

Milestone 2

A Teacher Without Capability, Do The Kids Miss Out?: Investigating Generalist Educators' Perceptions of their Impact on Drama Teaching

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Course: Master of Philosophy (Education)

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The Foetal Position (2025)

Screenshot from Scene 2: The Foetal Position by Tayla Fordham created in conjunction with this Master exegesis

Glossary

Autoethnography: A research method that places the researcher at the centre of the study. Describing personal experience in order to understand oneself in a wider context (Cohen et al., 2018).

Capabilities: The ability to do something (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Emic Experiences: When an individual holds subjective interpretations and perceptions of the particular group being studied due to their “insider” perspective (Cohen et al., 2018).

Ethnodrama: A written adaptation of an ethnographer's research data (e.g. interview transcripts), which is transformed into a live, public theatrical performance (Sallis, 2007).

Ethnography: A qualitative research method where a research study is conducted on a particular group, observing the perceptions of what is happening (Cohen et al., 2018).

Generalist educator: An individual who teaches across all subject areas (primary education context) or is teaching outside their major subject area (secondary education context).

Self-efficacy: Refers to an educator’s belief in their capacity and abilities to effectively handle work-related tasks, responsibilities and challenges (Barni et al., 2019).

Specialist educator: An individual with knowledge, experience and expertise within one major subject area.

Research Overview

- The proposed research seeks to investigate the narratives of six Western Australian generalist educators' classroom experiences teaching drama and their perception of whether their lack of specialisation negatively impacts students' participation.
- This research employs an Arts-Based Education Research design to transform and express participants' spoken words and my emic experiences as a specialist drama educator through a live Ethnodrama performance.
- The Ethnodrama will interweave our perceptual understandings of the research phenomenon into theatricalization, narrative vignettes, embodied phrases and symbolic representation to address the current deficit in generalist educators' capabilities to teach drama in Western Australian primary/secondary schools and its impact on students' drama engagement.

Research Question



How do generalist educators' attitudes and *perceptions* of their capabilities toward teaching drama impact students' engagement across West Australian primary and secondary schools in a post-COVID period?

Gallery 501 Work-in-Progress Exhibition

26th September 2023

Research Aims & Objectives

- Evidenced in the literature is that many generalist educators are teaching outside their specialisation yet have minimal formal training in teaching a highly technical art subject such as drama (Ardzejewska et al., 2010; Lummis et al., 2014; Collins, 2016; Stinson & Saunders, 2016; Leonard & Odutola, 2016; Pryor, 2018; Ewing, 2020; Çayır & Yolcu, 2021).
- Literature reveals that there is likely a detrimental impact on the quality of their teaching (Wittber, 2017; Ennis & Tonkin, 2018).
- Literature advocates the benefits for students when the subject is taught well; therefore, it seems reasonable to imagine that this lack of training will impact students' access to the benefits the arts offer.

■ Explore participants' lived experiences and their perceptions of their capability as a generalist teacher delivering drama programs.

■ Discover teachers' attitudes and beliefs concerning what they perceive about this 'deficit' proposition and how their professional and pedagogical responsibilities impact student's engagement with drama education.

■ Determine if their perceived lack of specialist skills and confidence to teach drama impacts student exposure, engagement and willingness to participate.

■ Synthesise effective support strategies for generalist educators teaching drama.

Methodology

QUALITATIVE ARTS-BASED EDUCATION RESEARCH

Interview Cycle 1	Interview Cycle 2
Interview 1	Interview 2
Data collection, thematically code and analyse	Data collection, thematically code and analyse
Synthesis of data into scenes for Ethnodrama	Synthesis of data into scenes for Ethnodrama
Synthesis of research findings into written Exegesis	
Creation of full Ethnodrama script	
Major ABER Ethnodrama (1 st performance; recruited audience and focus group session)	
Results of the Ethnodrama and post-performance focus group to be added to the written exegesis	
Major ABER Ethnodrama (2 nd performance; reviewers)	
Major ABER Ethnodrama (public performances)	

Qualitative Inquiry

- The use of semi-structured interviews creates an open dialogue between the researcher and participants to explore their feelings and lived experiences against the research objectives (Cohen et al., 2018).

Interview Data

- Two semi-structured interviews with each participant allow scope for nuanced responses whilst aligning with research questions (Cohen et al., 2018).

ABER Data

- The art practice of an Ethnodrama will be devised to encapsulate the research data and findings to address the educational issue.
- Performance is the most powerful way to explore lived experiences and their meaning (Bresler, 2011).

Emic Experiences

- My insights and experiences as a specialist drama educator will act as a source of understanding to shape how I analyse and interpret data (Leavy, 2020).
- Interweaving my insights as an ethnographer with those researched (Black, 2012).

Initial Findings

Themes emerged from Interview 1 with “Joel”- Participant 1 pseudonym

“I never want to teach drama ever again.”



The Aftermath (2025)

Screenshot from Scene 3: *The Aftermath* by Tayla Fordham created in conjunction with this Master exegesis

Low self efficacy and confidence when teaching drama.

Lack of student engagement.

Lack of administrative support.

Negative emotions:
Anxiety,
depression & fear
of judgment.

Finding Inspiration

“As a result I think like 90% of my class chose not to pursue drama in Year 10 and I wouldn’t be surprised at all if the 10% when they started Year 10 Drama had major deficits in their knowledge, major gaps because they weren’t able to have that learning when they were in Year 9”.



The Aftermath (2025)

Screenshot from Scene 3: The Aftermath by Tayla Fordham
created in conjunction with this Master exegesis

- During our first interview, Joel described feeling as though he was in a war when he had to teach his Year 9 drama class. *“It was just me against the kids”*, he stated.
- The reference to his drama being like a war was poignant, and it became the main inspiration for the foetal position scene and scene titles.
- When the interview concluded with Joel and I packing away, he reiterated the trauma he still feels after his lived experiences teaching that Year 9 drama class.
- He mentioned tears in his eyes whilst he spoke during our interview.
- His final line was, *“I never want to hear a soldier again; I have been through that war already; I do not want to be in another fighting those kids”*.

Synthesis of Ethnodrama Script

- From there, I went through other memorable quotes from Interview 1.
- This helped guide the theatricalisation and writing of the Ethnodrama script.
- Taking Joel's words and creating symbolic artefacts/representation/visualisation.

Examples of quotes that helped form Ethnodrama inspiration/script and its symbolic representation:

“The War”

- *60% of students whom he formed strong relationships with and did want to be there were his “allies in the room”, “they tried to help”, and “we were fellow veterans together trying to survive the year”.*
- *“Then there were 40% who were there only because they had failed to pick electives” and ended up in drama even though they didn't want to be there”.*
- *The 40% of students “caused a huge ruckus, and I had to deal with that most of the time...I was also not trained to teach drama, so I had no idea what I was doing most of the time...the kids who chose drama missed out on a whole tonne of learning that they could have had”.*

Theatricalisation of Ethnodrama Script

While reviewing Joel's lived experiences, I recorded them, collected them, reflected on them and represented them as a theatre script to be performed on the stage.

This may be viewed methodologically as the transitions between “doing” and “writing” described above.

The use of artefacts helped guide and structure this process, as my perceived value of these artefacts helped to qualify theatrical and conceptual decision-making.

My inquiry question began to take the following shape:

- What could the stage or conventions of performance offer me and/or an audience in terms of symbolic insight into Joel's experiences?
- How could the physical and symbolic artefacts bridge the gap between the remembered and the embodied experience?



The Foetal Position (2025)

Screenshot from Scene 2: The Foetal Position by Tayla Fordham created in conjunction with this Master exegesis

Artefact Theatre

In the same way, that auto-ethnographers would “consult with texts such as photographs, journals, and recordings” to help focus on significant moments of recall (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 3), I used physical or symbolic “artefacts” to convey their presence in the process and theatricalisation of Joel’s lived experiences.

Example- Symbolic and visual interpretation of Joel's lived experiences through artefact:

The Moving Spotlights- symbolic of school administration and feeling of being targeted/fear of judgment

- The challenging conditions that teachers are working in are largely being neglected (Karnovsky & Gobby, 2024), with teachers leaving their schools or profession altogether due to a lack of administration support (Talley, 2017).
- Multiple times throughout the interview, Joel mentioned how he felt as though the administration had failed him.

Lack of
administrative
support.

Inspiration "Bright siding"

This refers to school leaders, including the Head of the Learning Area and administration, ignoring the wider demands and complexities faced by teachers (Karnovsky & Gobby, 2024). School leaders often want everything that happens within their school to be positive, which stresses that "positivity is compulsory."

This denies teachers the reality of the poor work conditions that become factors for their stress and vulnerability (Karnovsky & Gobby, 2024). If teachers are deemed to exhibit cynical, critical, or pessimistic emotions or thinking, they are treated as disruptive and destructive, often becoming the target of pedagogical interventions (Karnovsky et al., 2022).

Verbatim Theatre

*“I still have too much baggage from my prior experiences and frankly trauma...
I can't risk putting myself in that position again”.*



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- Verbatim Theatre is a form of theatre constructed from the spoken words of real, ‘ordinary’ people responding to a particular issue or topic (Anderson, 2007).
- Verbatim Theatre illuminates how it was spoken to reveal the uniqueness and complexities of interactions (Sajnani et al., 2018).

Emic Experiences

Emic Experiences: When an individual holds subjective interpretations and perceptions of the group being studied due to their "insider" perspective (Cohen et al., 2018).

- My emic experiences will be used as knowledge and data (Leavy, 2020), interweaving my insights as an ethnographer with those researched (Black, 2012).
- Translation through the arts creates more opportunities for dialogue between the researcher and participants (Morris & Paris, 2022), which is important within my research as I seek to explore participants' troubles, which many hesitate to voice.
- During Interview 1 with Joel, there were times when I validated his experiences/thoughts and gave an example of my own experiences to support them.
- Created open dialogue- Joel expanded his thoughts and ideas
- Scene 4: Trauma- explores my post-interview thoughts, ideas and emotions after Joel's first interview.

Ethnodrama Script Annotation

- Each interview will be audio-visual recorded and transcribed verbatim.
- Capture verbal communication cues, such as the participant's tone of voice/inflection/emphasis/mood, and non-verbal cues, such as gaze/gestures/facial expressions/posture (Cohen et al., 2018).
- Analysing the participants' verbal and nonverbal communication will be important when transforming their words into performance-embodied phrases or narrative vignettes.

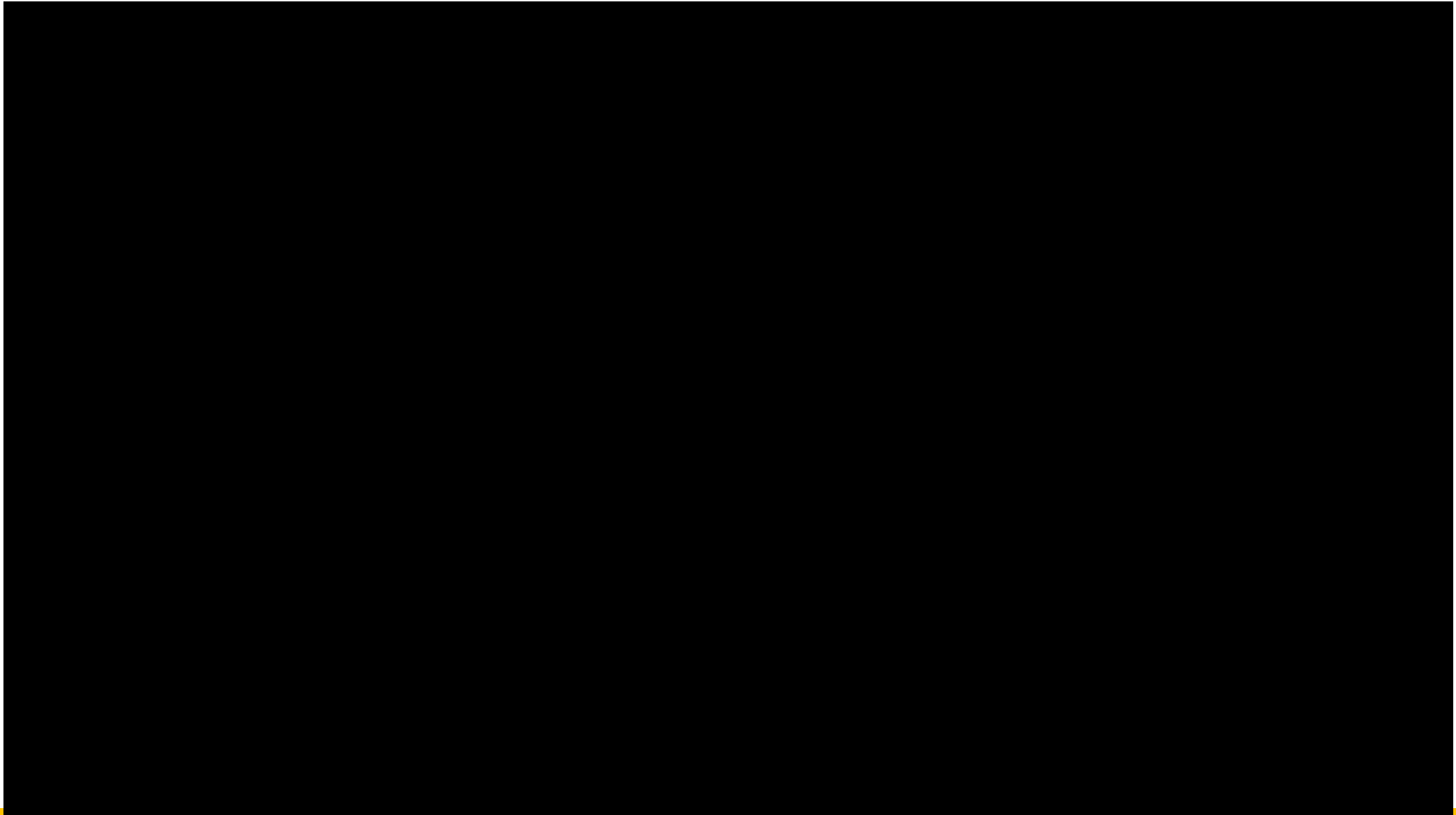
JOEL: *(Defeated tone continued)* I will be totally honest, if my school asked me to do that again I would be looking for another job. I do not want to teach drama ever again *(BEAT- tone; certainty)* Sure, I may be better prepared to teach drama because I know what I would be stepping in to, but as far as my emotional preparedness to do so. Never again *(Emphasis)*. It is a shame as I know intellectually with the proper training I could have been an amazing drama teacher. I am certain of it, but there is too much emotion that's associated with my experiences teaching drama... *(BEAT- tone; depressed. Pace slows)* I still have too much baggage from my prior experiences and frankly trauma *(Pause)*... I can't risk putting myself in that position again.

(Depressed tone continues) I have a lot of regret from that time and feel sadness looking back. It was a tragedy *(Pause)*...a shame for the students who chose drama, who wanted to learn, who tried their best but ultimately missed out on learning. *(BEAT- tone; certainty)* For the students to successfully learn they needed a teacher that was more knowledgeable about the subject and were able to support their learning. As a result I think like 90% of my class chose not to pursue drama in Year 10 and I wouldn't be surprised at all if the 10% when they started Year 10 Drama had major deficits in their knowledge, major gaps because they weren't able to have that learning when they were in Year 9...

Annotated Ethnodrama script example

M2 Creative Practice Work Sample (Video)

Please see Slide 28 for the OneDrive link



Participant Checking & Feedback

- Performance-based research has two intertwined issues: validity and aesthetics. To ensure validity can be assessed, I have employed Cho and Trent's (2006) strategy of dialogical performance style, which ensures dialogue between multiple people has occurred to enable a breadth of perspectives and create an open and co-existential understanding of the research phenomena (Leavy, 2020).
- Chilton and Leavy (2020) support the above and believe that 'artful authenticity' is powerful in creating truth and trustworthiness within the research.
- Chilton and Leavy (2020) also highlight 'participatory and transformative' as important criteria when evaluating ABR. This technique asks participants to be active collaborators in shaping the research findings by discussing and reflecting on my interpretation of the interview data and its visual representation to ensure the authenticity and integrity of their voices are captured (Morris & Paris, 2022).
- These approaches hope to build trust and a collaborative relationship between myself and the participants (Summerskill, 2020; Morris & Paris, 2022) and encourage open dialogue in their responses (Sinner et al., 2006).

Joel's Feedback

Post Interview:

- *“Going back to that space has dug up a lot of buried emotions for me. It’s actually quite cathartic talking about all of this because I am finally releasing”.*

After reading the Ethnodrama script and watching video sample:

- *“I loved how the metaphor I shared at the end of the interview has transformed into a physical representation of my experience”.*
- *“I am really excited to see it all come to life”.*
- *“It felt validating and a little surreal to read the script and see someone else speaking my words”.*

“I no longer feel as lonely in my experience as I did before this project began”.

Progress



The Foetal Position (2025)

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Written Exegesis & Ethnodrama

- This study is equally divided between a written exegesis and ethnodrama.
- 50/50 split in time and output to analyse and represent the research findings in a traditional written form and creative, visual form.



“The foetal position”

Joel was asked if he was to create a tableau of how you felt during these experiences and how you would position your body. Joel said the foetal position; “on the floor”, with his arms wrapped around his legs, “head down, trying to make myself as small as possible so that I can disappear”, trying to “hide from the world”. He not only hid from the students he was teaching, but Joel also revealed that it was administration that he feared.

Joel mentioned that the foetal position was symbolic in masking a deep frustration and sense of helplessness; he defined the term “learned helplessness”. “I had learned that I wasn’t going to get help, and I wasn’t going to get support so why even try...why even try...just give up. Foetal position”. The foetal position is a widely assumed symbolic representation of vulnerability and a primitive source within all humans (Berceli, 2009). A person may assume this compact position when experiencing psychological trauma, such as extreme stress, to seek comfort and protection. The foetal position within the scene is symbolic of Joel’s response to his lived experiences teaching drama and the “trauma” that he stated came with it.

Dr David Berceli is an international trainer in trauma intervention and stress reduction and the creator of Tension and Trauma Releasing Exercises (Berceli et al., 2014). During his time working in war zones and bomb shelters, he was “stunned” by what he observed (Berceli, 2009). When Berceli was trapped with colleagues and shells were exploding, he noticed they all were startled, but everyone would instantly contract and jerk into the foetal position, no matter how accustomed they had become to the explosions. “It was an automatic response” (Berceli, 2009). Berceli concluded that the protective procedure automatically springs into action, and the natural human reflex is to shield oneself. The response of muscles when they are threatened or exposed to stressful events is to contract the body for our safety (Berceli, 2009).

The foetal position for Joel in the scene represents exactly that, his need for security, comfort and protection (Berceli, 2009). Joel had experienced recurring negative experiences of teaching drama to the point that he felt helpless and had lost control and

Progress to Date

2023

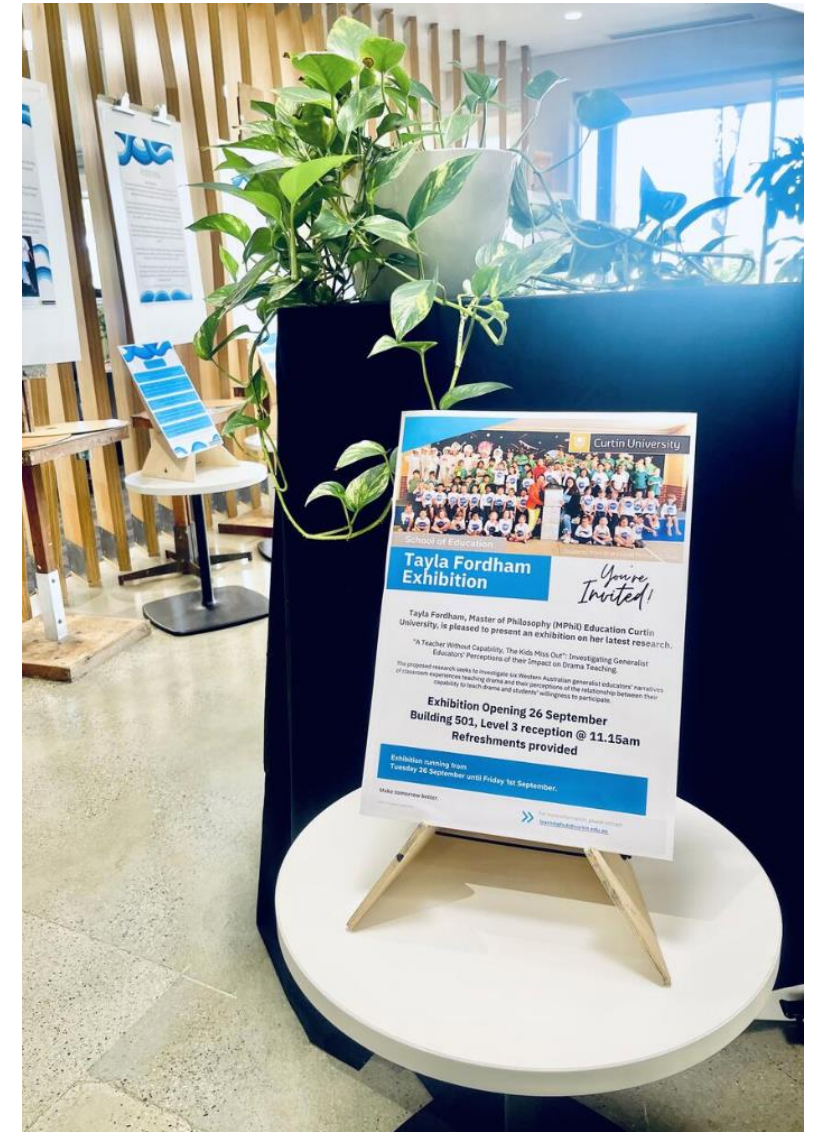
- Milestone 1 Presentation
- Work in Progress Pop Up Exhibition
- Milestone 1 Application Approved

2024

- Application for Part-time study approved
- Ethics Approval- HRE2024-0218
- Leave of Absence 9th July 2024- 13th January 2025

2025

- 4 participants recruited
- 2 participants pending signed consent forms
- 1st Interview conducted with Participant 1 (2nd Interview scheduled)
- Data collection, thematic coding and analysis of Participant 1 Interview 1
- Synthesis of Scenes 1-4 of Ethnodrama
- Filmed rehearsal of Ethnodrama scenes with colleagues
- Continued literature scope and draft structure for written exegesis
- Check in with Participant 1 regarding the Ethnodrama script and rehearsal video



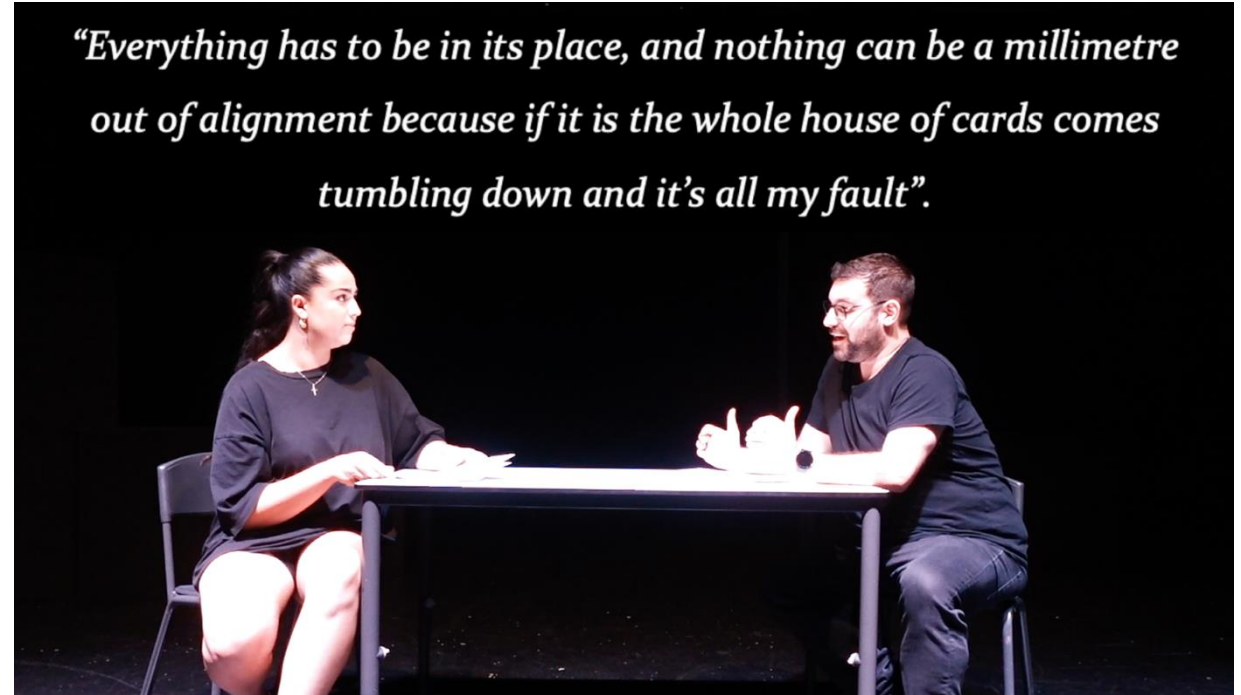
Gallery 501 Work-in-Progress Exhibition
26th September 2023

Progress to Date

- The next slide displays The Gantt Chart Milestone Timeline I presented in June 2023.
- Unfortunately, the study is behind schedule due to a delay in receiving M1 reviewer feedback, actioning the M1 Application, Ethics Application, two approved Leave of Absences, and difficulties with participant recruitment.
- The next slide outlines what tasks have been completed as of April 2025.

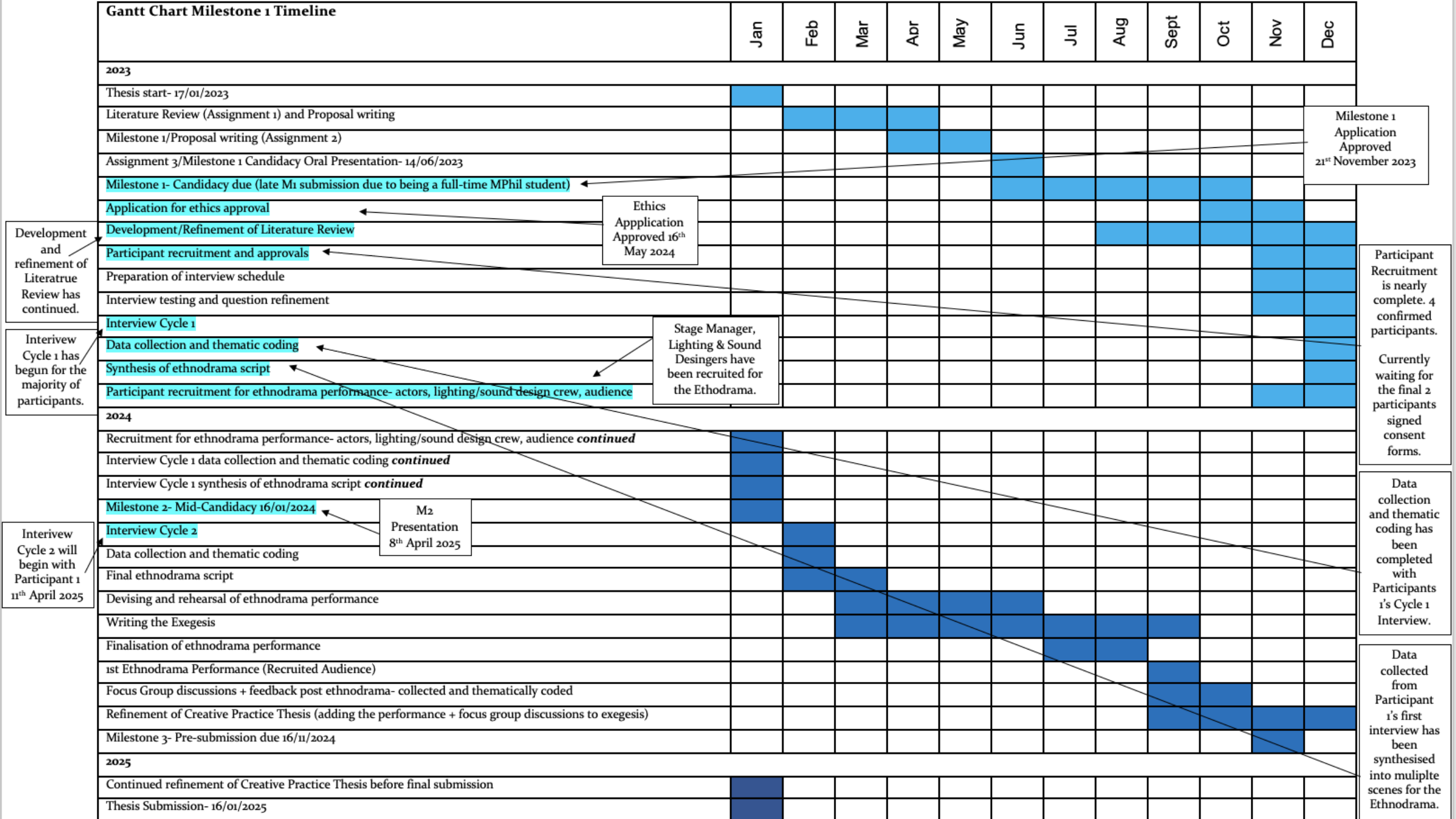
Please see the 2023 – 2024 Progress Overview in my M2 Application for a detailed breakdown that highlights the above delays that I experienced.

“Everything has to be in its place, and nothing can be a millimetre out of alignment because if it is the whole house of cards comes tumbling down and it’s all my fault”.



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A major part of disseminating the research findings of my Arts-Based Education Research (ABER) project is the Ethnodrama performances.

Stage 1- First Ethnodrama performed to a recruited audience

- Selected audience members completed a demographic survey outlining whether or not they would be interested in participating in the post-Ethnodrama focus group.
- Following the ethnodrama performance, the audience members who were previously selected will participate in a 60-minute focus group discussion to explore their responses and feedback on the research results.
- This study's perceptual and collaborative nature makes capturing the audience's responses and feedback on the research results important.

Stage 2- Second Ethnodrama will be performed for the reviewers.

Stage 3- Public performances of Ethnodrama

- Ethnodrama will play for a short time at the Hayman Theatre, allowing the study results to be accessible to the public, participants and the Drama/Arts Education community. Potential plans to perform the Ethnodrama at conferences.

Dissemination Plan



Conference Paper/Ethnodrama Performance

2025 Drama West State Conference

2026 Drama Australia National Drama Education Conference

- Present initial findings of how generalist educators' attitudes and perceptions of their capabilities toward teaching drama impact students' engagement across West Australian primary and secondary schools in a post-COVID period.
- Present Ethnodrama.

Conference Paper/Ethnodrama Performance- 2026 Research-Based Theatre Symposium

- Shared methodology of Arts-Based Research utilised within the context of qualitative education research.
- Present findings of how generalist educators' attitudes and perceptions of their capabilities toward teaching drama impact students' engagement across West Australian primary and secondary schools in a post-COVID period.
- Present Ethnodrama.

Dissemination Plan



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Timeline & Completion Plan

Gantt Chart Milestone 2 Timeline- Progress Plan	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2025												
Development/Refinement of Literature Review	█	█	█	█	█	█	█					
Finalising participant recruitment and approvals				█								
Interview Cycle 1			█	█								
Interview Cycle 1 data collection and thematic coding			█	█	█							
Interview Cycle 1 Synthesis of ethnodrama script			█	█	█							
Participant recruitment for ethnodrama- actors, lighting/sound design crew & audience			█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Milestone 2- Mid-Candidacy 8/04/2025				█								
Interview Cycle 2				█	█	█						
Data collection and thematic coding				█	█	█						
Final ethnodrama script							█					
Annual Work In Progress Exhibition											█	
Devising and rehearsal of ethnodrama performance							█	█	█	█	█	█
Writing the Exegesis							█	█	█	█	█	█
Finalisation of ethnodrama performance												█
2026												
Writing the Exegesis	█	█	█	█								
1st Ethnodrama Performance (Recruited Audience + focus group)	█											
Focus Group discussions + feedback post ethnodrama- collected and thematically coded	█											
Refinement of Creative Practice Thesis (adding ethnodrama + focus group to exegesis)	█											
Milestone 3- Pre-submission due 23/01/2026	█											
Continued refinement of Creative Practice Thesis before final submission		█	█	█	█							
Thesis Submission- 23/05/2026					█							
Annual Work In Progress Exhibition Date TBA												
2nd Ethnodrama Performance (Reviewers) Date TBA					█							
Ethnodrama Public Performances Month TBA					█	█	█					

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M2 Creative Practice Work Sample (Video)

OneDrive Link

The War.mp4