Drama performance assessment in senior secondary years: A study of six Australian schools

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the assessment of Senior Drama performances in Australian states and territories. The practices, processes, roles, experiences and cultures associated with assessing Drama performances are analysed, using two Australian states and one territory as contrasting examples of practice. NSW has an external assessment model which is contrasted with the school-based assessment models used in Queensland and the ACT where verification of grades is undertaken by external panels. These models use varying methods of grade verification, or moderation. This study is presented in the context of the release of the Australian Curriculum for the Arts which encompass the Foundation Year to Year 10 state and territory curriculum (the Foundation year is called Kindergarten in NSW and the ACT, and called ‘Prep’ or the Preparatory year in Queensland). Senior secondary curriculum, assessment and certification is administered by states and territories. Nevertheless, extensive discussions are being held at a national level about the knowledge, understanding and skills contained in the curriculum and this research has currency for discussions taking place at a national level.

Meanings and inferences that lead to findings about Drama performance assessment are constructed based on document analysis, narrative inquiry, ethnographical experiences and an autoethnographic approach. Through an analysis of relevant literature, policies and curriculum documents, this study arrives at a rationale for the assessment of performances in the senior secondary years. Volunteer student and teacher participants from six secondary schools (two in each of Queensland, NSW and the ACT) were engaged, using narrative interviews, performance ethnographies and participant observation to develop insights into the field of Drama performance assessment. This study engages in qualitative research within a conceptual frame whereby knowledge is constantly constructed in critical relationships to prior ways of knowing.

This study found varied Drama assessment practices at the different school sites, as demonstrated by experienced teachers. The assessment tasks reveal six critical issues that characterise the distinct challenges associated with the assessment of Drama
performance. These critical issues identify performance as fundamental to Drama, establish students’ aspirations when performing, describe students’ motivations for their performance efforts, analyse the capstone nature of Drama performance tasks, evaluate performance as a form of formative assessment, and establish the audience’s role as an influencing factor on the assessment of Drama performances.

Drama assessment practices are discussed in terms of assessment cultures that play out under the influence of state or territory, school, class or teacher influence. Accordingly, the roles of teachers and students in the Drama performance assessment process are theorised using the metaphors of teacher-as-curator, the teacher-as-critic and student-as-artist. These metaphors suggest new interpretations for the phenomenon of performance assessment. This study concludes that there is an overarching framework of Drama performance assessment in Australia, despite some significant differences between various states. The study calls for an enhancement of dialogue between states and territories, to share understandings of Drama performance assessment and highlight exemplary practices that are occurring in other jurisdictions. This thesis contributes to the research on current practices in arts assessment and has implications for policy, practice and professional development in drama education.
CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

1.1 The starting point

I’m sitting in a moderation meeting. My first in the third Australian state where I have worked as a Drama teacher. I am desperately trying to get my head around a new set of procedures and assessment practices, looking to my colleagues for guidance. I can hear students in the Drama room next door, rehearsing for their performance assessments, which will take place tomorrow. They sound focussed and highly engaged. I wonder what they think about the task. What do they know of the assessment and moderation process? Do they care? I look at my colleagues, so experienced, practiced and professional. They have been doing this for years. Where did they get their knowledge? How was their practice constructed? Have they ever known any other way? Suddenly someone snaps me out of my daydream,

‘So Rachael, is this similar to how you’ve done it before?’

This thesis investigates the assessment of Drama performances in the senior secondary years in two Australian states and one territory. The reflection above was written with the purpose of describing personal experiences that became the impetus for this study. As a teacher, I have assessed Senior Drama performances in New South Wales (NSW), the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Queensland. In the process, I developed an understanding of the benefits of drama education and the aims of Drama assessment. Every time I moved to a new state or territory, new syllabus and assessment practices challenged my views on what I thought was the right way to assess. Although this process made me a more adaptable and informed teacher, I also found myself comparing state-based assessment and moderation or grade verification procedures.

In order to learn about each Australian state and territory’s curriculum, I looked to experienced teachers, both at the schools where I was teaching and in the wider drama education community. I was extremely fortunate that such experience was abundant and graciously shared. It was at this point that I pondered how this knowledge was formed, what philosophies underpinned it and how that knowledge was shared with students. To better understand these issues I was encouraged to undertake a doctoral study to critically explore the field. It seemed an appropriate
time to begin this study, as discussions were beginning to take place about Drama’s place in the Australian Curriculum.

Chapter 1 outlines the background and rationale for this study, its purpose, the research questions to be explored, the study’s significance, as well as the context, assumptions and limitations of the study.

1.2 Background and rationale for the study

Australia has a state-based system of education, which will soon be complemented by a newly developed national curriculum developed for Year F (Foundation) to Year 10. Drama curriculum for Years 11 and 12 have yet to be formalised and until then, states and territories will remain responsible for the organisation, assessment and certification specifications of their senior secondary courses.

The range of state-based Senior Drama syllabus documents has led to various interpretations of drama education in each state or territory. Additionally, each state and territory has a different system of assessing Drama in the senior years, accompanied by varying methods of grade verification or moderation. This research aims to understand the ways in which Drama performances are assessed, and the ways in which grades are verified in two Australian states and one territory. Section 1.2 provides background information about the field of drama education in Australia and explains the rationale for engaging in research on this and related issues.

Each Australian state or territory’s approach to Drama assessment reflects the role the Arts play in that jurisdiction’s educational context (Schonmann, 2007). The Queensland, NSW and the ACT approaches are each worthy of investigation as they represent a range of curriculum policy and assessment practice. NSW has a model that uses a combination of school-based and external assessment that can be contrasted with the purely school-based assessment models used in Queensland and the ACT where verification of grades is undertaken by external panels. The ACT and Queensland systems are very similar. However, ACT students gain admission to tertiary institutions using an ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank) result,
which was introduced nationally in Australia in 2009 to unify the system of university entrance across Australia. Queensland operates a tertiary admissions program using an Overall Position (OP) result which can be converted to, or from, the ATAR. This study began before the ATAR system was introduced, and in interviews, some students from NSW and the ACT refer to receiving a UAI (University Admissions Index) score (the system that preceded the ATAR). Another notable difference between these states and territories lies in the processes used to assess Drama performances, each with differing methods of selecting external examiners or moderators that review assessment tasks and results. This is discussed at greater length in the literature review (Chapter 2).

Performances comprise an essential component of all senior secondary Drama courses. Engagement in dramatic performance tasks communicates studies of theories, histories and techniques of drama through a practical performance process. The summative assessment of performance is not unique to the subject of Drama. In Chapter 7, I reflect on a range of school subjects that offer similar experiences to performance assessment in Drama.

Across the curriculum, performance assessment presents particular challenges to teachers and administrators alike. Quantifying achievement can be seen to be difficult because of the wide range of responses that students may produce for a particular task. Divergent responses require the assessor to use judgment in relation to the execution of the task and the assessment criteria (Gordon, 2004; Jacobs, 2009b). Cockett (1998) argues that it is more difficult to individualise drama assessment as compared to other arts forms, as the processes used are highly dependent on a wide range of interrelated contributions. These include group dynamics, the strength of the ensembles’ skills and the balance between actors that should be struck in a successful dramatic piece. These matters are explored in further detail in the literature review (Chapter 2) and the discussion in Chapters 4-7.
1.3 Purpose of the research

The primary purpose of this research is to develop theories about senior secondary Drama performance assessment in the Australian schooling context. Explorations through literature and the use of narrative and ethnographic methodological tools assist in the analysis that result in findings that respond to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. In the first instance, the study aims to identify the purposes of drama education, particularly in the senior years of Australian schooling, thereby investigating the purposes of Drama assessment and exploring what is produced for the purposes of assessment. These understandings are analysed in conjunction with narrative and ethnographic data that has been gathered at six school sites. Examples of practice emerge from the school sites, forming a picture of senior secondary Drama assessment in Queensland, NSW and the ACT. A constructivist and interpretive approach (Andrade, 2009; Bowen, 2005; Charmaz, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Gratch, 2001; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006; Urquhart, 2007) is employed to arrive at findings about the field of Drama assessment, while pointing towards future developments in the field.

1.4 The research questions

An investigation of Drama performance assessment raises several complex issues, but the major question that the thesis will address is:

*How do teachers and students in the senior secondary years in Queensland, NSW and the ACT engage with the curriculum and assessment expectations associated with Drama performance?*

The contributory questions outline the subsequent spheres of inquiry:

- Relating to teachers’ curriculum and assessment expectations: What are the roles of assessors in Drama performance assessment and what tensions emerge when they assess student performances?
• Relating to *Queensland, NSW and ACT*: What similarities, differences, strengths and challenges can be discerned within and between Australian states and territories?

• Relating to *students’ curriculum and assessment expectations*: How do students engage with Drama performance assessment and attempt to achieve their aims when performing?

• Relating to the *senior secondary years* of study: How do teachers and students perceive each state or territory’s methods of achieving comparability of standards?

### 1.5 Significance of the research

This thesis references literature on the benefits of the assessment of artistic works and how performances can be assessed fairly, using a process that has a high degree of integrity (Colwell, 2003; Hanley, 2003; Schonmann, 2007; Taylor 2006a). Australian states and territories have developed different methods for assessing performances and verifying grades, although research comparing these methods is limited. In my experience as a Drama teacher in three Australian jurisdictions, assessment practices across states and territories are infrequently shared amongst teachers. This study allows the philosophies and practices employed in Drama assessment in Queensland, NSW and the ACT to be discussed in current research.

In addition to developing findings about the assessment of Drama performances, this thesis documents teacher and student experiences of performance assessment and contributes to the research available on assessment practices in the Arts. The study also provides insights into the ways in which comparability measures are enacted in these three education systems. An exploration of student performance for assessment provides insights into students’ interpretations of performance assessment tasks. The inquiry into teachers’ perceptions of Drama assessment methods contributes to the body of research that uses teachers’ voices to arrive at conclusions about the field.
The thesis also contributes a methodology that uses narrative and ethnographic research tools in the drama education environment.

This research takes place in the context of developing an Australian Drama curriculum. Comparing different assessment procedures broadens understandings about assessment practices in the arts education community generally, and this thesis contributes significantly to this debate. Extensive analysis is taking place at a national level about the knowledge, understanding and skills contained in the Drama curriculum. The research in this thesis contributes new insights to those discussions. It also looks to draw on, and enhance, the national conversation by using rigorous research methods, and to contribute effectively to considerations on future pathways in Drama performance assessment.

1.6 Overview of the context of the research

The personal context that led to the development of the study was grounded in the curriculum context I was working on. My background is important because it reveals the genesis of research ideas, explores personal biases and informs my orientation as a researcher.

1.6.1 Personal context

The foundation for this study lies in my passion for creative arts education and curiosity about assessment processes. Professionally, as a secondary Dance, Drama and Music teacher, I hold strong views on the value of creativity, imagination and innovation in the Arts curriculum. Having taught these subjects at senior secondary levels, I am convinced that it is possible to effectively teach, learn and assess the necessary skills and understandings that are fundamental to each art form.

The impetus that shaped this research stemmed from the challenges that arose from teaching in three different Australian states and territories over an eight-year period. As suggested in the opening reflection, I feel (and have felt) that much of my professional time was spent trying to become familiar with each jurisdiction’s syllabus material and assessment processes. Moreover, I gained professional learning
through a mentoring buddy system, and through the observation of other teachers, which was a largely informal process. I would ask questions and other teachers would provide details of board requirements and assessment procedures. There were few opportunities for formal professional development opportunities on Drama assessment practices. Much of the practice in senior secondary assessment was grounded within the knowledge community of teachers within their schools. Most teachers seemed to hold clear understandings of how to assess Drama performances effectively within their senior secondary system. Without formal professional development, I pondered on how this knowledge was constructed. Then a particular incident furthered my desire to know more.

In my fifth year of teaching, I crossed state borders to teach in a different school system. Early in the job, I attended an external cluster moderation meeting as a peer reviewer of Drama performance assessment. I left the meeting in tears after a disagreement with a colleague from another school. I had clearly not understood the assessment system and the responsibilities expected of me in the moderation process. Unaccustomed to feeling confused, I perceived that this new assessment regime was vastly different to what I was familiar with. This unfamiliarity scared me, and the fear bred contempt. I felt the procedures to be inferior, lacking in rigour, fairness and quality.

Upon further reflection, it became clear to me that we only know what we know. When teaching in my previous state, I had learned how to assess and moderate according to that school’s methods, in that state system. Even in my pre-service teacher course at university, a four-year Bachelor of Education course majoring in humanities and creative arts, I was offered limited exposure to diverse Drama assessment practices. When I began teaching, most fellow teachers were familiar only with the system in which they had taught. I did not observe professional dialogue on the benefits and challenges associated with a range of assessment practices in Drama. In my current professional context, lecturing in creative arts pre-service teacher education courses, I am constantly mindful not to limit my teaching to any one model as this infers that graduates’ destinations will not vary across Australia and overseas.
When reflecting on these matters, I realised that I wanted to know the answer to four questions:

1. How does each Australian state and territory assessment system differ in senior secondary Drama?

2. What can we learn from the different practices that are used?

3. How are teachers’ understandings of assessment constructed?

4. What do students think about being assessed in Drama and are their perceptions related to their state or territory context?

These questions inform the planning and development of my doctoral research project and research purpose outlined in Section 1.3.

### 1.6.2 Curriculum context

For many years, the value of drama education has been argued in a wide range of literature. Heathcote & Bolton (1995), Heathcote, Johnson & O’Neill (1984), Morgan & Saxton (1988) and Bolton (1979) pioneered arguments that value the teacher using drama techniques to teach in role, while trusting the student to become the expert artist, bringing to life imagined realities. Courtney (1995) wrote of the aesthetic value that Drama brings to the curriculum. Henry (2000) and Way (1967) discussed drama’s pedagogical value, enhancing students’ development through embodied learning. Neelands (2009) argued that drama’s collaborative nature enhanced democratic processes in both art and life. O’Toole (2006) advocated for drama’s value in furthering research methods, while using drama research tools to develop deep understandings of the field. The longevity of research attesting to the value of drama education has been documented by Bowell & Heap (2010), O’Connor (2009), Bolton (2007) and O’Toole & O’Mara (2007).

Drama is currently an established art form studied in Australian schools. In the recently published Australian Curriculum, Drama is one of the five Arts strands.
within The Arts learning area (ACARA, 2014), with the other art forms being Dance, Media, Music and Visual Arts. The Australia Curriculum encompasses Year F (Foundation years) to Year 10; state-based Senior Drama curricula are therefore still in use. Appendix A outlines the requirements of each state and territory with regards to senior secondary Drama syllabus programming and assessment. Further details of the Queensland, NSW and the ACT Drama curriculum documents are also discussed in Section 2.6.

Drama curriculum documents note performance work as an integral component of drama learning and assessment (ACT Board of Secondary Studies, 2011; NSW Board of Studies, 2009; Queensland Studies Authority, 2013). Engaging in performance allows the theories, histories and techniques of the art to be demonstrated through an embodied process.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Board authority</th>
<th>Senior secondary assessment</th>
<th>Ensuring comparability of standards</th>
<th>Performance component of the senior secondary Drama course</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>In Years 11 and 12, assessments take place through continuous school-based assessment.</td>
<td>Verification of results takes place through review of student folios reviewed by a merit-selected panel.</td>
<td>Performance is assessed in a school-based setting weighted at 30-40%.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>In Year 11, assessments take place through continuous school-based assessment. In Year 12, assessments take place through a combination of school-based assessment (50%) and external assessment (50%).</td>
<td>Moderation of results takes place through externally assessed components using markers appointed annually on merit.</td>
<td>In Year 12, students are externally assessed on a group performance comprising of 30% and a choice of an individual project, of which one of the choices is performance weighted at 30%.</td>
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<td>ACT</td>
<td>Assessments take place through school-based assessments across four semesters (Years 11 and 12).</td>
<td>Verification of results takes place through mandatory consensus-based Drama teacher peer review done through a bi-annual review of portfolios.</td>
<td>Performance is assessed in a school-based setting consisting of 30-40% of the grades for tertiary entrance or 30-50% for accredited (not contributing to tertiary entrance) courses.</td>
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Assessment in the Australian senior secondary years is criteria and standards referenced and each state and territory has developed procedures to ensure comparability of standards across the system. These procedures for the states and territory relevant to this thesis are detailed in Table 1.1, but broadly put, the procedures used around Australia utilise moderation of work, review of student samples of assessed work, external examinations and the use of common assessment tasks.

A more detailed discussion of the drama education landscape and requirements of each Senior Drama syllabus are undertaken in Section 2.6.

1.7 Assumptions

This research design is based on the assumption that Drama has an important role in the school curriculum and its inclusion in the senior secondary curriculum provides avenues for students with an interest in Drama to experience academic success. It also assumes that Drama teachers have experience and expertise in teaching performance skills and assessing performances effectively; that the assessment of performance skills positively influences a student’s learning experience in Drama, as explored in further detail in Section 2.4; and that understandings of how to assess performances in Drama can be strengthened by dialogue between teaching professionals and the sharing of perceptions and lived experiences.

1.8 Definitions

Establishing clear definitions will assist the researcher and the reader to arrive at a shared understanding of the research.

Drama education: This research presents Drama as an art form, the study of which its components can be explored, discovered, learned, taught and assessed. While drama is also pedagogy, this is not the focus of this research. In this study, Drama refers to a subject in the senior secondary curriculum, while the uncapitalised word, drama, refers to an art form that can be studied. The positive impact of drama
learning on students’ educational experiences is also elaborated upon in the literature (Section 2.3).

**Senior secondary:** In the ACT, NSW and Queensland, Years 11 and 12 are referred to as senior secondary years. Australian schooling begins in a foundation year (called Kindergarten in NSW and the ACT and Preparatory in Queensland) and is compulsory until the age of 17 in NSW, the ACT and Queensland.

**Australian Curriculum:** Australia has developed a national curriculum that ‘sets out the core knowledge, understanding, skills and general capabilities that are important for all Australian students’ (ACARA, 2014). The curriculum is being developed progressively, with Drama being encapsulated within The Arts learning area. The Australian Curriculum for the Arts was to be implemented in 2014, but is currently under review by the Federal Minister for Education.

### 1.9 Organisation of the thesis

Chapter 1 provides an orientation of the purpose of the research and its context, as well as outlines the main spheres of inquiry, as expressed through the research questions. The significance of the research is also outlined with suggestions of how this research can potentially impact on future pathways in drama education.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature and aims to achieve ‘generativity’ (Schulman, 1999, pp. 162-163) in order to address the research question. The history of drama education, the purpose of contemporary drama education, the relationship between drama education and assessment, the role of the assessor in Drama assessment and the nature of performance tasks are categories that have been distilled from a wide reading of literature. These categories form sections of the literature review that explores drama education, arts education and performance assessment.

Chapter 3 presents the qualitative research methodology. It outlines the methodological choices of the study, along with the elements of constructivism employed in this thesis. It further explains the research process with details about the
methodological tools that are used. Chapter 3 also contains storied accounts of the research sites and descriptions of the volunteer participants and the processes employed to select them. It also documents rigour, trustworthiness and limitations of the thesis and details the ethical considerations of the study.

Chapters 4-7 present the findings arrived at when using the qualitative research process as outlined in Chapter 3. These chapters reflect and theorise about the Drama performance assessment process, the roles of the student and assessor, the experiences of assessment and the culture of Drama performance assessment in Queensland, NSW and the ACT. Chapter 8 draws together the findings and theories developed in Chapters 4-7, arriving at conclusions about Drama performance assessment in senior secondary years. It explores pathways for future developments in the field and further consequences for this thesis. Each chapter of the thesis is diagrammatically represented (Figure 1.1).

![Figure 1.1: Chapters of the thesis](image-url)
1.10 Reflections

Chapter 1 begins with a storied reflection outlining the impetus for this research, and proceeds to outline the purpose, rationale and overview of the study. It gives the reader insight to the researcher’s thoughts prior to developing the thesis. As the thesis progresses, a number of other definitions emerge, as does the range of literature that is used as the springboard to new understandings, brought to light through this study. Each chapter in this thesis concludes with a Reflections section, in which the main findings of the chapter are reiterated and offers the researcher’s personal reflections on those findings.

The focus of this study and subsequent limitations are discussed in detail in the methodology (Chapter 3). It is foreshadowed here that the research, as a whole, works with a values orientation. McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003) argue that locating the study within the context of teachers’ current practice restricts the ability of the research to adopt a ‘neutral stance’ (p. 16). However, the research process enabled me, as the researcher, to develop deeper insights into the many lenses through which Drama performance assessment can be viewed. I acknowledge my active position in the field of drama education through the autoethnography. Section 3.3.2 acknowledges the bias present in this research and identifies the values orientation and assumptions that accompany this thesis.

Additionally, this thesis does not aim to generalise about the field of Drama assessment in schools or test a hypothesis or a particular professional practice. Rather, it seeks to theorise about a range of practices and experiences associated with Drama performance assessment while letting the research discoveries guide the process.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Schulman (1999) argues that one of the hallmarks of scholarship is achieving ‘generativity’ (p. 162-163) in a literature review, which builds on the scholarship of previous researchers bringing about new findings that contribute to existing understandings. Boote and Beile (2005) add that generativity brings integrity and sophistication to research. To be useful and meaningful, educational research should build on and be informed by prior research on the topic, therefore, providing a framework for new findings to emerge (Randolph, 2009). Generativity, in the context of this thesis, provides an understanding of the role of performance assessment in drama education. The nature of performance tasks is explored, as is the role of assessors and the methods used to assess performances to create new findings.

This literature review aims to achieve generativity by beginning with an overview of influences on drama and arts education while situating the research within the framework of what we understand drama education to be in Australia. An overview of the rationale for drama education will follow, addressing the achievements expected of Drama students. The relationship of the rationale to assessment practices follows, providing a critique of performance assessment tasks in Drama and an analysis of the assessor’s role and their use of assessment criteria in performance settings. Finally, the literature review puts forward the relationship between the aforementioned concepts and the context of the study, exploring literature relating to the state-based systems of education in Australia and the varying methods of achieving comparability of assessment grades and standards in Drama.

An outline of the relationships between the concepts presented in the literature review is presented in Figure 2.1.
2.2 Drama in the curriculum

Drama is one of five art forms that comprise part of Phase 2 of the design of the new Australian Curriculum, to be implemented at each state or territory’s discretion. The development of this curriculum provides the impetus for Australian Drama educators to revisit fundamental curriculum questions: *What drama content, processes and knowledge do schools teach, what drama should they teach, and who should decide?* (adapted from Flinders & Thornton, 1997). Drama education is a strongly theorised field in Australia and the theoretical framework that it operates within is the central subject matter of the following section. This section contributes to the generativity of this literature review by critically exploring the nature of drama education and the influences that have shaped its evolution in an Australian context.
The tradition of drama education in Australia has an ancient lineage. Indigenous cultures worldwide have complex and diverse oral traditions that are essentially performative (Marshall, 2004). Within Indigenous populations, drama-based activities were used to teach living skills, that were not always associated with aesthetic, personal or spiritual expression. These assisted in sustaining knowledge systems. Elders oversaw and guided this process (O’Toole et al., 2009). All art forms were experienced as part of people’s identity and culture (Russell-Bowie, 2011a), taking place through a ‘seamless web of painting, dance, music, storytelling and singing, which even included fairly formalised performance’ (O’Toole et al., 2009, p. 31). These forms create rich performance textures and allow for multiple layers of meaning to be explored simultaneously by engaging and blending the senses in the acts of both creating and interpreting meaning (Marshall, 2004). Australian indigenous children’s involvement in the Arts from birth formed a significant part of the spiritual, relational, social and entertainment life of the community. Indigenous arts education policy constituted an integrated immersion model in which skills and knowledge in music, dance, drama and art were passed down in the community (Mason, as cited in Russell-Bowie, 2011b). However, commencing in 1778, indigenous arts practices were undermined by the effects of invasion. In the years since, the indigenous curriculum was driven underground, almost to a point of extinguishment, by attrition, neglect and strategic attack (O’Toole et al., 2009). The assumptions and practices of the education system that replaced it were largely imported from Europe, and this system of education provides the foundations of the current curriculum.

In the first half of the 20th Century, the content of schooling was based on what employers or universities felt was necessary or examinable (O’Toole, Stinson & Moore, 2009). Within this context, Drama’s role was confined to speech training and recitation, within the English curriculum (Russell-Bowie, 2011b). This tradition was formalised into the British curriculum in 1921 when a curriculum statement designated drama in the classroom as something to be ‘written, read or acted’ (p. 45) from students’ desks or the teachers’ chair (Board of Education, 1921, in Bolton,
2007). At this time in Australia, drama classes, which included speech and elocution lessons, were recommended for socially maladjusted students, with dramatic activities used to provide recreation for students’ leisure time (Ben-Peretz & McCulloch, 2011). Pascoe (2009) asserts that there was a strong view, at this time, that Drama should be located in the extra-curricular domain, involving the presentation of plays and performances on a voluntary basis.

In the 1950s, theories of children’s learning and creativity emerged under the influence of writings from the earlier part of the century on the power of art-making in the process of self-realisation and transcendence (Cizek, in Malvern, 1995) and the power of drama to improve students’ confidence and presentation skills (Slade, 1955). Slade also argued about the significance of play in the formation of students’ learning. As a consequence, arts education began to emphasise discovery and creativity, as advocated also by Dabron (1958). However, Drama’s inclusion in the curriculum was still prescribed as a structured and procedural study with children presenting play scripts or skits and practising elocution (Russell-Bowie, 2011b). It lacked the creative processes advocated by Cizek (1995) and Dabron (1958). At this time, the rationale for Drama’s inclusion in the curriculum also came to include its role in addressing issues of personal development. Drama education became associated with wider discourses about human development and the formation of character (Ostern, 2006). In this regard, Haseman (2006) reported that drama learning in the 1960s was said to help students work in teams, experience situations and learn to consider other people in the world and at work.

In 1969, Dorothy Heathcote made a landmark keynote speech on a visit to Northwestern University, Illinois USA, where she challenged Drama educators to go back to basic principles and ask, ‘What is drama? Why art?’ (Taylor, 2006a, pp. 109-110). She wanted educators to increase their own aesthetic insight, to guide students toward the development of their aesthetics. Here, Heathcote questioned not only the understanding of Drama as a personal development study, but also its predetermined place within the English curriculum. However, within the confines of schooling, Drama retained a limited role in the curriculum. Music, Visual Art and Craft were implemented widely in the discipline of the Arts (Russell-Bowie, 2011b),
while other arts subjects such as Drama and Dance were considered optional additions and utilised at the school’s discretion.

The 1970s in Australia was a period of widespread social and political critique, leading to large-scale policy changes brought about by the Whitlam Labor government. Curriculum recognition for Drama was advanced with the release of the New South Wales Arts in Schools Report (Morrison, 1974), which generated recognition for the Arts, including Drama. Mooney (1996) argues that implementation of the Morrison Report’s recommendations were slow, except where performances in schools were concerned. However, the report formed part of a tapestry of documents of the time that advocated for the Arts to the re-envisaged in the Australian context. The importance of arts education was affirmed in a national research report (Schools Commission and Australia Council [SCAC], 1977), and Drama was signalled as a unique subject in schools that could be taught within the Arts curriculum (Education Department of South Australia, 1978). Drama continued to be delivered as part of the English curriculum, as it is today, during the period of drama curriculum development, demonstrating the multidisciplinary nature of drama education.

Drama conferences held between 1979 and 1981 had a strong focus on the campaign for acknowledging Drama in the curriculum (Mooney, 1996). After considerable advocacy and curriculum development, several significant events occurred in the development of Drama as a school-based subject. For example, in NSW, the initial development of the *Drama (Kindergarten to Year Six)* syllabus began in 1984. For Senior Drama, a milestone was reached in 1985 when the NSW Secondary Schools Board approved the *School Certificate Drama Syllabus*, an elective syllabus in Years 7-10 for schools wishing to offer school-based Drama as a subject. However, government agendas often diverted schooling’s direction away from the emerging Arts syllabus documents. In 1988, the federal government published *Strengthening Australia’s Schools* (Dawkins, 1988), which focused on literacy, mathematics, science and technology education, with no mention of the Arts as an essential area of study (Russell-Bowie, 2011b). State governments adopted the federal government’s priorities and channelled their focus and resources into literacy, mathematics, science.
and technology (Russell-Bowie, 2009). However, simultaneously alternate forces were at work and the policy document, *The arts framework: P-10 for total growth* (Ministry of Education (Schools Division) Victoria, 1988) presented an alternative understanding of the Arts curriculum by reinforcing the argument of Drama as a distinct learning area. For the first time, an Australian policy document, ‘the Arts as a whole’ (1988, p. 7) argued for the Arts to be drawn together. The Hobart Declaration of 1989 (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs) allowed for a significant recognition of the role of Arts in education at a national level. This declaration was the first national document to include Education in the Arts among the 10 Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia. The Arts were later absent from the newly developed National Standards Framework (Mayer Committee, 1992) which created standards and profiles for schools in relation to key learning areas. After extensive lobbying from arts educators, Dance, Drama, Music, Media and Visual Arts were incorporated within a separate key learning area, called the Arts (Curriculum Cooperation, 1994).

In 1999, the Adelaide Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 1999) named the Arts as one of the key learning areas (KLAs) in which all students could attain high standards of knowledge, skills and understanding. In other words, school students would need to complete mandatory studies in the Arts as part of their formal curriculum in the compulsory years of schooling. These policy documents located Drama as a specific learning area within the Arts, but also maintained its role as a form of literature within the subject of English. The subject of Drama was identified as artistic engagement and employment of the aesthetic senses through creating, performing and responding to drama. Whereas the study of drama as a form of literature was characterised by analysis of texts within the English curriculum. Drama educators understood that the learning area model was both an acknowledgement that Drama should have a legitimate place in the learning culture of Australia, while challenging the long-held Arts curriculum hegemony of Music and Visual Arts (Pascoe et al., 2005).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Drama was being established as a subject within the Arts key learning area, widespread acknowledgement of the
importance of aesthetic learning (Abbs, 1993, 1989; Lavery, 1992; McLean, 1996) was gaining momentum and provided a direction for Drama curriculum development. For example, *Drama Makes Meaning* (Queensland Department of Education, 1991) gave aesthetic learning prominence, identifying cognitive, physical, sensory and social learning as key aspects of drama education. Published shortly after was *The Arts National Statement* (1994), created by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, comprising of Australian state and territory Education ministers. Even without federal government endorsement, it was significant because it described the rationale of drama education as enabling ‘both individuals and groups to explore, shape and symbolically represent ideas and feelings and their consequences’ (p. 15).

Another key element in the shaping of Australian Drama curriculum was taking place. Bolton (2007) argues that from 1990 Australia became a leading site for experimental practice and academic research in drama education, as Australian drama education researchers drew on a range of philosophies and methodologies, developing ideas about drama education for a global and multicultural perspective. Australian researchers developed influential theories that would influence the practice of drama education locally and internationally. Process Drama, developed by Haseman (1991) and subsequently influenced by O’Toole (1992), and popularised by O’Neill (1995), was introduced as an improvised form of drama used to engage students in empathetic learning experiences by simultaneously working in real and imagined worlds. Process Drama, as an art form and a pedagogy, became noted by many drama education researchers and practitioners (Hornbrook, 1991; Neelands, 1990), assisting teachers to translate Heathcote’s (1974) theories of drama as a learning medium into classroom practice. The dramatic form, Playbuilding (Bray, 1991), whereby students work collaboratively through drama activities to generate drama, was developed by Australian Youth Theatre director Errol Bray’s work with NSW theatre companies in the 1970s and 1980s. Australian drama education researchers placed themselves at the forefront of pedagogical development, thereby advancing the recognition of drama education in Australia and internationally.
Australian Drama educator and researcher John O’Toole (1992) contributed to the discussion of Drama’s curriculum positioning by describing Drama as a way of learning about the world and drama-in-education as a way of learning life skills. However, in 1993, Christine Hoepper (Comans) argued that a ‘broader definition of drama’ needed to be embraced (1993, p. 6). She argued that it was ‘time for drama to shrug off the personal development, the social skills and life skills training justification for doing Drama’ (p. 7) in the classroom, adding that, ‘we must finally acknowledge and not shy away from acknowledging that we are working with students in the aesthetic field’ (p. 7). It is certainly true that vocational skills are important in the study of drama, but it is the prominence of aesthetic, creative and imaginative practices that are fundamental to drama education (Haseman, 2006; Radvan, 2006) and the school curriculum. These attributes remain relevant in current Senior Drama syllabus documents (ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies, 2010; NSW Board of Studies, 2009; Queensland Studies Authority, 2013). Across Australia, the Arts curricula are generally essentialist (Eisner, 1972) in nature. They emphasise the unique nature of artistic mediums and the unique contributions they make to human experience. However, as with many current curricular outside of the Arts, some elements are contextualist (Eisner, 1972) in nature (e.g. literacy, numeracy, lifelong learning skills and futures orientations) wherein the Arts are studied for the contribution they make to students’ living skills and the building of an educated society. For the purposes of achieving generativity in relation to Drama’s evolution in the Australian education context, this thesis contends that Drama has developed into a unique area of study that uses both essentialist and contextualist approaches. Drama coexists with other art forms under the umbrella key learning area of the Arts. The current aims of drama education will be discussed in the next section.

### 2.2.2 Purpose of drama education

The factors and events that influenced drama education in Australia can be discussed in much greater depth. O’Connor (2009) suggests that drama education researchers should focus on Drama’s purpose, as it connects to the human experience. O’Connor (2009, p. 29) writes:
Regardless of its place in curriculum statements, we must recognise the absolute centrality of Drama in giving a sense of what it is to be other than ourselves in a world where otherness and difference is too often something to be feared and punished.

Accordingly, it is notable that the Queensland Drama senior syllabus’ rationale makes reference to Drama’s ability to help students ‘gain understandings of human experience in different cultures, times and places’ (Queensland Studies Authority, 2013, p. 1). The ACT Performing Arts (Dance and Drama) Senior Syllabus (ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies, 2010) similarly makes reference to the human experience, describing Drama as a unique artistic expression ‘through which people construct, explore and convey meaning’ (p. 5). By contrast, the rationale in the NSW Senior Drama syllabus (Stage 6) is less direct in its expression of Drama’s link to the human experience. Rather, it focuses on the application of broad purposes and the ability of Drama to explore through enactment, while providing opportunities for collaboration and interaction (NSW Board of Studies, 2009).

When considering influences on the current focus of Drama curricula, McLeod (1985) identifies imagination, empathy, spontaneity, commitment, creativity, tolerance and playfulness as central to a successful Drama classroom. The word play or playfulness is used decisively (Baldwin & Fleming, 2003; Courtney, 1974; Winston & Tandy, 2009). It denotes an important purpose at the heart of drama education. In the vernacular, Drama is often described in schools as being a practical subject; the aim being to engage students practically in doing the art, rather than just learning about it (Lovesy, 2002). This sort of argument is longstanding, and is found in John Dewey’s (1934) notion that knowledge is not acquired independently of the means of instruction. There is a physical and embodied nature of learning at work in Drama (Wright, 2011) that is similar to childhood play, which utilises the imagination and helps people express and understand reality (Miguel, 2010). In this respect, McLaren’s (1985) studies of the connections between schooling and ritual conclude that ‘knowledge is more than just words – more than just being told’ (p. 235). McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras and Brooks (2004) similarly argue that students experience greater and more lasting benefits from direct hands-on
experiences in their learning. Such learning is central to drama education; students are engaged in the experience, feeling and ritual of dramatic encounters.

Literature on the rationale of drama education also explores the dualities of drama. The generativity of this literature review acknowledges that drama can be both a noun and a verb – a discipline and a pedagogy (Bolton, 1979; Stinson, 2007). It is both a product and practice. Bolton (1982) describes Drama as consisting of two components: (i) artistic; and (ii) educational. O’Toole and O’Mara (2007) elaborate by identifying four paradigms at play in drama education: (i) cognitive/procedural which involves learning about drama; (ii) expressive/developmental in which one grows through Drama; (iii) social/pedagogical which involves learning through drama; and (iv) functional which relates to connecting with the work of professional theatre practitioners. These paradigms are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they overlap (Stinson, 2007) considerably. For example, students can develop expressively and developmentally when they create drama, while engaging in cognitive/procedural drama learning as they create their drama in a particular theatrical style or tradition.

In the current educational climate, teachers are required to make links between the Arts curriculum and lifelong learning. Drama learning accesses technical skills whereby students learn the language and skills required to create, perform and respond to drama. Engagement in technical skills can lead to vocationally orientated experiences. In 2009, Australian Arts Minister Peter Garrett affirmed arts education’s role in relation to industry and economy, arguing that

“creativity, interpretation, innovation and cultural understanding are all sought after skills for new and emerging industries in the twenty-first century. Arts education provides students with the tools to develop these skills”
(Garrett, 2009, p. 1).

However, Bowell and Heap (2010) warn Drama educators not to de-emphasise the subject’s ‘dramaness’ (p. 584) by justifying its value using non-drama terms and a generic educational vocabulary. Bowell and Heap (2010) argue that Drama should
also demonstrate its effectiveness in contributing to national agendas outside of the arts if it is to endure a climate of accountability and curriculum crowding.

O’Toole and Appleby (2002) connect drama learning to Australia’s national literacy agenda (Hempenstall, 2006) by including multiliteracies in Drama’s attributes, stating, ‘Literacy is central to what we do in Drama’ (p. 21). The strong link between Drama and multiliteracies has been developed over time. Eisner (1998) asserted that multiliteracies are the key to increasing the impact of an arts education, arguing that if every student was allowed to develop multiple forms of literacy, then all students would have an expressive form in which they excelled. Additionally, Eisner (1998) contends that a multiliteracy approach mirrors life more closely than one that prioritises a single form of literacy. Kalantzis and Cope (2008) concur, arguing that everyday experiences are essentially multimodal with diverse representations of understandings. Related to this, Martello (2004) explains that drama learning uses spoken, written and visual communications to enhance students’ intellectual quality, connectedness, social support and recognition of differences. Dunn (2005) adds that Drama provides students with opportunities to develop oral, written, multi-mediated, visual, kinaesthetic and aesthetic literacies.

The inclusion of aesthetic literacy (Dunn, 2005) is prevalent in Drama, as well as in other arts disciplines. Greene (1995) argues that the purpose of becoming proficient in literacies is functionally aesthetic, ‘so that they may contribute to our seeing’ (p. 25). Courtney (1990) asserts that at the core of Drama is the ability to engage the imagination and to connect emotionally. O’Toole (1997) adds, ‘Drama is an art which by its very nature explores the metaphysical construction of alternative realities in aesthetic configurations’ (p. 186). Aesthetic learning has long been discussed. In Art as Experience, Dewey (1934) advocated that conscious involvement with aesthetics marks a differentiation between aesthetic and everyday experiences. According to Dewey (1934), the three main components that constitute an aesthetic experience are emotion, expression and consummation, and all three can be facilitated through appropriately structured learning experiences.
The inclusion of aesthetic modes of thinking is somewhat at odds with the structure of educational practice. Rational and functional modes of thinking are more commonly privileged in Western education systems and aesthetic values are often absent in discussions of learning and curriculum. Martin-Smith (2005) argues that this tension originated from Descartes’ philosophy that dissociated the mind from body and considered aesthetic feelings to be associated with irrational senses of the body rather than reasoned thought. As a result, Martin-Smith (2005) contends that theories of education are focused on the primacy of cognition, believing that learning is independent of its context.

However, reference to aesthetic learning is still persistent in arts education (Jacobs, 2009b), but accompanied by challenges. The notion of aesthetics suggest ethereal qualities that are abstract in nature and often associated with high culture (Duncum, 2003; Ross, Randor, Mitchell & Berton, 1993). The importance of aesthetic literacy is further diminished when the aesthetic response is perceived as private and feelingful (Barrett, 2002; Kaschub, 2002; Kokkos, 2010). Similarly, aesthetic literacy is not the same as the artistic talent possessed by an individual. Although artistic creation is a notable aim of most Arts syllabus documents, the ability to produce great works of beauty is not a requirement of aesthetic learning. Gale (2005) illustrates the concept of aesthetic literacy in terms of outcomes, describing what we can hope to see from students who are engaging aesthetically. These outcomes include: (i) analysing aesthetic elements; (ii) developing personal and critical response through judgement and evaluative tools; (iii) appreciating different cultures, values and contexts; (iv) understanding disciplinary perspectives that inform the aesthetic; (v) actively pursuing aesthetic engagement; and (vi) possessing the ability to articulate aesthetic processes. The aforementioned outcomes have clear learning processes embedded in them. Through these learning processes, Gale argues that aesthetic literacy can be accessed in classrooms from the early learning to senior years.

Apart from political dimensions that include aesthetic learning in the curriculum, there are several challenges associated with aesthetic practices. Wright and Gerber (2004) argue that the aesthetic dimension of drama education makes the field more
intricate, providing more difficulties for the tasks of assessment and certification. Nevertheless, the contemporary demands of education deem that assessment and reporting procedures accompany all areas of study. Therefore, it is timely to investigate how ‘accessing the aesthetic’ (Jacobs, 2009b) can be successfully evaluated through assessment and certification processes.

2.3 Relationship between Drama and assessment

Blending previous findings about drama education’s purpose into a summary contributes to the generativity of this literature review. The summary creates a new rationale for drama education, allowing performance assessment to be critiqued within this new framework. The rationale for drama education is multifaceted; Drama connects to the human experience, engages learners in imaginative and aesthetic growth, accesses technical skills and allows for vocationally orientated experiences. These purposes are addressed concurrently. Learning in Drama is creative and dynamic. It allows a range of responses to be gauged upon the learning trajectory. As with any subject area, Drama’s inclusion in the curriculum conforms to curriculum policies and procedures, including those related to assessment and certification. Indeed, it is arguable that ongoing and regular assessments are critical components of the Drama classroom. For that reason, it is timely here to discuss the relationship between the purpose of Drama and assessment.

Landy (2006) asserts that assessment in Drama has two purposes, both of which are related to the global aims of drama education. These purposes are to determine student readiness for certain dramatic tasks and to gauge students’ competency in Drama. It would be fair to say that most students do not engage in the study of Drama purely for the purposes of engaging in assessment. However, most have chosen Drama with an interest in performance or creative work. They simply love to ‘do’ (Lovesy, 2002, p. 85). Additionally, Drama students are generally able to perceive the broader aims of performance assessment and they can see the relationship between performance tasks and their broader lives, as shown in studies by Hatton (2004) and Smigiel and Barrett (2005). While this literature review only discusses a few studies on students’ perceptions of performance tasks, these studies
all attest to students being able to acutely perceive the bigger picture of the purpose of drama education through engaging in assessment.

Recognising this, Gardner (1985) suggests that teachers should vary their instruction styles and learning experiences in order to reach as many students as possible. Similarly, Eisner (1998) suggests that assessment tasks should also be varied. In Drama, formative and summative assessment takes place through a range of assessable instruments, including individual and group performances, journals and logbooks, essays, research assignments, design portfolios (e.g. costume, set or lighting design), director folios, script development, improvisation tasks, video production, self-reflection, theatre reviews and interviews. This thesis is primarily concerned with assessment of performance, however, other associated task types are explored in order to develop findings about drama learning and assessment in the senior secondary years.

2.3.1 Assessing performance

Cockett (1998) argues performance assessment in Drama presents unique challenges, as the processes used are highly dependent on a wide range of interrelated contributions. Performance assessments are complex because of the variations between performance sites, the requirement for ensemble or group work, the nature of the ensemble or group, the access to technical equipment and the composition and reactions of any audience that might be in attendance (Oreck, Owen & Baum, 2003). There are other challenges associated with Drama performance assessment, many of which also apply to the wider field of arts education, and other disciplines as well (e.g. creative writing and design). It can be argued that the outcome of formal and widespread assessment of artistic creations can result in a stifling of individual expression, imagination, creativity and originality, while not allowing for the fresh pursuit of ideas (Hanley, 2003). A wide range of responses are also plausible to a particular task.

One of the biggest challenges identified by Harris (2008) is that creativity is not easily defined and therefore difficult to assess. Aesthetic education also utilises personal responses to stimuli, which can be unfamiliar to those more accustomed to
assessment tasks with previously defined answers. This is where the duality of objective and subjective constructs comes into play. Haynes (2008) and Ross et al. (1993) describe traditional assessment methods, as identified by Hyde (2013), as being ‘objectivity-focused’ (p. 9) whereby assessors are expected to discard their own feelings in favour of strictly set criteria in which interpretations are not required. A focus on objective judgments is contrary to drama education, as O’Toole et al. (2009) remind us, ‘Knowledge and learning are of course never objective nor value-neutral, much though ultraconservative groups and politicians might wish them to be seen as such’ (p. 108). Jackson (2006) justifies the validity of creative assessment tasks, arguing that ‘it should be possible to separate subjective judgments of creativity from judgments of technical goodness and from judgments of aesthetic appeal’ (p. 169). Tomlinson (2001) argues for a healthy balance between subjective and objective judgments in order to create informed judgments on performance assessment that provide the most ‘individually sensitive, accurate and comprehensive evidence’ of student learning (p. 15). Misson (1996) goes so far as to identify Drama as a site for the construction of subjectivity, which he argues operates at the nexus of intelligence and emotion. ‘Thought is charged with feeling, while feeling is refined and strengthened by thought’ (p. 11). In this respect, it has long been argued that Drama teaches empathy (Holland, 2009; Trinder, 1977). Similarly, Bolton (1984) describes Drama as a process of unselfing, which makes subjective and alternative responses a valid part of the dramatic response.

The challenges presented by creative assessment tasks that use aesthetic engagement can be disconcerting to those more accustomed to ‘traditional’ (Hyde, 2013, p. 190) assessment methods. Hyde (2013) states that traditional assessment methods (such as multiple choice tests, short or long essay questions) are often noted for ensuring reliability and fairness, but receive criticism for their reductive tendency to ask students to show evidence of pre-determined knowledge (Ross, 1991). Eisner (1998) identifies tensions between traditional testing and assessment in the arts.

*Testing aspires for all a set of common correct responses; in the arts, idiosyncratic responses are prized. Testing typically focuses on pieces or segments of information; artistic work emphasises wholes and configurations. Testing emphasises the acquisition of products produced by others; the arts*
emphasise content growing out of one’s personal experiences, especially those concerned with matters of feeling. Such matters of emphasis are so fundamental that it seems as though testing and the arts reside in different worlds (p. 2).

Since Eisner’s lucid comparison, the assessment landscape has shifted, and a broader range of assessment types are employed in schools. As this thesis is primarily concerned with Drama performances, an exploration of the unique qualities of performance assessment tasks is a valid point of focus. Eisner’s (1998) comparison of traditional testing methods and the attributes of arts assessment emphasises the importance of individual responses in the creation of art. Drama performance involves creative processes which are multi-faceted with many interlocking variables (Thomas & Millard, 2006), emphasising originality, creativity and innovation. In order to create Drama performances, students are not only required to interpret theatrical traditions, but synthesise their own ideas with theatrical conventions, while showcasing their performance skill, all while accessing the aesthetic as appropriate to the task. Performers make decisions each second as they engage simultaneously in performance and reflection (Baptiste, 2008). Attributes such as flair, imagination and originality, as appropriate to the style concerned, feature strongly in assessment criteria in the Higher School Certificate (HSC) Drama Marking Guidelines (NSW Board of Studies, n.d.) and the ACT’s Performing Arts Framework (ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies, 2010). Additionally, performance assessment requires students to demonstrate – and assessors to evaluate – not only what students know, but also what they can do (Bergen, 1993).

Assessment in the Arts can present challenges for educational administrators. Using an international example, under the United States’ ‘No Child Left Behind’ Act (2001 in U.S. Department of Education, 2002), achievement could only be demonstrated by ‘scientifically rigorous evidence’ (Zucker, 2004, p. 2). The term, scientifically rigorous, is a style of measurement that is easily subjected to testing but unsuitable for aesthetic domains. While this policy has now been superseded, it is worth noting, particularly as Australian policy writers have recently introduced high-stakes testing and comparative analysis of schools. Taylor (2006a) argues that arts experiences are ‘constructed by contextual circumstances and the social health of any given
classroom’ (p. xvi), and characterised by physical realities and subjective aesthetic encounters. This philosophy is well developed, but Taylor argues further that, even in the field of Drama, most assessment insufficiently takes the aesthetic dimension into account. He argues that Drama educators are required to be overly concerned with technical skills, due to the outcomes orientation of the education system. Taylor’s criticism is a reminder that performative assessment in Drama is a complex phenomenon. It has been argued that the promotion of innovation, experimental ideas and autonomy can create incomparable measures of success. For example, Fowler (1996) celebrates the fact that the Arts develop what he describes as ‘non-measurable accomplishments’, which include discovering new perspectives, improving one’s aesthetic sense and enjoying the process of learning. Macgregor, Lemerise, Potts and Roberts (1994) explain that the arts present us with a ‘tension between the need to demonstrate skill mastery and the desire to embrace autonomy and incomparability’ (p. 3).

However, there is much literature that argues the benefits of assessment in aesthetic fields and attests to creative work as being able to be assessed with a high degree of integrity (Colwell, 2003; de la Harpe, Peterson, Frankham, Zehner, Neale & Musgrave, 2009; Fleming, 2012; Pistone, 2000; Willoughby, Feifs, Baenen & Grimes, 1995). Assessment in the arts involves the demonstration of skills and craftsmanship (Hanley, 2003) and requires students to create original work that will ‘energise us with some previously unseen thing’ (Kleiman, 2005, p. 1). Recognising that the assessment of original works presents challenges, Treffinger (2009) argues that educators should abandon attempts to make the assessment of creative products ‘easy’ (p. 246). It is preferable to maintain the complexities of creative assessment tasks as assessment helps to heighten awareness of the challenges of assessing creative work, thereby bringing about greater transparency (Hyde, 2013).

Despite these challenges, system-wide assessment in the arts is achievable and necessary to establish the credibility of the field of drama education and to provide systems for identifying student achievement within the formal school curricula (Hanley, 2003).
2.3.2 Role of the assessor in Drama performance assessment

The relationship between teacher and student takes on an interesting dynamic in the Drama performance assessment process. Bird (2006) describes this teacher-student relationship as multifaceted and periodically ‘intense’ (p. 80). At times, teachers direct their students; at times, they actively assist in the editing process; and at other times, they are required to challenge the artistic content of student performance pieces. Kempe (2000) believes that the success of student-devised work relies on the teacher developing independence in their students so they are able to collaborate with each other in performance making, without direct leadership by the teacher. Warren (2003) adds that it is the place of the Drama teacher to structure independent work but then intervene, asking ‘good and significant questions’ (p. 33). Harris (2008) adds that care should be taken to ensure the work is not unduly a product of the teacher’s influence, and that student ingenuity emerges, not just ideas and practices developed under teacher guidance.

During the performance assessment process, the Drama teacher is required to be both the facilitator of learning experiences and the assessor of creative work. This creates challenges. Treffinger, Young, Selby and Sheppardson (2002) argue that it is essential that teachers create an environment in which students feel safe and are encouraged to express their ideas, if creativity is to develop. They state that the learning climate should be one that is open and values new and different ideas; allows and promotes playfulness and humour; offers challenge and encourages involvement; builds trust; provides both idea time and idea support; and promotes freedom and risk-taking (Treffinger, Isaksen & Dorval, 1996). These statements sound like the natural order in the Drama classroom. However, in the senior secondary years when students are competing for grades, marks or even university places, it is questionable as to whether students feel comfortable taking creative risks. Ultimately, the Drama student is expected to know that their work is made for the purpose of assessment, and to act upon that understanding. Chapters 6 and 7 enquire into students’ motivations: Do they seek to create innovative art, to achieve good results, to achieve a combination of both, or something different again?
By engaging in performance-based tasks, students learn numerous dramatic conventions, including that of the relationship between the performer and the audience. Aitken (2007) emphasises the relationship between theatre-makers (performers) and audience members within a performance space and context. He suggests that for a performance to be successful, a number of shared understandings are required, including that between theatre-maker and audience member. Both parties require a loosely shared sense of how the performance will be read and what will be valued, or considered of quality. These can differ in different circumstances, but ultimately, the control of the terms of the performance lie with the theatre-makers. They should have an understanding of the expectation required in their construction of a piece, and then consider the level of interaction or direction called for from the audience. It is always the theatre-makers, as relationship managers, who are in control within a successful performance (Aitken, 2007).

A particular power relationship between the actor and audience is present during an assessed performance. Theatre-makers are required to dictate the terms of the performance to the audience; the student is the theatre-maker. The teacher (who may also be in the role of the assessor) maintains some degree of control over the performance event and performance environment. Although the theatre-maker maintains a degree of autonomy over the terms of the performance, the teacher-assessor will probably have prescribed the boundaries within which the theatre-makers work, theatrical style and the subject matter that can be dealt with. Additionally, the teacher-assessor may halt a performance which is deemed inappropriate or unsafe.

An assessor is more active than an audience member. Dunn (2005) argues that Drama is unique in that much of the work is both ephemeral and fragile in nature. Therefore, the ability of the assessor to capture their thoughts on the quality of work as it occurs is vital to the integrity of the assessment process. During a performance, the assessor is required to make judgments about the quality of the work and physically notate their thoughts in relation to given criteria. The assessor makes cognitive links between student choices based on the assessment criteria, balancing their judgements with their own implicit criteria, which are necessarily based on their
personal experiences (Baptiste, 2008). While an audience member is permitted to make purely subjective judgments, the assessor aims to make informed judgments, which may result in marks or grades being recorded. Teachers in the Arts develop expertise in assessing the outcome of the aesthetic process or the manifestation of the individual aesthetic experience. The product is therefore viewed from a number of perspectives and informed judgments are made by the assessor based on set criteria and personal discretionary judgements in relation to, and the quality of, what is produced (Ross et al., 1993).

Leach, Neutze and Zepke (2000) argue that assessors are consciously and unconsciously biased by their own values, preferences and dispositions. In this respect, personal responses from both the assessor and the student can widen the possibilities for interpretation (Ross, et al., 1993). Rather than command that assessors discard these personal responses, it is preferable for students to be taught to use individuals’ insights to reflect upon, and if necessary, make adjustments to their performances (Soep, 2005). The discussion chapters of this thesis demonstrate that students do not perform solely for the purpose of being assessed; rather they engage in Drama to pursue their own artistic expression. Therefore, students should be encouraged to assess feedback and apply their own artistic decisions to their work. Both Drama students and teacher-assessors should be aware that subjective responses are natural, as they are rooted in culturally authorised criteria for judgment of the level of achievement (Ross et al., 1993, p. 164). However, the assessor’s judgement is recorded in quantifiable terms such as grades or marks, therefore, the student has a heightened awareness of the assessor’s responses in the high-stakes assessment environment.

2.3.3 Criterion-referenced assessment in Drama

To assist the assessor to make informed judgments that access the aesthetic, Ross et al. (1993) suggests that grading in the arts should be criterion-referenced (interchangeable terms include the use of a rubric, marking criteria, marking and standards criteria or grading criteria) and not based on normative structures in which students’ achievements are assessed in relation to their peers (e.g. using a distributive
Well-designed assessment criteria can help to inform students of the expectations before them (Baptiste, 2008; Stemler, 2004). Almost inevitably, the development and interpretation criteria and standards in creative fields are highly controversial. Criterion referencing, by its nature, is predicated on the known. Creativity researchers Amabile (1996) and Sternberg (1988) argue that any products derived from a known formula or pre-determined set of instructions can never be considered creative. Kleiman (2005) similarly argues that a criterion-referenced framework is a ‘closed system’ (p. 21) that perpetuates non-creative outcomes. However, Boulter (2004) argues that criterion-referenced assessment is a key to our existing understanding of measurement as it is demonstrably fair, enabling students to prepare for assessments, engage with judgments and appeal against results. Australian schooling has embraced criterion-referenced assessment, therefore, the question arises regarding how assessment criteria can be devised so that it values and enhances creativity, yet meets the requirements of Australian senior secondary studies authorities.

Tierney and Marielle (2004) suggest that criteria should be stated explicitly; the attributes for each performance criterion should be clear and the attributes that are differentiated from one level to the next need to be set out and applied appropriately. The continuum of performance levels should assist students to engage in a critique of their own skills, while also increasing their knowledge and assessing their personal growth (Arter & McTighe, 2001; Goodrich Andrade, 2000; Hyde, 2013; Lindström, 2006).

This thesis takes the position that assessment in Drama involves more than competency-based tasks; rather, it requires the demonstration of creativity, originality, innovation and aesthetic learning are valued within the confines of the curriculum at hand. For this reason, Ross et al. (1993) suggest that assessment should aim to arrive at a rich, descriptive profile of each student’s achievement. Griffin and Nix (1991) state that ‘the same principles that apply to the development of objective essay and affective assessment tasks also apply to the development of performance or practical tasks’ (p. 71). As with all learning areas, it is vital that Drama assessment follows the guiding principles of good assessment (Brookhart, 2011; Hyde, 2013;
McMillan, 2000). Good assessment is fair and ethical, uses multiple methods, is valid and feasible, and it enhances instruction. Just as for any other subject, the alignment of learning and assessment is imperative. Boyle (2003) declares that the first step in assessing higher order thinking in Drama is ensuring that the curriculum (what is taught), pedagogy (how it is taught), and assessment (how the content is assessed) are in alignment. Hence, arts assessment is a judgment of the outcome of artistic styles of learning, discovery and creativity (Sadler, 2009) rather than a confinement of students into responses that are predictable and iterative (Ross, 1994).

In the quest for generativity, it is useful to explore research assessment in other arts disciplines such as Music and Dance, as they too manage similar tensions in the assessment of performances. In the related arts field of Music, Dixon (2000) and Asmus (1999) contend that assessment criteria often lack details when describing the elements of artistic accomplishment that are valued in creative tasks. Ross (1994) and Gordon (2004) assert that assessment criteria across art forms are created by teachers who may have a background as artistic practitioners. It can be difficult to place this practitioner wisdom in a grid that is meaningful for students. As an example, Gordon (2004) explains the difficulty when dealing with responses that work beyond the brief, containing what he explains as the wow factor. The wow factor is ‘an elegance, which will arrest and satisfy the reader, in the terms of the medium, beyond the norm demonstrating innovation, ingenuity, independent thought and divergent thinking’ (Gordon, 2004, p. 62). Dixon (2000) also calls for performance assessment criteria to recognise stage presence, which can be an intangible mixture of charisma, talent and ego (Roberts, 2011). Dixon (2000) suggests that passion, soul and spirit are often omitted as criteria within Drama assessment, yet these qualities lie at the heart of a great performance. The Drama teacher, who is also the assessor, negotiates such challenges in the drama assessment process and identifies skills and qualities that they themselves may not have anticipated.

Clark (2002) adds that well-constructed assessment criteria provides a way for student performances to be evaluated easily and equitably, without compromising on
the divergent qualities of individual creative processes that arise in student responses to Drama assessment tasks. Ross (1994) suggests that the key qualities of assessment criteria should address the links between the generation, realisation and response to Drama, using methods that allow the use of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993). Work produced in relation to aesthetic qualities should also be grounded in content knowledge. The student needs to apply content knowledge with creative skills to address the task (Pritchard, 2004). Divergent responses are permissible and assessable, and in some cases, encouraged.

As with all styles of assessment, validity and transparency of criteria are important to the design of fair assessment. Thus, assessment processes should not be shrouded in mystery (Biggs, 2003). According to Gordon (2004), the ‘knowing it when they find it’ (p. 62) approach to assessment is no longer acceptable in contemporary education. To aid transparency, there have been further developments in the language used for Arts assessment criteria. It is now, for example, acceptable to use simpler, less descriptive grids, less formal language or holistic criteria (Sadler, 2009) while still communicating expectations using acceptable formal terminologies.

Similarly, feedback as a result of the assessment process should be easily understood by students. Students’ ability to understand their feedback is one of the measures by which they judge the quality of an assessment process. A study by Wojtas (1998, cited in Weaver, 2006, p. 381) claimed that students were more likely to improve their work if they understood their feedback and assessment criteria. Weaver adds that the value of feedback depends on the student’s ‘particular conception’ (p. 380) of what is being assessed. If a student does not have a similar understanding of the assessment criteria to the teacher, they have difficulty in understanding and using feedback. A lack of understanding of feedback can result in disappointed and disheartened students, who lack confidence for future learning (Harris, 2008). In a drama performance context, this can manifest in students either being unwilling to develop their performance skills or in performance work that repeats past shortcomings without improvement or progress.
2.4 Senior Drama assessment

As this thesis operates within the context of Australian senior secondary schooling, generativity is achieved through a critical analysis of each system of assessment and certification. In the senior curriculum, Drama operates within a system that ensures comparability of standards across that state or territory. Numerous measures are used to ensure comparability of assessment standards and fairness in Australian states and territories, including moderation of work, external examinations and the use of common assessment tools.

Once again, the issue of whether comparability applies to artistic and aesthetic fields is contentious. McCollow (2006) questions the drive to reach consistency of standards, asking: ‘Should the pursuit of consistency be put ahead of the pursuit of better educational outcomes for students?’ (p. 13). In an arts context, Taylor (2006a) observes that once assessment is subjected to benchmarks, teachers are bombarded with series of ‘bulleted points and levels of achievement’ (p. xvi). Stake (2008) asserts that it is unhelpful to emphasise common agreement among assessors as studies of the Arts contain diverse understandings of quality. Therefore, it is necessary for assessment to remain in the domain of those who teach the discipline based on a system of personal confidence and trust ‘with teacher assessment seldom overruled by external assessment’ (p. 20). Stake’s (2008) contested critique of the purpose of assessment does not influence the direction of this thesis. Dunn (2005) attests that ‘students and parents have a right to expect that there will be consistency in the way teachers ‘read’ the evidence gathered’ (p. 5). Dunn (2005) describes consistency as one of the big challenges facing Drama teachers, suggesting that a range of strategies are needed to address this challenge. A critical exploration of the methods used by Australian states and territories to facilitate consistency contributes to the generativity of this literature review by establishing current practices and foreshadowing issues that arise in Chapters 4 and 7.
2.4.1 State and territory approaches to assessment and moderation or grade verification

As noted earlier, Australian state and territory systems of assessment differ. This section summarises how Senior Drama performances are assessed and results verified in Queensland, ACT and New South Wales.

Senior Drama students in Queensland and the ACT undertake continuous school-based assessment and their grades are verified by teacher review panels. By contrast, NSW uses a combination of school-based assessment (50% of final mark) and external examinations (50% of final mark). Each education jurisdiction has been developed over time, adapting to government and policy changes and teacher feedback.

In the early 1990s, the inaugural 2 Unit HSC Drama Syllabus was introduced, including compulsory practical performance components. This Senior Drama course conforms to the combination model of external and school-based assessment, which relies on external assessors using criteria constructed by the board authority in consultation with Drama teachers. External assessment has been noted for providing fairness and comparability of standards across the state (Schneider, Grogan & Maier, 2011) while decreasing the potential for cheating, plagiarism or collusion. However, Donovan (1993) maintains that different forms of fraud can be found in both internal and external assessment systems.

This NSW assessment system has been positively noted by researchers in the field of assessment (Darling-Hammond & McCloskey, 2008). However, central examinations or high-stakes testing also attracts criticism for their pressure on students to perform and their narrowing of curriculum that encourages practices such as teaching to the test (Buoncristiani, 2009; Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith, 2008; McCarty, 2009; Patrick, 2008). Opponents of external examination argue that content is privileged over process and knowledge over critical judgment (McCollow, 2006). Policy writers in NSW attempted to address these concerns, introducing curriculum reforms in 2001. Changes to examinations for HSC courses attempted to make the assessment process less fragmented, addressing the view that assessment was
detached from real world contexts. The reforms intended to create outcomes-based tasks that were more student-centred and critical, using greater creativity, analysis and higher order thinking (Ayres, 2005).

Queensland receives widespread recognition in Australia and overseas as being well practised in school-based assessment, having used it longer and more extensively than most other educational jurisdictions. In Queensland, there has been no assessment system external to schools for over 40 years (Darling-Hammond & McCloskey, 2008). School-based assessment is celebrated for giving professional autonomy to teachers and for allowing contextualised judgments about student achievement, which is said to facilitate the provision of diagnostic feedback to students (McCollow, 2006). The Hong Kong Education Examinations Authority, which is increasing the use of school-based assessment in its schooling system in a manner akin to that used in Queensland, aims to enhance the validity of the assessment by including the assessment of outcomes that ‘cannot be readily assessed within the context of a one-off public examination’ (HKEAA, 2009, online).

However, critics raise questions over the effectiveness of school-based autonomy. School-based assessment is often criticised for over-assessing students. The ability of teachers to provide equally rigorous assessment tasks or comparably rigorous standards is also called into question (Grima, 2003). These concerns are echoed throughout the educational community. Early studies undertaken in the formative years of Queensland’s school-based assessment structure report that comparability of standards between schools/colleges was one of the main concerns highlighted by students when considering their assessment experiences (Fairbairn, McBryde & Rigby, 1976; McBryde & Lamont, 1980). Students relayed the same concerns to Viviani (1990) in her study of Tertiary Entrance procedures. Furthermore, the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (Lingard & Ladwig, 2001) and the New Basics Research Report (Education Queensland, 2004) expressed concerns about the potential of school-based assessment to deliver intellectually challenging and relevant learning experiences to all students.
Supporters of school-based assessment have admitted that, like any system, it should be accompanied by effective practice (Darling-Hammond & McCloskey, 2008; McCollow, 2006). Remedies for the concerns associated with school-based assessment include time for teachers to make judgments and reflect on them, internal moderation and external moderation (Grima, 2003; Sadler, 1986). The concept of moderation is currently used widely and has been critiqued and investigated across a number of fields. For example, systems of second marking or double-marking whereby teachers in a school or from nearby schools form teams to grade performances is used formally and informally in some jurisdictions. In the ACT, which similar to Queensland uses school-based Drama performance assessment processes, moderation of Drama performance tasks takes place using clusters. Each semester schools are assigned cluster groups that negotiate to mark one performance task per school together in that semester. Different practices are used in NSW where the external examination of group and individual performances takes place with at least two trained external assessors who have been randomly placed together in a team. This method has received positive critique as it is seen to help limit bias in relation to culture, gender, school and the teachers’ own preferences (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007), which is another concern associated with school-based assessment.

Other models of moderation, including consensus-based peer review, are also used in the ACT and Queensland. Drama portfolios containing work programs and student work (including videos of performances) are reviewed by an external moderation panel of teacher-reviewers each semester. The external moderation panel reviews the grades awarded for student work and provides feedback to teachers on the accuracy of their judgments in relation to state or territory benchmarks. This system has received widespread recognition as an effective practice (Griffin, 2005; Hill, Brown, Rowe & Turner, 1997; Sadler, 1995). However, Dunn (2005) reiterates that the effectiveness of moderation is dependent on the standard of the documentation provided. This standard is also related to the quality of the initial evidence gathering process. ‘Sloppy evidence gathering or incomplete/inappropriate approaches to the recording of this evidence can limit the value of moderation’ (p. 4). The onus is on teachers to provide students with effective assessment instruments and to record these appropriately. Dunn (2005) suggests that for this system to be used
meaningfully teachers need to supply as diverse a range of materials as possible, with these materials providing a holistic view of the learner and their achievements.

Among the moderators or portfolio reviewers, there should be a shared understanding of what constitutes a quality response to the task. Reflection and dialogue is required for this to be effective. Seidel, Tishman, Winner, Hetland and Palmer (2009) explain that continuous reflection and discussion about what constitutes quality and how to achieve it is not only a catalyst for quality but also a sign of quality. ‘Thinking deeply about quality and continually revisiting ideas about its characteristics and its indicators is essential both to the pursuit of excellence in arts education and to its achievement’ (Seidel et al., 2009, p. iv). Dialogue among Drama teachers about quality in the assessment context helps to align standards among professionals. Misalignment among teachers about what constitutes quality compromises a system’s pursuit of comparability. Seidel et al. (2009) infer that this professional dialogue is challenging. Alignment is difficult to achieve and easy to ignore; it requires detailed investigation, discussion and negotiation.

The comparability of standards can be assisted by the use of accessible language for statements of standards of achievement and key benchmarks for tasks produced in Drama. The nature of Drama means there are numerous challenges associated with this ideal. For example, Dixon (2000) argues that each assessor will inevitably see different things and seek different things from both performer and performance. Stake (2008) states that practical assessment needs to consider the ‘present instance’ (p. 15) against other instances, meaning markers need to consider what is available to students at the time. He adds that to effectively do this, markers need previous experience with ‘other instances’ (p. 15). In all three states and territories and other places where performance assessment is conducted, teachers and administrators have pondered over how best to ensure equity across schools when assessing. It is for these reasons that Drama performance assessment criteria usually emphasise skills associated with theatrical style, performer skill and aesthetic impact, rather than staging brilliance.
The perceptions of Drama teachers who are charged with implementing curriculum, enacting politics and using the tools of assessment are also important. Landmark studies, such as those from Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), and Kirschenbaum, Napier and Simon (1971), report on the connections between teachers’ perceptions and practices when assessing. While research in subsequent years supports their findings and suggests weaknesses in the research (as cited in Zoeckler, 2007), there is an established link between teachers’ pre-existing perceptions and practices in assessment procedures. A teachers’ perception of their Drama assessment system may affect the way they enact their curriculum, thereby having an effect on the operation and integrity of the process. This thesis reports on findings relating to teachers’ perceptions of their systems and makes connections between these perceptions and their practices.

2.5 Reflections

Schulman’s (1999) principle of generativity proposes that researchers build on the scholarship of previous researchers bringing about new findings that contribute to existing understandings. In order to achieve generativity, Chapter 2 engages in analysing previous research on drama and the arts in education in order to frame an understanding of Drama performance assessment that follows in Chapters 4-7.

Building on the existing research, Chapter 2 explores the influences on Drama while considering a number of challenges that arise in the assessment of Drama performances. Other Arts subjects, particularly those that use performance tasks, conduct assessment in similar environments. Further dialogue between Arts disciplines would illuminate a range of responses to the challenges presented by creative and artistic performance assessment tasks. Tensions arise when considering the methods used to achieve comparability of standards across a state or territory for performance tasks. Comparability of standards is necessary in the context of high-stakes senior secondary assessment. However, assessment in Drama does not take place solely for the purposes of establishing comparability or demonstrating standards and the rigour of the subject to the wider educational community. Drama educators and educational administrators are able to balance quality assurance with
the creative and artistic experience of engaging in the performance task. Ross et al. (1993) conclude that ‘accountability has to be rescued from the accountants – mere reckoning must make way for the lively exchange of human insight and intuition’ (p. 168). Therefore, the pursuit of Drama’s purpose should always be paramount in the design of effective assessment instruments. Drama’s purpose is to connect to the human experience, to facilitate imaginative, aesthetic and creative growth, to access technical drama skills and engage students in vocationally orientated experiences. Kleiman (2005) also reminds us that the assessment process is a product of the drama education environment. Assessment tasks alone cannot lead students to be creative, imaginative or artistically engaged. Rather, the Drama class and subsequent assessment processes create the conditions that allow creativity to thrive.

The assessment of performances in Drama is a rich and multifaceted phenomenon, reflective of the field. Drama, like performance assessment, connects to the human experience, contains aesthetic elements and requires creativity and imagination to be accessed. The following quote from Eisner (1998) reminds us to embrace the rich experience of artistic engagement that is more akin to life than traditional testing methods:

*The problems of life are much more like the problems encountered in the arts. They are problems that seldom have a single correct solution; they are problems that are often subtle, occasionally ambiguous, and sometimes dilemma-like … Life outside of school is seldom like school assignments--and hardly ever like a multiple-choice test. (p. 84)*

Generativity (Schulman, 1999, pp. 162-163) is celebrated for its ability to bring integrity and sophistication to research (Boote & Beile, 2005). In the context of this thesis, integrity and sophistication in the research is brought about by a critical acknowledgement of prior research relating to Drama performance assessment in a way that brings about new findings that relate to previous findings in the field. Chapter 2 also provides a context for the thesis findings, as discussed in Chapters 4-7. Following, Chapter 3 outlines the methodological choices and philosophies associated with this study, and describes data collection and analysis.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research questions

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used to gather and analyse data for the purpose of drawing conclusions and developing theories in response to the study’s research questions.

The major question being addressed in this thesis is:

_How do teachers and students in the senior secondary years in Queensland, NSW and the ACT engage with the curriculum and assessment expectations associated with Drama performance?_

The following four contributory questions are also addressed:

1. What similarities, differences, strengths and challenges can be discerned in Drama performance assessment within and between Australian states and territories?

2. What are the roles of assessors in the Drama performance assessment process and what tensions emerge during that process?

3. How do students engage with Drama performance assessment and attempt to achieve their aims when performing?

4. How do teachers and students perceive each state or territory’s methods of achieving comparability of standards?

Chapter 3 is organised into six sections which, in turn, explain the methodological choices, outline the research process, discuss ethical considerations, discuss the rigour and trustworthiness of the study, justify the study’s focus and reflect on the methodology. The chapter is represented in Figure 3.1.
Figure 3.1: Organisation of methodology chapter
3.2 Methodological choices

This study seeks to arrive at insights into the nature of senior secondary Drama performance assessment in Australian states and territories. In order to achieve this, I employ research tools that allow teachers’, students’ and the researcher’s voice to be represented in the research.

I am inspired by Mary Beattie’s writings about research in artistic fields and qualitative methodologies since the late 1980s, especially her summation of the central research goal, that is, to ‘empower both researcher and participant to bring about action and to generate knowledge by observing it, reflecting on it, and locating it within the narrative unities of the individuals involved’ (1995, p. 40). The concept of empowerment for the researcher and participants can be achieved through ethical research practices, valuing the participants’ experiences, making connections between the individual’s experience and the wider field of drama education and valuing personal experiences as a researcher (Schwarzer, Bloom & Shono, 2006).

In order to develop theories about the assessment of Drama, a naturalistic research method has been selected that values the way in which people make sense of experience (Patton, 2002a). This research uses qualitative research to ‘adumbrate the complexities, potential, and idiosyncrasies’ of the data (Eisner, 1978, p. 201). Researchers such as Taylor (2006b) and Eisner (1978) explain that qualitative research allows researchers to inquire into the complexity and layers of lived human experience as they attempt to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Eisner (1978) states that within the complexities of educational research, qualitative analysis is highly suitable as it allows for descriptions and experiences to be explored while developing an awareness of context whilst having regard for individual cases. These attributes allow for comprehensive responses to the research questions to be developed. The research questions in this study inquire into the purposes, tensions and roles associated with Drama performance assessment, asking the researcher to compare, contrast and make inferences for the purposes of developing theories and drawing
conclusions. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2008), and Howe and Eisenhart (1990) suggest that the research questions should derive from data collection techniques and analysis rather than the reverse. The research methodology described here aims to build a complex and holistic picture (Creswell, 2009) while also emphasising the importance of the natural setting of the study (Creswell, 2012).

3.2.1 Constructivist approaches

Qualitative research can be both descriptive and interpretive, and is supported through the conceptual frame whereby knowledge is socially constructed. Constructivism is the theory of knowing, or rather, a concept set around the belief that knowledge and truth are created, as opposed to being discovered by the mind (Schwandt, 1994; Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2012). Despite this, constructivism does not exist as a unified theory, but rather a conglomeration of different positions with varying emphases (Jha, 2012; Tynjälä, 1999). These positions and emphases have been built on the theories of Piaget who asserted that knowledge is not simply transmitted from teacher to student, but actively constructed by the mind of the learner. Guba and Lincoln (2005, 1994, 1989) advanced the theory of constructivism as a research methodology, and similarly proposed that knowledge of the world is mediated through a process of construction, resulting from the interactions of the mind and environment.

Constructivism is a broad term and von Foerster (2002) advocates that researchers discuss understandings freely without being ‘pinned down’ (p. 44), arguing that ‘the problem is that labels like these interfere with understanding and listening to each other’ (p. 45). His conception of constructivism is as follows:

... what is referred to as constructivism should remain a pure and simple sceptical attitude that casts doubt on the self-evidence of realism. (p. 46)

This study identifies with von Foerster’s approach. While this thesis uses constructivist elements, it does not conform to all constructivist conventions that have been explored by constructivist writers. My personal philosophy stems from relativism in which there is no absolute truth, and I also question the idea of any one
best practice in a field. My intention is to facilitate the discovery of Drama assessment understandings from this perspective. Constructivist elements emerge when I work with meanings and inferences offered by research participants. This approach is consistent with ontological relativism (Quine, 1968; Sparkes & Smith, 2009) in which there is no objective truth to be known (Kotzea, 2010) or as Baum (2002) states, there is no ‘strict truth, but instead multiple shifting realities’ (p. 126).

These concepts are complementary to the field of drama education. Drama operates from an ontologically relativist standpoint; truth in drama is not a known or objective entity; rather, truth is constructed by the writer, actor, producer, theatre technician and audience member through the perspective they bring to the encounter. Constructivist learning theory is also based on the premise that learners actively construct their own understandings through reflections upon their own experiences (Boyer & Semrau, 1995; Damarin, 2004; Jadallah, 2000; Jonassen, Howland, Moore & Marra, 2003). Sunal and Haas (2002) define constructivism as a learning theory based on the concept that people are active knowledge seekers powered by their own innate curiosity. Constructivism and drama education are similar in that they both acknowledge the importance of the understandings, beliefs and skills that an individual brings to the experience of learning. Constructivist learning is a not passive acceptance of information; rather, it arises through the learner’s active continuous process of constructing and reconstructing understanding as a result of encounters with phenomena (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003; Palmer, 2005; Tynjälä, 1999). This is similar to the process that a Drama student undertakes when making a performance. They construct and reconstruct their understanding and representation of the role, the scene and the overall drama for the purposes of its representation. Constructivist learning theory helps us to appreciate how the learner builds their own understanding which they use to make sense of and represent their insight into experience.

There are also social and contextual elements at play in drama education and the process of constructivism. Neither can be understood without considering social interaction and collaboration. According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006, 1999), knowledge construction in education occurs in a storied landscape that incorporates
moral, social and aesthetic dimensions. Schools and teachers are located within their own socially constructed realities. Each school community has its own rituals, routines, expectations and cultures. In this study, the researcher is privy to some of these rituals, routines, expectations and cultures. These factors are not static and constructivism recognises learning as an active process that is always changing. As new understandings are acquired, the learner combines these with their existing understandings and new meanings emerge.

I acknowledge that in a constructivist tradition the knowledge generated in this research will be fluid rather than static. The word knowledge will seldom be used. Rather, the term understandings is preferred. The interpretation placed on understandings by the researcher, teachers, students and the drama education community differ in time, place and circumstance. The researcher is part of the reality being researched and recognises that understandings are therefore subjective. This is complementary to one of the philosophies that underpin drama education. Objective, subjective and informed understandings are active in the Drama environment, as previously discussed in Section 2.3 of the literature review. Like drama, the constructivist researcher experiences a process similar to Bolton’s (1984) unselving, which is also discussed by Haseman (2010) in a drama education context. The subjective is made objective and at the same time, the subjective’s nexus of intelligence and emotion (Misson, 1996) is still valued. This study has been designed to create a comprehensive and intimate exploration of senior secondary Drama performance assessment. These stages of research will be explained in Section 3.3.

### 3.3 The research process

In the world of fiction, Conan Doyle (1981) claims that ‘it is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data’ (p. 17). In the world of contemporary research, this principle is still alive. The research questions lend themselves to a method in which concepts and theories are allowed to evolve as the research process unfolds. This project will adhere to Chinyowa’s (2006) suggestion that the researcher looks for the ‘right questions’ instead of the ‘right answers’ (p. 83). Accordingly, the methodology
has been crafted to open up insights into Drama performance assessment as they emerge from the data and to be informed by subsequent analysis.

Within the field of qualitative research, Armstrong (2003) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that a methodology should be pieced together ‘using a close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem’ (p. 2). They go on to explain that qualitative research is a ‘multi method in focus’ (p. 2). This study uses multiple methodological practices which I consider to be close-knit and suitable for the purpose of responding to the research questions. Kenny (2009) and Crotty (1998) find this permissible as every piece of research is unique and calls for a unique methodology. Crotty (1998) adds, ‘We, as the researcher, have to develop it’ (p. 14).

The methodology has three interconnecting stages that work together to generate analysis, providing the space to develop theories in response to the research questions.

**Stage 1: Understandings:** Theoretical underpinnings of senior secondary Drama assessment are investigated through the literature review (Chapter 2).

**Stage 2: Research fieldwork:** Teachers’ and students’ own voices (including my own voice as the researcher) are used to explore perspectives of Drama performance assessment. Performance artefacts, observations and documents are studied as representations of what is produced for the purpose of assessment. In this stage, the following data collection tools are used to develop the analysis that responds to the research questions:

- Teacher narrative interviews
- Student interviews
- Ethnography of performance
- Autoethnography
- Participant observation
- Document analysis
Stage 3: Interpretations: Using a range of methodological practices, including Chinyowa’s (2006) process of analysis of critical issues, development of metaphors (Carpenter, 2008) and frame analysis (Edmiston & McKibben, 2011; Goffman, 1974; Gray & Williams, 2012; Rainio & Marjanovic-Shane, 2013), I arrive at Chapters 4–7 which provide insights into Drama performance assessment. Theories derived from the analysis generate new ideas and understandings, as well as contribute to the body of research available on Drama performance assessment. Figure 3.2 demonstrates the interaction between research stages.

![Figure 3.2: Three research stages of the research process](image)

The following sections elaborate on the three research stages, outlining the process used in each instance.

### 3.3.1 Stage 1: Understandings

The initial task of exploring understandings of Drama performance assessment requires an inquiry into the purposes and nature of drama education. The literature review provides a comprehensive review of research, curriculum documents, syllabus materials, policies and other relevant documents. Previous research is synthesised to analyse its relationship to assessment practice in drama education. To undertake this analytical process, elements of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss,
are used whereby ‘the discovery of the theory from data’ (p. 1) is privileged. Rather than beginning with a definitive set of documents for analysis, the research process is ongoing, which allows the many factors at play to reveal themselves through an exploration of the artefacts. As a result, theories are allowed to emerge, as opposed to forcing data into preconceived frameworks (Charmaz, 2003a; Glaser, 2004; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Grounded theory is said to construct theory from the ground up, evolving in parallel with data collection processes (Neuman, 2003). In the context of this research, the grounded theory approach aims to yield understandings of Drama performance assessment from a wide perspective, allowing for a comprehensive overview of the field to be demonstrated in Chapter 2 and Chapters 4-7.

Grounded theory elements have shaped the structure of the inquiry. The study began with an initial set of questions that were modified as the study developed. And just as grounded theory has no demarcation point for the conclusion of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), the literature review seeks to arrive at an emerging understanding of drama education and assessment.

3.3.2 Stage 2: Research fieldwork

Narratives and ethnographies are used to arrive at rich or thick (Denzin, 1988; Geertz, 1983; Ponterotto, 2006) descriptions of how Drama curricula are realised in school settings. Denzin (1988) defines a thick description as a deep, dense and detailed account of problematic experiences. The methodology uses data collection tools to create a comprehensive picture of the Drama assessment landscape. This includes the perspectives of the teachers, students and researcher, all of whom work in that landscape.

Glense and Peshkin (1992) assert that qualitative researchers aim, among other things, to make sense of personal stories through the exploration of personal narratives. Narrative inquiry research contributes to a strong line of qualitative research pioneered by Connelly and Clandinin (1994, 1990, 1988) and Connelly and Clandinin (2006, 2000). Narrative inquiry is linked to the context being studied and
allows for suitably complex issues to be explored and addressed in a manner that can provide paths towards the objectives and formulation of theories. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) explain narrative inquiry as a way of understanding experience through lived and told stories, involving collaboration between the researcher and participants. The narrative researcher works to inhabit the world of the participant, to understand individuals in their context and to understand the stories that give meaning to that individual’s experience. The researcher engages in reflection, makes connections between past and present events and speculates about future implications (Coulter, Michael & Poynor, 2007). The researcher aims to understand the field through the lens of the participants with regard for their perspectives and understandings.

Narrative inquiry is advantageous for this study because it allows exploration of a field that reflects the distinctive understandings of the participant narrator while accommodating participants’ own construction of meanings within the context (Benson, 2005; Iser, 1988; McEwan & Egan, 1995). Narrative inquiry also enables the researcher to draw individual cases together to gain an in-depth view of the situation, as the participants are irreducibly linked to their social, cultural and institutional settings (Moen, 2006; Wertsch, 1991). Importantly, narrative inquiry enables the researcher to understand challenges from multiple perspectives, allowing both the participant and researcher to identify strategies for addressing multiple issues (Coulter et al., 2007; Larson, 1997).

Narrative inquiry is complementary to constructivist philosophy in that it acknowledges that narratives are works in progress, open for reconsideration and reconstruction. Narrative research is similarly complementary to drama. Drama performance uses imaginative storytelling, much of which is the representation of personal narratives and the telling of human stories. In this respect, it is arguable that drama education and the field of education itself can be understood in terms of the construction of personal and shared stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).
In the context of this research, the teacher and student participants’ understandings are explored through interviews that draw on narrative inquiry methods conducted at school sites. Teachers and students from six schools were interviewed. Two schools from Queensland, two from NSW and two from the ACT were volunteer participants in the research. Participants were engaged in conversations surrounding the research questions and theories raised in an initial reading of the literature. The participant selection, interviews and participants themselves are explained in the following sections.

3.3.2.1 Participant recruitment

Participants were selected for the study through the process of critical case sampling (Patton, 2002a; Turner, 2010), whereby schools were invited to participate, based on set criteria. Critical case sampling uses ‘those that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things’ (Patton, 2002a, p. 236). To fulfil the research purposes and respond to the research questions, it was decided that schools with healthy and robust drama cultures and/or schools with experienced Drama teachers would be the most likely to be able to provide comprehensive insights into the experience of assessing in Drama. The research did not set out to investigate exemplary practice, rather, to investigate the understandings of Drama teachers who had well-developed practices in the teaching and assessing of senior secondary Drama.

Possible school sites were identified by the following criteria:

- Schools with strong performing arts cultures, as suggested by any of the following attributes:
  - Published results
  - Regular participation in local performance culture (e.g. local Drama festivals)
  - Participation in merit-selected performance showcases (e.g. the annual On Stage festival which is a showcase of exemplar HSC Drama performances curated by the NSW BOSTES)
• Schools with consistent enrolments in Year 11/12 Drama
• Schools that were known amongst Drama educators as having experienced Drama teachers who participated in that community, evidenced by recommendations from the Drama teachers’ association in their state/territory.

Within eligible schools, Drama teachers were recruited according to the following criteria:

• Teaching Year 11 and/or 12 Drama at the time of data collection
• Experienced Drama teachers, evidenced by over five years Drama teaching experience, preferably to senior levels
• Teachers recognised as fostering an active performance culture, suggested by any of the following attributes
  – Participation in local drama festivals
  – Regular performance opportunities for students
  – Participation in merit-selected performance showcases (such as On Stage)

In order to attract a diversity of participants, the selection process sought to include the following:

• Males and females
• Drama teachers in both regional and urban locations
• Teachers in state, systemic and independent schools.

Conducting research in all school sites requires the researcher to gain recruitment and ethics approval from the governing authority for that school from the school or school system. Once approval is granted, school principals are contacted to obtain consent for the school to participate and grant permission to the researcher to contact their school’s Drama teachers. The conduct of research in independent schools usually requires approval from the principal. After approval is granted, the principal is asked to contact the Drama teachers on the researcher’s behalf. At this stage of the
selection process, Drama teacher(s) within each school fitting the selection criteria are identified. Prior to consent being given, teachers are provided with an overview statement of the research. In total, contact was made with 11 schools, six of which became volunteer participants in the research. Appendix B illustrates the process used to shortlist and select potential participants and obtain their consent to contribute to the study.

The data collection took place within the participating teachers’ Senior Drama classes. All students within each Senior Drama class were invited to be volunteer participants in the research. I personally explained the project to the students in one of their Drama lessons. Written information was provided to the students and their parents. All students in the class were invited to participate, in line with ethical requirements (Section 3.4). Students under 18 years of age also needed their parent’s or guardian’s consent.

### 3.3.2.2 The participants: Schools, teachers and students

This section describes each school site by using six vignette style descriptions that illustrate the context in which the data was collected. These descriptions aim to capture some atmosphere of the school site, which help to frame the participants’ narratives. These vignettes have been written using my ethnographic field notes, audio and written journal descriptions and emotional recollections of each context. Each vignette is designed to convey the initial impact of the setting, as an outsider entering an educational environment that was suitable for the conduct of narrative and ethnographical research. In the tradition of narrative research, my thoughts and feelings are intertwined with the data; therefore, the vignettes aim to paint myself into the picture of each site. Following these vignettes is a description of the teachers and students who were volunteer participants in the research, accompanied by a description of their contexts and experience.
Queensland schools

School One

Lethargic from the plane ride, I step out of the taxi into the humid, thick air. The environment is lush and green, with insects chirping a continuous wall of noise that surrounds the school. The school is on the main highway, not far from the nearby town with its malls, shops and cafes. Buses, trucks and cars zoom by, adding to the insects' racket. Walking into the school’s entrance I see large murals of art, some indigenously themed, painted in bright colours along the walls and the covered walkways. Upon locating the office, I sign in and wait for my visitor’s pass. Three unfamiliar faces stop, in a friendly manner, to ask where I’m from and what brings me to the school. Each conversation concludes with a welcome wish. A chatty student walks me to the Drama space, which today is the school hall; an old, large and empty building with wooden floors, a stage and backstage area. Students sit sparsely around the space, huddled in pairs or small groups of three, several with scripts in hand … except for one group – clad in Renaissance style costumes – who have filled the stage area, moving rostra and other furniture into place. The teacher appears, with video camera in hand, looking for an appropriate power outlet. The atmosphere is casual and relaxed, yet a working sentiment prevails.

School One is a co-educational government high school in a large regional city in Queensland. The school population is diverse, consisting of local families from a range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. There is also a sizeable indigenous population. The school has approximately 1200 students enrolled in Years 8–12. There are three Drama teachers and two Drama classrooms (one of which is the school hall). During informal meetings with staff, the three Drama teachers discusses the collegial nature of their relationship. Drama is offered as an elective subject from Years 9–12. At the time of research, there was one Year 11 and one Year 12 Drama class.

Teacher participant at School One: Glenda – Glenda (pseudonym) has been teaching Drama for over 20 years, of which at least 15 included Senior Drama classes. Throughout her Drama teaching career, she has been a resident of the regional town in which she currently teaches, and has been employed at her current school for 10 years. Glenda has coordinated moderation panel in her region, although she is not currently in that role. In her wider experience, she has a background as a theatre actor and now works alongside two other Drama teachers.
Student participants at School One: Eleven students (3 males and 8 females) from the Year 12 Drama class were volunteer participants in the research. Performances excerpts of a range of Shakespearian plays were observed.

**School Two**

As I have been a visitor at this school in the past, I somewhat know what to expect. The carpark is inside the school, dotted with boys playing handball, tossing footballs or running around vivaciously. Along the walk to the school office the number of boys increases, sitting on stairwells, barging through corridors or shouting across the playground to each other. They are dressed identically in shirts (several of which are un-tucked), ties, shorts and long socks, with some older students wearing dark blazers. The parts of the school I’m walking in are concrete clad, although I pass some green fields and a swimming pool. As I walk toward the Drama room I’m nearly bowled over by four boys punching each other in the arms. ‘Sorry Miss’, they mumble, briefly stopping their ‘fight’ before resuming when they’ve rounded the corner. I enter one of the two Drama rooms: a clean and empty space, with a carpeted floor. A computer and a lighting desk are at the rear of the room and a black curtain covers the front. As the teacher greets me she calls ‘Tuck your shirt in’ to almost every student who enters. Each student diligently complies, then joins the class to sit in a circle with their books and pens neatly stacked in front of them. There is a comfortable formality about the ritual. The boys sit with cheerful anticipation, as if something exciting is about to begin.

School Two is a Catholic systemic school close to the centre of Brisbane city. The school population is made up of boys only from a range of cultural backgrounds. The school has a long history of education in the Catholic tradition, with an old-boys network. The student body comprises of a range of socio-economic backgrounds. It has 1200 boys enrolled in Years 5-12 (with the majority of pupils enrolled in Years 8-12). The two Drama classrooms are similar – medium sized spaces with curtains and lighting rigs. The school has five teachers who are qualified to teach Drama, although their allocation of Drama classes varies for each semester and all have other teaching areas. Students must complete some Drama studies from Years 5-8, and it is an elective subject in Years 9-12. At the time of research, there was one Year 12 and one Year 11 Drama class.

Teacher participant at School Two: Jane – Jane (pseudonym) is a teacher in her late 20s who has been teaching for six years, five of which have included Drama classes at senior levels. School two was the first school Jane was appointed to after
graduating with her education qualification. Jane works with a large performing arts faculty. Her other teaching area is English, and she is currently studying to qualify to introduce Dance into the school’s curriculum.

Student participants at School Two: Four male students from the Year 11 Drama class were volunteer participants in the research. A whole-class evening performance of excerpts from the play, *Blackrock*, was observed.

**NSW Schools**

**School Three**

After driving around the suburb for some time I finally find the entrance to the school, hidden down a residential street, with an underground carpark available for my use. The school is quiet when I arrive, students are in class and I can only hear a whispering breeze and the sound of faraway footsteps. The school, set into a cliff, seems a maze of stairs and paths that lead past aesthetically pleasing asphalt playgrounds and grassed sitting areas. The scenery of the sunny campus is stunningly beautiful, so much so that I draw breath. Girls in neat uniforms, many with hats, walk purposefully around the grounds, coming and going quickly with their schoolbooks in hand. I’m led to a small staffroom, housing teachers from a range of subjects, including Drama. This room has a through door into the Drama space which is a small open area in an odd shape with doors at both ends. Tables are laid at the front of the room ready for the teacher to take her marking position. The room contains smiling and chattering girls, running back and forth to get changed from their uniforms into black tights and t-shirts, preparing for their imminent performances. They are creating signs, reviewing scripts, or calling instructions to each other. There is an atmosphere of organised chaos about the room as the teacher tells them they have 10 minutes until their performances begin.

School Three is a well-established independent Anglican girls’ school offering day and boarding school facilities in the Sydney metropolitan area. The students are mostly from middle-class or high socio-economic backgrounds, although there are a range of scholarships available to attend the school. The school has approximately 1000 girls enrolled from Years K-12. There is one small Drama space and a theatre used for formal performance events. The school has only one Drama teacher because Drama is only offered as an elective subject in Years 11 and 12. At the time of research, there was one Year 12 and one Year 11 class.
Teacher participant at School Three: Tania – Tania (pseudonym) has held a long career in drama and language education. She has been teaching for over 30 years, all of which have taken place at her current school. At least 15 of those years involved teaching Drama at senior levels. Tania has taken periods of leave to teach and study overseas. Currently, she is the only Drama teacher at her school, as Drama is only taught in Years 11 and 12. She is making plans to introduce Drama into the junior school after the Australian Curriculum has been introduced.

Student participants at School Three: Nine female students from the Year 11 Drama class were volunteer participants in the research. Small group performances of self-devised experimental theatre pieces were observed.

School Four

It’s a chilly morning in Sydney when I arrive at the school office. The first bell is about to ring and a constant stream of students pour into the school grounds. They walk with comfortable familiarity through the nearby trees and long grass. The school is surrounded by bushland and abundant in green space. Some are boisterous and chat noisily with their friends, others more solemn, yawning or walking in silence, headphones attached to their ears. At the office I wait for an escort which never arrives. After telling the office staff I can find my own way, I enter the Drama room – a large open space, freezing cold with a wooden floor – and look for the teacher. The scene is one of bedlam as students nervously dart here and there, changing into costumes, scribbling furiously into their logbooks, pulling sets and props into the performance space, whilst calling to each other the whole time. It takes a moment to locate the teacher, who is surrounded by students at the makeshift markers desk, all rapidly asking questions. Another younger class, possibly Years 7 or 8, is seated on the floor, waiting patiently for the performances to begin. The teacher spots me. ‘Trial HSC day!’ she exclaims and throws up her hands.

School Four is a co-educational Catholic systemic school in Sydney’s western region. The school attracts students, mostly local to the area, from all socio-economic backgrounds. The 800 students represent a large cultural diversity as much of the school’s students are of European or Asian descent. The school is known in the area for its thriving performing arts culture, and they regularly feature performances at local arts festivals and events. The school has two Drama spaces and three Drama teachers. Drama is compulsory in Years 7 and 8, and offered as an elective subject in Years 9-12. At the time of research, there was one Year 12 and one Year 11 class.
Teacher participant at School Four: Christine – Christine (pseudonym) has been teaching for over 15 years at various schools around NSW. She considers Drama to be her primary teaching subject and has taught Drama at senior levels for most of her teaching career. She has been working at her current school for five years. Christine works with a large performing arts faculty, including three other Drama teachers. She has also been an HSC external examiner of performance tasks in previous years.

Student participants at School Four: Four students (males and females) from the Year 12 Drama class were volunteer participants in the research. Small group and individual self-devised performances were observed on the day of the trial HSC.

ACT Schools

School Five

I have tried four doors already and none of them have allowed me to enter a building. The buildings look new, and are surrounded by neat arrangements of native growth. A voice calls from inside one of the buildings ‘Come around the side and I’ll let you in.’ It is school holidays and students have come to rehearse their senior production. When I finally enter, the students are having a lunch break, sitting in pods of five or six, chatting and eating excitedly. I find the teacher, who is rigging up lights in the recently built school hall. A large, white set has been constructed inside the hall on the floor area, rather than on the stage. The lighting rig looks complicated, but the set is fairly sparse, as sheets of white material cover the space. Students dressed in casual clothes are called to resume the rehearsal. They casually wander to the set, some with scripts in hand, some with food in hand, others reciting Shakespeare to each other. They take their places, presumably where they left off.

School Five is a co-educational independent Catholic school in Canberra. The school has 1000 students in Years 7–12, most of which are from middle-class backgrounds. The school has three teachers who are able to teach Drama, although class allocations vary each semester. There is one well-equipped and recently renovated Drama room, and the hall is also available for productions. Drama is compulsory in Year 7 and offered as an elective subject in Years 9-12. At the time of research, there was one Year 12 and one Year 11 Drama class.

Teacher participant at School Five: John – John (pseudonym) is a long time Canberra resident who has been a Drama teacher for over 20 years, of which the last 11 have
been at his current school. He has been Head of the Performing Arts department for some years, and works with two other Drama teachers. John has a background in professional theatre and is completing postgraduate studies to further his understanding of experimental theatre practices. He has taught Drama at senior levels for most of his teaching career.

Student participants at School Five: Five students (3 females and 2 males) from the Year 11 and Year 12 Drama classes were volunteer participants in the research. A rehearsal and whole-class evening performance of the play, *King Lear*, was observed, however, this performance was not summatively assessed. Students later performed excerpts from *King Lear* to their class in the Drama room, this assessment task, which was summatively assessed, was also observed.

**School Six**

It’s the middle of the day, but there is still a hive of activity at the school gates. Some students are arriving, some leaving, some are draped casually around cars, others sitting in groups at the gate. All are dressed in casual gear, as this school does not have a uniform. I walk through the paved school grounds full of modern buildings. I ask for directions to the school office, and friendly faces point me down a large corridor. At the school office the secretary calls ‘Do you need to pay for something?’ from behind her computer. In reply I nervously stammer that I’m a researcher who is meeting the Drama teacher. She laughs and is overly apologetic, offering me directions to the Drama room. There are two Drama spaces, students are sitting casually talking to each other in one, but the teacher leads me to the other which is set up as a darkened black box with lights in full operation. ‘Students are rehearsing this period.’ she says ‘but we’ll begin the performances in the next lesson.’

School Six is a co-educational government college in Canberra catering for senior students only. The school has approximately 400 students who live in the surrounding area. They are from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and there is considerable cultural diversity in the student population. The school has two Drama rooms, both open spaces, but one is a black box with a lighting rig that is used as a theatrette. There is one Drama teacher at the school, and at the time of research, there were two Year 11 and one Year 12 Drama classes.
Teacher participant at School Six: Megan – Megan (pseudonym) has lived in Canberra for most of her life. She has been a Drama teacher for over 20 years, of which the last seven have been at her current school, a college catering for Years 11 and 12. Previously, Megan has taught at high schools (Years 7–10) around Canberra. Megan has a background in professional theatre and has been involved in community theatre around her region.

Student participants at School Six: Seven students (5 females and 2 males) from the Year 12 Drama class were volunteer participants in the research. Self-devised experimental theatre pieces performed as individuals and pairs were observed.

To assist the reader of this thesis, a table summarising the numbers of participants at each school, the school’s location and description of assessment task can be found in Appendix C.

3.3.2.3 Interviews

Semi-structured (Diefenbach, 2009; Myers & Newman, 2007) interviews with teachers and students were used to highlight the individual’s experience and move the inquiry closer to the participants’ experiences. However, literature identifies challenges associated with narrative inquiry with regard to its usefulness in achieving this aim. The main problem derives from the traditional hierarchical position of the interviewer who is assumed to be objective and value free (Byrne, 2004; Kvale, 2006). However, as von Foerster (2002) argues, objectivity is a highly suspect concept. In such a situation, it is the perspective of the researcher that places value on interview data and the circumstances of the interview. In effect, the researcher or interviewer determines the story of the research, and readers are asked to take this story on trust (Miller & Glassner, 2011). Therefore, care should be taken to provide background information that enables the reader to evaluate the perspective of the researcher: to enable trust to be conditional. The researcher should also try to use interview techniques that engage participants in conversations that enable the lived experience of participants to speak for itself: to claim its own authority. Smith and Stewart (2001) argue that this type of interview is more honest and trustworthy. It
treats the participant as an equal and allows individuals to communicate personal feelings, thus, enabling a more realistic account of their experiences. There are additional concerns that arise when interviewing school-aged students; among other things, the researcher should be mindful that the adolescent participant will not respond well to clinical formulaic interview styles, some of which can be considered to be interrogatory in nature. The interview techniques described in the following sections aim to address these sorts of concerns, while facilitating, then documenting the conduct of ethically sound narrative interviews that yield rich data.

All interviews were recorded using a digital sound recorder, with the permission of participants. I also took notes during the interviews, which helped me to recall points of interest when reviewing the data.

Six Drama teachers from six different Australian schools were interviewed individually at a place and time that was convenient for them. Most teachers preferred to be interviewed at their own school, which had the added benefit of providing a context for the interviewer. Occasionally, the participants would walk across their office or teaching space to access a document or artefact that was of special significance. Upon arrival at the schools, I contacted the Principal, and my presence was registered with the school. All initial interviews took place face-to-face after observing student performances. Follow-up interviews took place, either face-to-face or over the phone, at a later stage in the research process.

The interviews were semi-structured (Diefenbach, 2009; Myers & Newman, 2007) in that teachers were asked questions surrounding four key areas of exploration. These were:

1. The performance assessment task and its aims: including task requirements, aims and what students learned.

2. Student response to the task: including teacher expectations, challenges, tensions, and the role of teacher when assessing.
3. The assessment process: including assessment task criteria, technique when assessing and feedback.

4. Curriculum matters: including details of students’ program of study, the state/territory senior high school assessment system, grade verification, moderation processes, and external assessment examinations.

A schedule of interview questions can be found in Appendix D. This schedule was written and used as a guide of general themes for the interviewer, or an incomplete script (Myers & Newman, 2007), rather than as a series of systematic questions that were to be asked in a closed manner. I initiated the interview by aiming to build rapport with the participants through an informal approach to our discussions. I drew on my own experience of teaching Drama at senior levels to casually commence the discussions. For example, I would comment on the teaching space, the students’ general demeanour or the school environment. These casual openings assisted the flow of the conversation and the building of rapport. Two extracts from teacher narrative interviews that illustrate this approach can be found in Appendix F.

Charmaz (2003b) suggests that flexibility should be an essential part of the research process, and as the interviewer, I aimed to stay as flexible as possible. If there was a question that was obviously problematic for the participant to answer, as evidenced by uncomfortable pausing, stumbling over words or incoherent answers, I quickly moved on so as not to place undue pressure on the participant or make them feel distressed in any way. Depending on the flow of conversation, I sometimes returned to that question, often rephrased, if I felt the participant could provide a more comprehensive response at a later stage.

Further to this, the interaction between teacher participant and researcher contains a specifically reflexive process. As discussed in the analysis section (Section 3.3.3), data collection and analysis run together in this study, as suggested by Burnard, Stewart, Treasure, Chadwick and Gill (2008) and Wiersma and Jurs (2005). Narrative inquiry allows some freedom for issues that emerge in early interviews, particularly those that are seen to have a bearing on the principal subject matter, to be
noted and more extensively explored in later interviews. Following the initial interview, participants were contacted, if necessary, to clarify issues and elaborate on their responses to matters that emerged during data analysis. These follow-up conversations contained elements of member checking (Carlson, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 1981, 1989; Mertens, 2005) which is discussed in Section 3.5.1 when demonstrating the study’s rigour, authenticity and trustworthiness. However, follow-up interviews were also conducted to enrich the existing data with perspectives on issues that I felt were critical to the research that may not have arisen, or adequately detailed in the first interview. Larson (1997) also suggests that misinterpretation can be minimised through the use of this kind of reflexive and deliberative dialogue. This brief, but important, aspect of the data collection process allowed the narratives to be grounded in a realistic context that more closely represents the myriad of views offered by the participants. Teachers were engaged in either one or two follow-up interviews each. A table is included in Appendix G which details the interactions with teachers. The initial interviews ranged between 42 and 78 minutes in length. Follow-up interviews ranged from 12–26 minutes in length.

Interviews with students were conducted at the six school sites across two Australian states and one territory. Forty student volunteer participants were interviewed in groups if they performed with an ensemble. Those who performed individually were interviewed alone. The interviews, which took place at the conclusion of the assessed performance, had a similar structure to the teacher interactions but were shorter in length. The reasons for this were manifold: generally, the students’ questions had a tighter focus and required less elaboration and storytelling, and most interviews took place between performances, creating a time constraint as the student was required to form part of the audience for the next performance. Most students, therefore, did not have the opportunity to recount extensive experiences or explain their storied realities in-depth, so these interactions did not necessarily constitute narrative interviews. However, in the context of the research aims, the interviews yielded rich data which allowed valuable insight into the students’ experience of Drama performance assessment.
In a similar fashion to the teacher interviews, the interactions with students were semi-structured (Diefenbach, 2009; Myers & Newman, 2007), in that participants were asked questions surrounding four key areas to be explored, as follows:

1. The task and its aims: including what the student felt they learned and their impressions of the learning program.

2. Student response to the assessment task: including their preparation for the task, how they responded to the requirements and their impressions of the assessment criteria.

3. Performance product: including audience response, audience expectation; the importance of the task and vocational aspirations.

4. Curriculum matters: including the senior learning program and the state/territory system.

The schedule of questions is also included in Appendix E. Similar to the teacher interviews, they were used as a guide for the interviewer rather than as a definitive set of questions.

The students generally expressed elation at having just completed a performance (this aspect is discussed further in Chapter 7 which explores the experience of performance assessment). They generally answered each question individually rather than using the narrative storied format that took place in the teacher interviews. I made an extra effort to congratulate students on their performances in order to establish a comfortable interview. I also aimed to stay as flexible as possible, willing to adapt the interview direction if there was a particular issue that a student wanted to pursue. Unlike the teacher interviews, there were often questions that were problematic for students to answer. I occasionally had the impression that they understood the question, but either did not know the answer or were unable to formulate what they perceived to be a coherent response. The reasons these instances might have occurred will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 7, but for the purpose of this
section, I emphasise that, from my perspective, no student was unduly pressured to answer any question. If they were hesitant or unsure, I quickly moved onto issues they were more comfortable discussing. At the end of each student interview, I asked if there was anything else they wanted to add or would like to ask.

### 3.3.2.4 Ethnographies

Story and cultural contextualisation are paramount in research of this nature, and the fields of both education and drama are inextricably linked to social and political orders of their time. Ethnography, like all qualitative research, is a quest to find the meaning of our actions as situated beings (Schwandt, 2007, 1999). It has been argued that many of the methodological problems in drama research have arisen from a top-down approach to development (Chinyowa, 2006). The use of ethnographies allows the inquiry to emphasise the interpreting of social systems through inference (Geertz, 1983) where the researcher begins with a set of critical questions rather than presumptions or predictions. However, it is impossible for the researcher to be devoid of presumptions and predictions as previous understandings of the field have already been established. I attempted to overcome this by using the literature to help formulate my critical research questions and subsequent interview questions. I also used autoethnographic techniques in an attempt to understand my predispositions, and this is discussed further in Section 3.3.2.4.

Ethnography has been described as a social art form and one that is ‘creative, inventive, emotionally charged, and uneasy’ (Luttrell, 2000, p. 520). These traits hold much congruence with the field of drama education. A thesis by Donelan (2005) asserts that ethnography is an approach well suited to researching young people’s dramatic experiences. The practices of ethnography and drama are similar as both engage with the socio-cultural world and attempt to interpret human experience. Van Maanen (1995) further advises that drama, like ethnography, has a capacity to identify with another’s point of view. Actors and creators of drama draw on empathy and imagination to develop roles and characters, whilst ethnographers strive to empathise with the perspectives and experiences of those studied (Donelan, 2005).
In this study, a range of ethnographic research tools are used, including the ethnography of performance, autoethnography, document analysis and participant observation recorded through ethnographic journaling.

**Ethnography of performance**

The use of ethnographic research tools in this research context allows for an understanding of the social text of performances to be exposed in a way that tells a story about contextual practices of performance assessment in Drama. The importance of accessing aesthetic modes of cognition in drama education has previously been explored in Section 2.3, and as a result, research tools that allow for the exploration of the artistic dimension of drama education feature in this study. The inclusion of the ethnography of performance (Chinyowa, 2006; Haseman, 2006; O’Toole & Stinson, 2009; Turner, 1988) as a data collection tool allowed the researcher to experience the creative and artistic aspects of Drama performance assessment in a situated context. Chinyowa (2006) describes the ethnography of performance as ‘a process-based and participatory research method for investigating an artistic medium that has close links with people’s cultural experiences’ (p. 84). The use of live performances as ethnographic artefacts aims to complement the artistic nature of the field. Live performances encapsulate the drama performance experience, and when observed, they allow the researcher an experience-based platform around which interactions with the participants can be focussed. Experiencing the emotions, tension and crisis of a piece of drama assists the researcher to gain deeper understandings of performance experiences.

In this research, I engaged in an ethnographic process while observing student performance assessment tasks. The viewing of performances provided a vital context for the interviews. For example, the participants (teachers and students) and I would make reference to the performances during the narrative interviews; it was, therefore, advantageous to have already viewed them. During the performances, I notated ethnographic observations, identifying elements of the performance experience, such as the number and role of performers on stage, the subject matter of the performance pieces, the space being used and the costumes, props or technological elements
utilised. In addition, I noted the reactions from the audience and my impressions as an audience member for each piece. Later, I used the journal to elaborate on my response to the performance. These ethnographic notes were coded in a similar manner to the narrative interviews (Section 3.3.3) and that data were used to form theories about Drama performance assessment, which is discussed in Chapters 4–7. I also video-recorded the student performances and used these videos in my analysis. In total, the ethnography of performance was employed for 19 student performances observed across the six schools.

Autoethnography

Wolcott (1990) reminds us that ethnographers do not discover a constructed world separate from themselves as researchers. Accordingly, the critical questions with which this research is concerned were spawned from my own experiences of secondary drama education in the three states and territories in Australia in which I have worked (which are also those that are the subject of this research). The desire to critically reflect on these experiences identifies with the aims of autoethnography (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008; Smith, 2005). Researchers associated with narrative and autoethnography (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Denzin, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008; Patton, 2002b; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Van Maanen, 1995) argue that the subjective experience is legitimate and fundamental to the research experience, and there is little that can be totally independent of personal context of the writer. In this light, it is necessary for the researcher to deeply consider understandings that have been formed by their own experiences. Autoethnography is a personal and powerful tool that allows for the researcher’s perspective to be created, critiqued and validated.

Drama, like autoethnography, often privileges first-person experience while placing that experience in context. Autoethnography is a form of research that involves a high level of introspection and has been described as ‘an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural’ (White & Dixon, 2005, p. 739). The autoethnographer
moves from being a participant observer (Creswell, 2002) to a primary subject in a way that allows for cultural insights into a field to be explored. The researcher is inherently linked to the field as the personal and cultural connect (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). It is further argued by Ellis and Bochner (2011) that distinctions between the cultural and personal become blurred as the author changes focus and moves back and forth between looking outward and inward.

There are several definitions and understandings of autoethnography. Reed-Danahay (1997) describes it as a self-narrative that places the self within a social context. In this study, the self is embedded into the ethnography, and autoethnography operates as both a method and a text (Dyson, 2007, p. 38). My autoethnographic inquiry has provided me with the opportunity to become aware of my own learning in the field of drama education, and more broadly, my learning as a researcher. As Patton (2002a) suggests, my own experiences have allowed me to garner insights into the larger culture or subculture of which I am an active participant. My experiences have helped me to gain wider insights into the big-picture of drama education in which I play a part. My own influences and biases are also acknowledged through this style of inquiry.

I utilise an autoethnographic process, as influenced by Adams (2007), who has used autoethnography to explore culture and gender issues in nursing and the social sciences. Adams applied the same narrative interview investigation to herself for the purpose of providing ‘a similar and comparable record of [her own] experience’ (p. 10). Deciding to follow a similar process, before the data collection at school sites commenced, I recorded my responses to the teacher participant interview questions (Appendix D) in written and verbal forms. Like Adams (2007), I then used the same coding process for the autoethnographic data that was applied to the other interviews (Section 3.3.3). I conducted a reflexive enquiry where I returned and repeated the autoethnographic process at a later stage in the data collection process to clarify issues and elaborate on matters that emerged at the school sites. I undertook a final autoethnographic reflection at the end of the research process to investigate the development of my understandings and find out what I learned as a participant-
researcher. Throughout the research process, I also kept an autoethnographic journal in which I reflected on my developing understanding of Drama performance assessment. At times, I reflected on events outside of the formal research process but related to Drama performance assessment, such as conversations with colleagues, experiences of live theatre shows and the like. These journal entries were also coded and analysed using the process described in Section 3.3.3. In this thesis, many of the autoethnographic discoveries are reported on in Section 3.3.2.4 in discussions about the researcher. Other autoethnographic reflections are also referred to in Chapters 4–8.

The intention of the autoethnography is to relate the theoretical literature and policy documents to my experiences in drama education through the medium of my own voice. In the process, I also became attuned to the significant risks associated with engaging in research where oneself is the primary subject. Dyson (2007) reminds us that autoethnography is one person’s view of reality constructed around and through other people. The first person’s active voice requires sensitivity because it exposes feelings, beliefs and attitudes in a way that others may object to; a fear previously noted by Ellis (1997). It also leaves a researcher open to criticism because of a perceived lack of objectivity. However, I intend presenting my autoethnographic findings as my perceived reality without claims of truth, aligning with the constructivist approach.

**The researcher**

The active nature of the participant researcher in constructivist inquiry has been discussed and, as such, an exploration of my own identity and subsequent lenses is warranted. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that there is no such thing as value-free research, and other writers encourage the researcher to abandon the any false quest for or even pretence of objectivity (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner & Steinmetz, 1991; Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009).

As a result of my former experience as a classroom teacher in three arts disciplines (Dance, Drama and Music) and my current role as an Arts education academic in an Australian university, I possess previously constructed understandings of the arts
education landscape. As an undergraduate student, I completed a Bachelor of Education (Secondary) degree, specialising in Humanities, Social Sciences and the Creative Arts. I then taught History, English, Music, Drama and Dance in high schools in NSW, the ACT and Queensland, with some minimal experience in primary and early learning settings. Of these subject areas, Drama became the focus of my workload in each position that I held, and I worked with the Drama syllabus to senior levels in every instance. I have also had further experience in the area of Senior Drama assessment. In NSW, I was a HSC Drama assessor of performance work, and whilst teaching in the ACT, I was required to participate in moderation panels (as is expected of all senior secondary teachers in the ACT). My experience in teaching Drama schools in Queensland has been minimal, however, my role as an Arts education lecturer requires me to be familiar with syllabus documents from both local and international contexts. I am currently an active member of the local Drama teachers’ association and have written various submissions for the Arts component of the Australian Curriculum. I have developed my identity as an arts educator as a result of my experiences working with a range of state and territory curriculum documents. My current work is chiefly concerned with applying the Arts curriculum in school settings, therefore, I am concurrently constructing my understanding of Drama curricular while engaging in this study.

As a consumer of theatre and a student of the dramatic arts, being an audience to drama has always been of great interest to me. However, it was during my involvement in HSC Drama performance marking that questions arose about the standard of student performances at different schools and the process for quantifying Drama students’ achievements across the state. The HSC Drama marking process is highly confidential so I am unable to disclose many details about my experience, however, the following extract from my ethnographic journal details the excitement I felt for the process:

*On my first training day of HSC Drama marking I felt like a door had opened, not just in my practice as a Drama teacher but in my mind as well. I had always assessed using the criteria, but not given it much more thought. Plus I’d only ever watched my students perform and only ever had to assess work that I had some kind of a hand in developing. But now I was faced with complete strangers presenting me with example after example, live mind you,*
of theatre. Some good, some bad, some hilarious, some pretty dull. I was faced with some intriguing questions, such as ‘should we be expecting students to summarise their abilities, effort and potential into 8-12 minutes of theatre, especially when they can share the stage with up to five other performers’?

I couldn’t get to know the students who performed for me. I couldn’t ask questions like ‘so what inspired you?’, or ‘what have you studied which lead you to that performance?’. It was totally anonymous and totally equalising, or at least I felt that it was. There was an obsession with objectivity, we didn’t need to know the reasons why students performed a certain way, we just marked it.

And we would travel, around Sydney and around the state. In planes, buses and cars we went to outback towns, coastal regions and metropolitan hubs. Marking. Marking performances. And I loved it …

It was like three weeks of co-dependency with your co-marker. But in that time I saw so many styles of drama, so many drama spaces and hundreds of kids, performing to the best of their ability. Some, like their life depended on it. And some of them felt like it did. I was inspired, enlivened, exhausted. Drama HSC marking was one of the highlights of my career. But it was a formative experience too. I first became a marker in my fourth year of teaching and it set a benchmark for what I expected to see; everywhere I went from then on, I looked for that level of professionalism, organisation and objectivity. Yes, objectivity. I thought that was the holy grail of assessment.

There are several other ethnographic journal entries where I contrast this excitement with tension when dealing with aspects of the Drama assessment process as part of the NSW HSC. I experienced both excitement and apprehension in aspects of Drama assessment systems in all three states and territories in which I taught. Brevity prevents me from presenting the relevant narratives here, except to say that much of the tension I felt was as a result of unfamiliarity, as has been mentioned in Chapter 1. Every time I relocated to another state or territory, I was required to familiarise myself with a new syllabus and a new set of administrative, teaching, learning and assessment practices. Performance assessment was, of course, one of the elements that had a different method of assessment or moderation in each setting, and I found this to be both fascinating and challenging. My experience, as detailed in my autoethnographic responses, holds implications for students and teachers within the context of the release of the new Australian Curriculum. Drama teachers will be required to familiarise themselves with a new curriculum, and the educational community will respond to that challenge.
Two main factors contributed to abandoning my apprehension and to embracing the diversity that Australian state-based curricular presents. Firstly, in my current role as a lecturer in education I am required to discuss the myriad of Australian assessment systems with university students. I am pleased that I am able to draw on my experience to illustrate points and provide examples. Secondly, writing submissions for the development of the Arts in the Australian Curriculum has allowed me to appreciate that each system has different practices that operate independently of one another. I have also begun to appreciate that there are a variety of approaches to assessments, each with their own strengths and challenges, and I no longer value any system above another. However, in the early days of my teaching career, I still recall that the diversity of methods used to assess and moderate performances was an area in which I had little professional experience. During my Masters studies, I also saw a gap in the research that reports on the attributes of each system’s Drama performance assessment practices. When I began this study, I felt this was a good point at which to start my inquiries.

The impetus for this study grew from my desire to explore the various practices of assessment and moderation or verification of grades that exist in the states and territory I had taught in. More specifically, I wanted to investigate how individual teachers construct their understanding of assessment and how they proceed to make judgements on students’ performances. I was also interested in students’ perceptions of Drama assessment; what did they find valuable, what linked to their lives outside of the Drama classroom and what changes would they make to the performance assessment process. I also considered the student’s interpretation of performance assessment tasks and wondered if they differed from my own and that of the state or territory’s curriculum.

**Journaling: Participant observation and document analysis**

Ethnography is designed to focus on people in their everyday settings with particular attention given to the way that people make meaning of their lives (Anderson-Levitt, 2006). It can be distinguished from other methodological processes in its assumption that the initial stage of developing understanding or interpretation of a phenomenon
comes from discovering what people do and the reasons they provide for doing it (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, 1999). Additionally, the researcher is required to acknowledge him or herself as an active participant in the research process. To produce trustworthy interpretations or understandings, the researcher should experience the life of the participants within their natural settings (Eder & Corsaro, 1999). In order to achieve this, a range of interactions should occur (Bresler, 1995; Christensen, 2004). Schensul and LeCompte (2013) and LeCompte and Schensul (1999) describe the tools of ethnography as the researcher’s eyes and ears, tools which they describe as ‘designed for discovery’ (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 2).

Participant observation and observation of the research environment are widely recognised as primary methods of data collection for an ethnographic study. For example, refer to DeWalt and DeWalt (2010, 2002), Denscombe (1999), Schensul and Le Compte (1999), Robson (2011) and Wiersma (1995). In this study, participant observation was employed as a method of data collection and an analytic tool, as suggested by DeWalt and DeWalt (2010). Dobbert (1982) considers ethnographic observation to be the least disruptive and intrusive method of data collection. This was important in this research as some participants were students experiencing the considerable pressures associated with senior secondary school study.

In this study, observations of participants and learning environments are central to identifying and demonstrating the cultural contexts at each site. They allow me to develop an intuitive grasp of the setting and give me the ability to relate the research to my own experiences of Drama assessment. In addition, participant observation has the capacity to build positive research relationships (Maxwell, 2012). I found that when I was able to demonstrate to the participants that I was familiar with their drama education environment or performance ritual, they were more inclined to discuss their perceptions freely, as my otherness decreased. Amongst the observations of participants and environment, immediate written and verbal notes were made (which I audio recorded before leaving the school) on the following topics:
• My impressions of the school when arriving.
• The drama performance space.
• The atmosphere of the space before the performance.
• The preparations of students before performance.
• The audience’s reaction to the performance, during and after the performance.
• The teacher’s actions whilst assessing.
• The atmosphere and interactions of the teacher and students after the performances or lesson had concluded.

In a similar manner to the ethnography of performance, this data was coded (Section 3.3.3) and used to provide further analysis of the Drama performance assessment process.

Love (2003) states that documents are often able to enhance and enrich data obtained through participant observation and interviewing. Another advantage of these artefacts is that they appear in the natural language of the setting, helping to provide vocabulary as used by the teacher participant or sanctioned by the school environment. A qualitative approach to document study allows researchers to focus on the description and tracking of the words, meaning and themes (Altheide, Coyle, DeVrise & Schnieder, 2008). Analysis of the documents is also used to suggest or identify a particular focus and can assist with the depth of inquiry in interviews or other interactions.

Prior to viewing student performances at all sites, I requested access to the following documents from the teachers:

• An outline of the unit being studied or the work program.
• The written instructions for the performance assessment task (otherwise known as the task sheet).
• The assessment criteria associated with the performance task.
Throughout the narrative interviews, the teachers often referred to other documents, such as the school’s assessment policy and the program for the performance event. I often requested access to these documents and they were analysed as symbolic representations of the narratives and student performances. When viewing the documents at the school site, I made field notes in my journal, in a similar style used for participant observations. I then asked to photocopy the documents in accordance with ethical procedures. On the copies I later highlighted sections for coding and analysis, a process which is described in Section 3.3.3. A full inventory of documents viewed is included in Appendix H.

### 3.3.3 Interpretations

This section describes how data were analysed. Analysis, in this context, refers to the practice by which raw data is analysed and ordered to enable the researcher to arrive at new understandings of the research questions (Dey, 1993). As this study requires the participants and researcher to construct understandings, the interpretation of the data is not limited to literal representations. For example, in the narrative research sections, a faithful representation emerges as the ‘story-truth’ (Ellis & Bochner, 2006) is allowed to illuminate the many perspectives arising in the data.

Applying a grounded theory notion, Ezzy (2002) and Wiersma (1995) recommend that the analysis of data be an ongoing process that begins soon after the data collection commences. In this approach, the researcher employs flexible methods whereby they can move back and forth between themes of interest as they emerge, then return to the field and gather focussed data to answer arising questions and fill in conceptual gaps (Charmaz, 2003a). Ezzy (2002) further argues that simultaneous data collection and analysis strengthens qualitative research and allows the analysis to be shaped by the participants in a more fundamental way.

The concept of going back and forth between gathering data and engaging in analysis has been explored by numerous researchers, including Ellis and Bochner (2000), Graneheim and Lundman (2004), and Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002). However, the back and forth description limits the process to working
between two linear, separate and distinct constructs, being data and analysis. In reality, the research process used a combination of data collection, analysis, interpretation, inference, construction, collaboration, feeling, dreaming, inquiring and imagining. The application of grounded theory methods of analysis allows the integration of data collection and analysis to occur in a natural way. The collection of numerous curriculum documents, research and literature early in the study was valuable as it allowed for emerging themes to guide the future data collection and also show where there are gaps in existing research to be investigated with participants. Similarly, when collecting narrative and ethnographical data, a process similar to grounded theory enables unexpected issues arising through the data to be continually responded to. Spindler and Hammond (2000) find this appropriate, as they state that ‘the problem one thinks one is going to investigate is not usually the one actually studied’ (p. 42). More importantly, they suggest that allowing data to lead the research in the early stage of fieldwork is paramount because ‘the problem must be allowed to develop without predetermination’ (p. 42). This is complementary to constructivist thinking, which allows emerging understandings to lead the investigation.

The interpretation of data in this research follows a process derived from Chinyowa (2006) which uses a series of phases to gather data, distil meanings and arrive at thick descriptions. Chinyowa (2006) labelled these phases framing, capturing, bracketing, crystallising and interpreting. Within each phase, I apply complementary research processes that allow for comprehensive exploration across the range of data available.

- **Framing**, according to Chinyowa (2006), involves the identification of a case where spheres of inquiry are being applied. In this study, case was created through the formulation of research questions, the development of the literature review and the introduction to the autoethnographic narrative. From this background, the methodology was refined and the questions for the narrative interviews are framed.
• Once the case or scope of inquiry was identified, the **capturing** phase began in which the researcher went about collecting data through a process of observing, identifying and locating the defining features of Drama assessment within the field (Chinyowa, 2006). The data collection utilised the narrative and ethnographic tools as described previously in Section 3.2.

• The **bracketing** phase allows the researcher to extract and reduce data to reflect the scope of the research so the features of Drama performance assessment are revealed. In the constructivist tradition (Damarin, 2004; Jonassen, Howland, Moore & Marra, 2003), the bracketing phase also looks to data to redefine the scope of inquiry as several surprising elements reveals themselves at this time. This phase also allows the researcher to find themes in the data, which were arrived at in the following ways: discovery of repetition of a key word or phrase (Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2007), discovery of a common or divergent experience, identification of a story around which the analysis can focus, or noticing either an emerging gap in the data or a jump in logic. Identification of these themes creates a system of coding which is an integral part of qualitative data analysis. In a practical sense, the researcher went about assigning tags or labels to the data based around the framed cases or concepts, thereby categorising the growing data into more manageable units. The coding was undertaken electronically, using the QSR NVivo 2 qualitative analysis software. The software was used to store codes and categories generated by the researcher, enabling them to be explored, organised or changed (Bazeley & Richards, 2000). Each transcription of the narrative interviews, autoethnographical notes or ethnographic journaling was coded in NVivo. The software assists in finding themes based on free and hierarchical nodes. Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) three stages of coding were also integrated in order to work with the free nodes created in NVivo. The three phases of coding began with open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Urquhart, Lehmann & Myers, 2010) in which the data was grouped into small sections and allocated a descriptor code. Axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Urquhart, Lehmann & Myers, 2010) also took place within the bracketing phase where the codes were grouped into several versions of similar categories. The open and axial coding
processes took place several times and evolved to include additional codes layered over each other to deal with the complexity of the data that was gathered. Then Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) third phase, selective coding, was employed where the features of Drama assessment within each code were grouped into themes. When a theme was identified and codes were assigned, the researcher looked for opportunities where the key turning points (Geertz, 1983; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003) were exposed. Turning points are dramatic events or pivotal points that expose deeper meanings, often existing hidden within the data. In this phase, the axial coding was re-evaluated and categorised against the research questions where places of commonality or dissent were evident. The turning points that emerged led back to the framing process in which further coding was necessary. In the research process, the framing and capturing of data was still occurring at other sites as the data collection and analysis run concurrently, as explained previously.

- The crystallising phase followed as the extracted data (expressed as descriptions, stories and groups of data) was sifted to determine the recurring aspects of Drama performance assessment that are identified for closer analysis. This process allows the researcher to gain access to multiple perspectives, including finding complementary, contrary and contesting evidence (Chinyowa, 2006). A study using multiple data collection tools yields large amounts of data, therefore, it is necessary to distil and crystallise the essential points of importance to the research. Here, the researcher selects certain categories recorded in NVivo based on their interpretation of the relevance to the theme being researched at the time. Using a pen and paper, the researcher constructs a list of the dimensions of these categories and then sketches diagrams that incorporate these dimensions into a visual representation of: (i) the conditions that give rise to them; (ii) the actions that arise from these conditions; (iii) the interactions with dimensions; and (iv) what I perceived as the consequences of these actions and interactions. Obviously, it was only possible to present a small fraction of the analysis in the final thesis, so the most significant, symbolic or relevant representations were chosen. Other techniques employed throughout this section included removing
questions from the narrative interviews, then moving to a level of abstraction by crafting the interviews into stories in the first person based on ethnographic notes. These techniques were applied with the aim of authentically recreating the individual research situation from a first person perspective. Some of these writings were then directly utilised as illustrative vignettes (such as the descriptions of school sites in Section 3.3.2.1), whereas others were used to create a fuller picture of the turning points that I would then elucidate in the next interpreting phase. It is also here that I engage in more selective coding (Scott & Howell, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) by using a ‘process of integrating categories along a dimensional level to form a theory, validate the statements of relationship among concepts, and fill in any categories in need of further refinement’ (Daveson, O’Callaghan & Grocke, 2008, p. 282). At this point, the capturing and bracketing phases are repeated with complementary data in the same theme to establish any consistency that may have crystallised. In order to test the appropriateness of this theme to the research scope, I investigate its links to all other categories, aiming to develop a theoretical narrative. Developing a theoretical narrative often involves a return to raw data or the bracketing phase.

- Finally, it was necessary to enter Chinyowa’s (2006) interpreting phase in which the researcher explores the meaning of emerging key words, phrases, statements, concepts and critical issues that emerge from the data. Some critical issues were directly reported in the final thesis if they were found to have particular significance to a chapter or section heading. Other critical issues were integrated into the chapters in a holistic way and some were discarded. In order to formulate insights that would become findings, the theoretical narratives were rearranged according to a loose correlation between themes. Upon investigation of the groupings, the researcher then brainstormed titles for potential chapters or sections. These titles often combined a selection of themes into summaries which are presented in Chapters 4-7. Finally, the researcher reordered and edited each summary for readability and flow.
At times, it is necessary to draw on other complementary research methods in order to arrive at findings that are uniquely illustrative of the field of Drama assessment. Chapter 5 uses metaphors (Carpenter, 2008) to illustrate the emerging theories in an effort to open deep understandings about the roles of teachers and students in Drama performance assessment. The layers of culture that emerge in the analysis hold some resemblance with the concept of frames, as developed by Goffman (1974). Chapter 7 is primarily concerned with the culture of Drama performance assessment, and it uses frame analysis (Edmiston & McKibben, 2011; Goffman, 1974; Gray & Williams, 2012; Rainio & Marjanovic-Shane, 2013) to present the organisation of cultural phenomena that emerges in the analysis. The integration of complementary research methods also aims to create an engaging presentation of the theoretical narrative as different research and writing techniques are utilised throughout the thesis.

The outcome of the staged process is that the research takes on a constructivist interpretive approach (Andrade, 2009; Charmaz, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006; Urquhart, 2007). The research endeavours to arrive at theories through describing and analysing data based on the understandings and interpretations of the researcher. This is somewhat at odds with pure constructivist approaches which tend to emphasise the collaborative nature of constructing understandings in research. However, the interpretivist-constructivist epistemology underlying Chinyowa’s (2006) process posits the interpretations in research to be multifarious and largely constructed by the researcher.

The dramatic arts utilise emotion, introspection, artistry and interpretation from multiple perspectives to explore the human condition. In this study, the research questions and methodology have been designed to complement this unique experience of learning. An interpretive approach in which the theories are discovered rather than predetermined is one way of respectfully and appropriately advancing research in drama education.
3.4 Ethical considerations

All stages of the research were conducted in compliance with legal and ethical requirements to ensure the welfare of those involved and affected by the research. As the researcher, I pursued ethical practice with regards to disclosure, protection from harm, confidentiality, informed consent, upholding the law, preserving self-respect, human rights, respect, balanced reporting and fiscal responsibility (Stuart, 2001). This was particularly important because this study concerns itself with having direct contacts with students, many of whom are minors. In addition to seeking consent from parents or guardians, where necessary, I aimed to minimise the impact on students’ temperament and work habits in their senior years of schooling. Poole and MacLean (2004) make several suggestions for ethical practice in the classroom or learning situation where students are the prime participants, which include using familiar spaces for interviews, providing extra explanations of the project in the vernacular, and allowing them the opportunity to debrief and ask questions in their own time. In forming the methodology, I identified literature (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011; Korn & Watras, 2009) that provided further guidance to me as the researcher when considering the ethical obligations surrounding the collection of data in schools. I am also informed by literature on the ethical considerations required when conducting research with adolescents (Bassett, Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic & Chapman, 2008; Mack, Giarelli & Bernhardt, 2009) which has assisted in the development of the ethically focussed model for this study.

Throughout the study, the confidentiality of participants was always assured. Pseudonyms were used for the participants and the schools, and care was taken to ensure that no individual or school can be identified. Participants were assured that the project operates within the University of Western Sydney’s procedures for ethics and that their responses would only be used ethically in the research.

Particular ethical practices also accompany engagement in autoethnographic tools. A criticism of using oneself as the primary subject is that seldom can the whole story ever be told, sometimes for moral or ethical reasons (Dyson, 2007). Ellis and Bochner (2000) warn that while personal feelings may be included in
autoethonographies, they should not do so in a manner that would bring harm to others. I recognise that being the sole instigator and observer in this study, I am in a relative position of power. I also understand that in affecting others, oneself is also affected as we exist within an interdependent ecosystem (Dyson, 2007) which the autoethnography may bring to life. These factors are significant and worth noting when considering ethical pathways for research. The field of Drama educators in Australia is relatively small and it is not difficult for one individual to influence change or be personally identified. This is not to say that autoethnographic research tools are not appropriate for use in this context, but as a researcher, I always proceed with caution and make every effort to de-identify participants in all areas of this study.

3.5 Ensuring rigour and trustworthiness in the research

In this research, trustworthiness and authenticity are the most appropriate measures of quality assurance, as they align with the narrative and ethnographic tools and the constructivist-interpretive approaches in this study. This study uses complementary quality assurance processes that affirm that meaningful and credible research is being carried out.

Authenticating strategies are embedded into the design, data collection and analysis procedures employed in this study. The use of open-ended questions throughout the interviews are considered an effective technique in encouraging participants to construct an authentic narrative (Seale & Silverman, 1997; Turner, 2010). Multiple interview sessions with teachers are used in which the researcher could clarify issues and elaborate on responses to matters that emerge in the data interpretation. Trustworthiness and authenticity are also achieved through multiple viewings of the data (McArdle & McWilliam, 2005; Maxwell, 2005). Comparisons between data are employed to determine the consistency of the findings that take place within the bracketing and crystallising stages of analysis.

In the pursuit of quality, Cobb and Whitenack (1996) suggest that extensive critique be invited from other researchers. Peer-debriefing (Barber & Walczak, 2009; Guba &
Lincoln, 1989; Morse et al., 2002) was used on a number of occasions in the research process. Sections of the study, including the methodology, are presented to professional (Jacobs, 2009a) and academic peer reviewed conferences (Jacobs, 2009b), and in peer-reviewed journals (Jacobs, 2011). These opportunities return important feedback which is applied in order to develop the research critically, particularly at stages when the research environment becomes increasingly familiar.

3.6 Research focus

The methodology uses six schools, purposefully selected and each with their own teacher and student participants, in order to investigate Drama performance assessment practices in-depth. In a constructivist tradition, meanings and interpretations are formed by the researcher. This raises the question of perceived realities. This study does not claim to be reality for the few teachers and students involved. However, it can be said that this study provides insights into their constructed reality. As a researcher, I have my own interests, which are tied to the research questions and my own constructed reality as a researcher and Drama educator. There are inevitably many interesting sections of data that this study does not address. Furthermore, it is likely that there are many more issues in the data that when seen through other lenses would create different conclusions.

The components of the methodology are not intended to be treated as stand-alone tools. Each has been effective at gathering data on a range of matters associated with Drama assessment, however, the methodology is designed to work as a complementary process. For example, simply exploring the narrative data without the ethnographic or literature context would deny the rigour and trustworthiness that was built into the research process.

3.7 Reflections

The methodology described in Chapter 3 was designed to collect and represent experiences of Drama performance assessment in a way that allows comparisons with the theory and previous research on the matter. Analysis was achieved through a three-stage process that used:
1. Literature to frame the research questions and explore previous theories on drama assessment by finding out what has already been documented.

2. Narratives and ethnographies that collect data that represents the lived experience of Drama performance assessment.

3. Interpretations that use analysis procedures in order to produce new theories and insights into Drama performance assessment.

I endeavour to craft a methodology that complements the field of drama education, which is intricate, storied, sensitive and aesthetically charged. I also aim to engage the participants in a meaningful way and value the participants’ experience in a way that breaks down the traditional hierarchical structure where the researcher holds the power and the participant is subjected to research. The analysis processes involves a high degree of interpretation, giving the study a constructivist-interpretive disposition. The intent is not to retell a series of events or experiences in the hope of satisfying all involved. Rather, this research aims to arrive at theories of Drama performance assessment as a result of engaging this methodology.

The methodology for this study is designed with a range of perspectives from which the researcher can address ideas of rigour, trustworthiness and authenticity. But I also recognise that ambiguity, uncertainty and unpredictability are part of the joy and frustration of qualitative research. The inquiry process should match the complexity of the human experience if the research is to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the Drama performance assessment as a phenomenon. Rigorous research requires a holistic approach to achieving the authenticity and trustworthiness that is built into each step of the research process. This study aims to use transparent processes that are able to be critiqued, not only to enhance the quality of the research, but also assist in the advancement of qualitative inquiry.

Chapters 4-8 are written using the first person voice while also giving voice to the volunteer participants and their narratives. This study acknowledges that the voices,
including my own, bring to the fore the lived experiences which are essential in a narrative tradition.

- Chapter 4 discusses a critical issue associated with the assessment tasks at each site, while discussing the intent of drama assessment and the process of assessing drama performance work.

- Chapter 5 uses metaphors to identify the shifting roles of teachers and students in the Drama performance assessment process.

- Chapter 6 reports on findings about the experiences of assessment, which include the emotional journey of performing, comparisons between performance and other styles of assessment and the teachers’ experience of assessing in their state or territory.

- Chapter 7 establishes the frames of culture operating in Drama performance assessment environment, including the cultures of the students, teachers, learning environment and the state or territory assessment system.

- Chapter 8 concludes the thesis with a consolidation of new theories, accompanied by discussion of possible pathways for future development in the field. A final metaphor and three storied reflections are also used to illustrate the researcher’s developing understandings of Drama performance assessment.
CHAPTER 4: DRAMA PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT: CRITICAL ISSUES AND PROCESSES

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 introduces the findings from the data collection in response to the central question of this thesis: How do teachers and students in the senior secondary years in Queensland, NSW and the ACT engage with the curriculum and assessment expectations associated with Drama performance?

Following this chapter, Chapters 5-7 further develop the findings of the research. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by summarising the findings from the study and makes recommendations for future developments in Drama performance assessment and the broader field of drama education.

Chapter 4 commences by discussing a range of critical issues associated with the teachers’ approaches to the Drama performance assessment process. During the research, a critical issue arose at each site which characterised distinct challenges associated with the assessment of Drama performances. These critical issues identify performance as fundamental to Drama, establish students’ aspirations when performing, describe students’ motivations for their performance efforts, investigate the capstone nature of Drama performance tasks, evaluate performance as a form of formative assessment, and establish the audience’s role as an influencing factor on the assessment of Drama performances. They are by no means definitive but rather, they are six areas of focus that assist in responding to the research question of this thesis. I describe and problematise these critical issues in this chapter, then revisit them in more depth as the discussion of findings develops in Chapters 5-7.

Therefore, Chapter 4 foreshadows the findings developed in the remainder of the thesis and describes the assessment tasks observed at each school site.

The findings about assessment practices described in this thesis emerged through an investigation of the processes of assessing Drama performances employed by teacher
participants. A six-stage process was developed to represent particular challenges associated with the assessment of live performance work. While there are similarities in the teachers’ assessment methods, each teacher demonstrates distinctive practices developed as a result of professional practices and state or territory mandated procedures, and individual skills and interests. Distinctive qualities of Drama performance assessments are noted for the purpose of highlighting approaches that are relevant to Drama educators or assessors in other curriculum areas, including performing arts subjects of Dance and Music. Chapter 4 also reflects on the students’ interactions with the assessment process, in particular, their understanding of assessment requirements, criteria, standards and feedback.

4.2 Six critical issues of Drama performance assessment

This section describes the senior secondary performance assessment task at each school site – School One to School Six – each aligned to one of the critical issues that emerged as themes in the analysis of data. These critical issues were observed to be major factors that affected the assessment environment and the students’ response to the assessment task at each site. In the analysis of the collective data of the whole study, it was found that these critical issues arose at some stage at every site, presenting unique challenges to the assessment of Drama performances. The six critical Drama performance assessment issues are represented in Figure 4.1.
4.2.1 School One: Performance as critical to Drama

School One, located in regional Queensland, is undertaking an Elizabethan drama unit, culminating in the performance of excerpts from various Shakespearian plays. Students are required to work in groups of five or less to produce a scene of five to 10 minutes. Glenda, the teacher, links the task to the global aims of drama.

*Glenda:* Firstly, I wanted them to understand language, how it evolves and how it’s spoken out loud, so then they can understand their own language and what it means in their life. I want students to have a really good knowledge of how language is used, and how it changes over the periods of time and that’s something the drama can bring their lives … but more importantly, in acting
we’ve studied human nature, how some people can be driven to do the things they did in Shakespearian times and could it possibly happen again today … Also, I think by studying styles from the past you get an appreciation of other people, and other cultures and sub cultures within our society, and hopefully you know, you gain a better understanding of people. And I think probably you know that’s a pretty sort of global issue once again, like the working with people and communicating with people and, working in teams and all those sorts of things.

These aims reflect the rationale of the Senior Drama syllabus (Queensland Studies Authority, 2013) and the theoretical work of Evans (2011), Hamilton (2009), Marshall (2009) and Meskin (2009) who argue that students should explore a range of theatrical styles and historical contexts in their drama studies. Glenda adds that performance is a vehicle through which understanding of the human experience can be developed while also enhancing interpretations of the theatrical style being studied.

Glenda: It’s not just about Shakespeare, we see how people lived and reacted in another time. And a student’s understanding of right and wrong can be enhanced if they really experience it. By performing they’re walking in someone else’s shoes. That empathy can change their lives, like their eyes are open to experiences outside of their own. It’s really rare for adolescents to do that and that’s where Drama is unique.

The students from School One have an awareness of the importance of performance to their understanding of theatrical styles. They mention the ways in which they feel the emotions of a character during their performance, and this allows them to arrive at greater understandings of the play’s themes and the characters’ struggles. Several students compare their performance experience with their studies in English, where they also study Shakespearian texts.

S1C: So, most of us have had to do Hamlet in English, but this is completely different even though it’s the same play. For a start, I understand the language better because I’ve got to put emotion in there when I’m in role. I’m not just learning quotes . . . I have to really understand why my character, which is Polonius, makes these decisions. I’m not just learning about the play … I am being the play, if you know what I mean.
This student’s reflection of being the play suggests they are engaged in embodied learning in Drama (Wright, 2011) and their experiences of performing and learning are intertwined (Schechner, 2003, 1981). The combination of embodied learning and artistic processes with creativity and the demonstration of specific performance skills makes Drama unique. The teacher and students appear to share an understanding that performance is critical to drama learning. For some students, this shared understanding leads to a shared understanding of the aims of the performance assessment task.

4.2.2 School Two: Student artistic and academic aspirations

School Two is an independent boys school in metropolitan Brisbane (Queensland) where the Year 11 Drama class is engaged in a study of Australian theatre. The study culminates with a group performance of excerpts from the play Blackrock by Nick Enright (1996) at a Senior Drama Night. The performance excerpts range from 8-15 minutes, all of them all-male scenes. Blackrock chronicles a rape and murder in a fictitious Australian town and the performances have a sombre tone. I observe families and friends being surprised by the intensity of the content, although not in a negative way. Many seemed impressed by the ability of students to deal with such a serious subject matter in a respectful yet realistic style. In interviews conducted at the conclusion of the performance evening, students discuss their thoughts about the play, which some felt offered an opportunity for mature insight into important social issues.

S2C: While learning to perform this play, it was like we were learning about life and human nature and stuff.

S2A: It was almost like to do well in this task you had to think about people in a really full on way, and like go inside the head of a rapist. It was a massive task, but if you wanted to do well and show it properly, you had to go to some dark places. It was hard but it turned out a good experience.

Student A’s use of the word dark fits the tone of the play, suggesting that he has arrived at some comprehensive understandings of the material. Furthermore, this student makes references to several of the shared aims of the class when performing.
Firstly, his desire to show it properly suggests that he wants the audience to be affected by the performance. Secondly, he makes mention of academic success, which is central to many students’ efforts in Years 11 and 12. All students interviewed at School Two make comments about wanting to do well for a range of reasons.

S2A: Well, this is our first semester of Senior Drama and I want to get off to a good start. That’ll set me up really well to have a good result overall.

S2B: My parents actually didn’t want me to do Senior Drama, so I sort of need to show them that I can get good marks and it is worth it.

S2C: I want to get into Law, so I need to do well in everything, and that includes performances. But I also just want to do well anyway because that’s what I’m used to, you know.

S2D: I think I might want to pursue acting after school so, like, if I do all right I can say ‘I’ve performed Blackrock’ or whatever. Or I can use these as audition pieces, or hopefully having a good set of results in Drama might help me to get into somewhere. I dunno what yet though.

The students, whilst displaying an achievement orientation (Biggs, 1999; Kozlowski & Bell, 2006), have diverse reasons for wanting to do well. Their teacher, Jane, is aware of her students’ ambitions, but is also mindful of her role as an assessor who needs to make informed decisions about each student’s achievements.

Jane: When marking this task I wanted to see who had really embraced the elements of realism demonstrated through their study of that character and interaction with other characters. I think, overall, they did very well. I’m really pleased, but I still need to mark them for their execution on the night. And that marking needs to be critical, and I don’t mean by criticising them, I’m talking about giving them areas for growth.

Teachers and students allude to the many purposes of performance tasks and their connection with the wider aims of drama education. When students are performing for the purposes of assessment, they are trying to connect with the teachers’ aims and the aims of performance in the syllabus. Even at an early stage in the senior secondary Drama course, students and the teacher have their own ideas about what they would like to achieve as a result of engaging in assessed Drama performances.
4.2.3 School Three: Student motivation for performance efforts

School Three is an independent school for girls school in Sydney (NSW) where the Year 11 class is studying experimental theatre. The assessment task is an in-class assessment where groups of four to six students are required to perform devised experimental theatre pieces of 6-10 minutes length. Each performance is based around a social issue of the students’ choice. The topics range from typically adolescent issues, such as body image, eating disorders and cyber bullying to wider political issues such as refugee rights and migration law. One group tackles the atypical topic of human genome engineering, depicting a futuristic world where cloning and liberal eugenics (selective breeding to enhance desirable human characteristics) are the norm.

During the teacher interview, Tania, expresses satisfaction with the students’ artistic choices in response to the task, but also shows concern about students’ ability to realise the aims of the task.

*Tania: Well, I think most of them did pretty well. But a lot of them are still showing only a surface engagement with the basic skills. A lot of them are still in that pretend mode and aren’t really committing to their characters. There’s a few reasons for that, like some groups didn’t have the same preparation time, for example, because people were overseas during the holidays. But ultimately, you need to mark what you see on the day.*

Tania reflects on her school’s performance culture, which is of interest to this research. The school fits this study’s participation criteria of having a strong performance culture, consistent enrolments in Senior Drama and a teacher who is active and well known in her local drama teaching association. However, Drama is only taught in Years 11 and 12 at School Three. Tania emphasises that the students progress very quickly in their two years of Drama experience and notes that most of her students achieve Band 5 or Band 6 results for Drama in Year 12. (Six bands are used to report achievement in NSW: ‘HSC marks from 90 to 100 will receive a Band 6, marks from 80 to 89 will receive a Band 5, and so on until Band 1, which covers everything from 0 to 49’ [NSW Students online, n.d.].) Tania says that the good results in Drama are part of School Three’s high achieving culture.
Tania: Of course, they’re very focused on results here. It’s not so much about what you learned it’s about what mark you got. The students are all wanting to do law, business, medicine or engineering. Very few want to go into service industries, like social work and basically none want to be teachers. I find that a bit sad in some ways. It’s very rare that any would want to pursue acting either. We only have a small handful, and I mean less than five, girls each year who take up a trade or go to TAFE or get full-time jobs. Going to uni is almost universal.

As Tania and I discuss students’ vocational interests, it becomes clear that success to most of her students means favourable HSC results, producing subsequent university offers. Applying this to Drama, Tania’s comments suggest that students’ performance efforts are affected by their achievement orientation. Some comments made in student interviews appear to support Tania’s point of view:

S3B: You want to get it right in a performance, because that’s how you get the good mark

S3D: I find it a bit weird actually, ‘cause like, in another subject for an essay you’ll give the answer you think the teacher wants for an assignment …

S3A: Yeah, like you try to reflect what the teacher said …

S3D: You know, ’cause you want to get a good mark and stuff. But I think in Drama that’s heaps harder.

While there are students at all schools who are motivated by academic success, Tania describes School Three as being overwhelmingly results driven. When asked how this affects the performance art that students produced, she replies:

Tania: I don’t know if it overly makes a difference. They still take risks and want to push boundaries, but I guess they still do that in a safe way. Their work is all highly intellectualised and they constantly strive to improve it until performance day. But maybe, they’re less prepared to be wrong. They’re always looking for success at the end of the day.

Generally, most Year 12 students hope for success of some kind, but it is up to each individual to decide what success means. Whilst a high achievement orientation is not unique to the students of School Three, it provides insight into students’ motivation for doing well in Drama, which can affect their performance response.
4.2.4 School Four: Performance assessment as a capstone project

School Four is a Catholic systemic co-educational school in NSW where I meet the teacher participant, Christine, and observe her Year 12 class during their Trial HSC exams. It is typical that the teacher marks the final practical internal performance assessment. In NSW, the Trial HSC is administered and assessed within each school. The tasks are designed to mirror the HSC external examination.

Students are required to present their HSC group performances, which are 8-12 minute drama pieces performed in groups of three to six. Students also present their individual projects on this day (of which they can choose to create a performance, script, video production, lighting/set/costume/promotional design or director’s folio). For both group and individual performance tasks, students are permitted to perform in any theatrical style. Four students from four different groups volunteer to be participants in this research. Of those, all but one chooses the performance option for their individual project. In total, four group performances and three individual performances are observed for this research and students are interviewed individually at the conclusion of their performances.

The concept of the blank canvas emerges throughout the performances observed at School Four. Apart from the task parameters, there are no common features in any of the three group performances, either in theatrical style or content. Each piece differs widely in plot orientation, subject matter and theatrical style. In one piece, diverse conventions such as mime, physical theatre, puppetry, song, mask work or monologue are used. In the interviews, the students reflect on the reasons for their performance choices:

*S4A: We definitely tried to play to our strengths. We had been told that if you have a talent you should use it. I have some dance skill, so we wanted to do that.*

*S4B: You could do anything. Totally whatever we wanted. So we were like, I’m good at accents, someone else could sing or whatever. So we included all of that because we wanted it to be like the best thing we’ve ever done.*
These students suggest that the blank canvas allows them to showcase their understanding of performance, as well as the skills developed throughout their drama experiences. This can include experiences outside of the senior secondary classroom, including primary and secondary Drama, co-curricular activities or drama experiences outside of school. When crafting their performance responses, students consider their preferred styles of performance and then rationalise their strengths into an effective representation of their creative ideas. This also demonstrates their understanding of the task for the purposes of assessment. Students’ efforts to refine the representation of their drama experience are more prominent at School Four than at other school sites. The performances at School Four differ considerably from other tasks observed in this study, which were all tied to a particular unit of work. The concept of a capstone project is apparent, whereby students are required to prepare and perform a piece that demonstrates their performance skills and understandings as constructed throughout their experiences of drama learning. Students may use any theatrical style to develop their responses to the capstone task, hence, the blank canvas. The students reflect on the nature of this task and their motivation for their efforts:

*S4C: This is a really important task for us. We’ve all done Drama since Year 8 and two of us want to go onto acting after we leave school and the other two want to go to uni. We actually chose this group because we were four really strong actors and we thought we’d all work hard to get good marks. So, I think our piece is trying to reflect all of our abilities and also our ability to present something that is historical and political and dramatic as well.*

It was apparent that students at School Four aim to produce a piece of art intended to achieve outstanding results. The assessment task clearly influences the work the students produce through the dramatic choices they believe will produce the best results possible. The process of being assessed has become the focus of students’ efforts. There is still a strong intersection between artistic and academic achievements, and the students’ comments (above) suggest where they perceive this intersection to be. The drama being produced for the capstone task is a product of students’ cumulative understandings of drama developed over their years of drama study.
The teacher, Christine, has had extensive experience assessing performances as an external HSC performance examiner. She is accustomed to assessing a range of theatrical styles in response to this assessment task. Furthermore, she has contributed to the benchmarking of standards for performance tasks as part of her role as an HSC performance examiner. Benchmarking in NSW is facilitated by the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES). Senior assessors view a range of assessment responses, select illustrative benchmark samples of student responses and develop annotated assessment criteria that can be referred to by other teachers across NSW (BOSTES, n.d.). As a result, Christine has expectations about the standard of work performed by her Year 12 Drama performances.

Christine: The thing with HSC Drama performances is that absolutely, you expect them to be good. And if they think they’re good, then there’s a danger because the standard is unbelievably high out there. They need to keep in mind that everyone is playing to their strengths and everyone is putting their best foot forward, so they have to compete with that. It’s a big ask, I think. And when I’m assessing, I always have to keep in mind where they fit in the rest of the state.

Christine’s use of the phrase ‘out there’ alludes to her understanding of standards constructed as part of her experience as an external assessor. She has expectations of the standard of student work for the capstone task and has previously engaged in benchmarking exercises for the purpose of communicating these standards with other teachers and students. The concept of standards for Drama performances is one of the major areas of inquiry in this study and will be explored further in Chapter 7. The capstone task is common to all Year 12 Drama students in NSW, therefore, the ways in which teachers apply the standard is critical. Christine is mindful of that standard when she is assessing, and she also aims to make her students aware of the standard during the assessment process.

4.2.5 School Five: Performance as formative assessment

School Five is a Catholic independent co-educational school in Canberra (ACT) with a thriving performing arts culture. At the time of data collection, the school has one Year 11 and one Year 12 Drama class with approximately 16 students in each. The task being observed is a performance of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, produced as a
combined production by both classes. The performance assessment task contains two components. The play is performed to a public audience in the school hall at the beginning of Term 4, and all Drama students have either an acting or production role. Formative feedback is given to students, although no summative assessment of the performance is conducted. However, six weeks later, small groups of two to five students perform excerpts from the play to their class and these performances are summatively assessed. As part of the data collection process, I observed the formative task (public performance of the play) and summative performance (shorter extracts performed to the class). These observations allow me to compare and contrast the performance work displayed by students in each instance.

Students appear to have separate understandings of the aims of the formative and summative performance tasks. Several student comments suggest they perceive the summative task as having individualistic aims, compared to the collective aims they associate with publicly performed formative task. When questioned about the differences between the two performances, students articulated their understanding:

*S5A*: It works both ways. I want us to do a great performance for the production, but in a way I also want that to have some effect on my schoolwork, which is why it’s good that we have a separate, formal assessment piece, which I want to do well at as well. If I didn’t, then I may as well be doing community theatre or something … if it’s just for the love of it.

Student 5A’s comments suggest that the summative assessment task is a pathway to academic achievement. The formative task offers an alternative opportunity to make performance achievements, however, the student refers to schoolwork as the summative assessment event. Other students also discuss their approaches to the two performances:

*S5E*: No, I’m not going to make much alteration at all, I have to say. You just do the same thing because you should be trying to produce an excellent performance no matter where you are or who you’re in front of. And all these things like lights and sets, they’re just accessories. Without the acting it’s all nothing.
S5C: I think it’s really different, because for assessment we’re just focusing on this one bit, and in that bit trying to give a whole like impression of the character and the story. In a way, although it’s a smaller job, it’s harder.

The teacher, John, notes that his feedback methods differ between the two performances. For the public and formatively assessed production of King Lear, his feedback focuses on enhancing the student’s understanding of the play, injecting more realism into some scenes or adjusting character portrayals to suit the overall cohesion of the play. He also gives feedback to individual student actors on their diction, timing and collaboration, as appropriate to a Shakespearian performance. By contrast, John provides feedback for the summative performance task more formally, using written comments accompanied by assessment criteria, results and grades.

Rust (2002, 2000) calls for assessment practice to be continuous with ‘plenty of formative feedback at regular intervals’ (2002, p. 149). In doing so, he argues that the teacher is able to emphasise the relevance of the task beyond the assessment itself, thus discouraging students from adopting a surface approach to learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Biggs, 1999). John utilises the public performance as a means of formative assessment, continuously giving students diagnostic feedback that can be used as an indication of achievement before employing a summative method to quantify the outcomes using marks, grades and criteria.

John: It’s an interesting exercise, having seen the group having to do not only all of Shakespeare’s piece but then not even be assessed on their major performance, but have to come back, revisit it and then reformulate within two weeks to come up with their own connection … but it’s impressive what they can do. But I need to assess them at a high level, because sometimes I’m seeing somebody who is doing a good job, but not exceptional work … and the marks need to reflect that.

The students are able to act on their formative feedback from the public performance in preparation for their summatively assessed work. In interviews, several explain the ways they intend to reshape the presentation of their characters based on their formative feedback. Some students also discuss the reaction of the audience to their performance which they consider to be a critical component of the public performance experience. Student awareness of the audience’s reactions again points
to the dual purpose of engaging in performance. Students want to entertain their audience and through a production of the whole play, they gain a deeper understanding of audience reactions. Audience awareness is discussed in more detail in Section 4.1.6 as this factor was also apparent in performances at School Six.

4.2.6 School Six: The audience factor

School Six is a government co-educational Years 11 and 12 college in Canberra (ACT). In the ACT, government high schools cater for Years 7-10, after which students attend local colleges for their senior secondary years. School Six is a large college, and at the time of data collection there are two Year 11 and one Year 12 Drama classes with approximately 15 students in each class. The Year 12 class is engaging in a study of experimental theatre in their final unit of Senior Drama. I observe their final performance task, which students choose to present individually or in pairs. Seven students are volunteer participants in the research and are interviewed either in their performance pairs or, for those who performed alone, individually.

At School Six, several students again mention attaining good marks as a motivation for doing well in Drama, with some citing university entrance as a reason for wanting to excel. However, one student gives insight into another motivation for her performance efforts:

*S6D: Drama is sort of different because you’re on show; it’s really, like, public. So, if you do a crap performance everyone is going to see it. Like, if I forget my lines everyone will see. I can hand in a bad essay and not think much more about it, I’ll just shove it under my bed when I get home. With a performance, there’s an added pressure of being judged by your class as well. The work is just so … public.*

This student alludes to the unique relationship that students have with their audience in the Drama performance assessment environment. Her comments also suggest that students have a dual purpose when responding to a performance task. They want to achieve favourable results for assessment, but also to impress their audience with a strong performance. Issues of self-esteem and self-image that are outside the bounds
of this focussed research project abound in Drama. However, the concept of authentic assessment is significant. In literature, authentic assessment is characterised as having conditions that mirror the ‘real world’ (Frey, 2012, p. 1) where discipline specific cognitive processes are developed and a product is created that has value inside and outside of the school setting (Palm, 2008). The presence of the audience is one of the factors that provide the conditions for Drama performance assessment to be considered authentic. The audience also provides dual scrutiny to the performance. Students receive feedback from the teacher-assessor and their audience of peers. Feedback from the audience is immediate and subsequent. It consists of emotional or affective responses to the art, manifesting in actions such as laughing, clapping, coughing and fidgeting. Audience members also offer comments or critiques to student actors after their performances, reinforcing the notion that art is viewed from multiple perspectives. However, one student’s comments from School Six suggest that one of the challenges of Drama is to develop one’s own judgment of the value of different perspectives when considering the feedback from the audience.

*S6B: Never believe the audience! I say that because I can just go out and be an idiot, muck around and swear and the audience will love it. But that’s not what the teacher wants. Also, my family always comes to my stuff and they love everything I do, but they’re not sitting there with the criteria.*

The difference between audience and assessors’ critique and the impact of the audience upon assessment is explored in more detail in Section 6.2.2. The teachers’ methods of assessing tasks that are publicly displayed are also explored.

### 4.3 The assessment process

Bird (2006) explains the teachers’ role in the drama assessment process by identifying three main phases within the pedagogy: (i) initial phase in which the teacher is the facilitator; (ii) developmental phase in which the teacher works as a collaborator with the students; and (iii) final phase in which the teacher is a ‘quality controller’ (p. 87). Although Bird’s (2006) research deals with solo performances, much of her theory surrounding the stages is relevant to this research. The phases acknowledge that the teacher’s role changes during the assessment phase, and
teachers do scaffold students through the assessment process, thereby influencing and collaborating on the art. Students concurrently experience the phases that are facilitated by the teacher. They also experience a multiplicity of roles, including director, writer or dramaturge, but as they are not necessarily assigned roles, they are fluid and flexible art-makers (Michaels & Tarlington, 1995).

Influenced by Bird’s (2006) stages and Michaels and Tarlington’s (1995) theory on building performances, the findings from the six sites is synthesised to create a six-stage process of Drama performance assessment, illustrating the practices noted at each site. The six-stage process is diagrammatically represented in Figure 4.2:
4.3.1 Stage 1: Designing and setting

The Drama performance assessment process begins with careful design of the learning program, which includes a consideration of the objectives of the course, course organisation, verification or examination requirements and exit standards that students are working towards (Queensland Studies Authority, 2013). All teachers suggest that the assessment process starts as part of the design of the curriculum and learning program.

_John:_ Well, it’s not simply about this one task. While I want them to produce a comprehensive piece for this unit, I also want them to learn and grow as performers. So, the skills they develop in the task should enhance all of their assessment efforts for the future.

_Christine:_ When you design your year, the assessment is at the forefront of your mind. I know it possibly shouldn’t be, but the students want to know you’re anticipating that process.

Students seem to show varying degrees of comfort with their teachers’ planning, with some noting they felt more at ease when they perceived the unit to be well organised. This suggests that assessment design processes can shape students’ experiences of a learning program. The core principles for improving student learning through assessment includes having an organised approach that situates assessment within the learning program; distributing task requirements in a timely fashion; communicating standards clearly and often; and regularly providing timely, useful feedback that helps students improve (Adams & McNab, 2013). One student from School Four reflects on the importance of organised assessment design:

_S4D:_ Like if they’ve given everything to you planned it’s not like they’re making it up as they go along. Then you can plan your stuff better and ask for help if you need it. And there’s no surprises.

When students perceive a degree of organisation, they display more comfort in the assessment process, and more able to ask for assistance if they require it. Being able to anticipate all assessed tasks allows them a more stable environment in which to develop their creative work. The impact of students’ emotional state on Drama
performance assessment will be further explored in Chapter 6 which discusses the experience of Drama performance assessment.

During the designing and setting stage, teachers are described by Bird (2006) as facilitators of learning. In this research, teachers seem to favour an organised approach to their work, but also require a flexible approach in order to adapt to the dynamic nature of schooling. When teachers design the task, they refine the ideas expressed in their learning program into a readable form where the parameters of the task are expressed in a written form for students. They may manipulate an existing document to create what they referred to as a task sheet. Teachers engage in the setting stage when they place the assessment task into the learning program for the unit or semester. When designing and setting, John from School Five aims to be specific about expectations while leaving scope for students to respond to the openness of the assessment task.

*John: It’s really important that you don’t set a simple competency task, saying, do this, do that. They need to be able to give you a range of responses and sometimes that won’t be what you asked for.*

Speaking from a NSW perspective, the teacher at School Four has a unique narrative in this regard. Christine emphasises that she is working towards an externally assessed task common to all Drama students in NSW. Her comments suggest that she does not feel she has a great deal of flexibility and cannot alter her program in a way that would deviate from the goal of providing students with adequate preparation for the external tasks.

**4.3.2 Stage 2: Explaining and guiding**

The explanation of the task and criteria is a critical stage in the assessment process. Hargreaves, Galton and Robinson (1996) found that the more clarity teachers provide when explaining the goals of assessment tasks, the more consistently they are able to apply the assessment criteria. Much literature suggests that assessment tasks and accompanying criteria can be complex and difficult to decipher (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Rust, Price & O’Donovan, 2003). Sadler (1989) argues that
this complexity is necessary due to the multidimensional nature of quality assessment tasks and the learning involved. However, Yorke and Knight (2004) add that written statements of standards, objectives and outcomes can be ‘insufficient to convey the richness of meaning that is wrapped up in them’ (p. 480).

Additionally, teachers and students operate in separate realities in the assessment environment, realities that have been constructed from their understandings and experiences of drama learning. This can mean that students require numerous opportunities to develop their understandings of task requirements (Higgins, Hartley, Skelton, 2001; Ivanic, Clark & Rimmershaw, 2000). Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) identify a range of strategies that can be used to enhance students’ understanding of assessment tasks, many of which are evident within the six-stage process. In this research, I identify these as crossover points occurring when Drama teachers and students simultaneously share their interpretations of the task or assessment criteria. At these points, students’ and teachers’ interpretations of the task converge as they construct understandings of the task together. The importance of crossover points in the assessment process can be seen in Christine’s interview comment:

Christine: It’s so frustrating if students are away. Then I need to sit down with that student and think of everything I told the class. And they didn’t hear the questions from all the other students, so they have to rely on the information the other students give them in their groups. I also find that I do it a bit quicker with the ones that weren’t there, so they’re probably missing out on something. Annoying, hey.

When explaining the task, teachers take time to discuss the criteria on which students will be assessed. Understanding assessment criteria is critical for students’ learning in and through assessment tasks (Daniels, Berglund, Pears & Fincher, 2004; Hammer, 2007; Orrell, 2005; Rust, Price & O’Donovan, 2003) and for students’ understanding of the feedback they receive for assessment (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). However, students’ engagement with this criteria beyond the teachers’ explanation is also critical. As part of the interview schedule, students are asked to discuss their impressions of the assessment criteria. All are vague in their responses and no student displays any definitive understanding of the criteria.
Sample responses:

S1D: Um … ah … Shakespeare? Is that the right answer?

S2A: Um, I think like physical stuff. Or maybe the play? Actually I don’t know.

S3G: I have no idea! Probably our grasp of experimental theatre.

S4B: I’m sorry, I haven’t looked.

S4A: Actually, I don’t think we were given that …

S4B: Yeah we were, it was on the back…

S4A: Oh, ok. Well, yeah, I never look at that. (Laughs)

While I tried to make students feel comfortable, they were hesitant in this section of the interview. Other questions such as ‘What do you think were some important skills you showed in your performance?’ elicited more comprehensive responses, which are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

Students’ responses are consistent with findings from other studies in which as many as three-quarters of students were unaware of the criteria they were being assessed against (Pain & Mowl, 1996), or name different criteria to their teacher (Norton, 1990). Hounsell (1997) also observes that teachers and students frequently have different understandings of assessment criteria and the goals of assessment tasks. While noting that the 40 students interviewed in this study do not provide a large sample, the collective inability of these students to articulate assessment criteria appears to be significant. Despite the explaining stage being a crossover point, the teacher’s explanations of criteria are either not understood or their terminology is not absorbed by students. However, as demonstrated by future stages, students still feel confident in going ahead to create a performance response. It appears as if these students construct their own understandings about how to respond to an assessment tasks, independent of the written criteria or teacher’s explanation. These students are, therefore, displaying their experience of a personal drama curriculum. This personal curriculum, as defined by Jackson (2011), is also referred to as a ‘lifewide’ curriculum (p. 109) in which students develop their own understandings, personal
knowledge, priorities, confidence, agency and identity through engagement inside and outside formal education. In this study, students’ personal curriculum is formed by their previous experiences in drama learning, which takes place within and outside of Drama classes. Students take leadership when they craft their performance response, applying their own priorities and personal curriculum to their understanding of a task.

Responsibility for learning shifts to the students when they begin to make independent decisions about their response to the task. Many models of leadership exist in literature on education and writing in the field of higher education. Fullan’s and Scott’s (2009) model has relevance to students’ experiences in the Drama classroom. Fullan and Scott (2009) describe how successful leaders ‘listen, link and lead’ (p. 116). This process is very much reflected in the student’s explanations of their group work. Their ability to listen to each other’s ideas and link them to their own visions of the performance also resembles distributed leadership models (Gronn 2002; Spillane, 2005; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004), which have been used to describe leadership approaches in schools. Students’ works in groups are characterised by multiple leaders, interaction between leaders and constant monitoring and evaluation of practice (Spillane, 2005). The students aim to unify their group for their central purpose (Fullan & Scott, 2009), which is to produce a successful piece of drama.

Students work independently on their performances and the teacher provides guidance using the pedagogy of facilitation. A number of guiding strategies are used, including consulting with the student performers regularly about their ideas and progress, viewing rehearsals from a distance, or asking students to present their performance work in progress. This is another crossover point where understanding of the task is shared between teacher and student. Bird (2006) goes so far as to describe the teacher as a collaborator who contributes ideas in the artistic process. However, the teachers in this study emphasise that students should have the freedom to develop their ideas, free from the teachers’ intervention, momentarily at least, thereby privileging students’ autonomous decision-making skills in the artistic environment. Hornbrook (1991) asserts that students devising performances are often
most productive when working by themselves. This is reflected in one teachers’ comments and was replicated by other teachers in the study:

Glenda: It is of the utmost importance that students have some time alone so they have some creative ownership of their work. The teacher must stand back, at least for a while, so the students can find their own way. Otherwise the work isn’t theirs.

Glenda makes an important reference to an issue raised by Kempe (2000) and Harris (2008) who assert that Drama teachers should be careful not to become too ‘personally involved’ (Kempe, 2000, p. 5) in their students’ works. Students should be given some degree of creative control over the performance to ensure that the product is not a simple execution of the teachers’ ideas. Rather than being collaborators, the teachers in this research are more akin to a mentor who offers advice and answers questions while the student accepts the role of theatre-maker (Aitken, 2007) and makes creatively autonomous decisions about the performance. The teacher and student operate within distinctly different realities, but the dialogue that occurs is characteristic of another crossover point where the teacher and students share their understandings and interpretations of the task.

4.3.3 Stage 3: Experiencing

At the time of the performance, Bird (2006) describes teachers as ‘quality controllers’ (p. 87) as they make judgments about the quality of the art that is being produced. At the experiencing stage, teachers become audience members and assessors concurrently. They suggest that it is necessary to watch and allow themselves to feel and respond as an ordinary audience member.

Christine: It’s really important that it’s not too clinical. You have to be in the moment yourself as part of the audience.

John: Even after you’ve put so much work into developing their knowledge and understanding of the play, you have to stand back and see what the audience sees.
The embodied experience of being an audience member can never be divorced from the performance assessment process. The teacher-assessor is more active than an audience member, notating their comments and referring to the assessment criteria. Teachers aim to move seamlessly between these roles, however, tensions emerge. These tensions are discussed in Chapter 5, which explores the different type of demands placed on being a teacher and assessor.

The experiencing stage appears to cycle between three main processes. Observations of teachers assessing Drama performances reveal that they initially respond as a participating audience member. They then write comments based on their reactions. They may refer to the assessment criteria, either loosely or with direct reference, and again, notate their comments. The teachers are observed to be engaging in a sub-process that has three components: watching and feeling, writing feedback and responses and referring to criteria. The interaction between each action in the sub-process is diagrammatically represented as such:

![Diagram](attachment:image.png)

**Figure 4.3: Experiencing Drama performance assessment**

After the performance, the teachers revisit the experiencing phrase for the purposes of review and assessment through video recordings, although the live performance experience cannot be repeated. There are numerous limitations associated with the
use of video recordings to represent a live drama performance which are discussed in further detail in Chapter 7. For the purposes of exploring this stage of the assessment process, it is important to note that the video recording is used to revisit the performance when students, teachers or a moderation panel review the performance that has taken place. The video recording does not intend to replace the experience of the live drama performance. Rather, it is a representation of the live performance used to review a performance or for grade verification in Queensland and the ACT.

4.3.4 Stage 4: Judging and appraising

Directly following each performance there is a short break for teachers to make initial judgments about the quality of the student’s work in relation to the assessment criteria. During this stage, teachers use the criteria to arrive at an initial judgment on the students’ work, using numerical marks or a grade. Two teachers explain that this first judgment is completed in haste without considering ranking or students’ achievements being compared to each other.

*John:* When you make this first mark, I think you’re considering that performance as a standalone piece, in isolation of all the others. When you go back and you consider them as a collective group and say ‘this was stronger than that’ then you might change your results.

*Megan:* I would never show students their initial grade. It’s a first impression and it often isn’t spot on.

The teachers later revisit each performance to add to their comments or clarify existing statements. Some teachers postulate that they would always review the video footage of the performances, whereas other say they would only refer to it if required. Afterwards, the teacher re-assesses the result to determine if it fits their impression of the overall student achievement. This is the appraising stage where teachers either confirm or alter the alignment of their judgments to the criteria and arrive at an overall summation of achievement (expressed as a grade or mark). Some teachers argue that teacher judgment is a critical component of the appraising stage and should never be divorced from the process. This judgement is supported when teachers use the assessment criteria to quantify their results or make comments that
reflect the task instructions or criteria. John explains that he is able to produce evidence of his judgements using assessment criteria.

*John: It’s definitely more than just a process of adding up marks. You reconcile your judgment with their performance on the criteria.*

There is a variation in how teachers assess individual performers within a group performance context. Some teachers use the same criteria sheet for the whole group, notating differences between student actors’ performances on the same page, whereas other teachers use one assessment criteria sheet per student. There is some discussion in the literature on assessments about the extent to which one group member’s performance can influence the results of another (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Roberts, 2011; Webb, Nemer, Chishik & Sugrue, 1998). The teachers structure their practice in a way that is designed to assess each performer individually, often using multiple viewings of video evidence followed by creating individually tailored feedback.

4.3.5  **Stage 5: Ranking and conferring**

Once the teachers’ initial impressions on the students’ dramatic achievements and initial comments on the students’ performances are developed, the results are finalised. The teachers view the rank of the students’ results to ensure the results reflect their impressions of the achievement. Each teacher has their own mechanisms for ranking achievements from highest to lowest.

*Megan: I lay the criteria sheets on the floor in a long line … and the best ones should be at the top and the worst at the bottom. Sometimes I need to do some reordering, but not usually. It’s to get it straight in my head that I got it right.*

In the interviews, the teachers discuss the collaborative nature of this stage. The conferring stage involves reviewing results with other teachers. Variations to procedures can involve departmental leaders (also called head teachers or subject coordinators) being invited to review the results. School One has two Year 12 classes completing the same performance assessment tasks, therefore, extensive liaison
between teachers is necessary to finalise the results. Glenda describes the method used:

*Glenda: Well, first we mark our own students, but we usually try to sit in on at least one of each other’s performances while they’re on, so we can make sure we agree on the standard … Once we have our marks, we get together and mesh them. So we do a ranking with all students from two classes. And we discuss what kinds of performances the students produced. We play the videos about any we’re not sure of, and I like to have a look at any videos of any ‘A’ performances, just to check we haven’t over inflated them. And then I think if we’re both happy we take that back to our students.*

The conferral mechanism forms part of the professional dialogue that helps to ensure that Drama teachers’ expectations are comparable with others in their field. Having defendable results is one of the hallmarks of fair assessment (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007) and by engaging in ranking and conferring activities, the teachers show they have constructed understandings of those principles. The conferring stage requires maturity and openness on behalf of the teacher, which can be difficult as the teacher may feel their practices and/or judgements being criticised. However, as demonstrated in this study, when seen as a mechanism for supporting teachers, the conferring stage is focused on applying standards to student achievement rather than critiquing teachers’ judgments.

At the conclusion of the ranking and conferring stages, the teachers record each result, which aligns to the assessment criteria and is accompanied by written or verbal feedback.

### 4.3.6 Stage 6: Reflecting and evaluating

The length of time between Stage 4 (conclusion of the performance) and Stage 6 (return of results to students) varies between teachers. All schools have their own policies regarding the return of results and feedback to students. Some school policies dictate that results and feedback be returned within two weeks of the assessment task taking place; other schools allow 21 days. Each teacher has a method for distributing feedback to students, some of which have a ritual quality. A key strategy is the facilitation of student reflection. Some teachers make reference to
approaching this stage with sensitivity. This sensitivity is validated in the literature which suggests that the relationship between teacher and student has a distinct effect on the success or otherwise of students’ absorption of their feedback. Furthermore, students who do not feel a degree of comfort during this stage will have difficulties interpreting the assessor’s comments (Daniel, 2001).

The returning stage starts with the teachers facilitating a discussion on the classes’ general achievements while encouraging students to engage in some self-reflection. Jane from School Two produces general written feedback for the class in order to facilitate self-reflection.

*Jane:* The students read the general comments and I talk them through it. What I want them to do is think which points apply to their performance. I want them to do some thinking. But they’ve also been an audience to each other so they can see the feedback that their peers are getting in a way and they can keep learning from each other.

After individual feedback is distributed, some teachers encourage students to follow-up with questions. This is the stage where the multiple realities present in the Drama classroom are most apparent. The returning and reflecting stage signals another potential crossover point occurring if a student seeks additional feedback from the teacher. All teachers said they occasionally encounter students who are unhappy with their results. This suggests that multiple understandings have been constructed concurrently in the Drama classroom. Different understandings of task requirements and standards can manifest in tense situations. The teacher negotiates a crossover point so that additional understandings can be reached.

*Glenda:* There’s always going to be some confusion from someone, so it’s best to head that off right away and say ‘come to me if you don’t understand something’. I’d rather start by having a chat with the student rather than getting an angry parent coming to the school the next day … And generally they want to hear that they’ve done good, They’ll say ‘I tried really hard’, but you have to explain that there’s no ‘tried really hard’ on the criteria sheet. They need reassurance that they were good, but still need to know where they have to grow. You get nowhere by meaninglessly rewarding them every time.
Examination of teacher and student interviews, suggests that evaluation takes place with three components. Firstly, students mention that they engage in self-evaluation of their performances, often by viewing the video recording of their performance. Teachers also mention that this is a valuable reflection strategy used after the class’ performances have been completed. The use of video recordings to facilitate self-evaluation for performance tasks is recommended in research (Baker-Jordan, 1999; Benson, 2000; Carty, 2000; Jay, 2000) as students witness their performance from the audience and assessors’ perspective. Secondly, teachers mention that they engage in self-evaluation of the assessment task, including evaluation of written instructions and the assessment process. Finally, some teachers invited their students to evaluate the learning program at the conclusion of the unit. These three components of the evaluating stage is diagrammatically in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4: Evaluating Drama performance assessment

Evaluative activities assist students to make a connection between their achievements in a performance task and their future development as Drama students and learners. Writing from the field of Music, Daniel (2001) asserts that self-evaluation of one’s assessment efforts in a performance environment is imperative, due to the ephemeral nature of the event. The assessment product is often accompanied by anxiety, nerves and tension; therefore, students often rely on the opinions of external evaluators such
as teachers, the audience and their peers. Learning is enhanced through self-evaluation (Miels, 1999). The student has an opportunity to reflect on what happened as opposed to being told by the assessor (Romano & Schwartz, 2005). When students engage in self-evaluation, they no longer view the tasks as isolated assignments that are completed to make pleasing achievements in one instance. The aim of continuous development, as described by the teachers in the designing and setting stage, is realised for students through evaluation processes. However, Daniel (2001) reminds us that self-evaluation assumes that students have constructed understandings of their assessment criteria and are capable of critically analysing the various technical and stylistic aspects of their performance.

The teacher’s evaluation of the overall learning program is ongoing. For some, evaluation takes place immediately after the feedback is returned, but for others, it is done at the end of the learning program. Teachers also mention that further evaluation takes place when planning the same assessment task in subsequent years.

Glenda: For me, when I plan an assessment task, that’s when I think back to last year and consider what adjustments I need to make. I have a really good memory of what happened and I collect all my comments for students, so I can refer to them if needed.

Christine: It’s completely ongoing. The way I teach the task one year is always dependent on what my students produced the previous year.

One teacher argues that the task and criteria is never completed. Rather, assessment tasks are evolving documents, reflecting the dynamic nature of Drama performance assessment. The evaluating stage forms part of a feedback loop (Peterson & Irving, 2008) which allows for the modification of tasks according to the teacher’s evaluation and student response. The feedback loop ensures that the assessment cycle is continuous (Figure 4.2) and delivered through quality professional practice. Evaluation has long been celebrated as one of the characteristics of quality teaching practice (Nair & Wayland, 2005; Salter, 1988; Winchester & Winchester, 2011). The teacher’s willingness to engage in various styles of evaluation is a testament to a degree of quality being ensured in their assessment processes.
4.4 Key differences in assessment practices

Chapter 4 addresses six critical issues associated with the assessment of Drama performances and a six-stage process undertaken by teachers and students in the Drama performance assessment environment. Teachers and students in this study are not a homogenous group. Each teacher is subject to the conditions of their schools’ assessment policies, as well as state or territory curriculum requirements. Some significant differences are apparent between teacher practices. These are particularly prominent in teacher descriptions of personal approaches to assessing performances. Some teachers follow a practice-based approach, starting with planning the practical elements of performance assessment (such as deciding on weighting allocation and scheduling), and considering the aims of the task at a later stage. Other teachers think carefully about the task’s objectives before they write the task’s requirements. Each teacher has his/her own method of providing guidance and holding varying attitudes to the level of autonomy that students should have in this stage. Similarly, when assessing, some teachers choose to immerse themselves in the experience of being an audience member, whereas others adopt a more analytical approach to experiencing the performance, referring more constantly to the task criteria and writing comments throughout. The methods used to give feedback to students also differ with some teachers using the video recordings to illustrate their feedback. One teacher delivers feedback using an audio recording of her voice rather than a written comment (explored further in Chapter 7). Finally, the task is evaluated in different ways with some teachers using student data to engage in formal evaluation, and others relying on their personal recollections of the assessment experience to guide their future practice.

4.5 Reflective interpretations on Drama performance assessment tasks

Teachers and students have their own understandings about the nature of a successful Drama performance assessment response. Students build on those understandings throughout the assessment process, mostly through collaborative learning experiences. This process is complementary to constructivist conceptions of learning (Lea, Stephenson & Troy, 2003; Palinscar, 1998). However, multiple understandings
of the task can be seen to emerge in the Drama classroom, leading to differences between teachers’ and students’ interpretations of the assessment criteria. The students’ hesitation in identifying specific criteria suggests they have their own understandings of how to craft a performative response, which they describe in their own terminology. Even when teachers explain the criteria in the classroom, the class is not necessarily experiencing a crossover point where understandings are shared or terminology mutually understood. Students are experiencing their personal curriculum and basing their assessment responses on previously constructed understandings of what a successful performance entails. This matter will be revisited in Chapter 7 which explores the level of success that students experience without having engaged in a close reading of the criteria.

It is evident that students align their creative approaches to developing a performance to the nature of that task. In a continuous school-based assessment setting (such as Queensland or the ACT), students consistently work to address the demands of specific tasks by using the skills developed in the unit and previous experience. While students’ Drama experience is cumulative, they see each assessment task separately with its own distinct demands. By contrast, students from NSW, approach the capstone task with a sense of its particular significance. They aim to create a piece of drama using a combination of skills and understandings developed over many years of drama learning. Students from School Four in NSW described their desire to present their best performance piece. This aim influences the art, and in some cases, overshadows it. This challenge is reflected in literature, as Bray (1991) states that devising tasks are harder when the group has ‘the whole world to choose from’ (p. 21). Harlen (2007) also reminds us that assessment can only sample behaviour, yet Drama performance assessment tasks lead to results that generalise about students’ achievements. The NSW HSC Drama performance task results in students sampling behaviours that they believe reflects their strengths. However, these strengths may not necessarily best represent the breadth of their drama learning. The capstone task and other systems of assessment will be critiqued in Chapter 7 which discusses the cultures at play in each state and territory assessment environment.
Aside from state or territory specific issues such as the capstone task, students’ comments about drama learning overall reflect a high degree of commonality. For example, students display consistency when discussing aspects of the assessment process that they value. The students appear to value teachers who take an organised approach, stating that their perception of the teachers’ planning relates directly to their trust in the assessment process. Students also welcome crossover points and reflect positively on the opportunity to ask questions and seek teacher feedback during the explaining and guiding stages. They also expect a degree of autonomy in making creative decisions about their assessment piece.

After the performance, some students say they undergo a shift in focus from wanting to create and perform a successful piece of art to wanting to know their teachers’ assessment of their achievements. In interviews, students frequently discuss their preferred styles of feedback. They acknowledge their human need to be gratified and comforted at the conclusion of a performance, but alongside that, they also look for an honest appraisal of their skills from the teacher. Many students appear to have a heavy achievement focus, and many place much of their attention on the summative grade or mark. These students seem to also take time to emphasise that they enrolled in Drama to expand their skills in the field of Drama.

The consistency of student experiences suggests that drama, as an art form in schools, has a level of cohesion across states and territories. While there are differences in individual teacher’s practices when assessing, this research notes that comparable standards are applied to student work across NSW, Queensland and the ACT, often using assessment criteria that values similar attributes of drama learning, using similar terms. Each set of criteria is crafted to complement the task it accompanies, but similarities are apparent.

Assessment criteria universally critique student techniques or performance skills, which include vocal skills, control of movement and delivery, and clarity of communication. The importance of roles is emphasised as teachers are able to make judgments on student interactions, focus, energy and understanding of the complexities of their role. Assessment criteria also value dramatic coherence,
allowing teachers to make judgments on the theatrical statement being made by the student. This includes a student’s work as a member of an ensemble, manipulation of dramatic elements such as tension, space or mood, and the intention of their drama as demonstrated during the performance event. The consistency between criteria used at the six research sites is significant to note as it is one indicator that drama education in Australia has some common elements despite differences in systems and learning environment cultures (Chapter 7).

Chapter 4 introduces findings associated with Drama performance assessment tasks and the process of assessing Drama performances. Chapter 4 mentions challenges associated with the role of the assessor in the artistic process, followed by Chapter 5 which identifies the roles involved in Drama performance assessment and problematises the tensions associated with these roles when assessing artistic work.
CHAPTER 5:
TEACHER AS CURATOR AND CRITIC

5.1 Introduction
Chapter 4 establishes six critical issues associated with Drama performance assessment tasks and outlined in a six-stage process that foreshadows a range of further findings in Chapters 5-7. After coding the data and categorising analytical units, a significant pattern of relationships emerges between the Drama teacher and the assessment process, and teacher-student interactions. Metaphors illustrating these relationships are used in Chapter 5 to provide structure to the discussion, to allow familiar processes to be viewed in a new light (Carpenter, 2008) and to open deep understandings of the multifaceted responsibilities of Drama teachers.

The key metaphor for the teacher in Drama performance assessment is that of the teacher as curator. As curator, teachers assess Drama performance assessment, plan and organise an exhibition of works and design an artistic brief to be fulfilled by the artists. The artists are the students who become student-artists when they respond to the brief and create their performative art. Another useful metaphor employed here is that of teacher-supervisor, illustrating the relationship between teacher and student during the creative process leading to an assessable performance being produced. Teachers also become critics of drama as they are required to assess the presentation of exhibited works, albeit ephemeral performance pieces. They provide a critique for the student-artist that has a focus on arts learning. These metaphors, as applied to the drama learning context, have distinct and similar qualities and are of relevance to the broader arts field. Limitations of these metaphors are also discussed in Chapter 5.

5.2 Role of curator and artists
This chapter compares the teacher to a curator in a theatrical context, similar to an artistic director of a theatre company, and also to curators in other fields, such as museums and art galleries. The role of the contemporary curator has evolved into a dynamic and proactive position as a ‘facilitator of situations and a mediator between
artists, artworks and audiences’ (Edmonds, Bilda & Muller, 2009, p 143). Curators are required to research new and upcoming artists while developing an intimate understanding of heritage works. They are passionate advocates for their art form and delight in sharing it with others, helping the audience to see art in ways they may not have discovered on their own (Eeds & Peterson, 1991). Scott-Murphy (2004) has previously drawn several parallels between the dramatic experience and the curated experience. She states:

A curated experience is like a play because in both events a sequence of scenes, artefacts, images, stories and so on offer directions and clues so that the participant(s) might be involved in an extraordinary experience. As theatre practitioners, we ask our audience to engage with the work intellectually, emotionally and imaginatively as well as physically, often delving into the higher orders of imagination and experience. (Scott-Murphy, 2004, p 1)

In a similar way to theatre practitioners, Drama teachers work with students to provide learning experiences that engage intellectually, emotionally, imaginatively and physically. Like the curator, the Drama teacher ‘brings old art to life and makes new art surprise us all the more’ (Sylvester, 1999, para. 12). The student is in the role of the artist who responds to the curator, not by merely replicating their instructions, but adding to it with imagination and innovation. The artist has the freedom to produce responses that are highly original and creative, which can include responses that the curator was not expecting. The responses can be divergent or tangential in a way that broadens the interpretation of the brief while responding to it.

Curators play an essential role in the development and preservation of art in our society. They also make influential decisions about what art is consumed in that society. One of the central roles of the curator is to recommend works or artists for exhibition. Noted British gallery curator Sylvester (1999) explains, ‘Art today is surrounded by explanation and contextualisation. It is curated’ (para. 11). Curators are responsible for organising exhibitions or performances, as well as the promotion of particular shows or artists. In a similar fashion, the Drama classroom is subjected to curation. Like the curator, the Drama teacher organises the timing and nature of the performance assessment task which is an exhibition of student works. While senior secondary Drama learning conforms to the relevant syllabus, teacher-curators
also draw heavily on other elements in their planning, such as their own understandings of drama, experiences, personal preferences and the resources available to them. At times, some teacher-curators also make assessment or programming decisions based on their assumptions of what will be of interest or advantageous to their students. However, teacher-curators do not directly involve student-artists in decisions about nature of the exhibition.

The teacher-cururator appears to have a range of aims when curating the exhibition. Teacher comments indicate they have multiple motivations for curating an assessment exhibition that is both artistic and educational.

John: Well, it’s not simply about this one task. While I want them to produce a comprehensive piece for this unit, I also want them to learn and grow as performers and this helps them learn and grow as people. So, the skills they develop in one task should enhance all of their assessment efforts for the future.

Glenda: I think about what they’ve learned before and what they’ll be working towards in the future. It’s part of a continuum. They need to grow as actors through assessment, not just achieve grades in separate tasks.

Referring to visual art curation, Rendle-Short (1999) describes the role of the curator, ‘The role is more one of facilitation, collaboration and coordination between artist, audience and institution’ (p. 15). This description is synonymous with the role of the Drama teacher. Drama teachers have a curatorial responsibility whereby they facilitate the creative project while coordinating the interaction between the student-artist, audience and relevant institutions (which include boards of studies). Bird’s (2006) discussion of the teachers’ role in the Drama assessment process identifies their initial role as a facilitator. As teacher-curators facilitate Drama performance assessment, they enact their local curriculum. Teacher-curators adhere to state or territory syllabus requirements when they design the task, as well as consider the school’s assessment practices and drama learning needs of the student-artists. Outside of the school environment, however, the role of the curator involves far more than coordinating and mediating between parties. Sylvester (1999) argues that the contemporary art curator plays a far grander role, using their position in a powerful
or even manipulative manner. He asserts that curators have the power to cultivate
taste, broker careers, and in instances, become the star of the exhibition themselves.
Sylvester (1999) states, ‘At its worst, the curator stands between us and the art’
(para. 5). It can safely be said that very few Drama teachers (if any) are attempting to
dramatically shift society’s cultural identities or manipulate students’ careers. But the
metaphor of the curator standing between the consumer and the art is a factor worth
contemplating. This research finds that the teacher-curator brings several agendas
with them when designing the assessment or exhibition program for the unit or
semester. The concept of agenda will be discussed in the following section, as will
the extent to which the teacher-curator filters, directs or influences the art that is
produced and the way it is consumed.

5.2.1 Curator’s agenda

The term agenda is somewhat problematic. It can be seen to have negative
connotations when denoting a desire to influence or manipulate a circumstance, and
it hints at these being carried out in an underhanded way. The use of the word in
Chapter 5 is not intended this way. Rather, it is used to refer to the teacher-curator’s
set of goals for their assessment program, as well as the ideological and culturally
constructed understandings that influence the way that assessment is approached. In
the professional arts context, the curator brings their own philosophies,
understandings, and artistic and cultural ideas to the role, and these ideas influence
the art that is exhibited or commissioned. In a similar way, this thesis uses the term
agenda as a socio-cultural term that refers to the teacher-curator’s conscious or
subconscious ideas on what student-artists should be studying and producing. The
teacher-curator’s agenda is artistic in that all teachers have preferences and
previously constructed understandings of drama as a result of their personal
experiences, professional learning or exposure to the arts.

The contention that teacher-curators enact agenda can be compared to the concept of
the hidden curriculum (Bergenhenegouwen, 1987; Cornbleth, 1984; Joughin, 2010,
Kentli, 2009; Margolis, Soldatenko, Acker & Gair, 2001; Martin, 1983; Snyder
1971) where ‘the kinds of learnings children derive from the very nature and
organisational design of the school, as well as from the behaviours and attitudes of teachers and administrators’ (Longstreet & Shane, 1993, p. 46). This includes the norms, values and belief systems enacted through the curriculum, the school and classroom life’ (Kentli, 2009). The similarities between agenda and the hidden curriculum lies in the way students are able to negotiate their prevalence in the high-stakes assessment environment. The student who is most attuned to the hidden curriculum or the teachers-curators’ agenda is better equipped to academically succeed in the assessment task. However, the teacher-curator’s agenda is more operational than the hidden curriculum as teacher-curators actively pursue a particular artistic aim. For example, they may want students to explore particular dramatic elements or even performance spaces through the assessment task. Therefore, they are asking students to enact their creative vision. In contrast, the use of the word hidden implies that something is being enacted surreptitiously, but this is not what the teacher-curator aims to do. For this research, the term agenda is more appropriate as it denotes a more transparent perspective that is enacted and defended while encompassing some subjective values.

In the professional arts context, curators also respond to the artistic and societal context around them. Bank (2008) argues that the curator’s role is never static; it is a dynamic and fluid process, constantly shifting and evolving in response to dialogue, conflict and collaboration. This is similarly true in the context of the Drama classroom. This research observes dialogue, conflict and collaboration as an integral part of the teacher-curator’s role. Further to this, the teacher-curator’s agenda is dynamic, allowing for shifts to be made to reflect a range of contextual factors. From the teacher interviews, the shifts occurred when teachers respond to factors within their classroom or state or territory curriculum landscape. It appears that contextual factors which influence the teacher-curator’s agenda include:

- The need to abide by syllabus requirements which are subject to change.
- Teachers massaging task requirements (or the artistic brief) based on evaluations of student’s performances in response to briefs in previous years.
- Teachers tailoring the brief to suit the classes’ abilities or interests.
There is much convergence between the teacher-curator’s agenda and their understandings of the purposes of drama education. This research found that the development of empathy, life skills, collaborative learning, performance skills and understanding of the human experience are the aims of the teacher-curator. Teacher-curators also address multiple agenda simultaneously when designing assessment programs. The teacher’s own agenda is layered within the school’s educational policies and organisational procedures. Both a school’s and a teacher’s agenda can be evident in the way they implement assessment policies. School agendas are multifaceted, often influenced by their sector or history. For example, Schools Three, Four and Five operate within the religious tradition of schooling. Schools Two and Three are older schools with long-standing traditions and rituals often attended by multiple generations in a family. School One, in regional Queensland, has a strong focus on community, in particular, links with the local indigenous community. School Six is a relatively new school in a growing suburb in Canberra with a strong agenda of innovation and technology. This research did not delve deeply into the nuances of each school’s history and traditions, although some findings about the influence of the school environment on Drama performance assessment are explored in Chapter 7 which discusses school culture. For the purpose of exploring the impact of the school’s agenda on Drama performance assessment, this research notes that a school’s focus and the background of the student body influence the type of art they choose to display and the manner in which that art is presented.

The school’s agenda is also layered within the state and territory’s agenda which is both artistic and operational. It is also political. The artistic nature of the state and territory’s agenda specifies the styles of drama that students are able study as part of their senior secondary Drama course. In NSW, this includes the explicit specification of set texts and a list of theatrical styles from which the teacher will choose options for the class to study.

The teacher-curator’s own agenda reflects their personal preferences in Drama and the drama learning that they would like the student-artists to experience. Glenda’s Shakespearian assessment task illustrates the many agendas that may become significant in the teacher-curator’s approach.
Glenda: Firstly, I wanted them to understand language, how it evolves and how it’s spoken out loud, so then they can understand their own language and what it means in their life. Plays in general to have a really good knowledge of how language is used, and how it changes over the periods of time and that’s something the Drama can bring their lives … but more importantly, in acting we’ve studied human nature, how some people can be driven to do the things they did in Shakespearean times and could it possibly happen again today. Also, I think by studying styles from the past you get an appreciation of other people, and other cultures and sub cultures within our society, and hopefully you know, you gain a better understanding of people. And I think probably you know that’s a pretty sort of global issue once again, like the working with people and communicating with people and, working in teams and all those sorts of things.

Glenda’s agenda includes understanding the evolution of language, appropriate vocal delivery in the genre, the longevity of language and its relationship to human nature. She wants her students to understand the human experience, which includes different perspectives on culture, relationships and social issues. These agendas are addressed through the task, firstly in the content being studied, but also in the collaborative way the student-artists are being asked to work.

The teacher-curator’s agenda is also reflected in the task instructions created by the teacher-curators for the purpose of explaining the task to students. The next section extends the metaphor to describe the task description as an artistic brief.

5.2.2 Creating the brief

The image of the teacher-curator is enriched by extending the metaphor to the task instructions and assessment environment. In the professional arts context, the brief is created by the curator (or artistic board of directors) to succinctly explain the aims, scope and boundaries of the project to the artist. It is the role of the curator or artistic board to create a brief that is easy to read and addresses questions likely to be raised by the artist (Arts SA, 1993). To this, the artist responds accordingly in order to have their work exhibited.

Therefore, in the Senior Drama classroom, assessment is like commissioned art where a brief is created by the teacher-curator, manifesting as the assessment task or the task sheet as teacher participants refer to in their interviews. When designing the
brief, the teacher-curator makes a number of decisions about task specifications, several of which are required to conform to the specifications set by authorities governing the assessment experience, for example, the school, state/territory board authority and Drama syllabus. Adhering to curriculum and institutional specifications is an essential component of the teacher-curator’s role. But this can create tension when reconciling these specifications with artistic aims. Renowned French art critic and cultural philosopher, Pierre Restany states, ‘The true art of a curator is an art of compromise’ (in Lassalle, 1993, p. 214). Russian curator, Viktor Misiano (2003) elaborates, stating that curators try to satisfy the requests of politicians, sponsors, managers, artists, professionals and large audiences. While not all of these agents are relevant in a school setting, the teacher-curator inevitably tries to amalgamate their agenda with the agents at play in the one brief. In the context of this thesis, the term agents is used to describe the stakeholders represented by the teacher-curator when crafting assessment. These include the school, relevant state or territory board of education and the syllabus which has been developed as a result of cumulative understandings of drama education and its purpose in our society. Each of these organisations has its own agenda.

When designing the brief, the teacher-curator makes decisions with regard to artistic content and working parameters, such as time limits and number of student-artists working on the project. Teacher-curators are expected to be specific about their expectations while leaving scope for the student-artists to apply their creativity. The brief should set up shared understandings for the artist and curator while establishing the curator’s expectations in a way that can spark ideas and support further discussion (Department of Arts, Sport & Tourism, 2011).

*John*: I see the task sheet as the beginning, it doesn’t tell them what to do, it points them in the direction of what to consider. It should start their thinking. It’s really important that you don’t set a simple competency task, saying, do this, do that. They need to be able to give you a range of responses and sometimes that won’t be what you asked for.

*Megan*: It’s impossible for me to quantify, like a checklist, exactly what I’m looking for. I want to give them a frame. They have to paint in it.
In creating the brief, the teacher-curators appear to form relationships between their artistic expectations and what they perceive the students to be capable of producing. Their expectations are quantified onto the assessment criteria that accompany the artistic brief, and this is where one of the tensions of the artistic process appears. The brief reflects the artistic and educational agenda of the teacher-curator. Concurrently, the accompanying assessment criteria reflect the agenda of the agents that require the artistic product to be quantifiable for the purposes of assessment, in part through the eyes of the teacher-curator. That said, there are common elements between the artists’ brief and assessment criteria. Both contain artistic aims and both emphasise the need for originality and innovation to be present in the student-artists’ responses. However, the language used in the assessment criteria is more technically descriptive, using specific terms that describe the relevant skills and understandings being addressed. By comparison, the artist’s brief is more of a general statement of the teacher-curator’s agenda. Some teacher-curators are aware that there is tension when different styles of language are used in the artistic brief and the assessment criteria. Therefore, they emphasise the need for the language of criteria to be accessible to their students.

Christine: We use Board of Studies documents to guide us, but I need to make sure that it’s written in plain English. So that another teacher or any student could understand it.

Jane: When I first started teaching I used to use a lot of jargon words that the students didn’t understand. I’ve stopped that now and am trying to use all the terms I’ve used in my teaching over the unit.

The teacher-curator generally uses language which student-artists are familiar with in the hope of allowing them to access their own creative interpretations and to arrive at an understanding of the brief. Monk (in Bank, 2008) argues that curation requires the curator to respond to the artist’s proposal. However, in this research, the curation is dominated by the teacher-curator, or to use a pedagogic term, is teacher-directed (Estes, 2004). However, some elements of the artistic brief are crafted in response to the student-artists’ propositions, as illustrated in the following data excerpts:
Christine: Sometimes you find they are showing particular ability in one aspect of the topic or text and you want them to explore that further.

Glenda: When I write it, I need to take into account what they’ve learned, how long they have to work on the task, is it group, individual or what, and how much help I’ll give them. I also need to give them a guideline about time. But overall, it has to be something they can create, and they can find familiarity with. It needs to be relevant to their learning otherwise it’s pointless.

5.2.3 Student-artist’s response

The work of the student-artist is highly contextual as it is made in response to the teacher-curator’s brief and several tensions emerge in this process. There are questions about the role of creativity within the confines of the brief, and the level originality and innovation that is acceptable within the brief’s boundaries. The treatment of divergent responses also has bearing on the assessment process. This section investigates the extent to which the teacher-curator leads the artistic process and guides the student-artist’s performance response.

Greenway (2003) suggests that the relationship between curator and artist should be one of mutual respect, support and even adventure. It is in this spirit that the creation of drama performances takes place. The student-artists in this study appear to display excitement when describing their drama pieces and the journey they took to develop them. Excitement becomes evident in their tone of voice, which is animated and lively when discussing the development of their performances. Many become willing to speak at length about small details and flashpoints in the artistic journey that helped to shape their final performance. Many of the student-artists also make comments about ‘wanting to do well’. Student-artists aim to facilitate their own growth as drama practitioners while also aiming to be successful in responding to the teacher-curator’s artistic brief. Definitions of success vary from student to student, and some of the possible outcomes are discussed in the interview excerpts in this section.

The student-artists’ desire to perform well intersects with their enthusiasm for wanting to develop and present their own dramatic creations in front of a live audience. These aims are strongly connected or, in some cases, interchangeable.
Some student-artists have an understanding that a strong response to the artistic brief results in a product that they are proud of.

S6C: For me, before I’ve even performed, I have a good idea of how I’ve done. I can sort of feel if I’ve learned something new or am going to show something that’s really different and awesome. And if the prep has gone well, then I’ll go well. On the other hand, like if we hated the piece, or were fighting all the way through we’re obviously going to fail.

This student can be seen to be using her own artistic intuition to gauge the quality of her response to the brief. She has not made reference to using the assessment criteria to assist with that judgment, nor did any other student-artists when discussing their response. The culture of assessment appears to be one where the student-artists rely on their understandings of drama performance rather than the technical and quantifiable list of skills provided by the teacher-curatorial. In this respect, this student is using her own interpretation of the brief when considering the quality of her response.

However, there are also several instances where student-artists express uncertainty about the quality of their response to the brief. Some student-artists’ comments suggest that they find it difficult to anticipate the response of the teacher-curatorial despite being satisfied with their own performance.

S3G: The thing is, you think you’ve done ok, and but then you get your result back and it’s crap. So, you really don’t know how you did until you get your mark back, then you learned what you did wrong. Or what you need to improve, and sometimes it’s stuff that wasn’t written on the assignment sheet.

This student-artist’s perspective suggests there may be a disconnection between her understanding of drama performance and the teacher-curatorial’s agenda. Most students say they clearly understand the task requirements, suggesting that this is not an issue with the clarity of the task. The disconnection is mentioned again by Tania (her teacher) who discusses the reasons why different understandings exist.

Tania: When I’m marking I have to remember they’re still in Year 11 and it’s still their third term … ever. Of Drama that is. At first students want to be told
Tania’s comment makes reference to the artistic brief as a springboard for creative development. She also reflects on the freedom that student-artists are allowed in responding to the brief. Tania understands that students mature in their skills as student-artists over time. She gives several examples where students, at the beginning of their Drama studies, look to fulfil the requirements of her brief in a competency-task style, but over time, develop the ability to see the artistic brief as a springboard for their own creativity. She tells stories that describe the way her student-artists gain the confidence to present divergent responses by the end of Year 12.

As a reminder, Tania’s school does not offer Drama as a subject prior to Year 11, and this is a factor affecting the student-artist’s interpretation of the artistic brief. My autoethnography and student comments from schools other than School Three make reference to drama experiences prior to the senior secondary years. Student-artists draw on their years of drama learning to create their performance response even though they are responding to a particular assessment task.

Other factors that contribute to student-artists’ understandings of Drama performance assessment include experiences in other subjects, co-curricular engagements and experiences of arts in their personal lives, including experiences of being an audience member. Their ideas of how to best respond to the brief have been constructed from their personal agenda (Jackson, 2011), which includes prior learning inside and outside of the drama classroom. Student-artists do not draw on all of this previous experience all at once, for example, some students mention that they experience different performance expectations in community theatre than in their drama classroom. The student-artists self-selects the understandings they feel are relevant in the development of their performative response.
The way that students develop their understandings of how to respond to the performance task is of interest to this research. In constructivist literature, there are several factors that influence student development of understandings. Social constructivist theorists consider the background and culture of the learner (Chopra, Thapliyal & Bisht, 2012; Dlodlo, Tolmay & Mvelase, 2012; Wertsch 1997), active involvement with the learning process (Glaserfeld, 1989; Kala, Isaramalaia & Pothongb, 2010), confidence and motivation of the learner (Dlodlo, Tolmay & Mvelase; Prawat & Floden, 1994), role of the facilitator (Gamoran, Secada & Marrett, 1998; Hung, Lim & Jamaludin, 2011) and the learning environment (Di Vesta, 1987; Powell & Kalina, 2009) to be critical in affecting the way understandings are constructed. In interviews, student-artists name the following situations and experiences that shape their understandings of Drama performance assessment:

- Experiences in Drama from Years 7-10, however, none of the student comments referred to drama learning experienced prior to this.

- Their own experiences of drama outside of school, for example, in local theatre groups, community musicals or spiritual communities such as church groups.

- Their own experiences of co-curricular drama at their school, for example, school musicals, school theatre nights, participation in drama clubs and theatresports competitions.

- Experiences of being an audience member for professional or community theatre. This may have taken place in their personal lives, on school-organised theatre trips or from visiting artists to the school.

- Experiences of other art forms that access artistic learning, creative processes or performance skills. Examples cited include music assessment, dance performances, debating or public speaking experience, visual art tasks, film and television subjects, oral presentations, project tasks and creative writing.
• Experiences of being an audience member to the arts in wider media, such as television and movies. Specifically, student interview comments cited reality television shows, talent-based television shows (e.g. Australia’s Got Talent, X-Factor and So You Think You Can Dance) and internet media such as YouTube clips as being inspirations for their artistic responses.

• Experiences of being an audience member to their peers’ artistic creations.

This final factor – experiences of being an audience member – is of particular interest in a social constructivist reading of this research. Collaboration is central to learning in a social constructivist tradition (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992; Girvan & Savage, 2010). The student-artists experience collaborative learning while they are an audience to their peers’ performances. As part of the assessment program, the student-artists become audience members to their peers’ drama. In this coexistence as an artist and audience member, they experience a range of interpretations of the curator’s brief and view the performance responses of their peers. Student-artists are able to move seamlessly between being audience members and performers as these roles are complementary to each other. Student-artists are also co-learners in the performance space as they learn about drama skills and stagecraft while watching their peers perform. In my ethnographic journal, I observe students giving each other feedback at the conclusion of the performance, either formally in a structured question and answer session or informally through praise, questions or comments. The following is an extract from my ethnographic journal, written in storied format, where informal peer-to-peer feedback has been observed.

At the conclusion of the performance, after the applause has died down, the students race around the performance space, clearing their props and sets. The next performing group has already hastily, but not rudely, entered the performance space to being setting the space for their own performance. As this is happening, both groups interact, with the previous performers receiving feedback from the other group. I hear them offer praise, offering comments such as “that was great…”. When the group rejoins the audience, more peer-to-peer feedback is offered, this time with some deeper observations and also some questions. Members of the audience offer praise but also add “…that was so funny when you…”
“…your character was great….”
“….how did you come up with that idea?….”
“….why did you decide to make that character evil?….”

I’m interested to see the depth of interaction that takes place in the few minutes between each performance. The performers respond well, thanking their peers for the praise but also explaining their dramatic choices.

The journal extract demonstrates that students engage in collaborative learning experiences whilst they perform and while being an audience to their peers’ performance. The artist and audience are equally involved in the learning experience while experiencing each other’s learning (Holt & Willard-Holt, 2000). The range of interpretations on the art create a multi-dimensional interplay between student-artists and the audience as the class is able to expand their understandings of the brief based on each other’s interpretations. The student-artists and audience members compare their artistic interpretations with each other to arrive at a new, socially tested (Kukla, 2000) understanding of the many ways one can respond to the brief.

The following student interview comment illustrates the interplay that can occur between the student-artist and audience member:

S5D: Sometimes it’s like … well you’re a bit in the dark when you’re working with your group. You’re like, I think I’m getting this right, and the teacher seems happy. But then you see everyone else’s and you’re like ‘holy shit, theirs is totally different!’ But that’s ok because they did it their way and you did it yours, you know? You can both be right. Or it’s like, there’s no right, it’s just the way you chose to do it … But they might show you something really awesome and you can take that on for next time. Like once, I saw my King Lear character played by a friend, and it really opened my eyes to another way of playing that scene. I asked them heaps of questions about it and I didn’t end up playing it that way, but I totally changed my version of it and sort of incorporated what they saw … but in my own way.

A short time later in the interview, this student adds:

S5D: Oh, by the way. I hope you don’t think I copied that character. I totally didn’t. Well, it’s not copying to me.
Some tension can be seen in the way the collaborative learning experience is reconciled with the student’s understanding of assessment. By adding the comment about copying, the student-artist is aiming to reaffirm the integrity of their assessment response to me in my role as interviewer. In this context, the word integrity is associated with originality. Originality clauses usually accompany assessed work in senior secondary school, for example, students sign statements that the work is their own before submission. This student has constructed an understanding of the assessment environment where assessable work, including creative work, should be completed independently of other student-artists lest copying should occur. Students are wary that collaborative approaches may be viewed as plagiarism even though they clearly believe they are responding with integrity. Collaborative learning is persistent in Drama, but does not always easily blend with traditional competitive approaches to assessment that students experience when engaging in other styles of assessment. Tertiary entrance results in Australia are, by nature, competitive and the place of collaborative learning within this paradigm needs to be considered. Similarly, this paradigm has an impact on how student-artists construct their understandings of how to respond to the curator’s brief. The art that is produced is influenced by the system and the purpose for which the art is made.

5.3 Teacher as supervisor

While student-artists respond to the brief, a shift in role occurs for the teacher-curator. Bird (2006) describes this phase as developmental in nature where the teacher works as a collaborator with the students. The teacher continues in the role of the curator when monitoring the student-artists’ responses and the artistic brief. However, they also provide guidance to student-artists who may seek clarification, present ideas, seek feedback or require help with a particular problem. The teacher-curator guides the student-artist through the artistic process in a way that allows the student to develop his/her interpretative response to the brief. There are also several instances where the teacher-curator learns from the student-artist.
Megan: What’s amazing is that you can ask for one thing but the students return a totally different perspective. And you incorporate that into your own knowledge of what is possible for these kids to produce. You can see something totally new in the topic that you never saw before. I’m learning all the time from their perspectives.

Megan’s comment reflects a socially constructivist viewpoint (Hung, Lim & Jamaludin, 2011; McMahon, 1997; Savery, 1994) in which the learner and facilitator engages in a dynamic interaction that they are able to learn from each other (Holt & Willard-Holt, 2000). The two parties are developing an awareness of each other’s agenda and values whilst the art is being created by the student-artist. Once again, self-constructed understandings are central to the interaction as the teacher-curator and student-artists compare their understandings which in turn will create new understandings (Kukla, 2000).

At this point in the creative process, the relationship between teacher and student is similar to that of a student and supervisor of a research thesis or project. The characteristics of the supervisor/student relationship have been likened to a professional/client relationship (Mackinnon, 2004) where distinct roles are respected and mutual responsibilities are acknowledged. At this time, teachers and students:

- Negotiate (between the teacher-curator and student-artist).
- Collaborate (between the teacher-curator and student-artist and between student-artists).
- Explain (student-artists explains their ideas and work to the teacher-curator).
- Discover (the teacher-curator discovers student-artists’ ideas and motivations).
- Understand (the teacher-curator’s understands students’ ideas and student-artists understand the teacher-curator’s feedback).
- Critique (the teacher-curators provides student-artists with dialogue in an effort to further develop their art).
Teacher-curators aim to show respect for the student-artists’ ideas. In interviews, several make reference to student-artists’ ideas being the starting point for the artistic experience rather than being a teacher-directed or paternal exercise, which has the power to disempower or marginalise the student-artist (James & Baldwin, 1999). Similarly, numerous student comments suggest they respect the teacher-curator’s perspectives. Student-artists often reflect positively on the teacher-curator’s ability to expand on their ideas whilst not deviating from their original intentions.

S2A: It can be really scary asking for feedback, but I have to say that I really admire Miss’ ability to take what we have and find ways to make it better. I mean, we still have to go back and do the work, and I feel like they’re still our ideas, but she makes suggestions that make it better, rather than saying ‘chuck it all out and do it like this’.

The teacher-curator provides guidance that aims to allow student-artists to maintain some authority in the artistic process. Teacher-curators continue to enact their agenda while collaborating and cooperatively learning with student-artists. There are times when teachers and students mention interactions that go beyond the scope of a curator guiding the brief or the artist responding directly to the brief. Elements of mentoring relationships also become evident. The teachers mention that students ask for guidance that is wider than the brief, relating the task to vocational aspirations (such as future theatre auditions), or relating the emotions they are portraying to events they have experienced in their life.

The prominence of mentoring practices in a social constructivist learning environment has been discussed in literature (Archee & Duin, 1995). However, the mentor-novice construct implies more of a relationship of equality than is suggested in this research. Additionally, mentoring relationships are generally thought of as something each party enters into willingly, which is not always the case in the secondary classroom. In interviews, the teachers reflect on the wide range of students that they guide in the performance assessment process, adding that these are not always their ideal students. Christine’s interview comment provides evidence to support this position:
Christine: The fact is in Drama you get what you get. It’s not like Advanced Maths where you can say, ‘your results aren’t good enough’, so it makes no difference what my preferred or ideal student is like. I have to teach them all, sometimes dragging them kicking and screaming towards getting a decent performance out of them on stage. With some kids, when they’re developing their drama, a large part of my role is kicking their butts and saying ‘you better get yourself together’.

The metaphor of the teacher as supervisor illustrates the teachers’ role when mentoring and guiding the creative process. Teacher-supervisors aim to help students set goals and then support them by guiding them towards relevant resources or assisting with the organisation of self and task (Styles & Radloff, 2001). Fraser and Matthews (1999) and Pearson and Kayrooz (2005) also highlight the many ways a research supervisor can support students, including adapting their own communication and guidance techniques to suit the relevant student’s learning needs. Vilkinas (2008) also found the research supervisor enjoying the development and growing independence of the student. This is mirrored in the Drama assessment environment. Towards the end of their Senior Drama experience, student-artists look for opportunities to demonstrate greater independence from their teacher-supervisor, often working with minimal guidance.

S6E: In the beginning I reckon I tried to get the right answer. I was actually a bit scared to get it wrong. Now, I’ve learned right and wrong sort of don’t work for Drama and if they do, I don’t care. I just want to show my stuff on stage. I think you ask for less advice in Year 12 than you do in Year 11. Maybe you become more know-it-all. Or maybe you’re just over it. But I just, you know, showing my stuff the way I want to now.

Teacher-supervisors also want to see their students excel. In interviews, they discuss their role in helping students achieve their artistic potential. Jane’s interview comment illustrates the way the supervisor role is focused around creating favourable outcomes:

Jane: Well, what you want is for your students to do the best they can do at the time of assessment. You see their potential over and over in class and what you want is to see that brilliance in that finished product. So as a teacher, you know their strengths, you know what they’re capable of. You have a unique view of that student so you steer them towards doing well so that on

5.4 Teacher as critic


IN THE FIELD OF HIGHER RESEARCH DEGREES, SUPERVISORS PROVIDE GUIDANCE THAT INCLUDES ASSISTING WITH PREPAREDNESS FOR THE ASSESSOR’S FEEDBACK, BUT THEY DO NOT PROVIDE THE
final assessment; external examination being one of the hallmarks of quality
assurance. Similarly, in the professional arts context, the role of the curator is often
separate from the critic. Australian curator Daniel Thomas (1999) believes that the
curator needs to be impartial and separate from the critiquing process, stating that ‘it
would be unthinkable for an art-museum curator to be an art critic. It would be seen
as an impossible conflict of interest’ (p. 4). The conflict of interest that Thomas is
referring to mirrors this research’s questions over the extent to which student-artist
needs to respond in accordance with the teacher-curators agenda in order to gain
favourable results. Some student-artists are aware of this issue, and their comments
prompted investigation of the ways in which their artistic responses may be
influenced by their awareness.

S2B: I reckon that sometimes it’s about what she likes. I mean, not what she
likes, but … ah … ok. Here’s an example. From our experience, Miss loves it
when you sort of leave your comfort zone and commit fully to a character, like
go way out there with it, even if you get it wrong she’ll still like that you tried.
So, I try to do that when I’m performing. I also know she doesn’t like dark,
emotional and repetitive stuff, like crying and like when it’s emotionally on
one level, so I try to stay away from that. I think once you know what your
teacher likes, you lock on to that because that sort of gives you an advantage.

This student suggests that having an understanding of the teacher’s agenda allows the
students to produce a performance that will advantage them in the assessment
process. The student can be seen to be anticipating the teacher’s agenda to attain
favourable results for the assessment task. The student’s choice to lock onto the
teachers’ agenda also suggests that they are creatively manipulating their art in order
for it to be looked upon favourably in the assessment environment. The art that has
been produced has been affected by the assessment process and the teachers’ agenda.

A tension arises in the case of external assessment in NSW where the performance
art is critiqued by examiners unknown to the student-artist. The blind assessment
process results in a lack of disclosure of the critic’s agenda. In interviews at School
Four in NSW, student-artists speculate as to what the preferences of their assessor
might be. Some suggest they have reservations about working with an unknown
critic and therefore amend their art in the hope that it is palatable to a wide range of preferences.

_S4A: I really hope the markers laugh, because it’s supposed to be funny. If they don’t get it, it’s all a bit of a wasted effort. So we tried to keep out jokes that are just relevant to people our age and stuff…We have no idea what they like, so I hope at least one of them likes comedy. We’ve got lots of different aspects of drama in our piece, so hopefully there’ll be something good in there._

This student’s reference to something good suggests that they are also considering the quality of their performance response when anticipating the critic’s agenda. The student-artist understands that there are attributes of good drama that manifests in an external assessor’s agenda. They craft their performance response in anticipation of what those attributes might be.

### 5.4.1 Students’ relationship with the curator and critic

Orrell (2005) created a metaphor that describes assessment as a game. He has written widely about the student’s understanding of what he refers to as the ‘rules of the game’. While his research is located in a higher education context, it has relevance to this context as the student-artists describe the process they use, or by Orrell’s (2005) description, a game they play to meet the expectations of the teacher-curator. Through his lens, student-artists have applied the rules of the game (or tailored their responses) to their artistic process by anticipating the teacher-curator’s agenda. However, this metaphor sits somewhat uncomfortably in a context where the teacher acts supportively. Likening the assessment process to game playing implies that students use underhanded methods to discover a secret code shielded by the teacher until found out. Hidden agendas or secrecy with regard to the assessment process was not evident in this study. As discussed previously, the artistic process involves collaboration and guided elements, making it more akin to a supervised project. When student-artists make inferences about the teacher-curator’s agenda, they are showing maturity in the way they are responding to the artistic brief. Student-artists are developing an awareness of ways in which the outside world will interpret their art and they are adjusting their response to fit the purpose of the brief.
S5B: It’s not about the marks for me. Well, sometimes (pause) … I don’t perform to get good marks. But I don’t perform to get bad marks either, if you know what I mean. So I take what I want to do and say like, ‘how can I make the teacher impressed’ but in a way that still shows my ideas. Just, like … better.

The approach used by the student-artists mirrors the professional arts context. Artists are often advised to engage in research to understand the persuasions of the curator before crafting their response. Scott-Murphy (2004) claims that it is possible to either subvert or find alternative ways of responding to the brief in a way that may prove to be favourable, such as finding common interests between the artist and the curator. She suggests finding out about the orientation of the selection panel, to make sure they are open to the artist’s preferred style.

Scott-Murphy (2004) also points to numerous examples where artists have been successful in gaining tender or selection when working outside the scope of the original brief. In this research, working outside the brief is referred to as a divergent response. As discussed in Chapter 2, artistic realms divergent responses are permitted and, in some cases, encouraged. This research finds that originality and innovation need not be diminished in an artistic assessment environment which is high-stakes in nature. Students in this study overwhelmingly believe that they need to take risks and show a high degree of artistic inventiveness to achieve in Drama performance assessment. Some student-artists find divergence to be a necessary part of their Drama performance assessment experience and suggest that it is often valued in the assessment process.

S6C: Our whole piece was about pushing boundaries. I mean, it’s experimental theatre, what do you expect? So, if you didn’t, like, push boundaries, you won’t do well. We were told to get out of our comfort zones, and try new things and take the audience out of the comfort zone. There’s a possibility you’ll totally buggle it up. But, I think you might still get points for trying.

The reference to points for trying reflects this student’s particular task, which includes criteria dealing with the student-artist’s ideas and intentions. A student can be rewarded in this criterion for taking a risk even if the theatrical realisation is not
effective. In the words of the student, the assessment criterion most certainly allows points for trying. However, one student-artist reflects on the need to meet the brief, and argues that this may involve minimising their divergence.

_SIH:_ This one year, we were being stupid and we did a scene where all the guys played girls and the girls played guys and stuff. It was so dumb, and we got canned for it in the marks. Served us right. But the next time we did realism I wanted to play it straight, like show we could do it right. I wanted to show I had the basics right, so I didn’t get all creative with it. Um, basically, I didn’t want to experiment even if I was being serious about it.

This is an interesting perspective, particularly as the student makes reference to getting it right. This quote reminded me of other comments made by a teacher-curator which referred to the student-artist’s creativity and divergence varying depending on the task.

_Jane:_ What I find interesting is how they approach this stuff depending on the content or text. I find that heritage plays, like the 17th Doll, they want to do it ‘properly’, nearly like they’re asking me how it should be done. But the self-devised and more modern plays, they’re more keen to experiment, show something new. They’re not so confined by getting it ‘right’, whatever that means. I’d like to see them apply their creativity more evenly.

_Megan:_ Before when I talked about giving them the frame so they can paint in it? Well, some go completely outside the lines. That’s ok….sometimes. If they execute it well.

Some student-artists take creative risks while others prefer to minimise divergence. Their reasons for taking risks can be diverse, reflecting the creative aspirations that students have when they study drama. The Drama learning environment creates a space that facilitates their involvement in ‘doing’ (Lovesy, 2002, p 85). It seems Drama students are motivated towards creativity regardless of how those responses may be rewarded in grades or marks. Student-artists achieve satisfaction by experiencing creative accomplishment.
5.4.2 Critique of performances

Student-artists have their performances critiqued in a number of ways. They are critiqued formally and informally by their peers, and receive critique in the form of the audience’s response. They also receive critique from the teacher-critic which is accompanied by quantified grades or marks. Finally, they engage in self-critique when they undertake structured or unstructured reflection. Structured reflection was observed at School Six (the ACT) when the teacher facilitated a whole class critique of each performance. It was also reported at School Four, when the teacher said they show the video of all performances to students, who must write their own critique of their own and others’ performances, based on the HSC Drama assessment criteria. Unstructured reflection took place at all school sites in a variety of ways, for example students were observed talking to their peers about the intention of their piece at the conclusion of their performance, or they asked the teacher for informal comments about the length of performance, choice of material or performance skills.

Critique is a necessary part of the artistic process. However, in the professional arts context, critique is often limited to commentary given without regard to the artists’ sentiments or disposition; this can be particularly scathing. At other times, it contains accolades of praise. The purpose of professional arts critique is to engage in a dialogue with the wider community about the perceived value of a contribution to the field. The critique is not created solely for the artist to absorb at an individual level. Rather, it informs arts consumers and other professional critics about developments in the field.

As the researcher, I am privy to some of the written comments on student performances produced by teacher-critics as part of the assessment process. The comments show that teacher-critics remain active supervisors when providing their critique. Their comments are informative, explaining the reasons for each of the criteria or standard of achievement being applied to the student’s performance. They provide a justification for the final application of marks or grades to a performance. Comments also contain a summary of how student-artists can improve their future performances. The written statements move beyond commentary to serve as a guide
for the student’s artistic development. Several comments contain affirmations and statements of encouragement, such as ‘well done’ or ‘it’s nice to see you trying to …’ The supportive tone is universal. These affirmations appear to encourage the student to continue their growth in Drama, while satisfying their need to be affirmed. Section 6.2.2. discusses students’ need to feel secure and supported in the Drama learning environment, as the public nature of drama performance opens them to feeling vulnerable while being assessed.

The comments are individualised, with teacher-critics writing in the first person to the student, akin to a dialogue between teacher and student. Although teacher-curators become critics, their critiques intersect with their responsibilities as supervisors. They never leave the supervision role, but are required to present and defend their judgments as critics as part of the performance assessment process.

5.5 Reflective interpretations and limitations of the metaphor

Drama performance assessment requires the teacher and student to accept roles that are reflected in the professional arts context. All teacher participants reveal that they had previous or current experience in theatre outside of a school context in a range of jobs, including acting, directing, producing and set design. Theatre experience contributes to the teacher’s familiarity with the roles involved in curating a theatrical exhibition. This on-the-job theatre training is a contributing success factor to transitioning to the role of the teacher-curator when planning and administering Drama assessment. They blend the teacher-theatre capabilities with the school agenda, as well as with state or territory governing bodies to create an artistic assessment brief that engages a refined response from senior Drama students.

Similarly, Drama students read teacher-curator signals that expect them to become student-artists required to imagine, plan, create and perform their own art within the classroom. Students’ understandings of the range of ways an assessment brief can be approached have been formed through a culmination of experiences inside and outside the Drama curriculum. Student-artists blend their understandings of performance conventions taught in the Drama classroom with their personal
experiences of drama in the community to produce their performance product for assessment. The result is a highly individualised response that, within a constructivist tradition, reflects the understandings they have constructed through their experiences. Many of the student-artists’ experiences in Drama have been collaborative, therefore, understandings are also shaped by their experiences as collaborators on drama, audience members to drama and performers of drama.

When comparing Drama performance assessment and the professional arts context, there are some differences that cannot be represented through the metaphors explored in Chapter 5. Unlike the professional arts context, student-artists are not expected to be experts or highly accomplished art producers. Rather, the artistic brief aims to appropriately challenge the student-artists while giving them scope to present their understandings of that which is being studied. In the Drama classroom, all students have their art selected for exhibition. Engaging in performance assessment is compulsory, unlike the process undertaken in the professional arts context where only selected works are exhibited. At times, artists are called upon to help craft the theatrical season and artist consultations take place where the views of the artists are allowed to guide the curator’s brief. In this research context, the student-artists have no input into the brief because the teacher-curators have the responsibility of curating a task that fits the requirements of the state or territory Senior Drama syllabus. However, the brief is adjusted from year to year by the teacher-curator, based on their evaluations of its effectiveness. As described in Chapter 4, these evaluations form part of a feedback loop which allows for the modification of tasks according to student-artists’ response to the brief.

Questions of objectivity and subjectivity are a prominent feature in the critique of artistic works discussed in both educational and professional contexts. As has been discussed in the literature, there is a valid place for both and the intersection of the two can be used to create informed judgments about a student’s performance (Ross et al., 1993). Informed judgments are also a product of the teacher-curator’s agenda of which the student-artists develop some awareness. This awareness is arrived at through a process of collaboration and guidance between teacher-curator and student-artist. The teacher-curator takes on a role similar to a research supervisor;
they collaborate with and guide the student-artist towards a final presentation, which invites commentary from their audience and their assessor. The student-artist often responds to the artistic brief and the teacher-curator’s agenda concurrently in an effort to produce what they consider to be an appropriate response. This process need not stifle creativity or repel divergent responses. The assessment criteria can be tailored to accommodate responses that the teacher-curator did not anticipate, thereby accommodating creative and divergent thinking.

The teacher-curator shifts role to become the teacher-critic at the time when students perform their product for assessment. It is common in Drama for the teacher to provide guidance and then assess the student’s work which has been created under that guidance. This process has several similarities with project work in other senior secondary subjects where the teacher acts as both the supervisor and critic. Similar assessment tasks named specifically by students are as follows:

- Creative writing tasks
- Society and culture personal interest projects (PIP)
- Design technology projects
- Visual art artworks
- Video dramas in film and television
- Music compositions
- Dance choreography
- Programming design in ICT

There will always be some degree of tension as the teacher is concurrently required to be the curator, supervisor and critic. The following excerpt from a student interview illustrates this tension:

_S3C: So, like sometimes, when I get my marks back, I’ll see these comments that are like, ‘you should have done it like this’._

_S3D: I know, and I’m like, ‘you never told me to do it that way’. You know, she saw it in rehearsal and stuff. And we asked her what she thought._
S3E: Or if we, like, try something that she said to do and it doesn’t work you’ll lose marks.

S3C: Totally. It’s so unfair.

The teacher is, by nature of the artistic process, in a precarious position here. There is a thin line between a student’s desire to do well in senior secondary schooling where the stakes are high and Harris’ (2008) caution to not allow students to merely produce ideas under guidance. This is a tension that can never be divorced from the Drama assessment process, as subjective judgements have a legitimate place in Drama assessment. But rather than reacting defensively, one teacher demonstrates that embracing the tension may be the key to diffusing it.

John: Your advice can come back to haunt you. Some students make sure of that. I think it’s great because they’re actually engaging in this internal dialogue, inside their head, about what I’ve asked them to do … And eventually they see that I don’t want to see my ideas on stage. I want theirs. If they can’t make my suggestion work on stage, they should let it go. Or they should be challenging me and saying, ‘that didn’t work for me, I’ll be more successful if I present it this way’. It’s a learning process and they get better at it as they go through the course.

To return to Eisner’s (1998) quote, the problems in life are like the problems in the arts. One of the joys of Drama is its subtlety, ambiguity and its lack of definitive answers. Drama often raises more questions than it answers, which in turn teaches Drama students to constantly philosophise, theorise and question their understandings. Similarly, issues raised in Chapter 5 suggest that various tensions in the artistic process will continue in the field of Drama. However, the challenges mentioned are not insurmountable. The tensions add to the richness of the assessment experience, making Drama performance assessment intricate and able to be discussed in detail with students. Tension is widely considered to be one of the elements of drama, and like conflict, is considered necessary in the creation of an effective drama performance. The tensions discussed in Chapter 5 require deep thinking on behalf of teacher-curators and student-artists so that rich discussions can occur where both parties share their perceptions in the hope of reaching shared understandings. From a
research perspective, the development of metaphors for the roles in Drama performance assessment provides a unique lens to help facilitate deep thinking.

Chapter 5 has used metaphors to discuss the roles within Drama performance assessment. Chapter 6 will investigate students’ and teachers’ experiences of Drama assessment. It will establish findings about the emotional journey of performing, presence of the audience, and teachers’ experience of assessing in their state or territory.
CHAPTER 6: EXPERIENCES OF PERFORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

6.1 Introduction

Drama performance assessment involves unique experiences facilitated by a teacher who curates an artistic experience that is enacted by students who produce performance art. Through the metaphors conceptualised in Chapter 5, key themes emerge that lead me to engage with individual student encounters of performance assessment; that being the focus of Chapter 6. These key themes encompass the emotional experiences of assessment, students’ preparation for assessment, presence and reaction of the audience, and assessment evidence that was gathered from the assessment experience. These themes are also relevant to teacher assessment practices within their jurisdictional assessment environment; a topic that is also discussed in Chapter 6.

Darling-Hammond and Snyder (2000) argue that the understanding of culture and experience helps teachers to ‘make good judgements about how to deal with the specific events in the classroom’ (p. 525). Chapter 6 investigates student experiences of the specific event of Drama performance assessment and how these experiences affect the act of performance by Drama students. A critical understanding of the experience of senior secondary Drama performance assessment contributes to an understanding of how Senior Drama syllabuses are enacted and the cultures at play in each assessment environment. Drama performance, as a specific event, includes actors being observed by an audience for assessment, emotional experience of performing, preparation of performance assessment pieces, and being an audience to drama.

Chapter 6 compares Drama performance assessment with assessment in other subjects and the experiences of teachers who assess performances from the dual perspective of an audience member and assessor. The relationship between assessment artefacts (such as video recordings, assessment criteria and assessor comments) and the experience of performance assessment is also discussed.
6.2 Students’ experiences of assessment

Three key themes of the student’s experience of Drama performance assessment are:

1. **Emotional experiences:** Students experience a range of emotional responses during the process of Drama performance assessment. These emotions have an impact on the art that is produced, subsequently affecting the academic results that students achieve. Teachers also engage in a range of emotions when assessing, which also affects the assessment procedure. Performance assessment experiences develop students’ understandings about reactions and interactions in emotionally heightened real and fictional situations.

2. **Comparisons with other assessment experiences:** Students make comparisons between assessment instruments used in their senior secondary studies. While there are some similarities with assessment tasks in other subjects, the Drama assessment environment presents some unique challenges for students and teachers to negotiate in order to produce items that can be assessed for students’ senior secondary results.

3. **Experience of preparing and viewing performances:** The presence of an audience is imperative in Drama performance assessment. Students prepare their assessable work to be experienced by an audience and an assessor, and this work impacts on the performative art that is produced.

6.2.1 Emotional experiences

To begin painting a picture of the emotional experience of Drama performance assessment, a vignette has been written using my ethnographic observations and personal recollections of the fieldwork. This is an extension of the storied pieces that describe each school site in Chapter 3. Like the pieces in Chapter 3, the vignette aims to convey the impact of student emotions at play in each setting. The dialogue is interspersed with storied descriptions to illustrate the emotional landscape of the assessment environment at the time of performance. The vignette is not situated in any one of the participant schools; rather, it aims to provide a holistic sense of the
emotional possibilities present in the Drama assessment process. As in Chapter 3, my own thoughts and feelings are salient in my role as the facilitator of constructivist research in which researchers constructs their understandings through their experiences.

The following is a vignette of student emotions prior to performance assessment:

I enter the room that is buzzing with laughter and chatter. Students dart from corners of the room to predetermined destinations, all moving with a purpose. I take a seat that was designated by the classroom teacher.

Student 1: Awww …

A student approaches me.

Student 2: I’m really sorry, we were going to use that chair. Can you take another one?

Student 3: (calls) Are we really performing today? Because Miss, I’ve got a note. I can’t do mine today because …

I busy myself into setting up my video camera. From my own experience I know that assessment rules that involve extensions can be tricky. I have no business knowing the reasons this student can’t perform, so I switch off for a moment. The teacher disappears out the door to conference with that student.

Student 4: O.M.G.

It’s said to me, exactly like that. In lettered format. O. M. G. They say it again.

Student 4: O.M.G. Are you videoing us?

Me: Not if you don’t want me to.

Student 4: Nah, it’s cool. Just upload it to YouTube so I can give it five stars.

They laugh then walk off before I can explain that I won’t be uploading it to any site. I return to my camera while the room continues to buzz around me. There are loud calls of questions from around the room that no one seems to answer.

Student 5: Uh, where do I put my logbook, Miss?

Student 6: Do you guys need that block? Well, we’re using it after you.

Student 7: Charlie, did you take my script?

Student 8: EVERYONE STOP! I can’t find my black top.

Student 9: Miss, which class is watching us?
This question does have an answer returned by the teacher.

Teacher: Year 8.

Her response is met by a chorus of groans.

Student 10: But miss, ours has swearing.

Student 11: They totally won’t get ours.

But they don’t dwell on the issue. Within ten seconds they have all darted away to deal with their next crisis. Some sit in groups with scripts in hand; others are sitting casually draped over tables or the floor. One of the groups is huddled in a corner with one boy, who looks to be leading them, talking earnestly. He suddenly turns to the teacher.

Student 12: Miss, we honestly don’t know how ours ends. Do we have to do this today?

The teacher moves over to talk to the group. They are quiet with anxious faces. In another group the action is not so much anxious, as busy. One girl is colouring in a sign, another is shaking her hands constantly, talking at her group member.

Student 13: I’m a bit freaked out. I really don’t know what I’m doing.

But she has a smile on her face and she starts to make little jumps on the spot. Her friend keeps colouring as a class of younger students have started to file into the room. This does nothing to dampen the nervous excitement around the room. The audience takes their seats on the floor and is told by their own classroom teacher to sit quietly. The Year 8 students chatter softly, but not impolitely, adding to the chaotic din. The teacher looks at her watch and suddenly calls a stream of instructions to various students in the class.

Teacher: Right! We’re starting in two minutes. Who’s outside? Someone tell them to come in. Cameron’s group, are you going first?

Student 14: Yep.

Teacher: Are you ready?

Student 15: Sort of.

Teacher: Two minutes.

Student 16: Ok.

Teacher: I want everyone else to stop what they’re doing and come and sit in the audience. We’re about to start. And logbooks on my desk please.

The room suddenly takes on a sense of order. Books and items of clothing disappear from the stage area, classroom lights are turned off and the theatre lights come alive. This instantly silences the room. The low murmur of the Year 8 students sitting on the floor has stopped; they are now waiting
expectantly. After a final series of instructions from the teacher the first performance is about to start. The room turns to black, and only the soft breathing of the performing students can be heard. The lights go up.

Student 17: Wait! I forgot something. Can we start again?

Another collective groan ensues.

The vignette portrays a mood and atmosphere of a Drama class prior to a Drama performance assessment. Several affective experiences can be seen, including nervousness, elation, excitement, fear, trepidation, anticipation and anxiety. It is acknowledged that a range of affective experiences in the performance context have been explored in the literature (Jacobs, 2000; Johnson & Emunah, 2009; Ostwald, Baron, Byl & Wilson, 1994; Wright, 2000) and the thesis does not engage in psychological analysis of student cognitive or psychosomatic processes whilst performing. However, it is commonly accepted that actors, in particular, novice actors, experience a degree of stress, nervousness or anxiety prior to a performance (Hays, 2009; Kirchner, Bloom & Skutnick-Henley, 2008; Struder, Gomez, Hildebrandt, Arial & Danuser, 2011).

The phrase, nervous energy, is used purposefully in the vignette as it is the temperament most commonly ascribed to the atmosphere observed in Drama classrooms and one that is consistent with the student interview comments. Students used the word nervous quite often to describe how they felt prior to a performance. Other frequently used words that denote an emotional experience include happy, worried, pleased, confused, excited and scared. Words that occur less frequently include anxious (or anxiety), hopeless, confident, relaxed and calm. These emotions can inspire or inhibit the student’s performance, possibly affecting their results. The effect of emotions on the performance assessment process is discussed in the Section 6.2.1.1.

6.2.1.1 Anxiety and elation

Anxiety is mentioned when students describe feelings about their own performance, creative work and the experience of being assessed. The following examples demonstrate this:
Anxiety about students’ own performance

S5D: I was so nervous I thought I was going to be sick. I didn’t know the lines until a week before which is actually not that great. I could falter any time. And before I went on I got this feeling like, well, there was nothing I could do about it. It was really helpless. And then you had to put the character’s journey on top of the emotions. It was a demanding role.

Anxiety about creative work

S6B: Ah, we were really nervous about how the performance was going to be received. Because there was so much audience interaction, the play sort of depended on them getting it, so I was really worried. But I think they did, because it all actually worked perfectly.

Anxiety about being assessed

S2D: The main thing I was worried about was how Miss would like it. I felt like I’d done everything I could, but I’m just nervous because I want to do well. Before I went on I was shaking a bit saying to myself ‘please let this be good’. I put a lot into this one; I’ll be disappointed if it doesn’t pay off.

Aside from anxiety, a wide range of feelings can be seen to be experienced by Drama students in the performance assessment environment. A feeling of excitement often accompanies anxiety in a number of student interviews. As the researcher, I note a tone of elation in several students’ interactions and it would appear that anxiety and excitement have similar visceral qualities. Students mention their excitement at the prospect of performing, as well as a sense of satisfaction once the performance had concluded. It has been well established that actors (and performers in other artistic fields, including singers, dancers and musicians) experience euphoria after what they perceive to be a successful performance (Schechner, 2003). In interviews following performances, some students display a sense of elation, demonstrated by talking at a fast pace, speaking with excited tones, laughing and giggling or smiling throughout the interviews.

These observations are consistent with the writing of Johnson and Emunah (2009) who discuss the potential for actors to experience nervous excitement or elation whilst performing. Conversely, they also point out that performance anxiety can make a performer freeze on stage, alter their behaviour or fail to perform in the manner that they had planned. Sax (2002) argues that perceptions of the self can be
constructed in and through performance, therefore, students’ identities as competent drama performers and self-concepts of being actors are formed as part of their performance assessment activities. Teachers are aware that students are forming self-concepts through performance and also recognise that this can be a turbulent aspect of Drama performance assessment. Some teachers describe the fragility of a student’s ego at the time of performance. Others refer to heightened stress that students experience during the assessment period. However, interviews with teachers did not explore how stress and anxiety is managed or strategies that assist students in understanding or addressing the range of emotions at play. One student reflects on this challenge at length, explaining that the emotional experience of performance is a necessary learning experience in Drama which he would like to see formally addressed rather than having to develop the necessary skills by osmosis.

S5C: When I started Drama I used to get terrible stage fright and I considered not doing it in Years 11 and 12 because of that. But I liked to act so I had to take the good with the bad, I guess. I asked a few people about it, like other friends and the teacher and everyone mostly said that you get over it with time. One teacher said the more you perform the easier it gets. But I actually think there’s more to it than that. I reckon we should sort of do exercises to prepare us for feeling scared and stuff. And afterwards you’re so wired after your performance that you need to come down from it, but you never get told how. Sometimes I wonder how many other people chose not to do Drama because of this.

This student’s concerns correlate with Johnson and Emunah’s (2009) assertion that teachers should address the question of performance anxiety and performance preparedness prior to the performance event (which Johnson and Emunah refer to as opening night). They do not list strategies that can be utilised, but suggest that rehearsing the whole ritual of performance beforehand provides sound preparation. A Students’ understanding of their emotional responses is critical here. If a student is able to understand the emotional experience of performing, they may also move towards a greater understanding of their reactions and interactions in the broader world, thereby better equipping themselves to deal with life’s journey whilst improving their drama performance skills. However, as a researcher, I ponder the extent of preparation that students are given to cope with the anxiety associated with Drama performance assessment and the ways in which such preparation could or
should be incorporated into drama education. Whilst teachers acknowledge the degree of anxiety in the performance assessment process, I observe very few strategies that address it in the assessment environment. One strategy can be seen at School Four (NSW) where I observe the teacher taking significant time to explain and then practice the ritual of the HSC Drama performance assessment with the students. Referring to the HSC performance that was scheduled in two weeks, she said to me:

*Christine:* They’ve got a lot to deal with at that time so we need to prepare for what’s going to happen. They’ll be thinking about so many things. They’re wanting to get a good mark, wanting to entertain the audience and also dealing with their stress and nerves. It’s a big ask.

The data collection process did not observe the development of Drama performances, and it is possible that teachers employ other strategies that address the emotional experience of performing for assessment that were not articulated in this study. A wide range of emotions, including anxiety, can be seen to be experienced by students, but these experiences are not unique to Drama performance assessment. Anxiety, uncertainty, anticipation and relief accompany the assessment experience in all subjects, but the presence of the audience contributes to the heightened emotions experienced by Drama students when performing for the purpose of assessment. The audience’s presence is explored in Section 6.2.1.2.

### 6.2.1.2 The audience factor

The presence and composition of the audience are contributing factors to student preparedness and anxiety. In performances observed for this study, audiences comprise of teachers, students from other classes (including Drama and non-Drama classes), friends of performers, family members, the Drama class itself and assessors, which could include the class teacher or Drama teachers of other classes. Sauter’s (2000) seminal research describes theatre as ‘the communicative intersection between the performer’s actions and the spectator’s reactions’ (p. 53). Radbourne, Johanson, Glow and White (2009) add that the audience experience is an important measure of quality in performance and the presence of an audience is essential to the
Drama performance assessment experience (Freshwater, 2009). This importance is emphasised by three teachers who make judgments on the student’s ‘interaction with the audience’, often listed as one of the assessment criteria for this task.

When students perform in front of an audience, they take on the role of the student-actor who leads their audience on a performative journey. Students are acutely aware of the presence and reactions of their audience. One student says the presence of the audience gives the performance an authentic feel and a more focussed assessment environment.

**S3A:** I always find it really funny when the audience enters, and we start to get nervous. That’s when it becomes a bit real for me, and it’s like, until then we’ve been mucking around with our friends and after they arrived you’re like ‘ok, so this is the real thing’. That’s when you become, like, a real actor.

This student’s reference to becoming a real actor when performing for an external audience suggests that the presence of the audience is a significant factor affecting their assessment experience. In interviews, teachers also make reference to the importance of the audience, emphasising the need for students to make their performances accessible to a wide range of observers who may not be Drama students. In Tania’s interview, she takes time to elaborate on the audience’s role in Drama performance assessment:

**Tania:** When the audience watches it’s like the moment of truth. That audience doesn’t know the task; they might not know the play, know about experimental theatre or whatever. They’re exactly that, an audience. So, by performing to that audience the students learn what it is to be judged by people unfamiliar with your topic. In a way you have to sell it, or the audience has to buy it … and that audience will give them their natural reaction, laughter, tears, distraction, whatever. And they haven’t seen the rehearsal, so the students have to nail it on the day or the work is lost on that audience.

The natural reaction of the audience is a significant theme that emerged in the analysis. During the performance, the audience is engaging in their own emotional experience, demonstrating engagement, humour, connection with the emotional journey of the performance, and even boredom at various stages during the performances. The audience’s visible responses (such as laughter, applause, fidgeting
and yawning) are honest and immediate indicators of their internal responses to which the student-actors can, and often do, respond. The audience’s responses are unrehearsed as most of them have not previously experienced the art prior to the performance. One student reflects on the pressure students feel when performing in front of an audience.

S5B: The audience sort of pushes you to that next level. So, if you stuff your lines, they’ll think you don’t know them, even if you knew them in rehearsal. But this actually makes you perform better because you want to look, you know, good. Or at least competent.

Schechner’s (1977) influential writing on performance describes, among other things, the impact of the audience on the artistic work. During a drama rehearsal, the only audience members are the performers and perhaps the teacher if the students wish to make themselves available for advice on work in progress. Schechner (1977) argues that theatre arises when the audience emerges as a separate group and the act of being watched changes the art in subtle ways. Therefore, the presence of the audience can influence the product being assessed. As mentioned previously, students are trying to impress the assessor and their audience while at the same time ensuring their art is accessible to that audience. One student commented that they want the audience to get it. The art of helping the audience get it involves consideration of that audience, as well as an understanding of how to reinterpret the style or text in such a way that the audience will be able to engage with the performance. The presence of the audience also changes the art by challenging the actor to perform in a given instance. Assessors are also required to make their judgement based on that performance alone. As Glenda, the teacher from School One (Queensland) explains:

Glenda: Your mantra is ‘mark what you see’. They have to be able to deliver on the day and you can’t make any allowances for having seen it better in rehearsal, because that’s what you’re assessing; their ability to perform within the pressures of performance.

The audience acts as an informal evaluator of the student’s performance. In response, students are able to simultaneously perceive and acknowledge the audience’s
reactions. The students, in turn, react to the audience’s reactions. In interviews, students comment that ‘they seemed to like it’ or ‘they found it funny’ and ‘I don’t think they got it when …’, and so on. The student-actor is receiving immediate feedback on their performance which can help to shape their understanding of their audience’s needs. This will, in turn, affect their future responses to other artistic briefs.

### 6.2.1.3 Emotional experience of the teacher

Teachers encounter their own emotional experiences when assessing, which includes feelings of hope and detachment. Jane describes some of the emotions that accompany the assessor’s experience:

Jane: *There’s a letting go process. The moment they step out it’s in their hands and you feel nervous for them, but also hope. A lot of hope. Because even while I’m marking I’m hoping they’ll do well. But, they have to deliver on the day. That’s what you mark.*

Jane’s use of the word hope is reminiscent of Freire’s (2004) ‘pedagogy of hope’ in which the lines between the educator and the person being educated are deconstructed as both prioritise the struggle for change. This prioritisation was evident on a few occasions at the conclusion of performances where the teachers would make small comments, either to myself, their co-marker or themselves. Below are samples of comments in the theme of hope that reflect Jane’s remarks:

- ‘I saw her do that much better in rehearsal.’
- ‘This one’s really come along nicely.’
- ‘Well, she’s really improved since I last saw it.’
- ‘That came together really well, didn’t it.’

These comments and Jane’s use of the phrase letting go denotes that a feeling of detachment is experienced from the teacher’s emotional investment in the artistic work, the student-artist or both. During the performance assessment process, teachers express approval or disappointment in relation to the art that is produced. Their
comments, mostly made immediately after the performance, intersect with my readings on the literature related to subjective, objective and informed judgements. The nature of these judgments in the assessment process is discussed in Section 6.3, which explores the ways in which assessment evidence is gathered. It is significant to note here that the range of emotions in the Drama performance assessment process can enhance and mar the performance. Several teachers and students compare these emotional experiences with those in other assessment tasks, which are discussed in the Section 6.2.2.

6.2.2 Comparisons with other assessment experiences

Several students discuss what they consider unique about Drama performance assessment and what is different to other assessment experiences. Their study schedules provide a range of assessment experiences in which Drama performance assessment features occasionally. They are in a position to offer valuable insights into the experience of Drama performance assessment as compared to other assessment experiences.

When discussing the anxiety associated with assessment tasks in senior school years, several students note the differences between anxiety experienced as part of the Drama performance experience and that experienced in other assessment tasks. One student believes anxiety helps drive her assessment efforts in Drama and put additional pressure on her to perform well. The public nature of Drama performance assessment changes her approach to the task.

S3F: I get nervous and particularly the night before, I’m thinking ‘what’s going to happen’, but I don’t think that’s necessarily a bad thing … So, what I mean is, if I do bad at an English essay or a Maths test I’ll throw it under my bed and never think about it again. If I do a crap performance, everyone will see it. So, it’s sort of by default, you have to do good. Not just for the marks but for your own pride as well.

When comparing Drama performance assessment to other tasks, several students make reference to alternate performing arts subjects such as Music or Dance in
which they find similarities. However, other students make connections with assessment experiences outside of the arts.

*S1H: I guess it’s a bit like an oral presentation. You’re being judged on the spot. But it’s different as well. During oral presentations the whole class just falls asleep or sits there, we don’t actually listen to each other. You’re not expected to be entertaining and you’re not marked on that. So I think the class basically makes their mind up before you start that it’s going to be boring. Drama is different though; the audience sits there expecting to see something good so you have to deliver.*

Another student uses a story to reflect on a different style of assessment experience in which she found similarities.

*S3B: Ok, ok. Can I tell you a story? So, last year I was in design tech, like fashion design, and I made this dress. Anyway for the fashion parade at the end of the year I wore it. And I mustn’t have sewn the straps on well because it fell off during the parade. I mean, I caught it; I wasn’t like flashing or anything. But, everyone was like, ‘Duh. You made the shittiest dress.’ And it was really embarrassing. Not the dress falling, but looking bad on stage. And I’d like told people that I might want to be a fashion designer … Sometimes I feel like that before a drama performance, like you pray ‘please, please, don’t let me look bad’.*

This student’s story reinforces that there are experiences in a range of creative assessment tasks that are governed by the affective domain and these experiences are not unique to Drama. Assessment involves some level of emotional investment from the student, some uncertainty and some risk, but creative tasks require students to risk having their ideas and execution of those ideas critiqued. In Drama’s case, this risk occurs in a public arena. Students suggest that this risk causes a particular anxiety because they have an emotional attachment to their creative work. Students use the word pride when discussing work of their own creation, which in turn suggests they feel ownership of their assessed work. It is indeed joyful and satisfying to see students express pride and a high degree of emotional attachment to their schoolwork. However, it is also possible that this can result in heightened anxiety, which affects the art, either by spurring students into additional effort or inducing mistakes in the performance execution. The ways in which students attempt to address these challenges is discussed in Section 6.2.3.
6.2.3 Experience of preparing and viewing performances

Many student comments about anxiety correlate strongly with comments associated with preparedness for the assessment process. Students who feel under-prepared (such as not knowing dialogue or not having enough rehearsal time with their group) express greater anxiety prior to the assessment performance than those who feel prepared. Students who feel prepared express a degree of confidence, with some students specifically commenting that they feel that thorough preparation by all members of the group assists in minimising their anxiety.

*S2B: If we all know it, then we’re confident in each other’s abilities too and then we can relax a bit and concentrate on feeling and getting into character on the day. You can’t really get into character if you’re thinking ‘what’s my next line?’ the whole time.*

Students aim to meet both assessment and artistic goals through their performances. These goals are more likely to be realised if they reduce their anxiety by engaging in thorough preparation before the performance event. Preparation involves extensive development and rehearsal with their fellow actors, as well as individual preparation activities, such as learning lines. Even if students are performing individually, preparation contains collaborative elements as the student consults with the teacher and rehearses either alone or in front of others. Students’ academic preparedness can help them meet their artistic goals, thus allowing themselves and the audience to engage with their intent. Students explain this as an individual and collaborative process.

*S4D: In the beginning it’s just up to you to learn your lines and stuff, but then later once you know your bit, the majority of the rehearsal time has to happen with the other characters. So you can’t really get it going well until you’ve done it again and again with each other. Only after that we can tell if it’s having an impact. I mean like the emotional impact.*

The experience of being an audience member to peer performances reinforces the phenomenon of ‘actor as audience member’ and is exemplified under two conditions: (i) when a student is watching another group of peers perform; and (ii) when a student is experiencing their peer performance while acting alongside them. Students
experience drama learning when they view their peers’ artistic work (both when they are performing and in the audience). They witness other students’ interpretations of the character, theatrical style or text, as well as watching their peers’ performance skills at the time of assessment. This experience enhances their own understanding of drama performance as they are able to draw on those understandings in future performances.

6.3 Teachers’ experiences of assessment

Students have an active awareness that their performance is made for consumption by an audience and judgment by an assessor. Section 6.3 investigates the experience of teachers who are required to gather evidence during the assessment process for the purposes of providing feedback to students and summative results to their relevant board authority. Considering the differences between teachers’ dual roles of audience member and assessor, it is critical when theorising about the tensions in Drama performance assessment. In this research, teachers’ comments suggest that they relish the experience of being an audience member, but they also take care to remain cognisant of their responsibilities as an assessor. Teachers are mindful that the performance is a time to gather evidence for assessments and make judgments for the purpose of summative assessment within the senior secondary course structure. The word evidence is used purposefully here. Australian Drama educator, Dunn (2005), uses the metaphor of forensic criminologists investigating a crime scene to describe the process of assessment. Her metaphor delves deeply into the process whereby the teacher collects artefacts from the assessment experience, which she describes as evidence. In this study, the evidence gathered by teachers for assessment includes videos of performances, written scripts, journals and logbooks or process diaries. Evidence also includes the teacher’s artistic brief (described by teacher participants as the task sheet) and explaining their judgments in relation to the assessment criteria, accompanied by marks or grades and comments. This forms the body of assessment artefacts that illustrate the student’s achievement in relation to the performance task.
In interviews, teachers were asked what kind of evidence, documentation or data they collect from assessment, and many of their explained the reasons for each artefact. Their comments suggest that they collect assessment evidence for the following purposes:

- To be used for student self-assessment at the conclusion of the performance.
- To be shared with other members of staff for the purpose of illustrating the assessment process and a student’s achievements.
- To be considered as part of the moderation or grade verification requirements. In Queensland and the ACT schools, evidence is required to be presented in a portfolio to the relevant state or territory board authority for the purpose of moderation or grade verification.
- To demonstrate to the student or parent/guardian areas for improvement or that require clarification.
- To be used for record-keeping and archival of the assessment process for the teacher’s own records.

Dunn (2005) also encourages teachers to use ‘broad and expansive’ (p. 2) approaches to gather evidence, rather than focus solely on what she describes as ‘large and obvious pieces of key evidence’ (p. 2), such as assignments and performances. Broad and expansive approaches include formative assessment tools, such as observation, consultation, focussed analysis or peer and self-assessment. Dunn (2005) argues that these can be effective in capturing teachers’ thoughts about the work as they happen because much of the work in the Drama classroom is ‘fragile and by its very nature, somewhat ephemeral’ (p. 3).

A finding within teachers’ experiences of Drama performance assessment is the prominence of ephemeral experiences, reflecting the fleeting nature of performative assessment. One teacher describes the experience of assessing student performances
as being in the moment. As teachers assess, they experience internalised reactions brought about because they are audience members. These experiences can include reactions to the emotions or mood of the drama, as well as engagement of their aesthetic senses. This is an example of what Dunn (2005) describes as ephemeral experiences which, she argues, are difficult to capture.

*Megan:* I can read an essay or assignment or test over and over again. Once that performance is done, the experience will never be repeated. You can see the piece again, but your reaction will be different because you know what to expect, sort of like you know what’s coming … But performance, well … that can only happen once. And when it’s over, the bubble pops, you’re out of their performance space, and you have to recall what you saw, or felt. Even the video doesn’t repeat the experience. There’s something about the video that sucks the soul out of it. Watching the video back is a very clinical experience. There’s no mood, no atmosphere.

Three of the teachers lament that performance experiences cannot necessarily be replicated, therefore, they need to develop strategies that assist them to recall the experience of being an audience member. Several of these strategies are discussed in Chapter 4, which reflects on critical issues in the assessment of Drama performances. The limitations of video evidence in capturing the ephemeral experiences are further discussed in the Section 6.3.1.

### 6.3.1 Relationship between assessment evidence and experiences of assessment

This section explores the extent to which the assessment evidence gathered by the teachers reflects the performance outcome and experience of the Drama students.

#### 6.3.1.1 Video evidence

Video evidence of the Drama performance is significant for the purpose of assessing performance in the senior school. Firstly, replaying the video of the assessment performance is used as part of a feedback and achievement review loop for the students, colleague teachers, parents and/or the relevant board authority. Secondly, teachers watch the student performances with their Drama class to review the quality of the assessment product. Thirdly, in Queensland and the ACT, video evidence is
used for validation of results in conjunction with state or territory moderation procedures.

The system of moderation for Drama in Queensland relies on video recordings as the representation of the live performance. The recording is accompanied by each teacher’s work program, assessment task and completed criteria sheet, which includes the teacher’s comments. The final result and evidence are sent to the moderation panel. From this evidence, the moderators judge the consistency of standards when comparing the teacher’s assessment and the board’s expectations of student achievement. The ACT has a similar system of portfolio review modelled on the Queensland approach. However, the ACT Drama moderation system aims to incorporate the experience of viewing live performance into the process. ACT Senior Drama now uses a system of a cluster review of live performances. A cluster review involves all Senior Drama teachers being placed in groups of three or four (the grouping changes every semester). The teachers attend one performance task from each school in their cluster to for the purposes of grade verification. The following piece is a compilation of Megan’s comments drawn directly from her interviews and rewritten into a single narrative, excluding my comments as an interviewer, which explains the benefits she sees in cluster review.

Megan: So until very recently it’s been all video recordings that we look at on moderation day. And that was ok. I mean to be honest, we hardly ever looked at the videos and that can be a problem in itself. So we all decided that there was a big difference between seeing the live thing and seeing the video. So we decided to come up with our own process to view performances … live. Now we are in these clusters and we go to performances, sometimes in our own time, and moderate. It’s much better. You can see what the audience sees at the time rather than just looking at it on the video in this overly-analytical, disjointed and sort of isolated way, with no atmosphere or face-to-face interaction … So, I would say that we’ve got a little hybrid of systems. It’s definitely school-based and continuous, but being in the ACT, a few of us have taught in NSW where live performance is sort of sacred. So I think we’ve brought a little of that here. Not sure how much difference it makes though.

The ACT system of cluster school moderation of live performances was designed by ACT Drama teachers in the hope of addressing what they consider to be a limitation of the evidence before them. The video evidence did not allow reviewers adequate
interaction with the performance experience. Using Megan’s phrase, they are not able to see what the audience sees. Teachers construct this system by using their shared understandings of the importance of the live performance experience in Drama and capturing ephemeral experiences in the assessment process. In order to make quality judgments about the work presented for moderation, ACT teachers want to see the live artefact as it would allow them to see the work under the same conditions as the teacher who would be assessing.

In NSW, individual teachers use video recordings of performances for the purpose of keeping records and providing additional evidence for assessment. However, video recordings are not permitted by NSW Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) for the final HSC Drama performance assessment for Year 12 students as part of the external examination conditions.

Students from Queensland and the ACT have an awareness and familiarity with state and territory procedures for video recording of assessments.

*S6B: On the day you know the camera will be there. You know not to look at it, but you sort of know it’s all recorded.*

*S5D: I find some comfort in knowing that it’s all recorded and the teacher keeps copies of her stuff like her comments. That way, the board or whoever, will see how it really was.*

The comment about outsiders being able to see how it really was suggests they trust the video recording, teacher comments and criteria sheet to make a representation of the experience of assessment. However, teachers consider the video artefact to be a limited reflection of the experience of performance assessment. All teachers state that viewing video recordings of Drama students’ performances provides a different experience to the live performance, and this has implications for using video recordings for assessment purposes. One teacher describes the video recording of performances as a clinical tool, adding that the same emotional response is not always elicited from a video recording. Another teacher offers an explanation as to why citing differences in sound quality and lighting plus the presence of a barrier between the actor and audience (i.e. the television screen) that is not present during
the live performance. McAuley (1999) asserts that theatre is a relationship between the performer and the spectator in a shared space where both come together, therefore, video evidence cannot reproduce the live performance experience. De Marinis (1985) goes so far as to call video recordings of live drama ‘respectful forgeries’ or, at best, ‘faithful betrayals’ (p. 389). There have been significant advancements in the quality of video recordings since De Marinis’ (1985) writings. However, teachers in this study contemplate the use of video evidence and identify caveats. It is merely a representation of the live performance experience that does not elicit the same emotional engagement or engagement of the aesthetic senses, as explained by John:

John: Well of course the video can only be representative of what was seen, not the aesthetic experience that was undergone, if you know what I mean. But I think for the purposes of the BSSS [Board of Senior Secondary Studies], they want to see a basic representation, and that’s fine.

However, for the purposes of moderation in Queensland, it is possible that a basic representation of the performance is adequate evidence of what has occurred. It is questionable as to whether it is necessary for the moderator to engage in the same emotional or aesthetic experience as an audience member or assessor of live performance. This research does not delve deeply into the experience of being on a moderation panel, but for the purpose of this section of analysis, it is noted that a representation of the performance experience is passed onto the moderation panel in Queensland, rather than the experience itself being presented.

### 6.3.1.2 Feedback

Feedback on assessment is presented to students in a variety of ways. As described earlier, student-actors receive immediate feedback from their audience as a result of the audience’s reactions to their performances (such as laughter, gasps or applause). Formal feedback from assessments is presented to students at the conclusion of the assessment task using the following artefacts:

- The assessment criteria, highlighting students’ achievements.
• A grade (Queensland and the ACT) or mark (NSW).
• A comment from the teacher

When teachers write or record their comments they try to capture the ephemeral nature of the drama performance experience while still making those comments acceptable for the local board authority. For example, Jane, a Queensland Drama teacher, aims to create comments that can be understood by both the student and the local moderation board.

Jane: One of the keys when you’re describing it, is to make it something that matches the criteria and syllabus language … that’s using terms that the moderation board can sort of understand.

Conversationally, Jane uses the term describe to explain her feedback. However, providing feedback to students and the relevant board authority does not merely provide a description of the student’s work. The process that the teachers use to arrive at feedback is diagnostic, using multifaceted analysis of the student’s achievements in relation to the task and criteria. John considers the audience of his assessment feedback, arguing that different audiences have different comprehensions of the language that he uses.

John: Well, the board will want to see one thing and the student will want to see another. The art is to marry those expectations together to satisfy both the students’ need for feedback and the board’s need for an explanation of achievement. It’s not hard, but your language has to be palatable to both groups. And some will require explanations to each party. In person, that is.

John’s comments explore the extent to which written comments reflect the artistic and ephemeral experiences of being an audience member. Glenda also describes a separation between teacher assessment experience and student performance assessment evidence.

Glenda: Sometimes things happen in that … space. That performance space, I mean. Which cannot be measured on a rubric. I sometimes think we’re overly concerned with the mechanics of the drama performance rather than the overall experience of performing. Or the joy of experiencing theatre.
Glenda understands the complexity of the drama performance experience in which the actor’s skills and the content being presented are vehicles through which the human experience can be explored, emotions can be elicited and reality can be transcended. However, these attributes of drama are not expressed on the assessment criteria, which is more concerned with the student-actor’s technique and mastery of the text or theatrical style. Glenda observes this as an inconsistency between the drama performance experience and evidence. Her views hold some congruence with Christine (from NSW), who discusses the use of marks and grades as evidence of the assessment experience:

*Christine: You have this experience which is highly subjective. Well, not subjective, I mean, feeling. So you feel all the way through. Then you need to quantify it with a mark and grade. I don’t have a problem with this. It has to be done. But a number doesn’t reflect the feeling, I think I’m trying to say.*

Christine’s comments suggest a similar disconnection between the assessment experience and the evidence, and she works with this challenge in a particular way. For her, the evidence does not necessarily need to mirror the experience. This tells much about the teachers’ purpose when gathering evidence. Christine feels the experience of assessment and the evidence gathered are two separate entities created for different audiences and purposes. They are, of course, intrinsically linked, but to her it is not necessary for the evidence to reflect the ephemeral and artistic nature of what is witnessed. It is somewhat problematic that Christine feels some disconnection between the result (being a mark in NSW) and the experience of the performance. Ultimately, the ephemeral aspect of a drama is a significant feature of the live performance experience. In Senior Drama, ephemeral performance experiences are captured, subjected to judgment, then qualified in the teacher’s feedback to students, and that advice reflects the students’ achievement in relation to the task criteria. Christine goes on to say:

*Christine: There’s a certain element of trust in those that experienced the performance, that they were there and felt something. Even when the HSC markers are here, they have no idea of the context of your kids. But they immerse themselves in the performance then they come out of that role and assign a mark. It’s part of the process, really.*
Section 6.3.2 explores the teachers’ experiences of formally assessing Senior Drama, as required by their state or territory’s assessment regulations, and evaluating the assessment evidence that is gathered as part of the requirements of each education regulatory authority for formal senior assessment procedures.

**6.3.2 Teachers’ experiences of gathering assessment evidence within their jurisdiction**

There is a range of assessment evidence that is used or required in each state or territory. In Queensland and the ACT, the relevant board authority requires all Senior Drama performance assessments to be video recorded and submitted to the moderation panel for review, along with evidence of all other work that has been assessed as part of the Drama course (e.g. essays, portfolios). The role of the moderation panel is to monitor how the syllabus is implemented and the standard of work set for senior assessment, followed by verifying the application of standards that has come from the syllabus documents being used. The panel does this by approving work programs and reviewing portfolios of student assessment, then verifying the levels of achievement awarded by the classroom teachers.

In NSW, group and individual performance assessment involves external assessors (who are other Drama educators called examiners) representing the NSW Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES). These HSC Drama external examiners visit each school to view and assess the live individual and group performances by HSC students. Internal assessment components (written and oral) for HSC Drama are assessed by the classroom Drama teacher and video recordings of rehearsals are frequently made for the purposes of review and record-keeping.

Jane discusses Queensland’s system where there is no external review of live performances. The moderation panel uses video evidence to verify student grades. When results are returned to students, Jane provides extensive comments that accompany the criteria in order to explain the student’s grade, giving them an opportunity for future growth. She considers this to be effective feedback. However, Glenda (also in Queensland) suggests that the depth of feedback given to students varies between teachers.
Glenda: I’ve been on moderation panels and it’s very interesting to see what teachers submit. I often see them submitting very small comments. By that I mean very short. And they use the words in the criteria but not much else. They do that because they don’t want the panel to critique their comment and say that they missed the mark or whatever. It’s a dangerous game to play.

As Queensland and the ACT use moderation panels, teachers are mindful that their evidence has its own audience beyond the students. As with assessment, the existence of an audience changes the artefacts in subtle ways. The moderation panel audience consists of Drama teachers external to their own school, therefore, teachers aim to ensure the following:

- Assessment instruments are rigorous and able to be understood by the external moderation panel.
- Judgments are fair and in line with state or territory standards.
- Comments provide adequate assessment advice to students, including an explanation of the mark or grade, and can be understood by the external moderation panel.

Furthermore, the presence of the moderation panel audience provides an additional lens on the evidence. The teachers in this study attempt to view the evidence through the eyes of the moderation panel using their understandings of what is valued in the moderation forum. Their comments suggest that this mindfulness leads them to create evidence that is transparent, but somewhat depersonalised in the drama education environment, as explained by John.

John: The feedback I want to give has personal statements about how the student is progressing on the trajectory, but the board don’t want to see that commentary on how this performance compares to the last. They want to see factual breakdown on this task, the skills, the technique and the reasons why the grade is what it is. I’d like to provide so much more, but it’s just not relevant when you submit to moderation.
In contrast, Tania from NSW creates highly personal comments to students which accompany their assessment criteria and marks. She can be seen to be giving highly personalised statements that address students’ achievements and suggest ways they can improve in future performances. For the NSW Drama performance capstone task, students do not receive feedback from external examiners, and this is another reason why Tania makes extensive, personalised comments:

_Tania:_ Well, I give them so much because that’s all they get! I see the visiting markers writing constantly during the kids’ performances. And that’s great. But you don’t ever get to see those comments. How disappointing. This is the way it is for all external exams. There’s no feedback. So, sometimes I wonder if the process is about learning, or if it’s just about getting these kids a UAI. Throw them into uni and then we’re done with our job.

One of Christine’s students also makes reference to this frustration:

_S4B:_ Yeah, so I’ve heard that we don’t get the comments from the markers and I think that kind of sucks a bit. Because, like, you’ll never know what anyone but your teacher thought. Well, I guess you’ll see the marks but by then I don’t know if I’ll … sort of care. And I don’t think the mark actually shows you what they thought.

Across a range of educational contexts, it is common that feedback is not provided in external assessment environments (e.g. university examinations and professional training courses). This is the case in NSW where the board authority reports on achievement demonstrated in examinations. Examiners’ comments, assessment criteria or raw results from the external performance assessment are not provided to students. While being common practice, this procedure has implications for HSC Drama’s purpose. Students receive immediate feedback from their audience, as described earlier in Chapter 6. They also receive feedback from their teacher who has assessed them throughout the year by using an assessment as learning approach (Dann, 2002; Earl, 2012; Torrance, 2007). However, the absence of feedback from their external examiners denotes an assessment of learning approach (Harlen, 2007; Torrance, 2007). Whilst learning has certainly occurred through the HSC Drama performance capstone task, the final result is emphasised rather than the learning process. As discussed in the literature, Drama assessment is enhanced by multiple
interpretations on the art, including that of the assessor (Ross et al. 1993; Soep, 2005). In NSW, students do not have an opportunity to reflect on those judgments from the assessor, and therefore, are limited to viewing their final mark when interpreting their achievements from their external performance assessment task.

Drama performance assessment also relies on the assessor’s ability to capture ephemeral experiences while making judgments about the student’s achievements in relation to the task’s criteria. Students can produce a wide range of responses to the task that may be nuanced or divergent in nature, and to this, the teachers respond as an audience member and assessor concurrently. Teacher-assessors experience the art while interpreting it for the purpose of assessment and their judgments are summatively recorded, therefore, contributing to students’ exit results from their senior secondary courses. The experience of assessment and evidence of assessment are two separate entities that should reflect each other, but this aim presents significant challenges that teachers, students and board authorities attempt to address by using several of the strategies discussed in this chapter.

6.4 Reflective interpretations on experiences

Drawing together the findings in this chapter was an enlightening journey for me as the researcher. As a result of comparing assessment practices, it was interesting to note the commonality of experiences across schools, as well as across states and territories. While some factors are unique to each context and situation, there are also many common experiences across schools, states and territories in Drama performance assessment.

Both teachers and students acknowledge that performing is a deeply emotional experience. Teachers also recognise that the performance experience is as individual as the student performers themselves. Yet there is nothing to suggest they address this emotional learning in their teaching or preparation for assessment. From my experience as a Drama teacher, I did not address this facet of drama performance in the classroom and I do not have data to suggest that many other Drama teachers do either.
At the time of the performances, students are dealing with the emotional experiences associated with their senior years of high school. The student looks for guidance to effectively manage the experience of assessment. Some students in this study consider this guidance to be as critically important as learning about the technical aspects of performance. A significant amount of ongoing research and statements exist inside syllabus documents regarding the importance of lifelong learning (Fenlon, 2006; Hargreaves, 2004; Wright, 2011). Students’ understanding of their affective responses is connected to these skills. If a student is able to understand their emotional reactions in performing, they can develop a greater understanding of their reactions and interactions when faced with similar challenges. Understanding the performance experience contributes to this goal.

In the Drama performance assessment environment, students experience being a servant to many masters. Some students aim to achieve outstanding results and to attain this, they demonstrate achievements to their assessor who may also be their teacher. At the same time, students want to create engaging experiences for their audience. All assessments contain some degree of anxiety, uncertainty and excitement at the prospect of sharing one’s work. However, the public nature of Drama performance assessment means that students have undertaken to have their assessable work displayed in public. This adds to the emotional experience of the assessment task. Students seek to look polished, professional and skilled in front of their audience, which mostly consists includes their peers. Pressure to impress one’s peers is a feature of adolescent culture (discussed in Chapter 7). In relation to the experience of assessment, it is noted that the public nature drama performance spurs students to want to produce a higher quality of work. This can result in them realising their academic goals while pursuing their artistic goals. Conversely, it may also result in disappointment if they do not achieve their goals. The theme of disappointment was not a prominent experience in this research. However, there are tensions that arise when students are disappointed with their performance, marks or grades. This phenomenon is not particular to Drama performance assessment and it can be seen in all assessment contexts. However, tensions particular to the assessment of Drama performances are often related to the teacher’s dual role as a
teacher and assessor, or to use the terms of Chapter 5, curator and critic. The feedback that students receive from assessments can address some of these tensions.

This research verifies that students receive feedback in two key methods. Firstly, feedback from their audience is their most immediate evaluation of the art. Secondly, formal assessment is provided by teachers who record their judgments to be translated into results. Early in the research process, I had many questions about the suitability of grades, marks, assessment criteria and comments in reflecting a performance. The teacher interviews contained some deep deliberations over the extent to which the comments, assessment criteria, marks or grades reflect the art that students created. I identify that three teachers do not feel that the evidence needs to reflect the experience of assessment. For these teachers, the purpose of evidence is solely for feedback, grade verification and recordkeeping. Teachers and some students are satisfied that the evidence fulfills its role, which is separate to the artistic experience of the live performance.

The NSW example of external performance examination provides this study with a different interpretation of the purposes of assessment and the assessment experience. The reporting of achievement and feedback from assessment is considered hallmarks of quality in assessment practice (Evans, 2013; Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2002). The fact that the examiner’s feedback is never directly returned to students is an issue of contention for some NSW teachers and students. Some feel that the lack of the examiner’s feedback lessens the learning experience. Rather, the outcome is emphasised through a strong achievement orientation. In my own experience as a teacher in NSW, it was commonly accepted that feedback from external examinations is not available to the teacher or student in any subject. The external performance task is defined by the NSW Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) as an external examination and examinations report on achievement. However, the participants discussing such matters question this assessment of learning (Harlen, 2007; Torrance, 2007) orientation, and in doing so, are exhibiting alternative thinking in relation to the assessment task’s purpose.
Teachers in this study are able to acutely critique elements of their state or territory’s assessment systems, both in terms of process and implementation. Students are not as adept in this regard. Having experience of their system, most students were only able to perceive their work within their world. Teachers, however, have some understanding of a range of assessment models and understand that one purpose of this thesis is to investigate state and territory procedures. Therefore, they discuss the strengths and challenges associated with their system. Each teacher’s lens has been constructed as a result of their position in their educational system over a period of time. The teacher’s willingness to offer critique denotes a culture where their input into curriculum and assessment procedures is invited. Teachers are able to influence the curriculum, thereby enacting their understandings of the Drama assessment experience and the way it can be used to enhance the students’ experiences of Drama.

Chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6 identify the following:

- History, philosophy and context of Drama performance assessment (Chapter 2).

- Process of assessing Drama performances and a range of critical issues associated with the assessment of Drama performances (Chapter 4).

- Roles of the teacher and student in the assessment process (Chapter 5).

- Experiences associated with Drama performance assessment (Chapter 6).

Chapter 7 explores the cultures associated with Drama performance assessment with particular emphasis on the cultures that can be seen in Queensland, NSW and the ACT contexts.
CHAPTER 7:
CULTURE OF DRAMA PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

7.1 Introduction

To summarise, Chapters 4-6 discuss the critical issues, purpose and process Drama performance assessment, used metaphors to illustrate the roles of student-artists and teacher-assessors in the assessment environment, and investigate the performance assessment experience, focusing on the individuals’ experience within the context of this assessment environment. Chapter 7 draws conclusions about the cultural aspects of the Drama performance assessment environment and considers the implications for a high-stakes assessment context.

Culture is referenced from an educational perspective where behaviours and interactions are cognitive processes situated in the learning environment (Centre for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition [CARLA], 2012; Peterson & Deal, 2009). The Drama performance assessment culture is framed to illustrate the behaviours, cognitive constructs and practices present in the learning environment. These frames also show the interactions between different cultures.

Drama performance assessment is affected by the nature of the art form, which is highly collaborative, therefore, collective cultures (Brislin, Worthley & Macnab, 2006; Starko, 2014) are prevalent. Collective cultures in a learning context are characterised by a high degree of group loyalty, a social atmosphere and collaboration on learning tasks (Brislin, Worthley & Macnab, 2006), all of which are noted in the observations of this study. Both group and individual performance assessment tasks are used in Queensland, NSW and the ACT, requiring Drama students to collaborate and share ideas to make collective artistic decisions. Group performance assessment requires students to demonstrate embodied learning (Wright, 2011) at the same time as their student actor peers while being assessed individually. In the senior secondary years, students are awarded individual results in a high-stakes assessment environment. Those results are used to determine their final results for their senior secondary studies, which may be used for tertiary admissions.
The ways in which teachers make judgements about individual achievements during a performance that has been collaboratively constructed are critiqued in Chapter 7.

7.2 Framing the culture of Drama assessment

Culture, in the context of this research, embraces shared patterns of behaviours and interactions, cognitive constructs and affective understandings learned through a process of socialisation (Centre for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition [CARLA], 2012). Peterson and Deal (2009) state that culture is derived from a combination of traditions, ceremonies, rituals, norms, beliefs, values, history, stories, people and relationships. In this study, each research site demonstrates habits, learning rituals, rules and understandings particular to Drama assessment. These phenomena contribute to the culture of each site, and more broadly, the culture of Drama performance assessment.

The cultural phenomena that emerge from this study draws upon the theory of frame analysis based on Goffman’s (1974) work on framing and adapted by Edmiston and McKibben (2011), Gray and Williams (2012) and Rainio and Marjanovic-Shane (2013). Frames are used to interpret and analyse data, which Goffman (1974) describes as ‘principles of organisation which govern [social] events and our subjective involvement in them’ (p. 10). Frames are described as ‘schemata of interpretation’ through which individuals or groups ‘locate, perceive, identify and label’ events and phenomena (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). In other words, frame analysis attempts to explain how and why people behave, interact or organise themselves in particular ways.

Goffman (1974) describes the interaction between an individual and the community by using situational frames which represent the stability, continuity and patterns of social activities at play. These are all evident in the Drama assessment environment in this study. Situational frames capture the subjective and objective realities, including the relationship between them.
The Drama performance assessment environment comprises a range of phenomena analysed here as frames. These frames provide an insight into the assessment environment within which students and teachers interpret their situations and shape their practices. For students, this contributes to the way they shape their performance tasks, whereas for the teachers, it contributes to their assessment practices. Five frames (Figure 7.1) of Drama performance assessment culture have emerged to illustrate the cultures active in the Drama performance assessment environment, as follows:

1. Student culture
2. Adolescent culture
3. Learning environment culture
4. State-territory education culture
5. Cultures of assessment

Representation of the five frames as concentric circles demonstrates layering of the frames. Each frame of culture is affected by the preceding frame inside. At the centre of Drama performance assessment culture is each student’s personal culture which they bring to the assessment experience. Student culture includes previous experiences in Drama, schooling background, reasons for choosing the subject, achievement orientations and personal goals. Student culture also involves an individual learning habit that is affected by their experiences as adolescents. Adolescent culture is created as a result of student development as adolescents, relationships with their peers and generational culture. Student and adolescent behaviours contribute to the broader culture of the learning environment, which is created by their teacher, school and Drama class, among other facets of schooling life. The learning environment for the six schools in this study operates within the context of a high-stakes assessment environment positioned within a state or territory that has different procedures for assessing Drama performances. The culture of assessment encompasses the Drama performance assessment experience, incorporating the emotional experience of performing, academic challenge and engagement with senior secondary assessment procedures. These five frames of
culture influence teachers’ practices when assessing students’ understandings of drama performance and subsequently, the performances that are produced for assessment.

![Figure 7.1: Five frames of Drama performance assessment culture](image)

### 7.3 Cultures at play in Drama performance assessment

This section identifies the five cultural frames in the context of the performance assessment process in the senior secondary Drama classroom.

#### 7.3.1 Student culture

According to Matsumoto and Juang, (2013), student culture is evident in their cognitive skills, emotions, personality traits and social coordination, which are also
referred to as interactions in group situations. Each student brings his/her own schooling background to the Senior Drama classroom, viewing the assessment situation through the frame of his/her own culture. Teachers have some awareness of the culture that each student brings to the Drama classroom, and they discuss their expectations of students and make several comments referring to the student’s prior experience and its impact on their artistic choices as they create their performance response.

*Tania: I think their performance choices are guided by personal experiences. They choose things they like to perform first up, but also the content is based on their personal experiences. It can be a challenge to get them out of that sometimes.*

Tania’s desire to get them out of that does not discount a student’s personal culture. Rather, she speaks from her position as the teacher-curator, seeking to advance student-artists’ responses by broadening their understanding of performance possibilities and challenging their views on performance conventions. Tania recognises that students bring their own ideas and experiences to Drama and she shows respect for those lived experiences.

Students’ reasons for choosing Drama in the senior secondary years are diverse. In interviews, students reveal elements of the personal cultures they bring to the Drama classroom.

*S1G: Drama for me is, like, my relaxation time. I know I’m not going to count it in my final result so it’s mostly fun for me. I still put effort into my assignments, but not as much as I might in other subjects I guess.*

*S4A: Drama is an expression of who I am. I don’t think I really play characters. It’s like all the emotions inside me are there and I express them on stage, or in class, or can see them in the plays we study and stuff. It’s sort of just like life, but you get marked on it. It’s pretty good, yeah.*

Students refer to previous experiences in drama learning environments that shape their performances. For example, student participation in community theatre or extracurricular activities contributes to their performance responses. Some students also discuss experiences in other subjects, such as History, English or Visual Art, which
contribute to their performance ideas. However, their previous experiences in the Drama classroom appear to be the dominant factor that influences their creative decisions. As they become familiar with the Drama classroom, they appear to take more risks in the assessment environment. Students in Year 12 express a desire to push boundaries and be highly inventive.

S3B: So, we’ve studied other types of experimental theatre and stuff before, but this year I wanted to invent my own sort of genre if that’s possible and do something no one has ever thought of before. I know that’s ambitious but I thought if I approached it that way I might have a breakthrough at some stage.

This student aims to do well in this task and make a contribution to the field of drama performance while challenging her world view. These ambitions demonstrate that student personal culture can push them towards more sophisticated performance responses in the two examples cited. A student’s cultural frame can contribute to the standard of work, leading to favourable assessment results.

However, other students’ personal cultures do not always support quality assessment responses, as characterised in the following comments:

S1D: This is not my best work. I just want this over with.

S6E: I didn’t really understand the task and wasn’t that into it. I’m just glad it’s over.

S4B: In some ways everyone’s taking this way too seriously. I don’t actually care that much so I just want to get it over with and move on.

Another student’s personal reasons for studying Drama focus on his enjoyment of the subject.

S6E: I’m not really that interested in that stuff, like being all intellectual with my performances and that. I chose Drama because I liked it and I thought it’d be easy. It’s like my bludge subject, and I don’t want to go to uni or anything like that. So, I guess I care less about it. I just try to have a good time, but I don’t try to be really smart in my performances.
Student S6E’s enjoyment of Drama may lead to high levels of engagement in the subject or an investment of time in their drama studies, which can subsequently lead them to achieve their academic goals. However, this student may have different personal goals to the peers he is working with. Students’ personal goals have implications for the assessment results of others when the work is undertaken collectively as many performance tasks are undertaken collaboratively although students are assessed individually.

This research encountered senior secondary students with a wide range of attitudes towards collaborative behaviour in Drama. Students in this study were all able to choose their groups for their performance assessment tasks, however, this is not always the case. Students appear to prefer to work in groups with students with a similar attitude towards Drama, as evidenced by a high level of agreement in interviews and positive rapport among student actors. In adolescent years, peer groups are often tightly defined, sometimes to the exclusion of newcomers (Gest, Davidson, Rulison, Moody & Welsh, 2007), and this affects the student’s choice of group members when asked to work collaboratively. This phenomenon is investigated in more detail in Section 7.3.2.

7.3.2 Adolescent culture

Students’ cultural frames are affected by their development as adolescents, their relationship with their peers and their generational culture (DiPietro, 2012). Adolescent culture is popularly characterised as highly technological with a broad level of exposure to mass media and marketing enterprises (Roberts, Henriksen & Foehr, 2009). Nelson and Nelson (2010) add that adolescent cultures are formed through shared daily experiences such as schooling or the use of technology, and common challenges such as the formation of personal identity. Other significant features associated with culture include shared language, music and rituals. The research observed these features, as well as other qualities of adolescent culture, including competing priorities, engagement in community or cultural activities and collaborative behaviours.
In interviews, students describe the competing demands in their lives, mentioning work commitments, family events, holidays and assessment tasks in other subjects as events that have an impact on their performance preparation. Of particular interest is the number of students who mention co-curricular commitments, many of which are performance related, such as musicals, community theatre, instrumental music, singing and dance lessons. Drama students often have lives that are rich in a diverse range of cultural or artistic pursuits. These pursuits enrich their performance understandings which, in turn, enhance their Drama performance assessment responses. The discussion of co-curricular pursuits is particularly prevalent in the ACT schools (Schools Five and Six), both of which have theatre companies that routinely produce performances for public consumption, akin to a community theatre company.

S5B: When I was performing for (school’s theatre company) we learned this technique where we worked with the other actors on our monologues and soliloquies and it was really good so we decided to do it for this assessment. It was awesome the way we got some other perspectives on our characters and stuff.

This comment suggests there are strong collaborative behaviours within the adolescent cultural frame. Other students from different schools concurred, with some showing a reluctance to work alone in Drama.

S3A: It was really hard because this was a monologue and with acting I’m used to bouncing off my group and getting ideas from them. You see them in all your classes so you can talk about it any time, but with this, it was hard to even know when I should work on this. Drama’s usually like a group thing.

Adolescent culture is a broad phenomenon and this research captures a small part of that phenomena. A strong attribute of the adolescent frame is the collective nature of Drama performance work and the experience of interacting with student actors. One of the highlights and challenges of studying Drama at school is its heavy reliance on collaboration and positive working relationships. Peer influences affect performance choices as students collaboratively craft their response to the assessment task while engaging with cultural frames outside their own experience. When students discuss
collaborative work, several note that they gravitate towards working within their friendship groups. Peer influence is strong within the frame of adolescent culture, as demonstrated by the following student’s comment:

*S1E: I’m not used to working with people who are not my friends, like not in my group. I feel like we have to waste time getting to know each other when the teacher chooses our groups so it’s just better if we can choose who we want to work with.*

Students also report that Drama requires them to work with others who approach the task with a different personal culture, and this is where tension emerges, as suggested in the following comment:

*S5A: This one time the groups were picked and I was with a bunch of slackos. It was hell. Their ideas were juvenile and I was often the only one at rehearsals. It was totally unfair and I told the teacher I didn’t want to do that again.*

I delve deeper into this comment in conversation with the student:

*I: Do you think you learned anything from this experience?*

*S5A: Oh, totally. I learned what I hate (laughs). I also had to be flexible, and be a nice person all the time but also take leadership and try to incorporate their dumb ideas so I was patient too. But none of that made any difference with the marks. My results really suffered that time.*

Lifelong learning is one of the broader aims of education (Fenlon, 2006; Hargreaves, 2004; Wright, 2011) and this student (S5A) seems to have experienced some growth in this regard. Drama, like other art forms, aims to teach students to understand themselves and others (Paige, in Anderson and Gibson, 2004), and provide them with skills that are useful for the workplace and society. However, as suggested in students’ comments, this learning cannot always be summatively rewarded in the high-stakes assessment environment. In some cases, a student’s personal culture develops alongside the assessment experience and the individual results bear some impact of this learning. Group assessment tasks are not particular to Drama although
Drama performance contains a great deal of embodied collaborative work driven by emotional and aesthetic processes as compared to other senior secondary subjects.

Within the challenge of developing performance for assessment lies immense reward. Sometimes a degree of discomfort is a necessary accompaniment to learning (Boler, 1999; Redmond, 2010; Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012). The initial uncertainty of the situation can prepare the way for important social learning within the drama performance context. Research by Prinstein and Dodge (2008) and Nelson and Nelson (2010) demonstrate the significant role that peers can play in adolescent behaviour, particularly when those peers engage in regular interactions. Peers are able to change each other’s behaviours by enforcing norms and values on each other and encouraging personal growth and expressions of individuality. This is heightened in a Drama assessment context where expression, originality and risk are valued.

Having said this, a student at School Four explains his reservations about the risk involved in the high-stakes assessment environment:

S4C: I’ll work with anyone you want me to, until it’s an assessment task. Then I’ve got to work with the people who are going to give me an advantage when we get marked. And for me, that’s the good actors and the ones who don’t stuff around. Sorry, but that’s the way it is for me.

This student’s comment suggests a strong appreciation of the capacity to make choices that will advantage him in the high-stakes assessment environment. Therefore, students’ individual achievement focus during a group assessment task affects their decisions about the level and value of their collaboration. In this way, student culture is framed by their contribution to relationships during the production and performance within and between the assessment group, and individually with the teacher.

7.3.3 Learning environment culture

The learning environment is framed by the cultures of the teacher, Drama class and school. Each culture has its own patterns of behaviour, interactions, constructs and understandings (CARLA, 2012) which are evident in this study. Each Drama class and teacher has their unique collective practices with ritual characteristics. Many of
these rituals are organisational and pedagogical, stemming from the teacher’s practices developed over years of experience in the Drama assessment environment. Students generally become involved in the rituals, which include warm-ups, final rehearsals of lines or movement, preparation of lighting plans, assistance in setting up technical equipment or readying the performance space. Each class environment in this study displays a unique tone or atmosphere on the day of the performance assessment, mostly demonstrated through student interactions with the teacher, audience and each other before and after the performances. The composition of each audience also contributes to the atmosphere of the learning environment, as did the teacher’s practices in establishing the assessment environment.

In analysing the learning environment frame, I consulted my ethnographic observations in conjunction with the teacher and student interview data. From these observations, I characterised each school site as having the following attributes:

• **Casual and formal interactions**: Demonstrated through teacher interactions with students; student interaction with the performance space; and student interaction with the audience. This is characterised by formal or colloquial language utilised between students and the teacher; the way that students set up their space; students interacting with audience members before their performance and so on.

• **Competitive and collegial attitudes**: Demonstrated through interactions between students characterised by sharing of resources or space; tone of friendliness and collegiality between students; degree of hostility if any, between students or students and teachers; students’ presence for their peers’ performances; and the prominence of individual student or teacher voices in the performance environment, denoting a power relationship.

• **Structured and unstructured organisation**: demonstrated through the teacher’s organisation of the assessment event, evidenced by formal programs or order of performances; seated audience; silence between acts; lighting or sound equipment.
These characteristics are not mutually exclusive and a learning environment contains a combination of many attributes. Learning environments also have different attributes demonstrated at different times throughout the school year. However, the attributes of the learning environment illustrate the assessment procedures used by the teachers, many of which have a ritual quality. These characteristics, as observed at each site, are presented in tabular form in Appendix I which illustrates the variety of cultural behaviours witnessed in this study. The table identifies cultural behaviours in each Drama class that have an impact on the tone and atmosphere of the Drama performance assessment environment. For example, students at School Five said the presence of an external audience enhances the collegial spirit on the day of assessment. The students aim to build a successful performance, believing this can be achieved by strengthening all class members’ performances. Prior to the performance of *King Lear*, one student from School Five said:

*S5B: I want us all to do really well on the night, but the assessment that we do in the Drama room, that’s more like an individual thing.*

Findings show that students’ anxiety is affected by the class atmosphere and interactions. Classes with casual interactions on the performance day yield a relaxed temperament among students, whereas classes that approach performance assessment more formally display individualised or competitive spirits that appear to add tension to the room. The more formal the assessment, environments appear to favour a well-structured organisation of the performances. There are less false starts and the transitions between performances are shorter. Students often have lighting, sound and staging equipment more readily organised. Despite this, there appears to be no significant difference in the range of individual results achieved in classrooms with either formal, casual, structured or unstructured environments. In each instance, a range of results are achieved on the trajectory, suggesting that Drama class culture and atmosphere does not necessarily have an impact on student achievement. Importantly, the state or territory’s achievement standards for Drama performance assessment appear to be able to be applied in classrooms with varying cultural attributes.
Feedback from assessments is a central component of the assessment process. The way in which the teacher facilitates this process also has ritual qualities. To demonstrate the many approaches that are possible in distributing feedback to students, I will use one particular school site to demonstrate an example of good practice in providing assessment feedback for learning.

School Six uses an interesting process during the judging phase. At the conclusion of each summatively assessed performance, the teacher, Megan, does not notate her final comments or make initial judgments on students’ results. Instead, she stands by the video camera and asks the performing students to remain in the performing space. She usually congratulates the performing group, then turns to the class and says something to the effect of ‘what did we all think?’

A verbal feedback session follows. Comments flow rapidly from the students, initially with calls of approval, followed by a few raised hands to ask questions of the performers. The questions concern the performers’ inspirations for the piece, creative decisions on the staging or use of space, questions about dialogue and character, and requests for an explanation of the symbolism or meanings behind the piece. The class, without prompting from the teacher, moves on from these questions to give feedback to the performers. They begin their sentences with phrases such as, ‘I liked it when you …’, ‘That was really funny when you …’ and ‘It made me think when …’. While most of the comments are overwhelmingly positive, there are also constructively critical comments or questions for the performers such as, ‘Could you explain?’. The performers, still remaining in the performance space, answer the questions colloquially, pausing frequently to laugh as they respond to questions as best they can. Megan, their teacher, interjects from time to time, only to add to the conversation rather than take control of it. When the conversation and questions slow down, Megan thanks the performers, offers another round of applause, and then asks the next group to prepare their performance space.

In our interview, I ask Megan to expand on the feedback process used in her class. The following is an extract from the transcript:
I: Megan, the feedback session at the end of each performance was really interesting.

Megan: Yeah, people tend to say that.

I: Really?

Megan: Yeah, I get visitors to my class and they all say ‘what was that all about?’ and I’m always really shocked that not everyone does it.

I: Is that right? Well, do you think other people should be doing something similar?

Megan: Well, it works for me. I mean, after a performance I think that it’s necessary to have some reflection time, because this is a learning environment. I want the kids to learn from the performers, and the performers to learn from their audience. It’s sort of simple to me.

I: Do you do it often?

Megan: Absolutely: for every single performance assessment. And I’ve been doing it for years.

I: Yes, I noticed the students were really comfortable with that process.

Megan: Totally. We start from their first performance at the start of Year 11. Then they need a bit of training about what to say and what to ask. Some people need to be taught how best to phrase their comments if you know what I mean (laughs). But I think it’s really valuable because then the assessment feedback isn’t just coming from me. Their audience can say, ‘I didn’t get it’ or whatever, and then when they get my comments it’s not like ‘well, Megan said that because she hates me’ or whatever. They really grow as performers from that feedback.

I: … yes, I can see that.

Megan: But more importantly, they grow as people and they learn to accept criticism in the right way. It’s a life skill.

Megan’s feedback ritual indicates that performance assessment is collaboration between herself and her student performers, and the whole class is involved. This is unlike other school sites where the judging phase is completed solely by the teacher. Megan uses the judging stage to invite observations and comments from the audience, broadening the performance environment to one where the audience’s perspectives are valued. The student audience seems confident, articulate and informed when giving feedback. Comments are made using their own adolescent jargon rather than using the formal language of the syllabus or assessment criteria.
The performing students also appear comfortable with the process and seem to welcome both comments and criticism. Some of the students spoke briefly about their feedback sessions in interviews:

S6B: We started doing verbal comments at the start of Year 11.

S6A: And first we were all, like, ‘that was good’, and that was all we said.

S6B: But Megan taught us what we should be looking for in a performance and we learned how to ask questions in a way that won’t hurt the people up there.

S6D: I really like that conversation. It’s pretty scary actually, because you feel like you’re going to be torn to shreds by your audience. But no one’s like that. Actually, I’ve noticed that even if you really stuffed it, and things are starting to go all negative, someone will jump in with a positive something to say.

Megan explains that she works hard to create a supportive environment, but also reminds me that I have witnessed the result of two years of developing students’ abilities to articulate their observations. The students concur:

S6C: I really like hearing what the class thinks. It’s a lot better now than it used to be. You used to get really dodgy feedback, like ‘you have a nice costume’ or whatever. But this year, and definitely this semester, I find they’re really saying deep things and you think so much more about your performance when someone has something meaningful to say about it.

7.3.3.1 Impact of the assessor on class culture

Megan’s feedback sessions observed in School Six demonstrate that assessors have their own cultures within the learning environment. The assessors’ cultures are apparent in the teachers’ descriptions of what they hope to see from performing students. Teachers are concurrently in the roles of teacher and assessor, or as described in Chapter 5, curator and critic. Their identities as curators and critics have been formed through a combination of factors, including past experiences, personal histories, formal studies, professional learning experiences, their own theatre backgrounds and the context of the students they are assessing. John from School Five reflects on each of these factors and offers insight into the development of the assessor’s culture.
John: It’s been a long time I’ve been doing this, and there’s a few things in my experience that tell me what I’m looking for … So, of course my background in theatre has really shaped what I’m intending to see from students. I guess my standards are high because they’re high when I go to the theatre … I think that’s actually important, teaching students to be good critics, so you’ve got to expose them to a lot of theatre, and to do that you have to expose yourself as well … But it’s more than that. My background in theatre taught me the value of rehearsal, and really quality rehearsal, so I try to pass that on. I’m always trying to see new ways to do things, which is why I attend a lot of PD events, because you can never stop learning enough. I’m doing this post-graduate work because the more you can develop yourself as a practitioner, the more students are going to learn as well … But I’m also really shaped by my past as well. So, I once had this amazing lecturer whose feedback helped me grow. But I have worked with other directors who believe you get more out of people by grinding them into the ground. It’s no surprise that because of that experience I’m going to guide my students in a positive way … As long as that approach suits that student. Some have to have their bums kicked. And I can do that too. Because I’ve been on the receiving end of that as well!

Wubbels (1992) argues that teachers’ identities and practices are highly influenced by cognitive and affective responses to their own educational experiences, as well as cultural representations of their teachers. There is some reflexivity at play here. Assessors are products of culture, but also create culture through their teaching and assessment practices. The assessor can further influence culture reflexively through his/her own tastes and preferences, just as the curator does through artistic briefs. The Drama assessor also communicates his/her theatrical preferences through feedback to students which is delivered in ways that he/she believes will influence student learning. As John stated, ‘Different students have different motivations; some will be motivated to act through positive encouragement, whilst others need more stern guidance.’

This suggests that assessment can be reflexively influenced rather than being a static and unchanging construct. Similar to assessors, students can be cultural consumers and contributors. Both assessors and students have relationships in their own contexts that can influence the assessment environment. Jane’s comment from School Two illustrates one of the ways this can occur:

Jane: I was taught a very board brand of physical theatre, which includes some studies I did a while ago when I was in theatre and stuff. But now, Zen Zo has grown so big and it’s the biggest physical theatre thing that we
Zen Zo is a Brisbane-based physical theatre company that has a tailored education program. Jane’s comment highlights the way the learning environment can be influenced by the current theatre practice and availability of learning resources. Furthermore, the professional learning that is available is a reflection of local and current practices in drama. Jane, as the teacher-assessor, is influenced by this local current practice. Her learning environment is influenced by the wider theatrical culture and this can reflexively influence her practice as an assessor.

7.3.4 State-territory education culture

Each Drama teacher guides their class by following their state or territory curriculum administered by the state/territory board authority. Cultural aspects of Drama, particular to the state or territory curriculum, are apparent in two key respects: (i) teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards assessment and moderation or grade verification procedures; and (ii) state and territory assessment procedures that have an impact on the performances created for assessment purposes.

This study discovered that Drama teachers often had perceptions or opinions relating to their own or other state and territory assessment and moderation or grade verification procedures. The interview schedule did not invite comment on other systems, but these arose during the course of our conversations. Teachers have some awareness of other state or territory curricular or assessment procedures, although some of their comments appear to be based on out-of-date information, rumour, stereotypes, perceptions or hearsay information. Regardless, these factors shape teachers’ opinions of educational models outside of their own experience. Drama teachers do have a high degree of familiarity with educational policies in their own state or territory, coupled with a degree of unfamiliarity with other systems of Drama assessment. It is well established that humans often fear the unknown and unfamiliar
(Dunsmoor, Prince, Murty, Kragel & LaBar, 2011) and the field of Drama performance assessment is not immune to this. It is also worth noting that this study took place in the context of the design of an Australian Curriculum for the Arts. Even though the curriculum is for Foundation Year to Year 10, there is still some anxiety over what a national approach to curriculum would mean for senior secondary assessment.

While teachers critique Drama curricula and state or territory senior secondary assessment processes outside of their own experience, they also critique their own system. They indicate what they see as the best aspects of their educational jurisdiction’s system and also provide evidence for suggested improvements to create efficient, fair, consistent, equitable, user friendly or clearer assessment procedures. Much of their critique relates to the quality assurance procedures, including moderation or external assessment processes. Teachers’ critiques of their own educational system demonstrate a curriculum culture and appear to be well formed within a feedback loop. Board authorities in each state and territory invite feedback from teachers and the drama education community when revising syllabus documents. Teachers are accustomed to providing critique on syllabus documents and have formulated strong opinions on their strengths and challenges.

When discussing their state or territory’s Drama syllabus and assessment procedures, the teachers engage in critique that broadly refers to the three main areas of critique: (i) content; (ii) procedures; and (iii) practice. Sections 7.3.4.1 to 7.3.4.3 explore the teachers’ critiques that are particular to their state or territory’s assessment culture.

### 7.3.4.1 Critique of school-based assessment

Queensland uses school-based assessment where all senior secondary assessment tasks are designed and assessed by the teacher. State-specific cultures are demonstrated in the teachers’ comments relating to the moderation procedures. Both Glenda and Jane are active on their local moderation panels and therefore hold intimate understandings of the process. The two teachers appear to have a high degree of confidence in the moderation process, but still suggest improvements. In
particular, Glenda makes comments alluding to a high degree of confidence in local Drama educators based on the materials presented at the moderation panels.

Glenda: It’s a very rigorous process that we go through, but also it’s not intimidating or designed to bully people. It’s very collegial and we try to be inclusive of all the views on offer. But really, most of what we get is pretty close to where the judgements should be. In some cases, people are trying to be too harsh and we have to remind them that these students are just 15 or 16 years old.

Glenda’s comment suggests that she experiences a culture of rigour and collegiality amongst Drama educators. Jane, another Drama teacher from Queensland, concurred, adding that she finds the experience of being an observer at the moderation panel to be a highly beneficial professional learning opportunity. However, cultural understanding has taken time to evolve and grow into the model currently experienced by the teachers.

Glenda: But it’s taken a lot of hard work to get to this point. We floundered at the start but I think we’ve always shared the view that moderation was a good thing.

Glenda’s and Jane’s comments about collegial spirit and a high degree of cohesiveness at their moderation panel pose are in sharp contrast to those of John and Megan from the ACT, who are less enthusiastic about their panel moderation process. The ACT system of moderation was modelled on several of the processes developed in Queensland. However, while moderation panel members in Queensland are merit-selected, Senior Drama teachers in the ACT are required to participate. Having all teachers involved provides the opportunity to engage in moderation practices, thereby being active contributors to the quality assurance processes for Drama assessment, and helping achieve consistency of standards. Both Megan and John emphasise the importance of moderation, and each describes the various benefits of engaging in the process. They also express concerns in relation to their system.
Megan: Participation is not equal. Sometimes not everyone comes. People don’t submit examples of work like they’re asked to. And we’re so over arguing with each other that we tend not to disagree.

Megan was asked to elaborate:

I: Are you saying there were arguments in the past?

Megan: Oh, absolutely! We all have a difference of opinion. And particularly when this started everyone kept saying it was so subjective. And then everyone asked who has a right to make a judgement on your kids. There was times when it wasn’t pretty.

The ACT system has been developed more recently than the systems in NSW and Queensland, and it is still evolving. This is not to say that practice is fixed in NSW or Queensland, but their systems have had more time to establish themselves into a regular pattern.

John elaborates on his concerns about the moderation practices in the ACT:

John: It’s really hard to be held accountable when you’re sitting two seats away. Then people take all that stuff personally. Or you don’t want to criticise that person sitting two seats away from you, so you let a few things go. But really, there’s such a huge inconsistency in standard here. I mean, I’ve rarely given A’s throughout my career. When I see the way they’re given out at other schools … I mean, gee. You’d want to hope the standard was a lot higher than my school. But it’s really not.

Both Megan and John suggest that the moderation system is not effective in achieving its aims; those being to confirm teacher judgement, guide teacher decisions and allow for consistency of standards to be achieved (ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies, n.d.). Their narratives are a reflection of their perceptions and do not necessarily reflect reality in the ACT. It is possible, however, that there is a culture of caution surrounding the moderation system. If so, this is a cause for some concern. Landmark studies, such as those from Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) and Kirschenbaum, Napier and Simon (1971), report on connections between teacher perceptions and practices when assessing. While there has been much research in subsequent years supporting Rosenthan and Jacobsons’ and Kirschenbaum et al.’s
findings and suggesting weaknesses in their research (as cited in Zoeckler, 2007), there are connections between teachers’ perceptions of the process and confidence in the assessment system. A teacher’s perception of the measures used to ensure comparability affects their understanding of the politics of assessment as applied in schools. If members of the ACT Drama education community hold reservations about the moderation system, they may need more time and space to develop their understanding of the system so they can enact the processes and standards with confidence.

The ACT students also express some trepidation with regard to the Drama moderation panel’s judgements and the comparability of grades for Drama in the ACT. Their comments are akin to the culture of caution expressed by their teachers in which concerns are raised about comparability in school-based assessment within the broader territory comparison. Some students at Schools Five and Six question the assessment and comparability of grades.

*S5C: So, my cousin is at (college removed for identification purposes) and they said they get As all the time. That’s basically unheard of here at our school. I don’t know if an A means the same thing everywhere.*

*S6A: I don’t know that the standard is that high here. I mean, I think the standards are really different between schools but everyone seems to get the same marks. And the BSSS doesn’t do much about that.*

These students’ unprompted comments suggest that the ACT students participate in discussions about moderation procedures either in formal ways facilitated by teachers or informal ways among peers, parents and community members.

Even though John and Megan are experienced and comfortable when applying territory-wide standards to student performances, their critique of the territory’s moderation procedures show vigilance to the inconsistencies of teachers’ judgements when verifying grades at moderation panel. However, there is no evidence in this study that inconsistencies in the application of standards are more prevalent in less experienced teachers’ practices.
7.3.4.2 Critique of the capstone project

In NSW, HSC Drama group performance is a capstone task, an externally examined task that benchmarks each group performance against others in the state. Both NSW Drama teacher participants claim a high degree of satisfaction in this process while also elaborating areas of improvement. Christine’s many years as an external HSC assessor influences her teaching practices, and she draws heavily on this experience when applying standards to her students’ work. Tania from School Three has over 30 years of experience teaching in NSW and draws on this experience when she reflects on the way the external examination system has developed during her teaching career. The breadth of Christine’s and Tania’s experience endows their comments with significant credence, most notably the rigour they attribute to the NSW examination system.

Tania: Oh yeah, the standard is high. And it should be, and at our school we aim for those high standards. But we have showcases like On Stage where kids can see what the best looks like so hopefully they can aim for that. It means that the kids are actually driving the standard up.

Tania identified a competitive culture within Drama at her school and feels that competition is reflected within the NSW system. Like many systems, the NSW Senior Drama assessment system is based on ranking students, but the NSW Drama HSC showcase event On Stage additionally gives students and teachers an understanding that their learning in Drama takes place in a state-wide context in which everyone will eventually be compared. Christine alludes to NSW Drama students developing an awareness of state-wide standards:

Christine: So, the entire time you’re working towards that external exam. Even when you’re in Year 9 Drama, you’re gathering experiences which will help you on HSC group performance day. And because you know that someone else will be coming to mark you, you become really aware of what outsiders think of your work. I like that because the students begin to see their drama as bigger than what can fit within these four walls.

Christine also appears to be highly supportive of the external examination system where performances are judged by external examiners:
Christine: It’s one of the best ways, I think, that we can make it fair and a comparable standard. You really are very close to your students’ work and you need an external face to come in, with no knowledge of the situation, and give the students the result they deserve. I don’t see any other way to do it that’s as fair. There are a lot of variables in schools. Public, private, good facilities and bad, and this is really the only way to have a fair expectation of everyone so you can compare them properly. Ask them to do the same task. It’s like the moment of truth.

The capstone task requires individuals to integrate their understanding of drama with their group members’ understandings. In most cases, there is no theatrical director for performance assessment tasks as students collectively devise and direct a piece of original drama. While this may appear challenging, it is consistent with the aims of Drama, particularly the syllabus statement that drama ‘is a collaborative art form that involves the creative interaction of individuals using a range of artistic skills’ (NSW Board of Studies, 2009, p. 6).

Hatton & Lovesy (2009) and Lovesy (2002) write in detail about the creative and collaborative process of the HSC group devised project. They characterise the creative process as being rich in peer learning and peer evaluation. Individuals develop empathy for each other and the group develops an identity through using its own voice and language. Many of these qualities are reflected in this study. Students from School Four undertaking the NSW Drama HSC performance task discuss the collaborative development of their ideas, often acknowledging the strengths their peers brought to the group. Their comments suggest a prevalence of positive working relationships which have been influenced by their personal and adolescent frames. The performance assessment experience also appears to create new practices in the drama learning context; it is creating a collaborative working environment, rich in embodied learning (Wright, 2011) and kinaesthetic interactions. Each group develops their own collaborative practices which contribute to the learning environment frame. Finally, each group is able to successfully showcase their piece of original drama. That piece is a product of a range of cultural frames that reflect the collaborative nature of Drama performance assessment.
7.3.4.3 Critique of assessment as professional learning

A strong feature of state and territory assessment practice is the prominence of professional learning activities or preparation for moderation or grade verification roles. The following teachers’ comments about professional learning provide a window into the preparation for the moderation or grade verification process:

*Jane (Qld): One of the best PDs I’ve ever done has been as an observer on panel. It really was an eye-opener to see what everyone is submitting. We also look at exemplars and that sets a standard. It made me view my own students differently because I was finally confronted with what the standard was. But not everyone has that opportunity, or if they do, maybe they don’t take it.*

*Christine (NSW): The absolute best PD you can do is HSC marking. It’s evolved so much. Now you spend three days viewing all these different student performances from different schools, all anonymously of course, you don’t know where anyone is from. And you go through this process of benchmarking. Then you set standards so you know what to look for when you’re marking. At the end of the three days if you disagree with the benchmarks, then you have to change, but to arrive at that, it’s done quite democratically, with some really experienced leadership as well. It so rigorous, but that process is only open to HSC markers and it’s really competitive to get in. So if you’re not in the gang, you’re out in the cold a bit.*

*Megan (ACT): Look, one of the big downfalls with our system is that there’s no training. You get in there, choose a portfolio and go for it. If you’re new they ask you to sit with someone who’s done it before. So it’s gotten a lot better over the years, but of course there’s arguments over standards. We don’t actually know what they are!*

There appears to be a strong correlation between professional learning and teachers’ perceptions of the system’s efficacy. This mirrors literature that attests to a strong link between teachers’ self-efficacy and engagement in professional learning opportunities (Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004; Hardy, 2012; Nabi Karimi, 2011; Wahlstrom & Seashore Louis, 2008; Watson, 2006). The teachers in this study suggest that their understanding of assessment standards is well-established, but also cite professional learning as one of the keys to achieving consistency of standards. This suggests that all systems should review the available professional learning activities in order to ensure system-wide standards become commonly known. This implication is further explored in Section 7.4.
7.3.5 Cultures of assessment

There are numerous cultural factors prevalent in Drama performance assessments that are common across the research sites. These factors allow for an exploration of the cultures present in Drama performance assessment, senior secondary assessment and the context of assessment itself.

7.3.5.1 The culture of challenge

Section 6.2.1 investigates the experience of Drama performance assessment and the myriad of emotions that accompany the process of performing for the purpose of assessment. Each student has his/her own experience of assessment, but all students appear to engage in emotional and cognitive experiences when performing their assessable pieces to an audience. Similar experiences take place in other subjects, particularly when students’ creative ideas are expressed. But in Drama, students showcase themselves and their characters, which they aim to present in the best light for the audience and the assessor. Students emphasise getting their character right, both for other student-actors on stage and their audience.

SIF: It’s weird that like, you’re this character, but it’s also you up there. So, sometimes you have to be ugly, or mean or really awful or whatever, but that’s not what you’re like personally. So, if your friends say, ‘oh my god, you were so … Ugly’, well, it’s like you’ve done a good job. Even though for me, as a girl, that’s not what I ever want to be like.

This student’s comment stems from the adolescent experience where students have a heightened awareness of perceptions of their bodies and their esteem may be hypersensitive. However, he is also suggesting that a culture of challenge can be associated with the Drama performance assessment environment. Students are being challenged to present themselves in new and differing lights, and on the whole, they are accepting that challenge, which is difficult for them as adolescents (Trainor, Delfabbro, Anderson & Winefield, 2010).

Accompanying the culture of challenge is a culture of acceptance. The notion of accepting offers is a ubiquitous theme in contemporary drama (particularly prevalent in improvisation technique) in which an actor makes an offer and their fellow actors
choose to accept that offer (Baumer & Magerko, 2010; Salinsky & Frances-White, 2013). In the development of a drama performance, student-actors are expected to advance on offers or yield to other offers. In Drama performance assessment, accepting, advancing and yielding behaviours are evident in students who are playing roles they would not typically choose. For example, one student from School Five describes the experience of working with a group of actors to whom he makes an offer and the group members respond accordingly.

SSB: When I started I absolutely hated my character, Regan. I thought ‘God, what a total …’ So, when I started playing her I had to find a way I could sort of, communicate her evilness without hating myself at the end of it. I came up with her being all sultry, like this manipulative seductress and I thought it worked. So, I talked to my scene members and they weren’t sure, but said they’d give it a go. I mean, the guy I was acting with had to adjust his character to get drawn into hers, but we tried it and it seemed to work so that’s what she became.

Teachers contribute to the culture of challenge and culture of acceptance by constantly encouraging their students to accept character roles outside of their personal experience. Two teachers referred to wanting to stretch or push their students to explore new dramatic styles or challenge them to play different types of characters. In my autoethnography I note that this is more widespread in Drama than is found in this thesis. The teachers concerned found these offers to be welcomed by students, suggesting that performance assessment can assist in broadening the student’s drama experience. This growth is facilitated by teachers who promote deeper understandings of drama through their own offers. To return to the terms used in Chapter 5, the teacher-curator challenges the student-artist by redefining each artist’s individual brief, which may include exploring new dramatic territory or experiencing a character outside the usual repertoire. The culture of challenge is facilitated by teaching and learning practices that allow the learner to construct deeper and broader relationships with drama in the hope of making student-artists to be stronger performers.

Central to Drama in the senior secondary setting is the culture of challenge. In the wider context of schooling, it has been argued that creative pursuits are often
undervalued (Albers, Dooley, Seely Flint, Holbrook, May, 2012; Deverell, 1995; Savoie, 2009; Smilan & Miraglia, 2009; Weisbart, 2003) or not recognised for their academic rigour (Boyd, n.d.; Welch, 2009). In interviews, many students make comments to defend their choice of Drama as a senior secondary subject, emphasising that it has challenge and rigour equal to their other subjects. Students were not asked to defend Drama as a subject but volunteered this advocacy. Many mention that friends, parents, relatives or even other teachers make disparaging remarks about their choice of Drama; the practice of undervaluing Drama and other creative pursuits appears to be alive in some students’ social environment. In this research, reinforcing the idea that challenge is central to the experience of Drama contributes to the already available body of literature that attests to Drama being a rigorous area of study that involves a level of challenge comparable to other subjects available for study in senior secondary courses (Donelan, 2009; Haseman, 2006; O’Connor, 2009; Pascoe, 2009; Sallis, 2010).

7.3.5.2 Culture of senior secondary assessment

There are other cultural factors that apply to the field of senior secondary assessment. Some behaviours and practices associated with senior secondary assessment appear to have a ritual quality reflecting the seriousness of the undertaking. Each Drama class in this study treats the performance assessment event with a degree of seriousness appropriate to the senior secondary course of study. This is demonstrated through the use of video recording, a formal markers’ table, and a performance environment that is focussed on the performers. Senior secondary assessment across the curriculum is treated with similar gravitas by teachers, students, school administration and parents due to its bearing on student exit scores.

In order to prepare for this high-stakes assessment event students engage in activities such as devising and rehearsing, or lighting and sound planning. Yet, as noted in Section 4.3.3, none of the students in this study are able to reiterate the criteria on which they are being assessed, suggesting that the students’ common practices do not involve a review of criteria in preparation for the assessment process. The students are aware of the existence of the criteria and most teachers mentioned processes
whereby they explain the criteria to the class. The teachers also aim to employ the language of the criteria in their discussions with students. The teachers encourage students to ask questions and seek clarification about the task requirements and criteria, but most student queries do not relate to the criteria.

The assessment criteria represent only one set of understanding about how achievements are quantified. Students have their own priorities when they craft their performances and their own understanding of what a drama performance should entail. Students in this study were able to produce drama for their audience, some of which was of a high standard. This suggests that the ability to articulate the criteria is not necessary to produce a successful response to the task. The students are relying on their own understanding of the task requirements in order to achieve their aims, and in that sense, they are succeeding as they demonstrate another cultural phenomenon. For teachers, the criteria’s purpose is to communicate the expected standards of achievement to the students. However, students, whilst relying on their own understanding, perceive the criteria to be a point of reference for the teacher to make a decision on their standard of achievement. For some students, their reliance on their own understanding is sufficient for them to achieve their aims.

7.4 Reflective interpretations: Applying understandings of culture

Chapter 7 reflects on the cultural frames that are active in Drama performance assessment: student, adolescent, learning environment, state-territory education and assessment cultures. There is some interaction between the frames and a great deal of opportunity for cultures to reflexively influence each other.

Both teachers and students arrive at the Drama assessment environment with personal and (in teachers’ cases) professional cultures that have been formed through previous interactions, cognitive constructs and affective understandings acquired during a process of socialisation (CARLA, 2012). For students, this includes experiences in artistic and cultural fields outside of the classroom, such as co-curricular activities. Through the Drama assessment process, students bring these
experiences into the classroom and they, in turn, contribute to the Drama class culture.

Adolescents generally lead full lives, rich with a range of activities encompassing family, cultural, social and educational contexts. As a result, they have a range of competing demands and are challenged to prioritise a wide range of tasks. Drama students have a tradition of robust co-curricular involvements. Several students also have leadership positions in their schools. I met several school captains, prefects, student council leaders and the like as part of the student interview process. Although it is not directly in the scope of this research, I noticed that many of the attributes valued in Drama are complementary to leadership positions in the school community; both roles requiring confidence, professionalism, collaborative skills, and at times, a degree of charisma. I also pondered over whether Drama students have a culture of over-commitment. Several students mention difficulties of completing group performance tasks with the number of competing demands in their lives. Whilst the experience of being school leaders, engaging in co-curricular commitments and managing work and family commitments is beneficial for a student’s life experience, in the short term, they may find themselves over-extended or having difficulty with short-term planning.

This study synthesises practices that students feel are helpful to their drama learning experience, understanding of performance assessment and subsequently, artistic critique. One example is Megan’s practice of feedback, as demonstrated at School Six. One of the wonderful experiences of researching for this thesis is the discovery of exemplary practises that can help to further practices in Drama assessment. This research can be of benefit if these practices are shared throughout the community of Drama educators. There are other areas where the sharing of experiences can help to bring the drama education community closer together, specifically addressing misconceptions that exist about other state and territory practices. This study suggests that there are significant misunderstandings circulating about Drama assessments outside the teacher’s home state. My autoethnography reflects on my own experience of moving between state and territories and having little understanding of the practices in neighbouring jurisdictions. This phenomenon is
evident throughout many areas of policy and professional practice, but I find its existence in drama education to be unfortunate. In the process of conducting this study, I was able to witness many fascinating and positive aspects of the three education systems and there is much to be gained from sharing these practices amongst the community of Drama educators. However, it requires the community to approach the discussions with open-mindedness, involving some degree of letting go of preformed ideas, which is a difficult task for most people (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Morrish, 2012). As demonstrated in Chapter 7, personal beliefs and cultures have been formed over time as part of behaviours and interactions, cognitive constructs and affective understandings learned through a process of socialisation (CARLA, 2012). They are not easily set aside, even in the quest for productive professional discussion.

As mentioned previously, this study took place at the time of developing a national curriculum now known as the Australian Curriculum – the Arts. Many teachers hold concerns about a common curriculum being applied to senior secondary schools in their state or territory, accompanied by a uniform method of assessment. At the time of writing, the Australian Curriculum for the Arts does not involve this brief – its scope is focussed on Foundation years to Year 10 – and all states and territories will continue to administer their own curriculum and assessment in the senior secondary years. Even so, teachers in this study display anxiety at the prospect of even having to discuss changes to their Senior Drama system, and all express opinions that their system is best. In popular media, Australians pride themselves on having a notoriously parochial culture. Rivalries between states and territories are commonplace in sport, lifestyle, politics and the arts, and it seems that this culture seeps its way into curriculum discussions as well. If, in the future, the Australian Curriculum brief is extended to a national approach beyond Year 10 into senior secondary curricular, it is recommended that consideration be given to clear and well communicated design of assessment so that confusion is reduced and professional learning is enhanced. The use of capstone tasks, external examinations and peer review moderation panels are senior secondary practices that have become culturally accepted within each state and territory. Those practices are associated with the state
or territory in which they operate, therefore, an element of cultural shock may be the
effect if a national approach to Senior Drama assessment is adopted.

Professional dialogue is a critical factor for developing and maintaining quality
practice in Drama assessment. The importance of professional dialogue is currently
being promoted in the Australian teaching and learning context. In particular, the
Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has devoted
Standard 6 of the seven professional standards for teachers to professional learning.

Elements of high quality teaching and learning involve identifying, planning and
engaging in professional learning with colleagues in order to improve student
learning (AITSL, 2013). Professional dialogue is not for the comfort or preservation
of our own practices, rather, it is for the benefit of our students who have chosen to
challenge themselves with the study of Drama. We should honour that choice by
providing high quality learning experiences that can be enhanced by deeper
professional dialogue. Some of this dialogue may cause discomfort or confront us to
explore the shortcomings of our own system. But we would all do well to remember
that what is familiar is not always the best we can do for our students. The great
thinker, Einstein, warns us:

There is fear of the unknown. They are afraid of new ideas. They are loaded
with prejudices, not based upon anything in reality, but based on … if
something is new, I reject it immediately because it’s frightening to me. What
they do instead is just stay with the familiar. (Fox & Keck, 2004, p. 206)

It is, however, encouraging to note that the teachers in this study apply critique,
suggest improvements and point to possible future developments in their system.
They also hold a degree of confidence in the system of Drama performance
assessment in their state or territory. Megan and John from the ACT hold more
robust criticisms of their system than the other states. Most of their critiques were
reserved for the moderation process in which they flagged a number of concerns,
including participation from colleagues, comparability of standards and collegial
relationships at meetings. It is somewhat concerning that both the ACT teachers and
a number of students voiced their perceptions that standards differ throughout the
territory. This may or may not be the case, but their insights suggest a lower level of confidence in their system than their NSW or Queensland counterparts.

Professional learning is closely associated with the development of assessment practices. Professional learning in the areas of moderation and external examination is an example of best practice as it provides teachers with an opportunity to develop understandings of state and territory standards with regard to assessment artefacts being reviewed. Queensland and NSW teachers suggest that one of the most beneficial by-products of participation in external moderation panels or examination processes is the professional learning opportunity to become more familiar with assessment standards. The professional learning (or lack thereof) that accompanies the moderation process in the ACT is an interesting criticism arising from the teacher interviews. Here, another cultural phenomenon emerges. Participation in HSC marking in NSW and the moderation panels in Queensland is merit-selected and not all teachers are able to participate. The large number of Drama teachers and geographical vastness of Queensland and NSW make it impractical for all teachers to be tasked with external assessment or moderation responsibilities. The Queensland and NSW teachers in this study experience participation in moderation or external assessment respectively, and they describe their preparation for the task as being rigorous, presenting them with deeper understandings of standards that can be applied to their own classrooms.

In contrast, all teachers of Senior Drama in the ACT are required to be on the moderation panel, yet Megan from the ACT laments that preparation for moderation or benchmarking procedures are not part of the grade verification process. Teachers from Queensland and NSW describe benchmarking procedures which include a viewing of examples or exemplar student performances. This helps teachers to develop deep understandings of standards as they see those standards being demonstrated by students achieving at a specified level. Queensland and NSW teachers state that the benchmarking process is extensive, whereas the ACT teachers identify this as an area needing further development. John from the ACT echoes these concerns, discussing what he describes as minimal direction given to teachers when participating in moderation. This is another example of an area where practices can be shared across borders. There are also opportunities outside the formal moderation or grade verification process where standards can be communicated. For
example, BOSTES distributes software packages containing video samples of performing students accompanied by markers’ notes pertaining to each standard of achievement. These examples of useful professional learning approaches can be shared across borders, not for the purpose of bringing practices closer together, but to assist in developing assessment practices for the benefit of students.

Finally, it is significant that one of the most prevalent factors that permeated all cultural frames is the culture of challenge. Like many previous writings (Donelan, 2009; Haseman, 2006; O’Connor, 2009; Pascoe, 2009; Sallis, 2010), this study confirms that Drama holds a level of academic rigour comparable to other senior secondary subjects. Drama, like other arts subjects, contains the additional challenge of aesthetic development, as explored in the literature in Section 2.2. Students accept the multitude of challenges presented to them as part of their Drama studies. Teachers guide students through these challenges often presenting them with additional challenges in order to facilitate a deepening of their experience in Drama. This noted, it is clear that students do not place a great importance on familiarising themselves with assessment criteria, especially for performance tasks and disassociate this behaviour with achievement success. An area of possible further research would be to explore this phenomenon in other assessment environments, including school experiences outside the senior secondary years and assessment in tertiary environments.

Chapter 4 presents the aims and stages of the Drama performance assessment process, finding a six-stage process that emerges from the tasks observed at the six school sites. A key finding in Chapter 7 was the multitude of roles and responsibilities experienced by the Drama teacher. Chapter 5 uses metaphors to illustrate the roles of the teacher and student in the Drama assessment process, noting that the teacher experiences Drama performance assessment as a curator, mentor and critic, and the student engages in the assessment task as an artist. Chapter 6 proceeds to present findings on teacher and student experiences of performative assessment, which is often culturally situated. Chapter 7 evaluates the cultural frames that contribute to the environment of Drama performance assessment, presenting five frames of culture that influence the performance assessment experience. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis with reference to the central research questions, reiterating the
main discoveries of this thesis while proposing pathways for future directions in Drama performance assessment.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

The study was undertaken to develop insight into Drama performance assessment practices in Queensland, NSW and the ACT. The research aims to produce findings in relation to teachers’ and students’ experiences of performance assessment and contributes to research into senior secondary assessment practices in the Arts. The study also seeks to develop insights into the methods used to achieve comparability of standards in Drama, which includes the use of moderation portfolios and external examinations in Queensland, NSW and the ACT. This thesis identifies these methods’ strengths and challenges, and explores opportunities for further development for Drama performance assessment and senior secondary assessment models. The findings in relation to senior secondary Drama performance assessment in Queensland, NSW and the ACT are summarised in Sections 8.2–8.4, along with implications for educational practice, policy, theory and research. These insights form the basis for conclusions that have bearing on Drama performance assessment.

8.2 Metaphor for the research

This research recognises that performance is a critical component of Drama. Students come to an enhanced understanding of themselves through developing and performing a role within a narrative and with others. While writing reflections in my autoethnographic journal, parallels emerge between the student-artist process when creating and performing drama and my experiences as a researcher conducting this study. I synthesise these parallels to develop a metaphorical representation that illustrates the research journey as dramatic performance. I, as the researcher, take on several personas (van Rooij, 2012), including that of the director, performer, actor, character and audience member. This study has inspired me, as the researcher, to concurrently extend my understanding of Drama performance assessment practices while further developing my research capabilities. Just as a dramatic performance is
developed with the view to present it to an audience, the audience for this thesis comprises supervisors, assessors, Drama educators and researchers in related fields.

This study demands that the researcher approach the project with a series of questions, then articulate a vision through proposals and an appropriate methodology, which I re-imagine through the lens of the metaphor. Dramatic performances require the vision of a director who will see the project through to the end. The director approaches the work with ideas about the construction of the performance piece and key themes, issues and questions involved. The director ponders a vision for the performance and as the vision develops, steers the dramatic piece in accordance with that vision. The researcher is called on to show leadership and independent study skills to steer the product towards fruition. As with any research project, the end performance may diverge from the scope of the director’s original vision, but researchers and directors aim to be satisfied with their discoveries provided they reflect the unfolding learning that is integral to the developmental process.

As the researcher or director steer their product towards fruition, they engage in research and analysis in order to gain deep understandings of the material they wish to present. When the development of a dramatic piece involves use of a script, a study of previous interpretations of that script is a technique often used by actors and directors to understand the material that will either be synthesised into their vision or disregarded. Just as a researcher engages in analysis of literature, a director or performer is able to explore interpretations from other directors or dramaturgs, revealing tangential issues to be explored. Actors and directors seek an understanding of dramatic context, therefore, they move back and forth between performance construction and textual analysis throughout the rehearsal process in an attempt to form a coherent dramatic statement, as expressed through the performance. This textual analysis is similar to the initial stages of the research project where the researcher acknowledges literature, theories and philosophies associated with drama education and performance assessment. Not all material is integrated into the thesis, but wide reading and discovery help to situate the study effectively within the context of current and past thinking. In the rehearsal process,
issues may emerge that require actors and directors to engage in further textual analysis to develop their interpretations of the script. So too, in the research process, issues may arise during the data collection process that require the researcher to return to the literature to develop further understandings of the phenomenon being investigated.

Within this metaphor, narrative inquiry research methods are symbolically represented by the actor’s undertaking to create a character. Characters are often enhanced through an understanding of the stories told and implied in the text. When analysing a text for performance, actors look to find stories within the script, constantly probing the text and subtext to find the meanings within these stories. Similarly, Wolcott (1990) draws parallels between drama and autoethnography as they both privilege the lived experience of reflective thought while placing that experience in context for a publicly presented purpose. Like an actor’s work, autoethnography involves a high level of introspection, requiring multiple layers of consciousness that connect the personal to the cultural (White & Dixon, 2005). The actor accesses a similar reflective process to provide depth to the character study just as the autoethnographic researcher is able to move back and forth between looking outward and looking inward (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Blocking the action in the theatre determines the positioning and movement of actors on stage to realise the behaviour, movements and interactions of the characters on stage. Blocking the action is guided by the director and is the collaboration between those involved in dramatic performance. Creating patterns of clear communication, adherence to timelines and professional working relationships are also essential to the creation of a successful dramatic piece. Just as the director provides leadership and develops the dramatic piece, so too a dissertation requires similar planning; the collaboration between supervisor, doctoral candidate and supervisors require patterns of productive interaction. Novice researchers and their mentors require professional approaches to communication and mutual respect for each other’s roles in the research process. The nature of relationships between the doctoral candidate and their supervisor are established during the planning of the study when the process for textual analysis, data collection and analysis are blocked into position within this
thesis. In the initial stages of developing a performance and thesis, the director and doctoral supervisor provide guidance and leadership, particularly when identifying the ideas that will result in a robust performance and study. Actors and doctoral candidate positively work with this guidance while integrating the directors’ and supervisors’ ideas with their own creative interpretation.

Developing dramatic performances can be a gruelling and exhausting process. However, when a performance has been successful, the sense of accomplishment is great, particularly if everyone’s combined efforts create a coherent theatrical statement that displays originality, creativity and innovation. These qualities are highly valued in a theatrical context. A dramatic piece draws from the historical context of the adapted theatrical style and contributes to further development of that genre. This research is comparable in that the researcher acknowledges past developments and existing practices in the area of research, and then contributes something new to that field. This research contributes a new methodology to education research that weaves together narratives and performance ethnographies in a Drama assessment focussed setting. Like a drama performance, the study makes a coherent research statement realised through findings that contribute new understandings of Drama performance assessment to the fields of drama education and senior secondary assessment. Dramatic performances aim to engage the audience often by presenting the human experience from a novel perspective and challenging audiences to consider dilemmas that have relevance to their lives. This research operates with a similar motive. Chapter 8 of the thesis draws conclusions and suggests areas for further development for the study’s target audience, those in the field of Drama performance assessment. The recommendations for further development include professional learning opportunities for Drama educators and name a range of issues for consideration by state or territory studies authorities. These issues are discussed with reference to the dissemination strategy of the thesis.
8.3 Key research conclusions

Section 8.3 synthesises the findings and considers the way that their implications can contribute to curriculum, educational policy, qualitative research and drama education practices.

8.3.1 Artistic and aesthetic engagement in Drama

This research complements theories that claim artistic engagement stimulates the aesthetic senses, given that aesthetic engagement is considered by some researchers to be at the heart of contemporary drama education (Greenwood, 2010; Hoepper, 1993; Jacobs, 2009b; McLean, 1996; Martin-Smith, 2005; Radvan, 2006; Queensland Department of Education, 1991), Drama teachers and students. Gale (2005) observe that aesthetic learning is demonstrated by personal and critical responses, active pursuit of aesthetic engagement and the ability to articulate aesthetic processes, all of which were reported by Drama students in this research. For example, students frequently discuss their feelings about performances, understandings of artistic elements critical responses to performative experiences, demonstrating an active pursuit of engagement of aesthetic sensibilities in the process of assessment, the act of being assessed and formal responses to performance assessment.

In the Australian Curriculum, the term aesthetic is used to describe the learning processes in all Arts subjects (ACARA, 2014) and this can be juxtaposed with the general capability of creative thinking that helps students to become ‘successful learners’, ‘confident and creative individuals’ and ‘active and informed citizens’ (ACARA, 2013). Other secondary school subjects design assessment tasks that require students to create original works and performative responses, but the prominence of embodied artistic creation that leads to the engagement of the aesthetic senses is a point of difference between the performing arts of Drama, Music and Dance. The combination of embodied learning whereby students enact the artistic product they have created through an artistic and creative process makes Drama unique. Students involved in this study observed that there are other styles of assessment that hold similarities to a Drama performance. Drama performance
assessment demands that students utilise public presentation skills, which are also accessed during oral presentations. Students also feel that their creative skills are subject to judgement when they create original works in subjects such as Visual Art, English, Music or Dance. However, they also say that Drama offers them a unique opportunity to develop performance skills that use their artistic and creative imaginations for the purpose of assessment. The students reflect on their desire to attain favourable assessment results while making strong links between academic achievement and artistic aims. These artistic aims include a pragmatic desire to impress their audience, to entertain and elicit an emotional response, all while addressing the details of the assessment task. Thus, they also show a strong understanding of their role as artists within an assessment environment that focuses on academic achievement. They appreciate that engaging in Drama means they would create original pieces of performance art that would be subject to judgement in a high-stakes assessment environment.

8.3.2 Performative responses in Drama

Performance is a medium where student actors consolidate and demonstrate their understanding of the theories, history, skills and techniques associated with the style of drama they create. The performance of the assessment task functions as a denouement, bringing together students’ understandings while asking them to use their creativity to develop original responses. As Drama performance assessment operates within an artistically focussed learning environment, the learner and teacher are open to possibilities that are outside teachers’ expectations. These possibilities form part of the phenomenon of a divergent response which is indicative of creative tasks. Divergent responses within the confines of a high-stakes assessment (Harlen, 2007) environment present challenges to the Drama teacher and students. Among other things, this study investigates the extent to which students feel comfortable developing a divergent response, knowing it will be summatively assessed. The presence of risk is critical in this assessment environment. Assessment processes have the potential to stifle originality, innovation and divergent thinking as students are asked to respond in accordance with the function of the assessment task (Ross et al., 1993). However, this research finds that originality and innovation are not
diminished in the high-stakes environment of Senior Drama assessment. Students overwhelmingly believe that they need to take risks and show a high degree of artistic inventiveness to achieve. The insights from Chapter 6 demonstrate that originality and innovation can be rewarded as long as the teacher-assessor has crafted a learning environment that values risk and assessment criteria that accommodate diverse artistic choices.

Literature identifies several challenges associated with artistic and aesthetic engagement in the assessment environment; one of those is the place of subjectivity in an assessment environment that claims to seek fairness. As discussed in Chapter 4, objective and subjective judgements can be valid, and the intersection of the two can be used to arrive at balanced and informed judgments (Ross et al., 1993) about students’ assessment responses. Good assessment practice identified by Drama teachers demonstrates complex understandings about objective, subjective and informed judgements (Jackson, 2006), artistic processes (Thomas & Millard, 2006) and aesthetic learning (Jackson, 2006). Teachers of Drama and the Arts are accustomed to conversations about engaging artistic elements through performance, yet such conversations are often confronting to those outside of artistic fields as they may not be familiar with the language used to describe artistic skills. Drama teachers involved in this research project are willing to express their assessment judgements using language relevant to a broader educational audience. Importantly, they are accustomed to clarifying their artistic and performative language for the benefit of their students and other audiences. They do this by engaging students and parents in discussions about the skills that Drama performance assessment seeks to develop and by putting drama skills on display in public performances.

In interviews, the teachers explains that subjective judgements from the audience and assessor can enhance the assessment process as multiple interpretations are applied to students’ art. Based on my experience of the interviews, I believe there is much that the wider educational community can learn from those assessing in artistic and performative fields. Educators across a diverse range of subjects in senior secondary schooling can strengthen their understandings of the place of subjectivity in assessment, as well as professional judgements and informed perspectives by
becoming more familiar with assessment tasks that involve artistic or performative experiences. Beyond Drama performance assessment, the findings of this thesis is relevance to other embodied artistic processes such as dance performance, or creatively focussed tasks such as musical composition and visual art making.

This thesis finds that challenge and rigour are central to creatively focussed tasks such as Drama performance assessment. Students engaging in Drama appear to feel challenged by the content, ideas, workload and level of commitment required. This is demonstrated in interview comments that attest to deep considerations of the time commitment and intellectual rigour required in Drama. Teachers contribute to the culture of challenge by presenting students with new and different understandings of drama while encouraging them to take risks with their artistic choices; to leave their creative comfort zone. Drama, as a subject, is appropriately challenging for students in their senior secondary years of study. However, students are affected by community attitudes towards arts education as Drama is not always recognised for its challenge or its rigour (Boyd, n.d.; Welch, 2009). Drama performance engages the student’s senses in joy, freedom, play and fellowship. In this respect, it can be difficult for Drama teachers and students to justify the challenge that accompanies Drama performance assessment. However, this research in drama education avoids conducting itself from a ‘self-induced position of inferiority’ (Young, 2001, p. 104) or conversely presenting an over-inflated sense of importance.

This thesis notes that students choose to study Drama, and are expected to approach the demands of the subject with an understanding of the time commitment, intellectual engagement and creative processes that are involved. Many of the students in this study embrace those challenges while others give a more limited commitment based on their aims for their senior secondary years of schooling. For example, those who prioritise enjoyment or relaxation in their approach to Drama are still challenged by the subject, but do not necessarily pursue the high standards and grades sought by others.
Metaphors are used in research to ‘illuminate experiences under investigation’ (Carpenter, 2008, p. 274) as they enable the researcher to apply known characteristics of familiar concepts to other less familiar discoveries in a way that clarifies and broadens understandings of the less familiar (Moss, Moss, Rubinstein & Black, 2003). Chapter 5 and Section 8.4 extrapolate on the parallels between the senior secondary Drama performance assessment environment and the professional context of the artist, curator and critic. The development of these metaphors provides a unique window into the challenges of assessing in an artistic and performative field. The limitations of the metaphors also point to areas for further development of assessment practice. For example, the exploration of the differences between the curators’ and critics’ roles broadens understandings about the tensions that occur in teaching and assessing performance in a high-stakes environment. The analysis of the way student-artists respond to the brief brings about greater insights into the place of divergent thinking, creativity and imagination within the confines of an assessment task.

The metaphor of student-artist and teacher-curator, as introduced in Chapter 5, draws on the tradition of artistic curation. Like a curator, the Drama teacher helps student-artists to see art in ways they may not have previously (Eeds & Peterson, 1991). They curate the assessment experience using performance tasks to enable judgements about students’ achievements to be made. Similarly, students enter an artistically focused course of study with an understanding that they will become student-artists who imagine, plan, create or perform an artistic response. Both teachers and students understand their role and responsibilities in the assessment process. Using Heathcote’s and Herbert’s (1985) term, they are experts living in the experience of being in role. As in Heathcote’s ‘Mantle of the Expert’ (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995), the student is trusted by the teacher to become the expert artist who is expected to take a leadership role in developing their drama and responding to the artistic brief. Heathcote’s ‘Mantle of the Expert’ brings to life imagined realities, but Drama assessment takes place in a real life with real life consequences. The student-artist’s
ability to take leadership in developing his/her drama and responding to the brief is critical to his/her success on the task. The teacher-curator is an enabler for the student-artists to become artistic leaders. Teacher-curators workshop the embodied dramatic work while facilitating open-ended communicative networks through which the Drama performance assessment experience is put on display.

Student-artists craft their performance responses based on their interpretation of implicit and informal aspects of the teacher-curator’s agenda based on past experience with the learning environment. The agenda includes the teacher-curator’s set of priorities and goals for assessment, teachers’ ideological and cultural values and their conscious or subconscious ideas about what student-artists should be producing. The Drama performance assessment environment is subject to a range of agendas: those of the school, teacher, Senior Drama curriculum and assessment policy. The teacher-assessors have expectations that are explicitly stated when they explain the assessment task and criteria to the class, but there are also other messages about how, what and why learning will be judged and rewarded.

The teacher-assessors’ messages and expectations hold similarities with the concept of the hidden curriculum, (Bergenhenegouwen, 1987; Cornbleth, 1984; Joughin, 2010; Kentli, 2009; Margolis, Soldatenko, Acker & Gair, 2001; Martin, 1983; Snyder 1971) which has been defined as ‘the kinds of learnings children derive from the very nature and organisational design of the school, as well as from the behaviours and attitudes of teachers and administrators’ (Longstreet & Shane, 1993, p. 46). This includes the ‘norms, values and the belief systems throughout the curriculum, the school and classroom life’ (Kentli, 2009, p. 86). An advantage is created by a student’s ability to negotiate that curriculum (Ayon, 1980; Kentli, 2009). In the context of this research, the student who is most attuned to the hidden curriculum of the Drama performance assessment environment or the teachers-curators’ agenda is best equipped to succeed academically and artistically in a performance assessment task. In this thesis, academic success refers to the attainment of favourable results, and artistic success is the creation of performance art that satisfies the student-artist and their audience. In the professional field of the arts, some artists successfully negotiate curators’ agendas. Drawing parallels between the
Drama performance assessment environment and the arts profession provides insights into ways that students can negotiate agendas and the hidden curriculum, as well as broaden thinking on tacit learning. Professional arts tendering and curating processes contain numerous agendas and tacit understandings which artists negotiate in order to be successful.

The teacher-curator also becomes the critic at the time of the performance event when they are required to record judgements and make an evaluation of achievement using marks or grades. They assess the performance while experiencing their own emotional, intellectual and aesthetic responses. A tension emerges in that the teacher-curator, who may have collaborated on the art, is required to critique that art. Critique is a necessary part of the artistic and assessment process, and the teacher is expected to negotiate these multiple roles concurrently in the artistic assessment environment. Although teacher-curators becomes critics, their critique intersects with their responsibilities as a supervisor of the creative project. Their written comments on performances serve as a guide for students’ artistic development while being supportive in nature. They rarely leave the curator role, but are required to present and defend their judgments as critics as part of the performance assessment process.

8.3.4 Realities in Drama performance assessment

This thesis operates within a constructivist paradigm, asserting that there is no ‘strict truth, but instead multiple shifting realities’ (Baum, 2002, p. 126). When extending constructivist theory to Drama performance assessment, it is apparent that teachers and students construct their own realities during the performance assessment process. Students’ understandings of curriculum and task requirements are largely shaped by their own perspectives and experiences. They craft their performance response based on understandings about drama and Drama assessment that have been cultivated both within and outside the Drama classroom. They possess extensive experience of the personal drama curriculum. In this personal curriculum, also referred to by Jackson (2011) as a ‘lifewide’ (p. 109) curriculum, students develop their own understandings, personal knowledge, confidence, agency and identity through engagement inside and outside of formal education.
In this research project, many Drama students express a desire to achieve a pleasing result for their work in the performance task, but many also seem to believe that a successful performance can be created without extensive consideration of the assessment criteria. Teachers use assessment criteria as a list of attributes they are expecting to see demonstrated by students, the students’ experience of drama learning and their understanding of task requirements allow them to develop their own performances. Many students to fail to appreciate this. Students did, however, discuss their performances almost entirely through reference to their personal curriculum which included their ideas, prior experiences in Drama and priorities when performing. Few made reference to specified task requirements or criteria.

Previous studies by Rasmussen (2010) arrive at similar findings; students feel they learn something in Drama, but find it difficult to articulate what it was. Rasmussen’s (2010) studies acknowledge that reiteration is a low level skill rather than view the student’s lack of articulation as ‘negative confusion’ (p. 542). Rasmussen (2010) wrote of students’ inarticulateness as a positive aspect of the artistic experience, arguing that aesthetic learning through drama facilitates complex and interpretative meaning-making, not the retention of factual knowledge.

This research asserts that students’ understandings of an assessment task become embedded in their practice. It is not an external construct that they strive towards. Effectively, this suggests there are a number of criteria functioning concurrently in the Drama performance assessment process. The range of criteria includes the objectives defined by the Drama curriculum/syllabus, those contained in the work programs developed by teachers and the individual students’ responses to their personal curriculum in Drama. The significance for drama education is that multiple realities are being constructed, especially in situations where a wide range of artistic interpretations are available and acceptable within a single task. However, in capstone assessment situations where not all interpretations can be judged within the scope of the curriculum, the teacher-curator has the responsibility to curate the task from a position of authority. The student-artist aims to fit the purpose of the curator’s brief in order to succeed at the task.
As facilitators of the performance assessment task, Drama teachers ensure that several crossover points are facilitated during the students’ preparation of an assessable performance piece. Crossover points, as discussed in Chapter 4, occur when Drama teachers and students share their interpretations of the task or assessment criteria. They are generally facilitated by the Drama teacher through conferences with students, viewing rehearsals, providing feedback on ideas in development, viewing video recordings of past and present students’ responses, peer critique, self-assessment and exposing the performance to a range of different audiences. All of these crossover points allow for multiple interpretations of the performance to be brought to the student-artist’s attention. The use of multiple crossover points also ensures that the performance is not a just a product of the teacher’s guidance.

The concept of multiple perspectives in the Drama performance assessment environment holds a variety of implications for the field of drama education. Students appear to find it difficult to absorb explanations of assessment criteria, even though all the teachers discussed them with their students at length. This study did not set out to enquire into the accessibility of the language of assessment criteria or the method used to disseminate this information, but these issues arose as barriers to students’ presentations of their performances and this should be an area where teachers show caution. The broader issue concerning the importance of criteria is also significant. Chapter 7 discusses the success that students experience when they rely on their own understandings of the task requirements to create a performance response. Students in this study attain a range of results from their performance assessments, including some high marks, even though they are unable to identify the criteria on which they are being judged. This suggests that it is reasonable to assume that tacit understandings are sufficient for academic success. Students’ reliance on their own experiences points to independent thinking, a trust in their own creative abilities and a willingness to engage in divergent thinking. However, students’ reliance on their own experience can be accompanied by negative risk as this behaviour can also be evidence of a lack of attention to assessment requirements and curriculum learning outcomes.
8.3.5 Drama performance assessment in Australian states and territories

This study finds several similarities and differences between each state and territory assessment system. Each state or territory regards live performance as central to the Drama performance assessment curriculum. In NSW and the ACT, Senior Drama assessment procedures incorporate live performance in their methods of achieving comparability of standards. NSW uses external examiners who visit every Year 12 Drama class, and the ACT uses cluster moderation with a team of teachers from a range of schools assessing live performances. In contrast, Queensland regional moderation panels use video evidence to review standards. Like some researchers in drama education and performance theory (Dunn, 2010; McAuley, 1999), the teachers in this study regard video as a limited artefact of the live experience, or in De Marinis’ (1985) words, ‘faithful betrayals’ or ‘respectful forgeries’ (p. 389). The Queensland teachers make their feeling clear about the inadequacy of video evidence in reproducing the live experience, but also argue the pragmatic need for moderation panels to view a representation of the performance event in order to provide teachers with an effective summation of their grade judgements in relation to state or territory standards.

Another similarity is that each state or territory’s performance assessment procedure recognises that external examination or verification plays a critical role in ensuring comparability of standards across their jurisdiction, and all use external mechanisms to either assess performances or verify grades. Participation in moderation panels or external examination marking teams has the added benefit of becoming an exercise in the professional learning of Drama teachers. All teachers reflect positively on these opportunities to review Drama performance standards and discuss attributes of drama performances.

An interesting contrast between state and territory assessment procedures exists. The means by which teachers are selected to participate in examining Senior Drama performances in NSW or verifying grades in Queensland and the ACT varies, with each method presenting challenges. NSW and Queensland deliberately merit-select their moderation external examiners and panel members. In NSW, both experience
and diversity are ensured as the selection process attempts to balance representation from all regions to balance genders appropriately and to invite representation from government and non-government schools. In Queensland, the selection process for the regional moderation panel takes into account other clearly identified attributes, including knowledge of the subject, knowledge of senior secondary assessment policies, involvement in the creation of work programs, availability and organisational skills (Queensland Studies Authority, 2010). Teachers apply for this role and their applications are assessed and selected by a committee at the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

A by-product of merit-selection is that the experience of examining or moderating is not shared among all Drama teachers. Some teachers may choose not to participate while others do not meet the selection criteria. As a professional learning experience, the merit-selected teachers who participate in the moderation process gain comprehensive understandings about assessment in Drama, state-wide standards and how they are applied. Merit-selection brings into question whether advantage or inequality is created among Drama teachers and subsequently, Drama students. Being a professional learning experience, there is a degree of advantage gained through participation in external examination or moderation. Merit-selected teachers are able to experience the ways that standards are applied to student work across a range of school settings, and thereby deeper understandings of the standard of drama performances expected from students. By contrast, all ACT Drama teachers have equal access to the moderation process as all are afforded equal participation in the process. The small size of the ACT makes such a system manageable. However, this research suggests that that some ACT teachers feel coerced into the process. Conversely, teachers from NSW and Queensland consider involvement in external assessment and moderation to be a privilege; they are both keen and proud to participate.

The differences in attitude towards participating in moderation and external assessment suggest a link between professional learning activities and teachers’ perceptions of the system’s efficacy. The ACT teachers identified a significant gap in the moderation process with regards to professional learning in the assessment of
Drama performances. Whether or not rigorous preparation for assessment exists in the ACT was not a core issue arising from this study. However, the ACT teachers interviewed perceive there to be insufficient preparation to assess performances or benchmark standards. Several of the criticisms of the ACT moderation processes stemmed from a perceived lack of professional dialogue around assessment standards and the subsequent understanding of standards between schools. By contrast, teachers from Queensland and NSW discuss extensive benchmarking and professional learning processes that form part of their state moderation or external examination procedures. This is, perhaps, another area where wisdom can be shared across borders for the purpose of enhancing the professional learning experiences available for teachers.

Across education sectors, the term standards is often used in the context of quality and comparability. Standards is used in substantive and descriptive ways to refer to shared measures against which comparisons can be made, as well as varying levels of the quality of a performance. Relating this to Drama performance assessment in senior secondary schools, predetermined standards ensure that students and teachers know what is expected for each level and comparability can be achieved from school to school (Queensland Studies Authority, 2010).

Chapter 7 demonstrates that the preparation for external assessment or moderation and benchmarking processes leads to a culture of shared understandings about standards. This suggests that professional dialogue around assessment standards is a vital ingredient in the continual evolution of shared understandings between teachers with regard to their expectations and judgements. Professional dialogue consists of discussions about the language of criteria and how teachers identify the attributes of performance they hope to see. When benchmarking includes a viewing of examples or exemplar student performances, teachers develop comprehensive understandings of standards because they see these being demonstrated. The development of benchmarking practices, or the advancement of shared understandings of standards, is an area where there is scope for further dialogue across state and territory systems. This dialogue may assist the ACT Drama educators to broaden their thinking on
standards while allowing scope to develop the practices that further prepare Drama educators for performance assessment and moderation.

The teachers interviewed from school-based assessment systems in Queensland and the ACT argue their processes create positive outcomes. These include the fostering of collaborative cultures, enhancement of professional knowledge and the sharing of standards relating to student performance work. By contrast, teachers from NSW identify a different set of positive attributes from their system, including consistency of standards between schools, equity and fairness of the assessment process and high standards for the state’s Drama students. In the context of this research, the terms consistency and comparability refer to the extent to which the mark or grade awarded for a performance is consistent with grades or marks awarded at other schools across the state or territory. Teachers interviewed in Queensland and the ACT view consistency of grades and marks awarded between schools as a concept that can evolve and develop. Thus, as the process of assessment and moderation continues, the state or territory is able to move closer to achieving consistency in the way that assessors apply standards across the state or territory. By contrast, teachers from NSW view consistency as something that is not constructed, rather it is pre-existing and enacted as part of the assessment process. This is an important and interesting distinction. Teachers from Queensland and the ACT feel they can play an active role in the application of consistent standards for performance work across the state or territory. By contrast, teachers from NSW feel that the opportunity to set benchmarks and engage in a dialogue on standards is not central to their role as teachers and assessors of Senior Drama, nor are they dissatisfied with the way that standards of achievement are arrived at and implemented across the state. On the contrary, analysis of their practice shows NSW teachers taking comfort in the distance between themselves and their involvement in the determination of standards. They argue that consistency of standards can be delivered through an external assessment process.
8.4 Implications for Drama performance assessment

Chapter 8 summarises findings about Drama performance assessment practices in each state and territory. There is much to be gained from widespread discussion among Drama teachers about approaches to assessment, particularly now that Drama is part of the Australian Curriculum. Professional Drama teacher associations, such as Drama Australia, provide an opportunity for Drama educators to share such understandings. Professional dialogue facilitated across state borders through these networks could address many of the issues related to Senior Drama assessment that are the focus of this research.

The research demonstrates that Drama teachers regularly critique their state or territory Drama assessment systems while at the same time hold a degree of confidence in it. Additionally, the research demonstrates that Drama students regularly make brave and bold choices, take risks and use their imagination in order to display their skills and understandings to the best of their ability. Drama teachers, teacher educators, researchers and policy writers do the same in pursuit of the best possible curriculum for the benefit of their students and the subject. Much of the dialogue that is necessary to achieve this can be dangerous and confronting. It requires teachers to reflect on their own practice. The familiar is not always the best and we can always do better by our students. There is benefit in meaningful dialogue across borders facilitated by exemplary Drama teachers explaining their assessment practices with others around Australia.

Australian educators and policy makers have developed the *Australian Curriculum in the Arts* which sets out core knowledge, understanding, skills and general capabilities that are important for all Australian students (ACARA, 2014). The Australian Curriculum encompasses from the Foundation Year to Year 10, and requires state and territory curriculum, assessment and certification authorities to administer the organisation, assessment and certification specifications of senior secondary courses. In 2013, the newly elected federal Australian government instigated a review of the Australian Curriculum, with recommendations to be made in mid-2014 (Australian Government, Department of Education, 2013). Extensive discussions are being held
at a national level about the knowledge, understanding and skills contained in this curriculum and this research has insights, particularly with regard to the assessment of performances, to contribute to those discussions. Bowell and Heap (2010) argue that the dissemination of findings to diverse constituencies, using language and mediums that those concerned can identify with, is central to the purpose of drama research. This research draws upon the works of past scholars, but also develops new thoughts on Drama performance assessment, which can help to inform future discussions about curriculum, planning and evaluation at this timely moment in the development of Australia’s curriculum.

O’Toole (1997) urges the community of drama researchers to ‘bring poetry and metaphor, dialogue, irony and humour into our scholarship’ (p. 191). A representation of this thesis that reflects the creative and performative nature of the field therefore seems to be appropriate. O’Toole (2006) further encourages drama researchers to consider performance ethnographies to engage audiences in the presentation of research. I have considered dance, physical theatre, play script or musical composition as mediums that can make creative representations of this thesis. As a person with a strong history of movement-based study, I know that choreographed dance can represent understandings in a way that a written medium cannot. As this study is primarily concerned with performance, a danced representation of frames of this research may be developed and disseminated as a performance suitable for a creative showcase or a conference where aesthetic work is valued and risk-taking is welcomed. The use of choreography and dance performance can broaden interpretations arising from this thesis and allow me to engage in dialogue with professionals in other aesthetically charged fields. The various approaches to assessment can be enacted using solo, duet or group configurations, depending on the style of symbolic representation that I wish to achieve. A dissemination strategy such as this is artistically attractive and aesthetically engaging for an audience which may include dancers, researchers, arts educators or community members, although difficult to position in a written PhD thesis.
8.5  Critical reflections

To further bring about poetry, metaphor, dialogue and humour into this thesis, I conclude with a series of storied reflections using sections of my autoethnography. The development of these stories allows me to become aware of my own learning in the field of drama education, and, more broadly, as a researcher. As part of my autoethnographic reflections, I choose to present a series of critical conversations that encapsulate the research outcomes and summarise the conclusions that have bearing on the field of Drama performance assessment. The first vignette is a conversation with a Drama student, the second is based on a conversation with Drama teachers and the third reflects on an ongoing conversation with myself.

8.5.1  Story 1: The Angela phenomenon

It is a mild afternoon in the Queensland autumn when I sat with Angela (pseudonym), who studied Drama in Year 11. She requested me to help her with her performance assessment, a self-devised monologue. Angela delivered her piece to me under a jacaranda tree in her backyard. She finished with a flourish, waited a nervous moment and then said, ‘That’s it. What did you think?’

I chose not to make any written notes during Angela’s performance. After all, I was an audience member to her performance and I give her feedback rather than simulate an assessment environment. Her piece was well-written and delivered effectively. I told her so, pointing out several places where I thought she had done well while also offering points for improvement. I even offered to workshop some areas that were not as strong in communicating her dramatic intent. Towards the end of our session, I offered more acclamation, reaffirming that she had created a great performance. But then I paused to tell her that my reaction was framed as an audience member and not as an assessor. Angela looked at me blankly. ‘What do you mean?’ she asked. I replied that I had not seen the assessment criteria for the task (Angela had lost it, along with the task sheet), or the work of her peers, or seen what kind of direction her teacher had given her in class. I then, as an aside, said, ‘And I don’t know your teacher’s agenda.’
I used technical language of my analysis and Angela looked at me with wide eyes, now more confused than ever. ‘Uh, she doesn’t have one. She just set us this assignment and … um, asked us to do it.’ It was too late to back out now. I had scared Angela and I needed to explain my words as best I could. But how do I explain an entire assertion of my research in a way that a sixteen year old would understand? I reminded myself that Dorothy Heathcote believed that students were capable of being experts in the learning environment (Heathcote & Bolton, 1996) and I also reminded myself that my own research declared Drama students to be artists. I had reported on their sophisticated understandings within that role. If I was true to my research findings, I would have to show confidence in Angela’s ability to comprehend it.

I explained to Angela that teachers are not imparters of knowledge; they are feeling and thinking humans with their own preferences and understandings. When her teachers created a task, they were like curators who had an agenda, which was like a list of priorities that they wanted Angela to address in her performance. I asked Angela what she thought those priorities might be and once again, I was returned a blank look.

‘Like the criteria? I lost that.’ Angela reminded me.

I tried to clarify that it was more than the written criteria and I also elaborated that Angela herself had her own set of priorities when she created her performance. The young girl’s confidence to speak was suddenly restored:

I know, right. It’s all your own personal opinion, isn’t it? In Drama, some people love your performance and others hate it so you never really know how you’ve done. I like what I wrote but if your teacher doesn’t like your work, then you’ll get a bad mark.

I thought about challenging Angela’s perception of subjectivity and enquiring if the criteria provided any room for objective judgments. I could see that this conversation could descend into a debate over whether objectivity exists. And that is to say nothing of the possibility of informed judgments (Ross, et al, 1993) where the
assessors’ subjective judgments help to inform the student actor about the many interpretations possible on one piece of art. Instead, I decided to work with Angela’s interpretation of the Drama assessment environment so I asked her what she thought her teacher liked. Angela listed a very wide range of attributes that could be considered part of the teacher’s agenda. These included observations about space (‘not too much stuff on stage’), task requirements (‘she hates in when you’re over or under time’), theatrical style (‘nothing too weird, she likes it to make sense’) and performance preparation (‘she wants each line to be like really … considered. So no impro allowed’). Angela also named a few performance skills which I assumed were addressed in the assessment criteria (e.g. projected vocals, controlled body movement and focus during performance).

I then asked what Angela wanted to show in her performance and why she made some of the choices that she did. Angela’s replies concurred with many of the findings from my research. For example, she wanted to perform in a comedic style as she usually plays serious characters (personal goals and the culture of challenge), she wanted the audience to have an engaging experience where they were moved yet entertained by her performance (artistic goals), and she wanted to receive a good grade for the task (achievement orientation). I asked Angela if there were any similarities or differences between her teacher’s and her own priorities for this task. Again, the puzzled look returned and Angela changed the topic to ask about a specific part of her monologue. I felt this conversation was becoming overly analytical for what she needed at the time. Angela approached me for help with her performance but she did not want philosophical discussions about the Drama performance assessment environment. Concurring again with my research, she felt she possessed enough understanding of the assessment environment to proceed with the task to the point where even the criteria were superfluous at this time. Additionally, Angela understood that I was not her teacher or a member of her Drama class. She knew I had taught Drama at secondary schools, but knew little of my research. Angela asked for my assistance as a drama expert, assuming my feedback would enhance her performance. To her, there were some drama and performance understandings that were universal rather than confined within a single Drama class.
The educator inside me could not help myself. As I left I said, ‘Try to find that criteria sheet. It might help you understand the task if you read it again.’

Angela shrugged and waved goodbye.

8.5.2 Story 2: A conversation with Drama teachers

It was late on a Friday evening when a social evening of my local Drama teachers’ association came to an end. I offered to drop two of my friends home and while walking to the car, the inevitable question surfaced.

‘Rachael, have you finished your thesis yet?’

I started to explain where I was up to when my other passenger chimed in, ‘It seems like you’ve been doing it forever. How many years is it now?’ I am tired after a long week of writing and working so I gave a curt reply that was a mixture of politeness and ‘none of your business’. I hoped that this conversation would end, but suddenly the conversation moved on from ‘how long it has taken me’ to the ‘content of the research’. My colleagues are familiar with my topic; most have sat through numerous presentations at conferences, proofread my articles for professional journals or heard my contributions at ACARA Arts curriculum consultations. Many of them have acted as friendly sounding boards for my discoveries throughout the research, and I suddenly realised that tonight is going to be another of those occasions.

My first passenger, Julie (pseudonym), posed an unusual question:

We have a new teacher from Sydney at our school and she’s just obsessed with their HSC system. It sounds good and all, but isn’t it really damaging for the kids? Don’t they have a higher suicide rate or something?

‘Wow’, I thought. These were strong assertions for a drive home from a social event. I explained that suicide, stress or mental health was not a topic of my research and I did not have any statistics on the matter. But I did make a comment that in my interviews with students, all of them expressed the myriad of emotions that accompany a Drama performance and high-stakes assessment in the senior secondary
environment. While there were differences between students’ emotions, I would not say that one group appeared to be more stressed than another.

My second passenger, Katherine (pseudonym), continued the conversation. ‘So after all your research, can you tell us who has the best system?’

Julie responds, ‘But, she didn’t go to every state or territory. Is that right?’

I told Julie that she was correct, but there were other reasons why I could not say which system was best. Each had their own strengths and challenges. I had seen challenges in all of them, but also lots of wonderful attributes as well. Plus, to say that something is best denies that there could be better ways of doing things out there.

After my explanation, the women are silent, until Julie finally said, ‘Nah, you’re sounding like a politician or something. Don’t tell us the research version. Tell us which you think is the best.’

I knew they would not take no for an answer so I jokingly said, ‘Queensland has the best weather, NSW has the best vista and Canberra has the best hot chips.’ They laughed but then pursued the topic further. I was interested in their persistence and started to wonder if the state-based nature of our education system makes us naturally competitive, wanting to compare every facet of our life to our federated neighbours and subsequently, wanting to know who has it best. In an effort to refocus the conversation I told them about some of the great examples of practice I encountered during the study. For example, in NSW the preparation for external assessors was extensive and exciting, taking three days with many viewings of live student performances. In Queensland the moderation panels were supportive and provided excellent feedback to support teachers’ judgements. In the ACT, the cluster moderation system allowed all of the territory’s Senior Drama teachers to work with a different group of teachers each year to view and assess students’ performances. These were just three examples, and I wanted my friends to know that there were many more that I could cite.
The conversation continued animatedly for most of the way home. My account of positive attributes had my passengers thinking about other possibilities for assessment practice and I felt that they were starting to recognise that there are examples of good practice in every state or territory in Australia. But the conversation eventually returned to comparisons when Katherine asked, ‘If we had to implement one assessment system throughout Australia, which one would it be?’ Once again, I attempted to avoid the question, answering that we did not need to do that because the Australian Curriculum encompasses the Foundation Year to Year 10 and not beyond.

‘Yeah, but one day it might do.’ Julie added. ‘And what are you going to do if it does? Will you share your research and eventually pick a side?’

It was time to drop my passengers off at their destinations, but Julie’s question hung in the air for the rest of my drive home. There is no question that the research will be shared. In fact, I have been sharing segments of the research formally and informally since I began the study. For research to have an impact on the field, it is disseminated through using mediums and languages that stakeholders can identify with. But I have shed any naivety about the questions I will be asked in the dissemination context. Many will want to know about the best practice even though I have no interest in commending one system over another. The notion of something as best is a positivist construct which denies that there are other possibilities outside of what is known at the time. I believe that each system studied in this research has strengths and areas for development, and each has something important to contribute to our understanding of Drama performance assessment, senior secondary assessment and all issues related to those fields.

The development of an Australian Curriculum for senior secondary years, along with centralised assessment and certification procedures, is not currently on the policy agenda, but that is not to say that it would not be in the future. The development of an Australian Curriculum for the Foundation Year to Year 10 has certainly opened the doors to more dialogue between Drama educators in Australian states and territories. More extensive dialogue is a wonderful thing and in the dissemination of
the research findings, rather than emphasising what is best, I will advocate for meaningful and frequent dialogue between states and territories in an effort to provide pathways for improvement of each state and territory Drama assessment system.

### 8.5.3 Story 3: Understanding Drama performance assessment

As the research was coming to an end, I found myself wondering how I, as a researcher and drama practitioner, had changed. I decided to return to the autoethnography to conduct a post-research self-interview; this time reflecting on different storied understandings of Drama performance assessment that emerged in my research. I used this final autoethnographic reflection to conclude the thesis. It encapsulated the personal process of the research and allowed me to reflect on what has been learned, discovered and theorised in the context of my own research aims.

Reviewing my first autoethnographic reflections, it was obvious that I approached the research from a perspective dominated by practice. In the beginning, my informed insights were minimal and my initial writings were on topics that were spawned from my own sense of deficiencies in the field of Drama performance assessment. I saw fixable problems that could be researched rather than a pathway of inquiry that would lead me to find out more about the assessment of Drama performances.

Once the field work began, my ethnographic reflections showed a temporal change in approach to the research questions; field notes recorded how I rejoiced in new discoveries about teachers’ practices and took delight in discovering the students’ perspectives, as I was able to see the field of senior secondary performance assessment through their lens. Most of all I delighted in the many surprises that accompanied this study. I had originally approached the topic of Drama assessment, wanting to know about how criteria were written, how assessment tasks were worded and how feedback was distributed. My early autoethnographic notes made reference to the significance of the process of assessment to the Drama performance assessment experience. During this study, I discovered that while these procedural
mechanics were important, they did not capture the Drama performance assessment phenomenon as it was lived and experienced. It was my methodological choices that shifted the focus away from assessment procedures towards reflections on the more nuanced aspects of the relationship between Drama performance and assessment, embracing tacit learning, agendas, cultures, experiences and understandings. Observing Drama performances brought to light the significance of the artistic value in Drama performance assessment, and confirmed that Drama assessment, like drama itself, deals with manipulations of metaphysical constructions and aesthetic experiences (O’Toole, 1997). This was very much where new insights lay; within the subtle and ambiguous facets of what is experienced when performances are assessed. I found what lay below the surface to be unique and complex, much like the field of drama itself. When I began this research, I conformed to Bowell and Heap’s (2010) assertion that drama education research often tends to de-emphasise its ‘drama-ness’ (p. 584) but instead highlights the more general educational vocabulary and justifies Drama in non-aesthetic terms. However, this study has found that artistic values and aesthetic engagement are not separate from the Drama performance assessment process. Once this notion was established, the analysis opened, allowing me to discuss the relationships between artistic and aesthetic learning, senior secondary assessment, certification processes and the similarities that Drama performance assessment holds with other areas of study.

As the study progressed, my views on the role of the teacher and the student became more fluid and nuanced. Upon analysis, I could see both teachers and students taking on different roles as required, at times demonstrating artistic leadership and at other times becoming critic, audience member, generator of ideas or reflector. In this study, there are several metaphors for the roles that teachers and students take on in the Drama performance assessment process. Each of these metaphors has helped me to understand the many facets of these roles in action. By exploring the metaphors, I could easily translate the nuances of roles in practical terms and cast a theoretical lens on those experiences, from multiple perspectives.

When it came time to developing the final layer of analysis which would lead to conclusions from the research, I somewhat stumbled, and in some places, froze.
Previously, I had set out to undertake a descriptive analysis of Senior Drama performance assessment that would report on documents used in the process, state and territory procedures and the like. While these were limited research aims, I had a clear idea of how that style of study would lead to strong conclusions and informed recommendations. By contrast, the cumulative analysis of the field contained much tunnelling into the landscape of Drama performance and assessment.

By synthesising the discussion of the findings, I realised that much about Senior Drama teaching and learning and performance assessment had been discovered. In addition to new insights that emerged, I had grown in my understanding of, not only Drama performance assessment, but also qualitative research in creative fields, constructivism, aestheticism and drama itself. It also struck me that there was more that I wanted to do. I certainly need to draw this thesis to a close, but I could see possibilities for additional research, further discussions with Drama educators and reinterpretation from other researchers. I could see the implications for policy, practice and professional learning in the Drama community. I could see potential for the conversation to be continued with artists, other researchers and educators and students as well.

In homage to the central topic of this study, I used drama lexicon, in particular, elements of Drama, as defined by the Australian Curriculum: The Arts (ACARA, 2014) to conclude the reflections on my research experiences.

Drama performance assessment in the senior secondary years holds much in common with the field of drama education. Like an actor, the teachers and students take on a range of roles and characters throughout the experience, and their movements in and out of those roles are fluid rather than static. The relationship between teachers and students, as well as the relationship among students are pivotal to the culture and dynamics of the Drama performance assessment environment, which in turn affects the artistic focus of the assessment effort. These relationships can act as symbols of a mood and atmosphere of the Drama class, which is both collegial in artistic collaboration and competitive as it operates within the high-stakes assessment environment. Within the performance assessment situation, there are a number of
tensions that the teacher and student need to negotiate in order to craft an artistic exhibition that is reflective of the teachers’ agenda and student-artists’ priorities. Teachers voice their agendas through crossover points, which occur throughout the assessment process. The culture of the assessment environment is influenced by the curriculum context, which includes the curriculum space created by the state or territory board authority and the time in which the Drama curriculum is operating. Finally, drama is a language of which there are many ideas, meanings and interpretations. The teacher, assessor and student may differ in their interpretation of the assessment task, but successful drama is often dependent on the common language of artistic value being shared.

Drama performance assessment, like drama itself, is heavily nuanced, but available to a wide range of participants. We do not engage in Drama assessment to have a complete and full understanding of all its nuances. Similar to this research, we engage in Drama and performance to experience the joy of creative expression and artistic creation, to play pretend in a range of roles and to build a more comprehensive understanding of the human experience through an array of lenses.

Students are drawn to studying Drama in their senior secondary years because they wish to develop embodied performance skills. They are challenged by Drama performance tasks and feel rewarded when they create their own performance works and present their creative ideas publicly. Drama education stands among many other subject areas that prepare students for lifelong and lifewide learning, while stimulating their creative senses, encouraging them to be active and sentient beings with strong aesthetic senses. Engaging in performance challenges students to develop these attributes. Drama teachers also feel satisfaction as they witness their students making artistic achievements that access their creativity and show originality. It is the nature of Drama, as it is in many facets of life, that meaningful experiences are accompanied by challenge and reward. The insights developed in this thesis bring to light understandings of the ways in which Drama teachers and students negotiate these challenges while maintaining the joy associated with performance tasks.
There is also joy within challenge; Drama performance assessment contains areas of ambiguity and subtleties that lack definitive answers. The subtleties add to the richness of Drama performance assessment, challenging Drama educators to engage in meaningful discussions in order to find ways to enhance fairness, equity and validity of assessment experiences amid the ambiguity. There is diversity within this richness. Drama performance assessment is enacted by using numerous practices of which this thesis reports on a few. I did not engage in this research with a view to acclaiming one set of practices over another. Rather, this thesis celebrates the variety of approaches to Senior Drama curricula in Australian states and territories, and the diversity of practices among teachers located within. It also argues strongly for those practices to be shared across borders in order to find pathways towards greater understanding of Drama performance assessment. This thesis also brings to light the perspective of the Drama student who take risks, make brave and bold creative decisions, and choose to engage in performance at the senior secondary level. As a Drama educator and researcher, I aim to honour their choice by learning more about Drama performance assessment and the ways it can be enhanced in the future.
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## APPENDICES

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## Appendix A: Performance assessment requirements in Australian states and territories (Chapter 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>Methods of assessment</th>
<th>Methods of achieving comparability</th>
<th>Examples of performance requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>Continuous school-based assessment</td>
<td>Bi-annual Consensus-based peer review with ALL teachers participating</td>
<td>For Tertiary courses Performing tasks comprise 30-40% of assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Statistical moderation of scores</td>
<td>For Accredited courses Performing tasks comprise 30-50% of assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AST Scaling Test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small group procedures for groups less than 10 in Tertiary courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>Combination of school-based assessment (50%) and external exams (50%)</td>
<td>External exams using merit selected markers</td>
<td>Externally assessed performance components:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Compulsory group performance (30 marks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual project which may include solo performance (30 marks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Continuous school-based assessment based on a work programme submitted for approval by State panel</td>
<td>Submission of folio to review panel (merit selected) for grade verification</td>
<td>By the end of Year 12 the folio must include at least one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monitoring by state panel</td>
<td>Presenting task (of published playtext) group or individual. Other presenting tasks may be self devised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Random sampling used to check consistency of standards</td>
<td>One forming (creating/process) task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Queensland Core Skills test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia/ Northern Territory*</td>
<td>School-based assessment and externally moderated visits</td>
<td>External visits by merit selection experienced teachers for performances</td>
<td>Drama: Performance 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reviews are centrally moderated</td>
<td>Drama studies: Group production 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State/Territory</td>
<td>Methods of assessment</td>
<td>Methods of achieving comparability</td>
<td>Examples of performance requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Tasmania        | School-based assessment and external exams | External marking of performances and centrally set exams | Drama strand:  
Group performance  
2 solo performances  
Other courses include Drama Foundation, Drama – Technical Production, Arts Performance (for non-Drama/Dance students) |
| Victoria        | Coursework (school-based assessment) and external exams | Externally assessed exam and performance marked by merit selected panel  
General Achievement Test (GAT) | Externally assessed performance component of Drama:  
Self-devised solo performance 35%  
Externally assessed performance component of Theatre Studies:  
End of year performance exam: 25% |
| Western Australia | School-based assessment and external exams | External exams (introduced 2009)  
Consensus moderation meetings (compulsory attendance for one representative from each school delivering a stage of the course)  
School moderation/validation visits | Externally assessed performance components  
Performance examination 50% - includes original solo, scripted monologue, spontaneous improvisation and interview |

*The Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCE) is based upon the South Australian Certification of Education (SACE) which is administered by the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) (Northern Territory Government, 2009)*
Appendix B: School and teacher participant invitation, consent and approval process (Chapter 3)

Develop short list of schools to be approached

Approach school principals of shortlisted schools through email/phone contact

- NO
  - Thank them for their response and choose another school to contact

- YES
  - More info required
    - Engage in further discussion and provide more information to principals in their preferred medium (email, phone, in person where possible)

- YES
  - Ask for the following information about the Year 12 Drama teacher: Name, gender, years of service, membership of Drama teachers' associations. Are there suitable teachers at the school?

- YES
  - Use the selection criteria to target one teacher
    - Approach teacher for consent to participate

- NO
  - More info required
    - Engage in further discussion and provide more information to teachers in their preferred medium (email, phone, in person where possible)

- YES
  - Develop timeline of interaction
    - Inform principal
      - Seek students' consent (see next flow diagram)
## Appendix C: Participants (Chapter 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Teacher name</th>
<th>Students interviewed</th>
<th>Performance observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queensland 1</td>
<td>Regional Co-educational State school</td>
<td>Glenda</td>
<td>11 students from Year 12</td>
<td>Shakespearian excerpts (variety of plays) performed in small groups in Drama lessons to the Drama class. 4 performances observed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland 2</td>
<td>Metropolitan Single sex (boys) Catholic systemic school</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>4 students from Year 11</td>
<td><em>Blackrock</em> performed as a whole class at school in the evening to a public audience (e.g. parents and friends). 1 performance observed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales 3</td>
<td>Metropolitan Single sex (girls) Independent school</td>
<td>Tania</td>
<td>9 students from Year 11</td>
<td>Student-devised experimental theatre pieces performed in small groups in Drama lessons to the Drama class. 3 performances observed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales 4</td>
<td>Metropolitan Co-educational Catholic systemic school</td>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>4 students from Year 12</td>
<td>Trial Drama HSC group and individual performances (self-devised) performed in Drama lessons to Drama classes of younger years. 4 performances observed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory 5</td>
<td>Canberra Co-educational Independent school</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>5 students from Year 11/12</td>
<td><em>King Lear</em> performed as a whole class theatre company at school in the evening to a public audience (e.g. parents and friends). Small excerpts in groups were then presented in school time for the purposes of assessment. 4 performances observed (one whole class performance of <em>King Lear</em> and three small excerpts in small groups)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory 6</td>
<td>Canberra Co-educational State college</td>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>7 students from Year 12</td>
<td>Student-devised experimental theatre pieces performed as individuals and pairs in Drama lessons to the Drama class 3 performances observed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Schedule of interview questions (teachers) (Chapter 3)

1) **Focus: The task and its aims**
   Explain the task requirements, time allowed for preparation, percentage weighting, place within the syllabus and curriculum, place in the program of learning (tracking the thread of learning), level of assistance provided to students, prior tasks completed by students etc.

   What was the aim of this task?

   How does this task address assessment of/for/as learning?

   What did students learn about drama and drama performance from engaging in this task? (analysis note: cross check with student responses)

2) **Focus: Student response to the task**
   How did the students’ performance on this task meet your expectations in relation to the task criteria?

   What challenges are presented to students in this task?

   What tensions emerged in relation to performance assessment? (interviewer note: This question may be ambiguous for teachers)

3) **Focus: Assessment process**
   Describe the process by which you assessed these performances?

   Can you explain how you created the criteria or where it came from? How was the criteria useful in assigning marks/grades/ranking for the performances?

   If you set this task again is there anything you’d do differently?

   How will you provide students with an evaluation of their learning? How will you demonstrate the relationship between the task criteria and student learning?

4) **Focus: Curriculum comparability**
   How does this task relate to other areas of assessment in students’ senior studies program?

   What are some other tasks students might perform in other subjects that have similarities to this?

   How will these results be used to compare Drama students’ achievements at different schools?
Appendix E: Schedule of interview questions (students) (Chapter 3)

1) **Focus: The task and its aims:**
   - What do you think you were supposed to learn by doing this task?
   - What did you actually learn from engaging in this task?
   - How does this task fit into your program of learning in drama?

2) **Focus: Responding to the task:**
   - How did you prepare for this task? (interviewer note: this is a procedural question rather than one about creative process. E.g. was it in our out of class, teacher directed or student-centred?)

   How did you use the marking criteria when preparing for this task? In what ways did that help you?

3) **Focus: Performance product:**
   - How did the audience respond to your performance? How did you expect them to respond?

   Do you think your performance responds well to the task requirements?

   If you could prepare for this task again what would do differently?

   How do you think the task was important to your overall learning in drama? (interviewer note: a broad question)

   How does the learning associated with this task relate to your everyday life or vocational aspirations?

4) **Focus: Curriculum comparability**

   Is there assessment you’ve done in another subject that required you to use a similar skill or a similar process to this?

   How will your results for this task be used to compare your achievements with other drama schools in the state?
Appendix F: Interview technique sample (Chapter 3)

The following are two extracts taken from the interview transcripts which illustrate this point:

Example 1

I: This is a lovely Drama space you have here

John: Yeah, well the renovations are nearly finished, so I’m pretty pleased with it.

I: Yeah, I can see that. What’s left to do?

John: Oh, bits and pieces, like that wall needs to be painted, we’re getting another lighting rig put in, the prop room needs a door. You know, things like that.

I: Yeah I see. Well, it’s looking really great. Do you always conduct assessments in here?

Example 2

I: They seem like nice kids

Christine: They’re lovely, we’re really lucky here.

I: Yeah, I can see that. Have you taught them before?

Christine: Most of them. Actually, there’s a little group which I’ve had every year since year 8, except I didn’t teach them in Year 10. So that’s nice.

I: Wow. I bet you’ve seen a big progression of their skills.
## Appendix G: Teacher participant interviews (Chapter 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Teacher’s name</th>
<th>Initial interviews</th>
<th>Follow up interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queensland 1</td>
<td>Regional Co-educational State school</td>
<td>Glenda</td>
<td>14/6/10 55 mins</td>
<td>23/7/10 17 mins 8/10/10 13 mins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland 2</td>
<td>Metropolitan Single sex (boys) Catholic systemic school</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>8/7/10 62 mins</td>
<td>8/10/10 24 mins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales 3</td>
<td>Metropolitan Single sex (girls) Independent school</td>
<td>Tania</td>
<td>17/9/10 68 mins</td>
<td>8/10/10 15 mins 8/12/10 21 mins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales 4</td>
<td>Metropolitan Co-educational Catholic systemic school</td>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>5/8/10 42 mins</td>
<td>12/11/10 19 mins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory 5</td>
<td>Canberra Co-educational Independent school</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>6/10/10 78 mins</td>
<td>6/12/10 26 mins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory 6</td>
<td>Canberra Co-educational State college</td>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>26/11/10 70 mins</td>
<td>4/2/11 12 mins 6/3/11 18 mins</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Auto ethnographic interview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Initial interviews</th>
<th>Follow up interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auto ethnographic interview</td>
<td>1/6/10 TNR*</td>
<td>8/10/10 TNR 6/3/11 TNR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*TNR = time not recorded*
## Appendix H: Inventory of documents viewed at school sites (Chapter 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Documents Viewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>Shakespeare performance assessment task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shakespeare resource booklet for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semester work program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>Semester work program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blackrock responding (essay) assessment task with criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers’ comments from the performance assessment task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>Experimental theatre performance assessment task with criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers’ results and comments from the performance assessment task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 4</td>
<td>NSW Trial HSC performance assessment criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NSW Trial HSC logbook task with criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students’ logbooks</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers’ results and comments from the performance assessment task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary of requirements for HSC performance assessment event (created by the teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 5</td>
<td>Semester work program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>King Lear rehearsal schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>Experimental theatre performance assessment task with criteria</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental theatre responding (written reflection) assessment task with criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semester work program</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teachers’ results and comments from the performance assessment task</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix I: Assessment and environment cultures (Chapter 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School site, task and performance environment</th>
<th>Casual/formal interactions</th>
<th>Competitive/collegial</th>
<th>Professional/non-professional organisation</th>
<th>Reflections relating to culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School One: Qld</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 12 class performed Shakespearian excerpts presented in the school hall during class time. No external audience</td>
<td>Casual atmosphere observed. Some students chose to rehearse or block on stage then perform later.</td>
<td>No evidence of either cultural factor was observed</td>
<td>Students performed in any order. Other class members did not need to be present for the performance. Costume items were used but not consistently.</td>
<td>The atmosphere was casual and relaxed, and the organisation was similarly casual. But this was not to say the students were unprepared or disorganised. A sound quality of performances was observed with a range of responses upon the achievement trajectory. The students addressed their teacher casually and seemed relaxed with the assessment process. The culture reflected a very calm approach to assessed performances, with a recreational atmosphere, while still producing a sound quality of work in most instances.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School Two: Qld</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 11 class performed excerpts from <em>Blackrock</em> performed during the evening. Audience consisted of parents, family members, teachers and other students.</td>
<td>Formal atmosphere observed. Students were unseen by the audience until their performances. Students displayed a degree of formality in their interactions with teachers.</td>
<td>Collegial atmosphere observed, evidenced by student run warm ups, congratulatory remarks, assistance given between groups.</td>
<td>Highly professional organisation. Set program of performances. Lighting and sound assistants (other students) provided technical support. Quietly seated audience.</td>
<td>Students were clearly putting on a show and were required to conduct themselves as formal performers at this event. Students were observed to be quite nervous, which added to the formality of the evening. Students sometimes displayed tension in their demeanour, but also a collegial nature when interacting with their peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School site, task and performance environment</td>
<td>Casual/formal interactions</td>
<td>Competitive/collegial</td>
<td>Professional/non-professional organisation</td>
<td>Reflections relating to culture</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
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<td><strong>School Three: NSW</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 11 class perform self-devised experimental theatre excerpts presented in the drama room during class time. No external audience</td>
<td>Formal atmosphere observed. Students rehearsed informally during the first period, then moved to a formal performance setting in the next lesson.</td>
<td>Competitive atmosphere evidenced by students interacting only with their groups, not sharing resources, using distinctly separate spaces to rehearse and not wanting others to see their pieces until the performance time.</td>
<td>Professional organisation evidenced by set program of performances, quietly seated audience, silence between performances.</td>
<td>This class showed high levels of organisation, but also competitiveness and individual culture before the performance. Having said this, there was also a collegial atmosphere after the performances as students congratulated each other, complimented each others’ performances, laughed and giggled. Students seemed to be nervous, contributing to the tension in the room before the performances.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School Four: NSW</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 12 class perform self-devised group and individual HSC performances in the drama room during class time. A year 8 class is present as an audience.</td>
<td>Casual atmosphere that became more formal was observed. Students were rehearsing in a range of spaces, asking questions casually of each other. Some chose not to audience their peers’ performances.</td>
<td>Highly competitive atmosphere observed evidenced by students interacting only with their groups, not sharing resources, minor disagreements between groups.</td>
<td>Professional organisation – audience was seated formally, students were taken through the ritual of the drama HSC performance prior to the performances commencing. A set order of performances was used.</td>
<td>Students were highly-strung and nervous during their preparations. There was some tension between class members. Most students chose not to watch each others’ performances, preferring to rehearse outside. Students engaged in casual interactions during the rehearsals but became very formal closer to the performance time. They started to address their teacher more formally and asked less casual questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School Five: ACT</strong></td>
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<td>Year 11/12 class performance of King Lear was observed on two occasions.</td>
<td>Casual atmosphere observed evidenced by the informal ways students addressed each other and the</td>
<td>Highly collegial environment was evident at the evening performance, evidenced by student-led warm ups,</td>
<td>Professional organisation of the evening performance event with a formal performance area, lighting, sound, technical staff,</td>
<td>Students collegiality was evident during the evening performance, more so than at any other site. They were working towards a collective aim and seemed to want to help each other to achieve those</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School site, task and performance environment</td>
<td>Casual/formal interactions</td>
<td>Competitive/collegial interactions</td>
<td>Professional/non-professional organisation</td>
<td>Reflections relating to culture</td>
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<td>instances: firstly the non-assessed performance of the whole play took place in the school hall with a community audience. Later, the assessed performance of excerpts took place in the drama room with no external audience. teacher.</td>
<td>encouragement between students, peer-to-peer coaching and many offers of assistance between students. At the later assessed performances a collegial atmosphere was also evident, but not to the same extent.</td>
<td>formally seated audience etc. The later assessed performance was organised non-professionally without an assigned performance area or order of performances.</td>
<td>aims. During the assessed performances students still showed a collegial culture but not to the same extent as during the evening performance. Students mostly worked and interacted with their groups, and not with the rest of the class.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**School Six: ACT**

Year 12 students performed self-devised experimental theatre performances to the class in the drama room.

Casual atmosphere, evidenced by students arriving at different times, leaving class during rehearsals and being left to work independently during the rehearsal period.

Competitive atmosphere evidenced by students interacting with their pair or group, not wanting their peers to watch performances, guarding of written work etc.

Professional organisation evidenced by a formal performance area, lighting, sound, technical staff, formally seated audience and order of performances.

Students were friendly towards each other but still showed some competitive culture in the way they guarded their written and performance work before the formal performances. Students very much worked independently when preparing for assessment and seemed accustomed to doing so.