructive transformation of many established relationships amongst the study participants. The community theatre model removes status as a management tool and instead relies on reciprocated learning, shared responsibility and an authentic unity of all participants to work successfully towards a common goal.

Another key theme that emerged through this research project is the potential of site-specific theatre to challenge and re-define the school’s spaces and thus the role and politic assigned to these spaces by the individuals involved in the production. The study shows that site-specific theatre influenced the school’s learning culture and re-framed the wider community’s attitude towards the school, its inhabitants and function.

The interview research for this dissertation was completed one year after The Journey had concluded when the legacy of the community arts event was still contemporary to the school context; therefore, providing evidence as to the immediate effectiveness of this kind of arts project in a High School. However, it also highlights the need for a longitudinal case study to consider how long these positive effects last and the long-term ramifications for the school’s immediate and wider communities combined.
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¹ The tissu or silks is an aerial circus apparatus made up of suspended fabric. The fabric is a specialised material known as ‘carol’. A length twice the required height is passed through a rated swivel and a protective sleeve to the mid-point then knotted in a figure eight. All tricks on this apparatus are done at several metres above the ground. (McCutcheon, & Perrem, 2003)

² Adagio is a circus discipline that requires hand to hand balancing (McCutcheon, & Perrem, 2003).

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Nature of Schools
   Schools are social institutions and education is a process where the child is guided through the practice of coming to share in social consciousness through the regulation of their behaviour (Dewey, 1897). Schools are populated by students and staff collectively which operate largely within in the confines of the school buildings. What makes schools challenging places to undertake learning is the diverse nature of their inhabitants and the various cultural and personal beliefs they bring to their place. This observation is also true of workplaces; however, work situations tend to involve adults who theoretically have the freedom to move between occupations if they feel uncomfortable or undervalued. In other communities, people tend to self-regulate in terms of age, race, gender or other cultural and social beliefs. However, in schools, people are forced to work cohesively to function effectively and complete the goals of societies’ educational establishments. School is a place of compulsory attendance where staff are often seen as the “oppressors” or enemy by the students (Johnson, & O’Brien, 2002), a label imposed when staff assume a higher status, commanding authority based on position and power. As Freire argues (1970), when students view teachers as powerful beings who impose knowledge, rather than promote authentic, critical thinking based on understanding, experience and invention, schools cease to work as effective educational institutions. Freire (1970) argues people (all people) need to have a “voice”, and when they have a voice that is being heard in an authentic, constructive way they are more likely to speak, teach and learn from others.

1.2 The Arts in Schools
   One method of raising positive social interaction and promoting creative, critical thinking is through the arts (Anderson, 2012; Caldwell, & Vaughan, 2012; Ewing, 2010a, 2010b). The literature in this area (reviewed in chapter 2 of this thesis) already establishes a firm foundational understanding of such work as potentially transformative. This transformation is examined through literature reviewed in 3 basic sections: 1) ‘Personal Transformation’ with a focus on the arts in schools, 2) ‘Physical Transformation’ through the medium of site-specific theatre combined with the model of community theatre and 3) the ‘Transformation of Learning Culture in Schools’. This study sought to explore this
potential transformation by answering the central research question: *Does site-specific, community theatre create change in an educational framework and how is this change demonstrated?* The implications for policy based on the answer to this question has fundamental significance for arts in schools; both as research and as policy, for planning and evaluating what makes students engage with personal, autonomous learning and school culture. If site-specific, community theatre has the potential to act as a catalyst for change, this study aims to explore how it does this and why it isn’t used more often to help young people engage with themselves, their schools and their community.

1.3 The Researcher

As a High School Drama teacher for twenty years, I have witnessed the arts work as an effective tool for personal development and social consciousness raising. I was motivated to conduct a study which examined the effects of a large-scale, site-specific, community modelled arts project called *The Journey* staged within a NSW public High School in 2012.

My position as a researcher comes from a perspective as a teacher at Duruga High School for the last fifteen years in the capacity as HSC Drama teacher, and writer and teacher of a Board of Studies Endorsed Circus Arts course for Stage five. I have also worked casually within the school in other faculty areas including PE, Science, Music, English and HSIE and I am familiar with inter-faculty rivalries and politics. I have directed Duruga High School’s *Clyde Circus* as an extra-curricular, whole school initiative that has been self-funding and has brought recognition from the Minister of Education and the Director General for its exemplary standard of teamwork and artistic merit to the school community. I co-authored the publication *The Circus in Schools Handbook* which stemmed from my university research into circus in schools and my Master’s thesis *Negotiating identity through risk: A community circus model for evoking change and empowering youth*.

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3 Stage five refers to years 9 and 10 in NSW High Schools; where the students range in age between 13-16 years old. [educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/years/stage-5](educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/years/stage-5)


1.4 Research Design

The design brief for the performance event which serves as the basis for this study specified a large-scale model in that it endeavoured to incorporate every member of the school’s population in some way; either through performance, production or appreciation as audience. It also had to be site-specific so that it transformed various locations within the school’s buildings and grounds into performance spaces; thus, breaking traditional fourth wall mores that had previously informed the school’s arts events. Previous to The Journey, public performances within the school had been limited to the school stage and hall. This restriction meant that the other areas of the school had become extraneous for the members of the public, including families, who had little knowledge of the physical space that their children inhabited for six hours a day. Furthermore, the production process was designed to be community modelled so that the whole school, (staff and students alike), were provided equal access, governing and performing roles throughout the production and performance process of The Journey.

Although I co-wrote and directed the production The Journey, staged within Duruga High School, my research only began after witnessing the positive effects of the production on the school and I became curious about the specific ways The Journey affected different members of the community.

By employing qualitative research techniques, this dissertation examines the effects of The Journey on the school’s immediate school community (staff and students), and on the wider school community (families of students in The Journey and other audience members who attended the performance). The responses of these different groups were collected through focus interviews, coded and then analysed to examine multiple perspectives on a single performance event. As this study included the staff, students, community members and the families of the staff and students that were involved in the production, the varying perspectives on the case for study (The Journey) crystallized findings regarding the development of relationships through involvement in the arts in schools.
1.5 Research Results

Within the immediate school community of study participants, the findings chapters are organised in the following way:

- **Chapter 5-Staff findings**: teachers from all faculties were interviewed including: Special Education Teachers, Teachers’ Aides, Support Administration Staff and members of the school’s Senior Executive.

- **Chapter 6-Student findings**: both genders through years seven - twelve were interviewed for this chapter; including students spanning the academic continuum.

- **Chapter 7-Circus findings**: Duruga High School has offered an in-school circus program since 2002 and this program emerged in several interviews as an unexpected, but engaging performance element in the arts project.

- **Chapter 8-Aboriginal Students**: The Indigenous students at Duruga High School have been included in a separate chapter because of their unique opinions about school culture which emerged throughout my research. As an individual with Aboriginal heritage in my own background, I am particularly interested in the emergent themes of cultural pride and identity in this study.

To ascertain a broader perspective of the effects of *The Journey* on the wider school community the following research participants have also been included in the findings chapters:

- **Chapter 9-Community Findings**: this chapter explores the opinions of wider community members who do not attend the school on a regular basis, but rather came to the school with the specific purpose of viewing *The Journey*.

- **Chapter 10-Family Findings**: this chapter focuses on the intricacies and development of family bonds in three different families through personal responses to their involvement in *The Journey*.

The predominant themes in the findings chapters are derived from the central notion that *The Journey* had a positive effect on the learning culture of the school’s immediate community and also helped re-frame the wider community’s attitude towards the school and its’ principle function. The evidence for promoting connectedness to community and strengthening existing family bonds collected
through my research has direct implications for policy in NSW High Schools. The promotion of partnerships with parents and extended community members complies with several (e.g.: 2.4, 3.7, 4.1 and 7.3) of the professional standards for Australian teachers as outlined by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, 2011) and one of the reforms that comprise the Australian Governments Low SES charter for the improvement in student outcomes and community health (Council of Australian Governments, 2008).

1.6 Research Limitations

However, despite its many benefits, the practice of creating large-scale, community modelled, site-specific theatre in schools is still a new area of research and development. This may relate to the daunting nature of the scale of a whole school production, or to others it may sound like a tribute to the political ‘art happenings’ of the seventies made popular by revolutionary theatre companies like ‘Welfare State International’ and ‘Bread and Puppet Theatre Company’. However, it is the large-scale, inclusive nature of this genre of theatre, combined with its’ political ancestry which gives productions like The Journey their transformative potential in schools.

As summarised, this case-study dissertation provides strong evidence as to the nature of the immediate and positive effects of this kind of arts project in a High School within the research time frame. However, this evidence cannot predict how long the positive transformative effects of this kind of arts project will last and to what degree its’ legacy continues. Therefore, a longitudinal case study is required to understand how long these positive effects resonate for the learning culture of the school’s immediate and broader communities, and how to sustain this atmosphere of respect and esteem on a more permanent basis.
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The research which informs this study draws on three key theoretical perspectives. The review of literature therefore, explores these individually under the following headings: ‘Personal Transformation’, ‘Physical Transformation’ and the ‘Transformation of Learning Culture in Schools’. These differing perspectives provide a complete foundation for my research design and support my investigation into the engagement of young people with themselves, their learning culture, communities and families.

The first section of this review provides a targeted context for the literature review by delving into the world labelled by the canvassed research as Generation Next (Anderson, 2012). It examines the emotional, physical and social repercussions of this generation’s belief in, and dependence on technology; and the consequences of this dependence within a High School framework. This examination of technology is necessary as it has become an integral part of what it means to be a young person today (Turkle, 2011) and so critically, it helps define popular culture and identity (Rosen, 2007). This study is not primarily ‘about’ technology but recognises this element of culture must be included if a thorough understanding of young people is to be used as a starting point to provide context for research and analysis. The first section also explores the role of the arts within education (Caldwell, & Vaughan, 2012) and the underestimated potential of creativity as a learning tool for the engagement of students (Ewing, 2010a, 2010b; Greene, 1995; Robinson, 2006). It also examines the resistance to the arts as a tool for engagement due to an ever increasing tumultuous political and economic climate (Jefferson, & Anderson, 2017) which sees Australia becoming more reliant on national testing and traditional subjects (Anderson, 2012; Ewing, 2010a, 2010b.). The literature reviewed suggests the arts, often seen as marginal and contrary to the notion of “effective education” (Caldwell, & Vaughan, 2012; Ewing, 2010a; Robinson, 2006), actually have the potential to enhance students’ conceptual understanding of their school experience and the world around them. This understanding can, in turn, aid a series of personal transformations which could potentially produce an Australian populace that is more likely to embrace change through creativity, and keep pace with a society based on innovative ideas (Ewing, 2010a, p.1) as groundwork for occupations which haven’t been invented yet.
The second section looks at ‘Physical Transformation’ through the medium of site-specific performance. This section defines community theatre and site-specific performance and investigates how these theatre mediums can positively affect the environments in which they are staged. It explores the human desire to connect with specific spaces and imbue them with politics and meaning and looks at how contemporary educators need to redefine school spaces if we are to keep pace with our ever-evolving world.

The final section of this literature review explores the ‘Transformation of Learning Culture’ by identifying common elements in a range of existing whole-school programs and discussing the benefits and challenges of bringing these programs to fruition. It reviews the benefits of these ventures for individuals, their schools and communities by exploring the contemporary cultural elements that have led to these patterns of accomplishment and satisfaction.

**Personal Transformation**

**Generation Next**

Technology can be our best friend and technology can also be the biggest party pooper of our lives. It interrupts our own story, interrupts our ability to have a thought or a day dream, to imagine something wonderful, because we are too busy bridging the walk from the cafeteria back to the office on the cell phone


This quote from American film director Steven Spielberg comes from a monthly American magazine called *Wired* which focuses on how emerging technologies affect culture, politics and the economy. Spielberg, as an iconic, multi-award-winning writer, director and producer, portrays the future in many of his films and relies on technology for the success of much of his work. However, ironically, he also warns us of the implications of an over-reliance on technology as a potential obstruction to our imaginations and creative processes. The quote articulates the challenge faced by many of us on a daily basis (Turkle, 2013) and teachers are no exception to this paradox, as they have the complex task of incorporating technology with creativity inside the classroom. Teachers guide a generation who want to
use available technology at every given opportunity as it is exciting and innovative (Rosen, 2007), yet, according to the literature surveyed here, young people continue to report feeling disengaged with their school experience.

Generation Next is a term used to describe the current generation of students who have been born into a world of technology (Anderson, 2012), and are continually exposed to ‘i technologies’ such as the iMac, iPod, iPhone and Wii (Rosen, 2010, p. 228). Generation Next have continual access to social media sites and are unique in that they have the ability to self-direct their identity from the comfort of their own home through global media accessed daily by the digital world (Rosen, 2007; Zimmerman, 2008). The key here is in the term self-directed; as Sherry Turkle argues in her book Alone Together, digital life is attractive to teenagers as they can achieve and maintain control over their communication and exist in a world where they are never alone (Turkle, 2011, p. 157). Generation Next has developed methods to manipulate their data input and output and maintain personal control over circumstance; entertainment, learning and relationships (Carr, 2010; Turkle, 2011).

Inhabitants of Generation Next are also unique in that they can absorb copious amounts of information simultaneously and operate with new levels of stimulus idiosyncratic to this digital era (Rosen, 2007). This research is relevant to my study as it paints a picture of what influences the generation which is the basis for my investigation and I believe it is necessary to understand the world of Generation Next and chronicle their significant influences to successfully create a context to frame my research.

Dr Philip Tam, child psychologist and founder of NIIRA, the Network for Internet Investigation and Research Australia, states that approximately 10% of young people who use information and global technologies regularly develop addiction around this use and that PIU or ‘problematic internet use’ is a psychological disorder which is on the increase in Australian society (Tam, 2016). Tam and Walter argue that PIU can be considered the “ultimate post-modern affliction of the 21st century” where young people use technology to enhance their existing reality and the virtual world becomes their real world and cannot be seen as the ‘other’ in terms of research, but an integral part of what it means to be a young person in modern society (Tam, & Walter, 2013, p. 536). However, as a researcher of youth culture and psychological disorders associated with this period of development, Tam acknowledges that
technology is here to stay and is undeniably an integral part of what defines popular culture and so parents and educators must develop the means to encourage a ‘healthy digital diet’.

Turkle (2011) also concludes that technology and its appeal for young people is here to stay. The challenge for educators comes in keeping pace with Generation Next and their rapid processing skills and multi-tasking world. Teachers need to integrate technology into an educational environment, whilst maintaining the human contact necessary to create multifaceted and durable meaning. Some researchers highlight the calculated contradiction in this process as it requires a “wholefood change and no change at all” (Anderson, 2012, p. 25). Freire’s discussion of man’s movement towards the technological world of mass conformism also highlights this conundrum. He argues that through amplifying humankind’s sphere of participation through technological advancements, we are also removing humankind’s critical capacity and responsibility. However, Freire also acknowledges that technological advancements are a part of human nature and furthermore how “the answer does not lie in the rejection of the machine, but rather in the humanising of man (sic)” (Freire, 1973, p. 35).

Educators already have the tools to scaffold and support learning (Anderson, 2012), now we need to focus on how technology can “lead us back to our real lives, our own bodies, our own communities, our own politics, and our own planet. They need us” (Turkle, 2013). Jefferson and Anderson (2017) argue: “our world has seen massive changes in the last three decades. The advent of globalisation and the technological revolution has presented opportunities as well as the disruption and fragmentation of communities” (p. 26).

They continue to highlight that this advancement in technology has had ramifications for several professions, including doctors (who have to contend with patients “googling” their symptoms and second guessing their diagnosis), and teachers who have to manage students accessing their learning from multiple external sources. Yet many of the structures in traditional schools militate against change, downplay choice and still promote the transmission of knowledge to students who have little say in what they are being taught (Jefferson, & Anderson, 2017). Generation Next has access to the whole world at their

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6 Tam’s ‘Healthy Diet’ can be accessed via The Department of Psychological Medicine, Sydney University, the Rivendell Adolescent Unit, Concord, NSW and Australasian Psychological Society.
fingertips, and the literature suggests educators need to change the way curriculum is structured and taught in order to embrace this autonomy, decipher and comprehend this information and nurture the imagination of the possible. “Comfort-zones, fear, apathy and indifference can only be stirred and challenged by a belief in the imagination and the capacity to imagine” (Jefferson, & Anderson, 2017, p. 64).

The research suggests that it is by balancing how we use technology in our lives and how we integrate technology effectively into our schools with physicality (Tuan, 1977), politics (Rosen, 2012), society (Louv, 2005), culture (Carr, 2010) and imagination (Greene, 1995) that we can re-connect students with themselves, each other and the culture of their communities (Jackson, 2009; Moore, 1993; Wilson, 1999). Technology has changed how young people think and connect with each other and educators need to become aware of this change in the world of Generation Next if we are going to engage them with learning in a school setting and help them build the capacity to imagine (Jefferson, & Anderson, 2017) and, as argued by Friere (1970), re-humanise our education systems to encourage connections and foster engagement.

The Role of the Arts in the world of Generation Next

You use a glass mirror to see your face; you use art to see your soul

George Bernard Shaw, 1921

In Shaw’s five-part play Back to Methuselah the she-ancient character proclaims “art is the magic mirror you make to reflect your invisible dreams in visible pictures…and to see your soul”. Ecrasia (another character in this scene), declares she has “found happiness in art that real life has never given her”. This section of this literature review will discuss the role of the arts as a means for engagement with education and examine the ever-increasing amount of research in the area of the arts and their potential for re-connecting students with their environment, with each other and with themselves.

The arts have long been recognised as an integral part of holistic education in the lives of young people:
There is a compelling case to be argued that drama, one of the oldest art forms, is uniquely placed to meet the demands of young people and their education in the twenty first century...also to connect young people with a growing understanding of how they might act morally ethically, sustainably and democratically in an ever-changing world (Anderson, 2012, p. 15).

“The arts, it is argued, by transforming learning in formal educational contexts, can ensure that the curriculum engages and has relevance for all children” (Ewing, 2010a, p. 1). Ewing continues to argue that including arts in the curriculum doesn’t literally mean creating a nation of artists and performers, but “rather using the arts as a pedagogical tool to view the world from multiple perspectives” (p. 1) to create generations of young people who aren’t afraid to take safe risks and explore and develop ways of creating individual and cultural identity. The research implies the arts should be used as a functional tool for connecting young people with their feelings (Finney, Hickman, Morrison, Nicholl, & Rudduck, 2005) and providing physical, tangible avenues to express these feelings in educational and social contexts (Ewing, 2010a, 2010b; Langer, 1979; Ross, & Gisman-Stoch, 2011; Ross 1975). The UNESCO conference on arts education in 2006 asserted that arts education has the potential to “uphold the human right to education and cultural participation, develop individual capabilities, improve the quality of education and promote the expression of cultural diversity” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 1). Maxine Greene, researcher and long-term advocate of the potential power of the imagination as a tool for possibility, action and hope, acknowledges the arts as a way for young people to make sense of their world of “fearful moral uncertainty” (Greene, 1995 p. 2). She argues that the arts can foster a desire to “understand, repair and heal” (Greene, 1995, p. 2) the things we deem “broken” around us:

Participatory involvement with many forms of art does enable us, at the very least, to see more in our experience, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become curious of what daily routines, habits and conventions have obscured (Greene, 1995, p. 2).

Greene (1995) goes onto to argue that the arts have the potential to do more than just help us heal and make sense of the world around us, she argues that art gives educators the tool to “communicate to students the notion that reality depends on perspective, that its construction is never complete, and that there is always more” (p. 6). She argues that art encourages us to
always question and to be spontaneous; thus, reconnecting with the process of becoming who we are (p. 6). Furthermore, art, in Greene’s opinion (2000), is where our imagination lies and our imagination is the key to crossing boundaries between us and the “other”. Imagination enhances our capacity for empathy and social understanding by stimulating our perspective on the world around us and our place within this reality (Harwood, 2010).

Ewing also argues for further inclusion of arts programs in critical, quality pedagogy. She presents examples of the arts as a catalyst for personal development, social cohesion, community image and regeneration, health and well-being and education and learning and concludes with:

A considerable and growing body of research supports the assertion that the arts should be playing an important role in all areas of school education and community development… if we are to realise the transformative potential of the arts in education, we must move beyond rhetoric in policy about its importance, to action (Ewing, 2010a, p. 56).

My investigation into relevant literature led me to examine art forms which are based on community building and communal communication and how these communities can enrich educational experiences.

One such example of relevant literature which supports the significant capacity of the arts in education is the 2012 publication Transforming Education through the Arts, authors Brian Caldwell and Tanya Vaughan. This study, which employed a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the academic and psychological effects of arts programs delivered to public schools in the Western Suburbs of Sydney, NSW, produced data which substantiated the case for the inclusion of the arts in all educational programs in schools. The report’s findings state how the arts can improve engagement and attendance, literacy and numeracy results, science and technology grades, self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, resilience, empathy and tolerance and can also reorganise neural pathways to extend the brain’s potential in all learning areas (Caldwell, & Vaughan, 2012). The report concludes by highlighting the major disruption in efforts to design an education that matches the need of the individual, society and economy of the 21st century and maintains the side-lining of the arts in favour of narrowly focused high-stakes testing is highly dysfunctional and will require
strong will, commitment and compelling vision to create lasting change. “Policy makers and practitioners cannot afford to ignore the case for urgent action” (Caldwell, & Vaughan, 2012, p. 149).

However, despite this growing body of research on the potential of the arts as a tool for student engagement and community development, educators in the area of the arts are faced with the constant dilemma of “going into battle” for their faculty area and being forced to argue for the viability of their subject within a whole school curriculum and contemporary economic conditions (Anderson, 2012; Eggleston, 1980; Robinson, 2006; Ross, & Gisman-Stoch, 2011).

Many teachers are anxious about teaching arts programs in their school because of previous negative experiences in this field. As Aprill (2012) highlights, most teachers’ experience of the arts is childhood humiliation and fear – “you can’t sing, you can’t dance, etc”, and are hesitant to include the arts in their curriculum. He stipulates the importance of overcoming this fear and using the arts as “an arena in which the child gets to redefine their self-image and participate in the classroom again in a different way” and emphasises “we must embrace the arts or kids will flood out of the schools because there is too much interesting stuff happening outside the schools, rather than inside the schools” (Aprill, 2012). This “interesting stuff” Aprill mentions is conducive to Rosen’s argument (2010) that technology has opened up a whole new world for our student population, one which is infinitely more interesting than what is going on at school and we, as teachers, must find new ways of engaging students with the current educational climate.

My research into arts in schools came from a platform of curiosity. I had witnessed the arts already working as a tool for engagement with Generation Next through my role as a Drama teacher and director of school activities and productions, so I was curious to know why my colleagues were hesitant to encourage creative activities in their subject areas. According to Ewing, (2010a, 2010b) and Aprill, (2012), the arts in education have often been regarded with suspicion and perceived as an elitist art form requiring specialist expertise. This segregation combined with “limited in-service training for educators, the lack of longitudinal arts research and the continued dominance of traditional academic curricula as the main passport for entering tertiary education” (Ewing, 2010b, p. 5) have added to the alienation of the arts. This suspicious attitude towards the arts is never afforded to traditional subjects.
which, as Caldwell and Vaughan (2012) point out, is not only removing undeniable value to 
the human society, but is morally cruel and practically discriminating. Young people in 
disadvantaged communities do not always have access to arts projects outside their school 
and so by removing arts subjects from schools, public education is effectively widening the 
cultural divide by further advantaging the elite in our society who often have access to arts 
programs outside school (e.g.: music lessons or amateur theatre groups) already (Caldwell, & 
Vaughan, 2012). Greene and Anyon (2010) highlight how young people from low SES areas 
have considerably less opportunities and perform poorly in school situations and areas of 
cognitive development when compared to young people from affluent societies. They argue 
that schools who serve students from low-income families are being offered the “short end of 
the stick” and if we continue to ignore the links between educational outcomes and 
connection to family and community resources, this divide cannot be rectified (Greene, & 

The research canvassed above suggests that the arts can not only provide young people with a 
vehicle for self-discovery and expression, but it can prepare all students, (not just those from 
affluent societies who are successful in the “important subjects” designed to facilitate 
university entrance), with an opportunity to develop a sense of identity and voice that is 
essential for a socially inclusive society (Anderson, 2012; Caldwell, & Vaughan, 2012; 
Ewing, 2010; Greene, & Anyon, 2010; Hare, 2000). The NSW Government suggests the arts 
should be “at the heart of all learning” as they play a major role in “making meaning in 
people’s lives and encourage children to experiment, create, interpret, criticise, innovate, 
imagine, appreciate and communicate and in doing so contribute to cultural life and develop a 
clear sense of their own identity” (NSW Government, curriculum support, 2012).

Researchers have long been publishing findings to this effect and arguing arts in schools 
develop personal opinions and reasoning skills; thus, exercising one of the intrinsic purposes 
behind education: the ability to responsibly claim personal power within a society (Eggleston 
1980; Robinson, 1982). In 2001, Hare argued arts in schools can renew interest in personal 
learning and communal understanding:

Researchers unanimously found that engagement in the arts nurtures cognitive, 
social and personal competencies by developing multiple skills and abilities... arts 
can have a tremendous impact on young people of school age and post-school age
who have the greatest need – offering poorly motivated students renewed interest in learning and enhancing their self-concept and ability to relate positively to others (Hare, 2001, p. 7).

The 2005 National Education and the Arts Statement; a joint resolution by the Cultural Ministers’ Council (CMC) and MCEETYA, is significant in that it argues for the inclusion of the arts in school curriculums in Australia and clearly states the fundamental necessity of including the arts in the education of all young people:

The arts foster imagination, risk-taking and curiosity – important aspects of creativity. Governments, businesses and communities now widely regard creativity and innovation as fundamental to social, economic, cultural and technical growth. Arts based enterprises are vitally important to economic success. Education is the most important means for developing knowledge and wisdom in an active, productive society. Creativity in education is a necessity, nurturing imagination and curiosity – two vital elements that can drive learning for us all... Education systems that value and develop individual’s creative capacities help to position Australia as a vibrant nation in the global context (MCEETYA, 2005).

A report completed by the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (McRae et al., 2000), concluded that the arts play a unique role in improving the learning outcomes for Indigenous students in this country. They do this in a number of ways:

1) The arts constitute a way of engaging students in learning that will result in the development of generic understandings and competencies found across the curriculum.

2) The arts are central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and have been used to pass on those cultures through many generations. The arts are seen as a powerful means by which students can express themselves and their identity, in order to achieve further personal and academic development.

3) The practical emphasis in the arts has an explicit influence on teaching practice and learner’s roles which improves student motivation and outcomes. (McRae et al., 2000, p. 103).
So, with this significant research and policy impetus for the necessary inclusion of the arts in school programs to help transform individual and thus societal identity for Generation Next, the arts provide an avenue of enhancing the learning of all students across all syllabi, thus deepening their understanding of all aspects of learning within the school climate:

If the arts are to help define our path to the future, they need to become curriculum partners with other subject disciplines in ways that will allow them to contribute their own distinctive richness and complexity to the learning process as a whole (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999, p. 45).

Ewing suggests that is imperative that we look at the potential of the arts as an all-inclusive learning tool for students to enhance their conceptual understanding of their school experience and in turn, produce an Australian populace of the future that is more suited to keep pace with a society based on innovative ideas and the struggle for originality in the arts, business, politics and thus economy (Ewing, 2010a).

Figures from the 2011 Australian Census showed that despite the financial climate, creative employment — jobs such as those in advertising, design and performing arts are on the increase; employing more than 50,000 Australians and generating 70,000 jobs in five years. “Creative professionals now outnumber the mining sector employees three to one and those of the fishing and forestry two to one” (Cunningham, 2013). These statistics, and others based on industrial enterprise, do not presuppose art should always leap into commercial corporations for monetary gain, but rather should be recognised as having a positive impact on all facets of society (Ewing, 2010a). To engage with the arts is to engage with creative thought and this process develops the ability to think critically about problems and solutions which are skills to be valued and fostered if we are to function effectively in contemporary society. Jefferson and Anderson (2017) argue that western economies have created a market driven school system with an emphasis on training young people for disappearing professions as opposed to imagined futures (2017, p. 30) and this must be rectified if we are to keep young people engaged in 21st century living:

The need for creativity and flexibility, coupled with the ability to solve problems are must-haves for those who wish to make sense of 21st century living… The arts
processes can provide the potential to reshape the way learning is conceived and organised in schools and other educational contexts. The arts can also act as a catalyst for personal and social transformation in schools and the community generally (Ewing, 2010a, p. 1).

The arts can provide a tool whereby young people can have input into what they are learning by engaging with their imagination to critically solve issues and connect with the world around them. As argued by Peter O’Connor (2015) in his foreword to *How Arts Education Makes a Difference*:

> As schools increasingly become places where what are taught and barely learnt are only those things that count or can be counted, the arts address those things that truly matter. The arts have always been the space where we wonder about the most difficult questions in life, and where we awaken consciousness about things of importance. The arts are important because they allow us to explore the big questions of what it means to be human... (O’Connor, 2015, p. 16).

Turkle’s research (2013) tells us that Generation Next want to maintain an element of control over their educational input and output and yet Greene (1995) argues our current education system continues to treat young people as empty vessels who passively await knowledge:

> Young people find themselves described as ‘human resources’ rather than persons who are centres of choice and evaluation. It is suggested that young people are to be moulded in the service of technology and the market, no matter who they are. Yet, as many are now realising, great numbers of our young people will find themselves unable to locate satisfying jobs and the very notion of ‘all the children’ and even human resources carries with it deceptions of all kinds. Perhaps it is no wonder that the dominant mood in many classrooms is one of passive reception (Greene, 1995, p. 2).

In conclusion, personal transformation here is represented by exploring the world of Generation Next, the role of technological stimulation in their lives and the potential ramifications of this self-directed, multi-tasking system of processing information. Young people want to maintain an element of control over their learning, their identity and their...
understanding of the world; they want to become “active learners” who are “awakened to pursue meaning” (Greene, 1995, p. 7) of the “big questions” (O’Connor, 2015). Greene highlights the contradiction with this notion of the “active learner” in educational theory and practise:

There are, of course, two contradictory tendencies in education today; one has to do with shaping malleable young people to serve the needs of technology in a post-industrial society; the other has to with educating young people to grow and become different, to find their individual voices, and to participate in a community in the making. Encounters with the arts nurture and sometimes provoke the growth of individuals who reach out to one another as they seek clearings in their experience and try to live more ardently in the world (1995, p. 7).

This notion of Greene’s active learner is in line with the conceptual framework which underpins this thesis: Constructivism. Constructivism is neither a new or narrow theory, but a theory of human development that dates back to Asian philosophy with the teachings of Lao Tzu (6th century BC) and Buddha (560–477 BC) (Mahoney, 2003, p.3). It is underpinned by the flow of human experience and how we are in a state of continuous active agency; constantly ordering processes and creating identity which in turn is influenced by the relationships we form. Mahoney states the essence of constructivism as “a view of human experience that emphasises meaningful action by developing self in relationship” (Mahoney, 2003, p.3).

The next section of this literature review looks at how young people gravitate towards social relationships in the form of communities and examines how to build these healthy communities in the realm of Generation Next.
Physical Transformation

Community Theatre Models

It takes a whole village to raise a child.

Igbo and Yoruba (Nigerian) Proverb

This African proverb exists in many forms throughout African countries e.g.: “One knee does not bring up a child” (Tanzania) and “One hand does not nurse a child” (Swahili, East and Central Africa) and conveys the idea that the upbringing of children is the responsibility of the whole community and consequently children are a product of their environment. It emphasises the ‘village’ must unify in thought and in deed for the child to be effectively guided through their journey to adulthood and fulfil their purpose in the community (Healy, 1998).

This section will focus on the role of the ‘village’ in community theatre as an instrument for engaging with young people and creating community transformation; with reference to prominent community theatre practitioners Helen Crummy, Neil Cameron and community circus practitioner, Reg Bolton. I have reviewed the work of these three practitioners as they deal with different kinds of community theatre, but commonly, all use the physical location of the theatre work and the connection of this location to the bodies of the performers, as a guiding ideology with which to inform their theatre practice.

This section also explores the notion of risk through two separate classifications. These classifications are relevant to my study as the school in which my research took place has a large population of ‘Youth at Risk’ (see chapter 4, Context for Study on socio-economic status), and many of these young people engage in what society labels as ‘risky’ behaviours (Duruga High School National Partnership on Low SES School Communities Situational Analysis Report July 2010). Therefore, the explorations of risk in this section of my literature review investigate these two different, (yet intrinsically related), notions of risk and how they connect through the often marginalised genre of community theatre (Carroll, 1999).

Before we delve further into the genre of community theatre, it is useful to look at what constitutes a functioning community. On a semantic level, ‘community’ can be defined as: “A social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government and
have a cultural and historical heritage; a group of people leading a common life according to a rule” (Macquarie Dictionary, 1985, p. 380).

If a community is what is shared, then it must take on a communicative form; a transformative idea of community where the expression of communicative competencies is the responsibility of the populace at large. However, when we explore the deeper meaning of community, it can be expressed through a collective responsibility, not just an inherent geography and communication: “Community, from its derivation literally means ‘to give among each other’ and is constituted by physical proximity, shared concerns, real consequences and common responsibilities. Its’ members help each other in the most practical ways” (Turkle, 2011, p. 239).

We, as humans, often fear authentic relationships, however we fear solitude even more (Turkle, 2011). Therefore, we tend to gather in groups, seeking solace in company; albeit regularly without critical ties, cooperation and true community (Freire, 1973). The assumption here is that often what we view as communities are in fact without critical, meaningful ties and reciprocated communication and responsibility; therefore, not actually communities, but rather social groupings of convenience.

Schools are communities where the residents come together and co-inhabit communal spaces and are governed by communal rules, however, unlike some communities, students in schools are forced to attend and be part of these communities; whether they like it or not. The student populations of specific schools regularly have vastly different cultural and historical backgrounds and are rarely given an opportunity to control how their communities are run. In fact, most teachers spend the majority of their time defining and instigating rules to keep students under control and remove autonomy, “this process is called making civilised people” (Postman, 1996, p. 47) and highlights the asymmetrical relationship within the school community membership. Public Schools have a responsibility to create a public and so the inhabitants are told how to behave in order to form an effective community (Postman, 1994, 1996). This description may appear to be an oversimplification of schooling, however as argued by Freire (1973) when schools are governed by a ‘top-down’ approach in order to maintain order and control, education can often lose its authenticity.
The definition of community that informs this research is primarily concerned with the notion of joint responsibility; as according to my canvassed literature, community comes through acknowledging the consequences of words and actions for other community members. As Freire theorises (1973), community involves equity; therefore, the removal of status as a governing tool. Furthermore, he argues education is doomed to failure when it is primarily structured from the ‘top-down’, based on the assumption made by many schools, that all pupils are empty vessels, ignorant and without knowledge; thus, without power. Freire proposes a method which assigned the responsibility for the sharing of knowledge between the student and the teacher; a reciprocated relationship that fosters ownership, respect and shared responsibility for communal learning, understanding and development. A method whereby students are not just given the “formula to store” (Freire, 1973), but the means for authentic thought based on creation and invention, using existing skill bases as building blocks for knowledge development. Jean Rudduck (2003), long-time advocate of the power and potential of the ‘student voice’ in schools, argues students must be consulted about their schools and their learning in an authentic way if educators are to re-engage, disengaged students in High Schools. She maintains ‘student voice’ has the power to improve self-esteem, belonging, respect and democratic principles and practices (Rudduck, & Flutter, 2003). These practices can, according to Rudduck, further influence the students’ feelings of membership and responsibility to their school and wider community.

Several of the elements of the NSW Quality Teaching Framework which codes learning as being significant, states learning has to be connected to existing knowledge and broader community if teaching and learning in a school environment is to be effective (Bowe, & Gore, 2011). The first of which being in the significance dimension “Background Knowledge: to what extent do lessons regularly and explicitly build from student’s background knowledge, in terms of prior knowledge, as well as other aspects of their personal lives?” The second significant element is: “Connectedness: to what extent do lesson activities rely on the application of school knowledge in real-life contexts or problems? To what extent do lesson activities provide opportunities for students to share their work with audiences beyond the classroom and school?” (Bowe, & Gore, 2011). Quality Teaching Rounds were developed to “engage teachers in sustained and meaningful professional learning activities that would develop collective diagnostic capacity about teaching practice, through a process of collegial enquiry using the shared pedagogical framework of the Quality Teaching model” (Gore, Bowe, & Elsworth, 2010). These elements imply learning can only
be meaningful and authentic when connected to the student’s prior knowledge and their understanding of their surrounding environment; furthermore, that teachers have a responsibility to ensure their teaching encompasses these elements if it is to have significant impact on students and their engagement with their wider communities.

An autonomous form of community building that has the potential to reignite its members with their personal and collective identity, (regardless of their socio-economic status), is community theatre (Cameron, 1995; Crummy, 1992). Theatre is one of the first art forms that brought people together to communicate stories, understand phenomenon and share communal experiences (Anderson, 2012). Participating in the arts and the cultural life of one’s community is a recognised Human Right (United Nations, 1948) and the best way community artists like François Matarasso (n.d.) empower marginalised communities.

Shaping your own cultural identity – and having it recognized by others – is central to human dignity and growth. If people can’t represent themselves culturally how can they do so in any other way, including politically? If people are only imagined and portrayed by others, how can they be full, free and equal members of society? And yet, in every society, people’s access to culture is very uneven. Those who identify with dominant cultures have no difficulty creating and promoting their values. Others, passively or actively denied cultural resources, platforms and legitimacy, remain on the margins (Matarasso, n.d.).

Dorothy Heathcote, researcher and practitioner in the arts has long argued that Drama is a public art form, not a private art form and as such, requires collaboration of cultures and communities in order to function effectively (Heathcote, 1994). Western Theatre can be traced back to Athenian society with the invention of staged Drama for public audiences. Neelands (2016) argues that theatre was one of the first inventions of the Athenian polis as “a necessary core of their political life” (Neelands, 2016, p. 31). He maintains “theatre made the irresolvable arguments of the polis visible in human form and aroused both intellectual and emotional engagement” (Neelands, 2016, p. 31) and that every neighbourhood in Athens had its’ own theatre to encourage dialogue and community action. He states the Athenians gave us our first working definition of community theatre: “that is the purpose of a democratic theatre – to confuse and to confound, to ask questions without the need to answer them. To
feed and mirror arguments in the public sphere about how best to live together” (Neelands, 2016, p. 32).

It is this element of democracy and the dramatisation of public issues and debate, that has led to many successful models of community theatre gaining recognition for change and evolution throughout contemporary history (Cameron, 1995; Crummy, 1992; Fox, 2002).

One such model that promotes community theatre as a catalyst for change and was pioneered by Helen Crummy; who was a widely acknowledged practitioner in the field of community theatre in Craigmillar in Britain in the 1970’s and early 80’s. I have included her work here as she is often held up as the bench mark by other community theatre practitioners (particularly Welfare State International) in the field of community transformation through the arts. Crummy maintained that the arts were not only an effective way to engage young people in meaningful activities for individual and communal benefits, but were also fundamental in the health of all individuals and their communities: “community arts are of course not a new idea. It has been going on for centuries. The only difference in Craigmillar was that we had stumbled on it as a catalyst for community development” (Crummy, 1992, p. 144).

Helen Crummy’s book *Let the People Sing* is an account of how the process of making art changed the ethos of her community – “Craigmillar”. She argues the arts empowered the Craigmillar residents and enabled them to take risks and evoke change, which in turn, created a new identity for themselves and their community. Her work was based in a community with a low socio-economic population and was of particular interest to me as a researcher, as the community where my research is based also has a recognised level of low socio-economics (see Chapter 4 - Context for Study). It is her model of community theatre as a form of community intervention and development, which inspired many of her devotees to develop her prototype to suit their own strengths and practice.

Neil Cameron, who began his training with Helen Crummy when he was a boy in Scotland, practises his radical, celebratory theatre all over the world. *Fire on the Water* (1993) is his personal account of large-scale celebratory theatre in the community. He stresses the importance of observing and celebrating the “joys of existence” and how our society, despite its increasing reliance on consumerism, acquisitiveness and anonymity, needs cultural
celebration and play, unity and identity, in order to stay healthy and develop. Cameron argues: “theatre is not a building, it is a human activity shared by all” (Cameron, 1993, p. 20).

Cameron argues about the importance of including young people in all community celebratory events “the needs of young people are taken seriously” (Cameron, 1995, p. 71). He stresses the significance of young people being seen as equals and given the opportunity to create for themselves and for each other and venerate their evolving identity. He cites his work in the Maleny Folk Festival as an example of his philosophy regarding the potential of the inclusivity nature of the arts and young people: “I work in the festival (Maleny Folk Festival) for my own children, to show them the joy of creating something that is worthwhile. The festival lies in people’s hearts. They go into the world and take a part of the festival with them” (Cameron, 1995, p. 73). Cameron stresses autonomy and individuality as a key factor is in work and emphasises the right for participants to choose the level of involvement in the community theatre practise.

Another community theatre practitioner based in the UK with over twenty years’ experience working in this area is Dr Selina Busby. She is currently working with communities that have experienced homelessness in India and New York and communities in the prison systems in the UK and Malta. She is a co-author of “Celebrating Success” a 2014 report on the effects of the “Clean Break” community theatre arts program which works primarily with women who have been through the prison system in the UK (Busby, & Abraham, 2014). Her work is informed by the central ideas of hope, autonomy and ownership as shown in her observation of the “Clean Break” program:

It is important to note that there is always a choice of whether or not to engage in processes of change, perhaps what is essential is the step towards thinking your life is worthy of being changed. Learning how to take supported risks and accepting non-judgemental care and support is a vital part of Clean Break’s pedagogical approach to supporting vulnerable women to achieve success. It is this approach and potential that is actively inherent within the performing arts as a form that naturally inspires creativity, imagination and collaboration that has enabled success through awakening the capacity of women to dream again (Busby, & Abraham, 2014, p. 28).
Busby’s approach of non-judgemental, equitable participation and an ethos of giving the marginalised back their voice and the power to create art that is representational of their personal and communal journeys is reflected in other companies in the UK; most notably ‘Hijinx Theatre’, Cardiff.

‘Hijinx Theatre’, is an inclusive theatre company in Cardiff Wales and their mission statement maintains that every production includes actors with learning disabilities and “The ability of these effortlessly talented performers is at the heart of every show we produce, creating work that is utterly absorbing, surprising and provocative” (Hijinx Theatre Company, n.d.). Much of the work developed by this company involves ensemble play building that centers around non-fictional narratives. Wooster discusses the Hijinx/Odyssey Theatre production of “The Ballroom” in 2007, an inclusive community theatre performance which received mixed reviews from the audience. Some critics concluded the personal stories of the performers were too long and lacked artistic merit (Wooster, 2009, p.84). However, Wooster also argues the audience brought their own prisms through which to process the performance (e.g.: a family member or carer might view the performance through a different lens to a member of the general public) and that the story telling gave the performers ownership, pride and validation as individuals and as a community. Something which as an often marginalized, under-represented group, is an important part of the artistic process; it is often the making of the work which is more empowering as a community than the performance itself (Wooster, 2009, p.85).

Some of the recurring factors that contribute to the success of the community theatre work listed above, are also integral to the work of Reg Bolton. Reg Bolton too began his community theatre training with Helen Crummy, but his ideologies manifested in the form of circus, in particular youth circus, as a tool for community development. Circus was in The Journey as a performance element and it emerged throughout my coded research as a notable element for engagement; therefore, it became an area of literature that I considered in my review to support my understanding of how this kind of community theatre can enhance community building for participants. Bolton developed youth circus ideologies to inform cultural identity through the recognition of young people as equals, and the establishment of programs to value the contributions and experiences of youth and youth identity. The importance of chaos/misrule, risk taking and working outside the parameters of the normal
educational setting are highly valued by Bolton and act as the framework for many of his projects when working with young people.

Bolton maintains circus, by definition, can give young people a healthy, attractive alternative to other risk factors that are available to “combat” adolescent stress (1999). This quality should enlighten schools about the inherent advantages of including the arts (particularly circus), in education. However, Bolton argues there are many more benefits of circus arts within a youth framework including scholastic, physical, psychological, sociological and mental.

Circus really is real, when kids are living in such a virtual world now and having such vicarious adventures in Nintendo, this is for real, this is it. You are yourself, you are the flesh in which you are living and it’s good to have some control of that and don’t let your weakness, your fear, your obesity, whatever it is, be your master (Bolton in McCutcheon, 2003).

Circus provides adolescents with a vehicle for engaging in the necessary risky behaviours that require the testing of social conventions and boundaries, and developing an identity that will help them move successfully from adolescence into adulthood (Bolton, 1999; Gonzalez et al., 1994; Ward, 1991).

Deborah Lupton in her book Risk examines the notion of risk and its’ associations with pleasure for teenagers and their desire to induce pleasurable sensations and improve personal perception (1999). Lupton maintains young people take risks to appear “superhuman”; portraying superior qualities that allow them to court danger and test boundaries which have often been externally imposed:

Participating in activities that are coded as dangerous or risky can bring an adrenalin rush that allows aficionados to escape the bounds of the rational mind and controlled body, to allow the body’s sensations and emotions to overcome them for a time. There is a heightened living... of breaking the ‘rules’ that society is seen as imposing upon people (Lupton, 1999, p. 152).
Lupton also argues that these dangerous behaviours are often undertaken by groups to foster a kind of “collective effervescence or communal spirit” as the participants rely on each other for safety and security in numbers (p. 155). Some researchers (Bundy et al., 2009; Lupton, 1995; Turkle, 2011) see this communal risk taking as a necessary rite of passage and point out the dangers associated with cloistering young people and preventing them from developing their identity and boundaries: “The potential for children to become afraid to use their bodies actively is among the risks of being overly concerned with protecting children from injury in their school grounds” (Bundy et al., 2009, p. 34).

In the traditional variant, the child internalises the adults in his or her world before crossing the threshold of independence. In the modern, technologically tethered variant, parents can be brought along in an intermediate space, such as that created by the cell phone, where everyone important is on speed dial (Turkle, 2011, p. 173).

This continuous protection and connection can act as a double-edged sword in contemporary society. This ‘sword’ works as parents can maintain communication with their children at all times through phones and tablets, however, social media also means parents can view any risky behaviour their children might be engaging in and so lose faith in their children to self-govern and develop independence.

**Youth at Risk and Risk Taking**

Kate Donelan and Angela O’Brien’s project ‘Risky Business’ was a three-year longitudinal research project from 2002-2005 that investigated the creative arts as an intervention activity for young people at risk. The study found that young people who engaged in arts programs experienced a broad range of personal and social benefits, including increased self-esteem, artistic and communication skills development, a sense of achievement and well-being, community connectedness and social inclusion, as well as pure enjoyment (Donelan, & O’Brien, 2008).

With this research in mind and that of Bolton (1985, 1987, 1999, 2004) and Sugarman, (2001), the strategy of including circus as an art form to engage ‘Youth at Risk’ becomes apparent and logical. Circus is often included as a performance element in community theatre.
for young people as it is intrinsically defined by risk and can provide an appropriate vehicle for effectively engaging in safe risk and empowering young people who are ‘at risk’ in communities with low SES. As highlighted by Jackie Davis when interviewed by Robert Sugarman for his book *Circus for Everyone*:

The whole thing of teendom – acting out, going for thrills and risks, experimenting with drugs; circus arts can channel that energy in healthy ways. Balancing on a tight wire or standing on a globe or riding a unicycle are things you have to do in order to be successful. There is nothing phony. You get up in front of three hundred people and there is a rush. Also, this is the time when the body and mind are undergoing all these changes – the hormonal things. When you put them on a tightrope or have them focus for juggling, they have to be balanced, coordinated and self-controlled (Davis in Sugarman, 2001, p. 171).

Circus, by its very nature is about the control of risk, the inversion of established power relationships and their intrinsic notions of ‘space’; both personal and communal.

While other forms of media communicate, there is something about being live in front of another person, or group of people that contains empathy and a true possibility of change. This is unique to the performance of live work. Maybe it’s because we are all breathing together, maybe it’s because one of us could drop dead. Maybe it’s because there’s a risk. This is important to acknowledge and take advantage of (Dempsey, & Millan, 1999, p. 122).

Carroll (1999) argues large-scale community arts projects which involve crowds of young people can produce conflicting responses for an audience. On one hand, there is the thrill and excitement of being part of a group that is generating collective energy and power, and, on the other hand:

...there is also present an edge of unpredictability and perception of risk, a place where the social norms of space, body contact and accepted behaviour breaks down. Dramatic reflexivity may be lost and the line between drama and life disappear (Carroll, 1999, p. 9).
Carroll continues to argue that it is through the development of shared ownership of large-scale community arts events (where there is a shift in perception from spectator to participant/performer) the event can be perceived as a journey that that the participants become engaged in. (Carroll, 1999, p. 23). Marginalised young people are infamous for being unpredictable and challenging established authority (Bolton, 1985, 1987, 1999, 2004). Community theatre, with its elements of perceived risk (both by participant and audience) and shifting power base, can provide a form with which to satiate this desire to ‘live on the edge’.

In conclusion, there are many kinds of community theatre which all have their roots in an ancient model of democracy and communal development where the ‘village’ becomes the arena in which to teach, learn, govern and grow. As Neelands (2016) points out these models are unique in that they encourage the freedom of speech and action yet are also constrained by rules and boundaries to operate effectively. It is the management of this delicate balance of freedom and restraint through empathy, which must be maintained, to effectively communicate a message to an audience in a designated theatre space.

**Site-Specific Performance**

There’s no place like home.

L. Frank Baum, 1900

This incantation is said three times by Dorothy Gale, the central character in Baum’s iconic novel *The Wizard of Oz*. Dorothy longs for her home and all the feelings of security and reassurance it evokes, but she realises she must complete her journey of self-discovery along the yellow brick road if she and her friends are to succeed (Tognoli, 1987). Tognoli argues Baum’s novel teaches us about the search for place and identity through our connection to home and to each other: “As the worlds of Kansas and Oz collide, there arises a synthesis, mediated by the concepts of home, based on personal growth in a social context” (1987). The quest to find a ‘place called home’ where one can belong is an age old, universal theme, explored by storytellers, researchers and, according to Sobel (2005), by young people as they struggle to navigate their place in the world. This section of my review examines literature on place and how our connection to place influences our individual and communal identity. It also examines the genre of site-specific theatre as a tool for re-defining space, its’ identity, purpose and role in enhancing education and community development.
Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 1977) suggests that place is security and place is freedom; we are attached to the one and long for the other. This could be said for schools where students are physically, psychologically and socially linked to their schools, yet often feel bound to their school in an incapacitating sense (Turkle, 2011).

Tuan argues that the feelings and ideas concerning space and place are extremely complex in human beings and all human beings have need for a personal place and personal belongings. He defines Topophilia as the “powerful and affective bond between people and place or setting” (Tuan, 1974, p. 4). Furthermore, he asserts the identity of place is achieved by “dramatizing the aspirations, needs and functional rhythms of personal and group life” (Tuan, 1977, p. 178).

Houston suggests that community theatre companies that focus on the transformation of established spaces through site-specific works maintain this celebration of previously taboo spaces can be very empowering for individuals and their communities. “Site-specific theatre stems from a desire to cultivate praxis, a transformation of knowledge into action and to aesthetically represent a position of being-in-the-world” (Houston, 2007, p. 8). Site-specific theatre defines itself through: “The location, in reading, of an image, object, or event, its positioning in relation to political, aesthetic, geographical, institutional or other discourses, all inform what ‘it’ can be said to ‘be’” (Kaye, 2000, p. 1).

One such site-specific, theatre company is Welfare State International or WSI. This community theatre group has been leading the way internationally in large scale, site-specific, celebratory community theatre since its beginnings in 1968, (Coult, & Kershaw, 1983, p. 1). The company was founded by John Fox and Sue Gill and has achieved “international acclaim for its joyous blend of visual spectacle, popular theatre and celebration” (Coult, & Kershaw, 1983, p. 1).

As defined by Pavis, the company is most famous for transforming spaces through site-specific theatre:

This term refers to a staging and performance conceived on the basis of a place in the real world (ergo outside the established theatre). A large part of the work has
to do with researching a place, often an unusual one that is imbued with history or permeated with atmosphere: an airplane hangar, unused factory, city neighbourhood. The insertion of classical or modern text in this ‘found space’ throws new light on it, gives it an unsuspecting power, and places the audience at an entirely different relationship to the text, the place and the purpose for being there. This new context provides a new situation or enunciation... and gives the performance an unusual setting of great charm and power (Pavis, 1998, pp. 337-338).

Site-specific performance is unique in its exploration and celebration of spaces and their inhabitants in that it engages with site as symbol, site as story-teller and site as structure in either a formal way through its architecture and history, or in an informal way with the perceived character of the building (Pearson, 2010; Wilkie, 2002).

Site-specific performance is distinctive as it can have a greater impact on its audience than other forms of the arts; “performers can get amongst them, encircle them, lead them on journeys, play with them, surprise them by appearing in unexpected places, or surround them with fireworks” (Mason, 1992, p. 12). The audience becomes a medium in which the performance can take place, thus transforming the established physicality of the actor-audience relationship (Schechner, 1994, p. 2).

Welfare State International’s handbook *Engineers of the Imagination* (1983) looks at the medium of site-specific theatre and its combination of craft and technology, past, present and future and gives recognition to the imagination as the power that drives rational and creative action and, most importantly, makes change, promotes risk and community evolution. The company also maintains the importance of art belonging equally to everybody, not just skilled performers or the ‘elite’ members of society with the correct social and economic status (Fox, 2002).

Their repertoire encompasses all aspects of society, but they have also produced works which address the specific needs of young people. A *Child’s Eye View* produced by Welfare State International in conjunction with the Cleveland Theatre Company in 2002 focused on the world through the eyes of a child and, as child psychologist Barry Hymer observed: “that when totally absorbed in a state of flow, boundaries between different areas of learning
become wonderfully blurred... that learning is as much about sensing and being as it is about accumulating facts” (Hymer, 2012).

Baz Kershaw, in his book *The Radical in Performance* describes this kind of theatre as radical, democratic and essential for a society’s health:

...here was a community of people constructing an identity through the production of a culture that could potentially enhance their collective agency, self-determination and responsibility to each other... it transcended those normative values and, at least for the time it was happening, created a space and time beyond the dominant, a new realm of civil society, in which the crucial values celebrated through creativity were equality, justice and freedom. In this sense, it was not just radical, but coherently radical (Kershaw, 1999, p. 219).

Maxine Greene uses the site-specific dance company STREB\(^7\) to highlight how this kind of gravity defying art work which challenges our perceived notions of space can release the human imagination and transform lives when “human beings reach beyond where they normally are and in a grand metaphor, enact what might be, what can be” (Greene, 1999, p. 5). She goes on to discuss Dewey’s notion of ‘aesthetic’ being the opposite of ‘anaesthetic’ and argues aesthetic education can counter the anaesthetic and “awake people to ellipses they never knew existed” (Greene, 1999, p. 5). This idea of the aesthetic creating a new working space for young people to explore and redefine their identity and how they manage risk is intrinsic in site-specific theatre as it redefines the aesthetic space of the body and the aesthetic space of the environment and finds a new arena where the connect. It redefines students’ purpose and place within schools and communities and in turn, creates new relationships, practises and politics for navigating education in the aesthetic (visible) space.

Kuppers and Robertson (2007) argue that site-specific theatre can have a lasting effect on our personal, social and thus political worlds by creating links between art, space, stories and boundaries for the communities where they take place. Wylie, (2007) argues that when the body and environment fold into each other through the sharing of physical spaces they can

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\(^7\) STREB is a dance company formed by Elizabeth Streb in New York City in 1985. The company’s choreography combines dance, circus and stunt work in productions which have taken them from the “heights of the experimental dance world to the cutting edge of popular entertainment” http://streb.org/company

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co-construct each other to create powerful new practices, relationships and politics (Wylie, 2007, p. 144).

My research explores what happens when this form of theatre is taken into a school environment and staged as intervention within the school’s curriculum, culture and community. An analysis of the community theatre practitioners in this literature review indicates the inherent potential for site-specific theatre to transform school spaces in a unique and valuable way; particularly as a vehicle to establish a mutually supportive relationship between schools and their communities. A relationship which engenders solidarity and a sense of belonging, thus nurturing the social and emotional needs of participants in a journey of self-realisation and identity (Limerick, & Nielson, 1994).

The literature canvassed here summarises the potential for site-specific theatre to be used as a tool for positive intervention in school culture, however, there is limited evidence of large scale, site-specific theatre being staged within schools. The reasons for this lack of literature regarding WSI style performance being created within a school may be linked to funding, insurance issues and the notion of what constitutes ‘appropriate’ school performance in a traditional sense. However, there is a growing body of research being done into the need to transform not only how we construct our school spaces (Malone, 2002, 2008; Malone, & Tranter, 2003; Smith, & Sobel, 2010; Sobel, 2005), but how we as educators perceive the roles of these spaces within our communities (Dillon et al., 2006; Greene, 1999; Velkou, & Bottrell, 2011).

The origins of this research can be traced back to John Dewey, who was theorising about the importance of the inclusion of community spaces and culture in education over a century ago. He argued that if education is to be considered effective it must be contextual and connect the inside world of the school and its students, to the world outside a school in a reciprocated, authentic relationship. Dewey warned that the reverence for secondary experience in childhood came with the risk of depersonalising human life. He also maintained “the conceptions of situation and interaction are inseparable from each other” (Dewey, 1938, p. 43) and that schools would become irrelevant if they ceased to create meaningful engagement between students and their communities:
From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilise the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning at school. That is the isolation of the school – its isolation from life. When the child gets into the school room he has to put out of his mind a large part of the ideas, interests and activities that predominate in his home and in his neighbourhood (Dewey, 1900, p. 75).

Or later in Freire’s *Education as the practice of freedom*: “Our traditional curriculum, disconnected from life, centred on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking in concrete activity, could never deepen a critical consciousness” (Freire, 1973, p. 37). Critical consciousness represents things as they appear empirically, in a student’s surroundings and Freire believed this understanding of our environment in real time is essential if students are going to take critical action and instigate change to make their environment better (Freire, 1973), “Critical understanding leads to critical action” (Freire, 1973, p.44).

In David Sobel’s 2005 publication *Place-Based Education*, we see Dewey and Freire’s ideas extended through the definition of place-based education as characterized by the “pedagogy of community, the reintegration of the individual into her home ground and the restoration of the essential links between a person and her place” (Sobel, 2005, p. 2). Sobel argues that site-specific learning has the potential to create a reciprocated climate of respect and understanding where the student “becomes a resource and a productive asset to the health of a community and the community, in turn, recontextualises education and prepares the students for citizenship both locally and globally” (Sobel, 2005, p. 12). Furthermore, Sobel argues that schools might be the ideal place to re-connect young people with themselves and their communities:

Caught in the interior and electronically mediated world, they are losing touch with both the society of flesh and blood humans and the delicate natural world that supports our species… schools are one of the few places where it might be possible to rectify this problem (Smith, & Sobel, 2010, p. 8).
Wan-Jung Wang has researched the transformative potential of creating alternative public spaces through site-specific theatre in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Wang’s research draws on the work of ‘The Theatre Space Company’ founded in 1998; specifically, their performance work which invited the audience to “aesthetically re-experience” Hong Kong’s historical sites and form new relationships with old spaces (Wang, 2016). “The community theatre praxis thus shifted the settled idea of heritage sites and enabled them to be transported into a state of mobile definitions” (Wang, 2016, p. 44). Wang concluded the residents who participated in the site-specific, community performance took back ownership of public spaces which had been taken away from them “through commodified global transnational enterprises, national institutions, commercial mechanisms and class distinctions” (Wang, 2016, p. 42). Furthermore, through claiming ownership over public arenas through performance, the participants (who were from diverse backgrounds), created alternate public spaces where they could share concerns, communicate issues and foster understanding (Wang, 2016):

After performing and watching the performance, the participants and audience were able to share visions and negotiate certain shared cultural identities on the basis of the historicized cultural identities recovered and rediscovered during the performance. They could therefore reimage and reshape their future together (Wang, 2016, p. 51).

The emphasis here on working together to reshape community identity and developing communal goals, fosters a sense of worth for something larger, or greater than ‘self’. This method of community building has been explored by a number of other theorists including: Dewey, 1938, Orr, 1994 and Postman, 1996. Postman hypothesized that one of the main points of public education is to get teenagers to esteem something other than self; “a sense of responsibility for the planet is born from a sense of responsibility for one’s own neighbourhood. It is hard to imagine anyone who fouls his or her own nest would care very much about the tree in which it is lodged” (Postman, 1996, p. 100). This idea of place-based education and site-specific projects is not a simple-minded return to a mythical past “but a patient and disciplined effort to re-learn the art of inhabitation of the corporal world” (Orr, 1994, p. 170).

Dewey discussed the importance of connecting students to their external communities to give education meaning and purpose:
A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognise in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilise the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile (Dewey, 1938, p. 40).

*Every Experience Matters*, a report published by Karen Malone in 2008 highlights the benefits of children learning outside their traditional classroom environments in other areas of the school and community grounds and that by disallowing young people this access, “teachers and parents are denying children the opportunity to develop the skills and resilience that they need to be able to be safe and manage complex human environments” (Malone, 2008, p. 5). Malone’s report draws on international research on LOtC (Learning Outside the Classroom) and concludes that young people who engage in LOtC:

Achieve higher scores in class tests, have greater levels of physical fitness and motor skill development, increased confidence and self-esteem, show leadership qualities, are socially competent and more environmentally responsible (Malone, 2008, p. 4).

Malone also argues that LOtC also has benefits for the wider community, not just the individuals that inhabit the schools:

School grounds are a valuable resource. Their size, design, the features they contain and how they are utilised, managed and perceived by staff and students of a school can all have a significant influence on the life and work of a school and on the quality of education provided for the students... the grounds are symbolic; at a macro level, it represents the school and its place in the world, at a micro level the child and their place in the world (Malone, & Tranter, 2003, p. 289).

Policy makers are still talking about ways of successfully incorporating school curriculums with their school spaces to improve their quality of learning. The 2010 Environmental
Education Policy for NSW Schools outlines the importance of linking curriculum and learning experiences to external school spaces to improve spatial awareness and to encourage students and the community to interact with their environment in new ways (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2001). Andrew Harrison, Director of architecture and design company DEGW (named after the company’s founders Frank Duffy, Peter Eley, Luigi Giffone and John Worthington), in his paper *Space for Change: Educational Transformation and Building Schools for the Future* outlines the need for schools to become more compatible with the requirements of the students and communities for generations to come:

Schools are currently only used for about 18% of the total time available. There is scope for major re-thinking of use of space and time in education across schools and further education... Increase the use of the school beyond the normal school day and as boundaries between the school and the community are dissolving the locked gate will be a thing of the past (Harrsion, 2012).

Schools are logical venues to house community projects because every member of the community knows where their school is geographically located and how to gain access to the site if need be. For many members of society there is a stigma associated with ‘school’ depending on their personal associations with their own education; stigmas which can be dissolved through whole school community projects. Malone (2002) argues that young people are in an ambiguous zone in relation to space as they are often seen as a threatening ‘mob’ when gathered together in public spaces, and conversely, they can be seen as needing protection when in public spaces. She continues to argue that by allowing young people (who often don’t hold the power in communities and so can be seen as a minority group) to take up the central position in public spaces, site-specific theatre has the potential to create “highly visible and regulatory practises” (2002, p. 160) which challenge existing notions of public spaces.

Helen Nicholson in her book *Theatre, Education and Performance* discusses Henri Lefebvre’s theories about space and its definition and maintains that space is not a gap between two places. Rather, space is an organic place which holds different meanings for different people according to context and circumstance “These meanings are neither fixed nor objective, but continually negotiated in and through social practise” (Nicholson, 2011, p. 11).
She emphasises the need to view theatre as an effective tool for redefining meanings and purpose associated with school spaces through the introduction of symbol, image and metaphor. Nicholson claims it is the introduction of these theatre conventions which can disrupt the orderliness of school structures and in doing so, encourage staff and students to look beyond their institutional environment and “into their wider social networks of family, friendships and community” to clarify meaning (Nicholson, 2011, p. 12).

As Velkou and Bottrell argue in their 2011 research into the potential of NSW schools to build effective links between young people and their communities:

School-community partnerships have recently been reframed in educational policy as strategies for equity... School-community partnerships are envisaged as ‘transformational’, contributing to improved student outcomes in school and transitions from school (Velkou, & Bottrell, 2011, p. 229).

School – community partnerships/projects have the potential to create links and social inclusion for young people which can give their educational perception and experiences meaning which extends far beyond the immediate classroom context. Thus, the projects can make relevant a learning experience which is often seen as failing to address the collective needs and desires of an ever-changing youth community culture. Bottrell, & Goodwin suggest these desires are based on “opportunity, reciprocity, and participation” (p. 7) and need to become visible through the re-definition of tangible space and perceived space; actual and imagined, the combination of which can facilitate community connections:

Australian schools are expected and encouraged to form partnerships with their communities, yet the role of young people within these communities remains invisible within most schools. The importance of the community as the context in which young people live, the responsibilities that young people assume within the community and the potential for young people to help shape and lead partnerships within the community are mostly absent from the curriculum and from the language and operation of school-community partnerships (Bottrell, & Goodwin, 2011, p. 180).
Luis Moll’s ongoing research into the “Funds of Knowledge” suggests there is untapped potential for engaging students in their learning and school environment if teachers connect to the child’s world outside the limited context of the classroom and utilise this external knowledge to make learning authentic. Connection to external communities should be framed by young people’s interests and questions rather than imposed by adults and contained inside classrooms (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 2001).

It is only when this school/community partnership and the transformation of space becomes visible and tangible, that real change can be measured within the school and community arenas and within the individuals that inhabit these platforms (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 2001).

**Transformation of Learning Culture**

**Whole School Projects**

One of the signs of passing youth is the birth of a sense of fellowship with other human beings as we take our place among them.

*Virginia Woolf, 1958*

Woolf devoted much of her life to observing and chronicling human nature. According to Tartell (2015) many of Woolf’s texts imply that the *process* of working together often transcends the final effect of unity itself. By highlighting the potential for unity, rather than the actual achievement of unity itself, Woolf suggests that this unfixed process allows for the possibility of a stable social identity (Tartell, 2015). Through Woolf’s 1958 quote this section of my literature review begins to investigate the process and potential of whole school projects and their value for young people and school communities.

For the purpose of this study, I define whole school projects as projects that invite the staff, students and adjacent community members to collaborate in communal efforts towards a common goal. An example of which is the National Partnerships Program; a partnership between commonwealth and state governments where 1.5 billion dollars was injected into more than 780 NSW government, Catholic and independent schools to achieve economic and
social reform across health, homelessness, early childhood, educational and vocational training. The outcomes of this program are currently being researched and will not be available for review until early 2018. Initial findings from the independent evaluation of the program being conducted by The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation conclude schools must take a whole school approach to student outcomes and implement an increase in teacher collaboration if they are to improve student behaviours and results (CESE, 2012). This program was instigated Duruga High School with mixed results; discussed in the findings chapters of this study. However, this literature review is focused on whole school projects which have evidence of being positive for the school and communities in which they took place.

One example of a whole school project dissolving boundaries and providing access and empowerment to a community can be found in Whitwall, Tennessee. The Whitwall area is predominantly Christian Anglo-Saxon and is a low socio-economic community. The 1600 residents of Whitwall are well aware that their town is famous for giving birth to the theories of “Divine Creation” and the “Ku Klux Klan” (Roberts, 2004). In 1998, teachers Sandra Roberts and David Smith from Whitwall High School, began a middle school project to teach children “what happens when intolerance reigns and when prejudice goes unchecked” (Roberts, 2004).

The middle school project asked the students to research the Holocaust in World War II Nazi Germany and to find a way to commemorate the six million Jewish people who lost their lives during Adolph Hitler’s Regime. The students discovered Norwegians wore paper clips on their collars during the War as a form of silent protest and so decided to collect six million paper clips to “signify the lost souls” (Fab, & Berlin, 2004). The project gained international acclaim and attracted media attention and support from survivors, celebrities, politicians, citizens and students. The entire school and its community became involved in the counting of the paper clips and chronicling the letters which arrived with every paper clip donation. The community organised an authentic Nazi transport car to house the paper clips and serve as a memorial. They also constructed gardens and created sculptures to commemorate not only the innocent people that were executed during the second world war, but to mark the strength of spirit and level of commitment of the Whitwall school community in a project which continues to operate to this day. The ‘Paper Clips Project’ also inspired a documentary entitled “Paper Clips: Changing the World one classroom at a time” (Fab, & Berlin, 2004)
which directors Joe Fab and Elliot Berlin credit as the most important project they have ever worked on:

It was an incredibly rich experience for me; much greater than any other project that I've ever been on. You can't go to Whitwell and interact with those children or the other people in the town and not be deeply affected... They are doing what I think we all want education to do (Fab, 2012).

Fab lists two main reasons why he feels this film is important: "It matters to me on the level of people being open to each other regardless of their background and orientation in life. The second area is what it says about what's possible in education" (Fab, 2012).

The paper clip project based in Tennessee has also inspired similar projects in schools all over the world for example: the ‘Classroom Holocaust Museum’ in Senkovec Primary School, Croatia and ‘The Paper Clips Extension Project’ in Herring Cove Junior High School, Nova Scotia Canada. The work of a small Tennessee community continues to provide inspiration to young people everywhere:

Their teachers are bringing them up with a great level of responsibility and helping them grow as citizens of the planet. They live a set of values that they are being taught by their parents and by the school (Fab, 2012).

Other examples of whole school projects redefining school cultures and inspiring their surrounding communities to evoke change include the ‘ruMAD?’ or ‘Are You Making a Difference’ programs Australia, whose mission entails being “a toolkit that enables young people to lead social change and become active citizens. It is focused on values and led by students, but benefits whole communities... it is now widely accepted that connecting student-led learning to the community benefits both the learner and the community” (Zyngier, 2012). The ruMAD? program was developed and piloted in Victoria in 2001 by Dr David Zyngier and Clare Brunner whose research into improving engagement for young people in low socio-economic areas led them to invite “educators to look at their teaching practice and how they, and their students, get connected to the real world” (Zyngier, 2012).

I have found that students most at-risk of failure, from socially, culturally and economically disadvantaged conditions are the least likely to be exposed to
intellectually challenging and relevant material. My considerable experience and research has shown that these students are more likely to be engaged through ‘productive and reciprocal pedagogies’ that draw on students ‘real life’ concerns and enable them to have more control of their lives and be connected to a more participatory social vision of society. The ruMAD? program is firmly grounded and based on these pedagogical understandings (Zyngier, 2012).

ruMAD? has been recognised by policy makers as an exemplar of effective student participation (Black et al. 2009; Keamy et al. 2007; Manefield et al. 2007). When fully implemented, it shapes pedagogical practises and furthers the school’s connections to its community. To date, ruMAD? Has been adopted by more than 150 Australian schools, many of them serving disadvantaged communities (Bottrell, & Goodwin, 2011, p. 178).

One example of a ruMAD? program at work is in Rokeby High School, Hobart, Tasmania. The school is a small school of only two hundred students in an area of high unemployment and relative poverty. The school is classified as amongst the twenty-five ‘most needy’ schools in Tasmania and has had attendance and retention levels well below the state average. (Zyngier, 2012). However, rather than accept that this was the reality of a school in a low socio-economic area, the staff at Rokeby set about making changes to the school culture through a process of greater community involvement to address these issues. Each class began a different project to address a regional, national or international charity. From ‘Litterbusters’ in their playground to raising funds for the ‘Firefly Children’s Homes’ in Nepal, the children included community awareness and responsibilities in their curriculum and consciousness and so became more engaged with their individual and thus, communal identities. The role and purpose of their school changed and their collective character developed in distinct ways that continues to reflect improvements in engagement and retention across all Key Learning Areas. A quantitative study completed by the school reported statistics where students who were surveyed in 2007 then again in 2010 reported:

- I have made a difference in my local community (from 34.3% to 65.4%)
- I enjoy going to school (from 73.1% to 92.3%)
- I like living in my community (from 83.6% to 100%)’

(Zyngier, 2012).
These whole school community projects are compelling examples of endeavours which began in classrooms and grew to include their communities; local and beyond.

Tony Vinson in his 2007 report *Dropping off the Edge* acknowledges the direct links between strong social cohesion and healthy communities by measuring such communal qualities as: “affinity, shared identity, intensity of interaction, reciprocity, trust and informal social control or the collective desire to do what is right for our own communities” (Vinson, 2007). The literature suggests that Australian schools are taking steps to include community building in their school charters, but on a case-by-case basis. A significant change in policy needs to occur if these kinds of projects are to become an integral part of our school curriculums:

Australia needs a policy environment that recognises the relationship between the largely unconnected agendas of social inclusion, community capacity-building, education and youth participation. Beyond this simple recognition, it needs a series of policy mechanisms together in the daily work of schools (Bottrell, & Goodwin 2011, p. 181).

As argued by Richard Elmore (1995) in his work on the principles of practise and regularities of schooling, schools and teachers aren’t usually open to change. Teachers aren’t fond of observing students in the process of learning and instead, are set up to treat students as objects of instruction. He argues that significant changes are required in the way curriculums are structured to accommodate deeper, authentic learning including: “Organised inquiry by students in the world outside the school, deeper teacher engagement in the sources of knowledge that students bring to the classroom, and the development of new forms of classroom activities” (Elmore, 1995, p. 373).

Furthermore, he states “translating principles of practise into organisation and policy requires changing traditional solutions to these problems” (Elmore, 1995, p. 373). The literature reviewed here provides substantial evidence as to the necessity for this kind of innovative change in an endeavour to create an effective education system within its environment. As Anyon (2006) highlights, school, family and community are intrinsically connected and equally responsible for each other. To assume one can function effectively without the other functioning effectively is ludicrous. She states the term policy alignment is not (as is often thought) the fit between education mandates issued by various levels of government and

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bureaucracy, but the fit we would seek is “between neighbourhood, family and student needs and the potential of educational policies to contribute to their fulfilment” (Anyon, 2006, p. 56). Anyon proposes a world where each of us is responsible and accountable for the other. Chawla and Cushing (2007) discuss the importance of encouraging students to develop reciprocated responsibility and the idea of the “common good”:

Engaging young people in the democratic processes, means enabling them to come to their own decisions based on the information they gather and the discussions they share. It means helping them to seek the common good despite gaps in knowledge and diversity in perspectives, acknowledging that their decisions need to be responsive to consequences and open to revision. Defending young people’s right to navigate these processes is equivalent to defending the role of schools to prepare students for authentic democratic citizenship (Chawla, & Cushing, 2007, p. 10).

It is through this belief in the common good young people are able to “link praxis to thoughts of a better world” (Allsup, 2003, p. 163) in which their opinion matters and they are valued members of their society capable of reflective ethical thinking. “Students must be given opportunities to choose to be persons of integrity, persons who care” (Greene, 1995, p. 4) and educators, parents and community members have a duty to provide those opportunities for all young people.

Conclusion

The literature surveyed here examines the theory and research, both historical and contemporary, which has informed the context for my study into site-specific, community modelled theatre in schools. It does this by examining the world of Generation Next and trying to ascertain what engages and disengages them with school and community. Through considering ‘personal transformation’, the literature in the first section of my review concludes Generation Next craves control, connection and confirmation in order to create identity and meaning. It looks at the arts as a possible avenue to nurture these desires for individual identity and democracy, and as a vehicle through which to foster personal transformation.
The second section of this review entitled ‘physical transformation’ focuses on the essence of site-specific theatre and the connection between public space and personal identity. It concludes the conundrum of youth in public spaces being perceived as potentially dangerous or ‘risky’, yet also needing protection or being ‘at risk’, could be solved by giving young people control of their schools’ ‘safe’ public spaces through theatre. This process could potentially redefine the school’s spaces as public forums, thus redirecting the public perception of their local school and in doing so, change existing personal connections to these institutions. This ‘physical transformation’ would see a radical inversion of an established power base (if only temporarily) with enormous potential for the transformation of the role and identity of students in schools and the role of schools themselves.

Finally, the third section of this review examines the ‘transformation of learning culture’ by discussing successful community projects and the positive effects of these projects on young people and their communities. It concludes that young people want an opportunity to give back to feel a sense of worth and purpose, and that without these opportunities they risk becoming disconnected from their education, and from the notion of personal and communal democracy and social justice.

There is a gap in our current knowledge regarding how whole school, site-specific, community theatre can be used as a catalyst for change within an educational framework, both on a personal and communal level. My research fills this gap by providing evidence from one specific case on the nature of this change by analysing the transformations undergone by the staff, students and community members who took part in the whole school, site-specific community theatre piece The Journey. This review suggests change needs to be instigated if we as educators are to keep pace with an ever-evolving youth culture (Rosen, 2007) situated in an organic, evolving world (Ewing, 2010a, 2010b).
CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLGY

This aim of this study is to investigate the effect of a large-scale, site-specific piece of theatre in a high school framework. The study employed qualitative research and a single case study approach to answer the central research question: *Does site-specific, community theatre create change in an educational framework and how is this change demonstrated?* The site-specific theatre piece central to this research was called *The Journey* and the educational framework is a small public high school in NSW called Duruga High School (pseudonym).

A ‘case’ has been chosen deliberately for study here due to its unique character and locality; (Saldaña, 2009), and as the whole school arts event contained specific teaching/learning parameters that were unique and integral to its success, a case study shows a “strong sense of time and place and a commitment to the overwhelming significance of a localised experience” (Freebody, 2003, p. 80). A case study is specifically suited to an arts experience because a performance is a non-reproducible experience where a unique set of social relationships become a single unit of experience capable of providing the foundation for analysis (Carroll, 1996, p. 77). Gröschel (2015) argues qualitative research into audience response evokes a trace of the performance and, in turn is a trace in itself; two different but related experiences… the reflective experience next to the original experience is essential, exciting and important (Gröschel, 2015, p. 265).

Furthermore, I want to examine the consequences of *The Journey* as an action that has produced a new intention (Shulman, 1996). The ‘action’ in this case study is the large-scale, site-specific performance *The Journey*, as, at the time of the performance, it was a ‘bounded entity’ which was unique in location (Duruga High School), content and style (Yin, 2012, p. 6). The ‘intention’ being the reactions of the study participants to the phenomenon and any by-products of change that can be attributed to these reactions. The research question presumes the educational framework (Duruga High School) used as a backdrop for this study required change to work more effectively as an educational institution, and so will investigate to what degree *The Journey* may have influenced this change. The analysis involves a descriptive case study where a number of key informants are considered jointly to explore a phenomenon (site-specific performance) because “understanding them will lead to a better understanding, and perhaps better theorising about a still larger collection of cases” (Stake,
This is not to say I am generalising as a researcher and pre-supposing that all site-specific theatre will work the same in all schools. However, understanding the particulars of a case allows us to engage in a theorisation of a field or phenomena more broadly, therefore providing a framework for further research on similar arts events (Stake, 2005).

The responses to this site-specific event were canvassed through multiple perspectives including staff and students from the school where the site-specific performance was based; and audience members who saw the site-specific performance. Once I began to collect my interview data, the answers given to my set questions began to reflect elements of school life which gave rise to new focus study areas. Responses relating to family bonds, Aboriginal culture and identity, and circus as an art form in the production, were included to offer different perspectives on the site-specific performance. These various perspectives provide a comprehensive picture from which to draw conclusions about the efficacy of *The Journey* in affecting Duruga High School’s learning culture. The school’s culture and operation are necessarily represented from multiple perspectives to give dimension to the findings. “Case study research assumes that examining the context and other complex conditions relating to the case being studied are integral in understanding the case” (Yin, 2012, p. 4).

**RESEARCH CONTEXT**

The making, performing and appreciating of *The Journey* provides the research context for the research project in that it included the whole school community. Their participation and response to the project generated data relating to the level of commitment by the school community at large.

The production was a challenging task; involving 450 students and 43 staff members, *The Journey* was difficult to successfully create within a school. The study is also challenging as it is difficult to analyse and measure the effect of the performance; largely due to the huge number of participants in the performance work. The performance was produced by me as director, artist and educator. No actual research was conducted during the performance rehearsal or production; the research for this study began after June 2013.
At the outset of my study, I considered quantitative research as my chosen mode to adequately canvass the opinions of such a vast number of participants through structured surveys, statistics and analysis. However, upon further reflection on the nature of *The Journey*, I opted for qualitative research to explore the quality of the experiences of participants and to understand how individual perspectives were formed and transformed through participant involvement in *The Journey*. I wanted to take a holistic, comprehensive and dynamic approach to the study of the complex relationships at work within my selected phenomenon (Corbin, & Strauss, 2015, p. 4) a NSW Public High School; Duruga High School.

**The School**

The context for the enquiry is Duruga High School\(^8\); a comprehensive rural high school established in 1988 on the South coast of NSW. The school’s feeder area has a population of 10,845 and has a ‘Socio-Economic Index for Areas’ or SEIFA score of 906; making it one of the largest socio-economically disadvantaged areas in the region.\(^9\) Income levels in the area are low to medium on average, with higher than average rates of unemployment and families receiving government benefits (NSW Department of Education. 2012 report on Duruga High School National Partnerships on Low SES School Communities-Situational Analysis Report, 2010).

Duruga High School’s population of 678 students and 45 teachers features a very broad socio-economic background. However, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are over represented; with 21 students in the special education program and approximately 100 students identifying with the Indigenous community.\(^10\)

**The Performance**

The performance central to this research took place from the 25\(^{th}\) to the 28\(^{th}\) of July; Week 2, Term 3, 2012. No formal research took place during this performance; however, I will outline

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\(^8\) Duruga working as a pseudonym which means “falling star” in local aboriginal dialect.

\(^9\) SEIFA is an instrument used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to establish the socio-economic status of a region and is derived from attributes such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, jobs in relatively unskilled occupations and variables that reflect disadvantage rather than measure specific aspects of disadvantage. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

\(^10\) More information on Duruga High School can be found in Chapter 4 of this thesis ‘Context for Study’
the production design as it plays an intrinsic part in understanding the methodology selected for analysis.

A case study based on a large-scale, site-specific performance that involved the whole school would ordinarily be classed as “community theatre”, and there are several examples of similar work existing in communities (see chapter 2). *The Journey* was a celebratory piece of community theatre based on Homer’s *The Odyssey* that was designed to be both physically and metaphorically a journey for the school’s inhabitants and the community within which it resides.

The evaluation of the performance project pre-supposes the knowledge that *The Journey* was in ‘promenade form’ and asked the audience to move through the school grounds. The audience experienced different scenes in different locations, thus seeing the school as a series of stages, not classrooms. Mason (1992) argues that this kind of promenade theatre has the potential to redefine a space that is not always associated with whole school communication and unity: “The audience not only has to make the effort, it also has to place considerable trust in the performers because it may be transported away from familiar surroundings with no easy possibility of opting out” (p. 145). This is largely why this style of theatre evoked such powerful reactions from the study participants and inspired this research.

Every faculty, and thus every student and teacher in the school, was asked to be involved in the performance in a way that incorporated their individual strengths and area of speciality within class time; rather than conforming to one central art form or style, difference was both embraced and encouraged. This level of whole school participation required a significant shift in the organisational and social thinking at a school and departmental level.

For example:

1) **CAPA**: Students were involved in drama, dance, music and art throughout every phase of the production.

2) **Maths**: Students designed and created three dimensional lanterns through geometry unit for lantern procession.

3) **English**: Students consulted in preliminary script stages and wrote “Journey” based Haiku poems for lantern decoration.
4) **Industrial Arts:** Students researched, designed and constructed historically correct armour and props for the performance.

5) **Physical Education:** P.E. students were asked to research Ancient Greek Philosophers/Scientists/sports and play out these characters in the ‘market place’ and Classical Greek Olympics.

6) **Science:** The science department provided special effects (e.g.: smoke/dry ice/animals for atmosphere, etc). Also, the catering for the show contained crops which came from the Agriculture Department and had been grown by students.

7) **Circus:** The school has run a successful in-school circus program “Clyde Circus” for eight years and included a large representation of this work within the site-specific performance; including aerial work, fire performers, adagio performers, acrobats, stilt walkers and manipulation artists.

Initial consultations with the school’s Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer, generated suggestions for production/performance areas to include traditional Aboriginal culture and the newly created medicine plants/bush tucker gardens constructed on the school grounds. The Aboriginal students who wished to be involved in *The Journey* were encouraged to participate in all and any areas of production and performance and had the added opportunity of writing and participating in cultural installations for performance at intervals throughout the lantern procession. These installations took the form of traditional art, dance, music and living sculpture with an Indigenous smoking ceremony[^11] performed by local Aboriginal Elders being included in the procession process.

Members of the local community were also asked to be included in the whole school project in the form of volunteers to aid in prop and costume construction, catering supplies and assistance, sponsorship and promotion/publicity and support by attendance.

The other areas of the production were budgeted for and appropriate time allocated by various faculty teachers. The staff members involved in directorial roles were worked into teams and continued to be consulted about their designated section of the whole school project via emails and weekly meetings regarding progress, development and commitment.

[^11]: A smoking ceremony is one of the most significant ancient ceremonies performed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The ceremony involves smouldering native plants to produce smoke which is believed to have healing properties and the ability to ward off evil spirits ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erJaQ_b09zI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erJaQ_b09zI))

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This rigorous communication process was vital to effectively monitor such a wide variety of producers and section administrators, and ensure everyone was moving towards the completion of the project, *The Journey*.

When the performance concluded, key informants for the case study were identified (after SERAP\(^\text{12}\) and the University of Sydney Ethics Approval\(^\text{13}\), approved 21\(^{st}\), June, 2013) according to their role within the production and within the school community. These informants provided the foundations from which to gather research data to effectively form an understanding of *The Journey* and its effects on the individual participants and their surrounding community.

**The Researcher**

Prior to working at Duruga High School, I trained and worked as a physical theatre and circus director and performer and so have a strong foundation in this area of the arts as a means of expression and understanding. My disposition to this particular kind of theatre comes through years of exploration of this art form and through witnessing its potential for the establishment of physical identity and connection amongst its participants.

With regard to *The Journey* as a work of site-specific, physical theatre; by participating in the project as a director, producer and performer I have developed a firsthand, empathetic understanding of the process of participation and development throughout my study. In particular, the inversion of previously established ‘power relationships’ and long-standing beliefs regarding educational hierarchy in educational spaces and their communities (Finley, 2005). I have worked at Duruga High School for fifteen years and so I have become immersed in the culture of the environment which provides the context for my study. It was this understanding which led me to think this project (*The Journey*) and its effects on the participants would be a substantial foundation for a qualitative investigation. I noticed the immediate reactions to the whole school arts project of the school’s inhabitants and was encouraged to further investigate the legacy of these responses through qualitative research.

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\(^{12}\) SERAP or State Education Research Approvals Process is a process which must completed through the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities, and in accordance with the National Statement of Human Ethics, before any research can begin undertaken in New South Wales Schools.

\(^{13}\) The professional Sydney University Ethical process and standards had to meet satisfactorily before any participants were approached to participate in the study.

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Every step of the ‘art-making’ process during *The Journey* was developed in collaboration with staff, students and community members. This collaboration is relevant to the study as it established a working relationship of reciprocated trust and understanding which opened up communication channels; channels which were utilised through the interview process. Epstein et al. (2006) argues that this relationship is particularly relevant in a school context were the students being interviewed are often scared to be honest in their responses for fear of getting the answer ‘wrong’ and are often intimidated by adult authority (Epstein et al., 2006). I approached my research with an attitude of courtesy and respect and attempted to establish and maintain the working relationship recommended by Saldaña (2011) of “comfort, security and equity” (p. 39). Saldaña argues sometimes the hierarchical nature of interviewer and interviewee can create an underlying politic where the researcher is deemed as the ‘expert’ and so the respondent is afraid to get the question incorrect in an interview situation.

However, due to the collaborative nature of *The Journey*, where I had been part of the artistic process from its foundations and though I played the part of the director in the production, the staff and students in the production were treated as experts in their fields. They were encouraged to have input into every aspect of the production process; thus breaking down the traditional director/performer hierarchy. As the barriers of authority were somewhat broken down through a shared artistic experience, the process of the participants in the study was explored, recorded and analysed through a critically reflective approach to qualitative case study research:

> The overall purpose of qualitative research is to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or the product) of mean making and describe how people interpret what they experience... the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis and the product is richly descriptive (Merriam, 2009, p. 14).

I wanted to design a research project that would be richly descriptive to investigate if *site-specific, community theatre can create change within an educational framework and how can this change be demonstrated*.  

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RESEARCH DESIGN

Graph 1 (page 52), demonstrates the chronology of the research project framed by *The Journey*. The performance was undertaken and recorded. Data based on reactions regarding the whole school performance was then gathered, evaluated and synthesised through participant informants in the research project and the participation of their respective friends and families. I interviewed 15 staff members, 10 students, 7 community members and the members of 3 different family groups (2 families had 3 members interviewed and one family had 2 members interviewed). A total of 40 people were interviewed for my study. Each study participant took part in a one-hour interview (approximately) which was then transcribed and analysed for themes and patterns. Archival research regarding the performance was collected in the form of photographs, recordings and local media, and lastly, quantitative data was collected via the school’s data base and then used to crystallize (Ellingson, 2008; Janesick, 1998; Richardson, 1994) findings regarding the project, *The Journey* and its effect on the school’s learning culture (see data analysis section of this chapter for further details on how research data was coded and analysed).

As my data came from a variety of sources and in a variety of forms, crystallization became my preferred approach for data analysis. Laurel Richardson (1994) coined the term ‘crystallization’ as an approach to qualitative data research which encourages three-dimensional data analysis through collecting data from a multitude of places and in a variety of forms. It includes creative forms of representation to tap into deeper thinking (Larrinaga-Gonzalez, 2011; Richardson, 1994).

(Crystallization) combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach... crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know (Richardson, 1994, p. 522)

Richardson’s later research broadens her work into the successful use of crystallization as a research tool through what she calls CAP or Creative Analytical Processes Ethnographies (Richardson, & St. Pierre, 2008):
In CAP ethnographies, researchers draw from literary, artistic and scientific genres, often breaking the boundaries of those genres as well… In CAP texts, we have moved from plane geometry to light theory, where light can be both waves and particles (Richardson, & St. Pierre, 2008, p. 963)

Graph 1 *The Journey* Research Design.

**Case Study Methodology**

This project takes the form of a case study where a number of key informants and other data collection methods have been used to jointly to explore a phenomenon (Stake, 2005). The case study method is the most appropriate research instrument for this study to effectively examine the contention that “site-specific theatre works in schools” as the phenomenon - *The Journey* as site-specific theatre, is indistinguishable from its context- Duruga High School (Yin, 1993). This form of qualitative research is also the most appropriate for this study as the case study is valued as a unit that permits in-depth examination from which to learn as much as possible about this unique phenomenon (Saldaña, 2011, p. 8). This case was chosen
deliberately because of “its unique character, thus presenting itself as a rich opportunity and exemplar for focused study” (Saldaña, 2012, p. 9). The case study was conducted within the cognitive anthropology domain, “which studies people’s perspectives as organised in schemata and categories of meaning are inter-related to each other” (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 48). Cognitive Anthropology is the study of human cognition in cultural contexts (Kronenfeld et al., 2011) and research conducted in this domain is descriptive in nature, (not predictive); and according to D’Andrade (1995), this domain is concerned with cultural knowledge; which in turn is embedded in words, stories and in artefacts. Furthermore, knowledge which is accessed via this cognitive anthropological domain is predominantly communal in nature and is shared between groups. Cognition is investigated both as content (e.g. knowledge) and process (e.g. reasoning) within its cultural context and is primarily concerned with what kind of behaviours and relationships have resulted through engaging through cognition (Giovanni, 2011). As the research participants in this study represent a number of different groups, but have reacted to the same single performance event, this domain is particularly appropriate for my research design.

Another key element relevant to this study is that research completed in the cognitive anthropological domain seeks to increase the validity of other qualitative research methods (for example ethnography) by using “interview techniques and analytical processes to bring out native categories of thought instead of imposing the analyst's own cultural system on the data” (Colby 1996. p. 211). As many of the study participants were already known to me and knew they were not alone in participating in the study and responding to my research questions, they tended to make reference to each other and shared experiences throughout the data collection process. Particularly in the family section of my research where all questions pertain to reacting to each other’s participation in school and community life.

**Participant Sampling**

The contextual conditions which provided the spatial and temporal dimensions for the case study existed inside Duruga High School and its surrounding community. Therefore, the coded analysis of the data collected from the staff, students and community members about *The Journey* and its impact on the learning culture of Duruga High School, work as embedded subcases within an overall holistic case (Yin, 2012, p. 7). The sub-cases include staff, students and community members.
Focus groups of staff members from varying faculties were targeted as informants for the collection of data and participant observation; as well as students from different age categories and socio-economic backgrounds. The sample groups for the key informants fall under four main categories:

1. 15 staff members of Duruga High School.
2. 10 students enrolled at Duruga High School.
3. 7 community members of the Duruga area and surrounding districts. (nb members of the first two categories are members of the school and therefore also members of the local community).
4. 3 families with two or more participants from The Journey.

School-based participants were selected purposively; I targeted students that represented different ages, nationalities, peer groups and socio-economic backgrounds. I had access to this information via the school’s data base and wanted to ensure I interviewed a broad cross section of the student community to gain multiple perspectives on the single arts event. The teachers involved in the study were also selected intentionally and were from different faculties and positions in the school and so provided a cross section of the school community. I also purposively approached the audience members to be study participants after they had seen the performance based on their relationship to students in the performance or their connection to the school through local community projects.

**Staff and Student Selection**

I approached staff members from different faculties and with different positions of authority to be represented as informants for the collection of interview data. Every faculty in the school is represented by at least one staff member; including administrative and support staff. I also purposively approached members of the senior executive of the school to participate as I wanted to include their perspectives in my data collection.

Students from different age categories, socio-economic backgrounds, race, religious and peer groupings were invited to be included in the study to ensure a variety of responses to set interview questions. This variation in participants is in accordance with the cognitive
anthropological domain which seeks to employ a cross section of ‘native’ responses to set research questions.

All staff and students were approached through a transparent process and were informed of the nature and purpose of the study from the outset. The participants completed a participant permission form and took part voluntarily.

Community Member Selection

Community responses were also canvassed, and these views are outlined in the findings chapters of this study. I identified audience members who had an existing relationship with someone who had performed in the production or had been involved with an existing community project and had some understanding of the arts culture that existed in Duruga High School. I approached these identified audience and community members after SERAP\textsuperscript{14} and Sydney Ethics Approval\textsuperscript{15} to seek their approval in my study.

The community chapters are further divided under the categories of community findings and family findings. These sub-headings emerged early in the coding process as complex conditions which warranted separate data analysis due to the frequency of themes pertaining to these categories. After interviewing several staff who were involved in the production and listening to their responses which focused on the development of their relationships with their children (descendants) who had also been involved in the production, I purposively asked their children and partners to participate in my research. This area of family research brought a new dimension to my findings regarding the strengthening of family bonds through involvement in the project as represented by multiple members of the same family.

\textsuperscript{14} SERAP or State Education Research Approvals Process is a process which must completed through the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities, and in accordance with the National Statement of Human Ethics, before any research can begin undertaken in New South Wales Schools.

\textsuperscript{15} The professional Sydney University Ethical process and standards had to meet satisfactorily before any participants were approached to participate in the study.
Family Member Selection

The parents who had students directly involved in the school production were targeted for the collection of data and participant observation through school data base statistics and individual interviews.

The families interviewed for the study, had two or more family members directly involved in The Journey and had other significant relatives come and view the performance. The families included in this study classify themselves as “close”, however, this “closeness” was not a prerequisite for selection for families to participate in the study; rather a coincidental factor of these participating families.

Not all students involved in The Journey come from “close” family backgrounds and so the family model explored through Chapter 10 - Family Findings, may provide insights into the facilitation of connections and the re-alignment of ‘lifeworlds’ for other Duruga High School students involved in the project (e.g. featured students Robert and Matthew in Chapter 6 – Student Findings). The families of these particular students did not consent to being interviewed for the study and so they have not been included in the family chapter discussion.

The school’s culture and operation is necessarily represented from multiple perspectives through participate selection to give dimension to my research findings. “Case study research assumes that examining the context and other complex conditions relating to the case being studied are integral in understanding the case” (Yin, 2012, p. 4). The sub-categories of data findings including: staff, students, circus, Indigenous, community and family, are integral in providing a holistic understanding in answering the stated research question. The participant categories are sufficiently different from each other in terms of the challenges they faced and benefits they stated pre and post The Journey. By gathering opinions from multiple sources, I have increased the credibility and trustworthiness of my study by providing additional contexts for analysis (Saldaña, 2012, p. 76).

16 ‘Lifeworlds’ is a term which originates from German Philosopher Edmund Husserl in 1917, meaning “the only real world, the one that is actually given through perception; a source of self-evidence and verification” Husserl, E.
DATA COLLECTION

Each student was interviewed individually and confidentially so their answers were not influenced by people around them, and were digitally voice recorded, as opposed to video recorded, to alleviate any personal reservations about being filmed\(^\text{17}\). Saldaña argues that voice recording for individual interviews is sufficient as audio-visual equipment in individual interview situations can often make participants feel extremely self-conscious and uncomfortable (Saldaña, 2012, p. 38). 4 staff members asked to be interviewed in pairs to save time and 2 community members were interviewed together for the same reason.

Extensive field work was also undertaken as data in the form of: community responses, archival data and the collection of artefacts (photographs/performance video/media responses).

Individual interviews

Individual interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. I chose the interview as my central research tool as this data collection method is:

…an effective way of soliciting and documenting, in their own words, an individual’s or group’s perspectives, feelings, opinions, values, attitudes and beliefs about their personal experiences and social world, in addition to factual information about their lives. (Saldaña, 2012, p. 32)

The interview is an adaptive technique which can allow the researcher to follow up on ideas, responses, motives and feelings that may be conveyed through tone of voice, gesture or hesitation (Bell, 1999, p137). The interviews were semi-structured in nature and although they had a basic format, the interview design allowed the interviewee a certain degree of latitude within the framework to expand on their responses in narrative form, thus generating unexpected insights for further inquiry (Saldaña, 2012, p. 32).

\(^ {17}\) A number of participants stated that they would not consent to their interview being filmed for the purposes of this study. Some of the interview questions challenged pre-conceived notions as to the hierarchy of control and order within the school’s framework and though anonymity was stressed on the participant consent form, video was a difficult domain for some of my research subjects. Therefore, the interviews were not filmed at any stage.
My interviews were composed of open and closed questions and were positioned within the parameters of the projected central research question: *Does site-specific, community theatre create change in an educational framework and how is this change demonstrated?*

The questions asked during the individual interviews primarily diverged on each individual’s journey as a performer, educator/pupil and resident of the school community. Subcategories for the questions include:

- Participation roles and personal transformation through reflection and any obstacles to participation (external and internal).
- Personal and individual goals set and achieved through participation in whole school project.
- Evolution of learning process through participation in the whole school project.
- The transformation of the school’s environment/culture through participation in the whole school project.
- Evolution of community (in particular attitude and perception) through participation in the whole school project.
- Willingness to participate in replica projects in the future (legacy of project/study).

These subcategories are focused to help answer my research question in two parts:

1. Examining participants’ personal development through psychological, physical, and social relationships with other participants in the performance and with their surroundings (school and wider community).
2. To what effect did this personal development have on the learning culture of Duruga High School during the duration of *The Journey* and in the months succeeding the project?

Subsidiary questions to inform the in-school evaluation include:

- What was the participant’s role in the project?
- Did participants enjoy the rehearsal/ pre-production process? Why/why not?
- Which individual or communal obstacles/challenges did participants face during the rehearsal/ pre-production process?
- Describe personal achievements/goals successfully fulfilled through the process of *The Journey*.
- How has *The Journey* changed the participant’s attitude towards education/learning and behaviour within the school environment?
- How has *The Journey* changed the participant’s interactions with other staff and students within the school and wider community?
- How has *The Journey* changed Duruga High School?
- How would the participant like to change Duruga High School to make it a better place?
- How has *The Journey* changed the local community’s attitude towards Duruga High School?
- Would the participant be involved in another large scale, site-specific performance?

Photos were also introduced into the interview context and the research technique of photo elicitation (Clark, 1999) was employed. The photos from *The Journey* were offered to each individual study participant and they were then invited to choose which images appealed to them and place the images to one side for further discussion throughout the interview process. Photo elicitation interview technique or PEI was explored as visual research methodology as, according to Clark (1999), Clark-Ibáñez, (2003), Epstein, Stevens, McKeever,, & Baruchel (2006) and Saldaña (2012), PEI can be used effectively in an educational setting when working with children. Clark argues that “the verbal interview relies primarily on linguistic communication... this greatly limits what issues and questions the researcher can pursue... children seldom share information among themselves strictly through question and answer sessions” (Clark, 1999, p. 39). Clark also argues that the PEI technique allows young study participants to “autodrive” (p. 41) the interview and so reveal thoughts, behaviours and attitudes without adult prompting and feel as if they have maintained an element of control over the interview and share greater depth when discussing responses evoked by these visual images. It gives students the opportunities to “actively interpret their own experience” (Clark, 1999, p. 49) and produces valuable data which may not have been included in the initial research design.

Photographs encourage open conversations with students where the students can lead the discussion topics and fill in the gaps and talk of many things and people that may have not been included within the verbal limitations of set interview questions (Epstein et al., 2006, p.
9). “Visual and tactile prompts tend to stimulate rich response and can sometimes be more effective than questions alone” (Saldaña, 2012, p. 38). The photos I used during the interviews were based on images of the school’s physical environment before and after The Journey to induce reactions from the identified research participants regarding their transformed space and its evolved identity. The images were also of interview participants participating in The Journey to trigger memories and reactions of the shared performance experience.

The interview design was primarily chronological as I looked at each individual’s journey before, during and after the whole school project and how they were affected by The Journey as a process. Despite the listed interview questions, some participants decided to tell personal stories connected to The Journey or Duruga High School and its surrounding community. These descriptive stories were encouraged and recorded; therefore, the emergent themes for analysis were wider than first suggested by stated interview questions (set questions). This was particularly true when I interviewed members of the community. Their responses to the performance and the school culture were often retold through lengthy narratives; particularly when photographs were introduced to the interview technique.

All but two interviews took place in interview rooms in the school’s library and were approximately an hour in length. Two community interviews took place in the homes of the participants for convenience reasons; one was elderly and found travel difficult, and one lived out of town and preferred I went to them to gather data.

The interviews began in July, 2013 and were completed October, 2014. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

**Archival Research and Quantitative Data**

Archival research in the form of newspaper articles and correspondence regarding the whole school project, video of production and photographs of rehearsal, production process and performance, were analysed to elaborate and clarify case study data. The text and featured images were examined for positive themes pertaining to elements of the production and its impact on Duruga High School’s culture.
Statistics regarding student truancy and student reports based on behaviour were also extracted from the school database. These statistics are used in the staff findings chapter to give credence to the interview data which stated a decrease in truancy and incidences of detention during the rehearsal and performances of *The Journey*. These statistics, when used in conjunction with evaluations collected through the case study, helped create a distinct picture of the effect of *The Journey* on the school and community culture and its potential for measurable change/difference; particularly on student learning and engagement.

**ETHICAL ISSUES**

All participants in the study were informed of the nature and purpose of the study and embarked on participation willingly and voluntarily. As I participated in the project as a writer, director, performer, audience member (retrospectively) and then as a researcher post-production, it was vital the project participants were made aware of my various roles at the outset of the research project so as to maintain a climate of trust and honesty where fellow participants were endowed as ‘co-researchers’ and brought their own insights about the project to interviews and felt valued for their contributions to the research. The more participants that have ownership, the more change is possible (Taylor, 1996). However, this balance is delicate and must be monitored through “common sense and shrewd judgement” (O’Toole, 2006, p. 81) to effectively remain responsive, reflective and objective when viewing the whole project in its entirety.

Research participation required written consent, confidentiality and involved no physical or psychological harm. The parents/guardians of all students involved in the study completed a letter of consent form which outlined the research design, the fields of knowledge to be developed and how the data will be used, (e.g. stored, destroyed or returned) and that the results of the study will be published but without students’ names. The letter also provided the parent/guardian with an opportunity to withdraw their child from the study at any point during the research process.

The Indigenous study participants were interviewed within *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies*, AIATSIS, 2012. This document contains 14 principles grouped under the broad categories of rights, respect and recognition; negotiation,
consultation, agreement and mutual understanding; participation, collaboration and partnership; benefits, outcomes and giving back; managing research: use, storage and access; and reporting and compliance (Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies, AIATSIS, 2012).

As previously mentioned, I also acquired a State Educational Research Approval Process form, SERAP (appendix 1) on the 21st of June, 2013, from the Department of Education before commencing research at Duruga High School.

By meeting the professional ethical standards required by The University of Sydney, I protected the participants in the research and created an atmosphere of trust, transparency, respect and confidentiality, thus maintaining authentic and valid data. Information from the individual interviews was verified and reviewed by research participants and is kept in a lockable filing cabinet for on-going storage, analysis and coding. All e-information is stored under the University of Sydney’s specific e-information requirements and guidelines.

DATA ANALYSIS

All individual interviews were digitally transcribed. These interviews were then subject to pre-coding, where “codable moments” worthy of attention were highlighted as significant participant quotes that were ‘striking’; not only unexpected but also surprising, unusual or conceptually interesting (Boyatzis, 1998; Creswell, 2007). These ‘striking’ quotes or moments of observation provided the basis for the vignettes which appear at the start and end of each findings chapter. Each vignette highlights the individual journey of a study participant from each chapter and brings a personal dimension to the case study data included in this thesis.

The coding process was carried out manually and then code phrases were assigned to passages in the first cycle coding process (rather than mnemonics or reference numbers to avoid confusion during analysis). The first cycle coding method I used was elemental coding where the interview narratives were split by applying a “content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data to both code and categorize the data corpus” (Saldaña, 2012, p. 66).
Second Cycle Coding was also achieved manually, though the phrases were now given numbers due to the volume of passages included for analysis. The second cycle coding method I selected was structural coding where the first cycle segments where further grouped into patterns. The splitting of phrases created a more nuanced analysis and then these split codes were entered into a separate code book. This code book (or file) became essential as the number of codes accumulated rapidly and changed as analysis progressed. The emergent codes were recorded with a description and a brief data sample for reference. This book/list became my way of organising the data into major categories and sub categories. I began this process on NVivo software, however quickly returned to manual coding. A method which can be beneficial for small scale studies under thirty participants where “there is something about manipulating qualitative data on paper and writing codes in pencil that give you more control and ownership of the work. A literal perspective is not always possible on a computer’s monitor screen – after you feel the codes are well set then transfer them onto electronic file” (Saldaña, 2012, p. 22).

Once the first and second cycles of data coding were complete, the study design began to take shape. The emergent conceptual framework for the analysis of my data can be listed as follows:

1) Duruga Community (the socio-economics of the area; largely for context chapter and framework).
   a. Audience reaction to the production.
2) Physical transformation (of the school’s spaces).
   a. Physical transformation (of the body as a space).
3) Site-specific theatre (as a performance medium).
4) Change in perception of learning (traditional versus contemporary pedagogy, purpose of education. E.g.: as a university filter? To prepare for citizenship?
5) Change in perception of teachers (traditional roles).
   a. Change in perception of students (traditional value attributes and expectations).
6) Personal goals – transformation of individuals.
   a. Family; enhancement of personal links to the family as a unit.
7) Connection and engagement.
8) Whole school projects.
a. National Partnerships program.

9) Ownership, belonging, pride.
10) Arts in education.
11) Circus in education.
12) Technology in education.
13) The legacy of the project.
14) Teacher dissatisfaction.
   a. Student dissatisfaction.
15) Magic wand question – how can this school become a better place?

This framework was then narrowed to 5 key focus areas for closer analysis:

- **Participation roles** and personal transformation; including any obstacles to participation (external and internal).
- **Personal and individual goals.**
- **Evolution of learning process and the transformation of the school environment/culture.**
- **Evolution of community** (in particular, attitude and perception)
- **Willingness to participate** in replica projects in the future (legacy of project/study).

The collected findings were placed into chapter groups pertaining to staff, student and community responses. The student chapters were further grouped under circus students and Indigenous students and the community chapter was further sectioned under family. These divisions occurred due to the frequency of data pertaining to these sub-categories.

The different research paradigms including a case study based on data collected from key informants, archival data, and artefact collection, have ensured the successful crystallization of the data and convergence of all results (Anderson, 2012; Ely, 1996). Thus, identifying the “credibility, resonance, plausibility and transferability” of the research data collected (O’Toole, 2006, p. 128) and the effects of large-scale, site-specific, celebratory/community theatre within a school framework. The collected artefacts, particularly newspaper articles and collected letters from audience members, provide a précis of the wider public perception of the site-specific performance within the broader Duruga Community.
LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The benefits of understanding a school and its community, through working in the same place for an extended period of time, can provide many insights and advantages when working as a researcher. However, this immersion in the school’s culture also posed a number of limitations when gathering authentic research.

Price and Murnan (2004) argue that the limitations of a study are those characteristics of design or methodology that impact or influence the interpretation of the findings of the research (p. 66). The limitations of this study are a result of a number of design factors.

Firstly, I did not imagine my established relationship with the staff at Duruga High School would have an impact on the style of the recorded interviews. For example, when interviewing staff at the school, they often began talking to me as a colleague, “chatting” informally about the production and individual students, personal classroom stories regarding classroom management and select families in the community. Staff frequently discussed day to day issues that they felt they needed to “vent”, so often interviews contained a larger volume of data than I needed and not all of it was relevant. I had to use focusing questions to ensure I gathered the data relevant to my central research questions. I was relying on data from the staff to crystallise the findings of my research and so this relationship often meant the information was ‘off track’ and limited what I could discuss in the set interview time frame. Also, many staff struggled with the idea of anonymity when discussing school issues; particularly with regard to leadership and executive positions. Several stopped ‘mid-stream’ of consciousness to check the interview area for fear of reproach for what they had said. I presumed these hesitations were an indication of the controversial nature of the responses and the relationship many of the research subjects have with the other staff members at the school. I had to reassure several of my interviewees of the confidentiality of the interviews to get them to speak freely about their involvement with The Journey and other activities at the school. This process often stopped the natural flow of conversation that was occurring and often limited the interview responses from being fully realised.

Regarding the student interviews, the senior students were obviously comfortable talking to me about their experience in The Journey, as is indicated by the lengthy responses to the set questions and the openness with which they expressed their opinions. Many students were
moved to tears when discussing their memories of the performance; a response I was not expecting or prepared for. However, in contrast, many of the junior students were initially concerned about “getting the wrong answer” through their association with me as a teacher, as opposed to my role as a researcher. I had not foreseen this limitation in data collection and I had to change my interview technique and use closed questions to get these students to focus and begin communicating. This technique helped to overcome this research design obstacle (of too many junior students as research subjects) and consequently, narratives about their recollections based on supplied photographs from the show (PEI) flowed without reservation.

Most interviews took several minutes to establish a new relationship protocol where conversation flowed unreservedly and without fear of external surveillance or reprimand. In retrospect, though logistically difficult, perhaps conducting the interviews off school grounds may have elicited different responses from participants and overcome barriers to objective data collection.

The final observation regarding the design of my research project is the timing of the data collection. As all the interviews were conducted retrospectively, the data had the benefit of hindsight when the study participants were talking about the stages of development and various reactions to The Journey of the school’s community. The study participants could also discuss the legacy of The Journey school/community project for the Duruga Community. However, this timing also meant the collected data lacked the spontaneity and exuberance that was present in the school during the production run and this may have limited the nature of my data collection, (despite using photos of the production to evoke responses). It would therefore be beneficial to conduct further research during future school production/performance periods and compare responses.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, after having worked at Duruga High School for an extended period of time I felt compelled to create a large piece of site-specific theatre that was all inclusive; for staff, students and the community at large. The Journey was a theatrical ‘band-aid’ of sorts that
created an atmosphere within the school and the community that inspired me to conduct my own research into the effects of this kind of production in a NSW High School.

This investigation has taken the form of an extensive case study which crystallises the reactions of each category of participant in the production to provide an overall picture of the arts project’s effects and legacy.

Using qualitative research and the methodology of a single case study this thesis explores the central research question: *Does site-specific, community theatre create change in an educational framework and how is this change demonstrated?*

The following findings section is divided into internal community chapters: Staff, Student, Circus, and Indigenous Students, and external community chapters: Community and Family. These chapters explore different points of view regarding *The Journey*, using data which has been collected from multiple sources including: interviews, observations, archival evidence and quantitative statistics retrieved from Duruga High School’s data base. These various sources provide multiple contexts to enable an analysis of the effects of the site-specific performance *The Journey* on Duruga High School and its surrounding community.
CHAPTER 4 - CONTEXT FOR STUDY

DURUGA HIGH SCHOOL

The context for the enquiry is Duruga High School; Duruga working as a pseudonym which means “falling star” in local aboriginal dialect. It is necessary to outline the context for this study as the research takes the form of a single case study; the parameter for which is Duruga High School; not only the buildings (sites) themselves, (as the case centres around the effects of site-specific theatre), but also the community in which the buildings reside. The central research question hypothesizes about the effects of a site-specific event on Duruga High School and its feeder area (educational community/framework), therefore an understanding of this community is necessary if change is to be effectively measured.

Duruga High School is a comprehensive rural high school established in 1988, located on the south coast of NSW. The school’s feeder area has a population of 10,845 and relies on the industries of tourism, fishing, oyster farming, pastoral farming, forestry, retail services and manufacturing activities. It is also a popular retirement destination but has begun to attract young families seeking affordable housing.

The community has a recognised low level of socio-economic status and a ‘Socio-Economic Index for Areas’ or SEIFA 18 score of 906, which classifies it as one of the lowest socio-economically disadvantaged areas in the region. The over representation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds has direct implications for the education of the young people of the local community. As Tony Vinson highlights in Dropping off the Edge; the variables used to determine which students will ‘drop-out’ of school with an 80% accuracy include: “low socio-economic status, urban environment, parent dropped out of school, parent incarcerated, belief that events are externally determined, delinquency, disciplinary problems at school, truancy and pregnancy” (Vinson, 2007, p. 23).

Of the twelve teachers interviewed for my research, all (excluding the Principal) believed the school has a poor reputation in the local community: “when I say I work at Duruga High they

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18 SEIFA is an instrument used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to establish the socio-economic status of a region and is derived from attributes such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, jobs in relatively unskilled occupations and variables that reflect disadvantage rather than measure specific aspects of disadvantage. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).
give me a bit of a shrug or kind of look at me like I’m a second class citizen” (Carol, personal communication, November 4, 2013) and despite attempts to raise the community profile the school continues to be judged as unworthy for “top academic students…”.

Lorraine (personal communication, November 4, 2013) commented on the year 7 intake and noted them as particularly difficult: “60% of this year’s year 7’s are out of control. The teachers spend so much time disciplining the naughty kids, they can’t teach the kids that want to learn”

We miss out on too many good students. And that’s not an opinion. That is actually a fact. Parents don’t think Duruga High School offers any academic advantage or they’re worried about the social impact of the school on their children… it’s all about separating ‘my’ children from a certain class of child or person (Graeme, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

We are getting more and more behaviorally disturbed kids one way or another and kids with difficult backgrounds and sometimes, to keep yourself sane, in order to get through the lesson, you might be doing things that aren’t particularly educational but will keep them occupied… I asked a year nine girl if she would like to take home a novel and read to get ahead and she said ‘No. I’m not going to do that… my parents will laugh at me if I read’ (Steve, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

As a consequence of Duruga High School’s socio-economic profile, the school was targeted under the National Partnerships scheme in 2010 as a low socio-economic status school that could benefit from targeted programs designed to increase literacy and numeracy rates amongst its students. As a result of this targeting, the school received a $5000 ‘seeding grant’ to conduct a situational analysis prior to commencing the partnership, a ‘Higher Accomplished Teacher’ or H.A.T. appointed for 18 months to facilitate National Partnerships Programs, two educational para-professionals (one of these positions was an Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer), a National Partnerships Deputy Principal and funding for approximately $500 per student per year for two years. In addition to this, the school has been further identified in 2011 by the Regional Attendance Team as a focus school for improving poor attendance rates; and a whole school goal in 2012 was to increase attendance
rates from 87.6% to 89.7% in 2012, thus bringing the school into accordance with the state average (*Duruga High School Plan 2010-2012*).

The school did not achieve these results and the overwhelming response to the National Partnerships Program within the school has been one of dismay and disbelief at the mismanagement of funds and poor results left as a legacy of this particular departmental initiative. With the Deputy Principal blaming students and staff:

> I see a culture of low expectations where the students and the staff are willing to accept people not striving for their potential. Where the quality of learning is not as high as it should be and people are content with that (Graeme, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

While the staff held the H.A.T. program and the way it was implemented, responsible for the lack of improvement in literacy, numeracy, retention and engagement:

> I think the money was mismanaged. The people in charge – their goals did not seem clear and if they were, they were the wrong ones… we need smaller class sizes because then you can manage kids better to be able to engage them more and spend one on one time with them in order to catch them up or help them… I felt like the money could have spent in that way. It seems to me the money was spent on a couple of fancy rooms and a couple of fancy projects, some TPL19 which was just pushed aside… it wasn’t a lasting change. It was not carried through in a positive light (Ron, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

The data suggests the staff at Duruga High School believed the National Partnerships Program was a ‘quick fix’ program that was poorly instigated, with a narrow focus which failed to reach its intended ‘whole school goals’.

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19 TPL is an acronym for Teacher Professional Learning.
Technology at Duruga High School

Technology has been included in the context chapter as, during the time of this study, it was seen by the school’s executive as one of the main focus areas that needed funding if the school was to effectively engage its students in meaningful learning.

The school distributed laptops to all year 9 students in 2009 as partial fulfillment of the election promises made by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2007. The funding for this technology program ran for five years and now the school is preparing to move into a phase of BYOD or “Bring Your Own Device”. There were mixed sentiments about this development as many of the staff felt like they spent five years creating resources and building programs to incorporate the mandatory laptops and must now bypass this existing system to incorporate new and varied technologies.

I think getting rid of the laptops is a backward step, a stupid decision… staff were getting used to teaching with laptops. They’ve got good ideas, they’ve written a lot of stuff that we can deliver on laptops then suddenly they’re all gone so we have to find another way of delivering that – a backward step (Steve, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

There were also concerns about the equity of the BYOD program in a school with such a broad socio-economic background:

I’m concerned about what is going to happen with BYOD… so many families, it’s not that they don’t want it; they won’t be able to afford it. Kids will miss out because teachers will give them an assignment and expect they will be able to use the internet and there will be a group of kids who don’t have access to it (Mary, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

Students were also mixed in their responses to implementing a new system and their reactions to technology in the school are predominantly skeptical:

The laptops were never that fancy. It was another distraction in the classroom… I always had two screens open – one with a movie on that I was watching and
one with a few lines on it of the work we were supposed to be doing. Everyone does that (Matthew, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

I think those laptops we got were terrible. We had so much trouble getting them working in class it was such a time waster... I didn’t like that way of learning I thought it was really distracting (Eliza, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

Through my interviews it became evident that the executive of Duruga High School recognized technology as an essential tool for teaching and one that is necessary to effectively engage Generation Next in learning relevant to contemporary culture and global trends. However, 3 staff members thought it would become increasingly difficult to regulate classroom control with BYOD and it could potentially pose the risk of creating a distraction from their set lesson plan. As discussed here by one of the members of the school’s teaching staff:

I like technology. It’s got a lot of uses but unless we can control it it’s going to be detrimental to the learning that can go on in schools and it should be the other way around, it should be beneficial (Steve, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

Some teachers at Duruga High School, through the course of their interviews, commented on the potential for damage due to the reliance on technology in the students’ personal and social contexts and the need for a returned focus to corporeal communication in real time.

I know Facebook and all that sort of thing is communication but it's not that personal. It’s not getting to know someone really. Not connecting (Bob, personal communication, March 12, 2014).

Technology is making kids worse because they are not active enough. Their brains aren’t active anymore. And if there is a fight at school, immediately it’s on Facebook and it just goes viral. It’s sad. What kind of future are they going to have swearing and cursing and running each other down on the internet. It’s terrible (Loraine, personal communication, November 4, 2013).
Students at Duruga High School have also noticed the need for real experiences which foster communal communication, with an emphasis on the authentic, rather than the ephemeral:

The show was something real. I know the show was made up but we weren’t just talking about crap. I think we were talking about stuff that really mattered in life and that hardly ever happens anymore where we are all in something together (Lucy, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

These interviews provide insights into the attitudes of the staff and students of Duruga High School toward technology; and highlight how, during the time of this study, it was varied; some viewed it as a hindrance, some, a help. The majority of teachers and students stated technology is a useful tool for learning but only if it is used efficiently and kept “under control” (Steve, personal communication, November 4, 2013). Technology was introduced into Duruga High School to help engage students in their personal learning and to improve the whole school culture. As the responses to this program were so varied, it is useful to look at other programs that have run in the school, (also with mixed results).

The Arts in the Curriculum

As a direct consequence of the increased emphasis placed on technological advancements and their role in traditionally perceived “academic” subjects, many whole school days that had previously encouraged full school participation, for example the sports events and school productions, became participant only and student spectators were not allowed to attend these events as it might have impinged on their study time in the more “important” subjects. The creative and performing arts subjects have had reduced attendance and consideration, with only a small ongoing circus skills program available to a limited number of students (18) and dance, drama and music available as stage five and six electives. In the past five years any major performances have been staged away from the school in regional centres and so the probability of Duruga High School students viewing these performances has diminished due to travel difficulties. The emphasis within the school culture has increasingly become focused

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20 Stage five and six electives in NSW pertain to students in years 9, & 10, aged between 14-16 years (BOSTES, 2015)
on the improvement of literacy and numeracy results and an increase in the performance of the students in state and federal testing. Robinson (2006), in his lecture *Schools Kill Creativity*, maintained that by only valuing traditional academic abilities, schools become a protracted filter for university entrance and in doing so, undervalue and alienate many talented, brilliant, creative people and prevent these students from effectively engaging in the school environment and thus the society in which they reside.

Duruga High School previously had a very strong local performing arts culture. The in-school circus program was previously available to all students and a large-scale production was developed every second year with opportunities available to between 60 and 450 students, in dance, drama, music and circus skills. The largest of which was in 2003, involving 450 students and 43 staff members. However, the emphasis has gradually shifted back into more traditionally “academic” subjects and the interfaculty competition has become a key component of student subject selection. The school can increasingly be seen as a market place where all the ‘stall holders’ are competing for patronage and funding in order to maintain their subject’s place in the school hierarchy. According to theorists like Robinson (2006) and Anderson (2012), this interfaculty competition is not unique to Duruga High School and is increasingly common in other High Schools nationally and globally.

It is this idea of the school as a “market place” (Anderson, 2012, p. 12) that has been challenged by this study, as teachers across every faculty in Duruga High School worked together simultaneously and collectively towards common goals during the pre- and post-production of *The Journey*.

There are numerous entrenched beliefs and barriers against the arts as an effective tool for student enrichment (Anderson, 2012; Robinson, 2006) that have also been challenged by this study based on *The Journey* and the background research it has been designed upon. This research includes the 1999 Fiske report *Champions of Change* and The 2005 *National Education and the Arts Statement*; a joint resolution by both the Cultural Ministers’ Council (CMC) and MCEETYA21, which aims to set down a vision for the future of education and the arts in Australia. This statement recognises schools that value creativity and innovation lead

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21 MCEETYA is an acronym for The Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs and was formed in 1993 by the Council of Australian Governments.
the way in cultivating the well-informed and active citizens Australia’s future demands. Furthermore, the statement highlights the importance of the arts in giving students opportunities to both appreciate and be active participants in Australia’s vibrant cultural life, which encourages the growth of flexible individuals who can communicate effectively and cope with change.

With this context in mind (both local and national), the following chapters will illustrate the findings of the immediate and external communities of Duruga High School, to summarise the effects of the whole school arts project *The Journey* on its environment, people and culture. The findings focus on the central research question: *Does site-specific, community theatre create change in an educational framework and how is this change demonstrated?* The term change is used in the research question to expressly represent moving from one state or form, to another; the extent and sustainability of which is then further explored through the presented findings. The term change does not imply that something is ‘broken’ and needs ‘fixing’, rather that something requires augmenting to work in a more effective manner.

The recurring themes regarding various types of change discussed by the study participants emerged through data collection and coding. These themes featured what respondents recounted as being significantly attributable to *The Journey* whole school production and can be grouped under the following sub-headings: Personal Development, Physical Environment, Community Perception, the Transformation of Learning Culture and Arts and Engagement. The findings chapters begin by looking at staff responses as a framework to the internal politics and procedures of Duruga High School retrospectively before *The Journey* and then post production. I decided to include the staff of Duruga High School as a featured research group as they offer a unique perspective on the engagement of students at the school and the relationship of the school to the external community. I also consider the wellbeing of the staff of Duruga High School an integral part of the educational framework which serves as the context for this study.
CHAPTER 5 - STAFF FINDINGS

Treading Water...

It is 8am and Bob is busy bustling at his desk, organising the staff Christmas party. Despite fluctuating numbers, he continues to promote the staff Christmas party every year... and celebrate staff birthday parties, barbeques, christenings, anniversaries, weddings... Bob oversees the school’s social committee and even though his rank has been elevated to that of head teacher, he sees himself as ‘one of the minions’. Bob views himself as a hard-working teacher who believes that just talking to another teacher in an informal atmosphere makes his job more tolerable. In Bob’s opinion, sharing stories and experiences helps make sense of a job that sometimes makes no sense, particularly when dealing with the chaotic, troubled world of many students at Duruga High School. He has taught at Duruga High School for fifteen years and he believes teachers are expected to be invincible and if they complain it is viewed as a sign of weakness and you’re probably less likely to get a promotion. Bob also believes that teacher wellbeing is seen as a second priority when compared to student wellbeing. Bob told me he sees too many teachers treading water, just barely keeping their heads above the waves, trying to keep on top of things so they don’t drown in the sea of paper work, huge workloads and little or no support from above. He thinks staff need to be thrown a life line if they are to thrive at Duruga High School.

THE STAFF

Teachers from all faculties were surveyed to discover if site-specific, community theatre can create change in an educational framework and how this change is demonstrated? This question hypothesizes the educational framework used as a backdrop for this study, requires change to work more effectively and as previously outlined, the term change entails moving from one state or position to another. Therefore, to effectively measure the personal development experienced by the Duruga High School staff members involved in The Journey, it is necessary to outline the initial attitudes of the study participants with regard to Duruga High School.
Personal Development – initial attitudes

During my focus interviews, staff discussed their levels of dissatisfaction retrospectively, leading up to their involvement in *The Journey* in 2012. This dissatisfaction was pervasive at Duruga High School; a view held by the majority of teachers interviewed who expressed their discontentment with their workplace and employment experiences. 13 of 15 staff members in this study expressed considerable despondency and feelings of powerlessness when discussing their occupation at Duruga High School (including Support/Administration Staff, Special Education Teachers, Classroom Teachers and Executive Teachers).

As Bob mentions, in the period before *The Journey*, staff morale was low; substantiated by waning participation at whole staff meetings and school social functions; for example, Christmas parties:

I’d say our Christmas party is our biggest thing and we’d be lucky to get half the staff to go... I think it’s important that’s why I try to organise them. Because it’s a hard job, teaching can be a hard job and I think sometimes to just let a bit of steam off or just have a chat with other people who are going through the same stresses is a good thing to do... but people don’t come. It could be the distances people have to travel... furthest to travel would be within two hours’ drive of each other I suppose. It could be an executive’s issue where it’s maybe not supported from all of the executives. Things often have to get led. I don’t know, maybe people just don’t value it the same as I do? (Bob, personal communication, March 12, 2013).

Bob suggests a number of reasons for the decline in staff morale including: difficulties in attendance of school functions due to the school’s regional location, increasing workloads and a lack of executive support. This notion of a lack of support from the school’s management team was common theme which emerged throughout the collected interview data. Quite often this theme was linked to feelings of inter-faculty rivalry, where staff recorded feeling like they were pitted against each other for access to limited resources; thus, were encouraged to compete, rather than work together as united personnel:
I don’t think everyone in our staff room is on that kind of power trip ‘look at us’ but that seems to be the perception. I haven’t felt like this at any other school I’ve worked in... it’s weird, it’s like why do you have to be like this? We are a team. The same team. Why is there such competitiveness between faculties? The top – it starts from the top because we all used to be tight. The whole staff used to be tight and supportive and use the common room... we don’t get time, we used to talk more – each staff room wasn’t so individual... staff need to make time to be sociable (Felicity, personal communication, August 11, 2013).

The school was more like a political landscape where people have particular interests and they group together in clandestine meetings that everyone does not have access to and they make power groups to force for their particular interests among other things. I’m not particularly good at politics (Steve, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

I think maybe there are some here who just gave up, been here too long, maybe don’t have the energy to give. Maybe they have tried different things and it hasn’t worked for them or they haven’t had the support... I think people had gone into the boss with this great idea and he’s knocked it on the head... and that’s terrible, it’s really hard because it makes you feel like you are unvalued or unworthy (Karen, personal communication, August 13, 2013).

Here Karen echoes the sentiments expressed by many members of staff interviewed for this study, when communication is not valued in the school environment, segregation tends to occur between faculties, instead of collegial co-operation. However, this last comment also highlights low staff morale on a personal level; where feelings of under-valuation and low self-worth were taking effect, resulting in individual isolation and apathy.

These samples taken from individual interviews highlight the level of staff dissatisfaction prevalent in the school leading up to The Journey. The teachers in the study didn’t feel like they had a ‘voice’ anymore and so reported feeling disengaged with the school through a lack of opportunities for collegial networking. There was an atmosphere of competition and unconditional compliance which saw staff retreat further into segregation and resentment: “Staff meetings at the school are one of the most appalling things I have ever been to, they
could put it all in a staff memo and give it to me, they don’t want input from me, why am I there?” (Mary, personal communication, November 3, 2013). Individuals felt isolated and unsupported and this had a detrimental effect on their sense of self-worth and teaching capacities. These feelings, when experienced by staff at the school, have the potential to filter throughout the whole school culture. The school’s executive stated that the personal satisfaction of the staff was not a priority of Duruga High School and “…that if it was nice for staff that’s ok, but if it doesn’t impact on learning and doesn’t make it better for the kids then it’s not at the top at my priorities list” (Nigel, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

This quote, from the school Principal of Duruga High School, highlights the institution’s philosophy regarding teacher well-being. We can conclude from this quote that the executive of the school does not believe that teacher satisfaction is directly linked to effective teaching practice and it is ‘nice’ if the staff are happy, but not essential for the school to operate effectively. This observation is further evidenced by the annual interviews conducted at the school regarding teacher progress, which are essentially designed for observing and evaluating teaching practices and results. The staff who were interviewed for this study reported that the Executive Teachers conducting review interviews are not obliged to enquire as to the well-being and personal satisfaction of staff members at any time. The annual progress interviews have been used as tools for evaluating teacher performance; without considering the role personal well-being may play in a quality teaching model.

The data collected in this study from fifteen staff members indicates that the majority of staff respondents were not happy in their relationship with their school and personal satisfaction was not acknowledged or considered a priority by the school’s administration staff. This sentiment is not uncommon and recent Australian studies have demonstrated that the personal dissatisfaction of school teachers in their classrooms is a widespread issue. The Australian Council for Educational Research nationwide survey *Staff in Australian Schools* found that only 38% of secondary teachers felt like they were valued by their communities and 42% felt like they had to do more clerical work than actual teaching (Mckenzie, Rowley, Weldon, Murphy, 2011, p. 100). The report also stated that teachers in rural schools are less satisfied with their jobs than teachers in cosmopolitan schools (Mckenzie, Rowley, Weldon, Murphy, 2011, p. 100) – supporting the argument that staff satisfaction may be something that requires attention alongside student satisfaction in Duruga High School. Given the ACER evidence regarding the dissatisfaction of teachers in the workforce generally and through the results regarding the personal satisfaction of teachers in this study, Duruga High School is no
exception to this finding. However, the staff responses regarding morale post *Journey* through involvement in the whole school arts project are predominantly constructive and provide insights into how whole school projects may improve staff satisfaction.

**Personal Development – Post Journey**

The personal evolutions experienced by staff through their participation in *The Journey* were recorded as being predominantly positive and empowering; the only critical data collected was with respect to the school’s culture prior to the whole school production. The staff that performed in *The Journey*, either in an acting or a musical role, had little theatre experience (4 out of 30 had previous theatre experience). However, this lack of familiarity with the arts did not inhibit participation in *The Journey*. Teachers said they set particular goals at the beginning of the production process and worked through obstacles to achieve these objectives and develop their connections with the school and the community:

I played the part of Cyclops and I took that part on because I’m a little bit shy and I was allowed to stand behind a screen and only have a shadow showing so I thought that would be fun. I’d had a major operation leading up to it so I was very keen to get back and be part of the performance because that meant I was able to do all the normal things. I couldn’t spend a lot of time learning the lines so I wound up writing the lines on post it notes and sticking them all over my arms but no-one could see, so that worked really well (Steve, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

I’d never done anything like that before so to me any sort of acting was a brand-new thing so I just tried to embrace the moment. Take whatever changes happened. I’m not much of an artistic person normally so for me it was great to have that chance to go from Computer Studies teacher and evolve into Zeus... the other students in the school got to see me in a different light. Students that I had never spoken to would come up to me in the playground and say ‘Hello Sir, how’s it going?’ (Bob, personal communication, March 12, 2013).

Yes, I was nervous, but I guess I was fairly comfortable this time because it is my workplace and the stage was all around the school – places I was
comfortable with, but before you say your first line I’m still always nervous... I was lowered in a harness through a skylight that was removed, but after a few practice goes and after the first night I was pretty confident that the boys knew what they were doing so I got a bit more confident each night. I think there’s a photo of me still with a bit of a white-knuckle ride. I think I was more nervous about delivering my lines coming though, than I was about going through the skylight. It was really fun in the end. I’m the type of person where those things really don’t faze me too much... so it ended up being fun (Ron, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

I’m not a natural performer and it’s quite confronting to a lot of personalities that are quieter but then again, it’s the learning thing, like we said earlier – the challenge – but you block that out, up on stage that was terrifying – I was shitting myself... well performance is like that... and when you are out of your comfort zone, that’s when real learning takes place (Felicity, personal communication, August 11, 2013).

These first-time staff performers come from different faculties in the school including English, Information Technology and Physical Education and all found the performing experience both challenging and rewarding. According to Ewing, the arts have the power to build self-esteem and work as a catalyst for personal development, learning, health and well-being (Ewing, 2010a, 2010b) and encourage play and development (Cameron, 1995) in people of all ages. The substantial personal development recorded here by teachers who initially reported feelings of low morale, poor self-esteem and dissatisfaction within the school environment pre Journey; to the antithesis, is noteworthy. The teachers involved in the study indicated in their interviews how the production, guided them out of their personal ‘comfort zones’ and feelings of being ‘shy’ and ‘nervous’ and allowed them the freedom to explore new skills, learn new things about themselves and their capabilities. Furthermore, the teachers recorded being seen in a ‘new light’; both internally as they viewed themselves differently, and externally as the other members of the school and its community viewed them differently. This is evidenced by the responses of community members who viewed the production, who had the following reflections when interviewed about the role and identity of teachers within a school environment:
When I saw a photo of the teachers with the band and with the choir, it gave me a different impression because often you look at teachers and you go ‘well, they are just teachers’, but this kind of reminds you that they are people beyond the teacher that have all these other interests that you don’t necessarily think of and it forms a bond with the students that I think is really important (Alex, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

As the staff began to show off their skills and interests in a public arena, their identity evolved; thus, bringing their self-perception into alignment with society’s perception of their identity and worth. The Duruga High School staff had found new reasons to believe in their ability, reinforced by the general public’s belief in their ability. This process of personal development produced feelings of rejuvenation and empowerment for the staff at Duruga High School in multi-faceted, innovative ways.

Throughout the rehearsal and performance process of *The Journey*, staff began to value their skills base and input into Duruga High School again; creating a personal revitalisation of connections to the physical spaces: individual, corporeal and communal. The experience of achieving these individual goals encouraged the staff to view their work situation in a different light and the staff began to set similar goals of development for their contiguous environments. Maslow (1954) argues when we feel good about ourselves and our achievements; we are inclined to want to reflect this through our proximate surroundings (Maslow, 1954, p. 45) and this flow on effect can be particularly worthwhile in a school setting where classroom and playground spaces are shared.

**School Environment**

The executive of Duruga High School believes the parents in the community allow external, physical presentations of the school to inform their judgement of the school’s effectiveness and the quality of the education offered at Duruga High School:

The school has got to have a really good public face because parents are so superficial that they judge schools on how well the students wear the uniform and what the buildings look like, not what happens in the classroom, so we do have to pander to that, it does grate on me a little bit but that is the reality. So, I
would change the physical environment if I could (Graeme, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

The majority of teachers interviewed for the study listed the physical environment as the first thing they would change about Duruga High School to make it a more effective place for teaching and learning. This improvement in physical appearance was recorded as leading to an increase in feeling ‘safe’ and ‘secure’ inside the school grounds and also an enhancement of feelings of pride and a willingness to be inside the school buildings and grounds; a pre-requisite for effective learning. Staff participants commented:

The environment first and foremost, just general beautification to make it a place where the kids like to be (Tom, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

We need to make the playground spaces more appealing and give students a sense of pride in being here. A lot of students will say ‘this school is a dump, it’s crummy’ because it’s physically not in good condition. There are physical aspects of this school which make it oppressive. The school drastically needs a facelift. It’s been allowed to run into disrepair and what students see affects their behaviour. I subscribe to the broken window effect\(^\text{22}\) (Graeme, personal communication, November 11, 2013).

Fences in schools are there to protect the student population. Those of us that work in schools know it’s to keep the students from sneaking off. It will decrease truancy and drug abuse because we will be able to supervise the students a lot better. I think it’s going to make a huge difference. The actual environment of the school is another thing we talked about even before National Partnerships. We talked about beautifying the place and the classrooms. I think it is essential because if the place looks good students want to be here, they want to learn if the environment around them is good and I think that has been overlooked as well (Steve, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

\(^{22}\) The ‘broken window effect’ was introduced by social scientists Wilson, & Kelling in 1982 which implies if an area is unkempt, vandalised and broken, the inhabitants of that area are more likely to behave in an unruly, disorderly way.
I’d relocate the school. I think we are hemmed in by this creek. It’s in a really bad area. I would change the overall look of the school, when you drive past you can’t even see where the front office is. There is a just a big mound of trees and shrubs and everyone says it’s a garden, but it looks absolutely horrible and I think that reflects sometimes on the type of school we are (Carol, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

All of the staff commented that they would improve access to resources, shrink class sizes and develop communication as alternate means to improve learning outcomes, but predominantly stated ‘physical transformation’ as their action to improve student engagement. The teachers felt stifled by their work atmosphere and furthermore, felt that the students had lost pride in their environment. They felt that if the students identified with a place that was so run down, that they didn’t have to care for it and this negative reaction to their physical learning spaces was having a detrimental effect on their desire and ability to learn. Dewey, Sobel and Smith suggest that reconnecting students with their environment will help them care about how that space is governed (Dewey, 1938, p. 43; Smith and Sobel, 2010, p. 8; Sobel, 2005, p. 2). The 2010 Environmental Education Policy for NSW Schools outlines the importance of re-connecting students to the external spaces they inhabit to improve spatial awareness and to encourage the students and their communities to interact with their environment in new and innovative ways (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2010). Findings from the Fair Go Project, based on research into student engagement conducted by researchers from the University of Western Sydney (School of Education and Early Childhood Studies) and the Priority Schools Programs, formerly PSFP (NSW Department of Education and Training), concluded that feeling connected to learning spaces and like an ‘insider’ is a key element in engaged learning:

Students feel that they belong in these classrooms as the physical space of the classroom represents a home for them... in the ‘insider’ classroom, the relationship between students and teachers exhibits a shared ownership of the learning space, mutual respect, tolerance and understanding (Lawson, Ey, Smajlogic, 2006, p. 74).
*The Journey* was a site-specific piece of environmental theatre designed specifically for Duruga High School; utilising its spaces in innovative ways which in turn encouraged staff, students and audience members to see the school in a vastly different light from its established function, thus redefining the ingrained institutional culture. This physical transformation saw ‘place’ become one of the ‘players’, a vital ingredient in seeing the potential of corporeal spaces and for changing the attitude of its inhabitants:

It was like a magical mystery tour... everyone was so involved – it forced them to be involved in what was going on because if they were just sitting in a nice comfortable hall there is a tendency to just drift off... this format didn’t allow people to drift off because they didn’t know what was going to happen next... it opened up a whole other area of drama and production rather than just being in a room (Karen, personal communication, August 13, 2013).

Everyone respected the environment because you knew that each night parents and community members were going to come through and watch the show... you’d put students in charge of a certain section of the school because they’d know that later on in the day parents would be walking through... and there is not many opportunities for the parents or the community to come into the school. They’d see the walls and they might come into the hall for parent teacher night but besides that they’d never come into the school. So being able to go through the school grounds in this fashion was fantastic. Everything you are seeing looks so professional, so many students and staff involved, it really puts a positive light on the school, it’s fantastic (Bob, personal communication, March 12, 2013).

While the show was getting set up, that week or so before the show gets performed, there were classes involved in all sorts of things. You know making lanterns, setting up props. All those lights were left out over that period of time and nothing got vandalised... the art classes created a banner and it was left hanging for the whole time and nothing got damaged, nothing bad happened. So, it created this community feel in the school because even if a student wasn’t involved, their friend was, so the environment and the way people felt about
each other did improve over time (Ron, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

According to these participants, the inclusive nature of the show fostered a radical change in the perception of the school space from a ‘crummy dump’ to an exciting theatre. This change meant the school’s physical politic was changed through a paradigm shift and a new and radical way of thinking about the school spaces, integral to the development of a healthy relationship between the school and its’ community and local environment (Smith, & Sobel, 2010). The nature of the show also saw the inhabitants view themselves as ‘insiders’ instead of ‘outsiders’ (Lawson, Ey, & Smajlagic, 2006, p. 66), who were promoting respect and celebration and challenging established politics within the school. The site-specific project created a climate of ownership among the staff and students which meant they connected with their school on a number of levels; most poignantly, a physical level. The shared ownership, mutual respect, tolerance and understanding listed as integral for student engagement and teacher satisfaction, have all been recorded as findings through the coded data in this study.

Sophie Nield in her 2012 work Siting the People; Power, Protest and Public Space highlights this mutual construction process:

Space is not separate from what it contains; it is formed by social relations and activities, and then sustains itself by restricting or permitting those activities…we begin to see more of a mutual process of construction – action determining space, which reciprocally determines action. This approach allows us to make two related proposals: first, that site may not be the stable, ‘found’ entity which a performance temporarily haunts. Second, the importance of the performance itself in producing (rather than occupying) site may allow for a re-temporalization of its work, and, perhaps, restore something of its potential political force (Nield, 2012).

Here Nields highlights how the medium of site-specific theatre has the potential to renew the connection between internal and external spaces and align this connection in new and constructive ways. The interview data suggests that The Journey, as a piece of site-specific theatre, redefined the school grounds of Duruga High School. The data gathered from the
majority of staff and students suggests that the school grounds were infused with a complicated political labyrinth of intricate teenage relationships and *The Journey* transformed these spaces into a series of stages where the inhabitants of the school community got to ‘show off’ and discover the potential of their bodies and what they could express, without the inhibition of a previously established ‘pecking order’. These bodies then transformed the school space they inhabited and brought it to life with a new light, colour, voice and energy to collectively align their internal and external spaces with a common focus and direction.

Parents too, were influenced by the renewed pride, ownership and physical transformation of their children’s connection to their school environment. All staff interviewed said they had heard positive feedback from local audiences about the production; particularly regarding the way the school was physically presented and the team work and abilities of the staff and students of Duruga High School.

**Community Perception**

‘Community’ is a word used to describe a group of people who share a specific locality and are therefore governed by the same set of rules and/or cultural and historical heritage.

According to Smith and Sobel (2010) a school is a unique community in that it is governed like a community where students share the same locality and are expected to conform to the same sets of rules and norms. However, all too often the ‘residents’ or, in the case of Duruga High School, staff and students, aren’t given any significant input into how their community is governed, or what constitutes their goals. As Agger (2012) argues, community is not only an acknowledgement of another’s existence, but it is a reciprocity based on dialogue and responsibility (p. 45). Community, from its derivation literally means ‘to give among each other’ and as Turkle (2011) argues this requires physical proximity, shared concerns, real consequences and common responsibilities. The members of ‘true communities’ help each other in the most practical ways (p. 239). Without this sense of reciprocal communication and shared responsibilities a climate of dissatisfaction and disillusion can emerge. As Mary, a teacher who has worked at Duruga High school for fifteen years points out “They don’t want input from me. Why am I there?” (Mary, personal communication, November 3, 2013). She comments here on staff meetings at the school which, in her opinion, had become a form of one-way communication where the executive were seen to promulgate policy without room...
for comment from the broader staff body. This misconception and mismanagement can result in a lack of pride, motivation and identity in personal and communal spaces. Discordance among teachers and students can have dire consequences on the potential of individuals to succeed and can be highly detrimental to the learning culture of schools (Miller, 1981).

Kuppers and Robertson (2007) argue site-specific theatre has the potential to create links between art, space, stories, boundaries and people that can have a lasting effect on our social and thus political worlds. The Journey saw Duruga High School instigate an evolution in the identity of the school as a ‘true’ community; even if only for the duration of the rehearsal and performance process. An identity where individuals worked together; often for the first time, and saw each other’s skills and abilities through a process of reciprocity (Agger, 2012), responsibility and care:

This is all working towards one goal and that doesn’t happen very often in high schools. People lock themselves in their own little classrooms and very rarely even get anyone else to come in and see what they are doing so this is an opportunity to have a talk about something other than teaching – to have a set goal where you are all moving towards the one thing is fantastic. Just like the students who don’t necessarily talk to each other unless they are forced to, same with the staff. You know I could be up here on stage with a PE teacher, a year 7 student, one of the Special Education teachers, a student from year 12. I’m just trying to think who was on the stage at one time and there would be no other situation where we’d all be up standing there together having a chat (Bob, personal communication, March 12, 2013).

It’s about the relationship that you have now with teachers that you previously had nothing to do with – that was a good thing because you had this common ground and you were talking about the show, trying to make it a better show, so you got that better connection between staff members and then you see qualities in people that you thought were a bit quiet or shy or maybe not the best public speaker, they suddenly come out with all these amazing skills in a different environment... there is a role and an opportunity for everyone. Even though we may run other activities they are kind of seen as trivial whereas a role in a large-scale production like The Journey, every role, even if it’s front of house, or
behind the scenes preparation, it’s seen as just as important as the star of the show for example. Without all of those people it wouldn’t be as successful (Tom, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

For me it was a really good chance to get involved in a whole school thing. Being in Special Education I’m not involved in whole school... that’s just the way it is. We seem to be segregated. Maybe it’s not meant to be – that’s just the way it is. So to me it was a great opportunity to be involved in a whole school initiative. Just to get involved with more staff and kids, mainstream kids, so it was really good. *The Journey* was the turning point, before that there was nothing, the disconnection was pretty great. Each faculty lived in their own little world, whereas now I feel like I’ve got more connections in the school; staff and kids. I think it’s brought people together. The people that really want to grow together – that’s how I feel about it (Karen, personal communication, August 13, 2013).

The recurring themes of common ground, mutual goals and feelings of communal identity, growth and celebration are evident throughout these interview samples from study participants. What is particularly noteworthy in these samples are the references to creating new relationships within a staff community where only forty-five adults work. This relatively small number is significant when we consider that many staff can work full time in this environment with only compulsory communication; “Staff only speak to each other when forced to” (Bob, personal communication, March 12, 2013). *The Journey* gave the staff at Duruga High School a shared experience which put them on a communal footing; fostering new connections which transformed the way they viewed each other. These new relationships may not have meant the staff had a direct say in how the school was governed in the long-term, but it provided an opportunity for people to get to know each other, share their stories and responsibilities and foster talk about their teaching experiences. The findings of this study suggest not only the high regard with which staff valued communication and understanding through their observation of how people working together equated to people who “really want to grow together” (Karen, personal communication, August 13, 2013), but also a collective desire to maintain this level of collaboration if the school’s community is to continue to develop “*The Journey* was the turning point, before that there was nothing, the disconnection was pretty great” (Karen, personal communication, August 13, 2013).
These sentiments of ‘true community’, where communal respect and growth have been fostered through an inclusive art event, extend beyond the self-perception of the staff and student community illuminated here, to the surrounding neighbourhood. This link between the internal community of the school and the external community of the Duruga area becomes apparent when we focus on what staff had to say about the change in perception of the school as a community through the eyes of the general public:

There is an awful lot of negativity about the schools in this area and you’ll hear criticisms, negative things – almost like school bashing, whereas with something like *The Journey* they see us in a completely different light, they see a whole lot of kids and teachers performing together and it is an ‘US’ and the community tends to love it and that’s one of the reasons why it is so successful because the community, especially the parents of Duruga High School kids, love it. Sometimes they mustn’t like telling people their kids go to Duruga High School, so I think that is changing and I think *The Journey* is a big part of that change – but we need more of it (Mary, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

It was really positive... everybody was very impressed with it. We got some good publicity in the paper, I think it was great. And I mean I have participated in shows before at previous schools, more your typical show, not this kind. It was very interactive and it’s always a big deal for the community to come along and see their sons and daughters performing and getting involved – they think it’s great (Steven, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

*The Journey* provided an avenue of connection between the immediate or *internal* staff and student community and the *external* or wider audience community. This connection reframed a partnership that is rarely investigated and given acknowledgement for its potential to enhance the learning and identity building of the community’s young people. This partnership functions on two levels. Firstly, as explored earlier in Personal Development; where the individuals involved in *The Journey* aligned their perception of self with society’s perception of themselves through their individual participation in the project. To clarify: when individuals believe they are doing a “good job” and the surrounding community believe
they are doing a “good job” the individual’s self-perception is reinforced and validated by common opinion and they have an authentic “springboard” (Santrock, 2008) from which to develop their self-esteem and skill base.

Secondly; on a public level, where the internal community of the school space is “functioning well” and the surrounding community perceive it to be “functioning well” the positive perception of the school is reinforced by the wider community’s opinion and so the perception of the school space becomes validated and genuine. Santrock (2008) argues, when the internal perception of a space equates to the external perception of a space; be that of a personality, culture, building or environment, the resulting reframed identity is authentic and provides a spring board from which to develop (Santrock, 2008).

All too often, schools are governed as separate entities from the wider communities in which they are situated. Site-specific, community modelled theatre has the potential to remove some of the barriers that exist in society about education and engage wider communities as an integral part of the physical space and teaching practise inside schools:

I’m thinking about your fun days and swimming carnivals and such where you do get a few parents at these things, but they wouldn’t get the huge audiences that The Journey did. You know it was parents and grandparents, big kids and little kids, whole families were showing up and really enjoying it and also participating in it themselves. Whereas other things that the school organises you’ve got a much smaller audience so there is less opportunity for community members to actually get involved (Steve, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

The responses suggest site-specific, whole school projects like The Journey have the potential to create links and social inclusion which can comprehensively augment the educational experiences of staff and students. The Journey gave Duruga High School residents experiences which extended beyond the immediate classroom and created visible and tangible change; necessary to keep pace with an ever-changing world where presence and identity in the community must be maintained and the regulation of the space must be discussed by staff, students and community members equally to create a ‘child-friendly school’ and a successful learning institution (Child friendly school’s manual, 2009, United
Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, p. 26). Bottrell and Goodwin argue these opportunities are undervalued by the Australian education system and that even though Australian schools are expected and encouraged to form partnerships with their communities, the roles of the inhabitants of these schools remain largely invisible (2011, p. 180). Furthermore, it is only by adopting a whole school and community approach to learning that we can begin to improve staff collaboration, satisfaction and performance, and student engagement and results, thus transforming the learning culture of schools (The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2013).

One way to include the feeder community in school projects is through the allocation of resources; in particular funding, to proposed school projects. *The Journey* took place in 2012 at a time when Duruga High School had control of its limited budget and could spend it as decreed. However, 2014 has seen a new model emerge called RAM or the Resource Allocation Model. RAM is a model piloted by the NSW Department of Education which mandates in-school projects must be approved through local community consultation before they can begin. There have been mixed feelings about this new development throughout the staff; with some staff believing this is how schools should always have been run:

> Absolutely the community should have more of a say in how this school is run. It surprises me they don’t. I have worked in schools forever, so I know that is not the case, but I think they should definitely have more of a say. That’s the way it should be. That’s the product that we are involved in. It’s what should happen. All schools are just a reflection of the community that they live within. Yes, we would assume that as a natural process the community should have some say about what goes on (John, personal communication, August 13, 2014).

This response comes from a teacher who is heavily involved in the school’s circus program and school performances, carnivals and community events. His interview contains strong feelings about the involvement of the local community in school life as central to the school’s identity and the community’s well-being.

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23 The Resource Allocation Model was introduced in 2014 by the NSW Department of Education and is focused on the philosophy of self-management. Where NSW schools manage their own budgets, and have more flexibility to respond to their students’ needs through the allocation of staff and resources.
Other opinions about the RAM model are critical about its purpose and feel that professionals should be allowed to allocate funding and resources within schools:

Sure, I think we should have a positive relationship with the local community and feel connected to it in some way. But I also feel that you’ve got to let the professionals be able to do their job and work out the parameters of what needs to be done (James, personal communication, August 13, 2014).

James’ sentiments reflect the other side of the RAM model where community consultation is tokenistic (through P and C meetings24) and the major decisions regarding funding and resource allocation are made by the teaching staff within the school. This opinion is not predominantly expressed by my study participants and concurrently, James was also reluctant to take part in The Journey as he argued he didn’t have time to be involved in any activity that didn’t take place inside the school, inside his classroom.

These two different opinions about community involvement (John and James), indicate the degree to which personal philosophy regarding the role of community in education heavily informs an individual teacher’s choice. If personal pedagogy is such that schools are reflections of their communities and that education should be influenced by and aligned with its’ surrounding community, then it logically follows the community should have a say in how school funding is spent. On the other hand, if the stated personal viewpoint is one of professionals making the decisions that influence the in-school funding, then the funding model becomes internally focused and the community must, in turn, deal with the consequences of the school’s choices. If we link this discordance back to Freire’s model of education (1970) featured in the introduction of this study; “conscientization” or “banking education”, we can draw parallels which highlight the dangers in seeing the person with the power (or in this case money) as having the knowledge and therefore assuming the person or persons (in this case the community) without the power (or money) as “empty vessels”, that need guidance if they are to know how best to spend the allocated RAM funding. The working definition of community discussed at the start of this chapter illustrates the importance of reciprocated decision making and shared responsibility when building a

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24 ‘P, & C’ meetings or ‘Parents and Citizens’ meetings occur monthly at Duruga High School and are open to all parents of students who attend the school and also local citizens with an interest in issues pertaining to the school. For example, the uniform policy.
working community. The differing opinions about RAM funding discussed here highlights how precarious the balance is between talking about community having a ‘say’ in how a school is run and actually giving credence to this process through action.

As previously explored in this chapter, many teachers at Duruga High School do not feel as if they have had a voice at staff meetings regarding important decisions and so opening up discussion to external members of the school and its surrounding community might change the power balance and see the school operating in alignment with our working definition of ‘True Community’.

At the time of the interviews, the school Principal was unsure whether the RAM model would benefit the school:

The jury is out on whether the RAM model is a good thing or not. I’d like to think school executive and school staff who work in the school, are in tune with community and their kids anyway, so they probably have a feeling you know. But we need more than a feeling. With the new increase in resources and flexibility, schools are now given many more dollars and much more responsibility to make up their mind how they spend them. Along with that comes great responsibility and we have to truly consult with the community. Not just a dozen P, & C families...we have to go broader (Nigel, personal communication, November 6, 2014).

The Principal continued to outline how in the past, the school had to consult with local school councils as part of the Department of Education’s charter but how they “didn’t really have too much power, or too much to do” and how with the recently adopted RAMS model, teachers will have to put forward proposals that are relevant to the local community and promote their public face. This process refers back to Agger’s model of ‘True Community’ which includes community governance and reciprocity based on dialogue and communal responsibilities.

During The Journey, the cast and crew remarked on how much they enjoyed connecting with the community and how this new relationship was healthy and productive “Something like The Journey - they see us in a completely different light, they see a whole lot of kids and
teachers performing together and it is an ‘US’ and the community tends to love it” (Mary, personal communication, November 6, 2013). Immediately after the production, a number of staff began inviting parents into their classrooms in ‘open days’ to look at what their students were learning and to foster encouraging feedback and ongoing communication. This relationship continues to manifest itself in new ways and this regulated RAM interaction will be in alignment with the “increasing body of literature pointing to the importance of effective home, school and community partnerships in enhancing educational outcomes for students form low SES communities in particular” (Lawson, Ely,, & Smajlagic, 2006, p. 66).

This connection of the internal staff and student community and the external wider community will potentially continue to transform the existing relationship between the school and its’ feeder area and encourage residents of the Duruga Community to view the school and its’ inhabitants in a different light; promoting active involvement in the education of their young people.

The Transformation of Learning Culture

Attard (2014), argues that many parents believe public schools do not see uniqueness as important and do not do enough to foster the individuality of each student and their needs. They believe students at public schools are judged if they are different and bullied, thus preventing them from expressing their true identity (Attard, 2014, p. 24). Attard’s research does not state whether parents believe this bullying is the fault of the students, the teachers or the system, but he does highlight a consequence of this lack of emphasis on individuality: home schooling. Attard argues an increasing number of parents are choosing home schooling, with the number of students registered for home schooling growing by 42% over the last five years (Attard, 2014, p. 24). 4 staff members interviewed for this study (Graeme, Karen, Mary and Nigel) stated The Journey treated each student as an individual and highlighted this aspect of the production as one of its strengths in improving student engagement:

*The Journey* didn’t discriminate amongst students. Quite often school productions appeal to a certain type of student. A student who has a background in creative and performing arts and they are not the sort of student who generally is in trouble. But *The Journey* had this broad appeal to all students – they might have been on a vocational pathway studying construction, or other
students who might have been more focused on the mathematical or Science type subjects, Physics or Chemistry students, and those kind of students were involved in The Journey too... it gave them all some direction. Some new learning for school (Graeme, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

The ideas expressed here identify the stereotype of arts students as students who are not generally “in trouble” at school and so have the freedom and confidence to participate in extra-curricular activities. However, the data also suggests students who may not fit the traditional “arts mould” were drawn to the project and worked on a production which provided an extra-dimension to their school experience. The staff stated how students from each end of the academic continuum volunteered to be part of The Journey and in doing so, found a place to belong:

*The Journey* helped the kids that don’t engage, they are not academic and they haven’t found their spot in school and because the school’s focus is so academic they needed another avenue for success – to be part of the school. Because they are not achieving anything in academics, they don’t feel like they belong anywhere, whereas *The Journey* helped them to belong to something and it was something very important and something big. It got them involved with other people and kids they wouldn’t normally be around, from kids in year 12 all the way down to year 7. So I think it was a great positive and I know there were kids that I saw who were constantly in trouble – being suspended – their lives outside of school weren’t very good – dysfunctional families – and they were coming to school so that they could be in the production and for me that ticked all the boxes and for that pure reason I think we need more of this in our school (Karen, personal communication, August 13, 2013).

This school seems to want to cater to the top kids. Which is wonderful, but we seem to have lost the focus for the kids at the other end. I know in Science we are running excursions for the top year 8’s, top year 9’s, top year 10’s and the other kids don’t get that offered to them. And maybe those others wouldn’t be interested, I’m not sure, but maybe we need to offer them alternative programs to get them out of the school and that’s where things like *The Journey* are great
levellers for our kids because there is no kid that can’t participate unless they
don’t want to (Mary, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

The staff believed that *The Journey* appealed to a wide range of the student population in Duruga High School and was something special for students who may not be used to being given access to special programs and opportunities.

It’s the only school event where all the kids are on an even footing. It really
doesn’t matter what year you are in or what ability you have, what problems you
bring, your socio-economic background, or how good you are at school. You
can be in it and be yourself and you get treated with an equal footing and really
most of other student activities try to pick winners, you know swimming,
athletics – where this is not about winning, it’s about working together as a
group of individuals to achieve a common outcome (Nigel, personal
communication, November 6, 2013).

This research suggests staff viewed *The Journey* as something truly unique and as a leveller,
in that all students who wished to be involved in the process could be in the production and
were encouraged to be involved. Students, who normally have nothing to do with each other,
were working together day to day for common goals. Furthermore, the responses suggest *The
Journey* gave the high-achieving academic students a creative outlet and an avenue for
artistic expression, and it gave the less academic students a reason to come to school. This
divide that exists in a school where streaming is part of the linear class structure was
suspended through the site-specific production; as students worked side by side to produce a
common piece of art and re-frame their collective culture for the period of the production,
and in many cases, beyond (see Chapter 6 -Student Findings, for more data regarding student
legacy).

The students who were attending rehearsals were also attending regular classes and
communicating with other students and staff in new and productive ways. The staff interview
sample below implies *The Journey* changed the way teachers were perceived by their
students, their colleagues and the community in general:
You always get a lot of students, I don’t know how to put this, who may not always have the guts or always feel confident enough to get involved or set up the band themselves so I think it’s good. Our involvement was to set up or create an environment where they felt confident enough to play in the band as a group so I think, I felt anyway, that we helped and gave those kids that opportunity. I think you always build up a good rapport with the other members of the band, other musos, so we had a good time putting those songs together and trying to perfect it. I think when you are playing together, the age barrier, whether you are a teacher or a student, doesn’t become relevant anymore, it’s just that you are a performer (Tom, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

The model discussed here by one of the band leaders is one of equality and understanding where music is the language spoken between band members who suspended their established social behaviours through *The Journey* when playing songs for the show, and developed a collective confidence which gave rise to a new communication and politic.

I saw a few people who were musically inclined in the band who I didn’t know played instruments so that was interesting. And a couple of kids mentioned my performance and I think it was a good conversation starter for some kids who may not have liked me or lived in fear of me because my job is partly to be the disciplinarian and so it was an opportunity to talk about things in a non-threatening way (Steve, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

The whole idea of taking us out of our normal environment, being in the classroom, and getting to see the teachers in a different light from standing out the front of a classroom, you know... Mild mannered computer admin. person into ‘King of the Gods’ – fantastic. The other students got to see me in a different light. Students that I had never spoken to before would come up to me in the playground and say hello and ask me how things were going... also you can see students that have talents that you never realised. I could have a student in my class that I never knew could, let’s say, play the guitar – it made it a friendlier environment when you have something else to talk about instead of
that teacher/student relationship of just what’s in class (Bob, personal communication, March 12, 2013).

Bob’s response outlines the initial processes in the transformation of learning culture experienced by participants in *The Journey*. Firstly, he mentions the significance of removing teachers from their classroom environment and into the “unknown”. This physical anomaly piques the student’s interest and is recorded here as ‘fantastic’ and dynamic. The data also suggests *The Journey* provided an avenue for a mutual appreciation of students and teachers as both ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’ at the same time. ‘Ordinary’ in the sense that through participating in the performance the participants were more likely to speak to each other about shared concerns and triumphs, and in doing so become ‘real’ and dimensional. ‘Extraordinary’ as students discovered their teachers had incredible talents and teachers discovered their students had amazing abilities that they had never seen before and both parties reported being able to appreciate these skills on an equal footing:

> It was good to build up a relationship with the kids as performers as well as them seeing you as being in the same frame of mind as well so it kind of helped ease the tension... all the students that were in my year twelve class – we got on better because we were all involved in it, and they saw me in a different light and we became a bit more friends, so that was really cool (Carol, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

> I think it was nice that they saw the teachers were not just up in front of a class doing their bit but they were getting involved with the students on a really positive, much more personal level. Because it was adults and kids together to make it work positively... I feel like I had a connection with them and also, I had something I could talk to them about. I could say something about a performance or the lighting in a particular scene was really good – whatever it was. Them knowing I took notice of them because most of the kids don’t know me at school; they wouldn’t have a clue who I am. So, they go ‘who are you?’ and I say ‘I’m down at Special Ed. I took photos of the show – do you want to come and have a look?’ So, then kids come over to Special Ed. to look at the photos and talk (Karen, personal communication, August 13, 2013).
This response emerged from Karen, a special needs teacher. This is significant because Karen acknowledged that the majority of students in the Duruga High School didn’t know who she was prior to the production, (the unit is distant from the rest of the school’s classrooms and often stigmatised by other students), but through her involvement in the show she felt connected to the school in a new and positive way. She also discussed how more people had to physically come to visit the Special Education Unit to look at photos and talk; spontaneous actions which symbolise the importance of community in a school’s learning environment. Particularly when the special needs students and teachers had previously felt marginalised by their location and lack of involvement in the school’s culture.

The recurrence of the term “positive” in interviews here is noteworthy as too often students equate teachers with negative feelings, particularly when the students are dissatisfied with their school experience (Slavin, 1997). Young people tend to see teachers as the ‘them’ in the ‘us and them’ equation and the enforcer of rules and barriers to freedom, self-expression and personal growth (Slavin, 1997). Teachers often become the scapegoats for the negative personal experiences in teenagers’ lives, and for the teachers involved in this study, to record being labelled as a consistent positive influence by their students, is a significant observation.

The phrase “in a different light” is also repeated throughout the collected staff responses and the value that the staff at Duruga High place on this elucidation is paramount in understanding the possibilities of a whole-school arts project. Previously, we discovered how the staff believed The Journey literally and metaphorically put the school’s buildings ‘in a different light’. However, the information gathered through these interviews provides evidence that the same project has seen this ‘different light’ shine on the staff that inhabit the transformed physical spaces as well. The staff reported that the project fostered connections with each other and their students which, in turn, improved behaviour, communication and learning in the playground and in the classroom. The Journey made their job easier by increasing the students’ interest in them and what they have to say, and in being at school and actively participating in school culture. The students felt like ‘insiders’ in the school environment and developed a mutual respect and understanding for their teachers during the course of The Journey. During the lead up, performance and aftermath of The Journey, staff became keenly aware of an increase in student engagement, ownership and pride in Duruga High School’s identity and achievements.
The coded data discovered the repetition of two main themes: 1) size and 2) integrity.

1) The recurrence of the words “big”, “big deal” and “enormity” indicate the perceived magnitude of the whole-school project by the staff for the students. The Journey was given this weight by the level of participation and belief invested in the project by the whole staff body. This behaviour modelling filtered into school culture and gave the staff and the students a sense of worth, collective power and identity.

2) The recurring theme of integrity is highlighted through the staff interviews through the terms “important”, “essential”, “real”, “genuine” and “unique”. The responses suggest staff viewed student participation in The Journey as genuine and utterly without coercion. This response is relevant to our working definition of a true community where collective ownership and responsibility can only be achieved when participation is inclusive and completely voluntary. The interview samples below provide examples of these recurring terms and themes:

Productions like The Journey are a way of having a multi-faceted approach to student engagement. I think it’s an **essential** part – you’ve got what happens in the classroom, you’ve also got what happens outside the classroom – what happens outside the classroom means we can reach students in a way that we can’t in a normal lesson... extra-curricular activities are a very **big** and **important** part of engagement (Ron, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

I can think of some year twelve students that I had run-ins with first or second week of 2012 and in a six month period I saw a change... They weren’t just biding their time until the end of the HSC. The Journey was a really **big** part of school for them and they knew that there were obligations and expectations and they knew that what they were doing was **unique**. The students had a sense of the **enormity** of what they were undertaking. It wasn’t just ‘I’m in the school play’ – they were part of The Journey and they knew it was a **big** deal (Graeme, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

This interview sample is particularly significant as The Journey is described as a “real reason” and a central focus for several students to stay at school. The arts event is recognised as being something out of the ordinary and holding a special significance for the participating students, as they saw the level of commitment of the school community and felt a
responsibility to ensure the success of the project. They were so busy with different aspects of the production that they didn’t have the time or the inclination to sabotage their school experience through misbehaviour or truancy.

I wasn’t dealing with the same number of discipline issues that I would normally have to deal with... there was certainly an improvement in school tone and that was noticeable from the start of the year. For a period of months anyone who was involved in *The Journey* did not step inside my office (Nigel, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

The Principal of Duruga High School pointed out fewer discipline issues throughout the rehearsal and production process of *The Journey* (the school’s data base also highlights fewer discipline issues during *The Journey*). He also referenced the legacy of the project through a sense of engagement, pride and positivity in the school’s learning culture which lasted for several months after the combined arts event. The reason for this after effect according to some of the interviews could relate to the sense of importance and integrity of the project. The good behaviour of the students involved was self-determined through a sense of community and responsibility, not externally driven as explained by the school’s Deputy Principal:

> Often when you dangle a carrot, when you offer students something special that they can be a part of as incentive to get some compliance or an improvement in behaviour... sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t. A lot of the time it can be a little transparent or there’s maybe some integrity missing and it just doesn’t work. With *The Journey* the participation of the students was **genuine**...it was so much more effective at changing and improving the behaviour of students...it was 100% effective as far as I know (Graeme, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

One boy actually said he was finishing school last year and after a member of the community praised his performance he said ‘if it wasn’t for *The Journey* I would have left school before this’ and for me that just says so much. It says a whole lot about how much *The Journey* meant to him, how **important** it was because his life, his whole world is so dysfunctional. It was so good for him, so
positive, good feedback – a good vibe which he doesn’t get a lot in his life. He will remember that for the rest of his life (Karen, personal communication, August 13, 2013).

Karen’s perception of *The Journey* being this student’s motivation to stay at school provides evidence that *The Journey* motivated students to engage in the school’s culture. The teachers listened to the participating students discuss the effects of *The Journey* on their attitude towards school and learning in general and in many cases, this affected the teachers’ personal philosophies regarding curriculum content and the role of the arts within Duruga High School.

**Arts and Engagement**

The whole school arts project *The Journey* influenced the personal philosophies of many of its participants, who now advocate the power and worth of the arts in schools. Many teachers campaign for their subject (often at the expense of other subjects) and for these teachers to trust involvement in the arts as a way to improve individual engagement and community perception signifies a major shift in pedagogy.

As Ewing argues, it is crucial to understand that the arts can be used as a pedagogical tool to view the world from multiple perspectives, to create generations of young people who aren’t afraid to take safe risks and explore and develop ways of creating individual and cultural identity (2010a, p1). The data implies that whole school projects like *The Journey* used the arts as a vehicle to aid in engaging individuals with themselves and their surroundings and to assist in their understanding of standard curriculum content via means of creativity, autonomy, development and fun. As Perry, Hogan, & Marlin (2000) argue the value of play and fun in learning cannot be underestimated as a tool for engagement. They argue that young people learn best when they perceive an activity as ‘fun’ and consequently are in a state of play.

It’s got to be fun. Sure, you can just look at the school side of it. The curriculum. But primarily there is no element of fun in it. Whereas the really good thing about this whole school production is it’s a rare opportunity to bring all those different elements together. The physical activity side of it, the literacy
side of it where you’ve got script writers and editors and people collecting and writing songs, there’s a level of interpretation in how that’s delivered. Stuff like the construction of props that can cut across the technology side of it, sound and lighting, that’s also part of the technology and some areas come into it. So, I think for a whole school event to be successful it has to be fun. I don’t know if you could generate that level of fun purely from an academic base activity, and then embellish it with an element of fun, or choose the fun side of it and then embellish it with the academic side – I’m not sure which would work better? (Tom, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

In this specific scenario, the two factors were intertwined. The design of the project was such that it encouraged all the students and staff to be involved through their class work and also through extra-curricular activities if they chose to. The teachers were asked if they wanted to be included in The Journey and then invited to choose scenes or responsibilities they wanted to be connected to. They were further asked if they wanted to foster the projects in class time or after scheduled hours. The scenes were then offered to students who autonomously selected their activities and the direction their chosen scenes or projects should be developed in. This independent work ethic created an atmosphere of autonomy where students helped each other in the most practical ways. This chapter has demonstrated ‘true’ community is possible when we align external and internal communities, listen to each other and remain responsible for our actions and their consequence. The findings also indicate this engagement as community can happen in constructive ways when the arts are utilised for engagement:

The Principal will tell you that if your lessons are really, really interesting that will be enough and it will be engaging and stop them from truanting or running off into the bush to smoke drugs or whatever it is they do. My view is entirely the opposite, because rushing off into the bush to smoke drugs with your mates is really attractive so no matter how interesting my lessons are I can’t compete with that. I’ve always said there has to be something else, there’s got to be a better way than ‘interesting’ lessons (Steve, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

We’ve already got a big vegetable garden, climbing wall... These kids need something different. They often come in with the attitude – school sucks, I hate
school. We’ve got to be the ones that think why does it suck? Why do they hate school? Why are we doing the same things that bore them shitless? We need to find a different way and I think that looking at the arts is the way to go. I can just see with the arts all the different facets of art that the kids can get involved in, they’ll tap into something. It covered every area: whether they were athletic, academic, could sing, act, dance, whatever- there was a place for them within that production. I just think that this school has got this huge need for something to give it a lift and I think it is the arts – The Performing Arts. That whole production was screaming out – THIS IS IT – THIS IS WHAT WE NEED TO GET OUR SCHOOL UP AND GOING AND RUNNING AGAIN! To me it’s like a beacon, a warning sign. Stop here. Just do it. We’ve got the people do to it. Have the balls to do it – change something, do something no other school is doing (Karen, personal communication, August 13, 2013).

The performance was about challenging yourself. It was about growing and learning about yourself. Not just subject matter or content matter of different subjects, I think through the performance they learnt a lot of things that were educational for them. They also learnt about communicating with each other. They were in small groups for each allotted task for the performance so they had to work in with each other... people underestimate the power of school – we want the kids to leave here as employable, productive members of society... I try to educate kids for life. Not just one particular subject (Felicity, personal communication, August 11, 2013).

I think there is so much emphasis on academic stuff, not only are we building the working class of the future, we are building people and I think kids get confidence, teamwork and co-operation skills and so much more from a project like The Journey than they ever do sitting in a Maths or English lesson or even a PE class where we talk about these things, but don’t actually learn them... there is a multitude of things that this type of project brings to making a better human being that you can’t teach in a classroom (Ron, personal communication, November 4, 2013).
The staff of Duruga High School responding here are all from faculties without a direct arts component – but obviously recognised the value of whole school, arts-based projects as a transformational tool for student retention and engagement. The arts can give students a growing understanding of how they might act morally, ethically, sustainably and democratically in an ever-changing world (Anderson, 2012, p. 15) and will increase individual capabilities and the overall quality of education (UNESCO, 2006, pp. 1-4). Caldwell and Vaughan (2012) further argue the arts can reorganise neural pathways to extend the brain’s potential in all learning areas and is essential in schools if we are going to effectively engage students with their maximum learning potential (2012, p. 149).

Creativity is a natural property of the human brain for survival, expression and identity. It is also a quality that must be used frequently and utilised effectively if we are going to develop as a species (Caldwell, & Vaughan, 2012). The arts foster creativity, identity, reasoning skills, communication and one of the most intrinsic purposes behind education: the ability to responsibly claim personal choice and thus power within a society (Ross, 1980).

This interview sample from Carol (below) states how the students involved in The Journey were given an opportunity to have a say in the direction of their learning experience at school and the how this autonomy gave them a sense of ownership and responsibility:

I think the best thing about the show was that the kids were given a say in their own education. The fact that the kids were part of the show, they weren’t told exactly what to say, they were given creative licence. They could change a line in the show if they wanted to and asked ‘if you do change it, what would you change it to?’ and asked ‘how do you feel about this?’ It gives them ownership of their learning rather than just telling them they are right or wrong (Carol, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

Kershaw believes this kind of whole school, arts-based project is democratic and radical and essential for the health of any society, be that of a nation, or a town, or a school. “A new idea of civil society where communication and choice are valued and can create a space beyond the dominant; a new realm where the crucial qualities celebrated through creativity are justice, equality and freedom. This process can enhance the school’s collective agency, self-
determination and responsibility to each other” (Kershaw, 1999, p. 219), hence transforming the learning culture of the school.

All of the staff participants in this study recognised the value of the arts in Duruga High School. Considering the long-established climate of alienation and competition for students, resources and funding that exists between faculties, this recognition for the arts is testament to the extent to which The Journey had a lasting and meaningful effect on the school’s culture. Its’ legacy includes regular ‘open days’ where 20% percent of the staff who performed in The Journey now invite parents and other members of the public into their classroom lessons in an endeavour to maintain the strong relationships they fashioned with their students, the parents and the community at large. This process reinforces the notions of pride, integrity and identity previously established through the whole school project, The Journey, and is helping to re-create a climate of open communication and recognition which is redefining the reputation of the school within the community.

The Journey provided a temporary avenue for connection and celebration. However, further research is needed to see how the RAM model and its constituent of community consultation can change the school’s philosophy regarding community connections. If the involvement of local families, relatives and friends in an integrated model based on Freire’s model of education or “conscientization” proposed in his 1970 text Pedagogy of the Oppressed, can utilise the existing knowledge and skill base of the participants to encourage authentic learning and critical thinking and in turn, encourage students to willingly attend school regularly, they will benefit from their learning experience. If students attend school willingly with a desire to engage in self-directed learning culture it will make the teachers’ jobs easier, the students will be happier, and the community can be proud of the human resource they have created through their integrated educational institution. The family-school partnerships framework (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008) states that schools must become a place that parents can call their own; including creating real roles for parents who come into the school (Family-School Partnerships Framework, 2008, p.8), The Journey took steps towards creating these roles as it invited parents and other community members to contribute before, during and after the completion of the arts event The Journey in an authentic, valued manner.
Conclusions

It is Thursday afternoon and Bob has his senior computing class. He has invited several other staff members and parents to come in and see one of his classes. Since his involvement as a performer in *The Journey* he has decided to schedule regular ‘open’ classes where parents can come into his classes and see what their kids do. This represents a significant change in policy and pedagogy for Bob who is enjoying his new public identity and transformed rapport with staff, students and the community. This image represents a member of staff who, after *The Journey*, were no longer “treading water”.

![Figure 1. Bob invites staff and parents into his senior computing class, Duruga High School, November 2013.](image)

The combined staff perceptions discussed in this study suggest that *The Journey*, with its multi-faceted structure and policy of inclusion, engaged students with their environment, their teachers and their education. The production process and resulting performance kept students at school and engaged them in authentic learning. The findings also imply that the arts event reconnected staff and students with an institution that may have previously been a place of routine, monotonous learning which was heavily focused on traditional academic subjects and national testing. The process reframed Duruga High School into a place where every student was valued, regardless of their academic ability and their individual differences embraced. A place where staff reported feeling valued as people, not solely as teachers; their diversities celebrated, and the school and its community were proud of their identity.
The description of the school/community connection established through the rehearsal and performance process of *The Journey*, conveys new bonds and strengthened relationships in unique and vital ways; particularly as a vehicle to establish a mutually supportive relationship between the school’s population and its community. A relationship which seems to have engendered solidarity and fostered a sense of belonging, thus nurturing the social and emotional needs of participants in a journey of self-realisation. In addition, *The Journey*, stimulated discussion regarding the way staff viewed traditional teaching practises and the role of arts education within society.

The next chapter will canvass the students’ responses regarding Duruga High School, the Duruga community and the effect of *The Journey* on their education. The student responses will add a new dimension to the staff findings outlined above to clarify if the staff’s perception of the students’ experience is accurate or projected.
CHAPTER 6 - STUDENT FINDINGS

Stranger in the Playground...

It is lunch time and a year 7 girl, Annie, sits by herself on a brick wall in the playground trying to balance her lunch and a large novel on her lap at the same time. There are children screaming and squirting water on each other, pushing and pulling, bouncing hand balls and scanning their phones for the latest gossip. They don’t laugh at Annie any more, but they have given up trying to talk to her because she looks closed off. Annie keeps one eye on her book, and on eye on the chaos around her. She is not at ease in the playground or anywhere at school and she longs to find her place. Somewhere quiet and shady where she can read her book, play board games, talk to people like her... find people like her?

Annie doesn’t want to feel like a stranger in the playground. But she does.

THE STUDENTS

The following chapter will present and reflect upon the responses collected from the students of Duruga High School. The ‘student findings’ chapter follows the ‘staff findings’ chapter as the the ‘staff findings’ chapter directly relates to the staff’s perceived effects of The Journey on the students at the school. Therefore, by presenting these chapters in succession, it is easier to compare how the staff believe the students felt about The Journey and how the students actually felt about The Journey.

Both genders through Years 7, 9, 11 and 12 have been interviewed for this chapter; including students spanning the academic continuum. The interviewees also include members of the Aboriginal student body, ESL community and exchange students; participation in The Journey the essential criteria for inclusion in the research project. All students have been anonymised.

Through coding the data, four central themes have repeatedly been discussed by the study participants and will serve as the framework for this chapter:
1) Relationship with School,
2) Building Confidence,
3) Relationship with Peers,
4) Relationship with the Community.

The key ideas explored under these themes include:

1) Relationship with school: Duruga High School has tried a number of programs to improve student engagement (including an increased focus on technology). These programs have proved largely unsuccessful (as evidenced in this chapter), and prior to the whole school arts project *The Journey*, the research sample of 10 students recorded feeling dissatisfied and alienated from their learning environment. Data collected shows that participation in the site-specific performance *The Journey* enhanced the student’s relationship with the school by re-connecting them with the school’s physical sites or spaces, thus creating open classrooms; a variation in learning practice which re-kindled an interest in attending school. The findings also suggest *The Journey*, through a shared artistic experience, connected the students to the teachers in new and innovative ways. Post-production, the students recalled feeling empowered through an increase in understanding, respect and the ability to reciprocate communication with members of the school community.

2) Building confidence: the students interviewed expressed an increase in self-confidence during the performance period and for a substantial period post-production (interviews were completed 12 months after the production). *The Journey* gave the canvassed students an opportunity to succeed in an activity which was viewed by their peers and extended community. This public encouragement evoked feelings of pride and self-worth; the legacy of which encouraged the students to attend school regularly and take safe risks in attempts to succeed in related arenas.

3) Relationship with peers: the inclusive nature of *The Journey* meant participating students connected with students in other peer groups through communal expression and celebration. The student interviews reflected key ideas of collective consciousness, communication and community building.

4) Relationship with the community: recurring themes of being a given a chance to "show off" and positively reframe the reputation of Duruga High School and its inhabitants, suggest *The Journey* enhanced the relationship of the participants with their community. The students got to work closely with community members and all
reported feeling more valued by the wider community after their participation in *The Journey*.

**THE STUDENTS**

**Relationship with School**

This chapter will first outline the context of the individual students in the study to understand their relationship with the school and how it developed through their involvement in *The Journey*. This context includes the students’ level of personal satisfaction, their attitude towards the school’s curriculum and pedagogy, and their opinion of the schools’ physical spaces.

Of the eight students interviewed for this study, only two recalled overall feelings of happiness and personal satisfaction at school prior to their involvement in *The Journey*. These students were both in Year 12 in 2013 and achieving at the elite end of the academic scale.

Eliza was the school’s Deputy Captain in 2013 and maintained her engagement with positive philosophies regarding learning and academic achievements were largely due to connections with specific teachers:

> A teacher that is passionate about what they are doing. I think that is really important. Someone who is always there to help you, they don’t fob you off or anything. They really listen to you, they pay attention and you can tell if they are listening to you... a few of my teachers went above and beyond their call... dedicated, passionate and helpful (Eliza, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

Furthermore, Eliza maintains the key to happiness and success at school is to be involved in school events; thus, creating a sense of belonging among students:
I think it’s nice if you feel like you are part of the school and you feel like you belong here. I feel that you are happier at this school if you are involved in lots of different areas. It makes you want to learn and to create... but it is hard to get people motivated, to get them involved and proud of our school. That is a challenge (Eliza, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

Here, Eliza explicitly acknowledges the culture of dissatisfaction amongst her fellow students prior to *The Journey*. As deputy captain of the school, Eliza played a primary role in motivating members of Duruga High to participate and appreciate extra-curricular activities and develop a sense of esteem for their connected community.

The other Year 12 student who recorded a positive learning experience prior to *The Journey* is Adam; a senior member of the Student Representative Council in 2013 and a high achiever in both academic and sport. Similarly, Adam credits motivated teachers and whole school involvement with his scholastic success:

> I think the best way I ever learnt was by instruction. Good teachers would teach something then ask questions, create arguments, test our knowledge... we also tried to get the students more involved with each other I think. More student interaction - work together (Adam, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

These common themes of dedicated teachers and whole school involvement lay the foundations for senior student’s Eliza and Adam, and their positive recorded experience of Duruga High School.

Conversely, when we look at student dissatisfaction in the school, one of the emerging patterns expressed by the students included in the study was their dismay at teachers underutilising existing programs within the classroom framework. One such program is technology. Technology was made a focus area in the school through the National Partnerships scheme in 2010 and teachers rushed to include technologies in their pedagogy to align with prescribed departmental outcomes. The theme of technology recurred as theme throughout the focus interviews when students were discussing elements of their education they found frustrating:
I think those laptops that we all had to use were terrible... we had so much trouble getting them working – they were just a time waster. Ten minutes into the lesson and we hadn’t even starting learning yet because we were fussing around with our computers. I didn’t like that way of learning. I thought it was really distracting – technology didn’t solve anything at the school (Eliza, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

Then computers came into the school and everyone was distracted by all the cool things the computers could do. Everyone was just watching movies all day... You need to look at technology as something that helps you, not as a distraction (Adam, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

When they gave the laptops to year nine and ten they just used them to go onto Facebook and other social media... and social media is a huge distraction (Patricia, personal communication, November 2, 2013).

This segue into technology helps illustrate its impact on student satisfaction in the classrooms of Duruga High School where students felt technology has been propelled into their lessons in an attempt to enhance pupil engagement and improve learning outcomes. However, the collected data in this study reflects how this introduced technology was seen as ‘distracting’ because of the way the tools were used, and at times, inhibited effective learning. This issue is not broached as a judgement on technology and its ability to engage or distract individuals from effective learning, rather an observation on the pedagogy of staff at Duruga High School; who expressed similar sentiments throughout their focus interviews:

When I first started teaching here it wasn’t an issue and now kids have technology as distractions... mobile phones, iPods, laptops. (Mary, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

I think technology can be really great. It can help kids but I think it is a massive distraction in the classroom. Especially when you have a large number of kids and when you are trying to get them all engaged and doing the right thing. It’s often very hard (Ron, personal communication, November 4, 2013).
Teachers at Duruga High introduced technology into their lessons as specified in the curriculum and the school’s policy regarding computers; some with the effect of creating a counter-productive learning environment. As highlighted by Steve, a member of the school’s senior executive: “One of the things we discovered is that some students will actually break their laptop rather than being forced to use it” (Steve, personal communication, November 4, 2013) thus preventing students from utilising these tools and defeating the initial purpose of the devices. Other members of the school’s senior executive believe this problem is, in part, to do with the teaching training and the level of competency displayed by staff members:

When I look at graduates coming through, the confidence with technology is still not what I would expect. It’s better than it was ten years ago, but it’s still not there... there are still a lot that struggle. People say ‘we need technology’ but they don’t understand what that means, what that involves or how it is going to be used (Graeme, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

Teachers at Duruga High School use technology in their lessons in line with school policy to encourage engagement in an innovative way. When in reality, the data collected that relates to the use of technology at Duruga High School suggests technology regularly serves as a replacement for sound teaching practise and as a distraction from curriculum content.

I was in Year 9 when the laptops first came in and it wasn’t everybody that got them. It was like a group of kids had a lolly and everyone got shitty at them because no else had a lolly... laptops suck actually in terms of things they can do. More of an escape from the classroom by looking at the screen rather than sticking my head out the window and wishing I was at the beach... it wasn’t like ‘Oh my God, learning is so much fun’ (Matthew, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

Student responses reflect how technology was, in many situations, having a negative impact on their relationship with Duruga High school and was not being used as an effective modus operandi by their teachers. The school’s NAPLAN results showed a marked decline after the National Partnerships Program and the extension of transmissive teaching as a result of a
focus on technology. This consequence of poor academic results indicates the school needed a different program to engage students with their learning and improve educational outcomes.

Other students interviewed in this study identified additional, multifaceted explanations for dissatisfaction in their school experience. These reasons include: bullying (cyber and face-to-face), feeling isolated, subject selection and availability, disempowerment, pressure to go to university and also senior study being solely cerebral and physically disconnected.

However, most frequently students at Duruga High School recorded feeling bored by day to day lessons:

I don’t think this school is really that great because there isn’t really that much happening any more. It’s all the same every day. You know wake up, brush your teeth, eat breakfast, go to school, come back, do your homework...we don’t have much exciting stuff...when I first came to the school I was excited because they said we were going to have many opportunities and stuff... but nothing much is happening (Karl, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

I think it is good to have several sources of information. I think if we are in the classroom all the time some kids can get really stuck. That same... go to the classroom, get out laptops, get out books, get out pens, write, write, write, write, pack up and go on again. I think if they change that it might help kids tune in a bit more. More interactive learning. We do it with PDHPE and the Arts but there is many more things we could do in Maths and English where there is more opportunity outside the school, or have more people come into the school (Lucy, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

One of the things I loved about living in Greece, was we went outside and actually went and actually did the lesson outside with the birds and it was far more interesting and you were much more motivated to listen and learn something; rather than sitting in the classroom with the teacher yelling at the bad kids about behaviour and homework. Greece is an older culture, a richer culture, and we have more excursions in the community I guess. That’s a thing that surprised me when I first got here, I thought there would be more excursions...
because it’s all out in the open and you’ve got the sea and you’ve got the mountains and all this nature, you should be outside constantly. But we don’t get to do that stuff (Larry, personal communication, November 5, 2013).

What becomes apparent from these student responses are the recurring feelings of boredom through the repetition of routine in structure and style. Generation Next are born into a world of technology (Anderson, 2012), they are constantly connected to several screens (Turkle, 2011) and generally prefer multi-tasking as their modus-operandi (Rosen, 2010; Zimmerman, 2008). However, it appears the students involved in this study are not stimulated by teachers including technology in their lessons alone and, in-line with the notion of multi-tasking and multiple stimuli, these Duruga High Students expressed a desire for a variation in physical learning environments and teaching styles. The students included in my study want to be stimulated at school and technology in the classroom isn’t providing enough stimulation to keep them engaged. Different lesson styles and structures, and regular opportunities for students to engage with their environments and communities is a pedagogical model dating back to Dewey (1938), and more recently: Field (2003), Louv (2005), Sobel (2005, 2011), Jackson (2009), Carr (2010), and the Department of Education’s policy on Environmental Education (2010). The students at Duruga High School interviewed for this study recorded a lack of engagement with their surroundings and with physical, interactive learning as a negative aspect of their school experience. The majority of students in this study reported that they were not ‘excited’ by their lessons anymore and furthermore that those feelings of being disconnected with each other and their surroundings were making learning harder and harder for students at Duruga High School to achieve learning outcomes. Johnson and O’Brien (2002) argue repetitive and unimaginative lessons communicate low expectations to students and can cause a barrier to engagement and continuation. Their research on the ‘Fair Go Project’ concluded the attitude and expectations of classroom teachers towards their students was a deciding factor in student engagement. This is examined through the interviews of students in this study; Adam and Eliza, who reported feelings of satisfaction and connectedness outlined at the start of this chapter. Adam and Eliza, stated that one facet of Duruga High School that had ‘excited’ them, connected them with their learning and alleviated the routine of day to day lessons, was the instruction of dedicated, passionate teachers who had remained enthusiastic in their role as educators.
The majority of students interviewed for this study said they had seen a different side of their teachers through their involvement in *The Journey*. This new dimension involved the teachers’ readiness to be part of a team and take themselves out of their comfort zone (in front of a class) and into the same zone as the students (in front of an audience) and has had a lasting effect on the student’s perception of their teachers:

It was funny seeing some of the teachers perform because you are used to seeing them up the front of the class teaching you how to do things and now they’re being taught by someone else and you’re used to them teaching you and they are being taught to act and everything (Annie, personal communication, November 5, 2013).

It was pretty funny seeing the teachers all dressed up and everything and not in the classrooms. It was weird at first but then it was ok. A few of the teachers that I thought before *The Journey* were a bit ‘you know...’ but then they kind of came out acting and stuff and I thought they were all right (Patricia, personal communication, November 2, 2013).

It put us all on the same level because we were all doing the same thing, we were all performing, because everybody is out of their comfort zone and we are all feeling the pressure. Like Mr Smith, he used to be our year advisor and we all got to be good friends with him. He became more like a role model for us after the show... we just saw him differently (Adam, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

It was amazing seeing the transformation of the teachers in the show. You see them in class and they are just doing their job and then you see them, they have changed as a person and you can talk to them about the show and it’s unreal, having that bond. Establishing this you feel like you are part of this big team and you are part of this whole creation together, instead of just being separate. You feel really connected to the whole team and you see them transformed and out of their shell (Eliza, personal communication, November 20, 2013).
The junior students here (Annie and Patricia) initially reacted by laughing at the teachers performing with students, as the inversion of the power relationship previously established in Primary School created a series of reactions which are alien to the junior students. These feelings of unfamiliarity culminated with feelings of respect and acceptance in the responses of the senior students Adam and Eliza. Where the experience of performing alongside staff evoked the repetition of the words “bond”, “team”, “togetherness” and “transformation”. The theory that a teacher could become a role model by working side by side with students towards a common goal is evidenced through data here as a model for success. Teachers’ accounts summarised in Chapter 5 support similar feelings of being seen in a “new light” as a means for making their time in the classroom more effective.

This model where staff and students are functioning on the same level removes the notion of ‘social ventriloquism’ (Bessant, & Watts, 2002), where the staff speak for the students, rather than with them. Students are often perceived differently from the outside than the way they perceive themselves; identity and behaviour are often interpreted in ways that have little, if any relationship to the ways in which the young person understands him or herself to be (Bessant, & Watts, 2002). As is evidenced by Matthew’s interview regarding his aspirations to be a professional racing car driver (see page 123 of this chapter), many adolescents live in prisons of other people’s expectations (Neville, 1989). However, The Journey, by focusing the self-perception of the inhabitants of Duruga High School, ensured the different parties (staff, students, families and community members) gained an understanding into individual’s identities, strengths and weaknesses which in turn gave rise to a level of respect which had previously been absent in this ecological model (Arthur, Gordon, & Butterfield, 2005).

This bond, described by staff and students through their focus interviews, is instrumental in creating a reciprocated learning culture which filters into all subject areas and playground activities to form an environment where connections between staff and students are more possible. Where the school community’s collective agency, self-determination and responsibility is developed and the students attend school willingly and regularly; thus, benefiting from their learning experience (Comer, & Emmons, 2006). The student data reported gives credence to the notion that the classroom; (if we define classroom as a space where learning happens), can no longer be considered as an independent domain which operates separately to its surrounding external communities. The data suggests that the students and staff of Duruga High involved in the research developed new connections when

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their learning took place outside of the perceived conventional learning space and transcended the established pedagogical practice of the school. It is only through viewing schools as ecological arenas where we direct our attention to the comprehensive interrelationships between the individuals, their classrooms, schools and communities that we can achieve success (Arthur et al., 2003).

The majority of staff members that were interviewed for this study listed the physical environment as the first thing they would change about Duruga High School to make it a more effective place for teaching and learning. However, the students, when questioned, did not share these sentiments. When asked “What would you do to make your school a better place?” all the students listed excursions and whole school events as their top priorities to improve their learning experience. Only one student, ‘Annie’, (as featured in the vignette at the start of this chapter), suggested changing the school’s physical appearance as a secondary consideration in her response and that was in the context of creating a “tranquillity garden” (Annie, personal communication, November 5, 2013) where she could read safely and have her lunch at the same time. The other students wanted to include excursions outside of the classroom to make learning more fun. This is important to acknowledge as all too often the word ‘excursion’ translates as extra work for teachers; particularly now with rigid regulations regarding liability and risk management (Bob, personal communication, March 12, 2013). However, for the students, ‘excursion’ can simply mean venturing into other parts of the school grounds. An activity which requires little or no extra work for staff, but, according to the student’s responses, this variation in the physical learning environment and routine could significantly improve the input and output of students during scheduled lesson time. Malone (2002, & 2008) and Malone, & Tranter (2003) argue learning in outside classroom spaces can positively effect students’ ability to manage complex environments and ultimately:

Achieve higher results in knowledge and skill acquisition, increase their physical health and motor skills, socialise and interact in new and different ways with their peers and adults, show improved attention, enhanced self-concept, self-esteem and mental health (Malone, 2008, p. 5).

A number of students involved with The Journey (Annie, Lucy, Matthew, Karl and Larry) credit the site-specific nature of the show with their connection to their school in new and creative ways; thus, realising its potential as a series of learning spaces. They were using their
imagination through the production work to transform the school spaces into platforms of performance and celebration. Thus, they envisaged their teachers utilising these spaces in similar innovative ways through their teaching practise as the next step in this process of physical transformation.

However, when we look back at the recorded data as stated in staff and student chapters, the responses regarding the school’s grounds are very different. The staff recorded a desire to beautify the school spaces to improve 1) the students’ reactions to the school grounds and 2) the publics’ perception of the school as a learning institution. The students wanted to creatively inhabit the school’s spaces to rejuvenate their lessons on a daily basis and invigorate their learning experiences. This differing perspective regarding school’s geography was addressed throughout The Journey where the school spaces were acknowledged, decorated and re-invented by staff and students alike. The school’s physical potential was re-imagined and utilised through the arts; through creativity, enthusiasm and respect. The students got to use their school in new and creative ways and also kept the school clean and aesthetically pleasing as they claimed ownership over it as a performance space with a new identity. This practical, yet creative process, fulfilled the recorded desires of both staff and students at Duruga High School.

The legacy of this transformation has manifested itself in vastly different forms throughout staff and student data. The staff have recorded a more superficial representation regarding the physical utilisation of the school spaces (see chapter 4). Whereas student opinions express themes of discovery, realisation and wonder, at the potential of a space that had previously housed feelings of dissatisfaction, boredom and control.

On a very basic, practical level, a site-specific piece of theatre in a school provides a vehicle for students, particularly new students, with a moving map where the school is demystified and becomes easy to negotiate:

I thought it was really fun... walking around the school and everything... I got to know where everything in the school is (Annie, personal communication, November 5, 2013).
Annie, a student who recorded anxious feelings about being in the school playground and was reluctant to venture out of the school’s library and into the school grounds for fear of ridicule by her peers, states how site-specific theatre provided an avenue to safely discover her school environment and realise its scope.

Other Year 7 students reported similar feelings of discovery through the rehearsal and performance process of *The Journey*:

There are other High Schools in our area that you drive up to and you just see everything straight away, but ours is a little bit older and you drive past the front and just see one little old building. So, I think it was really good for everyone to walk around the school. I was in year seven and didn’t know everywhere around the school and just walking around all the time, we knew exactly where everything was. We looked at it all differently. And for the public, well they got to see how big our school is. It’s not just what you see from the front – it’s so much more – all the little buildings, the blocks and stuff (Lucy, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

However, site-specific theatre did more than provide orientation for the students in the production and enrich their physical connection with their school. In many interviews, performers credited site-specific theatre with an avenue to connect with themselves through developing a new relationship with the spaces around them. Participants reported that *The Journey* helped them view the school and its community as being intrinsically connected as a communal organisation; mutually responsible for each other’s environments and successes. Several study participants felt like they were part of an extended family; with shared responsibilities, goals and a supportive place from which to develop as individual.

**Building Confidence**

A student involved in this study who credits the nature of *The Journey* with improving his attitude towards school and level of self-confidence is Matthew. Matthew was in Year 12 when *The Journey* was performed and recorded feelings of despondence and negativity throughout his time at Duruga High School prior to the performance:
I like doing stuff. I liked school but I didn’t like the fact that you had to do this and do that and once you said you weren’t going to uni, everyone looked down on you. Everyone had their own opinion of you. Most teachers - they go to school, then go to uni, then go back to school and it’s just like they never left. It’s all they know. They were always good at school... I just hated it. Like the time Mrs Sutton asked me what I wanted to do when I left school and I said ‘race cars’ and she just laughed at me. She pointed at me and laughed and I thought ‘I’m leaving. This is not what I want to do’ (Matthew, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

Matthew was a professionally sponsored Go Kart racer during his senior school years and was also receiving substantial pressure from his parents to quit school and take over his father’s oyster farming business. Matthew credits The Journey as the event that kept him at school and gave him the impetus to complete Year 12:

I went to year 10 and I thought I still don’t know what I want to do? So I’ll stay until year 11 and if I don’t like it I’ll get a job a year ahead of year 12 who leave and then get a job. Obviously for the kids who go to uni it’s a bit different and about half way through year 11, I thought ‘this is not what I want to do’. Then you started talking about ‘Southern Stars’ and I knew you had you had to be in school to perform in ‘Southern Stars’ and then you guys started talking about The Journey and I thought I would just stick school out till the end... everyone there wanted to be there... I miss the fun of that’ (Matthew, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

Matthew was a student who was adamant that school wasn’t for him and was determined to leave. An individual who, through his rehearsal and site-specific performance experience, developed a sense of self-worth and fun which engaged him with High School in a way traditional learning couldn’t.
Matthew, who performed on the aerial tissu or silks in one scene in the show, reflects on how site-specific theatre meant he could look his audience in the eye at height during his performance; an experience he wasn’t expecting at eight metres in the air:

It was so big and involved; the audience weren’t just sitting down the whole time. I think one of the things that I liked most was that when we were right at the top of the tissu, the top level of the audience was level with us and it was just really cool. Like when we were about to fall down and they were still up there, that bit was really cool. That was the bit I liked the best because usually people are sitting underneath and looking up and you can’t really see. I mean if I was holding myself flat, maybe. But when you are looking at the same level you can see everything... catch a lot of people’s eye... just before we dropped (Matthew, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

Figure 2. Matthew (on tissu), at eye level with the audience before his ‘drop’ The Journey, July, 2012.

For a student like Matthew, (who was too shy to audition for an acting part in The Journey, but was happy to perform in a more physical role), this physical transformation of the school’s upper quad into a performance space meant he could conduct his own physical transformation and connect with the audience during a usually secret moment of adrenaline – immediately before a manoeuvre called a ‘fast cartwheel’. This trick or ‘drop’ is thrilling for the performer as it involves, just as the name would suggest, letting go of the tissu fabric and dropping from a substantial height at rapid speed. Matthew revelled in this moment

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25 The tissu or silks is an aerial circus apparatus made up of suspended fabric. The fabric is a specialised material known as ‘carol’. A length twice the required height is passed through a rated swivel and a protective sleeve to the mid-point then knotted in a figure eight. All tricks on this apparatus are done at several metres above the ground. (McCutcheon, & Perrem. 2003)
(illustrated in Figure 2.) as he let the audience witness his newly created physical world and discover this thrill through his proximity. Furthermore, he became visible and his previously established anonymity gave way to recognition and distinction; defying gravity and reputation, to trigger applause and admiration. Matthew’s narrative, as captured and reproduced in this thesis has significant bearing on my research as it directly correlates with redefining his personal identity, the identity of the school and the aesthetic space where the two connect. Adolescents need to independently master tasks and foster achievement to develop a healthy self-esteem (Bandura, 2002; Santrock, 2008). Matthew was engaged with this social cognitive concept of self-efficacy during The Journey through the physical transformation of his body and his connection to the transformation of the school spaces. Killen (2005) suggests if students are to be successful, they must believe they are able to learn and most often this belief will come from the knowledge that they have previously been successful when attempting to learn and achieve new things. When Matthew experienced success through his involvement in The Journey, a series of intricate connections and developments filtered through Matthew’s physical domain and into his social and psychological domains; thus, providing the momentum to complete his education.

Matthew completed his education and now has full time work in retail in the Duruga Community. He regularly returns to the school to help train the school’s circus troupe and observes rehearsals for other school-based performances.

A similar story of building confidence is attributable to Robert; an Indigenous student who serially truanted, displayed aggressive behaviour and was constantly in trouble with staff and students until his involvement in The Journey.

When I first met Robert I thought he was a bit of a rough one, but since the show he’s change completely – he’s a lot more sensitive. More aware (Adam, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

This response is from one of Robert’s year group peers. However, staff members interviewed for this research also commented specifically on Robert as a “success story” of the whole school project. Success being measured by the facts that he stayed at school, remained off the discipline and uniform list and actively participated in school culture; not only in The Journey, but in other lessons in his subject selection areas:

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One boy actually said he was finishing school last year and after a member of
the community praised his performance, he said ‘if it wasn’t for The Journey I
would have left school before this’. The Journey was so good for him, so
positive, good feedback – a good vibe which he doesn’t get a lot in his life. He
will remember that for the rest of his life (Karen, personal communication,
August 13, 2013).

This quote substantiates the philosophy underlying The Journey and its’ inclusive nature; the
ability to foster choice and autonomy which in turn saw study participants see an
enhancement in individual’s strengths and their areas of speciality. Every individual who
asked to be involved in the show was involved in the show. No one was excluded. Individual
areas of interest and proficiency were identified and celebrated – ensuring the input and
output of a vast array of skills, ideas and motivations for involvement. The ethos of the
production event was that every student was treated with respect and participants saw this
filter into the other areas of their school experience:

I can think of some year twelve students that I had run-ins with first or second
week of 2012 and in a six month period I saw a change. And you might think
that’s hard to attribute to their involvement in The Journey, but I think it’s solely
the reason they were able to focus on school and why their attitude in general
changed - because they had a real reason for being here. They weren’t just
biding their time until the end of the HSC (Graeme, personal communication,
November 20, 2013).

This comment by Duruga High School’s Deputy Principal is in direct reference to Matthew
and Robert and reflects the sentiments of the majority of staff members surveyed for the
study. Graeme’s quote provides evidence for the assertion that High School had lost its’
meaning and purpose for the senior students who participated in this study and The Journey
gave them an alternate reason to be at school:
I don’t think I’d have that much confidence like getting up on stage – I could never do that “Welcome to Country”26, I could never do that... I was always wanting to keep my legs and my hands moving and my fingers... It was, like in English I couldn’t learn anything at all, I couldn’t concentrate, it was going in one ear and out the other... To tell you the truth, I feel really blessed as well for you to work out how that show is going to go and to be part of it. To teach me how to be still (Robert, personal communication, June 13, 2013).

This response provides an insight into how The Journey met the personal learning needs of participating students Matthew and Robert, whilst encouraging these students to create change in themselves; physically and intellectually. This process was undertaken voluntarily and as Matthew said in his interview he didn’t really like being told what to do; therefore, the autonomous nature of the project was also a key element in the success of the learning process for these senior students. The current generation of students are becoming increasingly self-governing in their desire to control their surroundings, input and output regarding their learning environments (Anderson, 2012; Carr, 2010; Rosen 2010; Turkle 2011) and autonomy was a recurring desirable element of the project for making meaningful differences in the students and in their surrounding environments.

One such student was Annie; a junior student who recorded an increase in self-confidence through her involvement in The Journey. Annie was in year 7 when The Journey was performed at the school and she took on a main acting role in the performance project. Although she had been involved in Drama at Primary School, her Primary School teachers labelled her quiet and reserved; lacking in self-confidence and social skills. The following quote is from one of Annie’s Primary School teachers and provides us with an insight into her personal development:

Annie certainly surprised me! Although we started to see potential in Primary School; Annie only flourished towards the end of year six, so we thought it would be interesting to see if she got involved in a whole school production. So

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26 “Welcome to Country” is a ceremony performed by Indigenous Australians to welcome visitors to their traditional land.
yes, it was a surprise to see Annie involved in *The Journey* (Kim, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

She struggles. She’s a little girl who struggles with life and struggles with her own self-confidence, struggles with her relationships and I just saw her blossom. I saw her up there on stage with some of the seniors and she was excelling. She was a little star (Nigel, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

Annie was in year 8 when interviewed for this study and recorded previous feelings of discontentment because she felt like she didn’t belong at Duruga High School. As an avid reader, Annie was bullied for reading in the playground but couldn’t sit and read in the library at lunchtimes because of the school’s ‘no food in buildings’ policy.

I love reading and I have since year five... it’s quiet and peaceful to just sit and read... we need an area at school where you could sit at lunchtime, a tranquillity garden, where you can eat your food and be sheltered and safe and do whatever you want, like have board games... I’d like to do more clubs like an acting club or a book club... (Annie, personal communication, November 5, 2013).

Responses collected after *The Journey* suggests the production helped Annie develop her self-esteem and meet personal challenges:

A lot of teachers were saying ‘Oh my God you were so good’ and I think I’ve gained a bit more confidence from it. I had tried out for other parts because I knew I had a strong voice in year 5 and year 6 but I never got accepted in Primary School because you had to sing and I didn’t like people hearing me and so I didn’t get through (Annie, personal communication, November 5, 2013).

As an academic student who preferred the company of books to people, Annie indicated she struggled with social situations in the playground and group work in the classrooms. She found it hard to communicate with her peers and credits *The Journey* with improving her self-confidence, relationships and attitude towards school. Annie, along with the other students interviewed for this study, stated *The Journey* not only improved their self-confidence, but
also gave them the assurance to speak to other students outside their normal friendship circle at school.

**Relationship with Peers**

The structure of *The Journey* was ‘community modelled’ meaning any person (staff, student or community member) that wanted to be involved in the project, could be involved in the project. This inclusiveness meant that many students who wouldn’t ordinarily interact were connected through creative expression and celebration. Students at Duruga High School were rarely given the opportunity to participate in activities that extend outside their immediate class and/or friendship group. However, *The Journey* saw students from different years, races, religions and socio-economic groups develop respect for each other and become friends. According to Vinson (2007) and Dewey (1938), these peer relationships are important in a school context, as shared experiences cultivate shared responsibilities and if the primary function of schools is to educate citizens for their future citizenship, research projects that examine the effects of these shared experiences in schools are vital to understanding the limitations of the said projects. This idea of communal citizenship is not a new one as theorised by Dewey (1938), through to Bottrell and Goodwin, (2011) and Vinson in his report *Dropping off the Edge* (2007); argues that communal rights and responsibilities are skills which need to be addressed and fostered through the process of education and the collective desire to do what is right for our own communities.

The collaboration of students in *The Journey* (who wouldn’t normally work together), was facilitated in a variety of ways. Firstly, as stated by Patricia, it was fostered through the nature of the arts and its tendency to encourage open expression and reciprocated communication:

> Go into Drama or Music and do something that you really want to do... see the real side of people, actually get to meet them and actually get to see what they are like and have decent, real conversations with each other. Make some real friends (Patricia, personal communication, November 2, 2013).

Secondly, due to the emphasis on students maintaining ownership of the show through design, construction and performance of every stage of *The Journey* process, different kinds
of students were working together (often for the first time) towards a common goal. Discovering new elements of each other’s personalities and giving these elements a new respect:

The show was just so fun, you know, running around, working on it, not getting any sleep, you become better friends with everybody. I get along with people a lot better now, like people skills, more accepting, not so judgemental. When I first started in the show I wasn’t good friends with Annie or Wal. I used to think they were weird. But now I am. Pretty cool dudes (Adam, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

I liked it that you thought you knew a person, but you have no idea they have this skill – it’s like ‘WOW! They can do THAT!’ Different students... like when we were having our make-up done. I was in year 11 and there were year 8’s doing my make-up and everything. It’s cool – you realise people have all these skills. (Eliza, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

I learnt it’s OK to be different, to be out of the box. And it’s OK for other people to be out of the box as well. You just accept them. It really doesn’t matter what you do at school and stuff – what really matters is what you do together (Lucy, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

These responses evidence the change in students’ perception of each other changed throughout the process of The Journey. This shift in relationships transformed the internal school community and, as stated, made participating individuals less judgemental, more accepting and more likely to work together on common projects. This unified front has the potential to transform the external community’s perception of Duruga High School by reframing the public perception of students’ relationships and attitudes. Through Duruga High working together as a team, the school projected a unified celebration of synchronized skill and cohesiveness. Hence, when the community values individuals, the individuals begin to value themselves, and this cycle of respect and understanding can revolutionise learning within a school framework.
Well, you got to meet kids that were in year 9 or year 12 even, and you grew quite close to them and you know them really well... one of the older boys... we had to move tables during the show and I had to look up and give him signals and stuff and I didn’t really know him but then we started talking and he is really nice. He still says ‘hi’ to me in the playground... and Remi was really fun and easy to work with and we got to hear all his stories and everything (Annie, personal communication, November 5, 2013).

Remi was an exchange student from Spain attending Duruga High School during the production run of _The Journey_ and was given the main acting part of ‘Odysseus.’ He worked hard on his lines with the ESL staff at the school and recorded improvements in his English expression through his work on the performance project. He also worked as assistant director for some scenes and designed and created the art work for the posters, fliers and programs. The cast and crew enjoyed listening to his personal anecdotes throughout rehearsal and production and positive references to Remi recur frequently throughout the student focus interviews:

_The Journey_ was really, really fun. It was a really good experience and I was really sad when it ended and I wanted it to keep going so we had more nights to do it. Even just talking to everyone before a scene, joke and a laugh – like the exchange student, Remi, I didn’t really know him until _The Journey_. And he is really funny; we all got to know him before he left (Patricia, personal communication, November 2, 2013).

Though English is Remi’s second language and staff reported he struggled with communication and expression in some classroom situations, the inclusive nature of _The Journey_ allowed Remi to share his stories about his culture with the cast and crew in an informal, supportive situation. The interview samples evidence that students at the school got to learn more about Remi’s country and culture through their connection through the whole school arts project _The Journey_. This opportunity to share customs through personal narratives with such a variety of students, is in direct accordance with the charters of international
exchange students and departmental multi-cultural philosophies. 

Finally, the site-specific nature of the performance meant the students had to become physically aware of each other in new and challenging ways. *The Journey*, as a piece of site-specific theatre, required the students to change their attitude towards their physical spaces. The students involved in the production were required to physically transform the school grounds and also their bodies and their subsequent relationships with these spaces to bring dimension to the work:

Performing some scenes was challenging. We had a pretty good idea the area was restricted and we had to be aware that the band was behind us and then you’ve got all the dancers and the actors and you’ve got to have all this special awareness as well. The timing, we had to work with the band as well, the drum beat – it all pulled together in the end. Yes, it was challenging, but that’s good. It’s good to have a challenge (Eliza, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

The scene being discussed by Eliza involved several hundred students, staff and community members performing for several hundred audience members. The scene showcased circus performers, dancers, actors, moving props and a six-piece band in an area which was also the school’s upper quad, so performers and audience had to navigate trees, drinking fountains and lunch seats during this section. This ‘place’ had become one of the ‘players’ in this scene and an institutional building was made accessible to the general public to redefine the perceived view of the established space, thus empowering its inhabitants and transforming their connection with their environment and with each other. The students recorded having to ‘pull together’ to overcome physical obstacles in a synchronised cooperative that forced individuals to ‘get along’ to maintain safety and effectively perform.

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27 [https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/multicultural-education-policy](https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/multicultural-education-policy), sites 1.3: Schools ensure inclusive teaching practices which recognize and respect the cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds of all students and promote an open and tolerant attitude towards cultural diversity, different perspectives and world views, and 1.4: Schools provide programs that enable students learning English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) to develop their English language and literacy skills so that they are able to fully participate in schooling and achieve equitable educational outcomes.
The performers had to develop a collective consciousness; an awareness and respect for themselves and their surroundings that became necessary for success. They had to transform the perception of personal space (the body) through rehearsal and performance and then transform the public space (the school) and the association between these two spaces. The data suggests it is the total environment which influences learning for students; therefore, as reinforced by Killen (2005), teachers must attend to the physical, social and psychological aspects of each student and their learning context, in order for learning to be effective. The students, in turn, recorded wanting to ‘show off’ this new correlation to their families and other community members and in doing so, challenged the public perception of Duruga High School.

**Relationship with the Community**

All the students interviewed for this study believe that before *The Journey*, their school had a bad reputation in their community:

> People go ‘oh, you go to Duruga High and they are as dodgy as’... but it was more like pity than a direct sledge (Matthew, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

This school did not have a good reputation in the community. Definitely not. Every time I’d go to the hairdresser they would say ‘What school do you go to?’ And I’d say ‘Duruga High’ and they’d go ‘Oh Really’... it’s because they only see the bad side. They had only seen the smoking and the fighting... (Patricia, personal communication, November 2, 2013).

> It’s a public school and it’s a bit rough. There are girl fights a lot now. It used to be older guys fighting over girlfriends and whatnot but ever since that year eight went to hospital with head injuries, it’s a lot better. Fighting is stupid, you know... you could kill someone (Adam, personal communication, December 11, 2013).
The school has received negative publicity in the last five years both locally and state wide for violence and low test results. Young people are regularly represented as the major cause of crime, anti-social behaviour, drug abuse and social disorder in society (Bessant, & Watts, 2002), and it is the nature of journalism to accentuate ‘bad news’ thus creating a ‘moral panic’ about youth culture (Bessant, & Watts, 2002). However, the majority of students at Duruga High School feel misrepresented by a minority of the school’s population:

Some people go ‘there are loads of fights at Duruga High’ but there are fights at almost every school. My mum has a friend who has taught here and she said ‘I taught the lower classes and the kids were really rude and everything’ and I was offended. I was like ‘you only taught the lower classes – when you teach higher classes it’s normally a bit better’. She was judging the whole school on just one group of people and that’s not right (Annie, personal communication, November 5, 2013).

The Journey gave the local paper something new to write about and the students noticed the change in attitude of their local community. On August 1st, 2012, the local paper reported:

The commitment of more than 450 staff, students and community members was evident by the professional way the production was run and executed... this innovative production actively involved the audience to engage and enhance the experience of those watching. Many audience members were amazed by the students’ talent, the rapport the teachers have built with the students and the creativity, uniqueness and professionalism of the production as a whole (“The Journey was Epic Entertainment”, 2012).

The Journey helped change the public face of their school by providing the students with an avenue to show off their skills and abilities:

I think the community got quite amazed and now people go ‘Oh my God – that was AMAZING! I am going to send my kid there in Year 7’ (Annie, personal communication, November 5, 2013).
I think sometimes because we are a small area and the word spreads quickly so sometimes the perception of the school in the community is not so good. But to see us all working together like this and putting on something amazing like this I think it was really good for the school... I think the performance part was really important because it showed what we can do. We have practiced and put a whole lot of effort into it – everyone has – and then showing it off... having the opportunity to go ‘heh, look how cool we are, we can do all this stuff’ It’s something positive for the community to focus on that we do. It shows that we are not bad all the time – everyone gets involved, everyone is happy to be involved (Lucy, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

Recurring themes of being “amazing”, togetherness and an implication of value placed on the opportunity to show their community a positive aspect of their school, suggest the value placed on community by the students involved in this study. According to Bolton (1999) and Sobel (2005), students need regular occasions to show their communities what they can achieve in order to create a climate of respect and understanding. They need opportunities to ‘give back’ and feel valued; thus, evolving into human resources and productive assets to the health of a community. The community, in turn, recontextualises their attitude towards their local school and in some cases, education in general; an important step when welcoming their students into citizenship (Dewey, 1938).

Conclusion

Figure 3. Remi (Odysseus) and Annie (his side kick), ‘sailing’ into a playground stage space filled with family and community members as audience during The Journey, July 2012.
It is the opening night of the show and Annie tells me she feels nervous about her lines, keeping her balance on the ‘boat’ and maintaining her focus if she sees her family in the audience.

The show goes well and Annie is backstage, smiling from ear to ear. She is pleased with her performance and that of her peers. She says she has performed with confidence and happily discusses the night. Through this discussion she claims ownership of her character, the story and the stage spaces which are also the playground spaces.

Annie no longer feels like a stranger in the playground as it has become her stage and a place she can identify with.

The students interviewed for this study were largely dissatisfied at school prior to their involvement in The Journey and then recorded feeling happier and more satisfied at school after their participation in the production. This recorded happiness can be attributed to a number of factors; most of which pertain to a change in the perception of existing relationships. The first of which includes a change in the way the teachers were perceived by students at school, from authority figures to allies with similar goals for success and a shift in the way students felt they were perceived by staff and their fellow peers, with an emphasis on individuality and mutual respect. By performing together in front of a public audience the inhabitants of Duruga High school had to rely on each other for support and understanding as they ventured out of their comfort zones together, many for the first time in a public arena.

The students also changed the way they saw their school environment from stagnant and rigid, to organic and evolving. The students expressed the desire to look after their school’s spaces and celebrate its’ potential as a series of stages and innovative learning environments. This pride in their school became evident through the performance process and this in turn, improved the reputation of Duruga High School within its’ local community. This amended public reputation, evoked feelings of pride and esteem in the participating students (and staff), a self-perpetuating pride which was still apparent at the time of the interviews (over a year after the completion of the performance).
The students in this study recorded an increase in the number and quality of relationships formed with each other; dispelling previously established social mores and norms. These friendship groups were across year and social groupings; many lasting beyond the performance period and into the research period.

Lastly, and in many ways most importantly, *The Journey* gave participating students an opportunity to achieve, many for the first time. This desire to achieve filtered into other arenas of the students’ lives; including social, psychological, physical and academic and in the cases recorded here, produced feelings of happiness, satisfaction and pride which meant the students were more likely to attend school and engage in school culture.

Whether the core business of education is to prepare students for productive citizenship and what constitutes a ‘productive’ citizen are issues examined by many educational theorists (Chawla, & Cushing, 2007; Dewey, 1938; Sobel, 2005) and their resolution should be considered a limitation of this study. However, the first logical step in any process of education is getting young people to school, closely followed by happily engaging them with their school culture. These findings provide evidence that *The Journey* achieved these two steps effectively for the students who participated in this study.

A recurring factor in the satisfaction for a number of students interviewed for this study is their involvement in Duruga High School’s circus program and they credit this program with their involvement in *The Journey*. The next chapter will explore this program by focusing on the testimonials of the circus students and how their experience of this art form has enhanced their education at Duruga High School.
CHAPTER 7 - CIRCUS FINDINGS

The Circus family...

It is Monday morning and Matthew runs into English, (his first lesson of the day) sweating and panting so as not to be late. He has been at circus training since 8 am in the school gym. The other boys in his class tease him and call him a ‘clown’ and a ‘girl’ for wearing silly costumes and tight costumes. He ignores them. He can afford to do this with a smirk on his face because he has a secret. Matthew is quietly confident that when they see his upcoming performance, see him high in the air, lifting girls and doing drops on the tissu, it will change their opinion of what it means to be a performer in The Journey and be part of ‘the circus family’.

This chapter will focus on the circus component of The Journey and its effects on the staff, students and community members of the Duruga area. Circus has been targeted in this study as a unique element of research, as circus and the physical embodiment of learning, emerged in several interviews as an unexpected performance element (by the audience) and as effective tool for engagement (by the students, parents and other family members involved with the in-school circus). It is important to include circus as a separate chapter in these findings as it is part of what made The Journey an idiosyncratic experience for performers and audience alike and, in turn, brings a unique dimension to this study.

Duruga High School has offered an in-school circus program since 2002 and for many of the participants it is an integral, if not ‘normal’, part of their learning experience. However, for a number of parents of students at Duruga High School and also for a number of audience members who witnessed the students performing circus during The Journey, circus was reflected through the interviews as anything but ‘normal’. The emerging patterns expressed through the interview responses imply that the circus component of The Journey brought a new dimension to the school production in that the skills displayed were not what an audience would expect to see in a ‘standard’ school production; as one mother pointed out after viewing her own children in The Journey: “They are extraordinary” (Leanne, personal communication, November 20, 2014). This chapter seeks to explore the effects of seeing the Duruga High students perform circus skills at school, in school buildings and how circus can
create awe and wonder in the eyes of parents and associated audience members (as opposed to other forms of physical theatre like drama, dance or gymnastics).

Several topics emerged from the coding of the collected responses regarding the role circus played in the whole school experience *The Journey* including: The Nature of Circus, Risk and the Physical Benefits of Circus, Interpersonal Benefits of Circus and The Psychological Benefits of Circus.

**The Nature of Circus**

Peta Tait, (2005) argues that although circus, like other art forms, is performative, making and re-making itself as it happens, and its languages are imaginative, entertaining and inventive; it differs from other art forms through its’ manipulation of cultural beliefs about nature, physicality and freedom. She argues:

> The overall effect of a circus act may be viscerally thrilling rather than cognitively understood, especially if the spectators do not knowingly see the calculated skill that went into creating its athleticism, artistry and cultural identity. Circus, as an institution, and through its separate skills, exemplifies cultural attunement to bodily display, and remains opportunistically responsive to social fashions, political events and shifts in political mood (Tait, 2005, p. 7).

The circus skills on display in *The Journey* can be categorised as:

1) Aerial work on the lyra (aerial hoop), trapeze (single and triple), the straps, tissu (silks) and aerial hammock,

2) Fire performing; in the form of twirling, sculpture and fire breathing (teacher only),

3) Three scenes with the ‘adagio’ or hand-to-hand balancing ensemble.

These categories list the specifics behind the circus skills featured in *The Journey*, however research into the appeal of circus maintains it is far more than just physical prowess. Circus is theorised to have a ‘magic’ which is linked to the history of the art form and the culture and tradition it stems from:

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28 Adagio is a circus discipline that requires hand to hand balancing (Perrem, & McCutcheon, 2003).
The magic of the circus still exists. This is a phenomenon that is rooted within all of us. It is held within our folk memories. I have experience of children who have never seen a circus performance, either live or recorded, who have been enthralled by the idea of circus alone (Ward, 1991, p. 23).

Circus is a very old art form, shrouded in mystery and wonder:

The history and actuality of circus is a model of Multiculturalism and co-existence. It is a universal art form with an ancient and diverse pedigree. To study history and contemporary development is to see the world in microcosm, its variety, its challenges and its ever-changing view of itself... circus is both metaphor and reality (Bolton, 1999, p. 14).


*The Journey* featured music, dance, drama and gymnastics. It also encompassed writing and research, design, art, craft and construction in its pre-production processes. However, it is circus and the physical embodiment of learning that featured in the majority of recorded interviews as an unexpected and effective tool for engagement. The co-director of the in-school circus troupe is a teacher of Industrial Arts at Duruga High School who has worked there for 16 years. He believes this perception of the circus program is largely because of the distinct characteristics of circus as a unique pedagogical program:

It is a point of difference, it’s very unusual in schools... typical circus skills that you wouldn’t expect to find operating in a school. Particularly if you were unaware that a circus operated here. You may expect to find a choir, a couple of soloists singing, perhaps a dance troupe, that sort of thing is what you expect in a school performance. Whereas this was a bit of a surprise for people who were not initiated to what we do (John, personal communication, August 13, 2014).
Janet and Leanne; mothers of students who have been part of the circus program at the High School and both participated in The Journey agrees with John’s sentiments:

All my kids did circus in The Journey. It was innovative. So different. It was so creative... it gave them the opportunity to do things they wouldn’t normally do (Janet, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

They have skills, new skills that they wouldn’t have normally gotten. People think ‘Where would you have learnt to do that? Not at school!’ That’s what circus has given them. They are extraordinary (Leanne, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

In summation, these responses suggest that the nature of circus worked on two distinct levels to affect the perception of audience members who viewed The Journey:

1) Circus is an art form that has been defined by folklore throughout history as risky and self-governing; it holds a place in the collective conscious of people as extraordinary. It is often perceived as ‘superhuman’ and has existed on the ‘fringe’ of society for centuries. It is this cultural perception which leads people to regard circus with a mixture of fear, awe and wonder.

2) As circus is not generally part of a NSW school curriculum or in the personal memories of many audience members’ school experience; it may be perceived as unknown, exhilarating and definitely something that exists outside the ‘norm’. Where the audience is unsure whether to feel ‘delight’ or ‘anxiety’ (Tait, 2005, p. 143) in response to activities which may be perceived as dangerous, through manipulation and artifice.

**Risk and the Physical Benefits of Circus**

Reg Bolton, a teacher, performer and circus practitioner who is widely acknowledged as the father of Community Circus in Australia posed the question: “If this Circus stuff is ‘so good for you’, why has it not been universally adopted by schools; why is there so little Circus in Education?” (Bolton, 1999, p. 9). He argues the intrinsic nature of circus as a spectacle tied to wonderment, awe and feats of danger is essential in understanding its appeal to young people.
as both spectator and participant. It is also these elements of mystery, danger and risk that can deter teachers and schools from running circus programs (Bolton, 1999). John, the co-director of the circus program at Duruga High School believes this may be the case as the same two teachers have run the in-school circus program since its inception, and while other staff members recognise the benefits of the program, they choose not to be directly involved:

I think they are worried they might put themselves at risk if somebody gets injured, or if they catch somebody awkward and aside from that the school has, for its entire history, had an older staff who aren’t so energetic anymore when it comes to extra-curricular activities... these are the people who see that as being too risky a thing for people to be involved in – adults let alone kids... but I think there are people who recognise it as being a magic thing to do. I think the kids perceive it as a desirable thing to be involved in... If you can do circus stuff then you’ve got some sort of superhero about you (John, personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Here we see a paradox where circus is perceived both as dangerous and exhilarating and simultaneously safe and highly controlled; a balance, John says needs to be “carefully managed to operate successfully within a school framework”29. This tension means that circus exists both ‘within’ and ‘outside’ culture at the same time and therefore is appealing to young people who are constantly attempting to find ways of fitting in and acting out all at once. As Helen Stoddart explains:

The circus is mendacious, eternally opportunistic, at turns demotic and status-seeking, absurd and charming, breathtaking and predictable; prone to material catastrophe and yet driven by unparalleled physical skill and spectacular showmanship. Culturally and geographically it is eclectic, yet also type ridden. Alternatively, sometimes simultaneously, it is conservative, outlawed, conformist and transgressive (Stoddart, 2000, p. 1).

17 The school’s circus program has an extensive ‘risk management’ policy document which is updated, scrutinised and approved by the school’s executive on an annual basis.
This dichotomy acts in favour of circus in a performance context as it creates an “air of mystery”; deeply ingrained in our “folk memories” (Ward, 1991) and therefore acts to attract young people to participate in the culturally perceived ‘risky’ physical activities.

Half the circus students who were interviewed for this study were identified by the school’s executive as ‘at risk’ and were being monitored for behaviour difficulties and so placed on academic review. The students featured in this chapter credit the circus program with the impetus for keeping them at school and motivated them to achieve. There is some research that considers the connection between circus and youth at risk. Bolton (1999, 2004), argues circus can give young people a healthy, attractive alternative to other risk factors that are available to “combat” adolescent stress and engage in the necessary risky behaviours that require testing social norms and boundaries, thus developing an identity that will help them move successfully from adolescence into adulthood. Deborah Lupton in her book Risk examines the notions of risk and its associations with pleasure for teenagers and their desire to induce gratifying responses to appear “superhuman”; portraying superior qualities that allow us to court danger without harming ourselves (Lupton, 1999, p. 152). A number of the students who participated in the circus part of The Journey maintained the measured risk in the performance, once conquered was a ‘stand out’ achievement and something to be proud of:

My favourite experience was the fire twirling because I hadn’t really had much experience with it before and I was a bit scared at first, but after I got taught how to do it was a lot of fun. My friends thought it was pretty impressive because you don’t really see it that often in shows. It stands out and they said it was one of their favourite things to see. It felt like a real achievement learning the fire poi (Eliza, personal communication, November 20, 2013).
Eliza selected this photograph as her favourite image when shown a selection of photographs from *The Journey* as she thought it looked impressive. The students had to be 18 years old to participate in fire performing and were part of a self-defined ‘elite minority’ who were strictly monitored during rehearsals and performances for safety reasons. These rigid conditions regarding fire twirling didn’t detract from the appeal of the skill and the feelings of freedom recorded by the participating students when they manipulated fire. As illuminated by John Fox when outlining why fire is such an effective performance tool:

> Fire will always appeal. It’s elemental, primeval, dangerous and beautiful. Given the time we spend inside our offices and homes, replete with central heating... the more exotic it becomes to see and smell real, unpredictable smoke and flames (Fox, 2002, p. 44).
This appeal of fire did not go unnoticed by the audience, who marvelled in seeing the elemental spectacle for the first time:

It’s confronting to see children playing with fire in a school, but I wasn’t actually confronted by it, I was impressed by it (Alex, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

The circus side of the performance was just fantastic. I’ve never seen anything like it locally and to have fire throwing, all those things you wouldn’t normally see... It’s exciting. Really good! (Kim, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

I’d never seen anyone so close playing with fire. I like the idea of the circus with the performance. That was really new for me (Larry, personal communication, 2013).

I liked the hell scene the most because it had all the circus in it, it had the fire, just the atmosphere, and I thought it was really cool. I heard from a lot of people that it was their favourite thing too, the fire breathing and everyone thought wow! (Patricia, personal communication, November 2, 2013).

The fire breathing was performed by a maths teacher who learnt how to breathe fire for The Journey and maintained that the level of “legendary status” associated with being a fire performer made his job so much easier for the rest of the calendar year (Paul, personal communication, August 13, 2014).

The ideas of innovation and confrontation at close proximity are repeated throughout these responses and they reiterate the cultural perception of circus as being unexpectedly ‘risky’ and yet simultaneously, beautiful. The idea that students can be perceived as being ‘risky’ and publicly playing at danger, whilst creating entertainment and wonder at the same time is intrinsic to understanding how circus engages students with arts experiences and how The Journey engaged students with their school’s culture and community. When these arts experiences happen within their school communities; they have the potential to connect the
students with their schools in new ways and give them new understanding of their potential as performers and as people within this environment.

This element of risk that makes circus appealing to young people can be challenging for their parents when they hear the word circus. Again, this reaction is part of the perception of circus that in turn makes it appealing for young people (i.e.: to ‘act out’ and discover parental boundaries (Bolton, 1999)). Some parents interviewed for this study expressed initial concerns about their children getting involved in the circus program:

Well I was dubious to start. I really was. I always worried about safety. Safety was always paramount in my mind. I told them to play tennis or take up swimming. Anything that was safe - I am just so safety conscious. But they were doing weird and wonderful things and she loved it. She just loved it. And I saw there were safety things coming into play, majorly. You did all the right things. The circus did all the right things and she just grew, she loved it (Leanne, personal communication, November 20, 2014).

However, other parents, after being invited to come into the school to view and participate in rehearsals to alleviate any concerns, misunderstandings or ‘mystery’ surrounding the circus performing, formulated different opinions regarding safety, risk and circus:

I don’t think I was ever worried because you know I saw that there was always safety stuff happening and I was never worried. No. Never (Janet, personal communication, November 20, 2014).

I think after years of following you guys with the circus and watching Eliza develop with the circus, we trust and have faith that you guys will train the kids up well enough for these situations. If she was in year 7 and it was her first day at circus – probably not, but she is in year 12. We always feel comfortable – if you guys reckon she can do it, then she can do it (Tom, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

The notion of ‘safe risk’ was explained to parents and care givers and the importance of maintaining the impression of ‘danger’ explained in detail. The quotes selected above are
examples of the level of belief the participating parents had in the circus component of *The Journey*. This point is relevant to this study as it provides evidence for the idea that circus can improve the participating student’s relationship with school and their overall attitude towards being part of school life. The parents were prepared to suspend the social stereotype of dangerous circus activities when they saw their children enthusiastically and safely engaging in school circus activities.

Lupton suggests young people should be encouraged to take calculated risks as this is how they learn:

Some risks, therefore, are not to be avoided but rather embraced as part of the trajectory of self-actualisation. To live a life that involves the avoidance of all risks is to be stultified, moribund, trapped in old habits and ways, to fail to develop as a person (Lupton, 1999, p. 155).

Parents who recognise appropriate risk taking and acknowledge it will usually get a more courageous child (Jensen, 1998, p. 21).

Some respondents also reflect this idea of calculated risk being associated with identity development and self-actualisation:

Survival skills are missing now days. Everything we do now is to ‘protect our children’. Whether we like it or not our children are going to get hurt and if they haven’t got a few scars on them they haven’t done anything. Haven’t learnt anything (Beryl, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

Obviously, fire performing is not a skill where a “few scars” would be an optimum part of the learning process and the performers spend years learning with non-flammable equipment before they are allowed to use fire equipment and are guarded by a safety crew. In fact, in the 12 years the circus program has run at Duruga High School there has only ever been one accident; a sprained wrist, the result of a student behaving outside the program’s safety guidelines during a warm-up stretching session:
...Even on the single case of an injury of a student that was nothing to with the circus acting outside their risk management brief. It was a student doing a silly thing in an unsupervised manner (John, personal communication, August 13, 2014).

The circus has worked hard to maintain this reputation and maintain its illusion of danger underpinned by its stringent level of safe risk. As outlined by the school’s Principal:

I think you’ve been here 12 years now and you’ve been running the circus all that time. Maybe 5 or 6 years ago we had circus in years 9 and 10 as a Course Elective and you and John have demonstrated to me that you have the ‘runs on the board’ so to speak in that you do a fabulous job, you can create a fabulous show, a creative show in as safe a way as possible. You have demonstrated to me that you’ve got the kids’ best interests at heart, the best interest of the school at heart; I know you are looking after it (Nigel, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

This observation made by the Principal is relevant to this study as it underpins the philosophy stated by John, the risk manager of the school’s circus, that risk is necessary to move forward and learn new skills, but must be managed effectively in order to receive backing from the school’s executive.

A number of audience members commented on how the circus was the most exciting part of The Journey and can be less dangerous than other aspects of school life at Duruga High:

If I was asked if I thought fire twirling was dangerous or having kids up on trapeze is dangerous, absolutely not. It’s exciting. It’s dangerous just getting home from school of an afternoon. It can be dangerous in some school playgrounds... some of the bullying or pushing or shoving that that goes on... (Kim, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

The data examined in the student findings chapter of this thesis suggests the young people of Duruga High School face genuinely risky activities on a daily basis that are not regulated by exterior authorities (like the safety crews required to make circus safe). The local students
live in a recognised area of low socio-economic status and are exposed to risk factors regularly through school, social and home environments (Duruga High School National Partnerships on Low SES School Communities-Situational Analysis Report, 2010).

Several researchers; Bolton, (1999); Donelan, & O’Brien (2008); Stoddart, (2000); Sugarman, (2001); Ward, (1991), argue involvement in creative arts (in this case, circus) can provide students with a broad range of personal and social benefits. These benefits include increased self-esteem, artistic and communication skills development, a sense of achievement and well-being, community connectedness, social inclusion and enjoyment. Circus is an example of a creative art form which has traditionally been labelled as working class, marginalised entertainment, existing in the cultural limbo of high and low culture (Fensham, 1997) and is therefore appealing for marginalised young people. As Bolton and Ward suggest, it is often these students that gravitate towards circus as a safe vehicle to ‘act out’ and take charge of their bodies and their lives through externally perceived risky behaviours in the form of a ‘safe’ cry for attention and affirmation. Steve Ward in his thesis “Role up and Join the Circus” points out that because circus is non-elitist it more accessible to young people from areas of social deprivation than most art forms, as it is inclusive and promotes values of equality and celebrating difference whilst promoting community, belonging and well-being at the same time (Ward, 1991). Bolton’s thesis argues that:

Contemporary western childhood presents unexpected hazards, mostly involving passivity and over-protection. In other parts of the world, childhood has other problems, linked to deprivation, exploitation and physical danger. In either case, a child involved in circus activities has a chance to make good some deficits by experiencing constructive physical risk, aspiration, trust, fun, self-individuation and hard work (Bolton, 2004, p. 3).

The circus students at Duruga High School recorded feeling aware of their bodies as vehicles for discovery, performance and celebration30. Bowman (2004) argues physical connection to the arts is vital in creating lasting meaningful knowledge about ourselves and how we connect to our environment: "Knowing in any humanly meaningful sense is emergent from and grounded in bodily experience and continuous with the cultural production of meaning”

30 See student findings chapter 6. Matthew and Robert interview samples.
(Bowman, 2004, p.48). This physical creation of awareness and knowledge is significant when we consider that all too often, the teenage body is ‘punished’ by teenagers in an attempt to fit into stereotypes and assert ownership through various (often physically destructive) rites of passage (Bolton, 1999, 2004; Gonzalez, Field, Yando, Gonzalez, Lasko, & Bendell, 1994).

The whole thing of teendom – acting out, going for thrills and risks, experimenting with drugs; circus arts can channel that energy in healthy ways. Balancing on a tight wire or standing on a globe or riding a unicycle are things you have to do in order to be successful (Sugarman, 2001, p. 171).

The students who participated in The Journey not only marvelling at their bodies mastering fire, but also heights:

I prefer doing aerial to adagio, the only new thing I had to do really was get stronger... so proud when I actually got something. New tricks. Being able to achieve stuff that people, even myself, still go ‘WOW’ I guess this is super cool (Matthew, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

I felt more comfortable doing the adagio stuff ‘cause I’d been doing it for a few years. The aerial stuff is different. It’s more exciting. I had to get a lot stronger and do a lot of work on my technique to get it right (Adam, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

A number of the boys involved in the aerial work in The Journey had to address stereotypes in schools regarding performance and traditional circus within the community before feeling comfortable enough to perform aerials in practical costuming:

Some people call me gay and stuff. But circus isn’t like that at all. I don’t care about it anyway. I’m not worried by that... I don’t want to stop circus (Adam, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

Circus is such hard, physical work and not gay at all. When I first started aerial people were saying ‘oh you will be wearing tights and prancing around and shit’
and the tightest thing we wore was that thing round the middle so our pants didn’t fall down, that was mainly it. When people heard the word ‘circus’ they’d sort of giggle and think of clowns and I’d say, ‘that’s not the sort of stuff we do’ and I’d show them some aerial and they’d go ‘oh WOW. That’s cool...’ (Matthew, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

This was the first time these students had performed an aerial routine and in a school dominated by football and other traditionally male sports, performing a choreographed spectacle in tight costumes was a significant ‘leap of faith’ for these teenage boys. The data demonstrates how the boys had been hassled and ridiculed by their peers until they had ‘shown off’ the level of physical expertise and strength required to successfully complete their routines. The nature of circus meant that the boys had taken public risks and gained respect (through stepping out of their ‘comfort zones’ and performing aerials and not ‘clowning around’). Furthermore, the inclusive nature of The Journey meant they were breaking down negative stereotypes and challenging cultural bias to work towards the same goal as their peers.
One of the teachers involved in *The Journey* as an audience guide and photographer noticed an increase in the number of students attending the gym and training for the performance:

He didn’t mind that he had to wear a ‘big white nappy’ because he could flex his muscles. I gave him a photo you know of himself in the show (see Figure 6. below) and I think he was pretty impressed. It’s so good for them – that positive body image. There is a misconception out there that boys don’t need this. But I think there’s been a turnaround in that because I go to the gym and I see a lot of these young guys in the gym and ever since *The Journey* they are very into their body image and staying healthy (Karen, personal communication, August 13, 2013).

![Figure 6. Adam and Matthew lifting Eliza and Lucy in an adagio routine in The Journey, July 2012.](image)

This image was selected by Adam as one of his favourite memories of the performance. He stated how the lifts in this section were difficult and required lots of rehearsal to perfect. It highlights how the notion of physical transformation in *The Journey* worked to transform the physical space of the school and also transformed the participants’ perception of themselves as physical beings.

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31 Adagio is a circus discipline that requires hand to hand balancing (McCutcheon, & Perrem, 2003).
Physical transformation is definitely part of the appeal for the kids to be part of circus. Without a doubt. Belonging to... you know if you were to turn this school into a teen movie they would be the popular group, because of the way they move. The confidence they develop - they just genuinely recognise the opportunity they have been given and that just beams out of them. So... I think just about anywhere we go with our kids its very much like walking in with the Cullens where people can’t help but turn and recognise in them a strength and a confidence that you might not always see in students (John, personal, communication, August 13, 2013).

These responses highlight the effects on healthy body image experienced by the young people involved in *The Journey*. Research suggests (Santrock, 2008) that physical appearance and personal concepts regarding physical attractiveness are the strongest predictors of self-esteem (Santrock, 2008, p. 303). Based on this interview samples canvassed here, there is some evidence that circus can help combat body image issues in young people as it encourages habitual physical activity and positive identity building. Members of the circus and their families reported an awareness of physical fitness and controlled training techniques which correspond with maintaining healthy relationships with themselves and with each other. Bolton believes that there are increasingly less and less opportunities for young people to experience real physical hard work and this is having a detrimental effect on their physical and psychological well-being. If adolescents don’t ‘work’ their bodies; they can’t understand the strengths, weaknesses and limitations of their physical selves and so may struggle with an understanding of their true identities (Bolton, 2004).

Humanistic theorist Carl Rogers (1959) believed that when the ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ selves are too discrepant, maladjustment occurs and this can highly destructive for individuals. The Cartesian dualism of having and being in a body has been widely theorised by philosophers and psychologists:

> We have a dual relationship to our bodies. We can experience the body directly through feeling or we can have an image of it. In the first case, we are

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32 *The Cullens* is a reference to the ‘Twilight’ series written by Stephanie Meyers in 2006 in which a group of fictional vampires epitomise the essence of physical perfection, strength and grace: “devastatingly, inhumanly beautiful” 2006, p17.
immediately connected to the self, whereas in the second case the connection is indirect. A healthy person has the dual consciousness, but it does not pose a problem because the self-image and the direct self-experience through the body coincide (Lowen, 1997, p. 30).

The interviews suggest *The Journey*, as a whole school community arts project, provided the opportunity for young people to display and celebrate this alignment, thus providing an opportunity to reinforce their personal developments and actualisation.

Physical engagement with learning is an essential part of a holistic approach to education. Thomas Collingwood suggests:

> Systematic physical training actually can aid in meeting needs in all three areas of deficits: physical, emotional and intellectual... physical exercise can provide some purpose and meaning in an environment where none exists. The meaning of that exercise is in the process, the movement and the physiological and psychological feelings that occur. The intensity of the exercise lets us know we are alive (Collingwood, 1997, p. 11).

Audience members interviewed for the study noticed how physically connected the participating students were with their environment, themselves and the other people around them. This kinaesthetic awareness was evidently visible and notable as an indication of student engagement:

> You could see the kids were more open to learning because they were involved in physical activity. Much more engaged with what they were doing and with each other (Alex, personal communication, December 12, 2013).

Circus is unique in that it provides avenues for physical exercise, whilst still providing avenues for creativity and expression. “Amazingly, the part of the brain that processes movement is the same part of the brain that processes learning” (Jensen, 1998, p. 84) and when students connect their bodies to their learning they are more likely to remain engaged with the subject matter and retain the information (Jensen, 1998). Jensen’s research suggests that when young people are participating in physical activity they are more likely to engage in
learning. Furthermore, according to Bolton, circus as a physical activity can mean these same young people are more likely to connect with the people around them; sometimes through necessity (safety reasons), but sometimes because it feels good to belong (Bolton, 2004).

The Interpersonal Benefits of Circus

It is impossible to make a circus on your own. It is a communal activity and the circus component of The Journey presents an ideal example of this point:

I think that circus is an excellent thing for kids and I think the idea of belonging to something where you are totally reliant on the people around you... where you simply can’t do, what you do, without them. I think it ties them together in a way that you can’t get in any other way in this school. The main reason for that is the vertical structure of it. I have kids from year 7 through to year 12 in my current group of sixteen. They operate very much as a group rather than an individual “star” in each scene. And I think that appeals to people, particularly in schools. That idea of the ensemble lifting someone up... that trust has to be developed for them to get any good work done at all. This comes through the physical trust and being alert and aware (John, personal communication, August 13, 2013).
Figure 7. Circus students from the school’s troupe lift aerialists onto the triple trapeze during a scene entitled “underworld” during The Journey, July 2012.

Figure 7 is an image which John referred to when attempting to illustrate his point about the communal nature of circus and its potential for building trust and a sense of community. The ethos that exists within the school’s circus troupe has been an attraction for many students over the years and continues to exude a philosophy of inclusion and extended family which is an attractive model for students and their relatives. As pointed out here by troupe members Patricia, Matthew and Lucy:

There’s really a closeness now, a bit more than when I first joined because I’m becoming a senior. It’s really good to be involved in it because everyone is like a family and everyone is really friendly. It’s just a good environment to be in (Patricia, personal communication, November 2, 2013).

You are there just for the fun of circus. Be the bit of encouragement or discipline that someone needs... You love everyone that is there. You are proud of yourself and you admire – I think admiration is a big thing in circus – you have complete admiration and awe that he did those things and vice versa. And this is a good way to look at people (Matthew, personal communication, December 11, 2013).
It’s like a big family. We are all kind of close brothers and sisters and we fight and pick on each other and just muck around all the time – it’s really fun. I was in year 7 when I started and having all those people that I knew really helped. Like if I didn’t know where to go there was a few familiar faces and I trusted them and I knew they would be really helpful (Lucy, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

Here Lucy talks about her experience of joining the circus troupe in year 7 when she first arrived at Duruga High School and decided to audition for *The Journey*. She had several acting roles in the show and then became an integral part of the circus performances; including being the top of a “three high” – a difficult balance pyramid which required months of training and a well-developed sense of trust in her fellow troupe members. During the interview process, Lucy selected the photo below (Figure 8.) as her favourite from a selection of images which featured her as a performer:

![Figure 8. Lucy stands on top of a three-high pyramid during a scene entitled “underworld” during *The Journey*, July 2012.](image)

This is my favourite photo ‘cause it’s like a family portrait. I trust them. I trust them all not to drop me (Lucy, personal communication, 2013).
Figure 8., when shown to Lucy’s mother and father, elicited similar sentiments regarding trust and the family attributes of the circus troupe:

Let me look at the photo as I speak. When rehearsals started for the show the talk going around was about the three high from the very start... so as they worked on it over the months of rehearsals for the show she shared that journey with her family and that teamwork. She had to trust the people she was working with and this developed intensely over the next few months. So, it was nice to share that accomplishment with her on the trust level and on the physical level. They are like her other family (Kim, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

My daughter is fairly confident but remember she was only in year 7 when The Journey was on so she had only been in High School for a few months and all of a sudden, she had this group of friends that were from year 7 through to year 12. In fact, I have heard it commented that my daughter is like the baby of the circus group where you might get a lot of year 12 students and the year 7 and 8 students really get looked after and that’s nice. As a parent, it’s nice to think that’s happening. We are a small community and it’s great to know other students are out there looking after her (Bob, personal communication, March 12, 2014).

The evidence surrounding Lucy’s involvement in The Journey implies that her personal development through social connections to other members of the school community was so palpable that it was noticed by Lucy and her both her parents independently. Not only in a literal sense in terms of being at the top of a three high pyramid (see Figure 8.) and relying on fellow students not to drop her; thus having to build trust relationships in order to maintain a degree of self-preservation. But also in a metaphorical sense, where the circus students and their parents remarked on a noticeable change in the attitude of Lucy towards her peers and her willingness to attend circus school as she felt like she belonged there. Parents of other students made similar observations about the sociological effects of the circus troupe and their children’s involvement in the training and performance process of The Journey:

My children went through circus the whole 6 years they were here at the high school. I have three kids and every one of them did circus, they just passed it on,
it was like a mandatory thing when they all started high school they just did circus. They all loved it. It was one of those positive things. Actually, it was the most positive thing that they did through high school because they learnt to look after one another and they learnt how to be in a team and it was fun for them, it was really fun. They looked after each other - not only when they were doing the circus but when they were going through the streets shopping or whatever, they never went alone. Their group was always together, so they were definitely a family (Janet, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

Trust and teamwork. Definitely. They trusted people to catch them if they were flying through the air. They built up their relationships. Imogen is still friends with those people now and she met them through circus. They still do stuff (Leanne, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

According to Santrock (2008) young people need to feel like they belong in order to explore the world, take safe risks and develop together and as individuals. Humans are “pack” animals and when we feel nurtured and supported we are statistically more likely to be successful in personal and professional life (Bessant, & Watts, 2002). One of the main themes in Bolton’s PhD thesis “Why Circus works; how the values and structures of circus make it a significant developmental experience for young people” highlights the significant moment when “the outsider becomes the insider” and in doing so realigns their identity with how they connect to their peers; an important step in adolescent development. The data suggests The Journey gave its participants a sense of family based on mutual trust, “admiration” and respect.

The data also indicates that the sociological benefits of the circus program and the circus featured in The Journey extends beyond the in-school community. The legacy of the program has effected the broader Duruga community and its inhabitants:

Everybody is always amazed, when we put them in a show, at how good they are - we always get great, great comments about how good our kids are in the circus. I think that’s why we’ve got to hang on to things like because that is what gives it a good reputation. Because otherwise we don’t have a very good
reputation in the community (Janet, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

The circus troupe is visually spectacular and highly visible and so the internal and external community benefits are enhanced:

I think the fact that the school has a circus here raises its reputation. They operate very much as an ensemble, and I think that appeals to people, particularly in schools. The circus is visible and unique it provides that image it is just so well received in the community. It’s actually probably one of the few points of contact that this school has with the community. I can tell you that when we perform here that is far and away the largest accumulation of people from the community that come inside the school (John, personal communication, August 13, 2014).

The spectacle tied to the circus makes for good “entertainment” (Leanne, personal communication, November 20, 2013) and so community members come to see the show and be entertained. However, the data implies the community also came to see The Journey to see people working together, on a common project; a by-product which gives credence to the sociological benefits articulated through the accumulated research in this study:

I think the arts provide the conduit for whole school events. The fabric that ties them together. If we are doing a whole school event like The Journey, people are comfortable with the fact that we are putting on a show and people will come and see it. Arts based events are all inclusive because you have removed that competitive element... And it much easier for teachers to be involved for the same reasons. The entire school is recognised as champions. And I guess from the community perspective it is the same. It is much easier to come into the school to see a lot of students doing amazing things rather than just a few students doing amazing things... like at a sports carnival... You can bring more community members into the school with an arts based approach to whole school projects (John, personal communication, August 13, 2014).

The interpersonal benefits of the circus program within the school and the whole school production The Journey examined here are two-fold. Firstly, within the program itself, by
advocating a ‘family’ atmosphere where students have fostered healthy relationships based on trust and respect; a climate where the students can comfortably take risks and develop, knowing they are safe and supported to explore and learn with those around them.

Secondly, in a wider context, the nature of circus is appealing to audiences due to its communal nature where everyone is recognised equally and so gives rise to a culture of genuine respect and admiration. Circus, by its very nature is about the control of risk and challenging people’s perceptions of the possible and the impossible. This awareness and fostering of community recognition is an integral part of students attending school with a sense of self-worth and pride; an important tool with which to engage students with learning and the desire to achieve.

The Psychological Benefits of Circus.

The psychological benefits of circus have been chronicled by theorists like Bolton (1985, 1987, 1999, 2004), Ward (1991), Sugarman (2001) and Tait (2005) for decades. These theorists maintain that succeeding in an activity that is culturally perceived as “superhuman” gives young people increased confidence, which in turn gives them the impetus to succeed in other arenas of their lives. This effect cannot be underestimated as a tool for increased achievement in a school setting.

Adolescence is traditionally a time of flux and turmoil in human development. Psychologists identify adolescence as a difficult phase of great change where young people are struggling to align their projected and real selves and develop an identity they are comfortable with (Santrock, 2001). Leanne had two very different children participate in the in-school circus program and perform in The Journey. One was a “tom-boy” and was an “academic” and she recorded different reactions to the circus program for both siblings:

Imogen was a real tom-boy, and all her friends were into dance and all that type of thing, so it gave her something that she was going to be good at. You know she was there after school, before school, she was happy. She wasn’t an academic child so that gave her something to build on and it gave her confidence. Whereas my son was a completely different kettle of fish. He would
just sit in front of a computer; he did not have any co-ordination or anything. No self-esteem, he had nothing and circus built him up. It just built him up to be Vice Captain of the school. So much self-confidence. Lots of confidence you know to be out there performing in front of hundreds and hundreds of people. Confidence was a big thing. A BIG THING! All because of circus (Leanne, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

Despite her children maintaining different attitudes toward academic achievement and social skills, Leanne credits the circus with giving her children the same passage of confidence and self-sufficiency through school. Janet also credits the circus program and *The Journey* with improving her daughter’s level of confidence:

> She amazes me she is just so capable and I think circus probably gave her that you know, so confident... because they had to go up there every year and she was in Year 7, she was the youngest one and everybody looked after her... and now she is really independent - doing her own thing (Janet, personal communication, November 20, 2014)

The responses presented here provide evidence that circus and the ability to master skills and then demonstrate those skills can boost self-assurance and independence in participating individuals; or what Reg Bolton calls ‘The Superman Effect’:

> Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it’s your self-esteem!
> Step 1: you see someone performing a supernatural feat (e.g. riding a unicycle)
> Step 2: you can try it for yourself
> Step 3: within half an hour you realise you might be able to ride it
> Step 4: after an hour, a day or a week, YOU can ride it! You ARE Superman! (Bolton, 1999, p. 14)

The notion that circus challenges people’s perceptions of the ‘possible’ is responsible for another aspect of this art form which has had a recorded impact on learning in a school framework. The levels of difficulty in many facets of circus training means participants have to spend hours practising and mastering these skills to progress to performance level. Several students interviewed for this study have spent years training in circus skills and many months
rehearsing specific acts for their roles in *The Journey*. There is evidence that participation in circus could teach young people *how* to learn and, as a model for engagement, could be replicated into other learning arenas. Sugarman (2001) argues that because circus is difficult and requires persistence, it has the potential to teach work habits that can be utilised in other arenas:

The methodology of circus learning can be adapted to other learning. Circus learning is difficult. It requires focus, effort and the ability to move beyond failure. It teaches good work habits. In a world in which the media lull youngsters into passivity and computers encourage them to inhabit virtual realities, circus learning provides an authentic world in which the individual controls his or her actions (Sugarman, 2001, p. 13).

Data from the parent interviews supports the idea presented by Sugarman above in that circus learning has the potential to inform the way young people approach learning in other scholastic arenas:

Tim was going places and he had the academic ability to achieve and I was worried that he took on too much. He needed balance because he was working, he was doing all advanced classes, had all the subjects, he played sport at weekends and he had to make choices. He made choices and put circus in there, he worked around it and he gave up other things so he could do circus. It challenged his ability. He was very regimented, so circus gave him something to strive for. He couldn’t even bounce a ball when he started. He was not co-ordinated at all. Until he learnt to juggle. He loved a challenge. It made him practice more – it made him determined to succeed at everything (Leanne, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

I think it changed their attitude to school, they were always here at 8 o’clock in the morning and always willing to put it that extra time to come to school early. Circus is what got them here. I don’t know, my kids are normal kids and I really think circus got them through school in a lot of ways, especially the boys, because they are not academic, not at all. It kept them here and they loved it (Janet, personal communication, November 20, 2013).
Goal setting and devising realistic pathways to achieve set goals is something many teenagers find difficult. Based on what Gelb, & Buzan call the “I can’t phenomenon”, students are generally scared of getting the wrong answer; scared of not appeasing their teachers with the correct response, therefore they tend to be reluctant to try anything new or challenging for fear of failure (Gelb, & Buzan, 1994, p. 96). Circus learning and its unique method of ‘drawing out knowledge’ rather than ‘stuffing it in’ (Gelb, & Buzan, 1994, p. 122), and its combination of physical embodiment, creativity and the cultural perception of being “superhuman” means young people can very quickly become better at set skills than their teachers. They are in control of their own learning and so tend to want to attend school, to attend training and put in extra hours to realize their goals. This boost in confidence and independence created a legacy where the students involved in *The Journey* were proud of their skills and achievements even after the production was finished:

They still juggle fire you know, if we have a party at home, they still ride unicycles. It’s great!!! They do it because they can I think, and they are proud of it. They are proud of what they learned over those years at school. Proud of their performances. People have just always been amazed that my kids could do it really (Janet, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

**Conclusions**

Matthew told me performing in *The Journey* got easier and easier every night. He invited his family and friends to come and see him perform in the different circus routines; including the boys from his English class. People in his class were forthcoming with compliments after seeing his performance and even his teacher was understanding when he ran in late from training with his ‘circus family’ first thing in the morning.

The interview responses canvassed in this chapter highlight the idea that circus as an art form engaged the featured students with *The Journey* and consequently with their school and a new way to navigate learning through their school. The data concludes that circus is engaging and that it gives students a rare opportunity to play, celebrate and learn together and give something back to their community. Students recorded feeling an increased sense of self-
worth and pride through their participation in the circus program and its spontaneous play. A kind of play which Dr Bernie Neville argues is an essential part of learning as a teenager:

It ought not to be necessary to teach children and adolescents to be children again, but for some children and adolescents schooling puts a considerable distance between them and the spontaneous play which is their natural way of dealing with the world. Besides, many teenagers live in a prison of other people’s expectations; their behaviour is every moment shaped by their fantasies of what peers, school, parents and the larger society demand of them. A Dioysian schooling\(^{33}\) would not only keep the child in alive in them, but nourish it through play, dance and drama (Neville, 1989, p. 201).

The evidence in this chapter suggests the circus component of *The Journey* provided an avenue for physical, interpersonal and psychological development in the participants and their families. It did so through its inherent mix of art, craft and entertainment, and integration of danger, perceived risk, grace and beauty and the control of what Reg Bolton and Ernest Hemmingway acknowledge as our deepest fears and dreams: “Circus is good for you. It is the only spectacle I know that while you watch it gives the quality of a truly happy dream” (Hemmingway, 1953).

Furthermore, the data outlined in this chapter highlights why young people gravitate towards activities that embrace their “deepest fears and dreams” (Bolton, 1999). In a time of great change and pressure in their lives, circus can give adolescents a place to look at their own bodies with awe and admiration and the bodies of those around them with the same respect. They can ‘act out’ safely and learn team work and personal resilience, confidence and independence for other arenas within the school and the community. When placed inside a performance context like *The Journey*, circus raised the profile of Duruga High within its environment and consequently made the inhabitants proud of their place and their people.

CHAPTER 8 – INDIGENOUS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

In the background...

Robert, a year 11 Indigenous student at Duruga High School is summoned out of class and sent to the Deputy Principal. He assumes he is in trouble and enters sheepishly with his head down. He is asked to do the Welcome to Country speech at the start of the school assembly. He says he can’t, using family commitments as an excuse and does not turn up to school on the day of the assembly in case he is asked to do the speech again. He is not proud of lying to the deputy principal and skipping school, but the thought of standing on stage and speaking is too terrifying to contemplate. He is also not happy to publicly identify as Indigenous in the school context and prefers to stay anonymous and ‘in the background’ of school culture.

This chapter focuses on the Aboriginal students and their families involved in The Journey whole school project. The Aboriginal students at Duruga High School have been selected as a focus group for research because of their unique opinions which have emerged throughout the study and its corresponding analysis. As an individual with Aboriginal heritage in my own background, I am particularly interested in the emergent themes of cultural pride and identity which have become apparent through the collected data in this study. These themes will be further explored in this chapter in an attempt to highlight this unique perspective.

According to the MCEETYA task force on Indigenous Education, formal education can cause complex cultural problems for many Indigenous individuals and their families. For some individuals, participation in formal education is a stepping stone to employment and economic capital in the dominant economy. However, for the past two hundred years, formal education has also been a mechanism of domination and colonisation in Australia; an ever-present realisation for Indigenous students in this country (Hughes, & More, 1997).

Many Indigenous students come to formal education with rich cultural capital, “but it is rarely the sort valued by formal education systems” (MCEETYA, 2000, p. 48).

34 ‘Welcome to Country’ is a ceremony performed by Indigenous Australians to welcome visitors to their traditional land.
35 MCEETYA: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
On the other hand, many Indigenous students are poor in their own Indigenous cultural capital and do not value their cultural background often because of the break-up of Indigenous families and communities, the loss of Indigenous culture, the demise of many languages and the breakdown of the Elder teaching process. This raises issues for schools about how to support the teaching of Indigenous culture, whether within school hours or outside the school (MCEETYA, 2000, p. 48).

More than 70% of Aboriginal students in Australia attend schools in communities outside metropolitan areas (Fordham, & Schwab, 2007, p. 5; Boylan, & Alston, 1993) and Duruga High School, as a rural school, is no exception. The school has a high percentage of Aboriginal students who identified through enrolment and some who did not. In a school with only 600 students, Duruga High School has 100 students who identify as Indigenous. The significance of the decision of these students and their families will be analysed in the proceeding chapter.

This chapter also examines the relationship local families have with the school and its politics, the student’s opinions on the arts, particularly *The Journey*, and the legacy of this opinion within the broader community.

**Learning Strategies**

Through the course of my research, several themes pertaining to the learning strategies of Indigenous students became apparent through the analysis of data. I became concerned with the level of discontent regarding Duruga High School expressed by the Indigenous students who participated in my study and their unique responses to their involvement in the whole school project, *The Journey*. The two students featured in this chapter ‘Robert’ and ‘Carol’, offer varying perspectives on what it means to be an Indigenous student in a small country high school in rural NSW.

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36 Families are asked to select Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander on the school’s data base at the time of enrolment; not all Aboriginal students choose to identify at this time.

37 Pseudonyms for Indigenous staff and students have been used throughout the chapter.
Robert is an Indigenous student who participated in *The Journey* as an audience guide and a circus performer. He also helped set up and pack up the show every night and throughout the rehearsal process. Robert acknowledged that he was often in trouble throughout his time at Duruga High School; he believed this was caused by a difficulty in maintaining concentration and engagement with school:

I got into trouble at the start (of school)... like in English I couldn’t learn anything at all, I couldn’t concentrate, it was going in one ear and out the other. I wish I’d done better at school... like I’m surprised I passed because I was running around all the time, food was like a fuel so if I didn’t eat I couldn’t concentrate. When we were doing our exams, it was so nerve wracking because I felt like I’d learned nothing and then you see other students and they’d say ‘oh I’m going to pass that was so easy’ and they did, they passed with flying colours (Robert, personal communication, June 13, 2014).

Throughout his interviews, Robert said he always learnt better through physical demonstration:

I think I have to be taught – like physically – someone has to show me and then I’ll be able to do it. I was good at sport but that’s only because people have shown me (Robert, personal communication, June 13, 2014).

A prominent finding in the area of Aboriginal epistemology is that much Aboriginal learning is done by observation and imitation, rather than through verbal instruction (McRae et al., 1999; Hughes, 1992; Harris, 1980). This idea of kinaesthetic modelling being a recognised tool for teaching Aboriginal children is a teaching strategy that has been practised in many Australian schools where considerable time and money has been spent on the area of Aboriginal education:

As well as being ESL/ESD many Aboriginal children learn differently... and the use of Multiple Intelligences (MI) when teaching Aboriginal children will go a long way to sustained engagement, motivation, achievement and the retention of Aboriginal children (Wright, 2012)
Hughes and Moore (1997) maintain that despite their observation that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students may have varying preferred learning environments, it is not Aboriginal people who are different from non-Aboriginal Australians – rather both are different from each other. Neither group should be considered to be the norm or the standard (Hughes, & More, 1997) and every student has a preferred individual learning style. Furthermore, we must avoid the notion of Aboriginal learning styles as a new way of stereotyping Aboriginal students. Rather the approach must be used as one way of building on the strengths of individual students (Hughes, & More, 1997). Wilson (2016) argues that although idea of separate or different Indigenous learning environments has established a foothold in Australian education, we must be careful not to perpetuate stereotypes of cultural and racial difference and rather define Indigenous learning styles as "Indigenous philosophies, values and epistemologies" (Cross-Townsend, 2011, p. 72).

Carol, the other Indigenous student who features in this chapter, discussed how she thinks she learns differently from other kids in her grade level and despite her best efforts and wanting to achieve strong results; she has difficulty retaining information like the other students in her class:

I always wanted to finish school and get good marks but I always get B’s and stuff. And like I try, I really do in every single subject, but I’m just not good enough. Basically, I just solve Maths problems in different ways to other kids. I always had to write it down... how I did it... so I can remember it. Or else it goes in one ear and out the other (Carol, personal communication, June 13, 2014).

The reviewed research on the different ways students prefer to learn concludes that many teachers of Aboriginal children point to a concrete learning style of their students. Abstract concepts and principles often lack relevance for Aboriginal students and so consequently aren’t easily retained.

Loraine, the school’s Aboriginal Education Officer and local community elder believes the Aboriginal students at Duruga High School are disengaged with their education because they fail to see the relevance of what they are learning in connection with the real world:
Our kids are really disconnected from what goes on in the community. At school, you learn all this stuff like maths – our kids have got to learn how the two meet up. What they should learn is that the things that they are taught here are good for them out in the real world... spend a few days following someone around in their job, the manager or something, what goes on in the real world... When I ask them what they are going to do when they leave school, I’ve had kids say ‘I’m not going to work. Mum and Dad don’t work and they still get money’ – that attitude has got to change (Loraine, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

Hughes and More (1997) propose that learning in a non-Aboriginal setting, particularly in a mainstream school like Duruga High School is decontextualised and, as the learning is not done in a real-life context, it ceases to retain meaning and worth. Hanlen (2010) argues that education in an Indigenous context is understood as a lifelong process and should not be undertaken as separate from family and other daily routine activities and furthermore that within many indigenous societies “the goals of the community are more important than the goals of the individual. All aspects of life are interconnected and dynamic and social practices are reciprocal, and for ease of explanation, can be described as circular in nature” (Hanlen, 2010, p. 3). Hanlen’s research suggests learning is ongoing and communal in nature and this needs to be addressed to improve engagement and learning outcomes.

Aboriginal students have a distinct cultural heritage whether they come from urban, rural (Duruga High School) or traditional - orientated families. There is still a significant gap between the participation, retention and achievement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in our schools, training institutions and universities (CAEPR 38, 1995). Larry, Duruga High School’s Norta Norta 39 tutor believes reasons for this gap at Duruga High School include limited access to the internet and technology at home, moving frequently to stay with different family members and a lack of focus on education at home. Ways to improve these statistics can only be addressed through an

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38 CAEPR or Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research - ANU is a unique university-based economic and social policy focused research established in 1990 under an agreement between the Australian National university and the Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). After review in 1999, CAEPR was established as an independent centre within the university.

39 The Norta Norta program at Duruga High School provides study, welfare and employment support to Indigenous students enrolled at the school. The tutor also liaises closely with the families of these identified students.
education theory and pedagogy that takes into account Aboriginal epistemology and identity (McRae et al., 2000; Hughes, & More, 1997). Perso (2012) argues that:

In order to provide culturally responsive service delivery and beneficial programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, we need to go beyond a ‘head knowledge’ and checklist approach since cultural responsiveness is more than ‘doing the right thing’ from a compliance and humanitarian position. Cultural responsiveness results from cultural competence which respects and values the unique identity or each child. A cultural lens helps us to see each child and their relationships from the perspective of their own family and community rather than our own (Perso, 2012, p. 18).

Identity
Identity is a complex issue for the Indigenous students at Duruga High School and varies from student to student based on their personal perspectives and family background. Nelson, & Hay argue educators need to recognise the Indigenous students’ cultural strengths and the complexity of their environments (Nelson, & Hay, 2010) when planning and implementing programs.

Larry reports that identity has a huge impact on the participation of Aboriginal students in cultural activities in the school (on average only thirty Indigenous students regularly participate in organised cultural activities) and that family connection and fluctuating attitude towards education is often responsible for Indigenous students refusing to participate in cultural activities:

Essentially you realise there is only so much you can do and that it is a personal choice for each individual student. Overcoming this lack of involvement is a hard and complex problem and I feel connecting to the children’s families would present the best opportunity to change this (Larry, personal communication, June 13, 2014).

Some principles of culture, connection and identity outlined in the 1995 CAEPR research paper which are relevant to the data I collected through my research include:
1) Personal Autonomy: Social interactions are defined not only in terms of kinship but also personal autonomy, with a strong sense of individuality and self-reliance.

2) Sharing: Sharing is considered a culturally grounded process that takes into account the breadth of Indigenous kinship, generosity and obligation as the basis for social and cultural identity.

3) Responsibility: An increasing trend for young Indigenous people to see themselves as caretakers of their country and their culture.

4) Shame: A complex cultural notion which relates to feelings of embarrassment, shyness and respect felt by indigenous people in the presence of others with whom they do not feel comfortable.

During his interview, Robert stated that he wasn’t “that proud” to be an Aboriginal student at Duruga High School and that he had reluctantly identified through parental pressure:

I try really hard not to take advantage of being an Aboriginal... Instead of getting Abstudy[^40] I got Youth Allowance and stuff like that. I don’t want to be a part of it... like I’m not all that proud to be Aboriginal. There were Aboriginals who just ruined it for everyone else; do you know what I mean? They drink, they quarrel... Like, in school I was playing with a band-saw and this kid threw a piece of wood and I could have lost my fingers because of it and he was Aboriginal and he said it was an accident and he got away with it. It’s not right (Robert, personal communication, June 13, 2014).

Robert did not participate in any of the school’s organised NAIDOC[^41] activities whilst studying at Duruga High School and though he enthusiastically participated in the circus section of The Journey, he did not participate in the performance section located in the school’s traditional bush tucker gardens.

[^40]: Abstudy or the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme was introduced in 1969 as part of the Commonwealth Government’s commitment to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve their educational, social and economic objectives through financial assistance to study.

[^41]: NAIDOC here is an acronym that stands for National Aborigines and Islanders Day of Observance Committee. It is celebrated throughout Australia in July and through Duruga High School annually in July or August.
Carol is another Indigenous student who is an active participant in the arts at Duruga High School, however, unlike Robert, she proudly identifies as an Aboriginal student within the school and community. She is always involved in whole school arts events, actively helps organise the school’s NAIDOC activities and often speaks at Indigenous events within the school. During her focus interviews, she expressed some distress at the lack of encouragement from within the school for NAIDOC week and feels like there isn’t enough support in general for Indigenous students within the school:

> I was very annoyed with NAIDOC day. Nothing was working that day. No microphones, it wasn’t set up. No special guests. Nothing. We need to put more energy into it. I am Aboriginal for 365 days a year. Not just one day. The Primary schools have beads, crafts, jewellery, every day, art, people singing to them. Non-Aboriginal students as well. Altogether, all learning. Everyone should get involved (Carol, personal communication, June 13, 2014).

Carol also discussed how she feels like lots of Indigenous students at Duruga High School are ashamed to identify as Aboriginal:

> My close friend Alice, she doesn’t want to do anything... every Aboriginal activity – she doesn’t want to do it. And if you ask her if she is Aboriginal, she goes ‘no’. And I honestly don’t know why. Because I try to get everyone involved, because... like half the school is Aboriginal and we only get twelve kids (doing the NAIDOC activities) and that’s really shit to be honest. I’m not ashamed of it. I’m only half black, but I’m not ashamed of it like the others (Carol, personal communication, June 13, 2014).

Carol points out how racism exists within the school’s culture and that the stereotype that was explored through Robert’s interview (regarding Aboriginal students being given opportunities that non-Indigenous students don’t get), has caused a rift between peer groups:

> There is a stereotype around school... people always say that Aboriginal students have it better. That we get more opportunities and stuff. My friends even say it. And that makes me feel sad and offended. Like we get everything because we
were here first. I have even been spat on at parties (Carol, personal communication, June 13, 2013).

The testimonials of Robert and Carol bring to light the divide that exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Duruga High School and the underlining current of racial animosity that is prevalent within the school’s culture. It also highlights the reluctance of Indigenous students to publicly identify as Indigenous within the school environment for fear of ridicule. In the 2000 MCEETYA discussion paper *Achieving Aboriginal Equality for Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, the double-edged sword of additional support programs in schools was outlined as follows:

First, they marginalise the target group and the personnel who implement the programmes, and second, they become the focus of perceptions about unfair access to additional resources. These side effects have led to the development of a mystique about the pedagogy and the policy on which Indigenous programs are based, which places them outside the general mainstream domain and reinforces the separateness and marginalisation (MCEETYA, 2000, p21).

This MCEETYA observation is in accordance with Carol’s sentiments where she expressed despair at the lack of support from the school’s executive for Indigenous activities and stated she wanted to see an increase in the input from the school for Indigenous support programs; however, she also relayed the marginalisation these kind of programs have created at Duruga High School.

Larry also relayed how the Indigenous students he works with regularly all seem to sit together at lunch times and tend not to socialise with non-Indigenous students at the school. He stated how he thought this was an anomaly compared to other regional schools he had worked in and was unsure for its basis.

Loraine stated throughout her focus interviews that there is a distinct lack of extra-curricular, cultural activities available to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and that this situation needs to be rectified and combined participation in artistic activities fostered if Duruga High School is to increase its rate of engagement and retention among Aboriginal students: “We need to break down some barriers... we should be participating together. Not just Aboriginal
people there and white people there. We all do the same things. We are just a different colour” (Loraine, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

The interviews with Larry, Robert and Carol also recorded how the parents of Indigenous students often feel alienated and are habitually reluctant to enter the Duruga High School on school/parent business.

**Parental Perception**

The school space is often taboo and even threatening for some members of the local community, in particular Aboriginal parents, who often associate the school environment with their own often negative experiences of the mainstream formal education system (Bottrell, & Goodwin, 2011; *Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission*, 2000; McRae et al., 2000; Richer, Godfrey, Parlington, Harslett, & Harrison, 1998).

Carol stated clearly in her interviews that her Mum “hates” coming into the school and that she has had negative physical and psychological reactions to the school when she has had to come in to pick-up Carol on occasion:

School kind of knocks her around a bit, you know? I think the office ladies are rude to her. Actually, one day after school when I was sick, Mum was held in the office for hours, they forgot about us. It happened in Primary School too. This teacher told Mum she had fallen behind in her bills and she reckoned that we were not rich enough, we weren’t ‘up there’ enough to keep at the school... and Mum just yelled and yelled. I was in year four. I was getting bullied and I just came home and cried every day (Carol, personal communication, June 13, 2014).

As a local elder, Loraine believes there is a stigma for a number of the local families associated with coming into the school and this problem is exacerbated by families focusing on the negative side of this relationship:

I know a lot of parents who have said they don’t like coming into the school because of all their own negative stuff (Loraine, personal communication, November 4, 2013).
She goes onto explain how this “negative stuff” is part of a wider racial perception that exists with the Duruga Community:

Even today some Aboriginal people will say ‘hello, we’re black, why aren’t you doing more for the black kids?’ The blacks will say ‘oh, the whites did this, the whites did that’ and the whites always say “oh the blacks did this and the blacks did that’. I think we should stop bickering and learn to get along. We all have bits of other blood in us, other cultures. Some fathers will only let their Koori kids hang around with other Koori kids – this attitude is quite common. My daughter had white friends and other Koori kids would spit on her and call her a ‘slut’ in town. All because she had white friends. I felt sick when she told me that (Loraine, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

The importance of school/parental and community partnerships in Indigenous education has been well recognised over the last thirty years. It was highlighted in CAEPR’s 1995 review of 20 years of policy recommendation for indigenous education and improved through the NSW Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs plan, OCHRE (OCHRE, n.d.). However, the data in this study suggests the issue of how to include the parents of Indigenous students and surrounding community members in the Indigenous learning programs at Duruga High School is still a significant issue for staff, students and parents. According to the MCEETYA task force on Indigenous Education:

...initiatives to develop culturally inclusive curriculums often fail to address levels of racial harassment and violence, the diversity of student needs, the different perspectives that Indigenous people have about the nature and purpose of education and the different views and choices that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students make in mainstream education (MCEETYA, 2000, p. 21).

One strategy that has been employed by Duruga High School is encouragement to participate in the Arts as a way of building engagement and self-esteem in Indigenous students and to further develop the relationship with the local Indigenous community.
The Arts

Initial consultations with the school’s Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer, employed under the National Partnerships Scheme, generated suggestions for production/ performance areas to include traditional Aboriginal culture and the newly created medicine plants/ bush tucker gardens constructed on the school grounds. The Aboriginal students who wished to be involved in *The Journey* were encouraged to participate in all and any areas of production and performance and had the added opportunity of writing and participating in cultural installations for performance at intervals throughout the lantern procession. These installations took the form of traditional art, dance, music and living sculpture with an Indigenous smoking ceremony performed by local Aboriginal Elders being included in the procession process. The aim was to include traditional and contemporary Aboriginal performance elements in the production; whilst still maintaining a philosophy of ensemble among the cast and community through embedding celebration in the school and its various spaces.

The bush tucker gardens were constructed on the grounds of Duruga High School in 2012 and according to Loraine, have been underutilised by staff at the school:

> The garden is really not included in a lot of things which is sad because that’s a place where even the teachers could take their kids out there and take them around the garden and teach them the value of looking after things... Maybe even have someone out here who could teach them about the plants, even just an ordinary class could utilise that area a lot more (Loraine, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

Carol also commented on how the bush trucker gardens were a good idea but are underutilised by the staff and students at the school:

> The gardens aren’t even used. It’s like they are just for display. They are supposed to be used by everyone to learn about Aboriginal ways of getting food from plants. As an important place. My Nan taught me all about our food and sayings and stuff. Her house was right in the middle of the bush (Carol, personal communication, June 13, 2013).
*The Journey* included the school’s bush tucker gardens in its structure in many ways:

1) Traditional didgeridoo performances throughout locations in the garden.

2) Indigenous students dancing with non-indigenous students to this traditional music (as instructed by local elders).

3) Statue/tableau work amongst the traditional wood carvings throughout the garden.

4) A lantern procession through the garden.

For many members of the local community the lantern procession was the first time they had ventured into the bush tucker gardens and other parts of the school grounds. The significance of this interaction is best expressed through Loraine’s interview:

> From the hall up the stairwell, right through to the girls who were on the roof, then out the back to the gardens... It all blended so well together, seeing all the different parts of the school (Loraine, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

This physical spectacle fostered an awareness and recognition of the school spaces which may have had a different politic for the visiting audiences prior to viewing *The Journey*. However, through watching *The Journey* and participating in the lantern procession through the gardens, the audience viewed the students interacting with the gardens and with each other which, according to Loraine, may have had a flow-on effect for the students and younger siblings in the audience:

> The audience were just in awe of the kids. It’s really good because it shows the kids what they can do in order to be part of a show like that... they have to learn how to be model students as well (Loraine, personal communication, November 4, 2013).

Loraine also stated how she believed by inviting parents and community members into the school to view and participate in the lantern procession in *The Journey* it raised the profile of the school in the local community.
Lantern parades are unique as a performance medium in that they are powerfully and peacefully autonomous (Fox, 2002; Kershaw, 1999). The audience of *The Journey* selected their favourite lantern and then choose which path to follow. The students, their families and their community all became performers as they decorated the school space with lanterns in a self-directed procession through the school’s grounds as a single flowing entity.

Carol observed that moments like this have the potential to change community perception of Duruga High School:

> The performance showed the community what we can do. That we are not breaking into houses, derros, pot smokers, juveniles. It showed everyone what we are really like. And what we have (Carol, personal communication, 2013).

This extract from Carol’s interviews highlights not only her pride in changing people’s opinion of the identity of the students that attend Duruga High School, but also changing the opinions of people regarding what we “have”. These words imply pride in the ownership of skill and ownership of place and environment combined. This finding is significant when we consider that connection to place was a factor that Carol had previously highlighted in her list of priorities for improving her engagement with Duruga High School and her learning experience.

Robert also credited *The Journey* with improving his engagement with Duruga High School. As previously discussed in the student findings chapter of this study, Robert had been identified as a student who, previous to his involvement with the arts at Duruga High School, was a difficult student, often in trouble and lacking the motivation to attend classes and participate in structured lessons.

After his involvement in *The Journey* and the circus program, the students who had performed with Robert and the staff who taught him, remarked on a change in his behaviour and enthusiasm for staying at school and actively participating in lessons.

The data of particular relevance for this chapter is in reference to Robert’s family. Robert stated how his mother initially had trouble watching him as it looked like he was “showing
off” by performing and she felt a sense of shock and surprise at seeing her son’s abilities (see cultural notion of “shame” explained in Identity section of this chapter).

It was hard for her when I was actually doing the performances, I was showing off a little bit because I just wanted to let them know “look what I can do” type of thing and she was in shock, pure shock... because I don’t think she has actually seen anything like that before (Robert, personal communication, June 13, 2014).

Here Robert, a self-confessed shy student who had previously kept out of organised extra-curricular activities and the public eye, discusses how his mother initially reacted after the performance. He continued to relate how his family had given him praise after the performance concluded and said “they loved the show”. Robert also stated that he thought his performance in The Journey had set him apart from his family in a positive way:

It was absolutely amazing. I wish I could do it again... I actually think I was given a bit of respect in the end because I actually had the confidence to get up on stage and actually do that, when they actually didn’t (Robert, personal communication, June 13, 2014).

Another aspect of the interview with Robert that was unique in its emotional dimension was when I showed him the photos of himself performing in The Journey. He became melancholy and silent when viewing images of himself in action with members of the circus troupe:

I’m a little bit upset that I’m still not doing it. I do miss the people what we were performing with... I would definitely love to do it again. An awesome experience... I would definitely not have had the confidence to get up on stage without the circus (Robert, personal communication, June 13, 2014).

Robert has continued to work in the area of personal fitness and now is studying to be a personal fitness trainer. He regularly comes back to Duruga High School to help rehearse with new members of the school’s circus troupe and is still an avid supporter of all school productions.
Conclusion

Robert takes a deep breath and begins to perform his practised routines in *The Journey*. He does not make eye contact with the audience, but is aware of the number of people in the audience by the volume of applause at the conclusion of his act. He smiles at the audience and exits. After the show, Robert accepts compliments from his family who have never seen him do anything like that before. His pre-show worries about his mother’s reactions are quickly erased by a quick hug and a teary smile, as she expresses pride in her son and all that he is capable of. He credits the circus for making him look good, but his mother knows he has made the circus look good and achieved the community’s praise.

Through interviewing Indigenous staff and students at Duruga High School it became apparent that there are a number of issues specifically affecting the engagement and retention rates of Aboriginal students at the school. This gap in equality is influenced by many factors; only some of which are highlighted through the evidence collected in this study. Some of these factors are directly related to the home environment of the participating students, for example: access to the internet and a lack of emphasis on formal education by their families. Other factors related to their home environments, include moving frequently to stay with different family members; (obviously factors connected to the participation in *The Journey* cannot directly influence access to the internet or living conditions in a domestic situation).

However, some of the other factors recorded through this study which may influence inequality within educational engagement, can be changed by school experiences (like *The Journey*) and need to be addressed to incorporate them within the parameters of the school’s policies. These include the relevance of education at school to real life experiences, the reluctance of parents to enter the school grounds and a duality in policy regarding programs targeting cultural and auxiliary learning programs for Indigenous students; often resulting in further marginalisation. This study confirms that by examining the factors of inequality, identity and pride, the culture of Indigenous students can be acknowledged and fostered more effectively.

*The Journey* contributed to rectifying these factors as evidenced by Carol and Robert, who reported several main benefits from their involvement in the performance; most of which pertained to the idea of pride and connection. Firstly, the students stated how *The Journey*...
increased their sense of pride and connection to their school spaces through the constructive utilisation and re-imaging of the spaces through performance. Secondly, the participating students felt an increased connection to their peers as *The Journey* helped to break-down previously established barriers that were engrained through the school’s policy on Indigenous programs and involvement. Lastly, the Indigenous students involved in the whole-school arts event recorded an acknowledgement of the members of their family and community having positive responses to their performance and their school. This finding is significant when we look at the testimonials of students like Robert who recounts a considerable change in attitude and commitment to school and community culture though his involvement in *The Journey* and his feelings of increased self-esteem and self-confidence.

Aboriginal students account for a considerable percentage of Duruga High School’s population (approximately 16% at the time of this study) and their unique cultural perspectives and educational needs must be addressed through research and policy if racist sentiments and educational inequalities are to be rectified. This issue also extends into the Duruga community at large and that is why community responses to the school and *The Journey* are canvassed in the next chapter of this study.
CHAPTER 9 - COMMUNITY FINDINGS

Begin at the beginning...

It is late in the afternoon when Beryl agrees to meet me and discuss her opinions of *The Journey*, Duruga High School and its surrounding community. She walks into the library, surveying the old buildings from floor to ceiling like an old friend. She moves easily, unfazed by the bustling students negotiating positions at the start of the library lesson. I am nervous to interview the town matriarch as her reputation as a woman who values her time precedes her and I want to make sure I am respectful, yet get all the answers I need. Beryl has had five children and now fifteen Grand children go through the Duruga Public School system, and has been on many school committees; (including the school’s founding committee). She closes the interview room door behind her, sits with a smile and says “now let’s begin at the beginning”.

This chapter will present and reflect upon the data collected from community audience members who attended *The Journey*. Interstate visitors and local residents were interviewed for the study; spanning several generations. ‘Community’ has been included as a separate group for analysis as a substantial part of *The Journey* was derived from a community based, site-specific theatre model (Fox, 2002) and as such, the findings necessitate a discussion based on the responses of the community, in order to gauge the project’s effectiveness in replicating this model. Large sections of the previous findings chapters concluded the staff and students of Duruga High School believed *The Journey* changed the way the surrounding Duruga community viewed the school. It is through this chapter on ‘community findings’ we can ascertain if the audience’s perception of the school after *The Journey*, aligns with the staff and student perceptions of the wider effects of the whole school production.

The sections of this chapter explore the concepts of Site-Specific Theatre and Community Building. These themes emerged as the coded data from the participant interviews focused on how site-specific theatre changed the considerations of the audience community regarding the

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42 John Fox founded his theatre company ‘Welfare State International’ in 1968 and continues to perform site-specific, community theatre around the world. The company’s premise being that “theatre should be a product of the community where it resides and not imposed from the outside” (Mason, 1992, p133) directly influenced the making of *The Journey* at Duruga High School.

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school’s buildings. These considerations then influenced their opinions regarding the school’s inhabitants; i.e. through viewing the spaces in a different light, with a different purpose and energy, the audience viewed the staff and students in a different light. These new opinions fostered a channel for the audience (or wider community) and the staff and students (or internal community) to form a collective new space with a new identity.

**THE COMMUNITY**

To effectively examine the responses recorded by the members of the Duruga High School community, it is necessary to briefly outline the history of the study participants and their motivation for attending a performance of *The Journey*.

Two of the community members surveyed here came from interstate, metropolitan areas and viewed *The Journey* as journalist and photographer; working as freelance media for Indigenous print media publications. The remaining four study participants were local residents at the time of the interviews who have had children and in one case, grandchildren, complete their education at Duruga High School. They came to see friends and family members involved in the production and all have lived in the Duruga area for over twenty years; thus, are self-regarded ‘locals’. They have an understanding of the surrounding neighbourhood and its culture that can only be developed by living in one place for an extended period of time:

> Well firstly, I’m a senior lady. I’ve had 5 children and 15 grandchildren go through the public system at Duruga High School and two of my grandchildren were involved in *The Journey*. I’ve been here a long time... I’ve been involved with the High School since it was built in 1988. We had the director sitting here, around this very table, talking about the school being built...when the High School was introduced it was going to be the hub of the community; we’ve got nothing that revolves around the Duruga Community except the High School. The High School is intrinsically important and people just don’t understand that (Beryl, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

Duruga High School is a comprehensive, rural high school that was established in 1988 to meet the needs of surrounding families moving to the area for work. The school’s feeder area
has a population of 10,845 and has a recognised low level of socio-economic status and a ‘Socio-Economic Index for Area’ or SEIFA score of 906. The high levels of students from low socio-economic backgrounds has direct implications for the education of the young people of the local community (Vinson, 2007), particularly when combined with the geographical feature of a linear or ‘ribbon development’. The feeder area for Duruga High School is situated along a coastline which winds through several remote towns, across hundreds of kilometers; each with a distinct population – but no defined centre or meeting place:

It’s a sad thing in this area that we’ve got the ribbon development. In most country areas, like Goulburn or Young, you have a major city centre, but we have so many minor city centres… communities have to become communities again. So many people come into this area and they are like strangers for so long because there is nowhere for them to meet. There is no common ground. And if you don’t have your common ground then it’s really hard for families with children who are growing up to meet other families (Beryl, personal communication, December 11, 2013).

There are several ramifications of this recorded low SEIFA and ribbon development feature which should be considered here. These combined factors suggest the students from Duruga High School regularly face challenges that reflect aspects of economic disadvantage and geographic isolation. Therefore, it follows, the parents of these children confront the same socio-economic obstacles, and education, as a higher order need, is often not at the top of their priority list (Maslow, 1954). Many of the children in the Duruga High Community are not supported or even encouraged to attend school and therefore the school operates well below the state attendance average (Duruga High School Plan 2010-2012, 2009); a factor identified in 2011 by the Regional Attendance Team as a focus area for improvement (Duruga High School Plan 2010-2012, 2009). People become disconnected from their environments when their growth needs are barely being met at home (Maslow, 1954); this disconnection has ramifications for the entire community.

SEIFA is an instrument used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to establish the socio-economic status of a region and is derived from attributes such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, jobs in relatively unskilled occupations and variables that reflect disadvantage rather than measure specific aspects of disadvantage. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).
For example; due to geographic isolation, Duruga residents are less likely to leave their home when it is more convenient to remain indoors, in a single dwelling; thus removing community interaction altogether (Agger, 2012). This removes the opportunities for community building and with it, the concept of responsibility for other entities, be they human or environmental. Furthermore, it diminishes the potential of the collective voice of a community and the power and sense of self-worth that stems from this communal identity (Agger, 2012; Dempsey, & Millan, 1999; Turkle, 2011).

Site-specific theatre

Site-specific theatre featured heavily in the focus interviews of the community audience as a unique element of *The Journey* that evoked powerful responses. Site-specific theatre refers to the staging of a performance in a location outside an established theatre space (in the case of Duruga High School its established theatre space was the school hall). It is included in this chapter because when the ‘site’ in this kind of theatre is a community site, the performance becomes public in that it attracts the attention of people that wouldn’t normally attend that particular site and then theatre ceases to be solely for a select group or facet of society (which, according to John Fox from Welfare State International is often an “elite” element of society), (Fox, 2002). Furthermore, the selected site-specific locations are often unusual ones, permeated with their own politic and history; quite contrasting to the context of the proposed performance. When a narrative is inserted into this discovered stage space, it gives the audience an entirely new reason for being there and they see the place in a completely new light. Research and practise from Fox (1983) and his contemporaries (Augusto Boal 1998; Bread and Puppet Theatre 1988; The Living Theatre, 1971) shows us that through exploration and celebration; this new context has the potential to evoke mystery and charm as the chosen institution’s rules and symbols are transformed through new narratives (Pavis, 1998).

This ability to transform the purpose and meaning of a space through performance means that site-specific theatre falls under the banner of ‘applied theatre’ and can be analysed accordingly through practitioners and critics of this style of performance. However, as Synder-Young (2013) argues site-specific theatre is unlike traditional applied theatre which is often criticised for its restrictions of not being able to create social change when framed in contrived stage spaces or a “fictitious world” with “relationships to imaginary constraints” as
opposed to the “real” world (Snyder-Young, 2013, p. 6). The Journey took place in the ‘real’ world in real time. To clarify; despite the content of The Journey being fictitious and transitory (Homer’s ‘The Odyssey’), the context of the performance was real and enduring (Duruga high School staff, students, community and physical spaces) and provided new avenues of exploration within the applied theatre model.

The responses gathered from the community participants in this study suggest that because they entered a school space; a space which for many participants had been previously taboo, as a renewed place of entertainment and celebration; site-specific theatre may have worked as a practise for political purposes deeper than the context of the scripted work; The Journey. The audience participants weren’t only watching an ancient Greek play, they were discovering their children’s school in new ways through their participation in the arts event and seeing the staff and students of the school in new ways with new skills, connections and purpose. O’Connor, & O’Connor (2009) argue that applied theatre actively blurs the distinguish between actor and spectator to make a collection of active theatre makers with the collective potential to create social change (O’Connor, & O’Connor, 2009, p. 471).

As long time local Beryl explains, Duruga High School has been through several phases regarding its structure and purpose:

When the school was first introduced it was going to be the hub of the community and they put in a stage so that we could have live theatre there, they put in a whole series of things that were to be used by the community. Then they became precious – the P, & C or whoever the school board was or whatever, well we couldn’t use the basketball court for a dance floor in case it got marked, and we couldn’t use the hall stage because it interrupted normal activities... do you understand what I’m saying? I believe our schools should be used 24 hours a day. Instead of building new buildings for TAFE colleges, we should be using what we have already got. Why are they being shut off at 4 o’clock? Why aren’t

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44 See chapter 6 pertaining specifically to the evidence gathered from Indigenous members of the school and surrounding community. (Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 2000; Bottrell, & Goodwin, 2011; Attitudes of Aboriginal Students to Further Education: An Overview of a Questionnaire Survey, 1998)
they being used right now? (Beryl, personal, communication, December 11, 2013).

Site-specific theatre employed the school structures in novel and original ways that community residents like Beryl believe should be allowed to happen all the time. Individuals like Beryl state the school is a versatile physical resource that, ironically, is not being used to its full potential by the residents of the community which petitioned for its initial construction. According to responses reflected later in this chapter, *The Journey* saw the school buildings re-framed with genuine, innovative purpose, solidarity and for many community audience members, a fresh identity.

Although the content of *The Journey* asked the audience to imagine characters from ancient Greece, and Homer’s archaic stories of Odysseus defeating giant sea monsters and magical sirens, the context of *The Journey* was strongly framed within the ‘real’ world of Duruga High School. It was not set on the school hall’s stage or the drama room, rather it moved through the entire school; using multiple levels as a series of spaces for performance, feasting, dancing, talking and resting. This re-framing of school spaces into performance spaces challenged the pre-conceived notions held by community members viewing the performance as they moved throughout the transformed school. The content of *The Journey* may not have created change as it took the audience on a fictitious voyage of discovery and adventure, however the interview responses suggests the context of *The Journey* got the audience to question their perceived notion of Duruga High School through the exhibition of clear collaboration between staff, students and community members in the school setting. Furthermore, as this collaboration took place in physical spaces whose functions were previously dictated by the elite members of the school’s executive only (see staff findings chapter), we can infer site-specific theatre has the potential to get the audience to re-evaluate their notions of educational institutions (Pearson, 2010; Wilkie, 2002) and their politics (Kershaw, 1999); a process with ramifications for powerful impact, new interactions and change (Mason, 1992; Schechner, 1994). By staging *The Journey* throughout the school’s many different buildings and playground spaces, the school moved geographically and metaphorically closer to the initial intended purpose of Duruga High School (see’s Beryl’s interview above regarding the school’s conception).
Two of the community audience members interviewed for this study recorded spontaneous negative emotional responses to the idea of school; its buildings, philosophies and ideologies. They “hated school” (Alex, personal communication, December 16, 2013) when they were students:

I know for myself that I can’t read very fluently. I was never chosen to read out loud and I know that I never got over this school experience as an adult. I also just switch off. If I am sitting there and someone is lecturing you, I have to get out. I just switch off (Kim, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

I was dux of my Primary school. But then I left school in year ten. I did bugger all. I hated school (Alex, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

Alex and Kim candidly disclosed their negative school stories and continued to make contrasts and comparisons between the performance experience of *The Journey* and their own school memories throughout their interviews. This continual referencing to past scholastic experience implies *The Journey* bought memories to the surface as a point of reference for their personal responses. Causally, through transforming Duruga High School via site-specific theatre, their personal spatial associations were suspended and temporarily replaced with a new relationship to a high school environment:

I thought *The Journey* was just spectacular to watch. It was just... incredible. I felt completely like I was in a performance space because the school had been transformed in such a way that you wouldn’t have known otherwise (Kim, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

In part for me, I was still conscious that I was in a school, but probably because I was there looking at it from a journalist’s perspective as well, but when I got outside it wasn’t a school at all, it was just a big playground... so fun... I was amazed! I remember being in school productions when I was at school – but they were just in the hall. There was obviously so much work that had gone into it. Everything was lit differently and it must have taken ages to light that many different areas and also to make up that many different areas. I don’t know what they call certain sections of the school but that quadrangle area where the
lanterns were, was amazing... out the back where they did the fire twirling...
There was a scene in a kind of stairwell... just to transform an entire school like that – I really thought it was remarkable (Adam, personal communal, December 16, 2013).

Figure 9. ‘Poseidon’ is lowered through a sky light inside Duruga High School to seek revenge on ‘Athena” in the ‘Battle Scene’ The Journey, July 2012.

Figure 9. shows the entrance of ‘Poseidon’, rigged into a harness and lowered through a sky light. This scene was set within an internal stairwell in the school’s buildings and was unusual as it challenged the audiences’ preconceived ideas about this area as a school stairwell as the student actor arrived from above; an area rarely observed by pedestrians who tend to focus their gaze ‘down’ on the stairs for safety reasons. By transforming the school spaces into performance spaces (many of them unconventional through design and spatial relations), the audience were asked to redefine their previously ingrained notions of school environments and the connotations that these pre-conceived associations carried. Figure 9. is also a clear indication of the close proximity shared by the audiences throughout The Journey. This invasion of personal space fostered communication as viewing positions were negotiated and reactions were shared amongst friends, strangers, and ‘new-friends’ who became acquainted throughout the course of the show. This proximity built relationships through its corporeal nature of shared space, play, laughter, identity and pride.
The comparison of the school to a performance space and a big playground, imbued with fun, energy and life force was a new experience for Adam and Kim who felt boxed-in and unstimulated by their previous personal school experiences.

Viewing *The Journey* evoked a powerful memory of primary school for Adam which epitomises the essence of site-specific performance:

> It reminded me of the only fond memory I’ve got of my Primary School where I planted a tree. A tree which is still there today and I still see it every now and again if I go past it. I’ve got this fond memory of this part of the school that I have a connection to – a physical connection and I know a tree is not an arts space like in some of these photos... I mean you’ve done performances on the school roof! A kid who is looking back in ten years will say ‘I actually performed on that roof’! It’s a thing that would create, not just a sense of belonging to the school, but a sense of affection for the school because you did something that was quite different and special. It would bring back a lot of good memories I imagine (Adam, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

This response reflects how a specific memory of a physical connection to a school space (the tree) has created a powerful “fondness” or affection, attachment and respect for a conventional, impassive, institutional structure. Adam also suggests how site-specific theatre in schools has the potential to evoke similar memories of personal associations with corporeal school spaces and empower individuals by making them feel like they are part of something bigger.
Figure 10. ‘Athena’ stands on the roof of the walkway or ‘Valhalla’ and challenges the audience to help her.

Figure 10. shows ‘Athena’ on the roof of one of the school’s walkways and she was securely harnessed in place by qualified riggers throughout the performance. The various levels which practically act as part of the school’s architecture for shelter and navigation, became houses and platforms for characters in The Journey. The higher levels traditionally representing the Gods and ethereal figures in ancient theatre and in this production meant spectators became ‘mortal’ participants as they looked up and engaged in dialogue with ‘Athena’ as she rallied support for her cause.

Francine, a local community member who viewed The Journey twice recorded feeling connected to the school space in new ways, but also viewed the staff and students of the school space on a new level:

I think it’s great because we had no expectations. I think when we came in, we got blown away because we were involved. We were all in together and you knew everyone could see what was going on and you were involved. I also enjoyed walking through the back area, ‘Area D’, that was good. The singing, the dragon and all the hands reaching for you... then you went out to the grounds and there was this show going on! It was good and you just felt like you were
actually part of *The Journey* (Francine, personal communication, November 11, 2013).

Francine is referring to moving through a section of the performance which saw the audience listening to the Gods rally for their attention, the Sirens singing and trapping them, Odysseus’ boat crew giving the audience wooden swords and asking them to help them slay a three-headed sea monster and lastly, moving through weaving hands and the gates to ‘Hades’; where they gathered around fire drums for feasting and discussions. The audience had all their senses stimulated through this section of the piece and became physically engaged in the work. This feature of site-specific theatre is considered by Barton and Windyer (2012) to be one of the most engaging and effective elements of this technique; increased mobility and close proximity ensures sensory stimulation and engagement not possible in conventional theatre contexts.

Francine’s experience of moving through the school suggests the audience connected to the performers and felt “part of the show”, consequently they were acknowledged as players within the play and within the school’s spaces. The barriers which normally segregate the performers from the audience and the performance space from the spectator space were removed in an attempt to bind all participants in a shared experience of creativity, identity and celebration.

The way the audience chose to move through the school and the reactions they chose to share with each other meant the performance was organic and unpredictable every night. The show (despite rehearsal) removed the predictable and protective element of the ‘fourth wall’ present in traditional theatre, so the performers had to be ready for variations in audience involvement in each scene. The ramifications of this unpredictability meant acknowledging each other and incorporating each other’s identity in improvised performance moments that linked the audience to the performers and vice versa in a series of single performance moments.

45 the ‘fourth wall’ is a theatrical term for the imaginary “wall” that exists between actors on stage and the audience members. https://alwaysactingup.wordpress.com/what-is-the-4th-wall/
One example of this was in the tunnel leading to Hades; or, as specified in Francine’s quote *all the hands reaching for you* as the audience passed through one section of the school and into ‘Hades’ for interval. The performers in this section (members of a choir cast specifically for this section of *The Journey* comprised of staff, students and community members) were initially quite apprehensive about singing and touching audience members as they passed through this narrow corridor, but once the performances were underway, this became a highlight for many of the players. Touch is not something one would normally expect when attending a theatre production. However, it is an aspect of being human that is vital for personal development and wellbeing (Field, 2003). This invitation to sing and shake hands took people by surprise but laid the groundwork for the communal feasting on the other side of the tunnel (where audience and cast had to share finger food and stories around fire barrels for warmth). These interactive techniques of site-specific performance are unique and can have a greater impact on its audience than other forms of the arts; “performers can get amongst them, encircle them, lead them on journeys, play with them, surprise them by appearing in unexpected places, or surround them with fireworks” (Mason, 1992, p. 12). The audience became a “medium in which the performance can take place, thus transforming the established physicality of the actor - audience relationship” (Schechner, 1994, p. 2).

To be led around this space by student guides saying ‘this is where I learn’ was unbelievable. Really unbelievable (Alex, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

As Alex observed, to have the student guides lead audience members around their school space and proudly proclaim “this is where I learn” was an exceptional response from a school student in the Duruga Community and was testament to the level of confidence and value assigned to their school buildings and personal spaces throughout their involvement in *The Journey*.

The student guides were able to challenge previous community perceptions of their school environment which, as discussed in staff and student chapters on community perceptions of Duruga High School, was often negative. It becomes difficult for students to talk openly about their school experiences when their community views the school with a negative attitude. By providing students with an experience where they could express pride at their surroundings, *The Journey* created a positive climate; the resulting legacy was constructive.
for staff, students and community members alike. As evidenced by the following responses from staff member Bob and student Lucy:

Everyone respects the environment because you know that each night parents and community members are going to come through and watch the show...

Everything you are seeing looks so professional, so many students and staff involved, it really puts a positive light on the school, it’s fantastic (Bob, personal communication, March 12, 2014).

To see us all working together and putting on something amazing like this I think it was really good for the school...I think the performance part was really important because it showed what we can do. We have practiced and put a whole lot of effort into it – everyone has – and then showing it off... having the opportunity to go ‘heh, look how cool we are, we can do all this stuff’. It’s something positive for the community to focus on that we do. It shows that we are not bad all the time – everyone gets involved, everyone is happy to be involved (Lucy, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

When the staff, students (internal school community) and audience (external community) members viewed the school in a positive light, the school evoked positive feelings and a reputation as a desirable space. The conclusion drawn from the collected responses could be a useful incentive for encouraging students to attend school:

I know there were kids that I saw who were constantly in trouble – being suspended – their lives outside of school weren’t very good – dysfunctional families – and they were coming to school so that they could be in the production and for me that ticked all the boxes and for that pure reason I think we need more of this in our school (Karen, personal communication, August 13, 2014)

I can think of some year twelve students that I had run-ins with first or second week of 2012 and in a six month period I saw a change. And you might think that’s hard to attribute to their involvement in The Journey, but I think it’s solely the reason they were able to focus on school and why their attitude in general
changed – because they had a REAL reason for being here. (Graeme, personal communication, November 20, 2013)

The data suggests that site-specific theatre played a vital role in bringing together the external and internal communities of the Duruga area. This form of theatre brought the communities together in a geographical sense through the nature of the performance, but also appears to have brought the communities together in shared feelings of pride in the physical space and in the abilities of the performers to animate this shared space. The interview responses indicate this communal pride saw a marked increase in the attendance of students at school and an improvement in the attitude of the performers towards their school and its upkeep. As Graeme indicates in the above response, the students appeared to have had a ‘real’ reason for being at school and he saw attitude changes as a result of the students’ involvement in The Journey. These changes in mind set regarding Duruga High School and its function, can have wider ramifications for the Duruga Community which were expressed through the research interviews with the study participants.

Community Building

Figure 11. Interval of The Journey in ‘Hades’ where cast, crew and audience members stood around fire pits eating, drinking and talking together.
Fire was an integral part of the design of the project as an established site-specific technique to encourage spontaneous feelings of warmth, safety and satisfaction and to stimulate conversation.

As observed by site-specific practitioner Neil Cameron through his extensive work with fire events:

There is no culture on earth that does not use fire and it has always been at the heart of human ceremony. We only have to sit around a campfire to feel the ancient memories stir and the feelings of satisfaction and comfort upon us; food cooked on it tastes delicious... there is an urge to tell stories and there is always a time when one looks into the flame to savour peace and stillness...we see a transformational energy in the fire, we feel its fundamental power (Cameron, 1995, p. 91).

My reflections and observations during interval, recorded informal conversations with audience members about everything from the weather to local and national issues. However, most commonly, observed conversations were about the show and how spectators were connected to the work and how talented the performers were. The performers were given the choice to stay in character or not, and many moved between the two mediums, depending on who they were talking to. The mutual conversations and instant gratification of praise and of value regarding the students’ performances and hard work gave them the impetus they needed to be spectacular in the second half the show. The data samples below have been presented together for the repetition of the word ‘adult” as observations made by the audience as to how the young people in The Journey behaved and were treated by each other, their parents and teachers:

It works. Expression, enthusiasm, involvement. Let the kids be responsible and let them be useful. I hear frustration and anger in the voices of my grandkids because no-one listens to them. Very few people are actually listening to them. They are not treated like adults. Our young people are adults by the time they reach 14 or 15 and we are not giving them respect, we are still treating them like tiny children (Beryl, personal communication, December 11, 2013).
You get a feeling of these kids being honest and open and genuine. It helps them to mature; they are not just being treated like children. They are communicating on this level playing field with their teachers and parents and that really helps close the gaps. (Kim, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

Here is a photo of the teachers with the band and with the choir and it gave me a different impression because often you look at teachers and you go ‘well, they are just teachers’, but this kind of reminds you that they are people beyond the teacher that have all these other interests that you don’t necessarily think of and it forms a bond with the students that I think is really important. You can’t sit in a classroom and teach young people confidence or how to break out of their shell, it’s something they have to experience. The thing that surprised me most about kids in The Journey is they can communicate on an adult level which you don’t really expect from kids (Alex, personal communication, December 16, 2013).

By creating opportunities for conversation among students, teachers, parents, guardians and other community members, these responses suggest The Journey provided an avenue for open and accountable exchange. The interviews recalled how students were given an equal voice and communicated on an adult level where they shared conversations in closed confines, around the food and the fires... John Fox (2002) theorises about the importance of telling stories away from the mainstream one-way entertainment which tends to be solitary by nature:

In presenting stories in more intimate and focused settings, often away from mainstream locations, we recognise that story-telling still has the important role of bringing individuals together. Sound systems, television and film offer mainly solo experiences with one-way communication. In an age dominated by skilfully made entertainment products, some of them extraordinary, there is also a need to demonstrate accessible beauty and stillness directly at close quarters; to take audiences on journeys away from frenetic hype to slow them down... (Fox, 2002, p. 35).
These elements of shared communication, audience participation and autonomy fostered throughout the scenes (like the roof-top platform stages), reaching hands and interval, were integral in allowing participants to feel ‘useful’, responsible and connected. This idea of spontaneous choice within a performance is certainly not new and continues to provide an opportunity to transcend established theatre praxis and radicalise our post-modern notion of theatre and other performance methods.

In his book *The Radical in Performance*, Baz Kershaw outlines how site-specific theatre which is often informed by autonomous pedagogy, can serve as a tool for radical performance:

...here was a community of people constructing an identity through the production of a culture that could potentially enhance their collective agency, self-determination and responsibility to each other... it transcended those normative values and, at least for the time it was happening, created a space and time beyond the dominant, a new realm of civil society, in which the crucial values celebrated through creativity were equality, justice and freedom. In this sense, it was not just radical, but coherently radical (Kershaw, 1999, p. 219).

The responses collected from the performers and the audience members of *The Journey* reveal similar responses with regard to discovering the physical spaces, personal skills and collective ability of the Duruga community to work together on one creative event. These responses can be labelled as ‘radical’, as members of the Duruga community who would not normally work together and communicate so closely, were collectively and simultaneously constructing a new identity through their voluntary participation in an organic artistic work. A process previously unrecorded in this coastal ribbon development; thus, “coherently radical” (Kershaw, 1999) in its nature.

An example of an autonomous, site-specific theatre technique which is effective in ‘radical’ community building is the lantern procession (Fox, 2002). As outlined in the methodology chapter, a substantial part of involving the school’s internal and external community in *The Journey* was through a lantern procession; its design, construction and performance process. The shared construction and ownership of an artefact is a
powerful way to help connect staff, students and community members of the Duruga area:

- Lanterns were designed and made by students in mathematics classes at Duruga High School through work in their units on geometry.
- Community members with an interest in creating lanterns were also called in to help with the construction process in workshops run at the school by staff and students.
- Students in English classes were then asked to write poems or short anecdotes about local stories or journeys of discovery (many students consulted their friends and parents when creating the short pieces).
- The lanterns were then given to art students to paint on the poems and related visual symbols.
- Thus, one lantern might be the product of five or six people and an example of what Kershaw calls multi-vocality or heteroglossia (1999, p. 81); in that they signified a plethora of cultural stories and identities, creative abilities and flair.

Once the lanterns were constructed, the processional work in the performance nights also involved inherent community building. The audience members were asked to select a lantern and then move through the bush adjoining the school grounds in a dimly lit procession area. The pathway was periodically lined with students performing dance and statue work in the native, bush tucker gardens with traditionally carved poles depicted local stories and journeys.

A local Indigenous man played Didgeridoo as a soundtrack for the procession; the volume complementing the sounds of the audience members reading the poems from their lanterns to each other. The audience members were then asked to hang their lanterns on an enormous tree which was suspended into the air for the framework for the final scenes of the production. The responses indicate the lantern procession in *The Journey* was a favourite element of the performance experience for many audience members.

Lantern processions have long been used as a tool by Welfare State International and other renowned site-specific practitioners (Fox, 2002) for their ability to create spectacle and
wonder... and community. Lanterns are a mode of ‘safe’ performance for many people as the light is a physical extension of the self and therefore technically they are ‘performing’ through their participation in the procession, whilst maintaining anonymity through the distance between the lantern and their body (similar to puppet performances – Fox, 2002).

The lanterns were a handmade product; the creative culmination of many hands and minds and an expression of the potential of the people of the Duruga community: “One goal of big-scale community events is for participants to gain some control over their lives by accessing their creative potential and by taking to the streets together” (Fox, 2002, p. 34). The audience, by choosing which lantern to select and then which path to walk and at what speed, changed roles and became performers instead of spectators. This dislocation of the audience allowed participants to reevaluate their position and take on new roles through the course of the production (Birch, & Tomkins, 2012). Baz Kershaw highlights the community building nature of lantern processions through his observations of “Glasgow. All Lit Up!” He discusses how lantern processions can create powerful effects on communities; effects which take diverse forms. Some of these forms include moments of stillness and peace where community members share light in the darkness and follow paths in quiet unity, illumination and spectacle. However other moments can be dynamic in nature and inherently democratic, with the potential to create radicalism in the procession’s micro-politics:

“Glasgow. All Lit Up” may have enabled even its most powerless participants to construct themselves as democratic subjects as participants appeared to be happy and self-possessed... enjoying the procession for its own sake. This was their event, they were staking a claim to their own creativity and, I think, through their procession, they may have been empowered. The total event modelled crucial aspects of democratic processes and created a new space of radical freedom for its participants (Kershaw, 1999, pp. 76, & 77).

The lantern procession in The Journey saw residents of the Duruga community share an artistic, autonomous experience. Where they had to choose which lantern to select and which path to take; whether to share their inscribed poem or keep it a secret in “quiet illumination”. The audience had to decide where to hang their lantern on the tree and how close to stand to

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46 “Glasgow. All Lit Up!” was a large-scale community lantern project commissioned by ‘Welfare State International’ to commemorate Glasgow’s selection as the ‘European City of Culture’ in 1991 (Fox, 2002)
the towering lantern tree. This experience, through its elemental characteristics, fostered expression, respect and democracy; qualities which Kershaw states are fundamental for building solid community structures and empowering their residents.

**Conclusion**

It is the interval of the opening night of *The Journey* and Beryl stands around a fire barrel, with a mug of soup and some crusty bread, bought to her by her toga clad Grandchildren who huddle around the fire to keep warm. She doesn’t talk about her favourite part of the show. Rather she discusses how the school buildings have changed and how the gardens look lovely. She asks them if they are comfortable and warm enough and encourages them to eat dinner with her and their parents. 3 generations of the same family huddled together discussing the night and the practicalities of togas as a costume in winter time. Their faces flickering in the glow of Beryl’s memories, as she reflects on the role of the school in the lives of her family.

The discussed data in this chapter substantiates the claims made by John Fox (2002), and other community theatre practitioners (Cameron, 1995; Crummy, 1992) that site-specific, community modelled theatre works. Site-specific theatre which stems from the community in which it is performed has the potential to re-frame people’s attitudes towards their environment and towards each other. As argued by Cameron (1995) festivals and arts events can help spectators and participants “focus on both the fragility and significance of our existence and the sharing we need to grow and celebrate together” (Cameron, 1995, p. 80). Fox (2002) also argues about the strength and potential for connection through shared imagery: “we learn that there could be a healing role for community theatre. It could make ‘whole’ and join together the many talents of a disparate group, giving them a shared imagery” (p. 56).

The data discussed in this Community Findings chapter indicates the potential of site-specific projects like *The Journey* to act as applied theatre in real settings and time frames to provide an opportunity for communities to communicate with each other. Community here meaning the internal community of the staff and students of Duruga High School and the external community of the audience who viewed the staff and students perform. However, as discussed with reference to Kershaw and Fox, the nature of site-specific theatre meant that
these two communities or “disparate groups” combined to form one “shared imagery” through the site-specific genre, and in doing so, forged a new identity which evoked positive feelings of communal celebration and pride.

These feelings, in turn, encouraged students to attend school regularly and engage in the personal learning and in the school’s overall culture and purpose. Study participants also reported one increase in connection through their involvement in The Journey was with their families (when their families worked at the school and/or viewed the production). This idea of the strengthening of family bonds will be explored in the next chapter as an extra factor to indicate the level of change affected by the arts project central to this study.
CHAPTER 10 - FAMILY FINDINGS

By the wayside...

It is 9 pm on a Thursday night when Eliza Davies is picked up from the Duruga High School social dance. On the way home, Eliza fills her mother in on the kids who were removed from the dance for being drunk and fighting inside and outside the school hall. Eliza tells her mother school dances are not fun anymore and she doesn’t want to go to the next one.

Janet Davies looks straight ahead, maintaining her poker face as she ponders the practicalities of removing her daughter from Duruga High School and sending her to the only other High School in the area. Her husband, Tom works at Duruga High School so the conversation about removing Eliza could be difficult, but she is not prepared to sit by and watch her daughter’s education suffer because Duruga High School has gone “by the wayside” and Eliza is becoming increasingly unhappy and withdrawn there.

This chapter will focus on the effects of The Journey for three different families involved in the whole school arts project. The families represent different reactions to the project and highlight complementary perspectives when considering the potential of a whole school, arts-based projects within an educational framework. These perspectives focus on the development of family bonds which were at times tested, then redefined through involvement in the project and their corresponding participation in this case study.

As a researcher, I did not initially consider families as specific research group. However, some of the data collected during my research related specifically to family issues and so the need for a separate chapter on families became apparent. Students wanted to talk about their families and how they reacted to their involvement in The Journey and parents wanted to talk about how the arts project influenced their relationships with their children and the school; thus, the chapter on families became a necessary inclusion for study. Furthermore, families have been included in this study as a unique unit of research because of their distinctive politic; for it is inside families we experience some of our strongest emotions, and as a social institution, families have the potential to dramatically affect the value and outcomes of education for Australia’s young people (Bessant, & Watts, 2002). The role of families in the education of young people is pertinent and “current research demonstrates that family
involvement can have a major impact on student learning, regardless of the social or cultural background of the family…family involvement in schools is therefore central to high quality education and is part of the core business of schools” (Family-school partnerships framework, 2008, p.3). According to Beneyto, Castillo, Collet and Trot (2018) the research in family/school connectedness has been based on the assumption that families need to upskill and take on more of an educator role. However, this assumption must change if we are to affect the dynamic in schools and teachers can no longer be seen as having the power in what Freire called the “banking education” model (1970): “Teachers have the main formal and non-formal school power, which allows them to shape the model of family-school relationships” (Beneyto, Castillo, Collet, & Trot, 2018, p. 5). Or as argued by Crozier (2006) parents are often taught how to ‘be’ parents, thus engendering Foucault’s notion of ‘disciplinary power’ whereby parents are taught how to be ‘good parents’ according to the school’s idea of what parents should be (Crozier, 2006, p.1), as opposed to treating parents and families as knowledge holders and equitable parties in the education process.

The interview samples discussed here examine how this power relationship can be challenged and changed through the equitable nature of the site-specific theatre event The Journey and the effects of this change on the participating parties. By looking at the effect of The Journey on the politics of the families involved in the study, we can draw conclusions about the effect of the arts project on young people, their teachers, families and wider community members.

The families interviewed here had two or more members directly involved in The Journey and had other significant relatives come and view the performance. The families included in this study classify themselves as “close” and, in alignment with Kalantzis and Cope’s theory regarding the optimum experience of a young person at school, recognise that the key to success and failure is the degree of distance between a child’s lifeworld experience and the culture of their schooling (2008).

This data will be analysed through the recorded narratives of the three separate families under the following pseudonyms: Thomas, Davies and Johnston.
THE FAMILIES

The Thomas Family

The Thomas Family story is reflected through the data collected from a mother and her daughter. The mother, or Mother Thomas, was employed at Duruga High School as an office administration assistant and a lab technician in the Science Faculty at the time the interviews were conducted. Her daughter, or Daughter Thomas was in Year 9 at the time of *The Journey*; Year 10 when interviewed for the study.

Daughter Thomas has been a victim of cyber and face to face bullying for years and her mother was thinking about transferring her from Duruga High School to resolve this issue:

> She got bullied in Year 7 quite badly, and over the last two years. Different little groups too - it wasn’t just one... I considered taking her out of school. But you know I was really pleased I didn’t step in because she didn’t want ‘mummy’ to step in because nobody knew we were related so we kept it quiet. So, she fought it for years... I am so careful of what I say to other children because my children are here at the school. I probably step back a little more than I should but it’s just to protect them. I wouldn’t want a child to want to take vengeance with me and take it out on them (Mother Thomas, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

The Thomas family recorded a convoluted, extended story of bullying above and chose to remain ‘in the shadows’; stepping back to avoid conflict and to develop the personal coping mechanisms necessary to navigate Duruga High School and its politics. The duo has had to be resolute in their encounters with their colleagues and peers in order to operate successfully within their environments. As Mother Thomas highlights above, it can be difficult to balance the role of a mother and employee in a community where your actions can have ramifications for more than one resident.

Mother Thomas stated she is a very shy person who wanted to take a passive role in conflict resolutions issues with her daughter and her other experiences at Duruga High School. Therefore, she chose not to perform in *The Journey* and preferred instead to assist with
costuming for her daughter and other characters; she was also involved in ticket sales and the pre-show set up each night:

I’m not a performer. I’m very shy but it was good, but we were selling tickets, and promoting it through the office... Actually, I was connected in quite a few ways. Firstly, my daughter was part of the show so that side of it with rehearsing and costumes and that sort of stuff. I work at the High School so I saw it from a working point of view in the sense of coming together and working as a group to make it happen. Our part in the front office there was to set up the entrance every night of the week that it was on. So that was good, it was the first stop everyone saw. We thought it looked pretty good... it went on for months and months so it was really good (Mother Thomas, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

Mother Thomas expressed personal and collegial pride here and reported feeling part of the school through her involvement in the show as a new and rewarding experience:

We were not performing and that was our choice, but we came together as a larger group... The office staff normally come together for everything so that was not new to us, but new as part of the whole school, we felt part of it and that was nice (Mother Thomas, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

The transition of Mother Thomas from an individual who was considering removing her daughter from Duruga High School and viewed the environment as potentially destructive and threatening; to an employee who openly expressed sentiments of pride at being part of the “whole school”. Mother Thomas had previously kept her connection to her daughter a secret to prevent any form of harassment or repercussion for her daughter inside the school or the wider community. After her involvement in The Journey Mother Thomas was open about her connection to her daughter and the school and this significant turnaround in attitude is testament to the effects of The Journey on Mother Thomas’ perception of the school’s environment and its’ learning culture.

Daughter Thomas also underwent a personal transformation from a self-described shy individual to a performer through her involvement in The Journey:
I was so nervous during rehearsals because I thought ‘oh my gosh, there’s going to be so many people’, but after the first night it was alright’ (Daughter Thomas, personal communication, November 2, 2013).

The changes in Daughter Thomas’ persona and attitude towards school were apparent and commented on by Mother Thomas:

She was as high as a kite over the performing nights. She was obviously very nervous on the first night ‘cause she still had a few little hiccups, but she just enjoyed it overall. (Mother Thomas, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

Family Thomas brought friends and family to experience The Journey and see them working together for a common goal:

It was exciting because she hadn’t done anything like that before and she really wanted to perform… You could choose which thing you wanted to do: you could be behind the scenes, you could be out there in the main roles – there were lots of things to do to be a part of it… We had friends over from Canada so we brought them to see the show. They are a family with young children and they loved it – a bit different. They’d never seen anything like it (Mother Thomas, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

When we examine the path of Family Thomas there is a distinct data pattern of the strengthening of family bonds. As previously stated, Mother Thomas, despite working at Duruga High School, kept a relatively low profile and did not make her relationship with her children publicly known for fear of retribution against her to take the form off bullying incidents against her daughter. The interview responses reveal after The Journey, Mother Thomas openly displayed her relationship and role within the school through inviting family and friends to view The Journey and then celebrated this connection in front of students, teachers, friends and family alike. These themes of collective pride and identity are intrinsic in maintaining healthy family bonds. The Journey provided an avenue for the Thomas Family to collaborate on an arts project and they simultaneously reported sentiments of gratification.
in feeling part of something bigger and feeling connected to the school in a new and positive way. This connection is important to acknowledge as The Journey marked the first time Mother Thomas had publicly displayed her connection to Daughter Thomas within the school’s arena and parents who are actively involved in their children’s schooling increase their children’s chances of success (Epstein, 1992). When visible partnerships are created with parents, particularly in low socio-economic areas like the Duruga Community, the students have the support foundation to create a climate of accomplishment through their learning experiences (Lawson, Ey, & Smajlagic, 2006), thus establishing the tools to combat bullying or other negative personal and/or social situations. Parent engagement has been shown to reduce the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on educational outcomes. The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY, n.d.) argues that families have an important role to play in helping their children to become confident and motivated learners, regardless of their occupation, education, or income. Mother Thomas stated her daughter was as “high as a kite” and eager to participate every night and come to school. A dramatic development from the child she talked about before The Journey who struggled with school due to bullying and feelings of insecurity.

The other families discussed in this chapter, Davies and Johnston, shared similar sentiments of reservation at their children attending Duruga High School prior to The Journey experience and recorded interview responses which suggest a development in the notion of respect for Duruga High School and for their own family’s achievements within the school’s culture.

The Davies Family

The Davies Family has within it three individuals, all connected to the High School in different ways. At the time of the interviews, Mother Davies worked at Duruga High School in a casual administrative role, Father Davies was teaching Industrial Arts at Duruga High School and played guitar in The Journey in several bands comprised of students, teachers and community members; and Daughter Davies performed in The Journey as a dancer and circus artist.

In the past, Mother Davies had concerns about her daughter attending Duruga High School and had thought of removing her on several occasions:
I have had my moments when I have thought of moving her around, maybe twice? Once was after a school social and all the town louts would come and hang around outside the social and they would climb onto the roof and come in. Half the kids were drunk and half the teachers would spend the night cleaning up after the sick kids. I just remember going ‘AHHHHH’ – this school has gone by the wayside... and I think there a few teachers I wasn’t happy with at one stage and I felt like she wasn’t learning anything. Some of the things she would come home and say that had happened and I’d think well that’s not right-how are you learning in those situations (Mother Davies, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

Mother Davies also expressed initial concern as to how her husband would find professional satisfaction teaching at Duruga High School. Father Davies was an Industrial Arts Teacher at the time of the interviews and was very ‘hands on’ in his approach to teaching with a strong belief in trade schools and VET courses. Mother Davies viewed Duruga High School as being predominantly geared towards academic achievement and thought this might pose a problem for her husband:

I just don’t know about the school’s politics. I don’t think the push for every child to go to university is right, not everyone is suited to academia. So, if they choose to leave at fifteen or sixteen or whatever it is now and if they can get a trade or join the army or whatever, well that’s great. Uni is not for everyone I don’t think. My husband works a lot with the boys that are good with their hands. They want to BUILD THINGS! They don’t want to go to uni. They don’t know why they are at school (Mother Davies, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

In summary, the responses from the Davies Family suggests Mother Davies had her reservations about the personal satisfaction of her respective family members attending Duruga High School and was initially concerned for their wellbeing. Furthermore, unlike Mother Thomas, Mother Davies did not enthusiastically support *The Journey* when it was initially proposed as a whole school arts project and continued to maintain reservations as to her daughter’s engagement in whole school culture. This apprehension regarding her
daughter, stemmed from finding balance in her senior study years and maintaining a holistic equilibrium across all subject areas:

There was a hairy moment – *The Journey* was on when she was in Year 12 and she was stressing a bit about all the things she had to submit. She did French and she had her French speaking exam about three days after *The Journey* and she was stressing and I said ‘maybe you should just not do *The Journey*?’ And well, she wouldn’t hear of that! She said ‘no, no, I’ll get it all done no worries’ (Mother Davies, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

Mother Davies was clearly concerned at the onset of the production and even tried to talk her daughter out of the performance so she could focus on her exam study and alleviate potential time management issues. However, Daughter Davies was determined to take part in the project and maintained she could successfully balance all aspects of school culture.

Post-production, Mother Davies’ reaction to her daughter’s participation reflected research (Caldwell, & Vaughan, 2012; Ewing, 2010a, & 2010b) on the arts in schools as a tool to maintain a healthy balance for individuals as they navigate school and the pressure to achieve in traditional academic arenas:

I’m glad she was in the show, you know, because she knows that balance better, it gave her that break from studying all that serious stuff and pressure – *The Journey* was something that she just enjoyed doing... she does spread herself a bit thin and she does get a bit stressed when she has got all these deadlines, but she knows, especially when it comes to circus, *The Journey* and other performances, it’s always a been a priority. It makes her happy (Mother Davies, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

*The Journey* also saw Mother Davies change her attitude towards her husband’s personal satisfaction through his work at Duruga High School:

He enjoyed it. I know he loves hard work and I know he has a good rapport with the kids already. He loves music and he enjoyed being on that level with the kids because it’s not that classroom situation, it’s a different situation and you get to
know each other on a different level (Mother Davies, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

These responses suggest despite Mother Davies’ initial concerns about her family members and their respective roles at Duruga High School, she saw her relatives develop through their involvement in the whole school arts project and thrive through their respective experiences:

*The Journey* was so good for confidence, and I know that in my daughter’s case, it’s been so good for her self-confidence (Mother Davies, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

Daughter Davies successfully completed High School as the School’s Captain and is now completing tertiary study.

She did very well. Very well. She is doing Primary Teaching and she has known for a long time that that was what she wanted to do. She got a good ATAR47 because she was aiming for that and she worked really hard (Mother Davies, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

The daughter of the Davies Family is recognised by her family as being ambitious, motivated and able to balance her study with extra-curricular activities through the collected interview data. However, Mother Davies also mentions the increase in her daughter’s self-confidence specifically through her participation in *The Journey*.

This sentiment is reflected in data collected through focus interviews with Daughter Davies who also credits *The Journey* with improving her personal self-confidence and desire to achieve personal goals. She also credits the experience with giving her a solid support base from which to explore her various talents and skills:

Yes, I had many personal goals that I wanted to achieve throughout *The Journey*, and I got there! At the start, I was very shy and quiet and then I felt like

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47 The ATAR is a rank, not a mark. The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a number between 0.00 and 99.95 that indicates a student’s position relative to all the students who started high school with them in Year 7.
it gave me this whole other friend group as well. I made friends with people from years 9, 10, 11 and 12 and I think overall it made me a lot more confident. It was really nice having a different group to get to know and feeling like you were part of a team (Daughter Davies, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

This development in self-esteem and balance of academic course work with extra-curricular activities was also noted by Father Davies as something beneficial in developing important skills for his daughter’s personal development and education:

No question, it’s amazing. The benefits are endless in terms of physical well-being, mental well-being, getting involved in something that gives them a sense of belonging, different friendships. They have a place where they can connect through different year groups, confidence, working as a team, self-reliant, leadership opportunities; it’s endless (Father Davies, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

The words “confidence”, “connection” and “belonging” reinforce the notion of the communal nature of The Journey as a spring board from which to launch self-assuredly into personal, scholastic and social experiences with confidence and support. Mr and Mrs Davies recognised the inherent importance of this bond as something external from the traditional family unit, but thriving as a family in a different sense; essential for fostering self-reliance, self-esteem and leadership qualities in individuals. Their personal stories have evolved from disharmonious beginnings and dissatisfaction with the culture of Duruga High School, to personal success stories.

The interviews to this point provide evidence that The Journey, through its’ community model, improved the Davies Family’s connections with the school and its members and improved their self-esteem, confidence and personal satisfaction. However, upon further analysis, the data implies that other, more traditional bonds have also been tested and strengthened through Family Davies’ participation in The Journey:

She loved it. I thought she might think ‘oh this might be a bit daggy, Dad being there’, but because he was doing his thing and she was doing hers, she loved it.
It’s so nice to have them in it together. And I know it was their little bonding thing too, because they rehearsed together and they spent that time and they were involved together and you know, there is a lot to talk about regarding that. I loved it. It gave me that warm fuzzy feeling (Mother Davies, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

This is the first time we have ever performed together and it was great. I was so proud of him. All my friends were like ‘oh my God, your dad is performing!’ They all got so excited for me. And it’s funny because before the show, a lot of them didn’t even realise we were related. It was the best experience. It was great. Not many people get to have that experience and I feel really lucky (Daughter Davies, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

As with the Thomas Family, there is a notion here that previous to The Journey, the school population didn’t know that these respective study participants were related and that this opportunity for public acknowledgement and celebration proved to be a revelation for the audience and for the participating families. Mother Davies expressed her concern at how this collective performance experience would be perceived by her daughter within the school context, but then reported feeling ‘warm and fuzzy’ at the strengthening of the family bond through the shared artistic experience. Daughter Davies also used positive terminology when expressing her sentiments on performing with her father and recognised the special and distinct nature of her experience. This family connection cannot be underestimated but may take a significant “change in attitude by some schools and families in order to create relationships where they see one another as allies in education… Schools that engage families in their children’s learning are tapping into a rich source of information and expertise and can help build communities” (Family-school partnerships framework, 2008, p.2). Equality is a key term here and the family interview samples rely on this concept for their recorded experiences of bonding through a shared experience.

As Cameron theorised (1995), there is something unique about different generations coming together in performance. This process allows young people to be equals; to create something that is worthwhile through common humanity and expression for an audience made up of friends, relatives and community members. This experience; its preparation and fruition,
brings a new dimension to the traditional family connection which is difficult to replicate in any other arena.

Father Davies also involved his parents in rehearsal conversations and early previews of the show and this, in turn, brought Daughter Davies into conversations with her Grandparents about *The Journey*; particularly about scenes where father and daughter featured:

> I spoke to my mum and she told us my timing was out. She explained to me the section that was out and we were a bit wrong and we talked it through and I think that helped (Father Davies, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

Here we see family discussions regarding *The Journey* spanning three generations and creating feelings of pride and collective respect that have, in turn, improved some relationships, created new connections and strengthened older bonds.

**The Johnston Family**

The Johnston Family includes Mother Johnston; a Primary School teacher at one of Duruga High School’s feeder Primary Schools; Father Johnston, a Computing Studies teacher at Duruga High School who portrayed ‘Zeus’- a main acting part in the production; and Daughter Johnston, who was an actress in *The Journey* and also participated in the circus and dance ensembles.

Mother Johnston has been mostly satisfied with Duruga High School since her daughter enrolled there. However, as an experienced Primary School teacher in the local area, she does have her reservations about how the school is being managed:

> There is always room for improvement. Probably the thing that concerns me the most is the connection between Primary and High School. Those middle years from 5-8. An example of this – I’ve had a chance to look at year seven NAPLAN results and the majority of students have gone backwards. It just blew my head off! It could be the year six teaching, it could be the friendship groups, it could be lack of engagement; it needs to be owned by more than one group of people. I think that sense of belonging, I think that once kids get to High School
and they move through those hard early years... I’m making a generalisation - but they seem to come out of it ok if they are supported. I think they have to form a connection somehow. Whether that is from relationships or experiences – or both. If they feel supported – that is the key thing. I also think experience is a huge thing – kids have to get involved in stuff at school (Mother Johnston, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

The collected data suggests Mother Johnston was a firm advocate of her family participating in _The Journey_; particularly for her daughter, who was nervous about attending High School and even more nervous about performing in a theatrical production in her first year at Duruga High School:

I was definitely nervous. The first night was probably the worst. No actually I think that’s lying, I think probably the third night when my family came to watch. It was the first time I had seen my brothers for about a year and I could see all of their faces staring at me... (Daughter Johnston, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

Father Johnston was also nervous at taking on a performing role in _The Journey_ and expressed considerable angst over his role as ‘Zeus’:

It’s a worry, being in front of your peers, and not so much about making a fool of yourself, but suddenly stepping out of the shadows – that can be a worry. I’d never done anything like that before (Father Johnston, personal communication, March 12, 2014).

Mother Johnston was aware of the levels of anxiety her family members were experiencing prior to the opening night of _The Journey_, however she lists other elements as paramount when discussing the personal transformations experienced by her husband and daughter. Firstly in response to her husband’s involvement in the show:

I think there was a bit of, I don’t know if embarrassment was the right word, maybe shy, but he very quickly got used to the performing side of things and I
think it gave him the opportunity to show a different side of himself too (Mother Johnston, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

And secondly, Mother Johnston’s reaction when viewing her daughter’s performance in *The Journey*:

The whole process was very good for her confidence and mixing with all types of people, different ages and sexes and different types of interests. So, it was great for her for that side of it - to broaden her interaction and she certainly does refer to the relationships that she made during the performance...they are like family and she has a high level of trust that has developed over time with the other performers... in her words – ‘it made school more interesting and important’. Any opportunity where teachers and students can interact outside of the classroom and get to know each other, make those personal connections and have an impact on student’s engagement...work for a common goal (Mother Johnston, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

Mother Johnston talks about how *The Journey* provided her husband with an opportunity to show a different aspect of his personality to the Duruga community and in doing so re-define his role in the school and his public persona. Mother Johnston also states how *The Journey* gave her daughter the opportunity to develop her public persona within the schools framework by strengthening her bonds with the ensemble students to the point where she refers to them as a ‘family’; therefore cultivating trust and an engagement with the school’s culture. As with the previous discussions pertaining to Families Thomas and Davies, participation in *The Journey* strengthened bonds within the school’s immediate environment. However, more relevant to the essence of this chapter is the testing and strengthening of the traditional family bonds recorded through the respective family’s interview data.

Daughter Johnston’s said her highest recorded levels of anxiety were experienced on the night her family came to watch her. She felt like she could “see all of their faces staring at me”; focusing on her individual performance despite the ensemble nature of *The Journey*. Daughter Johnston’s need to impress, be accepted and appreciated by her family, above all other audience members, was largely connected to their historical significance and influence throughout her personal and social development. This desire to be loved and accepted inside
families is part of this unit’s defining function and politic (Bessant, & Watts, 2002) and is necessary for physical and psychological wellbeing. However, Daughter Johnston came to realise that she shared the pressure of making her family members in the audience proud of the family members on the stage with her father:

Initially it was hilarious looking up at the stage and seeing him up there with his costume on... We practised together and Dad remembered his lines first. It was good and Mum was joking ‘oh, I don’t have anything to talk about’ because we were always talking about the show. It was so good to have him with me. I was proud of him (Daughter Johnston, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

As long as I didn’t embarrass my daughter then it’s ok. You know? I mean I was wearing a metallic vest, a wreath and a toga. I think that was great she didn’t get embarrassed. She enjoyed it I think. It was another topic of conversation at home around the dinner table... any Dad with a teenage daughter knows it’s good for the Dad to have something else to talk about (Father Johnston, personal communication, March 12, 2014).

Oh it definitely brought them closer. I was always the third party at home – them practising their lines – they would just start up their dialogue and they wanted feedback from me and I’m like ‘yeah, ok’. It did become a whole family activity I guess, those times when they were practising their lines from the time when they brought their scripts home, to when they were polishing their performance. It was great (Mother Johnston, personal communication, November 1, 2013).

These responses provide evidence that the whole school arts-based project *The Journey* improved relationships on a number of levels. It improved communication, connectedness and evoked feelings of pride and acceptance as a family unit.

This need (to be accepted and appreciated by families/guardians/significant others) constitutes one of Maslow’s hierarchical steps (Maslow, 1954) and must be successfully met before individuals can begin addressing Maslow’s identified ‘growth needs’: the need to know and understand, aesthetic needs and self-actualisation needs. Once the students involved in *The Journey* felt loved and appreciated by the investment and support of their
families/guardians/significant others, they could begin to seek higher order growth needs; including the search for knowledge and understanding and the creativity and openness to explore new ideas and begin self-actualising (Slavin, 1997).

This process of family acceptance has direct implications for education and the importance of personal development through acceptance, respect and support, and cannot be underestimated as a foundation for successful learning.

**Conclusion**

It is the opening night of *The Journey* and Janet Davies sits in the front row with her extended family who have travelled to watch the production. Her husband, Tom Davies, plays lead guitar in one of the show bands and stands on stage in a toga which draws a giggle from his family as they are unused to seeing him in “dress ups”. Their emotions change when he begins to play lead guitar in a Tommy Emanuel song entitled (ironically) *The Journey*. The dancers enter the performance space and Eliza Davies leaps and twirls across the stage with confidence. Janet Davies feels “warm and fuzzy” as she watches husband and daughter perform together, she recollects conversations around the dinner table about this particular song and feelings of nervous anticipation at how it will be received. The song finishes and the audience applauds. Janet Davies is so proud of her family and, as she looks at the smile on her daughter’s face, she knows she made the right decision to keep Eliza at Duruga High School.

Several main findings have become apparent through the presentation of the correlated family data in this chapter and will be stated here. Firstly, Families Thomas, Davies and Johnston each recorded feelings of dissatisfaction towards Duruga High School prior to their involvement in *The Journey* and the school population was unaware that the participating family members were related until the commencement of the production. This anonymity was maintained by the families on purpose to preserve the perceived mores of the school community.

Secondly, the three families involved in this research took on active roles in the production *The Journey* willingly and once this knowledge became public, the family members enjoyed owning their relationships and expressed pride and relief at this public connection. All the
families involved in the study bought extended family members and friends to view *The Journey* and recorded positive feedback from this shared performance experience. The families stated they grew closer to each other through their collective involvement in *The Journey* and strengthened existing bonds between immediate and extended families.

Other positive feedback included the repetition of emotive words like “happy”, “excited”, “lucky”, “connected” and “proud” by the family study participants. This indicates a significant increase in the satisfaction and self-confidence of the performers through their participation in *The Journey* with their families and an increase in feeling connected to other members of the whole school community through their participation in the performance event.

Through their participation in *The Journey*, three families and Duruga High School became intrinsically connected and these strong family bonds can provide the necessary spring boards for students to safely explore their respective worlds and discover their possibilities for future development.
CHAPTER 11 – CONCLUSIONS

This research has examined the effects of a large-scale, site-specific, community modelled arts project called *The Journey*, staged within a NSW public High School in 2012 in an attempt to answer the question: *Does site-specific, community theatre create change in an educational framework and how is this change demonstrated?* The research sought to ascertain to what degree the school’s internal and external communities had been affected by the arts event in an immediate sense and also subsequently as legacy.

By surveying the school’s internal community of staff and students and the external community of associated families and audience members that came to see *The Journey*, the study concluded that *The Journey* had a positive effect on both communities. This is both in an immediate sense and as a legacy (the interviews were conducted one year after the completion of the event; therefore, this is the pragmatic range of the collected data). This study highlights the need for a longitudinal case study to establish the long-term effects of a whole school arts event on the school community.

While there is a distinct lack of research into site-specific, community modelled events in schools, the literature review surveyed a large spectrum of information regarding the potential of the arts to influence an individual’s attitude towards their personal learning (Anderson, 2012; Caldwell and Vaughan, 2012; Fiske, 1999; Hare, 2000) and their individual identities (Aprill, 2011; Ewing, 2010; Robinson, 2006). The review also canvassed research into the potential of community modelled theatre where the making of the theatre is a communal process and responsibility and ownership is shared among participants and audience alike (Bolton, 1999; Fox, 2002; Cameron, 1995; Crummy, 1992). This community theatre model is informed by Freire’s model of education (1970). This model rejects the long established pedagogical model of “top-down” which presumes participants are empty vessels that need filling; and instead values and enacts the existing knowledge and skill base of the participants to encourage authentic learning and understanding. The research findings concluded that it is the notion of a community modelled project which is responsible for the transferral of the established power base within the school (if only temporarily) which gave rise to the idea of reciprocated responsibility and unity expressed through the findings of this study.
The element of site-specific performance also featured throughout the research findings as something that enhanced the ownership, connection and responsibility of the study participants. This form of theatre, though rarely done in schools, is common practice in other arenas where it is used to transform how physical space is inhabited (Pavis, 1998; Schechner, 1994; Tuan, 1974; Wilke, 2002;) and is viewed as a tool for the transferral of ownership (Houston, 2007; Pearson, 2010;) and a shift in politic (Coult, & Kershaw, 1983; Kaye, 2000; Kershaw, 1999; Kuppers, & Robertson, 2007; Mason, 1992; Nicholson, 2011; Orr, 1994). This positive development in Topophilia48 through the medium of site-specific performance, coupled with the idea that the whole school was involved in the same project with the same goals, has led to some powerful conclusions and recommendations.

Through the collected data of the case study based on The Journey and its subsequent analysis, these main conclusions can be drawn:

1. Site-specific, community theatre can rejuvenate teachers and make them feel uniquely valued, satisfied and more effective as educators.
2. Site-specific, community theatre can influence the way staff view the role of arts education within society.
4. Site-specific, community theatre fosters personal and communal development.
5. Site-specific, community theatre can keep students at school and engaged in learning culture through their own volition.
6. Involvement in whole-school arts events can strengthen existing family bonds.
7. An acknowledgement of the potential for this kind of theatre to create change in school environments is needed by policy makers and a longitudinal study is required to access the long-term effects of this change.

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48 The powerful and affective bond between people and place or setting (Tuan,1974, p4)
Conclusion 1: Site-specific, community theatre can rejuvenate teachers and make them feel uniquely valued, satisfied and more effective as educators.

One of the key themes that emerged through the collected responses was the recurrence of the idea that *The Journey* had changed the way the teachers viewed themselves and in turn gave them the impetus to re-define their value and roles within the school context. George Bernard Shaw once said “Those can do, do. Those who cannot, teach” (Shaw, 1903) and according to the teachers involved in this study, work had started to feel like they weren’t making a difference in the lives of their students and so they had become the ‘cannot’ in this archaic idiom. An emergent theme of low staff morale was prevalent, with thirteen of fifteen staff members in this study expressing considerable despondency and feelings of powerlessness within the school (prior to their involvement in *The Journey*). This recorded position of dissatisfaction was retrospectively stated by staff participants in this study when questioned about their evolution through their participation in the whole school arts event, *The Journey*. Reasons collected include lack of support, increasing workloads, segregation, competition for resources and a lack of unity in goals and purpose. On an individual level, many staff felt like they had lost the means to connect with their students and they were not happy in their relationship with their school and this discordance was not acknowledged or considered a priority by the school’s administration staff. This finding is consistent with the Australian Council for Educational Research 2010 nationwide survey *Staff in Australian Schools* which found that only 38% of secondary teachers felt like they were valued by their communities and the other 62 % felt unsatisfied by their profession (McKenzie et al., 2010).

An important observation here is that only four out of the thirty staff involved in *The Journey* had experience in the arts, yet all personal evolutions experienced by staff through their participation in the arts project and this study were recorded as being constructive and empowering.

Prior to *The Journey* the staff involved in this study maintained that teachers only spoke to each other when they had to, and it was often to complain about bureaucracy or problem students. The recurring themes of common ground, mutual goals and feelings of communal

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49 Teachers from all faculties were represented in this study, including Special Education Teachers, Teachers’ Aides, Support Administration Staff and members of the school’s Senior Executive.
identity, growth and celebration evident throughout the interview samples, work as evidence for the significance staff place on collegial communication and collective growth.

The research featured in the literature review (Anderson, 2012; Caldwell, & Vaughan, 2012; Ewing, 2010; Robinson, 2006) argues the arts have the power to build self-esteem and work as a catalyst for personal development, learning, health and well-being and encourage play and development (Cameron, 1995) in people of all ages. The personal development recorded here by teachers who stated an initial position of low morale, poor self-esteem and discordance within the school environment; to the antithesis, is of substantial importance to the overall conclusions of this study. The staff featured stated how the arts event, through guiding them out of their personal ‘comfort zones’ allowed them the freedom to explore new skills, learn new things about themselves and their capabilities, and be seen in a new light; both internally by students and staff and externally, by the wider community. This new light meant teaching was easier as their students had seen them in new ways, particularly when the staff were performing alongside students; sharing feelings of nerves, excitement, exuberance and pride.

My observation is that staff satisfaction is an intrinsic part of the healthy functioning of a school and should be considered when planning events which acknowledge and celebrate diversity and unity. By observing the Freire model (1970) where the existing knowledge and strength is utilised in the teaching and learning process, we can conclude that by giving staff the opportunities to learn, grow, communicate and utilise what they do best in a practical sense, teachers will feel valued again. They have the potential to contribute to the ‘can’ instead of the ‘cannot’ and in doing so, become personally satisfied with their roles within the school, happy to be at work and more effective as educators. Educators who can connect with students and espouse knowledge efficiently; thus, completing the task they were trained to do.

**Conclusion 2: Site-specific, community theatre can influence the way staff view the role of arts education within society.**

Duruga High School, in accordance the ‘market place’ paradigm (Anderson, 2012) has traditionally operated with teachers vying for the collection of students in their subjects to perpetuate their subsistence. The literature reviewed in chapter 2 discussed how the arts are
often seen as non-serious subjects that sit at the bottom of the curriculum ‘pecking-order’ within schools (Robinson, 2006). This perception is wide-spread both in the internal and external school communities (Caldwell, & Vaughan, 2012) and is echoed through our national attitude regarding the role of the arts in society (Anderson, 2012; Ewing, 2010; Greene, 1985). My observation is that this resistance to the arts as a tool for engagement in genuine learning was challenged by *The Journey*; its rehearsal, production and legacy. What emerged through the data was that while it is not a practical option for schools to focus solely on arts subjects; thus, creating a nation of artists at the expense of other professions (Ewing, 2010a, 2010b), whole-school arts projects give rise to an acknowledgement of the potential of creative expression; both as a tool for engagement in learning and as a channel for connection to school culture.

When we consider that only a small percentage of the staff involved in *The Journey* had previous experience in the arts, their willingness to participate either behind the scenes or on stage indicates that they developed belief in the arts as a productive use of time and resources within a school framework. My observation is that through ‘voting with their feet’ the staff at Duruga High School indicated their acceptance and commitment to the arts as a means with which to engage the school’s students with their surroundings, their community and themselves.

**Conclusion 3: Site-specific, community theatre positively effects people’s perception of school spaces.**

An emergent theme throughout this study was the importance of the physical appearance and perceived function of the school’s physical spaces. The most prominent staff response to the question “How could this school be improved?” was to renovate and repair the classrooms to encourage the students to take better care of their environment and pride in their surroundings. However, the students responded to this question in a very different way. Their prominent response was to use the buildings and grounds in new and innovative ways to make school more interesting and fun. This discrepancy is a clear indication of how different generations view physical spaces and their role within education. My observation is that both parties feel confined to traditional classrooms, however they have taken a vastly different view on how to make this confinement an opportunity rather than a condemnation.
Site-specific theatre has a body of research to demonstrate its effectiveness in influencing the connection to place (Houston, 2007; Kuppers, & Robertson, 2007; Tuan, 1974), purpose of place (Kaye, 2000; Nicholson, 2011; Pearson, 2010; Wilkie, 2002) and politics of a specific place (Coult, & Kershaw, 1983; Kershaw, 1999; Mason, 1992; Orr, 1994; Pavis, 1998; Schechner, 1994). The lack of research undertaken into this kind of theatre in schools is indicative of the teachers’ attitude towards classroom spaces outlined here and the perceived ‘adult’ role these physical spaces should play in education, i.e.: Classrooms are for learning with teachers’ desk, students desks, board, etc. However, the students involved in this study want their school to be less “bored” and more “fun”; particularly when we consider the hectic pace with which they live their external lives outside school (Carr, 2010; Rosen, 2012; Turkle, 2011). My observation is that students, through exploring their school’s physical spaces and inhabiting them in new and interesting ways as performance and back stage areas, took care of them through responsibility and ownership. They recognised the idea that their school was a public arena and it would be the stage upon which they were to play and be judged on through their roles and performance in The Journey. The staff remarked on how different the school looked and felt during the pre and post production phases of The Journey and how remarkable this transformation was considering the various other methods that had been attempted to get students to keep their school graffiti, litter and vandalism free. This process is an example of Freire’s model (1970) in action as the notion of giving the students the power and responsibility for their surroundings fostered pride, which can be measured through tangible results. This study suggests educators need to re-think the traditional notions of threatening students with punishment if they don’t keep their classrooms and playgrounds clean, in favour of using the school spaces in new ways which incorporate student input, self-regulation and guidance. Thereby fostering responsibility and pride, effectively utilising learning spaces and engaging students with their environment and its’ many functions.

The external community also viewed the school’s spaces differently after viewing The Journey. The study concluded that, previous to the whole school arts event, many parents felt anxious and even threatened when visiting their children’s schools due to their personal schooling experiences and engrained notions of authority. Therefore, many parents were reluctant to enter the school and did so under duress. This is particularly the case when we take into account the collated responses of the Indigenous students in this study who stated the difficulty many of their parents experienced when they had to enter the school grounds due to personal bias. What emerged through this study is the idea that The Journey was a
pleasurable way to enter the school grounds and changed the way the parents viewed the school environment. It is my observation that site-specific theatre, through its change in ownership and politics, showed the parents and other community members how school spaces can be used constructively through skill, team work, celebration and unity. Furthermore, The Journey provided a non-threatening way to connect external and internal community members and unify them in celebration and pride.

**Conclusion 4: Site-specific, community theatre fosters personal and communal development.**

As previously stated, the literature reviewed for this study canvassed a large body of research into how engagement with the arts can make communities stronger. This is why my research looked at the responses from individuals in the school’s internal community and individuals from the external community in an attempt to ascertain how The Journey actually fostered personal and communal development.

My observation into how this process of development occurs involves a number of steps: on a personal level it stems from acceptance, perseverance and public praise. Firstly, because community modelled theatre is inclusive it meant anyone who wanted to be involved in the project, could be involved in the project; thus, removing the elitist tradition of only the best students being allowed to perform in school productions. This community modelled process of acceptance took away the element of fear often experienced by students when auditioning for the opportunity to be involved in school performances, thus encouraging the initial step of committing to the project as the element of failure was removed.

Secondly, once the individuals had decided to commit to the project, they had to set themselves goals to complete their part of The Journey. Some of the goals recorded by participants in my study were cerebral, some were physical and some were emotional. The study participants recorded high levels of personal satisfaction when they achieved their goals; whether it was learning lines, mastering a song, completing a lantern, performing an aerial circus trick, designing the poster, making a costume or performing in front of people. This idea of fostering self-guided perseverance to fulfil an objective is a life skill which has the potential to improve goal setting and personal satisfaction in other learning areas.
Thirdly, participants were asked for their input and guidance in every step of the pre-production and production phases. The participating staff and students (emphasis on the latter) were given ownership of the project, so that when it went “well” (this feeling of “well” being determined by audience response in an immediate sense and through archival data in the local media and parent and community correspondence) the resulting emotions were pride and satisfaction as they felt responsible for the project’s successful completion. To create something that is venerated by the community in which you reside, fosters personal development and a sense of belonging and, based on my collected data, it is my observation that The Journey successfully did this for the participants involved in this study.

On a communal level, the project’s community model meant that staff and students, family and community members were communicating (often for the first time) about a shared idea with a shared goal. This research has provided evidence that this process of sharing ideas and goals has meant The Journey was able to unify the staff, students and external community members and strengthen existing bonds. The nature of site-specific theatre meant community members saw a different side of the school’s spaces, however, the nature of the production (e.g.: all inclusive) meant the community also saw a different side of the staff and students in the performance, thus changing their perception of the school buildings, politics and function. The performance itself provided many opportunities for community members to discuss the event as it happened (e.g.: The fire barrels for feasting around during interval, or the lantern procession and placement during the audience procession) and compare stories regarding the skills and prowess of the students and staff of Duruga High School. Much of this commenting was in the form of “boasting” and was overheard or shared with cast members (dressed as waiters or roving characters), then filtered back to the cast and crew. This immediate reaction by the audience and subsequently by the cast and crew, is an example of reciprocated community appreciation and development in action and an important conclusion of this study.

**Conclusion 5: Site-specific, community theatre can keep students at school and engaged in learning culture through their own volition.**

Whilst the personal satisfaction and positive wellbeing of staff is an important conclusion worth acknowledging in this study, a more important conclusion is the increase in student satisfaction and engagement through involvement in The Journey. This conclusion is of more
significance because, according to the literature surveyed for this thesis, the primary goal of schools is to educate students as productive citizens for the external world. This education occurs when students attend school of their own volition; not under duress or pressure from their parents or other external forces. This research has provided sufficient evidence to conclude that if students believe they have made their own choice to be at school and be actively involved in their education, they are more likely to retain what they are being taught. This study also concluded that the students interviewed for this study were largely dissatisfied at school prior to their involvement in *The Journey* and that the staff at the school had tried a number of programs to improve student engagement, none of which was recorded as being successful. Furthermore, the students interviewed for this study recorded feeling happier and more satisfied at school after their participation in *The Journey*.

This change can be recorded as the result of a number of factors, none of which can be attributed to the study alone. Firstly, the students perceived their teachers in new ways through their involvement in *The Journey*. Prior to the arts project, many students viewed teachers as figures of authority and retribution, in some instances they were stated as perceived as “the enemy”. This idea of “enemy” only occurs when the motive and desired outcome of the student (i.e. to “ignore instruction and do little or no work” or “to do work, but only on their terms”) is different to the desired outcome of the teacher (i.e. to “comply with their instruction and do work”), therefore the two parties come to a conflict situation where no-one “wins” as neither party get their desired outcome. The community modelled arts event, *The Journey* was designed to ensure staff, students and community members were equal and egalitarianism was maintained throughout the design and performance process. This meant the students perception of the teachers changed from authority figures to allies with similar goals for success. It is my observation that this evolution meant teachers found their jobs easier as the students related to them as allies, not enemies and therefore students learnt more in the time period after *The Journey* (leading up to the recorded interviews) as they had changed their perception of the traditional value and role of the teacher. The study found *The Journey* humanised education for the participating students and they came to realise teachers were at school to help them succeed with their chosen goal. Students also saw their own school environment in a different way and so inhabited their learning spaces with pride and responsibility. This shift in what students valued is significant as staff stated they wanted students to make this change in their perception of their school spaces but were baffled as to how to accomplish this. By making the school spaces public and
making the students accountable for the presentation and maintenance of the space, results are a natural by-product of this reciprocated accountability. It is my observation that students want recognition for their work and their work place; their ‘home’. To do this effectively they must feel a connection and a sense of ownership to their place. Site-specific theatre is one way to achieve this shift in perception and understanding.

The study also recorded a change in the way students felt they were perceived by staff and their fellow peers, with an emphasis on individuality and mutual respect. The students in this study reported an increase in the number and quality of relationships they formed with each other; dispelling previously established social mores and norms. In a school with a recorded history of anti-social, often violent behaviour and a large number of students living in the “at-risk” category, findings which suggest that the arts can change self-perception and relationship building in a positive sense, provide us with a powerful argument as to how this kind of arts event can encourage students to stay at school.

_The Journey_ gave every student an opportunity to achieve. It did this by asking students to set their own goals and then provided support in order for the goals to be successfully met. It is my observation that when individuals are given the opportunity to experience success in whichever arena they choose (e.g.: hospitality/catering, costume making, set design and construction, program design, tap dancing, etc), this desire to achieve filters into other arenas of the students’ lives; including social, psychological, physical and academic, and gives them the impetus to thrive in other arenas.

_The Journey_ also saw the external community view the internal school community in a different light and this change in reputation meant the students saw themselves differently. This conclusion indicates an improvement in the self-confidence of the participating students which, in turn, gave them the impetus they require to safely take risks and develop as individuals within a positive and supportive community environment.

**Conclusion 6: Involvement in whole-school arts event can strengthen existing family bonds.**

Three different families were featured in this study and all recorded similar outcomes through their involvement in _The Journey_. During the interview process, the families stated that prior
to the whole school arts project they felt dissatisfied with their experience at Duruga High School and concluded the school was not providing an effective public service. The parents in the featured families worked in the school at the time of the study and stated they had maintained a climate of anonymity to prevent the school’s inhabitants from discovering they were related as they didn’t want to embarrass their children or put them at risk of bullying.

During the course of *The Journey*, the school’s internal and external community discovered the students in the show were related to the staff involved in the show (either in a performance or a production role) and the families then recorded positive feedback including the repetition of emotive words like “happy”, “excited”, “lucky”, “connected” and “proud”; particularly proud of each other and proud of their newly ‘public’ family bond. It is my conclusion that the three families grew closer to each other through their collective involvement in *The Journey* and being able to openly discuss and publicly foster their family connections. Furthermore, every family involved in the study brought extended family members to see *The Journey* so the strengthened family bonds went beyond the immediate Duruga Community. This indicates a significant increase in the self-confidence of the performers through their participation in *The Journey* with their families and an increase in feeling connected to other members of the whole school community through their participation in the performance event.

**Conclusion 7: Recommendations for future change.**

An acknowledgement of the potential for this kind of theatre to create change in school environments is needed by policy makers and a longitudinal study is required to access the long-term effects of this change.

As canvassed in my literature review, there have been extensive studies undertaken on the potential of the arts to change the learning culture of schools (Robinson, 2006; Hare, 2001; Fiske, 1999) and to develop the potential of young people as creative thinkers (Anderson, 2012; Aprill, 2011; Caldwell, & Vaughan, 2012; Ewing, 2010) who can not only think imaginatively about their world, but can also communicate their ideas effectively with each other and with their communities. This thesis has added to the existing body of academic research by outlining the positive changes which occurred in the internal and external community members of a country town in rural NSW through their involvement in a whole-school arts project. This case study states the opinions and sentiments of study participants.
from various back grounds regarding the same event and overwhelmingly supports the claim that The Journey had a positive influence on its school and community inhabitants.

It is my observation that the strength of these findings provides strong evidence as to the nature of the immediate and positive effectiveness of this kind of arts project in a high school. However, it also highlights the need for a longitudinal case study to ascertain how long these positive effects last, the long-term ramifications for the school’s internal and external communities collectively combined and whether the project can be replicated in other high schools.

**The larger context**

The curriculum in NSW continues to change and evolve as policy makers develop a system of education whereby Australian students can keep pace with an international job market. Unfortunately, this desire to be competitive often leads to an increase in emphasis on more traditional subjects (i.e.: Maths and Science) at the expense of the creative subjects (i.e.: dance, drama, music, visual arts). The body of research (Anderson, 2012; April, 2011; Caldwell and Vaughan, 2012; Ewing, 2010a, 2010b; Fiske, 1999; Hare, 2001; Robinson, 2006) substantiating the potential of the arts to help people learn to think creatively and critically, solving challenges for future careers (some of which haven’t even been invented yet), and international models of outstanding education (e.g. Finland), leads us to conclude that by encouraging students to engage with creative arts projects, we are preparing young people for a exigent future which needs creative thinkers who aren’t afraid to take risks.

This thesis examined an arts project from a number of different perspectives to ascertain its capacity to create change inside a NSW high school and its surrounding community. This change was found to be predominantly positive in nature for all parties involved; students, staff and community members who viewed the performance. On paper, projects like The Journey have the potential to be seen as distraction from core curriculum content and as a waste of resources in a secondary school setting. However, when we consider that every member of this study concluded The Journey enriched their experience at school personally and socially and also their relationships with their families and surrounding community, the question becomes one of how to replicate whole school, community arts projects like The Journey in other schools. This leap of faith requires a whole school commitment to respecting...
the opinions of its inhabitants and a level of trust in the communal voice of a community to promote an authentic democracy, much like the Ancient Greek origins of Drama and democracy, where “Theatre made the irresolvable arguments of the polis visible in human form and aroused both intellectual and emotional engagement” (Neelands, 2016, p. 31).

Schools can become places where stories are told, problems solved and futures imagined. Neelands states that every neighbourhood in Athens had its own theatre to encourage dialogue and community action; this study recognises that every neighbourhood has a school, and the study provides evidence that these venues can be used to stimulate a community’s voice and capacity for communal change and action.
**REFERENCE LIST**


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Sharon McCutcheon


APPENDICES

1) The University of Sydney Ethics Approval

![University of Sydney Logo]

Research Integrity
Human Research Ethics Committee

Friday, 21 June 2013

Associate Professor Michael Anderson
Faculty of Education, & Social Work
Email: michael.anderson@sydney.edu.au

Dear Michael

I am pleased to inform you that the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved your project entitled “The Journey”, An inquiry into how site-specific, community theatre can be used as a catalyst for change within an educational framework.”

Details of the approval are as follows:

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<th>Project No.</th>
<th>2013/443</th>
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<tr>
<td>Approval Date</td>
<td>21 June 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Annual Report Due</td>
<td>21 June 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authorised Personnel: Anderson Michael; Freebody Kelly; McCutcheon Sharon;</td>
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<td>External Ethics Approval</td>
<td>Principal's Letter of Consent</td>
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<tr>
<td>07/03/2013</td>
<td>Participant Consent Form</td>
<td>Ethics Consent Form</td>
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Sharon McCutcheon
HREC approval is valid for four (4) years from the approval date stated in this letter and is granted pending the following conditions being met:

**Condition/s of Approval**

- Continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans.

- Provision of an annual report on this research to the Human Research Ethics Committee from the approval date and at the completion of the study. Failure to submit reports will result in withdrawal of ethics approval for the project.

- All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC within 72 hours.

- All unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.

- Any changes to the project including changes to research personnel must be approved by the HREC before the research project can proceed.
Chief Investigator / Supervisor’s responsibilities:

1. You must retain copies of all signed Consent Forms (if applicable) and provide these to the HREC on request.

2. It is your responsibility to provide a copy of this letter to any internal/external granting agencies if requested.

Please do not hesitate to contact Research Integrity (Human Ethics) should you require further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely

Dr Stephen Assinder
Chair
Human Research Ethics Committee

This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), NHMRC and Universities Australia Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007) and the CPMP/ICH Note for Guidance on Good Clinical Practice.
2) Archival Research (sample: newspaper article, August 1st,

The Journey was epic entertainment

High School’s 2012 production of The Journey has been a huge success.

For four fantastic nights last week the production showcased the incredible and varied artistic, musical and dramatic talents of both students and teachers.

The commitment of more than 450 staff, students and community members was evident by the professional way that the production was run and executed.

This innovative production actively involved the audience to engage and enhance the experience of those watching. Many audience members were amazed by the students’ talent, the rapport the teachers have built with the students and the “creativity, uniqueness and professionalism” of the production as a whole.

This 12-month project has actively engaged students from every year in a multi-discipline and aesthetic learning experience which will be remembered for years to come.

EPIC JOURNEY:
High School’s production of the journey.

Q. Let’s get started. I’m just going to ask you a few questions about The Journey. I’ll start by asking about your involvement in the show, how were you connected?

A. Actually, I was connected in quite a few ways. Firstly, my daughter was part of the show so that side of it with rehearsing and costumes and that sort of stuff. I work at the High School so I saw it from a working point of view in the sense of coming together and working as a group to make it happen. Our part in the front office there was to set up the entrance every night of the week that it was on so that was good, it was the first stop everyone saw. We thought it looked pretty good, it went on for months and months so it was really good.

Q. Yes, we had a lot of comments about that from the audience members about the way the entrance looked. I want to talk about those two roles separately if that’s okay? So, you mentioned “coming together as a group” – do you mean the office staff or a larger group?

A. A larger group. The office staff normally come together for everything so that was not new to us but new as part of the whole school, we felt part of it and that was nice.

Q. Do you think that normally you guys don’t get to feel part of the whole school over there in the office?

A. That would depend on the circumstances – it’s not a yes or a no answer

Q. OK. Can you elaborate for me please?

A. Well, we were not performing and that was our choice, but we came together as a larger group. We didn’t see the performing side of things unless you had a child in it?

Q. So maybe next time you might perform?

A. No. I’m not a performer I’m very shy. but it was good, we were selling tickets, and promoting it through the office.

Q. Leading up to the performance what was the feeling like in the office? What was the energy like?

A. It was good, when we were selling tickets and promoting it from within the school so we had that role – it went on for months so it was really good.

Q. You mean beforehand or afterwards?
A. Beforehand, leading up to it.

Q. Okay. Can we talk about your other role as the mother of one of the performers? What was that like watching ‘Daughter Thomas’ get ready and the performance?

A. It was exciting because she hadn’t done anything like that before and she really wanted to perform and unfortunately Drama didn’t run last year because of numbers so she missed out twice. She didn’t get the opportunity in Year 9 and 10 so when it came on again as electives in Year 11 and 12 that’s why she really enjoyed The Journey because she got to perform.

Q. So, do you think if we did another one she’d be involved?

A. Oh definitely.

Q. Did she face any obstacles leading up to the project?

A. Just remembering her lines, I think that was the only obstacle.

Q. Even though you did the pre-sale work did you get to see the whole show? What did you think?

A. I really liked it. It was really different.

Q. Did you have other people that you knew who went to see the show?

A. Lots of locals.

Q. What was that feedback like from other locals?

A. Generally, it was just good. I didn’t hear anything bad about it at all. We had friends over from Canada so we brought them to see the show. They are a family with young children and they loved it – a bit different. They’d never seen anything like it.

Q. What did you notice most about the school when the production was on?

A. I saw a big shift in morale – teachers coming together and working together. Not just with the teachers but with the students as well. There were a lot of students involved in different things. I found about three quarters of the school we were involved in “The Journey” which is really good.

Q. Do you mean people who normally don’t get involved?

A. I think so – because you could choose which thing you wanted to do, you could be behind the scenes, you could be out there in the main roles – there was lots of things to do to be a part of it.
4) Research Journal (sample: 21\textsuperscript{st} February, & 19\textsuperscript{th} February 2013).

\textbf{21\textsuperscript{st} Feb, 2013} – "Love to place"

Situated learning – Love to place

Learning/ knowledge mutually constructed & maintained by students.

Learning in specific context embedded in a particular social & physical environment – people, space, geography

"Topophilia" connects to place.

Connections to place made stronger through participation in site specific theatre. \textit{How? Why?}

Ownership of space?

Challenged & re-defined through story telling as performance

"Died in interest in politics & culture imagined as their place."

Sharon McCutcheon
Research different WSI techniques and their potential for transformation for individuals and communities.

- Inhabiting spaces in different ways through techniques.
- Shadow puppetry, feasting, craft making, installations.
- Story telling, writing, creating, sharing.

What can we learn from telling shared stories in places with fixed politics? Speculation.

And if you don’t stop playing because you grow old it’s the other way around.

Accessed 19th Feb 2013


Projects specifically with young people.

“A child’s eye view”

Reflections by Barrie Hymer, educational psychologist.

Relevant to initial observations regarding The Journey.

Hands-on doesn’t mean boredom.

That children don’t just like playing — they need to.

That children see with their fingers and feel with their eyes.

That when totally absorbed in a state of flow, boundaries between different areas of learning become wonderfully blurred.

That learning is as much about sensing and being as it is about accumulating.