Fossils, Johnny, and parents: three plays and their use in theatre in education

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"FOSSILS", "JOHNNY", AND "PARENTS": 
THREE PLAYS AND THEIR USE IN 
THEATRE IN EDUCATION

DOCUMENTATION

Volume 1 of 2

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my son,
Christopher James Aston,
and to my daughter,
Gabriella Christine Aston
Volume 1 charts the origins, theoretical underpinning, development and execution of three original theatre projects: *If Johnny Jumped Off the Harbour Bridge, Would You?*, *Parents: A Kids Eye View*, and *Fossils*. Factors leading to my interest in Theatre In Education are documented along with the origins and development of each script. The rehearsal process for each project is examined, as is the impact of each production in terms of the response from audiences, reviewers, performers, and theatre professionals.

All three projects were created using a series of short, self-contained scenes, based on the theme of ‘parents’. A resource module was developed based on scenes from the three projects, subsequent teacher and student workshops, and the development of a workbook and Internet website. This module is the core of a suggested approach to the Theatre In Education program – ‘modular theatre’.

Volume 2 of this thesis comprises the resource module – titled the *K4K Resource Module*; the unpublished scripts of *If Johnny Jumped Off the Harbour Bridge, Would You?* and *Parents: A Kids Eye View*, the published version of *Fossils* (Currency Press 1995); and an archival videotape of Theatre South’s production of *Fossils*, recorded at the Sydney Opera House on Saturday 27 June 1998, directed by Des Davis, presented as part of the Bennelong Program’s 1998 school holiday season.

I hereby certify that this work has not been submitted for a degree to any other university or institution.
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As outlined in this thesis, the rewritten version of *Johnny* and *Parents* has been published as *Fossils* and I thank Currency Press for their continued support and for allowing me to quote liberally from my play, unrestricted. Similarly the following have also kindly granted permission to reproduce their copyright works: Illawara Mercury (production photo taken during Theatre South’s premiere season of *Fossils*); Sydney Opera House (program design for *Fossils* Bennelong Program season); Platypus Theatre (program design for *Fossils* Berlin season); and Oxford University Press (extract from John Seely’s *Dramakit*).

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Theatre South has staged a great many of the productions of *Fossils*, and over the years have been staunch supporters of my work. Des Davis, himself an authority in the field of Theatre In Education, has always been approachable and encouraging both as a director and a friend, and he should take credit for being the first to recognise the potential appeal of *Fossils*. I am most grateful to Des, Faye Montgomery, Scott Davis and others associated with Theatre South such as Michael Coe, for their friendship and support.

Finally a big thank you to all the groups who have over the years performed versions of either *Johnny, Parents* or *Fossils* in school halls, community centres, hospitals, and even paddocks! Their enthusiasm and commitment towards the productions I have been lucky enough to see, has been heart warming.

On a personal level, I would like to express my love and profound gratitude to my parents for their ongoing support, encouragement, and faith in my academic and artistic endeavours. Without them, in more ways than one, none of this would have been possible. Not least, to my dear wife Leanne, who has patiently lived with “the thesis” looming heavily over countless evenings, weekends, and holidays, I would like to quote Jason Alexander (George on *Seinfeld*) speaking about Jerry Seinfeld:

> In the beginning, I admit, I thought Jerry was a relatively bad actor and a wonderful audience. He was always standing around the set laughing at everybody else. I remember thinking, “Gosh, if this guy was watching out in TV-land we’d be a hit”. Of course, Jerry became a better actor and remained the best audience.

Thanks for being my “best audience”.

The birth of my daughter Gabriella this year, and my son Christopher in 1997, was easily ‘my best production of all’. It is children like these who might one day be studying drama at school, and will no doubt benefit creatively from any advances made in this field, so it is with much love that I dedicate these volumes to my own children.
1. INTRODUCTION

If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts, but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties.

*Francis Bacon (1561-1626). English philosopher, essayist, statesman. The Advancement of Learning, bk. 1, ch. 5* (1605).

Over the past few decades, Theatre In Education has changed the face of theatre as seen by thousands of Australian school-age children. Many will remember the compulsory school Shakespeare, not least the poor actors who as John Lonie observes, "had to struggle against the deep resentment coming to them in waves across the footlights" (Lonie, 1992:7). There was resentment against the final examination, the teachers who forced them to attend, Shakespeare and all his works, the whole English language and theatre itself - not a happy memory. Compulsory theatre - 'because it is on the syllabus' - still thrives but no longer is it the only theatre that young people can see. Theatre In Education (TIE) companies can claim considerable credit for this cultural progress.

For many school students, a performance by a TIE company will be their introduction to 'live' theatre. Indeed, some companies when touring in regional areas bring the only live theatre many small communities ever see. One of the advantages TIE has, is that it is usually portable, so that what is seen by students in Adelaide, Hobart or Sydney can also be seen by students in large or small country towns. What is special about these TIE plays is that each is tailor-made for its audience. The plays are presented by companies made up mainly of youthful professionals, who have a special interest in this field of theatre-craft and whose ideology dictates the treatment of young people as autonomous individuals with a growing capacity to think for themselves. It is no surprise that the various TIE companies, along with the community-based theatres, can present some of the most innovative theatre in Australia.

For some students, theatre is represented by the end of year school concert - often a production of epic proportions involving students, teachers and even parents.
The play is afforded Broadway status with a generally harried English teacher directing a cast of hundreds in musicals such as Oklahoma, Grease or South Pacific. Often the real drama occurs off stage rather than on, with actors worrying about lines, directors worrying about actors, parents worrying about the director, and the school principal worrying about parents.

For countless other school students theatre is restricted to the classroom. Practical exercises based on short scenes generally taken from the wider context of a completed play are common, as are drama games, short readings and even performances. Teachers are often limited by the time restrictions of a 50-minute class, the size of the classroom, and access to theatrical props and equipment. The most common activity connected to theatre, then, is often the process of evaluation – a discussion about ‘ambition’ in Macbeth, ‘fading dreams’ in Death of a Salesman or ‘fading youth’ in A Streetcar Named Desire.

There is a gap between the Theatre In Education ‘visit’ (either in-school or out-of-school), the traditional ‘school play’, and theatre in the classroom. This thesis documents the origins, development, and implementation of three projects that (collectively) attempt to bridge this gap, and examines the relevance of each project within the wider context of TIE in Australia.

The submission for the Doctor of Creative Arts comprises the creative work together with its accompanying documentation. Essentially, Volume I of this thesis is the documentation, while Volume II is the creative work. Nonetheless, the notion of creative work is worth clarifying. The creative work in this doctoral submission is a series of interrelated projects resulting in three plays. If Johnny Jumped Over the Harbour Bridge, Would You? consists of 18 short scenes based on the theme of parents, developed in response to the demand for a flexible, accessible learning tool suitable for both classroom activities and public performance. Fossils is an 80 minute TIE play, based loosely on the scenes that comprised Johnny. It was written for three actors to perform within a traditional TIE touring environment. Parents: A Kids’ Eye View consists of 23 short scenes, and is similar to Johnny in that the scenes are based on the theme of parents, however it also includes selected scenes from Fossils. A Resource Module was
developed based on scenes from the three projects, subsequent teacher and student workshops, and the development of a workbook and Internet website. This module contains 25 short, self-contained scenes, and is the core of a suggested approach to the Theatre In Education 'program' – modular theatre.

These three projects are linked by the same theme, however they were developed in widely different ways within different theatrical contexts and environments. *Johnny*, for example, was developed for students attending a drama school; so much of the work on the project was on weekends and after school. Students performed the resulting play to an adult audience outside of a school context. Three professional adult actors performed the original season of *Fossils* to primarily a schools audience. These performances were both in schools and in theatre venues. Students also staged three public performances of *Parents*, however in this instance to an audience made up of parents, friends, and classmates. The play was rehearsed both in class and on weekends, and after school as an extra curricular activity.

The creative work then, encompasses not only the plays and the Resource Module themselves, but the use of this material within the educational framework. The archival video recording of *Fossils* is one such example of 'use of the material' – clearly any performance is an example of use. It is the aim of this thesis to document the proposition that the original and significant contribution of the creative work lies in not only the material itself, but the way in which the material is used within the creative discipline of drama – in particular the field of Theatre In Education.

The documentation is primarily in the form of case studies. The use of case studies in Arts Education Research is quite common. In *Researching Drama and Arts Education: Paradigms and Possibilities*, edited by Philip Taylor, John Carroll (Carroll, 1996:77) makes the point that “the research methodology that most clearly fits the special conditions of drama is that of the case study.” He continues, “Case study fits because drama, by its very nature as a negotiated group art form, is a non-reproducible experience.”
The case study is useful when, as is usual in drama, the researcher is interested in, and deeply involved in, the structures processes and outcomes of a project. ... Case study methodology is capable of examining in an open and flexible manner the social action of drama in its negotiated and framed setting. (Carroll, 1996:77)

This thesis is based mainly on case studies of three projects and the subsequent workshops and lectures surrounding the projects. Hopefully, it is able to examine in an “open and flexible manner” the social action of the plays Fossils, Johnny and Parents and their use within the “negotiated and framed” setting of TIE.

This thesis has been divided into ten chapters, with Chapter 1 obviously being this introduction. Chapter 2 of this thesis is a brief background to my work, influences and events that have shaped me as a writer; particularly those events that have led to my interest in Theatre In Education.

Chapter 3 aims to provide a broad overview of the Theatre In Education field, starting with the terminology that defines it, followed by a brief history of TIE, particularly in Australia, and an examination of the TIE process focussing on the presentation and follow-up. This chapter is heavily dependent on many books and articles written on TIE, and so serves also as a defacto review of the literature within the field.

Chapter 4 focuses on the development, rehearsals, and performance of the play If Johnny Jumped Over the Harbour Bridge, Would You? The nature of the short scenes which make up the play are examined in terms of their impact on all three projects discussed in this thesis.

Chapter 5 charts the metamorphosis from Johnny to Fossils. It documents the progress of the script from early drafts, to rehearsals, through its first performance and finally to publication and further productions.

Chapter 6 describes the K4K Project culminating in a play called, Parents: A Kids’ Eye View. The rehearsal process within a school environment is examined along with the preparation, administration, planning, and rehearsals required to stage three public performances of the play. The impact of this project is
particularly significant as it forms the basis of the approach to modular theatre, as outlined in Chapter 9.

Chapter 7 examines the Resource Module that was the basis for all three projects, and its development to a flexible resource for teachers available on the Internet. The significance of a resource such as this is examined in the light of the increased role of technology in education and available educational resources.

The projects in this thesis have been influenced over the years by various workshops to school classes, teachers and theatre companies; and the development of the projects have in turn influenced the workshops. This interaction is examined in Chapter 8, along with the relevance of selected workshops to the 'modular theatre' approach to TIE.

Chapter 9 proposes an approach to modular theatre based on the three projects examined in this thesis and the related resource module and workshops. The model is intended to be complementary to many of the excellent TIE programs currently available to schools.

Finally, Chapter 10 concludes the thesis by summing up the impact of the three projects discussed on Australian Theatre In Education, and evaluates whether the aims and objectives set out in this introduction have been met.

Broadly then, the thesis is divided into three main sections. The first section, Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, serves as an overview to both my theatrical background and effectively the genesis of this thesis, and an overview of the Theatre In Education field. The second section, Chapter 4 to Chapter 6, discusses the origin, development, and implementation of each of the projects in chronological order. As each of the projects were developed roughly in succession, the chronological structure for this section seems appropriate. The third section, Chapter 7 to Chapter 10, expands on the concept of ‘modular theatre’, focussing specifically on the Resource Module itself, workshops related to the module, and finally a model for implementing modular theatre within schools.
2. EXIT, PURSUED BY A BEAR: 
A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

The child is father of the man.

*William Wordsworth (1770-1850), English poet. My Heart Leaps Up* 
*When I Behold (1807; written 1802).*

It is generally acknowledged that a writer's life experience has much to do with the work they ultimately produce. Certainly, whether consciously or unconsciously we draw upon our experiences not only in a creative sense, but also in a purely empirical manner. This thesis will be evaluated on the merits of my creative work, the documentation of its execution and development, and its significance in the field of Theatre In Education. It is important, then, to begin by outlining what influences and experiences have led to my development as a writer; and led to the views and values I have formed, related to the field of drama, and more specifically, Theatre In Education.

The chapter is divided into four sections, and chronicles the personal milestones and events that have influenced me as a writer, teacher, and theatre practitioner. Beginning with my recollections of studying drama at school, the first section discusses briefly the formative years of school, employment in the media, and university study. The second section outlines my work with the Big Hand Theatre Company, and my development as a playwright. The following section details influences and experiences that are related to Theatre In Education, namely work with Self Raising Theatre, touring with the New England Theatre Company, and brief travel overseas. Finally, my own teaching experience is discussed in the light of my views about the education process.

Many of the recollections are from diary entries, particularly in the case of the New England tour and overseas travel – on both these occasions, I made extensive notes. It seems in my case it was easier to keep more detailed and regular records when away from home. While the events themselves no doubt had a profound
influence on my theatrical outlook, the diaries were an invaluable source when compiling a chapter such as this.

ARTS AND MEDIA

My own early memories of school drama start with the bright orange textbook, “Exit, Pursued by a Bear” and crawling like a troll to Grieg’s ‘Peer Gynt’ Suite in Year 5 at Marist Brothers Eastwood, 1972. This was an in-class drama exercise – the object being to interpret the music using movement. I suspect my poor English teacher was as nonplussed about drama as we were about crawling like trolls. Like many schools, Marist Brothers placed a great emphasis on sport – our true school heroes were the footballers and cricketers. I remember the Presentation Night extravaganzas of Oliver, and Joseph and his Technicolour Dreamcoat, where ironically the star of the show was often the football or cricket hero, or the son of the woman who played the piano. I didn’t play football or cricket; my mother didn’t play the piano, so I ended up a playing a beggar in Oliver, and a slave in Joseph. My crowning achievement was a one-line ‘walk on’ as Humpty Dumpty in the 70’s musical, Lightshine.

I suspect my experiences mirror that of many school children, where the concept of theatre is limited to a giant end of year musical extravaganza. These ‘school concert’ evenings were filled with a backstage crew of mothers, fathers and teachers applying make up, organising costumes, and marshalling children quietly from one part of the stage to the other. In my case Ryde Civic Centre was the preferred venue, however I imagine school and local halls across the country were being used to stage similar shows on similar evenings. The nights were long, generally extending well past midnight. The audience was treated to a show from every year, mixed with academic presentations, awards, and speeches. Dutiful parents were usually grateful if at least a few performers could actually sing on tune; if a handful could act; and if the principal’s speech finished in under thirty minutes.

The effect on the performers was very different. The magic of being backstage, the adrenalin, and the feeling of spectacle were quite palpable. Although I may
have been third row from the back, mixed in a chorus of indistinguishable beggars, the applause was still very satisfying. It was an early lesson in the actor-audience relationship. An extension of the performances for Mum and Dad or the play acting one engages in as a child.

It is interesting to muse that the legacy of the school concert is often carried into adulthood where Andrew Lloyd Webber has replaced the harried music teacher, but the technical splendour remains. Shows like the *Phantom of the Opera* are good examples of plays where the set is the star of the show. The astronomical cost of spectaculars such as these, along with equally impressive marketing, ensure that often this is the only theatre people go to see, leaving smaller more imaginative productions in their wake.

Apart from the musicals, I recall studying Douglas Stewart’s radio play *Fire on the Snow*. We made an audio recording of it in class and I remember feeling quite privileged to be cast as one of the characters. As an interesting aside, while at university I studied a screenplay by English playwright, Trevor Griffiths, *The Last Place on Earth*, which like *Fire on the Snow* is based on Scott’s epic journey to the North Pole. Griffiths however, went to great lengths to present the drama as realistically as possible. The result is a fascinating contrast between the manufactured mythology (almost fairy-tale) of the ‘Scott legend’ as portrayed by Stewart, and the sometimes-brutal historical accuracy of Griffiths’ well-researched screenplay.

My next brush with drama at school was through William Shakespeare and the obligatory *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*. I was now in my senior years and unfortunately, the point of the exercise was often the ability to memorise study guides such as Brodie’s Notes. Shakespeare remained a mystery to me, as he does to many teenagers. The closest I came to seeing an actual performance was through the film version of *Macbeth*. The film, I recall, was gory, full of battles, and immensely enjoyable.

Studying drama at school remained simply a variation on reading a novel. However, I have my parents to thank for exposing me to the added dimension of performance. From an early age, they took me to a diversity of theatre from opera
to standard English drawing room comedies. Many of the performances remain fragmentary memories: *The Threepenny Opera* at the Opera House; *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at NIDA; *The Chairman* at Marian Street.

I was always keen on writing, but like many children, had produced only the first five pages of countless novels, and had written the odd short story. One novel, written in collaboration with a friend, took up most of my recreational time between the ages of 14 and 17. It ran into hundreds of pages, but remains more a fond memory, rather than anything of literary value.

Many children who pursue vocations in the entertainment industry often have a background in school musicals and similar productions albeit with slightly more illustrious credits than a ‘one-liner’ as Humpty Dumpty. Recalling my own school-year drama experiences helps me, as a teacher, to identify with the students, many of who have similar sensibilities and backgrounds. With the emergence of Drama as a discipline in its own right in schools, there is opportunity for a greater range of dramatic experience than I had in my school years. To be honest I can’t recall an early vocation to the theatrical arts and often marvel at those students who at a relatively young age have already demonstrated a substantial commitment to theatre as a career.

A last minute Christmas present from my parents provided a great deal of entertainment during much of the mid 1970’s. I was 14 when I received a Super 8mm camera, complete with projector and screen. Quite a few summer holidays were spent producing film after film, with a collection of local kids as the cast and crew. Eventually my new interest in film and television was directed towards my school’s video equipment – an old black and white video camera and recorder. ATN Channel 7 was no more than a kilometre from our school, and I approached the make up department for help with our first video – a remake of the horror classic, *Frankenstein*. The Channel 7 staff were very helpful and supportive of our project and I left with a handful of blood capsules, actors ‘putty’, an assortment of props and the experience of a detailed tour of the station. Our video turned out surprisingly well – much credit to my classmate Paul Newton who created most of the special effects. He is now an established artist having been represented in the
Archibald Prize with portraits of Fred Hollows and Kate Fisher. His talent was apparent even in Grade 7 – our monster was a dauntingly accurate replica of Boris Karloff’s screen version.

After leaving school, I studied Psychology at Macquarie University, and completed one year of my degree before leaving to work full time at Channel 7. I was lucky enough to be employed as a trainee working on shows as diverse as *Romper Room, A Country Practice*, the news, and various sporting events. *Romper Room* was my first contact, in a professional sense, with children’s television. I had the somewhat notorious task of spending six months as Mr Doobee, the show’s puppet bee – surely a career highlight!

The production process was fascinating. I was able to see scripts come to life as actors grappled with each take. I was amazed by the ‘magic’ of performance, watching as actors dropped in and out of their roles. This magic is something that I still find just as enthralling today as I did almost twenty years ago. In watching students respond to my play *Fossils* I notice the same reaction in them, when actors transform themselves on stage using only a quick gesture or small prop. Theatre, like television, is a collaborative medium and valuable lessons can be learned from working in a team.

In my first year of university, I joined Dramac, the drama society of Macquarie University. A number of walk-on roles in both revues and plays cured me of any aspirations I might have had towards a career in acting! I was mainly involved in operating sound, lights, and general staging. Working backstage as part of the crew, and my brief attempt at performance, was a valuable insight to a budding theatre practitioner. These experiences certainly reinforced the concept of drama as a process, not just a product. It was around this time, though Dramac, that I met Lyn Wallis. My professional history with Lyn is extensive. We were both co-founders of the Big Hand Theatre Company – a fringe theatre company active in the Sydney theatre scene during the mid 1980’s.
THE BIG HAND THEATRE

Along with cast and crew from a local amateur drama group, Lyn Wallis and I formed the Big Hand Theatre Company. Our first production was of two one-act plays by Polish writer Slawomir Mrozek, Striptease, and Out At Sea. Lyn inspired this rather eclectic selection of plays, having recently completed a university course on Eastern European writers. The name Big Hand sprang from a large wooden hand, which was used in the closing scenes of Striptease.

These early influences, coupled with a general notion of 'wanting to be a writer', led to my first short play, Emergency Exit, a one-act mixture of absurdism and farce, probably influenced more by the work of Mrozek rather than any real inspiration on my part. Nonetheless, on reflection, the play perhaps showed an interesting 'turn of mind', even if there wasn't much regard for playwriting technique. I assumed the role of Big Hand’s ‘writer-in-residence’ while Lyn either appeared in or directed most of my plays. The theatre company was well known on the fringe and amateur festival circuit having won many awards in festivals such as Theatrefest and Wagga Festival of Arts. Fringe performances of my plays Deja Vu and Three Blind Mice at venues such as the now Crossroads Theatre (then Studio 228) and Bay Street Theatre first brought attention to both the Big Hand Theatre, our company members, and my writing. Early reviews were generally kind and encouraging. The Sydney Morning Herald wrote about Deja Vu, “Aston’s unusual play is worthy of attention.” Reviews in the Herald for Three Blind Mice called it “an engaging and provocative play”. As with many new writers, I was labelled a “promising young playwright”.

Like most fringe theatre companies, the Big Hand worked on a co-operative basis. There was no special treatment for the writer – if a floor needed sweeping, or a set needed painting, everybody helped. Being involved with theatre at such a ‘grassroots’ level was an invaluable experience. I imagine in Melbourne in the mid-1970's, there might have been a similar atmosphere in companies such as the Australian Performing Group. I still maintain that serving at the bar during interval is a terrific way of gauging an audience response to your work.
Many actors, directors, and technicians who worked with the Big Hand have gone on to successful careers within the arts community. Lyn Wallis, after a four-year stint as Artistic Director of Canberra’s Jigsaw Theatre Company, is currently director of Belvoir Street’s downstairs theatre. Actor, Brendan O'Connell has recently returned from Queensland after a successful schools tour of his play, *Nothing Like The Odyssey*, and is currently rehearsing with Theatre South. Brendan is also a regular performer with Sydney’s REM Theatre, as is Annerose de Jong, another Big Hand ‘graduate’. Pamela Hollings, who directed a number of Big Hand’s early productions, completed the NIDA Directors’ Course and now works as a director in Melbourne. As the reputation of the company grew, it attracted many already professional actors happy to spend time between mainstream shows working on a co-operative production.

In 1990, the Big Hand staged my second full-length play, *Clay Soldiers* at the Stables Theatre. The play revolved around the life of the McCrae family, in particular Franky, a disenchanted club comedian, his wife Violet, a barmaid at the club, and their daughter Eden. The setting is a country RSL, where Eden, now a successful entertainer, is performing on the tenth anniversary of her father’s death.

To quote from Lyn Wallis’ directors notes in the program of the Theatre South production:

*The instant appeal of* *Clay Soldiers* *is that the world of the play is so familiar - the institution of the RSL Club, filled with medals and trophies, ‘characters’ like Horrie the bingo caller and the young pokie player out to beat the odds. But the elements of the play that strike deep within our hearts as Australians are those central to the destruction of the McCrae family. What Aussie family has not been touched by critical issues such as loss of youth, the souring of hopes and dreams, passionless marriages, lost mates and personal sacrifice?*

Sydney director Peter Snow directed the original Stables production. The critical response was generally extremely positive apart from one crippling review in the Sydney Morning Herald. Rosemary Neill of the Australian called the play “one of the most accomplished new Australian plays of the year”. The Daily Telegraph felt it was a “pacy script reeking of clever irony. Very entertaining, and very Australian”. The Sunday Telegraph reported the play had “very funny, gifted moments” and “magnificently captures the atmosphere of an RSL Club, its
characters and personality”. Bob Evans of the Sydney Morning Herald on the other hand felt it was, “aimless, cumbersome and fragmented” and even “doggedly rusticated”! On a personal level I was quite pleased with the play as it was a far more mature effort than my previous works, and it encouraged me to continue to develop my writing skills. It was the first play I had written that was subjected to mainstream critical scrutiny – dealing with criticism, constructive or otherwise, was also a very valuable lesson.

The script was sent out to various theatre companies for consideration. This was met with an encouraging response – it was short-listed for Playbox Theatre’s 1993 season and generated interest from Theatre South in a co-production. Theatre South decided to schedule the play in their 1991 season. As Peter Snow was unavailable to direct, Lyn Wallis resumed her familiar role. The season was reasonably successful given that I was an unknown writer in the Wollongong community. More importantly, the production cemented a relationship between Theatre South and myself. In 1993, I spent a very constructive six months as the writer-in-residence for the company.

In May 1992, Big Hand Theatre embarked upon its most ambitious production to date, my play *When the Bough Breaks*. Dubbed by one of the critics as “a poetic excursion into suburbia”, the play is about an ordinary suburban couple, Marian and Martin Keech. Marian is a housewife who grew up in the shadow of the Madonna and Christ-on-the-Cross. To prepare her for life and marriage, Marian’s mother taught her to think of heaven as a supermarket, with groceries as ‘sins’ and God as an eternal checkout operator. Martin Keech works in insurance, catches the 7.45 express each day and can calculate a man’s life expectancy to within five years. Caught in the endless tedium of ‘ordinary’ lives, Martin and Marian no longer communicate. Haunted by the loss of a child and the expectations of parents and friends, they begin their respective journeys to salvation.

Again directed by Lyn Wallis, this play opened at the Stables to good reviews and a successful season. It toured to Melbourne as part of the 1992 Melbourne Fringe Festival, and was short-listed for a season at Queensland’s La Boite Theatre Company. The response from the critics was not as polarised as for *Clay Soldiers*. 
The bulk of the reviews were complimentary, but with some reservation – and in this case it was the unusual situation of the writer being in agreement with the critics! Nonetheless, my favourite banner headline is from the Telegraph Mirror: in a font unusually large for the Arts section, it reads, “Bough Breaks Beautifully”.

This was effectively the last play for the company. As the following chapters show, I continued to maintain a close working relationship with both Lyn Wallis and Brendan O’Connell through projects such as *If Johnny Jumped Off the Harbour Bridge, Would You?*, and the K4K Project at Riverview College.

During the time Big Hand Theatre was in operation, I also dabbled in writing for mediums other than theatre. A quick brush through my various other activities would include an eclectic list of everything from the odd episode of *Hey Dad*, a screenplay, revue sketches, to corporate documentaries and television commercials. The Big Hand Theatre was certainly instrumental in my development as a writer.

**TIE INFLUENCES**

**Self Raising Theatre**

Self Raising Theatre was, in the 1980’s, a small TIE company based in Bathurst, touring between Broken Hill and the New England Region. Brendan O’Connell worked with the company for a few years before becoming its administrator in 1988. The company relocated to the Penrith area and during 1988 and 1989 I worked as their writer-in-residence, writing three shows: *Learn Not to Burn*, a show promoting skin cancer awareness, funded by the cancer council; *How on Earth?*, a schools environment awareness show; and *Take Five* a show based on the concept of ‘human values’ which was performed as Australia’s entrant in 1990 Asian Festival of Drama. These shows introduced me to the Theatre In Education genre.

*Learn Not To Burn* was a suitably didactic play designed to increase the awareness of the risk of skin cancer in teenagers. It was the first time I had written
a play, on commission, and about a predetermined subject. The result was a somewhat predictable play based around the characters Captain UV and Sergeant Ray and the ‘cool’ tanned kid in school who discovers that getting a tan isn’t so cool after all. The play was aimed at lower secondary students and was generally well received.

How On Earth? was, on the other hand, a very forgettable play based on an ‘environmental’ theme. One could be forgiven for thinking the title sprang from “How On Earth was this show ever written?” It suffered from a ‘semi-group devised’ approach during development, and to me highlights many of the pitfalls of group devised work. There seemed to be a need to accommodate everybody’s ideas on the grounds of democracy, rather than on the grounds of quality. So as writer, I was presented with many scenes that were unworkable and it was my job to “make them work”. The worst aspect of the play was that it was a mishmash of ideas without a unifying voice. While no doubt there are many fine examples of group devised work, I still have a horror of this type of process.

Take Five, my final play for Self Raising Theatre, was a far more pleasant experience. We were fortunate to have been selected to represent Australia at the 1990 Asian Festival of Drama held at Kuala Lumpur. The challenge was to write a play in English that would be understood by children (and adults) whose native language was not English. The theme of the festival was ‘human values’. The result was a collection of five short ‘parable-like’ scenes, linked together by a little girl’s poem. It was a very interesting experience as the Festival was far bigger than we expected – imagine our surprise when we learnt our play would be opening the Festival at a gala black tie event, and we would meet the King of Malaysia after the show!

The New England Theatre Company

In 1988 I was very fortunate to be able to tour with The New England Theatre Company on an informal basis while their TIE Team performed three short plays, Calico Pie, Be Like Us, and Way Out West, written by Simon Hopkinson. I was working on my play, Clay Soldiers, and was keen to visit a few regional RSL clubs, as this is where the play was set. As a writer developing my skills, I was
also keen to act as an observer. Lyn Wallis was one of the actors in the show, so she was able to arrange for me to meet the team, and tour with them for a few weeks of their six month schedule. I watched the plays being performed in various schools, sat in on countless ‘question and answer’ sessions, workshops and classes, and participated in discussions with the team and teachers after the show.

What made this experience particularly valuable was that I was there as an observer with no other agenda than to learn about the TIE experience. I have, since the New England Tour, attended many performances of my own plays, usually as a ‘special guest’ or ‘surprise visitor’ or in a more formal capacity as a writer for Theatre South, Self Raising Theatre or Jigsaw Theatre. In many of these cases, I was either on contract or being paid a set rate to run a workshop with teachers and students. The plays I was observing were my own and my role in discussions with both students and teachers was that of ‘the writer’. I was part of the TIE process, not an observer of it, as in the New England Tour. It is very difficult to be objective about a particular process when the play being performed is yours. A bad audience reaction is taken personally – it is immediately a reflection on your work, rather than perhaps a reaction to external factors such as the performance environment. In addition, if you are introduced to students and staff as the writer, it is often difficult to get an honest response. Students and even staff can often be disarmingly shy when ‘meeting the writer’.

It is interesting to reflect on the fact that I have never been on tour with a TIE team in a professional capacity as a writer. Certainly, writers have gone on TIE tours, however usually only if they are performing in the show or if they also double as a stage manager and technician. I believe there is great merit in involving the writer in the TIE touring process, perhaps via special funding. The value in an exercise such as this would be immense. While the actors run the acting workshops with students, the writer can run workshops for those students keen on creating rather than performing.

The three plays taken on tour were an interesting mix. Briefly, Calico Pie was based on an aboriginal myth of the creation of the universe, so many of the characters were allegorical. Be Like Us was about three people who were
camping, one who was very prim and proper and not at all friendly to the other
two people she happened to be sharing a campsite with. She is opinionated and
quite judgemental. A storm unites them and she learns to not ‘judge a book by its
cover’. Way Out West was more a collection of songs and bush poetry – designed
as an ‘add-on’ for adult audiences. This ‘triptych’ of shows was quite flexible in
terms of delivery to an audience. The team could use one, two, or all three of the
shows depending on the circumstances. This sort of flexibility is very valuable to
a touring company as audience numbers, and even allotted performance time can
often vary without notice.

The plays were aimed at a Year 7 to 10 age group. All three shows were popular
with the audience. The poems and songs from Way Out West were particularly
flexible as individual poems and songs could be performed in isolation. This was
put to good use, when the actors were off duty and were asked to “perform
something”.

In schools, there would usually be a question and answer session after each show.
While the response in some schools was ‘better’ (more considered) than others, a
similar pattern emerged. When the show finished the actors would come out from
backstage and, out of character, introduce themselves. They would briefly talk
about the play and the performance, and then ask if there were “any questions?”
Usually this would be greeted by a few hands going up tentatively. If it was a
particularly shy or quiet group, the actors would generate discussion by asking the
students questions. Once the ‘ice was broken’ a good discussion would usually
follow. If any effects were used the usual question would be “How was that
done?” The storm scene in Be Like Us, contained simple thunder effects via a tape
recorder. The tape recorder was placed in a tent without the children seeing it. The
play button was activated during a scene. The effect had a particular lead-time so
the thunder seemed to come out of nowhere. The other fascination was usually the
actors themselves. Students were either interested in the craft of acting or whether
any of the actors have ever been in Country Practice.

Understanding the audience was clearly an important factor in TIE. It was easy to
assume that just because a particular audience was quiet and reserved in question
time – and often quiet and reserved during the performance – they didn’t enjoy or understand the show. It was often quite the opposite. The silence during the show might rather be rapt attention, and a quiet question time more a reflection on the style of teaching, particularly regarding discipline, at the school. In some schools, the students were literally ‘scared’ into submission. Well meaning teachers will lay down the rules before the show, “If anyone makes any noise during the performance, you’ll be on detention for a week”. The result is a group of students who are too scared to react in any way at all – the actors being greeted by silence at often hilarious moments.

The opposite is also a real problem. During one performance on this tour the students were so noisy during the show, one of the actors, Andrew Dilollo, dropped out of character, politely told one group “Could you please be quiet. This is theatre, not your lounge room,” then without missing a beat continued with the play. Apart from a few embarrassed teachers, Andrew’s ‘ad lib’ was incredibly effective.

The lesson here may be that often students don’t know what it means to be an ‘audience’. A steady diet of television and film leaves many ill-equipped to deal with a situation where the performers are on stage in front of them. Teachers can do much to educate students on how to be a good audience.

Apart from the actual performance, one of the major concerns for the school and for the performers, was logistics. For the school, it was a question of timetabling the event, designating a performance area, and then physically marshalling students to that area. The nature of the performance area could vary from the traditional school hall, to the function room of the local RSL club. Some schools had a surprisingly well appointed drama area, while others made do with the space outside the canteen. The actors’ primary concern on arrival was setting up in the performance area. The cliched expression regarding TIE, “Does it fit on the back of the truck?” is appropriate in this instance as touring theatre of this nature can only use sets that are easy to construct and versatile.
Overseas Travel

In 1989, I was fortunate to travel to Europe, Canada and the United States for three months. The trip was primarily recreational, but making use of my ITI (International Theatre Institute) Card enabled me to make contact with other theatre practitioners in a number of countries. As I had then recently finished working with Self Raising Theatre, I was particularly interested in TIE and youth theatre in general, however, any meetings I had were primarily ‘goodwill’ visits with discussions centring on the current theatre scene of our respective countries. So armed with a letter of introduction from the Australian National Playwrights’ Centre and a swag full of small koalas I was lucky enough to make contact with theatre practitioners in Budapest and in New York. Unfortunately, in London and Toronto, the ITI offices were either not easily accessible or unattended.

Both my parents are Hungarian, and fortunately, I am able to speak Hungarian fluently. Naturally this was a great advantage not only to my meeting with Kristina Szabo of Budapest’s ITI office, but when travelling around Hungary in general. Most Hungarians found it curious to meet someone from Australia, let alone one who could speak fluent Hungarian as well! As an overseas visitor, I must confess to feeling quite chuffed at getting the ‘red carpet’ treatment from Budapest ITI. I soon realised that as some colleagues from other countries knew so little of the Australian theatre scene, they were operating under the maxim, “better be safe than embarrassed”. I was given a reception worthy of a notable writer, just in case I may be someone ‘important’.

As I learnt, amateur drama played a significant role in Hungarian youth theatre, however the term ‘amateur’ represent something quite different to what I was used to. Under the Communist government, actors were usually employed by theatre companies full-time, and would work in repertory on a number of projects. Anyone not employed full-time by a theatre company was therefore called ‘amateur’ – according to their definition, most of our entertainment industry would also be classed as amateur.

Youth theatre existed in Hungarian schools in two main ways: adult amateur actors played for students, and students for their classmates and peers. Theatre
where students themselves play the roles is the most common. For many years, the schools and dramatic clubs put on performances where the accent was on the production itself, and not on process of theatre. The effort to put on a good performance resulted in generally 'cute' and saccharine plays, with the teachers-as-director usually barking instructions to young actors, most of whom didn't have the experience – even if they happened to have the imitative talent – for character portrayal. This scenario is not unlike many end-of-year 'school plays' that bring nightmares to parents in thousands of school halls throughout Australia.

In the quest for innovation, Jozsef Ruszt introduced 'initiating theatre' performances – where the students had input into the outcome (in terms of the plot) of the play. In other styles of school theatre, comments were interjected during the performance; in another variation, the play is presented in a 'cross-section' or in rehearsal – where the various interpretations can be discussed and where stops for instructions and repetitions of important details is possible. Another form, much like our standard TIE program, is a normal full performance with a discussion period following it.

In New York I met with Ethan Coen – the same name as the Ethan Coen of the Coen Brothers who were responsible for films such as Barton Fink and Fargo, but not the same Ethan Coen (at least I don't think it was...). I again received the 'red carpet' treatment along with the very friendly, "better be safe than embarrassed" policy. I suspect if the Hungarians didn't know a great deal about the Australian theatre scene, the New Yorkers knew even less!

As with Hungary in the late 1970's, by 1980 many American groups had begun to experiment with alternative methods to presenting theatre to young audiences. One interesting innovation was the 'residency program' where a number of theatre practitioners take up residence in a school for an extended period. Some groups would come into a school with a performance already in process and involve students in its completion. Some residencies did not include student involvement in a production, but rather culminated in a "model class," where workshop participants presented a demonstration, which included (for example) an improvisational play the students helped create. Programs of this sort are
offered on the secondary as well as the elementary school level and may run for one to several weeks.

My trips overseas left me invigorated, inspired and full of new ideas. It was a humbling thought that many of the performance styles, methods of working, and ideas, that I thought were incredibly innovative on my part, were already well established in the youth theatre repertoire of other countries. The residency programs in New York, or Hungary’s ‘initiating theatre’ are good examples. They serve as a cautionary reminder along the lines of the old maxim about there being no such things as a truly original idea.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Clearly, my own education has a profound bearing on how I approach the education of others. Education and the quest for knowledge is an ongoing process and naturally one I have not reached the end of – this thesis being evidence of that.

In 1986, I finished my Bachelor of Arts degree at Macquarie University majoring in Philosophy and Mass Communication. Many of the subjects I completed, particularly in my third year, have been very useful to me as a writer, particularly the study of semiotics, aesthetics, and metaphysics. I completed my Master of Creative Arts degree from the University of Wollongong in 1993. I found this an extremely rewarding course, which among other things forced me to view the process of my own writing far more critically.

The process of studying and my own experiences as a student have also helped a great deal in my career as a teacher. It's probably a natural tendency that I should mould myself on teachers who have influenced me greatly, and avoid teaching techniques that left me bored and jaded.

In 1988, I attended the NIDA Playwrights' Studio – in a sense this was my first formal training in the craft of writing. Lectures by teachers and industry professionals such as Ken Healey and Terence Clarke were extremely valuable. Workshops by distinguished writers such as Nick Enright and Louis Nowra were
a highlight. Many of the insights by people such as these have found their way years later into projects as outlined in this thesis.

In 1990, I began teaching a subject called Broadcast Production and Scriptwriting to advertising students at Sydney Institute of Technology, Ultimo. This is significant only in as much as it introduced me to the educational environment. As a teacher I had to structure and plan classes, and maintain control of a group of often over thirty young adults. I now understood why teachers I met on the New England tour were grateful for any structured activity or practical exercises to complement the plays presented.

I was well suited to teach the Broadcast Production subject as it drew on my background in both film and television, and writing. Happily, teaching was a very rewarding and satisfying experience – representing a new vocational path for me. It is a path that I continue to follow, having recently applied to formalise my teaching experience with a Graduate Diploma of Education.

While continuing to expand my teaching repertoire at TAFE, I also started teaching at the Australian College of Entertainment, based in Parramatta. My role was to introduce scriptwriting to a predominantly drama and dance oriented curriculum. The results of my work at the College are discussed in chapter 4, which details the development of the play *If Johnny Jumped Off the Harbour Bridge, Would You?*

In 1995 the Advertising and Marketing syllabus was revised and I was fortunate to play a role in the planning and writing of selected subjects on the new syllabus. By that time, I was teaching at four different TAFE campuses often up to 30 hours per week. My subject became Creative and Production Elements, a first year ‘foundation subject’ for students completing their Advertising Certificate, or Advertising Diploma.

I continue to teach as a ‘part-timer’ around 30 hours a week, and am grateful that it is an occupation I still enjoy immensely. I now regularly visit schools and run workshops for both teachers and students on topics such as screenwriting and playwriting, Theatre In Education, my own play *Fossils*, and drama in general.
No doubt, every person’s ‘theatrical’ and personal history contributes significantly to his or her current theatrical values. The aim of this chapter has been to provide an insight into the ‘theatrical values’ that have contributed to this thesis and the works discussed in it. Most theatre practitioners have certain biases, likes, dislikes, values and opinions, and it is the diversity of these ideas and opinions that contributes to a varied and robust theatre community.
3. THEATRE IN EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW

Life is amazing: and the teacher had better prepare himself to be a medium for that amazement.


Theatre is a field where opinions are quite diverse and often quite polarised. In TIE these divisions are often extreme – plays presented might be too “text-based”, or “too visual”; some programs are “not confronting enough”, while others are “too confronting”; even opinions on the TIE field itself vary from, “TIE is where the best work is being done”, to “TIE is not relevant”. To quote Brian Joyce, Artistic Director of Newcastle’s Freewheels Theatre Company, “There are a lot of opinions about anything and everything” (Joyce, 1997:76). Theatre In Education is a particularly complex and interdisciplinary field, demanding a detailed knowledge of playwriting, dramaturgy with groups, theory of education, practice in schools, and the pedagogy of drama education. TIE is also an area where many terms and definitions overlap, for example there is ‘theatre in education’, ‘theatre for young people’, ‘drama in education’, and ‘creative drama’, to name but a few.

This chapter is divided into four sections, and aims to provide a broad overview of the Theatre In Education field, starting with the terminology and major concepts that define it. The environment that influences TIE is examined, as are the types of TIE programs. Factors such as the nature of the youth audience are discussed along with the content and structure of the typical TIE play. The second section briefly outlines the history of Theatre In Education, from its origins in England, to its emergence in Australia. The third section focuses on TIE performance, in particular the arrival, the presentation itself, and the departure of the team. The final section examines the role of ‘follow-up’ in the TIE process. A number of different types of follow-up are discussed along with the vexed question of the actor’s role as teacher within the context of Theatre In Education.
In essence, then, this chapter is a review of theory – or at least my understanding of the theory as a practitioner in the Theatre In Education field. The distinction between theory and practice deserves mention. Philip Taylor in his introduction to the text Researching Drama and Arts Education: Paradigms and Possibilities, makes an excellent point about the separation of theory from practice. He refers to a study by Deborah Britzman (1991) which “highlights the flawed premise on which the separation of theory from practice hinged” (Taylor, 1996:5). Taylor’s summary of Britzman’s study continues:

In her study of teacher education programs and how student teachers learn in them, she discovered that the foundations and sources of theory lie in teachers’ practice. Educational theorising, she claimed, is situated within “the lived lives of teachers, in the values, beliefs, and deep convictions enacted in practice, in the social context that encloses such practice, and in the social relationships that enliven the teaching and learning encounter” (Britzman in Taylor, 1996:5).

The context of this quote is educational theory and practice, however a similar principle can apply to theory related to drama, indeed Theatre In Education. The theory is bound inexorably to the lives of those who work in the field – the writers, actors, directors, and educators.

WHAT IS TIE?

To say that the term Theatre In Education has become overworked is not a criticism of what it stands for, but rather a sign of growth. Under the banner, “TIE is dead”; there has considerable discussion of the significance, indeed relevance of the term. Those championing new terms cry, “TIE is no longer an appropriate label for the genre.” What is now being offered, they say, should be described as Theatre for Young People in Schools, or Educational Theatre, or perhaps whatever the latest fad dictates.

Towards a Definition

Edward de Bono, in his book A Textbook of Wisdom comments on the concept of definitions:
Definitions have their place in law, philosophy, science, medicine, and various other specific areas. When you go to the supermarket to buy 'low-fat' food, you would really like to know exactly what is meant by 'low-fat'. In many other areas definitions have no practical value and are really, a game with words (de Bono, 1996:26).

Definitions may indeed be only “a game with words” in the context of practical theatre practice – actors and directors are concerned more with techniques, actions, motivations, and objectives rather than definitions. In trying to quantify what is essentially a creative pursuit, we can find ourselves trying to define the indefinable. Definitions are valuable and essential, but if they are made into absolutes, they can become obstacles. This attempt at defining TIE should therefore be treated as merely outlining the somewhat fluid boundaries of the field.

Theatre In Education

Earlier definitions drew heavily on the work of John O’Toole, who wrote the first book on TIE – Theatre In Education (1976). Changes in our understanding of both performance and youth have expanded the earlier boundaries of TIE, nonetheless, O’Toole’s ideas are still very relevant, and a good place to start.

One factor common to most TIE companies is that “all comprise a group of actors, working in role for and with children” (O’Toole, 1976:9). In this case, I interpret the term ‘actors’ to mean professional actors. This criterion is significant inasmuch as it differentiates TIE from other related forms that lie outside the professional theatre arena. One such ‘related form’ is simply drama as taught in schools, the difference being its reliance upon a teacher rather than industry professionals. This is not to say that work in the classroom run by the teacher is inferior in any way. Far from it. It simply would not be TIE as defined by this thesis or John O’Toole for that matter. According to Tony Jackson (Jackson 1996:8) in his introduction to the text Learning Through Theatre, drama taught in schools, even when involving the preparation of a play for public presentation, would be classed as either ‘curriculum drama’ or ‘drama in education’ (DIE).

Another common factor between TIE companies is that:
"all involve areas of theatricality and performance combined with areas where the members of the audience are directly and personally spoken to, even personally embroiled in the dramatic conflict" (O'Toole, 1976:9).

The concept of being "directly and personally spoken to" could mean ‘direct address’ within the script, or perhaps some kind of follow-up via question and answer sessions, or workshops. The performance, then, is usually placed it in a context of other educational experiences that will enhance its value. Tony Jackson (Jackson 1996:4) again in his introduction to the text Learning Through Theatre, makes the point that one of the distinguishing features of TIE, as opposed to a “self-contained play” or other kinds of young people’s theatre, is the concept of a TIE “program”. Jackson’s definition of a program is:

... a coordinated and carefully structured pattern of activities, usually devised and researched by the company, around a topic of relevance both to the school curriculum and the students’ own lives, presented in school by the company and involving the children directly in an experience of situations and problems that the topic throws up (Jackson 1996:4).

Many of O'Toole's criteria are contained in this definition. For example O'Toole states that another defining characteristic of TIE is that the “performances take place or are associated with schools” (O'Toole, 1976:9). That effectively differentiates TIE performances from those of youth groups, community groups or similar organisations who may in fact use professionals to present theatre to young people. Jackson comments that “the event in the school is not the be-all and end-all of the exercise.” (Jackson, 1996:5) Rather, he continues, it is the concept of the ‘program’ that is important. Naturally, not all TIE work is done in school. Many companies present programs in theatres or similar venues, nonetheless, it generally follows that as most programs are connected with the curriculum, schools are a fairly common place to work.

Closely linked to this is another of O'Toole’s criteria. He states that in TIE “the subject matter of each play is clearly relevant to the curriculum, or has an educational aim” (O'Toole, 1976:9). TIE has become a very broad term, but generally refers to a performance primarily aiming to educate or instruct. To this end, it often contains a strong educational message, for example, anti smoking,
skin cancer awareness, peer pressure, self-esteem, and so on. However, lately the focus has been blurring slightly, between an emphasis upon educational aims related to the curriculum, and the fostering of an appreciation of theatre itself.

O’Toole’s criteria are not ‘rules’ for TIE but a definition of elements – most TIE programs should have these factors in common, regardless of the background or ideology of the company presenting them.

It should by now be readily apparent that within the arena of Theatre In Education, many terms and definitions overlap, so it is helpful to establish a common ground for terminology used. Certainly, I am not alone in this pursuit. In 1956 a special committee of (what was then called) the Children’s Theatre Conference of the American Educational Theatre Association published Drama With and For Children: An Interpretation of Terms (Viola, 1956). It was felt that while the committee’s report did account for aspects and views of the field prevalent at that time, continued development in children’s theatre and creative dramatics ultimately left practitioners without a comprehensive statement on terminology (Davis and Evans, 1982:261). In December 1975, the Children’s Theatre Association of America appointed twin committees with the ultimate goal of producing a set of new definitions that would more accurately reflect the (then) current trends. The following definitions are based in essence on the findings of those reports, which are cited in Davis and Evans’ Theatre, Children and Youth (Davis and Evans, 1982:262).

**Theatre for Young People**

Originally called Theatre for Young Audiences in Davis and Evans, Theatre for Young People basically consists of actors performing a theatrical work for an audience of young people. The performance may be based on written scripts of traditional form, or adapted, devised, or developed via improvisation by directors, directors and actors in cooperative effort, or by actors working in ensemble. The dramatic material of the performance may be a single story line, or it may be a series of shorter, separate, or thematically related stories or sketches. The audience may be assembled in any configuration utilising a variety of spaces, from proscenium to open field. Even though adults frequently attend Theatre for
Young People, either as teachers accompanying classes, as parents with their children, or merely as interested patrons, the focus of the performance remains on the young people in the audience.

Theatre for Young People, taken as a broad umbrella term, encompasses many variations including TIE. There are countless names for essentially the same type of theatre involving youth, including Theatre for Young Audiences, Young People’s Theatre, Theatre for Youth, Youth Theatre, and so on.

One variation worthy of comment consists of the presentation of specially written, adapted or devised drama with an established story line constructed to include limited and structured opportunities for active involvement by all or part of the audience. Sometimes known as ‘Participation Theatre’, the participation in question may range from simple verbal responses to an active role in the outcome of the drama. In the participation segments, adult actors usually function as creative drama leaders guiding the audience.

*Children’s Theatre*

Children’s Theatre is a non-specific, global term indicating the general field of theatre as applied to children. The word ‘children’ in a theatre context suggests to some only the trite and whimsical – what might be vividly expressed by some members of the profession as the cult of ‘Mr Chicken and his Magic Egg’. While it is recognised that the term is used in a variety of contexts, the use of more specific terms is encouraged for situations where exactness of meaning is important.

*Creative Drama*

Creative Drama is an improvisational, process-centred form of drama in which a leader or teacher guides participants to imagine, enact, and reflect upon human experiences. There is generally no public performance associated with this type of drama. Although creative drama traditionally has been thought of in relation to children and young people, the process is appropriate to all ages. Some other terms used to describe this form of drama include ‘improvisational drama’, ‘informal drama’, ‘educational drama’, ‘drama with children’, ‘developmental drama’, and even simply ‘drama’. A large element of school drama studies
incorporates creative drama. The creative drama process is dynamic. The leader or teacher guides the group to explore, develop, express and communicate ideas, concepts, and feelings through dramatic enactment. In creative drama the group improvises action and dialogue appropriate to the content it is exploring, using elements of drama to give form and meaning to the experience. The primary purpose of creative drama is to foster personality growth and to facilitate learning of the participants rather than to train actors for the stage. Creative drama may be used to teach the art of drama and/or motivate and extend learning in other content areas.

Types of TIE Programs

The types of drama found in schools are many and varied. For example, there is movement, mime, dance, and drama of all kinds. Students can engage in a wide variety of improvisations based on making up stories or working on existing stories, situations, and relationships. They are involved in role play and simulations (often used as a teaching method in other subjects); theatre arts, including many of the techniques which go to the making of documentaries, spoken anthologies, films and tape programs and the performance of plays. All these come under the general heading of drama.

A number of channels are open to enable young people to experience theatre in conjunction with their work in school. They can be taken to a theatre to join with students from other schools in a shared viewing of a production. On the other hand, a play can be brought to them and performed in their own school environment. This might be a more traditionally staged performance or one in which they actively participate. In some cases a group of theatre professionals takes up 'residence' in the school and include students in the entire production process, from inception through performance.

In-Theatre Programs

The idea of taking a bus full of students to a 'real theatre' to see a play is as old as TIE itself. In the days when the fully mounted production of a traditional script was virtually the only style acknowledged by the field, this was one of the only
ways to link school and theatre. It still remains a viable system, and in some cases where the show is technically complex, for example, it is still the best alternative. Those programs where the students leave the school and visit a theatre can be termed *in-theatre* programs.

There are many advantages. The students see the play in its best environment, in terms of lighting, sound, and technical values in general. It is also 'an event' for the students – an excursion. It closely resembles the theatre-going experience of most patrons. We do, after all, *go out* to the theatre; the plays do not come into our house (apart from on video)! Further, the experience of a live performance in a 'real theatre' is for many students, their *only* experience of the dramatic medium. The main disadvantage from the school's point of view is the time and cost of transport, and perhaps the lack of contact with the actors. The educational component of the experience, apart from the performance itself, is usually limited to a brief question and answer session after the show.

**In-School Programs**

The most popular manifestation of TIE is when plays are brought into the schools as part of a program of arts education and curricular enrichment. These, naturally enough, can be called *in-school* programs. Each performance becomes a focal point for classroom activities in which the actors themselves may be involved. A significant number of theatre companies have added in-school performances to existing programs, and a large number devote themselves exclusively to this work. Many offer a variety of services in addition to performance. These may include teacher workshops and post-performance sessions in individual classrooms with actors leading the students in their own dramatic activities. In-school performances also have many advantages. Wendy Michaels, in her excellent article "The Follow-Up to Theatre In Education" (Michaels, 1997:12) comments:

> A performance coming in from outside provides a break in the school routine, an event which is in itself valuable in a timetable where every day proceeds with relentless monotony.

Of course, it could be argued that any event could similarly provide 'a break in the routine'. Michaels continues, ‘the possibility of seeing ‘theatre’ in schools and not
in a theatre aids the whole demystification of live performance for students and also for teachers …” (Michaels, 1997:12).

**Residency Programs**

Far more elaborate and comprehensive in scope than even the most highly organised programs of in-school performances are projects where members of a theatre group or ‘team’ take up residence in a school for an extended period. The patterns of activity for these programs vary widely, but the universal goal is to provide some sort of in-depth experience in the theatrical process. Some groups come into a school with a performance already in process and involve students in its completion.

One residency project, described by Gillette Elvgren (Elvgren, 1977:6) of the University of Pittsburgh, began with his company’s decision to create a play with a circus motif as its structure, and a theme that would challenge young students and would also provide opportunities for meaningful involvement with the theatre process. As the script evolved, so did plans for a series of workshops designed to achieve the latter goal. The workshops were structured to produce results that would eventually be incorporated into the production. Examples included drama sessions in which students learned the rudiments of characterisation through becoming circus participants, both human and animal, and devising conflict situations for them. There were mime exercises recreating typical circus performance activities, music workshops where circus sounds and rhythms were explored, and various art workshops where murals were painted, collages created and slide projections produced. This extensive and comprehensive involvement occurred over a period of several weeks residency in a single school.

Some residencies do not include student involvement in a production, but rather culminate in what the Children’s Theatre Company of Minneapolis terms a “model class,” where workshop participants present a demonstration, which may include an improvisational play the students have helped create. Programs of this sort are offered on the secondary as well as the elementary school level and may run for one to several weeks.
Another residency plan is reported by the Bear Republic Theatre of Santa Cruz, California (Davis and Evans, 1992:253). During a two-month stay in a secondary school a ten-member company developed a multi-ethnic, bilingual play based on stories and legends from the various cultures represented in the community, holding open rehearsals to make the process of creating a play accessible to students and teachers.

These examples suggest a few of many approaches followed by American theatre companies in their working relationships with schools. However diverse methodologies may be, most companies involved in residency programs maintain a focus on the theatrical process, espousing a common goal of involving the students in that process.

The TIE Environment

A typical Theatre In Education program generally aims at a particular audience, and by its very nature is subject to a series of guidelines that influence the content and structure of the show.

Audience

Des Davis in his book, *Theatre For Young People*, makes the point that, “young people are a special audience, different in degree if not kind, from an adult audience” (Davis, 1981:xi). Certainly, the theatre practitioner needs to know the nature and implications of this difference. Determining the age range that Theatre In Education caters to is relatively simple. While education is naturally a lifelong process, TIE usually targets young people from Kindergarten to Year 12, or between 5 and 18 years of age. In terms of this thesis and the plays presented, the audiences are usually between Year 8 and Year 12 students, or between 14 to 18 years old – broadly speaking, teenagers. Determining the difference in ‘degree’ is a little harder. Is there, in fact, any empirical evidence of a difference between teenagers and adults in terms of their response to theatre?

Professor Willmar Sauter from Stockholm University, Sweden, has conducted extensive research on what people respond to in the theatre. One study documented by June Frater in her article “Does Age Make A Difference? The
Research Of Willmar Sauter, had 25 groups of people seeing the same six shows over a period of seven weeks. The shows included Dario Fo’s Icarus and Daedalus, Romeo and Juliet, and Chekhov’s The Seagull. Three of the 25 groups were made up of teenagers. According to Frater, Sauter’s analysis of response to the shows showed that the responses by the teenage groups were significantly different than that of the adults (Frater, 1992:16). Interestingly enough, while age was a significant factor in determining response, gender was not. The main difference was noted in critical appreciation of form and style. Where adults preferred a consistency of style, teenagers appreciated variety. According to Sauter, “Teenagers are quite uninterested in form” (in Frater, 1992:16). This does not mean that young people are not affected by form, he continues, but “they do not notice it.” Rather than inferring that teenagers do not like obvious changes to the form of a play, I interpret the results to mean that they accept most styles of theatre without question. Sauter also found that teenagers are interested in characters and plot. They identified with characters that were perceived to be similar to them, and those with qualities that they wished to have. Finally, teenagers were slower than adults to pass judgement, but when it came to matters such as themes, were very quick to perceive the intention behind the act. Sauter’s conclusion (Frater, 1992:17) is that “Didactic, issue-based theatre is likely to be rejected.”

According to the Queensland Department of Education Curriculum Guide, 1991, the following is the learning characteristics of early to mid-adolescent students, between Year 8 and Year 10:

Young people strongly identify with their peers and are more conscious of their place within the society. They are interested in exploring possible life roles. They are concerned with establishing and expressing their attitudes to cultural traditions and accepted practices, and are starting to develop some sophisticated critical thinking skills. Developing a distinctive personal style is characteristic of this age group. (Dept. of Education, Queensland, 1991:7)

The difficulty in attempting to quantify the nature of the youth audience is, of course, that not all teenagers can be lumped in one basket – the responses from an average fourteen year old will vary from that of an average sixteen year old. In
fact the response between an average fourteen year old and another average fourteen year old will also vary!

A few years ago, I was asked to lecture on TIE and writing plays for young people as part of an Australian National Playwrights’ Centre (ANPC) workshop. The following was my perception (at the time) of the youth audience. It was no doubt based on both my own observations and those of other writers and academics who I am unable to cite. It is expressed in terms of pros and cons.

In terms of the pros:

- Young people are without prejudice – they come to the theatre with an open and innocent mind.
- They are not much influenced by publicity or reviews.
- They usually don’t go to plays only because of the name of a director or a star performer.
- They will accept most kinds of theatre.
- They are spontaneous and honest in their reactions.

In terms of the cons:

- Young people are spontaneous and honest in their reactions – one hundred and twenty Year 9 boys can do more damage to your ego than a panel of opening night critics.
- They usually have a short attention span.
- For some, the best thing about your play is that it’s a better option than Modern History

I suspect my perceptions at the time highlight some of the fallacies all too common among theatre practitioners working in the TIE field. One is the underlying notion that there is a necessary separation of education and entertainment – if it’s educational, it can’t possibly be entertaining. The unwarranted conclusion is that companies performing in schools are somehow uninterested in or even incapable of entertaining young people. Such thinking may
even go to the absurd length of equating entertainment with conventional big theatre values, seeing all alternative work as somehow inferior.

The second fallacy, an even more dangerous one, is that young people are themselves infallible in distinguishing gold from dross in the content and themes of their entertainment. Young people are a ‘critical audience’, this fallacy argues. Yes, they are a critical audience, but they often have only one real criterion – their attention.

While it’s true to say that the status and reputation of a theatre company does not overly affect young people, it does affect their teachers. However if an actor is well known from a current popular television soap opera – much of the students’ previous objectivity is lost.

Further, is no doubt true that young people make a frank and sincere audience. Their responses and reactions are immediate and obvious, however it would be wrong to assume their judgements are always fair. Young people can be just as judgemental as adults can. What they cannot accept is if there is no genuine endeavour to establish contact with them. If the actors are not playing for them and with them, they immediately become bored. Richard Tulloch, who has an impressive list of young people’s plays to his credit, offers this advice:

In the first 5 minutes you have to persuade the kids that, a) the actors aren’t weirdos, b) it’s okay to laugh, but don’t throw things at the cast, and c) this show is going to be fun. If you don’t manage to do this, you’ll have a) a riot, and b) kids kept at bay by prison guard teachers (Tulloch, 1992).

Content

The nature of TIE content, and exactly who is responsible for that content is a complex and often contentious issue. In this thesis, the term ‘content’ refers simply to the topic of the play. This is usually, but not always, manifested in a script or a play text. Even the term ‘text’ is somewhat fluid – “the word ‘text’ is now taken almost universally to denote the dramatic event, not just the playscript (O’Toole, 1992:9).”

TIE by its very name suggests that there is an educational content. This is at times subtle, but often, very obvious. Theatre for Young People has always to some
extent aimed to educate. Indeed most plays have a message for its audience. Even primitive theatre in the form of ritual was designed to educate and pass on information. TIE companies are often given very specific objectives by groups of teachers, education advisory committees, curriculum advisers, or other interested parties. Each theatre company will have an approach to TIE and this will be reflected in its programming. Individuals within the theatre companies and funding bodies will have their own views on TIE: it should be more visual; more challenging; movement based; interactive; incorporate more puppetry, mime, dance; be more daring, innovative, or multicultural.

Every few years some specific themes become fashionable, usually because they are connected with social changes and sociological facts. For example, smoking, drug abuse, pollution and conservation or the exploitation of human and natural resources are very properly common themes. Certainly my own repertoire of TIE plays has dealt with issues such as skin cancer awareness (Learn Not To Burn), environmental awareness (How On Earth?), human values (Take 5), the role of the broadcast media (Mercury!), and of course, teenagers relationship with their parents (Fossils, Johnny and Parents).

The artistic policy of many major TIE companies has indicated a move away from 'issues-based' plays. Katerina Ivak in her 1992 article on Toe Truck Theatre echoed the sentiments of many in the TIE field when outlining the company's future direction. "I would like to move away from the current obsession with "issues" and concentrate on universal human experience instead" (Ivak. 1992:18). Unfortunately, it is not easy to find the best way of depicting the universal human experience – particularly for the 14 to 18 age group.

The responsibility for creating the play usually rests with the writer. On one end of the scale is the playwright working in complete isolation; on the other end is a play written by a number of people, or group-devised. In between these poles are numerous other methods including: play-building, teacher supervised projects, class initiated projects, and so on.

Scripts of course can be co-authored, or even group-devised. Group devised theatre has many advantages and disadvantages. In some case the work may suffer
from the "too many cooks spoil the broth" syndrome. There is often no single unifying voice to the play, and the production may seem quite disjointed. The reverse of this is the "two heads are better than one" phenomenon, the idea being that the input of more creative minds will lead to a better result. Regarding group devised material, Jim Mirrione in his article "Playwriting for TIE" comments that he "grew weary of the endless debates, discussions and negotiations that ensued in the attempt to craft a single script" (Mirrione, 1996:72). This is phrased wonderfully by Lowell Swortzell in the article, "Trying to Like TIE". Art, he says, "cannot be created by a committee" (Swortzell, 1996:241).

While I have seen many excellent group devised performances; most have suffered from the "too many cooks" syndrome. Nonetheless, my working methods are not those of the group-deviser, and my opinion is probably unfairly biased as a result of my experience.

**Structure**

John O'Toole notes in his book *The Process of Drama*, (1992:123) that the instrumental purposes of TIE normally take precedence over the aesthetic dimension. Broadly, the aesthetic can be equated to 'artistic', while instrumental can be equated to 'practical'.

When writing for TIE there is an inherent series of instrumental criteria that must be met regardless of the aesthetic nature of the project: portability, cast size, and length of show. The nature of TIE determines these limitations. Restricted budgets determine cast size, school programming generally determine the length of the show, and touring restrictions determine the nature of the set.

I use the term 'portability' to refer to the general mobility of a particular show. For example, the nature of the set, the number of props and costumes, the necessity for special effects, all impact on the mobility of a production. If the schools come to see a show at the theatre, or the play only tours to a small number of places, then the issue of portability is not so vital. However, when a production travels to a different school every day, then large cumbersome sets are impossible to work with. Generally, a TIE play must be written assuming there will only be
very basic production values. It would be a mistake to budget on impressive light shows, sound effects, and imposing sets.

When considering cast size, it is unusual to find a touring TIE show with more than three actors. Equity wages for the cast, including living away from home allowances usually form the major part of a theatre company's production budget. Naturally, if a show is to be performed in a school by the students, many of these limitations do not apply. In fact, it is often the opposite principle of 'the more the merrier' — teachers have a greater flexibility with a larger cast, and can occupy more students. My experience with *Fossils* bears this phenomenon out. The play was written for three actors playing multiple roles. All professional productions have had a cast of three, while all school and amateur productions (that I am aware of) have had a cast of eight or more.

The length of a standard TIE show is usually restricted to between 50 and 90 minutes. This is partly because it is a definite advantage to fit neatly into a school timetable — the longer the show the harder it is for the school to schedule — and partly because it considers the attention span of the average teenager. Depending on the style of show, it can be difficult to sustain young people's attention for over 90 minutes, particularly in a school context where the average classes are in lots of 50 minute lessons. A feature film lasts on average 90 minutes, but has millions of dollars of special effects and big screen action to hold attention. There is nothing quite so daunting as two hundred bored teenagers — I recall during one TIE performance (thankfully not mine), one teenager yelling over the whispered conversations and general chaos, "This show sucks!" Needless to say, his theatrical experience was quite short-lived, as was the season of the unfortunate play.

THEATRE IN EDUCATION HISTORY

An overview of the major historical milestones in the field of TIE is important in a thesis such as this as it places the body of work in a relevant context. Ideas that initially seem revolutionary to the creator are often found in projects, movements, and works of the previous half century. As an example, Geraldine Brain Siks, a
pioneering academic and practitioner in Children’s Theatre, divided the educational drama field into a number of areas. She wrote in the second edition of *Playmaking with Children* (quoted in McCaslin, 1975:3) that four widely different attitudes had evolved concerning the use of drama in education:

First was the attitude of classroom teachers to use it as a tool, a tool to involve children in learning facts. A second attitude was that it was purely recreation with no concern for education. A third designated it use entirely as therapy. Fourth was the attitude that regarded creative drama as an art with such unquestioned value that it should be part of every elementary school curriculum, on equal footing with music, and the graphic and plastic arts.

This assessment, made nearly forty years ago is still relevant today. John Hughes in his introduction to the Educational Drama Association’s publication, *Drama in Education: The State of the Art* (Hughes, 1991:2) credits John Deverall with “conceptualising the multiplicity of (educational drama) activities into four ‘purposes’”. These purposes are outlined as Learning Medium; Personal Development; Therapy; and Art Form. Hughes makes the point that this range of purposes “has provided Drama teachers with a rich field of theory and practice.” However, the similarity between Deverall’s concepts and those of Geraldine Brain Siks forty years earlier illustrates the notion that many seemingly original ideas and concepts are often the result of a ‘creative osmosis’ from conferences, seminars, workshops, classes, and lectures. Indeed, being involved in the Theatre In Education movement exposes practitioners to a wealth of ideas and theories that are in turn modified and recycled as new theories and ideas. Such is the nature of the collaborative medium.

It is all too easy to dismiss past movements and trends in favour of progress, forgetting that much can be learned from the lesson history has to offer. To this end, it is worthwhile to examine TIE’s background.

The ‘birth’ of Theatre In Education is usually regarded as being in England in the mid-sixties. In fact, it is hard to find many texts that go beyond this ‘British model’ of the TIE genesis. However in most countries, plays with educational significance written for children have been performed since the turn of the century. Tony Jackson makes the point that TIE’s emergence “stems from a
number of distinct but related developments in theatre and in education evident throughout the twentieth century” (Jackson, 1996:3). One such development was the movement to re-establish theatre’s roots in the community and in so doing broaden its social basis (Bradby and McCormack, 1978). This they say has been manifested since the war in the revival of regional theatre and the rapid growth of community, ‘alternative’ and children’s theatre. And according to Gavin Bolton, developments in education include the recognition during the sixties and seventies of the importance of the arts (and drama particularly) in the school curriculum (Bolton, 1984).

It wasn’t until the late 1950’s that a concerted effort was made in England to extend the educational potential of drama beyond the compulsory teaching of Shakespeare and the annual ritual of the school play. A group of directors – most of them based in the Midlands, including Gordon Vallins at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, John English at the Midlands Arts Centre and Clive Barker at Warwick University – gradually developed a thorough program for the use of drama in schools. This approach, which involved the extensive use of touring companies and had objectives that were closely linked to the academic curriculum, became known as Theatre In Education, or TIE.

So, TIE began in a formal sense in 1965 at the Belgrade Theatre in the English City of Coventry. As part of a plan to establish closer links between the theatre and other branches of the community, the City Council provided for a Theatre In Education team under the leadership of a producer/teacher. It was decided that the team would work in the schools, and with the teachers.

The core of what the original Belgrade team of four ‘actor/teachers’ originally set out to do was regarded as the blueprint for Theatre In Education work. Such work involved a team of actors using theatre skills in schools to provide a framework in which children can work with the actors (both often playing a role) to explore a subject through the methods of educational drama. At times, the dividing line between actor and audience disappeared entirely. The team usually devised its own material, aimed at a clearly defined age group and involving a limited number of children. The program often began in the classroom, moved to the
school hall and then back to the classroom, leaving further initiative firmly in the hands of the teacher.

As a movement, it had sprung from those involved in educational drama, and from those in theatre concerned to enlarge their audience by gearing their work to the interests of those who hardly, if ever, attended theatre. Fostering a liking for theatre among children was an obvious way to blend both the interests of theatre and of education.

The TIE movement in Britain has had a great influence in the development of TIE companies in Australia in the last thirty five years. This influence on Australian TIE occurred not only because of the "cultural cringe" but, as Dianne Mackenzie points out in her excellent article, "A Brief History of Theatre In Education," (Mackenzie 1992:7) "because many Australians travelled to Britain in the period and gained experience there which they then applied on their return home." For example, Don Mamouney founded the Sidetrack Company in 1979 when he returned home from the U.K. where he had worked in classical and community theatre. Roger Chapman was director of South Australia’s Magpie Theatre in the 1970’s and he had come from Leeds.

However, British TIE is quite different from most of the TIE that has evolved in Australia. Our geography and our system of education have led to many of the obvious differences. As John Hughes and Jennifer Simons comment in their editorial to the Educational Drama Associations journal, Do It (Volume 51):

... where the UK has Local Education Authorities, Australia has large Departments of Education, based upon each state. Moreover, there are different ideological and aesthetic perspectives, and different funding arrangements. (Hughes & Simons. 1992:4)

Dianne Mackenzie’s article published in the EDA journal, Do It! 51 is interesting to read because it documents the extensive range of theatrical experiences offered to young people in Australia well before the ‘birth of TIE’ in the mid-1960’s. For example, in 1948, two sisters, Joan and Betty Raynor travelled in a caravan to isolated children in country areas. Dubbing themselves ‘strolling players’ they travelled for over twenty years playing to adult audiences and children.
Pageant was the first Theatre In Education team to operate in New South Wales, beginning in 1966. After eleven years of excellent work in difficult circumstances in both metropolitan schools and country areas, the Pageant Theatre went bankrupt and closed down (Mackenzie, 1992:7). Unfortunately, Pageant Theatre’s is a story that has been repeated all too often. Many companies instrumental in the history and development of Australian TIE, such as Hunter Valley, Toe Truck, and Sidetrack theatres, are no longer in existence. Sometimes this is as a result of funding cuts, while other times it is as a result of normal market forces such as competition, or a change in the management of the company. A new artistic director will almost always bring a new set of values for the company.

Other companies such as Magpie in South Australia, Salamanca in Tasmania, Australian Theatre for Young People (ATYP) in Sydney, Freewheels in Newcastle, Wollongong’s Theatre South, Canberra’s Jigsaw Theatre, and many others have stood the test of time, and continue to provide quality theatre to schools.

The funding dilemma is one facing almost all TIE companies (and most mainstream ones as well). Jumai Ewu and Tunde Lakoju’s article in the book Learning Through Theatre makes an interesting point on funding. Writing about Nigerian TIE, they hope to learn from the mistakes made by many British TIE companies in the past. They continue:

A form that claims to be anti-establishment cannot honestly expect adequate patronage from that system. As the English saying goes, whoever pays the piper must inevitably dictate the tune. (Ewu and Lakoju, 1996:175)

In my experience the tune is very much dictated by the funding bodies, whether that is through the Department of Education or the Australia Council. Rob Galbraith, speaking in his capacity as Education Officer of the Victorian Arts Centre comments:

As long as the TIE accepts educational rather than theatrical money and serves rather than leads education, it will remain a peripheral learning tool – a novelty rather than a vigorous force for change in the schools and our way of life (quoted in Jackson, 1996:135).
Unfortunately corporate sponsors have not fully embraced the TIE movement, and indeed even professional companies find it difficult to attract corporate sponsorship. Usually it is given by way of a good or a service ‘in kind’. Large corporations are besieged by requests for sponsorship so can be quite rigorous in selecting whom to support. Smaller theatre companies find it harder to get sponsorship, as larger theatre companies can offer a greater audience and public relations profile. Even though the youth market is a very lucrative one, unless the theatre company has a commercial mainstream season, it is very difficult to snare corporate sponsors. A common complaint from both theatre companies and schools is that funding schemes and programs are so short sighted. The degree of funding and organisational uncertainty in the long run, forces the industry to think short-term.

The seventies in Australia saw a break away from the ‘cultural cringe’ that linked us to all things British. The uniquely Australian theatre that was emerging in Sydney and Melbourne via alternative theatre companies such as the Australian Performing Group and Nimrod was having its impact in the TIE community. Unfortunately it left TIE torn between what it saw attractive from Europe and Britain, and the need to create an Australian ‘voice’ (O’Toole, 1996:136).

Australia’s small population has been blamed for everything from economic woes, to cultural difficulties. The small population equates to a relatively small ‘cultural market’. It follows that our arts community is close-knit and crowded. As O’Toole confirms, “there is a smaller gap between ‘heritage (and) mainstream’ and ‘alternative (and) community’ theatre than in the UK (O’Toole, 1996:137). This means that quite often, mainstream theatre actors, directors and writers ‘moonlight’ in TIE simply to make a living. In an ideal situation there should be no distinction between ‘mainstream’ and TIE. Realistically, though, TIE is often associated with long hours in a transit van loaded with sets and props, travelling along a dusty road to an small outback town, trapped with fellow actors – all waiting for their ‘big break’ into mainstream theatre. Dianne Mackenzie echoes the sentiments of many involved with TIE when she writes, “the prestige of TIE in the eyes of the professional theatre was (and is) low” (Mackenzie, 1992:47).
THE TIE PERFORMANCE

The performance itself is obviously central to the TIE experience. The way in which this performance is delivered can vary greatly from company to company and school to school – it is precisely this diversity that contributes to many of the trends and movements within the field. The arrival and departure of the TIE team also influences the students' theatre experience and is an aspect of the TIE process that is often overlooked by companies as being of little importance. Factors concerning 'arrival' and 'departure' are quite significant when dealing with the more traditional in-school and in-theatre programs; less so in terms of residency programs as the contact between the TIE team and the school is not a 'one-off' event.

The term 'arrival' basically refers to activities that occur before the performance begins. This usually includes the arrival of the TIE team, the preparation for the performance, and the assembly of the audience. Obviously the main factor of actors arriving at an in-theatre performance is that they arrive at the theatre at their designated call-time. Just as with mainstream theatre, it would be unacceptable for a show to start late because an actor is late. Similarly efficiency and timing is a crucial factor with in-schools performances. School schedules are usually crowded and the actors themselves are working to a tight schedule – in some cases they visit more that one school a day. On regional tours they sometimes have to travel hundreds of kilometres between schools!

The arrival of actors in schools also gives rise to a number of other issues relating to efficiency and discipline. Sometimes students are cautioned, threatened and generally intimidated into submission, to the point where they are too frightened to respond. Performances of Fossils in private schools with a reputation for discipline have often received a noticeably subdued response. Efficiency is particularly important when assembling what are often large numbers of students – this sometimes results in ironic and sometimes humorous by-products. One incident relating to performance of Fossils illustrates this point. The students had all assembled in a large hall, and were seated in silence ready for the performance.
Just as the lights dimmed a voice boomed over the loudspeaker, “Students are reminded not to disrupt today’s performance of *Fossils* in any way.”

One characteristic of TIE is that it can generally be performed ‘anywhere’ – from theatres and schools, to coalmines and caves. My favourite image is that of the New England Theatre Company TIE team performing scenes from their play late one evening, in a thermal spring near the opal mining town of Lighting Ridge. The impromptu encore performance resulted from a chance encounter with some of the local teachers at the spring, and was a wonderful event in terms of public relations.

Most school performances take place on the floor of the school hall, usually in broad daylight. However, some schools have fully equipped drama theatres. The most popular layouts are generally a straightforward ‘confrontation’, or what would be termed a proscenium production in conventional theatre terms, or sometimes a semi-circular layout. This is mainly because of the limitations the theatre or school hall. The more modern theatres had semi-circular raked seating and ‘thrust’ stages.

The teachers usually sit at the side, or rather, in view of the varied layouts, ‘on the fringe’. Some teachers like to sit where they can see their pupils’ faces, not just for supervisory reasons but because they can gauge the reactions to the performance. Several teachers made this point very strongly: only too rarely, they said, did they have the opportunity to sit back and observe their own students in the hands of someone else – in this case of course, the actors.

The departure usually signifies the end of a particular theatrical program. In the case of an in-theatre performance the audience will leave the theatre and assemble at a designated area before returning to school. In the case of an in-school performances it is the actors who leave while the students stay. A student audience should be allowed the same opportunity to leave as an adult theatre audience does: without regimentation and at some leisure. Unfortunately, in some cases the end of a program is often followed by shouts of command by groups of efficiently briefed seniors harvesting and re-arranging fields of chairs. Some plays end at the close of the school day, others end at lunchtime, and the remainder with
students returning to classes, often to a teacher who had not seen the performance. Wendy Michaels comments that unfortunately some teachers, “grab the performance time as free time for themselves” (Michaels, 1997:12). This is not to say that there is a lack of interest; merely a lack of opportunity, since the organisational demands of a high school (particularly the larger ones) is quite complicated.

If there are follow-up activities planned the audience may wait for the director or actors to appear. As part of the follow-up to the performance, students may have the opportunity to ask questions, perhaps direct the actors to replay scenes or even workshop various ideas.

THE FOLLOW-UP

Long before theatre companies began to distribute teacher’s guides for post-performance activities and discussions, teachers took advantage of the enrichment opportunities opened by theatre attendance. Many a school filing cabinet contains folders of drawings and essays done by classes whose teachers encouraged personal responses to the theatrical experience. Many a teacher returned to school inspired to attempt informal dramatic activities based on the play – with the full cooperation of students filled with ideas about how they would like to recreate the experience.

The standard pattern of presentation adopted by most TIE teams is to provide a teachers guide, and to have a ‘question and answer’ session after the show. The teachers guide usually contains background notes and suggestions for ‘follow-up’ to help the teacher in subsequent work with the class, while the question and answer session is often the only contact (apart from the performance) between the students and the actors.

While the presentation itself should stand alone as an experience of value for the students, it is usually placed it in a context of other educational experiences that will enhance its value. Clearly, the theatrical event is the central stimulus for a richer and deeper learning process than a one-off play could hope to offer.
Des Davis in his book *Theatre For Young People* (Davis, 1981) makes the point that follow-up (or in his words “supplementary work”), is of two kinds, one looking to the past and one to the future. Davis continues:

Frame of reference supplementary study looks inward to the work or backward to its creation while creative supplementary work looks outward from the work or forward to further development. It does not follow however that the former is necessarily done before the performance and the latter after it. Either kind of work can be done both pre-show and post-show according to the nature of the particular work. (Davis, 1981:160)

The notion that follow-up is not necessarily limited to events after the show, is an important one. Teacher’s workshops before the show, or programs and handouts would be good examples.

“Looking inward” or backwards to the shows creation means strengthening the frame of reference for the theatrical event in terms of the content, themes, and the production itself. For example this would include discussion on the plot, the characters, the setting, the playwright’s background, and so on. In terms of discussing the production, Wendy Michaels makes the point that follow-up, “should not neglect the theatre aspects, such things as shape of the performance space, genre, style, design, acting or directing styles and any technical features that are used in the performance” (Michaels, 1997:13).

In terms of “looking outward” or forward from the work, Davis suggests that the theatrical event be used as a stimulus for creative work on the part of the student. Such creative work may be further reading, writing, drawing, craft work, or creative drama. Once again this creative work may be based on the content, theme, or on aspects of the production.

**Types of Follow-Up**

Bearing all of this in mind, there are probably as many methods of following up a program as there are programs, teachers and schools. Nonetheless the following methods would be reasonably familiar to most companies: teacher’s guides, ‘hit-and-run’ discussions, lectures and workshops, and the use of evaluations and feedback.
Teacher’s Guides

Teacher’s guides have become one of the most common tools of theatre companies working in an educational context. They are usually issued to teachers before, or at the performance. Teacher’s guides come in many shapes and sizes, and with a plethora of titles such as Study Guides, Student Guides, Resource Kits, to name but a few. They range from a one-page handout with the barest of background information, to bound, printed and elaborately illustrated manuals. These guides usually incorporate all the elements of a program, however include a great deal more of what Des Davis would term “creative supplementary material”. Each company has its own style and content for the guide. Some simply contain factual information about the play, its source and the style of the production. Others are far more elaborate, outlining strategies for stimulating anticipation before the performance and providing detailed instructions for post-performance activities and discussions. A typical program, for example might include background notes about the genesis of the play, biographical notes about the author, cast and crew, notes on the plot and characters, suggested activities, and even the relevance of these activities to the syllabus.

A well-designed teacher’s guide can serve as the point of departure for workshop activity as well as provide tangible material that the teacher can use in the classroom. Some guides go beyond drama activities into story creation, visual art, music or simple puppetry, giving concrete ideas about extending the theatre experience through other modes of expression.

Ideally, the education officer would prepare the teacher’s guide, however it may also be the responsibility of other company members or advisory panels of educators. It is important, however, not to lose sight of the teacher’s guide as primarily an educational tool – unfortunately many are no more than a collection of biographies and a brief plot outline.

‘Hit And Run’ Discussions

One of the most common forms of ‘face-to-face’ follow-up is the question and answer sessions after a show. There are many variations in the way in which these sessions can be conducted. The actor conducting the session can remain in
character or be out of character. The audience may consist of a small group or be a large group. The session can be conducted in a theatre, a school hall, or a classroom. Discussion topics might be sent in advance to the teacher to encourage the students to focus on certain areas of discussion, or questions might be taken in an open forum. Sometimes the discussions are incisive and revealing, however the logistics involved in some of these variations, particularly with larger groups, and a general lack of innovation among many educators and theatre companies, means the standard question and answer session immediately after the show is still usually the norm.

They should perhaps be called ‘hit and run’ discussions, as that is exactly the effect many of these encounters between actors and audience have. Much of the time students have not had enough time to assimilate the performance, their questioning ability is limited, and the actors by that time are tired and may have to move on to another school. The result is that the audience will ask irrelevant questions like, “Have you worked on Home and Away”? or “Is Julie (the character's name) your real name”?, or if genuinely astute questions are asked, there is often little time to offer meaningful answers. Unfortunately discussions such as these are token gestures to education – a feeling on the part of the company that they need to do something to convince teachers and students that there was ‘educational value’ in the performance. Wendy Michaels, in her article on TIE’s follow-up, discusses the result of the TIE team trying too hard to stimulate discussion of the issues in the play:

On the one hand they may end up explaining the play, which suggests a basic mistrust of their own art and tells the students that plays are obscure messages which have to be interpreted afterward. On the other hand they may discuss some issue in the content not relevant to the main theme.

Indeed sometimes the discussions fail because of the very success of the performance, which was so effective that it makes anything else an anti-climax.

To avoid these traps, follow-up work done by the company needs to be very carefully structured. As an example, the actors could come out and introduce themselves, and perhaps discuss some of the difficulties faced during rehearsals and production. A number of scenes could be performed again in different ways,
allowing the students to see the effect of different interpretations. Another variant is the questioning of the actors in character by the audience so that the ‘release’ from the world of the play is gradual and under the control of the actors. These presentations could nicely compliment any teacher’s guide that may have been supplied. Of course, the other end of the spectrum is to have no discussion after the play at all. This, in some ways, leaves the theatrical experience ‘in tact’, in much the same way as when any other theatregoer goes to see a play.

Lectures and Workshops

Lectures and workshops included in a TIE program can help eliminate the “hit and run” aspect so often encountered in after-show discussions. Lectures are usually more of a one-way process – the lecturer discusses a set topic – while workshops, as their name implies, involves greater interaction. They can be directed at the students, the teachers – or sometimes both – and will vary greatly in terms of content and complexity. A teachers’ workshop is often extracurricular and will generally be designed to provide background information about a particular play or production, or focus on issues related to teaching drama. More comprehensive workshops will provide practical exercises that teachers can use with their classes. Unfortunately, in my experience, many teachers’ workshops are quite poorly attended. Perhaps the term ‘workshop’ is a little too forbidding particularly to teachers who don’t have a great deal of experience in the jargon of drama. It is more likely, however, that the demands of day-to-day teaching leave little time for extracurricular activity.

Another type of workshop is the student workshop. These workshops are the logical extension of the simple question and answer session in that they generally offer some sort of structured activity. In some cases when the play offered to a school is to be examined in an educational context, such as English in general or in NSW the HSC in particular, a slightly more formal response is required from students. This means that in a sense the follow-up needs to be more ‘formal’ as well. Each year as the HSC looms, there are a myriad of lectures being offered on everything from Shakespeare to Death of a Salesman, with students frantically cramming any information they can.
**Evaluation and Feedback**

The element of feedback, both from teachers and students, is vital to a TIE company’s work. Refinements in a program can only take place if the Company understands the student’s responses to the program and the teacher’s assessment of its value. To some extent student’s responses are evident during the performance, and in the discussion after the show. However responses may be quite different from both teachers and students some weeks later after they have had time to discuss the show.

Many companies have a formal evaluation sheet that is often bundled together with the teacher’s guide. Theatre companies that welcome evaluation and feedback can gain valuable insights into the quality and impact of their work. An evaluation form seeks feedback not only on the play and its standard of production, but even on the promotion of the play, and the follow-up itself. The growth of new technologies, particularly email and the Internet, now give even greater opportunities for evaluation. Many theatre companies are already on the Internet and through their web sites are able to promote their activities, and gain valuable information about their patrons.

**Actor as Teacher**

The responsibility of organising follow-up material is generally shared between teachers, actors, or other members of the company. Teachers will often use any supplementary material, such as teacher’s guides and their own notes, and work independently at planning their lesson based on their particular TIE experience. From a theatre company’s perspective responsibility for supportive educational work will usually rest with an individual variously titled as Educational Director, Youth Theatre Director, Dramaturg or more often Education Officer. In terms of the follow-up process, the role of Education Officer is crucial. Not all companies have one, and even if they do the range of duties may be diluted. The role is more often one of a personal assistant to the Artistic Director, or simply, as I recall one professional describing it, “selling the show and supplying notes”.
At the heart of much TIE work is the question of how much teaching an actor should be allowed or required to do – a question still asked by members of both professions. It might be useful at this stage to consider what common ground there is between actor and teacher in their work with students, for there is no escaping the fact that on many occasions in school the actor takes on the role of teacher.

By training and experience, it is the job of actor and teacher to be able to communicate with audiences of all sizes. Unlike the teacher’s audience, the actor has to deal with a largely unknown quantity, and they must ‘deal with it’ in a short span of time. Generally, they do this within the framework of the performance as a whole. Not only do both actor and teacher communicate or transfer something from themselves to their class or audience; they also elicit and receive response and stimulus from them. Role-play is clearly a theatrical technique and therefore within the province of the actor, however it is used by many teachers as part of their teaching method.

Gordon Vallins, whose team originated the actor-teacher designation, insists that TIE personnel must have:

... enthusiasm for and experience in both acting and teaching, that they must either be actors who can teach, and preferably have had some teacher training – or teachers who can act. Whatever their background, they must have a fundamental interest in the process of learning (Vallins in Jackson 1980:12).

The actors in Theatre South’s season of *Fossils* had no teacher training, and in some cases had never even performed in a school context. Needless to say, the adjustment came as a shock. Wayne Fairhead in his article on Canadian TIE, notes that many TIE actors were “doing it in order to make ends meet and as a stepping stone to the real thing – adult or what was termed ‘legitimate theatre’” (Fairhead, 1996:152). Cora Williams in her article, “The Theatre in Education Actor” comments that TIE companies need to use two main criteria when selecting actors, “their craft skills, and the company member factor” (Williams, 1996:93). In terms of craft skills, apart from the skills most actors posses, those working in TIE need a few extra, such as the ability “to work in unconducive circumstances, in a classroom cluttered with furniture, or in a school hall with intruding sounds from adjacent rooms” (Williams, 1996:94). The company
member factor means that an actor is usually a member of a TIE team, and that in this capacity needs to liaise with their colleagues outside of rehearsal and performance. This is particularly necessary in many of the Australian regional touring companies, where the distances travelled together – often in a small van – are vast!

Much of the discussion on the role of both actors and teachers points to the significance of the relationship between actors and teachers. For the most part actors and teachers go their separate ways with mutual courtesy and efficiency. Due to tight scheduling, rarely are actors able to spend time with teachers after a performance or in the staffroom afterwards. There is often reluctance (and indeed shyness) on the part of teachers to make contact with the actors immediately after their work and to discuss it with them. In some cases I am aware of, the actors took the initiative to stay and talk to the teachers; and interestingly enough, those actors usually had a background in education.

Unfortunately, there is at times, a feeling of uneasiness on the part of actors and teachers over the occupation of their ‘common ground’. Perhaps the common ground should simply be occupied by all those interested in the needs of the students. After all, the best theatre-school interactions almost always occur in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect.

The aim of this chapter has been to provide an overview to the field of Theatre In Education, which has in its relatively brief history already provided a wealth of experts, theories, methodologies, and resources. An approach towards a definition of TIE, a brief outline of its history, and analysis of the TIE process is fundamental to understanding the context of the three projects discussed in the following chapters of this thesis.
4. "IF JOHNNY JUMPED ...": A KID'S EYE VIEW

Even a minor event in the life of a child is an event of that child's world and thus a world event.


This chapter outlines the development of the project _If Johnny Jumped Off the Harbour Bridge, Would You?_ – due to its long title, generally referred to simply as _Johnny_. The origins and the background of the project are discussed, with particular emphasis on how the nature of the scene structure contributed to the project's success. The scenes themselves are outlined, followed by an examination of the rehearsal process leading to the play's eventual performances.

**ORIGINS AND BACKGROUND**

**Early Workshops**

The Australian College of Entertainment, situated in Parramatta, New South Wales was founded in the mid 1980's by Robyn Dixon and Glenn Stapelton, focusing mainly on dance and musical theatre skills. Drama was introduced in 1989 with Leila Hayes as principal teacher. In 1990, Lyn Wallis formed an association with the College, teaching both singing and drama. Most students were aged between 4 and 18. They were divided into tiny tots' classes, being kids between 4 and 8, junior school, between 9 and 15, and senior being 16 to 18 years old.

During several of the school holiday breaks, I was asked to run a number of writing workshops for both senior and junior students. Like most new teachers my primary difficulty was devising suitable practical exercises and selecting appropriate scenes for students to work on. I read quite extensively but found very little material that seemed relevant to Australian students in the 1990's. Being a writer, I decided to write a few short scenes myself. They were a mixture of
absurdist dialogues that I wrote for fun, ‘out-takes’ from previous plays, and various segments of past plays. I also wrote a few scenes that were used as springboards for discussion. The scenes had no title, no stage directions, and no character names – they were simply lines of dialogue. By not having a title, we were not giving any hint as to what the scene was about. The lack of stage directions gave a greater range of performance options, and the absence of character name meant that students could name each character and either males or females could play the same role. The following is an example of a few lines of this kind of ‘neutral’ script:

Are you okay?
Yep.
You sure?
Positive.
Let’s go then.
Hang on.
What are you waiting for?
You know.
Oh, right.

As is readily apparent, a short scene such as this could be interpreted in literally hundreds of ways. The skill, in terms of writing, was simply to create lines of dialogue which were easily open to varied interpretation.

Dramaworks

Discussions were held during August and September of 1992 regarding the possibility of “writing something” for children at the College to perform. One pitfall of being a writer is that people often approach you to just “write something” or “knock something together”. The problem is that most people don’t know what that elusive ‘something’ is, and only rarely are they willing to pay for it. In the case of the Australian College of Entertainment, our agreement was that I would have access to the students so they could in essence ‘workshop’ ideas. As Theatre South were keen on engaging me to write them a ‘youth play’, I saw this as an opportunity to do the College, and myself, a favour.
I was keen on the idea of writing a play that could be used for drama exercises, forming the basis of a class, and one that would also lead to an eventual performance. This was exactly what the College was after: the performance was to be an informal gathering of parents, students and teachers – much like the ‘poetry nights’, showcases, or talent nights of countless drama schools throughout the state.

Seven students were auditioned and selected to be part of a ‘performance company’ called Dramaworks. I attended the auditions with Lyn. She had worked at length with most of the students in the school and had a reasonable idea of which ones she would want to be involved. I had already worked with most of them during the September holidays, and also had an idea of each student’s potential.

Auditions

The auditions were promoted throughout the school. Students wanting to be involved in the project had to prepare a monologue or short scene they were familiar with. During the audition, they would be given an additional scene to ‘cold read’. For some students the audition process was a completely new experience, while others were near experts. The college had links with the Joan Gibson Agency and many students already had quite an impressive portfolio of commercials and appearances in various television dramas. It was recognised that the audition process was a valuable lesson to students who were ultimately keen on a career in entertainment. Students who were obviously talented, but had not prepared for the audition, or those who were clearly nonplussed by the whole process, were generally overlooked in favour of those who were very keen, had worked hard to prepare for the audition and seemed committed and enthusiastic.

As an interesting aside, another factor taken into consideration was the students’ parents. Artistic Director of the college, Robyn Dixon, called it “auditioning the parents as well as the kids”. These sentiments were echoed two years later by Anthony Renshaw, Head of English at Riverview College, when auditioning students for the K4K Project. Certainly, parents who were supportive made a big difference to the performance of the students. Not only did most students depend
on parents for transport, but also like any extracurricular activity, being involved in a play demanded quite a reasonable time commitment. Students with enthusiastic parents often reflected these attitudes in their approach to their work. The other end of the spectrum was the classic ‘stage-mother’ syndrome – a parent so enthusiastic about their child’s progress that it actually hindered the process. In other words, we were less likely to cast a talented student with forceful or obnoxious parents, over a student with easy-going and supportive parents. Memories again of the student whose mother played piano in the school concert getting the lead role.

The luxury in student theatre of this nature was that we were able to take a ‘process’ approach, rather than a ‘product’ approach. The product/process debate is not new to theatre, but is nonetheless a vital consideration when dealing with theatre and education. The following example helps illustrate the point. One young student, who auditioned was quite nervous and his performance was very ‘average’, but he was obviously extremely keen to be involved in the project. Above all, it was clear he would benefit immensely from being involved. If we took a ‘product’ view, then his selection would not (on first impressions) be to the best advantage of the show – the product. In professional productions this would be an important factor to consider – producers think long and hard before giving the enthusiastic ‘unknown’ a chance, over the celebrity ‘name’ who will draw in an audience. In our case, selecting him was an extremely rewarding experience as he proved to be a very dedicated and engaging member of the Dramaworks cast. If there were a ‘most improved’ award in theatre, he would certainly have received it.

Another point to note, was that I recall Lyn saying to me before the audition by way of briefing, that by including certain ‘popular’ students we would be increasing the desirability of the group. Perhaps this is a fairly accurate reflection of casting a mainstream play, where directors often look for ‘names’ that an audience will know. Obviously, there is no perfectly equitable casting process. Clearly a major factor was finding a group that would work harmoniously together, and who were, largely, keen on the project.
The following is the audition scene, used for the original casting.

**ROYCE** Chocolate cake. That's what did it. It sneaks up on you. Cholesterol, fats ... this cake had it all ... bitter cherries, cream, thick, thick icing. One minute ... nothing. Two minutes ... nothing. Three minutes ... there's a message. Print out to brain. Message: “We're in trouble, Royce. Less blood. Less oxygen. System error.” You take that breath and it's just a few seconds longer than normal, a little deeper. Then you feel it. A tiny little squeeze in the chest. Print out to brain. Urgent. Message: “Major cardiac malfunction, Royce. Tough luck. You're history. Say goodbye to the world.” You sit there still staring at this piece of cake. It's a murderer ... criminal pastry. All right, cake, you've made your move ... it's you or me ... this world isn't big enough for the both of us. Then you feel the squeeze again, only this time it's for real. You go white, you sweat, all these fluids ooze out of you. Someone get a mop ... I'm dying. It's pulling you down ... I can see it. These huge hands have ripped through the ground and are pulling at you. You're on all fours, hot damp, breathless. It's the cake, Royce ... it's got you. Giant chocolate arms pulsing with egg and flour mix squeezing the life out of you. That's it. It's over. You're flat on your back lying in a fantastic white cloud of whipped cream.

This is a short monologue from an earlier play of mine, *Three Blind Mice*. It features Royce, a young boy telling his friends about an imagined heart attack after eating a particularly appetising chocolate cake. Lyn was familiar with the scene, and it was sufficiently ‘flexible’ in terms of how the students might choose to interpret it. For example it could be played seriously, or over-the-top, or in an absurdist fashion. It was designed mainly to test the ability of the children with slightly offbeat material.

A group of ten students were selected. We were conscious of selecting a relatively even ratio of males and females, and an even spread of ages. The eventual age range for the original Dramaworks company was between 10 and 16 years old.

**SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT**

**Early ideas**

It was arranged that I would have access to the students for two hours on a Saturday to discuss the concept of the play. This would include improvisations,
and workshops, led by Lyn. My idea was to create something that was flexible in not only a teaching environment, but also flexible in terms of performance. Children at this age can be notoriously fickle. It was very rare to have every child present every week. The concept I was working towards was to establish a central theme, and then write a series of short scenes based on that theme. I had seen the short scene/monologue concept used to great effect in a number of graduation shows. One in particular that sprang to mind was a Theatre Nepean graduation show of the late 1980's, where students were each given three minutes. This format, of course, was chosen to highlight their talents to prospective agents and is now a very popular format for many graduation shows.

During October 1992, I devoted a large percentage of workshop time to simply talking to the kids. My aim was to find out what issues concerned them - what kinds of subjects were important to them? The object was to find a unifying theme to the short scenes I would write - an ‘issue’ that would link the various scenes. I proposed the familiar ones like drugs, school, relationships, self esteem, and so on - each generated some level of discussion, however each also had drawbacks. Drugs, for example, were well covered in teenage literature and most of the younger students (thankfully) had no experience of them. Even the older students (again thankfully), were relying on what had happened to a friend of a friend. The idea of relationships was interesting but ultimately too broad a topic – most of the discussions bordered on soap opera like scenarios reflecting the current favourite television show. Peer pressure was also an issue that was well covered in teenage literature and was obviously familiar territory. As an afterthought, I mentioned the idea of basing the scenes on stories about parents. The response was terrific - here was a topic all the students could relate to.

Research

Traditionally, research is divided into primary and secondary research. However, in relation to Johnny, I would like to use three alternative terms - research that is intrinsic, investigative, and magnetic. I have devised these terms because they suggest something about the manner in which information was obtained relating to Johnny.
Intrinsic research is using the knowledge stored in our minds, (which in turn is shaped by our experiences and life attitudes). In the case of developing the script for Johnny, this meant simply listing past issues and incidents with my parents that might have some sort of dramatic potential. This was surprisingly easy – I wrote a list of issues that were significant in my own teenage years. The list contained items like ‘going out’, choice of friends, music, tidying my room, homework and so on. For some of the issues, I would write short bursts of dialogue if anything came to mind.

Investigative research is actively seeking information. This was mainly through discussions with the Dramaworks group. Students would talk about their relationship with their parents, sometimes relating funny stories, other times discussing issues with great sincerity and honesty. For example, one student talked about how she felt during her parents’ divorce. In some ways, these discussions were disarmingly cathartic – I felt that perhaps some of the things I was being told were being articulated for the first time. Often stories that were quite poignant or moving were not necessarily good material for short scenes, perhaps precisely because it was so personal. My discussions were not only limited to the Dramaworks company. I found myself discussing the topic of ‘parents’ with friends, associates, and even my students at TAFE.

Magnetic research is when the writer seems to attract (or repel) information without consciously thinking about it. As soon as the topic of the play was determined, I had parents volunteering funny stories that I might be able to use. I found myself far more conscious of my own parents’ mannerisms, and was far more observant of other parents with their children.

Drafts

The distinction between the first draft and subsequent drafts is often quite arbitrary. An excellent first draft for one writer would be unacceptable for another. According to researchers such as Janet Emig (Emig, 1977) and Donald Graves (Graves, 1983), we discover ideas as we think and even as we write. Because creating is a discovery process, creating a draft requires careful planning and rewriting as the major points, details and organisation of a play emerge.
According to this view, errors are considered signposts rather than mistakes. Pamela Lloyd’s book, *How Writers Write* (Lloyd, 1987) includes twenty-three authors talking about why they write, their motivations and methods. It reveals that there is no single writing process. However, two broad styles emerge – those who write after extensive treatments, breakdowns and plans, and those who write initially quickly and freely, but then have to revise extensively. I use the latter style, relying on a technique I call ‘burst-writing’.

Burst writing is basically thinking in writing. The concept is not new. In the 1920’s, the surrealist artist Andre Breton championed the *automatic* writing method. He suggests (Breton cited in Daiute, 1978:86)

> Attain the most passive receptive state of mind possible. Forget your genius, your talents, and those of everyone else … Write quickly with no preconceived subject, so quickly that you retain nothing and are not tempted to re-read. Continue as long as you please.

I have modified this technique to include a time limit (a lower limit). I put an electronic timer on my desk (like one used for cooking), setting it for ten minutes and then start writing non-stop until the alarm rings. Usually this results in relatively meaningless dialogue, but sometimes interesting exchanges and ideas can surface. If nothing else, it contributes to an ‘off-beat’ quality. Character names are usually not included. One reason is that when writing ‘against the clock’, there simply isn’t enough time to write them down. Another reason is that if it is not clear who is speaking when the draft is revised, I know the dialogue is not working properly. Where action suggests itself quicker than dialogue I just write what happens, with a view of returning to it in future drafts.

There are a number of advantages to using burst writing. Firstly it is a good warm up activity, it exercises not only the hands on the keyboard, but the mental channels and inner voice. It controls the ‘vicious editor’ lurking in our subconscious. Because of the time limit, one subverts any inhibitions. Burst writing is particularly suited to the word processor as material can be altered, copied, or deleted very quickly.

The actual writing process for *Johnny* was relatively quick and painless. I simply selected an ‘issue’ such as worrying, assigned the scene in my mind to a student
who I knew would be capable of performing it, and set about writing. My own memories of being a teenager were a wonderful ally. This method of working was one I was extremely familiar with. My background with fringe and co-operative theatre was usually based on working with the actor first. In almost all of my plays I knew who the actors would be before the first draft was even written.

It was valuable to watch Lyn run her drama class with the students and to make notes as to what sort of characters they were playing in improvisations. For example one fifteen year old was constantly playing the tough ‘street kid’. It made sense to try to incorporate a persona such as this in the script. In his case it was clear that although his interest was in gangs and fights, this was mainly influenced by American television shows and the prevailing youth ‘street culture’. Happily, he had never really been in a fight – and this difference between tough exterior and real experience made for the basis of a monologue called “Fights”.

Revisions

The process of revision for Johnny was a little easier than for a ‘normal’ plot based play. As it was simply a collection of scenes, decisions involving structure were not as harrowing from a writer’s point of view. Each scene was given a title that summed up the scene, for example “Worrying” or “Tidy Rooms”. I would print out a number of copies of the scene, and Lyn Wallis and I would allocate a scene to a number of students to read. Based on the reading we would determine whether the scene was acceptable, and which student was best for the part. After the reading Lyn and the students would act as dramaturgs, making suggestions. Often I would change scenes on the spot and we would try them again, other times I made notes as we discussed each issue. Some children related well to particular topics so I would try to modify the scene with their suggestions in mind.

I found the best method of revision was to make notes on the printout and then incorporate the changes in another session. Usually when incorporating the changes, another round of editing would take place. These incremental changes to each version are reflected in the names of the computer files. For example, the Rough Drafts were named Johnny0A, Johnny0B, etc. Over the years I’ve developed a code: Rough Drafts with prefix ‘0’; First Draft prefix ‘1’; Second
Draft is ‘2’, and so on. Each draft may go through a number of ‘versions’ – A, B, C, ad infinitum. The result is not only a record of all the changes the play went through, but also a stored version of each. Just as hard copies offer added security, I found it essential to store all of the working files and revisions on floppy disk. Experience has taught me that there is nothing more distressing than losing good material to ‘electronic heaven’.

Style

The common factors in what I would call my ‘style’ of writing have always been (according to both critics and colleagues) a strong sense of humour, use of direct address, and a sometimes-cynical approach. This is probably a perfect combination of elements for a project dealing with teenagers. Firstly a topic such as ‘parents’ lends itself well to humour. Secondly, an adult audience is generally won over by young performers particularly when they are spoken to directly. Direct address also gives the audience a greater chance to get involved with the script and the characters. Thirdly, teenagers are noted for their cynicism. In fact, most of the kids I talked to regarding their parents were very cynical to what they saw as double standards. Naturally, much of this was a reaction against authority, however I did attempt to capture some of these perceived double standards in a scene like, “Worrying”.

MICHELLE They worry about my homework.
   If I do too much, it’s
   “Michelle, you work too hard”.
   If I don’t do enough, it’s
   “Michelle, why aren’t you doing your homework?”

   If I don’t care about the environment, I’m apathetic.
   If I get involved in a Greenpeace group, I’m a radical.

   Then they worry about food.
   If I eat too much, it’s “Michelle, you’ll get fat and flabby
   If I don’t eat enough, Mum thinks I’ve got anorexia!

   If I’m being silly, it’s
   “When are you going to grow up,” or “Act your age!”
   If I try to be more mature, it’s
   “Don’t grow up too quick, darling”, or “Act your age!”

   They worry if I try to be like everybody else.

MUM Why do you have to do what everyone else does?
DAD Can't you think for yourself?

MICHELLE And, of course, they worry if I dare to be different

MUM Why can't you just be like everybody else?

This short extract illustrates the use of humour, direct address and a healthy dose of cynicism.

Structure

There is no real plot or story, in *Johnny*, rather a succession of discreet scenes where the characters relate their point of view to the audience. This ‘kid’s-eye-view’ is extremely important to the overall structure of the play. As with the scenes workshopped in the summer schools, by writing in a deliberately ‘neutral way’, there are a great range of possibilities for each scene. This neutrality is achieved in the following ways:

- There is generally no indication of the setting.
- The gender can be changed, usually without any great difficulty.
- Students can have input in naming their character.
- Each scene is self-contained.

As there is no indication of the setting for most of the scenes, it was up to the students to create the setting and context. For example, “Worrying” could be set almost anywhere. With other scenes it was clear where the characters were, however the final decision was left up to the director and actors. For example, “Tidy Rooms” would probably work best if it were set in the character’s room.

Either a male or a female can perform most of the scenes, with only minor alterations to the script such as names, pronouns, and activities. For example, Michelle and her girlfriend Julie who are returning from an afternoon shopping could be changed to a Mark and David returning from an afternoon fishing. If that seems too stereotyped, then I’m sure an adventurous director could have Mark and David returning from an afternoon of shopping!

Care was also taken in the naming of characters. The students had considerable input in naming ‘their’ character. This also contributed to a sense of ownership.
The most common criteria for selection would be whether the named sounded right for a particular character. The reason some names sounded right and others didn’t can be traced back to a host of stereotypes from film, television, and probably the children’s lives. Often it reflected a name that the students would have preferred for themselves. Naturally, there was considerable coaxing on my part if the student’s choice seemed wildly inappropriate. In this instance, it was I as the writer who was responding to my own catalogue of stereotyped names. Of course, naming characters is an important part of writing. Much like real people, characters are identified by their names. Not only do names have a literal or historical significance; they become inextricably linked to the person’s identity. It’s hard to imagine Shakespeare’s Iago, as say, Charles.

Each scene is self-contained, with its own beginning, middle and end; and has its own internal rhythm and structure. What links these scenes is the Mum and Dad characters, and the off-stage presence of Johnny and Dominic. The Mum and Dad became central to not only the script, but also the rehearsal and indeed the whole Johnny concept. Mum and Dad’s dialogue would contain a litany of common expressions so familiar to children and their parents. As an audience, parents would view the play both in terms of their own childhood, and in terms of themselves as parents!

Even during the early readings, it became clear that the parent roles should remain in the background. Lyn often read the role of Mum, along with another student who read Dad. These characters would read the script and ‘feed’ lines rather than interact with the main character of the scene. This concept is better described in the Production Notes of Johnny,

The play is in some ways ‘stylised’ with the parents occupying a space on the stage somewhere upstage right and upstage left. All their actions take place with the boundaries of this relatively small area. On the first performance, they were seated in ‘throne-like’ chairs.

The parents had their scripts on stage. This was effective for two reasons: a) they could prompt the younger cast members if necessary, and b) the focus remains on the children.

It is important that the world of the children and that of the parents be quite separate. Mum and Dad sometimes exchange short bursts of
rhythmic dialogue – often at the start of each scene. These can work quite well when delivered in quick, toneless phrases.

The parents also supplied a common link between most of the scenes. The other device that did this was the introduction of both the Johnny and Dominic characters. While never actually appearing on stage – it was assumed that all the characters knew about Johnny and Dominic. Johnny in this case the archetypal hero – the class captain, good sportsman, desired by the girls and so on. Dominic then, became the archetypal victim. Research and indeed my own recollections indicate that we all knew (and could usually name) at least one Johnny and one Dominic.

By the end of October 1992, rehearsal scripts were ready.

THE SCENES

A breakdown of the individual scenes and a short commentary on each is useful at this point. Although no order had been established for the scenes when they were written, I will list them in the order they were performed in the ‘Dramaworks version’ of Johnny and comment on some of the considerations that affected their placement. The gender, while flexible as mentioned, is also described as was performed in the original ‘Dramaworks Version’ of the script. This version is included in Volume 2 of this thesis.

Worrying

In this opening scene, Michelle discusses the chaos caused by her parents who “worry about everything”. Sacha Manietta who played the role was quite a strong actor, and could handle the difficulties of direct address very well. The double standards of parenthood are explored. On a deeper level, the scene explores the paradox of being expected to act like an adult, while still being treated like a child. The character is quite mischievous. When asked to give more information about her current romantic interest, Johnny, she describes him as a criminal rock drummer with long hair and tattoos – every parent’s nightmare. The scene ends with Mum and Dad reciting a list of things that worry them, while Michelle indicates that her view on worrying is that it is a natural parental state. As Mum
and Dad say, “It’s only because we love you dear”, and as Michelle says, “Yuk!” This scene was written without much consultation with Sacha. It reflects a fairly personal view of my own parents and memories of my teenage – obviously not too much different to most. I’m happy to report that my parents still worry. Sacha’s acting ability, the early reference to Johnny, and the structural strength and humour of the monologue made this an ideal candidate for an opening scene.

**Tidy Rooms**

In this scene, Rebecca complains about her mother’s obsession with her room. Karen Costa, another strong actor, played this role in the original production. The scene was based mainly on Lyn Wallis’ recollections of the battle with her mother about the state of her room. Rebecca’s parody of her mother – whose room consisted of an old garden shed, with a plank placed between two bags of fertiliser for a desk – is a technique used in a quite a number of the scenes. It’s difficult to tell who is exaggerating here, Mum in her original version of the story, or Rebecca’s retelling of it. Apart from borrowing Lyn’s experiences with her mother, it was relatively easy to recall my own battles regarding privacy, independence, and my own room. The humour of this scene, and its instant recognition by the audience, made it ideal to warm to audience up at the start of the show.

**Careers**

Three boys and two girls feature in this scene about teenagers grappling with a choice of careers. The age range was between 12 and 16 years old, roughly reflecting the ages of the actors assigned to the various roles. I didn’t need to look further than my own teenage battle with career choices to write this scene. The premise is how parents can sabotage the most innocent of teenage career aspirations, in favour of a job more in tune with their own aspirations or dreams. Rebecca wanted to be a mechanic, but surely, nursing would be more suitable, after all, “Your grandmother was a nurse.” Scott wanted to be a pilot, but “computers is where the money is”. Daniel wants to be a police officer, Annie a model, and Franky to his parents’ horror wants to be an actor. As the kids were all
attending a drama school, 'wanting to be an actor' was quite a familiar scenario for the parents, and Mum and Dad's horror at this prospect always proved popular in performance.

This scene also gave me a chance to have a little fun with the Mum and Dad characters. A 'python-esque' exchange similar in structure to Monty Pythons 'Four Yorkshireman' sketch parodied the standard parental refuge in telling the kids how difficult things were in their time. Mum and Dad’s story progresses from walking through snow to get to school, to working in Chinese laundry, scrubbing floors to working in factories. In performance, this scene was usually popular. It is worthy to note that when working with kids from the Willoughby Youth Theatre, some expressed reservations about the scene. One teenager felt that it was somewhat gratuitous, and possibly playing for laughs. On reflection, I have to accept that point. It does however set up the exaggerated view of parents.

Boyfriends

This scene belongs to Julie, about 15 years old, who desperately resists her mother's attempt at matching her with Dominic – the school 'dag'. Julie is set up as the desirable teenage girl, and Dominic is introduced as the undesirable teenage boy. He is the boy who seems reasonably intelligent, has acne, and has parental approval – a lethal combination for any teenage girl. Julie's real love interest is Johnny, the archetypal hero. This scene plays heavily on the stereotype 'dag' or nerd, and equally stereotyped school hero. Structurally, it is best placed near the beginning of the show as it serves as a form of exposition outlining Julie’s dilemma – and her somewhat narcissistic personality.

Phones

In “Phones”, Julie and Michelle have a typical teenage conversation on the telephone. On one level this scene is about the teenage preoccupation of using the telephone, however it also shows Julie’s fear of possible peer pressure resulting from her future ‘date’ with Dominic. She devises an ingenious way to get out of her date by staying on the telephone long enough to be grounded. The scene is usually most effective placed directly after Boyfriends as there is a natural link
between Julie’s horror of Dominic, and her conveying this to Michelle on the phone. It only requires Michelle to come on stage. The scenes do not however need to run back to back.

Fashions

In this scene, Franky laments about his mother’s lack of understanding about fashion. Essentially the trick is to take the opposite of what your mother thinks is fashionable – if she disapproves; it’s bound to be cool. No doubt, countless teenagers (and even I) have used this strategy quite successfully. In another exaggerated vignette, Dad recalls his family’s concept of fashion, which consisted of a hand-me-down pair of pants made out of an old hessian sack. While my father hasn’t quite reached the hessian sack level, he does still have ties from the seventies!

Shoes

In this scene, Daniel explains the complexities of his new Nike Air Double Pump cross trainers. His father – a confirmed Dunlop Volley fan – has trouble understanding. This scene was essentially written around the young actor who first performed it, Richard Sedin. He was a wonderfully enthusiastic actor, yet hadn’t developed enough stage skills to handle a complex scene on his own. His enthusiasm for all things American, including his shoes, inspired this scene. The Dunlop Volleys, I must confess, are my weakness.

Games

In “Games”, Annie who is about 11, teaches her father the subtleties of “hide and seek”, and “I spy”. Dad doesn’t really seem to have his heart in the game. Mum is not much better at playing “Simon says”. This scene was first written during an early rehearsal. Bianca Murdaca, who originally played the part of Annie, was 11 years old, so this scene (along with “Goldfish”) sits outside of the ‘teenage’ age range. In some senses, it deals with issues of lack of communication between parents and children. In playing I spy, Dad is more concerned about the types of words Annie uses, rather than having fun in playing. His lack of enthusiasm for
“Hide and Seek” is an observation on the difficulties many adults have in simply playing games. Amanda Jermyn, who played this role in the ‘Dramaworks Version’, added much charm to this scene. In terms of placement, this scene could be virtually placed anywhere in the script.

Brothers and Sisters

“Brothers and Sisters” represents sibling rivalry at its most vocal. A brother and sister run through a litany of insults while (playfully) fighting with each other. This is a clearly physical scene extending from the washing machine in the laundry to the freezer in the kitchen. There is no great subtext to this scene. It was written to break up the pattern of direct address that is used in most of the other scenes. The humour lies in the pace of the action, the rhythm of the insults, and the parents’ calm, resigned reactions to the kids attacking each other with everything from superglue to the Mixmaster. It is well placed toward the middle of the show.

Sandwiches

This is a very popular scene; featuring Franky complaining about the quality of the sandwiches his mother makes for him. All he wants is a normal Australian peanut butter or vegemite sandwich. Instead, he has to cope with his mother’s highly ethnic combinations. My Hungarian mother is totally to blame for this scene as it parallels my fate as a young student. Reactions to the scene indicates it is not merely an ethnic, but perhaps a cross cultural phenomenon – most kids, even “Vegemite Aussies”, had reservations about their school sandwiches. Sam Nerello played this scene exceptionally well. His genuine dismay at the contents of his lunch usually got a huge reaction from the audience.

Fame

In this scene, Julie admires herself in front of a mirror, pretending to be a famous Australian actor on the eve of an Oscars win. Dad just wants to use the bathroom. This scene was well suited to Kristie Sands-Wade, who played the part of Julie. The concept of daydreaming is not foreign to teenagers. I would hate to admit the
number of Oscars, AFI and AWGIE awards I’ve received in my own daydreams (well past my teenage). As with many of the other scenes, it can be placed virtually anywhere in the script.

**Fights**

In “Fights”, Franky comes home after getting into a fight with Johnny, his best mate. He tells his story of the incident to the audience. In many ways, this is one of the more challenging monologues. A reasonably funny exchange with Mum and Dad at the start gives way to Franky’s account of his fight. His realisation that he had more than just physically hurt his friend, he had ‘damaged’ him is one of the more poignant moments of the play. Recollections of a childhood fight with my best friend at the time, helped when writing this scene.

The scene was written for Same Nerello, who – in and out of class – always played the ‘tough street wise kid’, yet it was easy to see that at heart he was a far more reflective and clearly non-violent person. This scene works well in the second half of the script as a ‘climax’ of sorts. It is perhaps the one scene where the laughter gives way to a very rewarding ‘pin-drop’ silence.

**Goldfish**

“Goldfish” is another scene featuring Annie, and so is aimed at about the 10 to 12 year age range. In many ways, this is quite a flawed scene – Annie has fed her goldfish the wrong kinds of food and they’ve died. It was simply written to give Amanda Jermyn a little more time on stage and on reflection does not have much to offer. Amanda, and director Lyn Wallis, did well to rescue the scene in performance.

**Pets**

In this scene, Scott describes the unfortunate fate of a series of his pets. From Myran, the turtle in the filter of the swimming pool, to Sherman the ‘baygoned’ budgie, to Fred the barbequed chicken. James Engelbert performed this monologue, and much that was written was based on a story he told me about his experiences with pets. Naturally, he alone is not responsible for all the
misfortunes with pets. The turtle was mine, as was Herman the mouse, Lyn Wallis' mother baygoned the house resulting in the demise of their budgie – however the chicken on the barbecue was James' recollection.

This monologue was usually very well received, and depended greatly on the innate 'cuteness' of the actor. James was then a Macaulay Culkin type kid, who delivered this monologue with perfect indifference.

**Adopted**

In "Adopted", Michelle agonises as to whether she is adopted or not. Obvious similarities between her and her father convince her she's not. The subtext of this scene is quite important in terms of a script dealing with relationships between parents and children. The concept of belonging is reinforced as Michelle says, "I know we often joke about our families, but we forget how much belonging there really is in a family." Sacha Manietta again was able to handle this scene very well. It is not an overtly funny scene and works well anywhere in the script.

**Homework**

This scene is more about Dominic than about homework. It serves as a conclusion to the major plot line in the script – Julie and her ‘relationship’ with Dominic. Julie and Michelle discuss the pitfalls of parents helping with homework. Julie admits Dominic was called to help her with her maths and they ended up having a terrific night. Julie realises that there is more to people than just appearance – she has a great time with Dominic and he even helps her with the maths. In fact, they're even going out the following week. A happy ending.

**REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE**

**Early Rehearsals**

A date and venue was confirmed for a public performance – Monday evening 7 December 1992 at the Bondi Pavilion. This was convenient as the Big Hand Theatre was already performing an early play of mine, *Three Blind Mice*, and the
Monday night was usually dark. A percentage door deal was organised with the management.

The first performance gave an excellent deadline for all of us. I attended most of the rehearsals and changed details, adopted suggestions, even changed character names in the last minute. This feedback and reaction to the script from the students was not much different to many of the professional rehearsals I had attended.

The rehearsals were usually only two hours on a Saturday and a few hours on a weeknight. The initial rehearsals consisted of allocating the scenes to the students, and reading and familiarisation of the script. Although some scenes were written with certain students in mind, once rehearsals started, there were many changes. We discovered that some students handled scenes better than others did. Sometimes one actor simply didn’t have enough material and scenes needed to be changed to give them more time on stage.

Each rehearsal would usually start with a warm up session, consisting of the standard acting games such as concentration exercises, tempo games, and improvisation exercises.

For the first few sessions, the scenes were read and Lyn and the actors would decide what the context of the scene was, how it should be played, what were the actions and objectives of the characters. The ambiguity of many of the scenes was a tremendous advantage at this point, as the students could contribute their ideas without being restricted by the script. After their reading of a scene, students were asked to describe their surroundings, and what they were doing before the scene started. For example, the response to a scene like “Shoes” was, “I was outside playing basketball, now I’m in the kitchen.” When asked what he was doing in the kitchen, Richard Sedin replied “I’m getting a drink because I’m hot”. Where are Mum and Dad? “Dad’s reading the paper in the kitchen, and Mum’s making a cup of tea.” This was typical of the type of discussions we had with the students in developing the scenario surrounding their scene. They were expected to make notes on their script and then incorporate their scenario into the action of the script. Richard in this case, would enter with his basketball, a little out of breath.
Mum shoots him a threatening glance about bringing the basketball in the house. He stops, and sheepishly puts the ball aside. Perhaps he could walk in bouncing the ball – which gets an even sterner look from Mum. It was an invaluable lesson in theatre-craft for the students to see a scene built in such a way. It taught them not only the power of action over dialogue, but about the difference between text and performance. The less directions and detail there was in the script, the more alternatives were possible. Richard suggested that perhaps Dad could be doing the household budget on an adding machine – which would make his ‘freak-out’ over the price of the shoes even funnier. That was an excellent point. As we explained to Richard, although in performance Dad would be seated behind him on stage, script in hand, Richard should still imagine that Dad is with his calculator in the kitchen.

Given the short rehearsal, period students were required to do much of the rehearsal at home – much like homework. Initially, the main task at hand was learning lines. Again, we realised the value of the flexible structure. As each scene was relatively autonomous, it was easy for the students to practice their scene with, in some cases, their own parents playing the Mum and Dad role. I had quite a few parents come up to me after the show saying they knew their child’s scene so well they could have performed it themselves.

The students were expected to arrive at each rehearsal prepared. They would have to perform their scene to their peers to whatever standard they had rehearsed it. It was readily apparent who had and who hadn’t rehearsed their scene. This performance to fellow students was vital as it provided a strong incentive to prepare their work. If a student had clearly not done any work, it would be apparent to their fellow actors and to us as teachers. They would simply be told to go home and practice, as until then they could not get to the next level. While this may sound somewhat harsh, it is a good introduction into the discipline needed to succeed in the craft of acting.

Again, the flexibility of the short autonomous scenes meant that not all students had to be present at once. This left plenty of contingency time for rehearsals clashing with social engagements sports and school demands. This flexibility was
greatly appreciated by parents who were already frustrated driving their kids to a procession of sport, ballet, and now drama classes.

The strongest incentive driving the rehearsals, of course, was the public performance at the end of the process. It was made clear that any scene not considered to be of a performable standard simply would not be performed. The kids understood that given the structure of the play, it would not be difficult to ‘drop’ a scene. This in fact happened with a scene titled, Potential. In the original cast, one student was over committed with other activities and was clearly not prepared. His scene was cut.

The Epilogue and Prologue

To give the performance some kind of rough structure the opening contained all the students in a seemingly group devised beginning and similar collective ending. I had recently written a ‘beginning’ and ‘ending’ for a group of students from the Sydney Acting Studio – the purpose was to open and close a graduation night series of short scenes. Much like the graduation show, our play needed a top and a tail – and a title. All three were achieved using a simple rhythm round exercise. Each student was asked to give me two lines that they hear from their parents all the time. There was the odd creative blockage, but within ten minutes, I was busily writing down their parent’s favourite lines. Each student was allocated two lines to remember. Where possible they were the lines they originated. Some examples of these ‘lines’ include: “Who died and made you Queen?” “Turn that radio down!” “If you can’t eat what’s on your plate, don’t eat at all.” “We’re only doing what’s best for you.” “If someone offers you a cigarette, say ‘no’!”

While numerous methods would be acceptable to generate an opening out of lines such as these, the following worked particularly well. Starting very softly students would repeat their lines over and over, gradually building in volume. The effect was a cacophony of words. At a designated point, usually cued by one of the students after a given time or volume, all would stop. Then each would clearly deliver their two lines. One line would be chosen as the ‘last line’ to lead into the first scene of the play. In the case of these students, the line “If Johnny jumped off the Harbour Bridge would you?” was chosen – it was delivered by the entire cast.
We all liked the line so much (it’s one I also remember from my childhood) it was decided to use it as a title. The total rehearsal time needed for the prologue was less than one hour.

The epilogue was created in a similar fashion. The only difference being the lines were now ones used by kids towards their parents. For example, students contributed lines such as, “Can I have some money?” “Look Mum, there’s Maccas!” “Get real Mum.” “Can I have more pocket money?” “How old do you think I am, two?” As in the prologue, students would repeat their lines, building in volume and tempo until at a designated point all stop. Using the ending borrowed from the scene “Worrying”, the kids all say, “But as we keep getting told”, followed by the parent’s refrain, “It’s only because we love you, dear.” The scene ends with an emphatic “Yuk!” from the entire cast.

Professional Actors

During November the two hours workshop sessions were primarily devoted to rehearsing the script, and the Mum and Dad characters were central to the rehearsal process. I called on professional actors Rosalie Lester and Brendan O’Connell, to play the roles of Mum and Dad. Both were experienced in working with young people. The result was remarkable. As soon as the students were given the opportunity to work with professional actors their standard increased markedly. The actors became not only role models but, in a sense, de facto drama teachers. During the rehearsals for Johnny, the input of the professional actors was critical to the success of the project.

The atmosphere was very inspiring for there was always some form of activity. I would be working with one student while a few fellow students gave feedback. Lyn would be working with another group of students, while Brendan and Rosalie also worked with their own separate groups. We would all be in separate corners of the drama room, or sometimes would find another space if necessary. At one point Annerose de Jong, who was also running acting workshops at the college, joined us for some of the rehearsals, and would work on a few scenes with students. The collaborative method of working in small teams was an essential factor to the success of the project. We would all routinely ‘swap’ groups and
continue working on a scene. The students were getting feedback from up to five committed professionals whose only goal was to make their scene as good as possible. At the end of the rehearsal, we would all run through the scenes to a collective audience.

Lyn and I placed the scenes in a rough running order with the prologue and epilogue as ‘bookends’. The general aim was to spread those scenes that were considered to be going well at the start, middle, and end of the show. A scene was ‘going well’ if the student was confident with the role, and had prepared well, and it was one of the scenes that was proving to be popular in the impromptu readings during rehearsal. The other main criteria was the logistics of getting cast members on an off the stage.

By early December, the show was ready for a few runs at Bondi Pavilion.

**Bondi Pavilion**

The first public performance was at the Bondi Pavilion on Monday 7 December 1992. The weekend before was devoted to a few rehearsals on the stage, along with a technical and dress rehearsal. The opening night audience consisted mainly of parents and friends associated with the Australian College of Entertainment – even so there were over 200 people.

Eddi Goodfellow, who was the lighting operator for my play *When the Bough Breaks* and Megan West who was the stage manager for the same show, were kind enough to lend their technical expertise. Roger Hind, who designed the lighting for the majority of my plays, supplied the lights and supervised the technical production. We had to work in with the preset lighting for *Three Blind Mice* however another bonus of the simplicity of the show was that the lighting was not very complicated. It consisted mainly of a number of spotlight effects.

Rosalie and Brendan were reasonably confident with the script. Nonetheless, as they were only brought into the rehearsal in the last few weeks, we decided that they would benefit from their scripts on stage. In fact, I was quite keen on the ‘script-in-hand’ effect as stylistic device for future productions. Along with placing the parents on either side of the stage behind the action, the scripts served
to keep the parents in the background. The focus was totally on the children – the
tscripts in hand giving the parents’ input a ‘rehearsed reading’ feel. The practical
reason for the scripts was in case Rosalie or Brendan forgot a line. Both were
working on other projects and they had only limited time to devote to our
production. In addition, if one of the students were to forget their lines it was
decided that Brendan would act as a prompt.

The response to the play was excellent. I’d made notes at that point that there was
a great deal of potential in theatre that was ‘modular’ in structure – particularly for
the youth market. An episodic structure was something they were familiar with,
through the medium of television. School holidays and general Christmas chaos
meant little activity in terms of Dramaworks until the following year.

The success of the play resulted in a number of changes in the drama department’s
status at the college. Until that point, the focus was dance – and musical theatre.
The positive response to Johnny suddenly boosted the profile of drama among the
parents and college staff alike. It was decided that the play would be entered into
Theatrefest 1993, Sydney’s premier amateur drama festival. The exposure to a
varied audience and a panel of judges would be useful for the kids, and lift the
profile of the colleges drama department even further.

Dramafest

As a warm up to the Theatrefest, the play was entered into Dramafest in 1993.
This is a smaller festival held in the Henry Lawson Theatre in early March. The
holiday break also meant cast changes for the following year. Some of the
students were no longer available, so auditions were held for the new parts. There
was a distinct difference between these auditions and the first, in terms of college
politics. Dramaworks was now “a very desirable company to get into”. Again,
Lyn Wallis and I selected the replacements. Rehearsals focussed on the new
performers, who did most of the hard work on their own.

By March, the group was ready for their first festival appearance. The play went
very well and was given an encouragement award. Interestingly enough the
adjudicator had difficulty in determining whether Johnny was a play or not. In his
opinion, while well written and performed, it was more a collection of scenes rather than a play. I certainly understood the adjudicator’s point of view – what was missing was a narrative through-line, a climax, and many of the traditional elements of the ‘well-made-play’. Nonetheless, were all sufficiently ‘encouraged’ by our encouragement award.

During this time, there were preliminary discussions with Theatre South regarding the viability of a project based on the same themes as Johnny. A script was left with Des Davis, who was immediately impressed with the potential of the project.

**Theatrefest**

In 1993, Theatrefest was probably the most prestigious non-professional drama festival in NSW. It had been held every August/September since 1988. Over twenty plays are performed over a week, with a large percentage of those plays being original works. The festival has three adjudicators who are generally well respected theatre professionals. The audience, as with most festivals, is supportive, and the technical and stage facilities are first class. It was an excellent opportunity for Dramaworks to experience professional theatre with backstage facilities and dressing rooms.

The response to the performance was astounding, by both judges and audience alike. It ignited an immediate interest in the play, with a number of teachers keen to perform it in schools. The comments were that it was something ‘real’ that the students could identify with – it was in their language. When the awards were announced Johnny won the three major categories – Best Play, Best Unpublished Play and a special adjudicators’ award for the cast. Appendix 4 contains copies of the three adjudicators’ reports, and an example of one of the many press articles generated by the win. The adjudicators John Krummel, Patrick Guerrera, and Lynette Curran all praised the play, the director, the production and efforts of the Dramaworks troupe. Their comments were certainly very flattering and encouraging. Lynette Curran felt the play had “intelligent humour”, was “compassionate and easily related to”. It was in her opinion, “positive and humanitarian. The dialogue rooted in reality and economics.” Her opinion of the performance was summed up by “I have seen many professional productions that
would not rate with these performers”. John Krummel was also very impressed with the play and the production, calling it “absolutely delightful, witty, perceptive, economical and hugely entertaining”. Similarly, Patrick Guerrera was also very enthusiastic:

The beauty of this production was its simplicity and truth. Every single person in the auditorium could empathise with almost every monologue, every choice, and every parental statement. It was more a celebration of childhood, innocence, family, and life itself than a piece of youth theatre.

Lynette Curran’s final comments echo the way most of those who were involved in the project felt, “This production cannot stop here.”

As part of the Theatrefest festival, the plays that were placed first, second, and third are performed the following week at a special evening called the Best of Theatrefest. This gives the audience a chance to see the winning plays they may have missed during the week. The audience is usually an interesting mix of people ready to be entertained by plays that have already been given a stamp of approval, and those who keen to see why these plays won awards, when theirs didn’t.

Of perhaps greater significance than the win at Theatrefest, was the impact of the project on the students who participated in it. Most had improved remarkably in terms of their acting ability and self confidence. The process gave them a sense of ownership over the project and their involvement with the professional actors and writer boosted their performance. The college and the tutors were receiving praise from parents who were quite surprised by what their children could do. Appendix 4 includes a copy of a letter I received from Kath and Peter Engelbert. Their son, James, performed in the scene, “Pets”. The letter sums up many of the benefits I felt a project such as Johnny offered the children over and above standard school drama. James, they wrote, “gained self-confidence and teamwork skills” and “felt important working closely with adults and other children”. They continue:

This project has extended James to a level of skill far beyond our expectation. He has shown commitment, an ability to memorise, discipline, stamina, and many other characteristics, which are not normally achieved in a typical classroom environment.
The modular structure proved useful for the College, as they were able to feature excerpts of the play in numerous fund raising events. The play could be tailored to fit the duration of performance required, or be based around the actors who are available. *Johnny* was repackaged as family show for parents called “Kids Train Parents” for a few shows at Ryde-Eastwood Leagues Club. The production was a new venture for the club, and proved very popular with the patrons. It even made it into the local papers nestled among various club artists and the prawn night!

**Opera House**

The culmination of the project was a performance at the Sydney Opera House. Lyn Wallis, who was also performing in the Opera House Christmas Show approached Lloyd Martin, the General Manager of the Opera House, with a proposal for a ‘showcase performance’. The adjudicators’ reports from Theatrefest so impressed Mr Martin, he agreed to a performance at the Reception Hall without charging Dramaworks for the hire of the venue. Again, the audience was mainly parents and friends, and again the show was well received.

Unfortunately, the success of the play also caused a few problems between the College and me, primarily regarding royalties. The Opera House performance proved to be the last straw for me and a number of other professionals associated with Dramaworks. The festival wins had generated over two thousand dollars in prize money that we assumed would be pooled into a Dramaworks fund. When the college started to exercise draconian limits on our budget for the Opera House performance, many of the professionals who were not directly involved with the College, myself included, felt somewhat taken for granted – after all, we were all ‘donating’ our services. As the College had not commissioned the play, I didn’t receive a fee for writing it. This was in keeping with our agreement. However, I naturally expected a royalty for any subsequent performances of the play. In the end, the question of royalties and minimal payments for some of the professionals involved was not resolved. I of course objected to the College using the play without paying even a token royalty. Ultimately, the incident led to severed ties between many of the professionals involved in the project and the College.
Brendan O'Connell eventually wrote and toured his youth play *Nothing Like the Odyssey*, and Lyn Wallis directed a number of other projects before taking on the position of Artistic Director at Jigsaw Theatre in Canberra. The excitement of performing in Australia's premiere venue was a fitting end to our involvement with Dramaworks and the College.

The development and implementation of *Johnny* differed from traditional approaches to youth drama in the following ways:

- A collection short self-contained scenes were used instead of a complete play. The nature of these scenes facilitated performance in almost any order.
- A large portion of the rehearsal time was self-directed.
- Professional actors workshoped the students and performed with them.

The value of the project can be summed up as follows:

- All work was directed toward the ultimate goal of a public performance. The process mirrored 'real-life' theatre practice of auditions, rehearsals, and public performance.
- The implementation of the project was made easier by the flexibility of the scenes.
- The emphasis on self-directed learning was excellent for developing discipline and commitment.
- The professional actors formed a bond with the students. This bond was based not only on the student-teacher relationship, but also on the relationship between fellow actors.

For a project such as this to be viable, the crucial question was, “could it be replicated with another group of students?” The discussion of the K4K Project at Riverview College (Chapter 6) examines our team's work under the more controlled conditions of a residency program within a school. In the meantime, my discussions with Theatre South had 'snow-balled' into a commitment towards a mainstream production of a version of *Johnny*, eventually titled *Fossils*. 
5. "FOSSILS": FROM DRAFTS TO PUBLICATION

No matter how calmly you try to referee, parenting will eventually produce bizarre behaviour, and I'm not talking about the kids. Their behaviour is always normal.

*


Even before *Johnny*’s win at Theatrefest, Des Davis was keen for me to develop the play for Theatre South to tour to schools. As many of the scenes were already written, we both fell into the trap of thinking it would be a relatively simple exercise to transform *Johnny* into a new play. In fact, the process was quite difficult – although a number of scenes provided raw material, the framework needed to sustain a full-length play, was missing. This chapter is divided into five sections, and follows the transformation of *Johnny* into the published version of *Fossils*. The first section describes *Fossils* in terms of its plot and an analysis of its characters. Such discussion is necessary at the beginning of the chapter as it helps place the discussions of the play in context. The second section details the origins and background of the play, followed by the third section, which discusses the development of the script *Fossils* through seven drafts. The fourth section outlines the rehearsal process and design considerations leading to the first season of the play. Finally, in the last section the publication and further productions of the script is discussed.

While *Fossils* is a stand-alone play, its metamorphosis from *Johnny* is nonetheless a vital element of this thesis. The process of its transformation is enlightening when considering the nature of the dramaturgical decisions made to comply with the demands of a TIE touring environment.

**SYNOPSIS AND CHARACTERS**

*Fossils* studies the relationships of teenagers with both their parents and their peers. The relationships are shown from the viewpoint of the teenagers. Throughout the play there is the notion that all parents are ancient relics – fossils
of sorts. The play begins in the bedroom of 15 year old Julie Jones. It is Sunday morning and Julie’s parents are insisting on a day trip to the Blue Mountains. Julie can’t stand family outings. She thinks that her parents are out of date, that they’re ‘fossils’. Her mother is a stereotypical housewife, her father attempts to be a handyman and both of them always tell her to be more grateful for what she has. Sure enough, Julie’s day in the Blue Mountains is disastrous. Michelle, Julie’s best friend feels her parents are “yuppie fossils”. Her father is some form of “corporate giant” and is always glued to his mobile phone. Her mother is constantly making notes in her Filofax.

Franky and his mum have just moved to this town, after the death of Franky’s father. Franky’s mum, a caring and somewhat over-protective Italian mother, reassures him in preparation for his first day at Bayfield High and (repeatedly) reminds him of the importance of first impressions. On the way to school, Julie tells Michelle about how she saw Johnny, the gorgeous guy from school who she wants to go out with, at the Blue Mountains. But she also saw Dominic there, the school ‘reject’, and her mother promised him that Julie would go with him to the school dance on Friday night.

At the train station, Franky introduces himself to the girls. It is his first day at their school. He and Michelle take an instant liking to each other. Franky pretends that he knows Johnny and promises Julie he will ask Johnny to dance with her on Friday night. Julie’s opinion of Franky sky rockets. At school, Julie passes on gossip to Michelle about Franky’s father. Apparently he is a criminal serving a jail sentence. This explains Franky’s move to a new school and the absence of his father.

At the dance, Julie asks Johnny to dance, but soon comes running back to Franky and Michelle in hysterics. Johnny didn’t know anyone by the name of Franky. In the silence ensuing this discovery Dominic, (“of all people”) ended up rescuing Julie from further embarrassment. To add to this, Julie commits a monumental faux pas when talking to Franky – she blurts out that everybody knows his Dad is a criminal.
Julie leaves early feeling humiliated for making a fool of herself and miserable about having been mean to Franky. She goes home where her parents comfort her. Julie recovers from the dance, makes up with Franky, and realises that Johnny wasn’t worth it. Franky and Michelle end up going out, much to the pleasure of Franky’s mum who is convinced Michelle is Catholic and has some Italian ancestry. Julie realises her parents are sometimes right and Michelle finds a way to communicate with her appliance enriched family.

The three teenage characters in *Fossils* are in a constant struggle to gain independence from their parents’ ways of doing things. They see their parents largely as relics of the past who have no idea of what it is like to be young today. In seeing their parents as such, Julie, Michelle and Franky exaggerate everything their parents do and say to highlight the embarrassment they cause them every day of their existence.

Julie essentially feels the best form of image damage control is to distance herself from her parents. She sees her parents as being over-protective. They crowd her space when dragging her on holidays to the Blue Mountains and call the rescue squad when she’s late home. Her parents only want what’s best for her and that involves her mum being on the ‘organising committee for her life’. Improving wake up times on weekends, cleaning her room and match-making her with “a safe boy” are on Julie’s Mum’s agenda just as ‘embarrassing Julie at school’ is on her Dad’s. With serious taste problems in the music and boys departments, these parents are to be kept as far from any potential boyfriend as possible.

When Julie experiences what she would no doubt describe as “the worst night of my life”, her parents offer her comfort and unobtrusive, simple advice. Furthermore, their matchmaking scheme ends up working, much to Julie’s surprise and pleasure.

Whereas Julie wants to escape her parents, Michelle is actually trying to close the gap. Michelle’s family is something of a corporate institution. Her parents are living fast-paced executive lives. Michelle seems to fit somewhere in the stream of appointments listed in the Filofax and between her father’s conversations with business associates. With family life dominated by her parents’ work schedules
there is little time for them all to casually share the elusive “quality time”. Hence, their conversations take on a business-like tone and manner. As Michelle says, “We don’t talk, we negotiate.” When her parents offer suggestions of how they can spend time together, it is all wrong. Michelle finds her parents contradict themselves: “Don’t grow up too fast. Why can’t you be more responsible?”

Then there’s the issue of boys. Having had a girlfriend at 15 himself, Michelle’s father says Michelle is too young at 15 for a boyfriend. And when she does find one, he has to be “nice”. The definition of “nice” certainly differs between generations. Just to be sure everything stays nice, Michelle’s parents attempt to talk about the birds and the bees. With such enormous communication problems looming over them, this is doomed to failure as the parents travel down memory lane to Michelle’s conception only to realise too much Chardonnay blurred the all-important event. Michelle’s father, although still distanced at the end of the play, does at least start to have a complete conversation with Michelle without talking to business associates at the same time. Michelle even finds she can talk to him about her music and her relationship with Franky.

Franky doesn’t want to escape his Mum. They are obviously very close. His main challenge is getting her to accept cultural differences between Italy and Australia. “Presentation is important – especially your teeth. People notice your teeth.” Franky’s mum is obsessed with her son’s presentation. She yells through the door not to squeeze those pimples and she is shocked by his clothes and hair, “What will the neighbours think?” From Franky’s point of view she is over-protective and possessive. She doesn’t understand why he wants to go out on a Friday night when he should be studying, particularly to the school dance where he might meet a girl who just might not be Catholic or Italian or have nice teeth. The relationship between Franky and his Mum differs to those of the girls and their parents from the start of the play. Franky and his mum are much closer and interact on a more personal level. They talk openly about his relationship with Michelle, mum definitely approving.
ORIGINS AND BACKGROUND

The pre-history of *Fossils* is naturally closely linked to *Johnny*. In fact at one point, both projects were running at the same time. Artistic Director of Theatre South, Des Davis, was most interested in my concept of a play about the relationship between kids and their parents, as seen from a kids’ eye view. He’d heard about the Dramaworks success at Theatrefest and was keen for me to develop *Johnny* so that he could tour it to schools.

For *Johnny* to be transformed into a TIE touring show, a number of factors had to be considered including, the cast size, the duration of the show, the portability of the set, and the suitability of the content. In terms of cast size, clearly Theatre South would not be able to employ eight children for a season of *Johnny* – not only would it be far too costly, but the logistics of touring with eight young people were overwhelming. We decided on a cast of three actors. Des originally suggested two actors, but I managed to convince him three would be far better for the play. My diary entries reflect this process:

There followed a quick round of bartering, as I felt two actors would limit the action too much. Des, of course, was watching the budget. We came to a compromise that I could have three characters as long as it ends up one male and two females. It seems there are more good female actors than male, so women are easier to cast. The creative process: bartering for your characters! I suspect the ideal cast size for an Artistic Director would be one!

It was decided to cast one male and two females. Des already had Michael Coe in mind for the male role. Michael, as resident Theatre South actor and designer, was a good choice. The two other actors were in Theatre South’s production of *Hating Alison Ashley* – Angela Karagianis and Caroline Johansson. Angela, who originally trained to be a dancer, was involved in a number of Sydney stage shows before being cast in Theatre South’s *Five Times Dizzy*. Caroline, who played a major role in the television drama *A Country Practice* during the mid 1980’s, was also cast in the same show. The girls worked well together, and were an obvious choice to play Julie and Michelle.
The original version of *Johnny* ran for about 50 minutes. Generally, this would be an acceptable length for a short touring show, but again in the quest for economy *Fossils* needed to satisfy a range of performance criteria. Apart from touring to schools it would be premiered with a two-week season at Theatre South’s Bridge Theatre in Wollongong. This would be a public season open to both adults and children. The schools season would include both tours to schools, and school visits to the theatre; and finally there was the possibility of a country tour to both schools and general entertainment venues. Bearing this in mind, a 50-minute show would be too short. The demands of the various performances indicated a short full length show between 80 and 90 minutes – not too long, so the school students don’t get bored, and not too short so mainstream patrons still feel they’re getting value for money. The two-week mainstream season at the Bridge Theatre also necessitated an interval to be structured into the play – as bar takings are another of the practical issues faced when running a theatre company.
The design of the set would need to be both portable for the touring, yet sufficiently robust for it to look impressive in the Bridge Theatre space. Naturally this would be the job of the designer, Michael Coe, and would only be determined once the script was near completion.

Given the change in so many of the parameters surrounding the play, it was clear that much work was needed on the script to transform it from *Johnny* to *Fossils*.

**SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT**

The writing process was much the same as outlined in the previous chapter for *Johnny*. There were periods of research, a great deal of burst writing and a number of meetings with Theatre South. The play went through five major drafts and a number of revisions after the first production and before publication, adding up to seven drafts in total. Appendix 1 outlines the major changes from draft to draft in greater detail.

**Early Drafts**

In a sense a first draft – the scenes that comprise *Johnny* – was already completed, so the major task in the process of developing *Fossils* was finding a structure. This was very important, as it would dictate the nature of the new scenes to be written. Among a number of stylistic considerations, one idea was that the play should be episodic, with quick changes, often reflecting the teenage point of view.

A brochure (in Appendix 3) was produced even before a decent draft of the play had been completed, as Des needed to begin the promotion process to the schools. The concept of the ‘kids-eye-view’ was discussed in the Notes section of the first draft.

The kids often tell each other stories (usually via the audience) which include an exaggerated description of the ‘family situation’. These vignettes represent the ‘kids’-eye-view’. There is scope for them to be stylised in some way, acted slightly over the top, or perhaps change the state using lighting. To clearly identify these sections from the rest of the action, I have included the somewhat unusual stage directions, (kids’-eye-view) and (end kids’-eye-view).
While the 'kids-eye-view' stage direction itself was eliminated in subsequent drafts, this stylised view remained with the play until its final version as *Fossils*. It is an important stylistic device in the play, bringing into question the concept of what 'reality' the audience sees. For example, a scene as described by one of the characters, then enacted, represents their version of events. The enactment of scenes as seen 'in the character's mind' also impacts on the way time is structured within the play, for example, Julie is on a train station with her friend Michelle, and they talk about their weekend – the audience sees the weekend scene enacted.

The first task was to go through all the scenes in *Johnny* and distil them into scenes for three characters. As the play was to revolve around the theme of ‘parents’, the Mum and Dad characters needed to remain. Clearly, there would have to be doubling of characters unless the play centred on only one family with one child. The dominant characters in *Johnny* were Julie, Michelle and Franky, Mum and Dad. Before I even began the drafting process, I simply used the replace function in the word processor and changed the names of characters where applicable. This phase was more tedious than creative. In many cases, the character's gender had to be changed, as did the pronouns relating to them. All the Mum and Dad roles stayed the same. For the kids: all the male roles simply became Franky; and Michelle and Julie's roles were distributed somewhat arbitrarily.

At this point, I was able to survey the available scenes to see what in fact I had to work with. *Johnny*, as a play, had no real story line. In terms of plot, the closest I had was the 'Julie likes Johnny, doesn't like Dominic’ scenario. The only dominant link was that most of the scenes were centred on kids’ relationships with parents. Although the concept of parents as a theme was quite valid, structurally much needed to be altered to fit the logistical restrictions of a smaller cast. The scenes that featured younger characters, such as “Goldfish”, “Games” and “Brothers and Sisters”, seemed too juvenile for the intended target audience. One solution would have been to include them as ‘flashbacks’ from each character's youth. This would mean that the actors aside from doubling as parents would also have to play themselves in their youth. The potential for confusion was too great, and ultimately these scenes were simply cut.
The character list of the first draft named eight main characters: Franky and his Mum; Michelle and her Mum and Dad; and Julie and her Mum and Dad. Throughout the script, their dialogue was indicated by MUM (M) for Mum, as played by Michelle (in other words, Julie’s Mum); MUM (J) for Mum, as played by Julie, (Michelle’s Mum) and DAD (F), Dad as played by Franky, in this case Franky played both Michelle and Julie’s father. This seemed to be the easiest way of dealing with the potential confusion of three respective sets of parents.

As detailed in Appendix 1, the first draft comprised a number of new scenes along with an edited version of the original scenes of Johnny. Most of the changes were to the start of the script. The opening now introduced the audience to the respective households of Julie, Michelle, and Franky. The scenes starting with the characters waking up and having breakfast establish a ‘day-in-the-life’ structure that I was considering at the time. It enabled me to arrange the scenes according to the criterion of “at what point in the day would this action occur?”

Much of the early burst writing did not remain in the final script, however the concepts generated by this form of ‘spontaneous’ writing often had a profound influence on the plot. One such scene was based on the game ‘Chinese Whispers’ and featured the characters passing on a story about Franky’s dad from person to person. The ultimate version of the story had Franky’s dad wanted by the CIA and Interpol. While the international crime connection was toned down considerably, Franky’s father being mistaken for a criminal became a significant plot development in Fossils.

In the second draft, new scenes were added and the existing scenes were revised. As I knew there would be a considerable amount of character doubling, I was worried about the logistics of the girls playing Franky’s Dad – if not presented exceptionally well, it could seem rather like a tacky pantomime. The solution was to have Franky’s father not appear on stage. This could be because of any number of scenarios: he could be away; the parents could be divorced or Franky’s father may have died. I was worried about trivialising an issue such as divorce by featuring it in an essentially humorous script. The death of a parent, of course, is equally a ‘big issue’ however it does not have the same social connotations as
divorce - usually it is an incident beyond the child's control. I should stress that my discussions at this point are not meant to be taken in a sociological context, but rather as an example of the way I worked through various script considerations, however politically correct or incorrect. The scene I wrote meanders through a series of stream of consciousness images for each character, based around the fear of losing a parent. In Franky's case it was stumbling on some old boxes his mother had put away, presumably after his father's death. In Julie and Michelle's case, it was a series of dreams.

As this draft was slowly starting to move away from the original *Johnny* concept, I had discussions with Des about the possibility of changing the title. It was clear even at this stage that the play I was developing would be considerably different, and that an identical title would only cause confusion in the future. Although initial promotional material had already been sent out, Des didn't seem too worried by the proposed change of title. His reaction was, "Well, we'll just tell the schools when they arrive, that the title has been changed". I had no idea of an alternative title at this point.

The third draft heralded substantial changes to both the structure and content of the play. While in essence many of the original scenes remained, they were now housed in a rough outline of an emerging story. Franky was now starting at a new school and it was the start of a new term. There is a mystery surrounding his father and why Franky suddenly had to change schools - the rumour was his father was in jail.

The 'day in the life' structure was proving quite successful in not only ordering the scenes, but as a guideline for writing new ones. Many scenes introduced new locations such as the train station, the classroom, and the schoolyard. The train station is a good place to catch up with gossip, particularly as it was the first day of a new term. It is also a good place to bring the three main characters, Julie, Michelle, and Franky, together for the first time. In addition, the classroom and school grounds would be a familiar setting for both students and teachers alike.

The relationships between the characters were now well established and as the deadline for the completed script was looming, I was looking towards discussion
between Des, myself and the cast to hopefully clarify some of the issues I was having problems with.

Development Day

As a writer, I have always been fortunate to work with the actors at some stage of the development of a new play. In some cases this was through a formal ‘development day’ arranged by the artistic director. The actors who were cast were paid for a day, and we would collectively read the script, workshop difficult sections, and improvise and discuss suggestions. In smaller co-operative productions, there were also a series of development sessions, however in a far more informal context – usually after a dinner and a nice glass of wine. In a practical sense, the development sessions were my deadlines, as it would be useless to all involved if I arrived empty handed.

In early September 1993, we had a development session which included Des Davis, the three cast members, Scott Davis (the stage manager of the production), Faye Montgomery and myself. We started by discussing the practical aspects of the planned season. There was some concern about the school bookings, which were a little low. It was suggested that there was a clash for hall space between HSC exams and the play. Des also confirmed that *Fossils* would run as part of Theatre South’s main season in late October and early November. This reinforced the fact that the play had to appeal to a wider audience – both schools and adults.

My development session was in essence the first reading of a ‘work in progress’, and as such was quite promising. The actors worked very well together, and their comments were both positive and constructive. I find readings generally are a very enjoyable part of the writing process. It is effectively the first time the play is being brought to life. I feel it is important for writers to be open to any comments and suggestions at this point in the process, as the director and actors have without doubt the plays best interest at heart. It was in this spirit that I presented many of the problems I was encountering with the script.

I had made notes in preparation for the development day highlighting some of the problems I felt needed to be solved. They included a lack of conflict between the...
main characters, and the necessity for some sort of central event that would
determine the course of the action. One of the cast members suggested that the
‘event’ I might be looking for could be something like a school dance. This
sounded perfect, as it was easy to draw on my own experiences of school dances.
School discos I attended in the mid to late 1970’s took on the significance of the
American school ‘prom’. Either way the inclusion of an important social event
would provide the much-needed dramatic action to drive a large part of the second
act.

To avoid conflict with the original version, we decided to rename the play. Des
Davis suggested *Fossils*, as it was a term he remembered calling his parents. The
new title immediately appealed to all assembled in the theatre. The designers were
already conjuring up images. By the end of the day, Michael Coe had planned the
main concept of the design. Capitalising on the title, the set would contain the
props needed to effect the quick character changes ‘fossilised’ in a bedrock-like
background. My diary entry reflects my feeling about the day:

> The reading was very promising – the cast were all very encouraging
> and enthusiastic. The poor old play, which I felt negative about for so
> long, has ‘come good’. There is still a lot of work needed in the
> second half, but as this was the first reading of sorts, the task seems
> surmountable.

The development day left me with pages of notes, a new title, and a chance to
familiarise myself with the actors who would be bringing my characters to life.
Now when I reworked troublesome scenes, I had the advantage of a mental
picture of the actors playing the roles. I was recharged with new ideas. For
example, as a result of hearing Michael Coe’s interpretation of Franky, I changed
the character to be far less ‘daggy’, less needy and more independent. Caroline
Johansson, who was cast as Julie, was well suited to adopting the primary narrator
role. Angela Karagianis, who played Michelle, displayed a remarkable flair for
accents particularly in the role of Franky’s mother. In future revisions, the syntax
of many of Mrs Zeferelli’s lines was changed to reflect her performance of the
role.

The inclusion of the school dance as an event led to a logical place for an interval,
thus neatly dividing the play into two acts. Act 1 centred on the first day back at
school and followed a chronological order from morning to evening, with the school dance looming as a major social event. Act 2 begins with the preparations for the dance, the dance itself, and finally the aftermath.

I was able to heighten the conflict in Act 1 by exaggerating many of the stereotyped traits that defined the parents. For example Michelle’s dad was not just a busy executive; he was never separated from his mobile phone. Franky’s mother wasn’t just mildly concerned about his welfare; she was worried about everything. Julie’s parents weren’t just daggy; they were, from a teenage point of view, painfully daggy. Given the extent of character doubling within the play – three actors playing eight major roles – I felt it would be easier for an audience to recognise who is who with the assistance of an easily identifiable trait.

I managed to convince Des to gather the cast for one more reading. As they were already rehearsing Theatre South’s production of *Five Times Dizzy*, there was no difficulty in scheduling a morning to read and discuss my latest update of the play. The actors were, by now far more comfortable with their characters and the direction of the play. The reading and discussion that followed resulted in many cuts to the first act and further development of the second act. Des and the actors were again very generous and constructive with their criticism. Their responses helped me complete the fifth draft, which was essentially the rehearsal script.

**The Rehearsal Script**

Rehearsal started on Wednesday 6 October 1993, and the script, as it stood, was copied for cast and crew. While there was certainly considerable progress on the second act, I still hadn’t written a suitable ending.

The ending of the Dramaworks production of *Johnny* relied on the dynamics of a large cast delivering a stylised epilogue. A similar ending would have been out of place in *Fossils*. Clearly many of the conflicts set up in the first act needed to be resolved, however the dilemma was finding a suitable means of dramatising this resolution. Again Des Davis’ advice was invaluable – he suggested a scene between Julie and her parents where their advice is genuinely welcome. This reinforces the message of the play – through teenager’s eyes, parents may not
always be the ‘coolest’ people to have around, but where would we be without them. Unfortunately, every variation I tried was too ‘corny’, contrived, or didactic. Ultimately I decided that rather than try to hide the ‘happy ending’ phenomenon in a cloak of reality, it would be more effective to exaggerate its magnitude. The most effective way to achieve this was through Julie narrating the outcome via an epilogue of sorts – this appealed to me as she began the play in a similar fashion. So, via a direct address to the audience, Julie admits to the shallowness of her pursuit of Johnny and confesses a possible liaison with Dominic. Michelle, we are told, has found a way to communicate more with her parents and is now going out with Franky. Franky is happy because he is no longer the new boy, and his mother approves of Michelle! Julie’s reaction to the happy ending is typical, “It’s all just too sick isn’t it?” Some things, however, like Julie’s little brother and her parent’s obsession with tenpin bowling, musicals, and Scrabble, will never change!

REHEARSALS AND PERFORMANCE

Rehearsal

The rehearsal period was from 6 October to 19 October. This was shorter than usually programmed for the premiere production of a full-length play. Des reasoned that the actors were already comfortable with each other having recently performed together in Five Times Dizzy, and the fact that we had two ‘formal’ readings of Fossils meant the cast was at least familiar with the play.

My impression from Des and the cast was that the rehearsal period passed without any real problems and the cast and crew worked very well together. I was invited to attend as many rehearsals as I wanted. The presence of the writer at rehearsals is often a vexed question. On the one hand, it provides an excellent opportunity for learning about the theatrical process, and changes can be made to the script instantly. However, there are also many negatives. Often the writer can get in the way of allowing the director to fully realise their vision of the play – it’s almost like having a chaperone present. In my experience, I have noticed that actors often ask the writer for “inside information” or clues about the character. Sometimes
points of conflict with the director are thrown up as issues for the writer to arbitrate on.

I attended a few early rehearsals and then the dress rehearsal. The first rehearsal was essentially a ‘round table’ read. Throughout the reading, I answered any questions that were put to me, and noted any changes that needed to be made. They were mainly minor corrections in logic or syntax. I felt it important wherever possible to incorporate the suggestions made by the director, cast, and crew. It gave them a sense of ownership over the project, and the freedom to comment and make changes. While working as writer-in-residence at Theatre South, I observed many play-readings. I recall one writer reacted very badly to any comments or criticisms, literally refusing to change a word. Consequently there was very little further comment and unfortunately, the result was a terrible play.

When I attended rehearsal I would usually make notes to myself about lines that weren’t working, or about technical points such as lighting and sound suggestions. Occasionally I would even make a note about the staging or the actors. These notes, as is the standard practice, were always given directly to the director. Des was very good about listening to my suggestions. Nonetheless, while taking most things on board, he was also forthright in saying when he didn’t agree with something. In that case we generally agreed to disagree – it was, after all, his production. I usually took notes during rehearsal. While many of these notes refer mainly to single lines of script, a few include the fate of whole scenes. For example, Des was having a great deal of trouble with a scene titled “Television”. Experience has taught me that problems with a scene are usually caused by one of three things: it is badly written; it is well written but out of place within the context of the production; or the director and cast have not fully realised the scene’s potential. My feeling in the case of “Television” was that it fell somewhere between the first and second category. Rather than bother fiddling with a rewrite, it was easier to simply cut the scene from the play.

Most of my interaction with Theatre South was via fax or telephone. Des would often call with a problem they had encountered during rehearsal. However I was
usually only consulted if there was extra writing needed. In some instances, I had to write a few extra lines, as there wasn’t enough time at the end of a scene for an actor to change costume. Some scenes simply needed re-positioning while others needed a complete rewrite. Des and the actors would generally make minor changes to the script as they saw fit. These would usually include updating any slang or colloquialism that had already become outdated, or to update the name of current pop groups referred to in the script. I was quite comfortable with this arrangement, as long as the basic integrity of the script was maintained. We decided that after the first season I would get together with Des and discuss the major changes and note any possible improvements.

Design

Design is unquestionably a crucial element to any production. Whether simple or complicated, a good design is not only a practical necessity but also an aesthetic consideration. The title, *Fossils*, is a fortunate choice in that it instantly evokes images of dinosaurs, cave dwellers, archaeology, relics and so on — and these images would be well served by an imaginative design. Design, within the scope of this thesis, encompasses the set, costumes, props, lighting, and sound.

I was fortunate to have Michael Coe working on the set design for *Fossils*. Michael, apart from acting, was also responsible for the set design of many of Theatre South’s productions. He designed the set for the company’s production of my play *Clay Soldiers*, and I was immediately impressed by his innovative and inventive concepts. While the basis of the set for *Fossils* remained essentially the same, there were a number of changes between productions.

The title of the play highlighted on the backdrop is something of a Michael Coe trademark, for example the Theatre South productions of *Dags*, had a similar effect. Painted under the title were three of the geological periods, “Cretaceous, Tertiary, Quaternary”, reinforcing the fossil concept. It is interesting to note that the spelling of the Quaternary period is incorrect on the set. I suspect not too many students — and probably even teachers — noticed it. Embedded into a sand speckled polystyrene set were various modern day artefacts such as mobile phones, tennis rackets, magazines, records and so on. Some of these were
‘detachable’ so the actors were able to use them during the play. Paint was ‘spattered’ on to the set giving added texture. The colours were rich browns, reds, and yellows – in other words very ‘earthy’ and rock-like again in keeping with the more traditional definition of a fossil. Figure 2 illustrates the set as it appeared in the original production.

Fig 2. Fossils set for Theatre South’s original production.

Eventually the three geological periods were replaced by a more subtle definition of parents as contained in the opening pages of the published play, “Fossil. (noun) Colloquial. An outdated or old fashioned person or thing. Slang. Parent.” This version of the set was designed for the more ‘adult’ audiences on the New England tour. There had been a few concerns expressed by the New England Theatre Company management that as part of their mainstream season, the show may be too specific to the teen audience.

Naturally, portability is an important design consideration with most TIE shows. The set for Fossils could be dismantled in sections and was remarkably light because it was constructed primarily of polystyrene. On stage, the set looked quite
large and impressive but, remarkably could fit, as the TIE cliche suggests, “in the back of the truck”, as Figure 3 attests.

Three tables on casters – about the size of coffee tables – doubled as dinner tables, chairs, beds, school desks, benches, and any other possible surface. Naturally, the casters meant they were easily moved around the stage. This was vital given the number of quick scene changes demanded by the play.

Michael had also created two mannequin-like models to represent the Mum and Dad characters. The first version of these was a three-dimensional model also on casters. The ‘3D Mum’ can be seen lying in the back of Michael Coe’s Kombi van in Figure 3. The models, like the set, held various props – for example, the Mum mannequin ‘gripped’ her Filofax, while Dad mannequin held his hammer ready for use. As a useful guide for future production, I included the following in the Production Notes of the script:

Fig 3. Michael Coe strikes a pose in front of his Kombi van, which is loaded with the “Fossils” set.
Although the play will perform quite well with a minimal set, much can be made out of the ‘fossil’ concept. Michael Coe’s design for the original production included a ‘fossilised’ Mum and Dad, which ‘hold’ the various props such as Dad’s mobile phone, Mum’s filofax, etc.

The figures were painted with a speckled-paint effect similar to the set. Unfortunately, the speckled paint also had a ‘blood spattered’ effect and it was felt that they actually looked a little eerie. One of the cast was less diplomatic, suggesting Mum and Dad looked like they had been in an industrial accident! They were eventually changed in favour of a two-dimensional ‘cut-out’ painted black giving the effect of a silhouette. The cut-out was similarly used to hang or hold costumes and props.

The costume design was relatively simple with most items being the ‘ordinary’ clothing worn by teenagers. Nonetheless, just because it’s ordinary does not mean it’s easy. The initial designs for the first season had a few problems. In an attempt to accentuate the stereotypes of the parents, the costume designer opted for a stylistic look for the parents. For example, Julie’s mum’s apron was a collage of Women’s Weekly, New Idea and various magazine articles, pasted on a stiff laminated material. No doubt, the design was clever, but as the actors commented, it was not practical. My note during one of the rehearsals was “maybe the ‘truth’ was a better option”. Clearly, in terms of the costumes, I was in favour of realism, rather than symbolism. The actors were able to select their own clothing for the teenage characters. Because of the quick character changes, it was impossible to have anything too cumbersome or complicated. The girls preferred light tops with darker pants, and Michael Coe followed suit, selecting a white shirt and dark jeans.

The props had a special role in the play in that they also helped identify each character. This is particularly important when there is extensive character doubling and quick scene changes. I even made a note in the script as to their importance.

In the original production a simple visual ‘device’ at the start of the play was created to distinguish between the parents’ characters when the actors double as both parents and children. Julie’s parents are the traditional ‘average’ Australians; Dad is always fixing things, tool-kit
in hand; mum with the magazine and crossword. Michelle’s parents are the corporate couple; Mum has her filofax, Dad has his mobile phone. Franky’s ‘ethnic’ mother wears a black cardigan.

In terms of lighting design, *Fossils* seemed to be a straightforward production. Naturally, on tour the resources were limited, but when in mainstream venues with full theatre lighting available the lighting design was a little more adventurous. Because there was always so much action all over the stage, the main lighting state was an overall wash of the stage. Spotlights were very useful when differentiating the different areas for each of the households on stage, and particularly when used to highlight some of the more poignant moments. A red ‘wash’ of light was used when indicating the scene was taking place in one of the characters’ memory. The dance scene gave the lighting designers a little opportunity to have some fun. In some venues, I even noted a ‘disco-ball’ effect.

Similarly sound was used to great effect not only in the dance scene but as links between scenes. Des Davis selected segments from current music that he felt teenagers would relate to. The sound in performance was a slight problem – one of my notes during rehearsals reflects this. Under the heading, “Sound still a worry”, I made notes to the effect that not only was the sound blurring out the start of some of the scenes, and it was riding over ‘laugh lines’. In the case of the dance scene, the volume of the music obliterated any of the rhythms the dialogue itself contained. Des and I had numerous discussions on how to handle the sound, agreeing that perhaps the solution was to brief the actors to wait a little longer before starting their scenes, and to have the music volume a little lower.

**Opening Night and Beyond**

*Fossils* opened at Theatre South on Saturday 23 October 1993. There was a full house, with the usual abundance of opening night regulars, selected guests, and complimentary ticket holders. Des was careful to make sure there was a reasonable number of teenagers in the audience as well. The response was excellent from both teenagers and the adult audience. Due to the number of complimentary tickets and the presence of family and friends, an opening night audience can often be excessively generous in their reception. Nonetheless, the
play seemed to be genuinely well received with many comments of recognition such as, “it’s just like what happens in my family” – a comment that has by now become quite familiar. It was very reassuring to see people laughing and enjoying themselves during the production. Rehearsal can dull even the funniest scenes and it’s often a shock to experience the reaction from the audience who, of course, have never seen the play before. Appendix 2 outlines the schools tour and future productions of Fossils. What follows is simply an examination of a few of those issues that had an effect on the script in terms of its final development towards publication.

Discussion with Des in the light of the first season addressed a number of points, the extent of stereotyping used to portray the parents, the opening of the play, and the ending. Certainly the parents are definitely stereotyped; however, I felt it was easier for an audience to cope with easily recognisable types, particularly given the quick shifts of character and time. For example Peter, with his tool-belt and love of musicals is instantly recognisable as Julie’s dad, and Steve with his mobile phone is immediately Michelle’s dad. The actors probably contributed to the stereotyping by the way in which they approached their characters – however the script gave them the freedom to do just that.

On opening night, I noticed the audience took a little while to get used to the style of the play, which perhaps indicated a fault in the opening. There are, after all, three actors playing eight major characters with three separate locations all within the first few scenes. Des and I agreed to workshop the start before the schools season. The actors spent hours going over a variety of alternative openings. The final version was a punchier more rhythmic approach with Mum and Dad firing staccato bursts of dialogue at Julie because her radio was too loud. The chaos of sound interrupted only by Julie’s opening direct address was a far better choice than any of the previous openings.

In terms of the ending, it was felt that the revelation about Franky’s Dad was a little sudden, and the mood of the play turned sombre perhaps a little too quickly. I felt this could be improved by making Julie’s reaction to the incident completely over-the-top. The ‘happy-ending’ epilogue was punctuated with short, funny
vignettes leading to the evenings activities at Julie’s house which was appealing to me because that is where the play started. Julie’s mum, engrossed in one of her crosswords asks. “What’s a seven letter word for parents?” The reply, from the whole cast, is an enthusiastic chorus of the title, “Fossils!”

PUBLICATION

I received news of *Fossils* publication in January 1994. I had already made contact with Currency Press regarding several of my previous plays. *Fossils* was submitted to them after the first season in October 1993. Theatre South had already committed to a second season, and the play appealed to then senior editor, Sandra Gorman. Naturally I was thrilled by the prospect of publication – it felt like the play had somehow finally become ‘legitimate’.

My initial meeting in September 1994 was basically a briefing on Currency’s publication process and an opportunity for me to ask any questions. We also discussed the planned launch date, which at that point was February 1995. *Fossils* would be part of the new Currency Teenage Series which already included plays such as Debra Oswald’s *Dags*, Mary Morris’ *Two Weeks with the Queen*, and Nick Enright’s *Property of the Clan*.

Apart from being primarily aimed at the teenage market, the Currency teenage series differs from the regular publications mainly by way of their design. Unlike a standard play format, which is reasonably conservative in its design, the teenage series was far more modern. I suspect the design is Currency Press’ contribution to making drama less ‘stuffy’ and more contemporary for the teenage market.

The front cover contains two figures cut out from a still picture from the original production, over a fossilised wallpapered background that includes bones, footprints, and a mobile phone. The figures are Michael Coe as Dad, and Caroline Johansson as Julie. It seems as if Dad is saying “Blaa, Blaa”, while Julie is saying, “Help!” The title is in the same font as used in Theatre South’s early leaflets. To give the term ‘fossils’ some sort of context, it was embedded in the phrase, “Are they for real? Or are they Fossils?” The back cover contains a short grab from Julie’s opening dialogue “Homo parentithicus. Found in most urban parts of
Australia. Usually roams in pairs. Over-protective towards off-spring. Parents!”

then a comparison with plays of a similar genre. Perhaps if I had had a number of
best selling plays my name alone would have been enough to sell the play, but in
my situation, the publishers were trying to give the play a frame of reference. The
back cover also features a photo of Julie and Michelle in the ‘classroom scene’. The
overall artwork won a design award for designer Jana Hartig.

Fossils!

In the tradition of Dogs by Debra Oswald and Boss of the Pool
by Mary Morris, Fossils takes a look at the relationship
between parents and teenagers.

Fig 4. Cover design for Currency Press’ publication of “Fossils.”

Apart from the cover, the layout of the published text itself was also
‘modernised’. The plays within the teenage series have selected production photos
included with the text. I suspect the purpose of the photos is to reinforce the idea
that drama is meant to be enacted – a visual cue for the reader. While the photos
were already established as a hallmark of the teenage series, the inclusion of
captions under the photos – consisting of quotable lines from the play – began
with Fossils. In terms of layout, a black and white photo was placed on a page
with a similar wallpapered background as was used for the cover. The only other
item on the page was the caption in bold capital lettering. Apparently, both
teachers and students have responded very well to the photo and caption concept. The design of the scripted elements, such as character names, dialogue, stage directions, and scene changes, was also given a more '1990's look'. The typeface rather than being the standard serif font was a more up-to-date sans serif font. The character names are bold and underlined by a bold black line. The stage directions are minimal, and a thin grey line indicates the scene changes. Figure 5 is an example of a page taken from *Fossils*.

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**Fig 5. A page from "Fossils" illustrating the modern layout.**
I was given a proof of the play, which I had a few weeks to correct and submit. I dedicated the play to my own ‘fossils’, Helen and Fernando Aston. After adding the ‘first performance’ information, and acknowledgments, I wrote the production notes, character list, and a few words about the setting. I was careful to offer suggestions rather than instructions. I indicated the way props can be used to delineate the characters, and described some of the characteristics of the first production more as a point of reference rather than a direction. One very significant note is simply “The play can be performed by three or more actors”. It is generally a surprise to an audience who have previously only read the script, that in professional productions only three actors play all the roles. Interestingly these notes were placed at the back of the play, which I thought was slightly unusual.

The content of the character list was also considered quite carefully. It is often the only guide that teachers and students have about the characters, apart from the script itself. The off stage characters of Dominic and Johnny are also included in this list, as are the character’s full names. I tried to describe the characters in a way that reflects the style of the play. For example, Julie was summed up as follows:


The final draft of the play needed only a few edits before publication. The script still had my cumbersome method of indicating which character was playing Mum and Dad – for example MUM (J), indicating Mum, as played by Julie. Unbelievably this had survived from the first draft! It was clearly an unnecessary complication as a director should easily be able to work out the logistics of the character doubling. Left as they were, my directions were remarkably confusing. I think that as I had worked on the script for so long, I was almost immune to their presence.

Another surviving relic from the early drafts was my scene titles. These are usually quite handy in rehearsal as the director can refer to each scene by its
descriptive title. However, on discussing the issue with Currency Press, we decided that the scene titles and indeed scene numbers were not really vital to the play, and could simply be deleted in favour of a thick shaded line discussed earlier.

The “Television” scene that was causing problems in rehearsal was also deleted. It remained in the script although it had been cut from the production because I felt a different production might make it work. The truth was that apart from a comment on spending ‘family time’ together, the scene was not really advancing the action or the characters in any real sense so it seemed wise to cut it from the published version of the play as well.

One of the final tasks was to change stage directions from “enters” and “exits” to “arrives” or “leaves”. The Editors felt that for the teenage series, entering and exiting was too old fashioned. In fact, part of the ‘modernisation’ process was to delete any directions that referred directly to ‘the stage’. The direction, “Michelle and Julie walk off stage”, would for example, be changed to “Michelle and Julie leave”.

My last editing task before publication was to remove all the line breaks I had inserted within the dialogue. A habit I developed early in my writing career was to construct the dialogue according to the meter of the lines. Accordingly, I would often place a new line where the natural break in the sentence would be. For example

```
JULIE
Tell him to stick his head in the microwave!
I love mornings ...
especially when my little brother is acting like an android!
Alright! I'm almost ready you little snot-ball!
What?
Mum, Scott just called me a fart.
At least a fart disappears, Scott.
A snot-ball just sticks to things!
```

As is evident in the layout Julie is speaking to her mother, then the audience, and her little brother. Unfortunately, this layout takes up a great deal of space – the draft script that I was proofreading was 147 pages. A script of this size would
ultimately cost more to print, and would undoubtedly be far bulkier than the normal published play script. Standard layout does not include line breaks and would read as follows:

**JULIE**  Tell him to stick his head in the microwave! I love mornings ... especially when my little brother is acting like an android! Alright! I'm almost ready you little snot-ball! What? Mum, Scott just called me a fart. At least a fart disappears, Scott. A snot-ball just sticks to things!

My final correction resulted in a far more manageable 84 page script.

The published version of *Fossils* was officially launched in September 1995 with a small gathering at Currency Press, and is now in its third reprint with just over five thousand copies sold.

*Fossils* has to date had a very happy history, having four seasons with Theatre South, one season with Jigsaw Theatre, one season at the Sydney Opera House as part of the Bennelong Program for schools, and recently a season in Berlin. Appendix 2 outlines the play's professional production history in more detail. *Fossils* has been consistently performed by schools, youth groups, and amateur companies throughout Australia.

After publication, there was a greater awareness of the play throughout the education community and in 1997 *Fossils* was included as one of the texts to be studied as part of the Theatre In Education unit of the NSW HSC Drama syllabus. Its inclusion on the NSW HSC drama syllabus reading list in 1997 led to a greater demand from schools for the rights to produce the play. Schools would approach my agent, Rick Raftos Management, and my only contact with the production would be the contract and sometimes a program or short article in the mail. Because of the present study, I was far more interested in following up performances of the play either by letter, fax or often a telephone call to the school (with many schools quite surprised to hear from the author). When at all possible I would try to see a production. Most of the time the level of ingenuity of each production pleasantly surprised me. It has been incredibly rewarding to meet many groups of young people who, along with their teachers, have put so much time and effort in producing my work.
As is evident from this chapter and the detailed script notes in Appendix 1, the transformation from *Johnny* to *Fossils* was a relatively involved project. The two plays, while similar in some areas of content, differ greatly in form. Many of the differences were shaped not only by demands of a professional season for both adult and teenage audiences, but by the requirements and restrictions of TIE touring in particular. Certainly using the same basic 'raw material' – the collection of short scenes that comprise *Johnny* – it is quite possible for school students and teachers to apply a similar process in developing a play of their own.
Nothing you do for children is ever wasted. They seem not to notice us, hovering, averting our eyes, and they seldom offer thanks, but what we do for them is never wasted.


K4K (Kids for Kids) was a project that integrated professional theatre practice into school-based drama programs. The program introduced selected students and teachers at St Ignatius College Riverview to professional theatre processes, taking them from planning, budgeting, auditions and casting, through to public performance. A ‘resource module’ is the core of the project, consisting of 25 short scenes based on the theme of parent/child relationships. The structure of the opening and closing scenes were fixed but the mid-section of the play could be modified according to the particular needs of the group. The project was carefully structured to produce a quality performance in only five sessions. This intensive process was achieved with the aid of not only the resource module, but with emphasis on private rehearsal and preparation, as well as a disciplined approach to acting. It would be an exciting prospect to think that similar programs could be designed as an ongoing part of the TIE framework.

This chapter is divided into five sections starting with an examination of the pre-production and planning involved in organising such a project. The second section outlines the audition process. This is followed by a discussion of the significance of the orientation sessions. The development of the script is detailed in the fourth section, and the final section details the rehearsal process leading to the performance.

PRE-PRODUCTION & PLANNING

The success of _Johnny_ at Theatrefest led to a general interest in the play. Richard Lewis, who was on the board of Theatrefest, mentioned my play to the Head of Drama at St Ignatius College Riverview, Anthony Renshaw. We met around mid
May 1994 to discuss the possibility of using the script at the college. It was a very promising meeting, with both Anthony and myself enthusiastic about using Riverview as a pilot school for a hybrid TIE program: educational theatre that is flexible enough to allow the structure to be tailored to an individual group of students. My main rationale for the project was that it would complement the existing drama units which were (as expected), Shakespeare, musicals, and self devised shows.

I suggested that Lyn Wallis was interested in directing the play, and Brendan O'Connell could be involved as actor/facilitator. My role would be as administrator and writer. This idea was generally well received. The appeal of this combination was that we worked well as a team and had previously implemented the same project for the Australian College of Entertainment. The concept of professionally trained actors visiting the school was preferred as it was quite an incentive for the students.

The Riverview project was quite different to the original Dramaworks project in many ways. With Dramaworks, we had no idea what the outcome or response to the project and material would be. At least now, we knew that the material stands up theatrically. In addition, we had a method of working that had proved successful. The question was, “could it be reproduced?” The students at Dramaworks were all studying dance and singing as well as drama. They were used to the discipline of rehearsal, and the demands of performing. They all had displayed a degree of talent to be in the Dramaworks company in the first place. They were all attending the Australian College of Entertainment because they wanted to be performers. In Riverview’s case the students were told in advance that there would be auditions held for the project and that they would get to work with a professional writer, actors and directors as well as their teacher. Theoretically, only those students who were interested would audition, however, unlike Dramaworks, they might not necessarily be interested in performing or in theatre for that matter.

Riverview is an all boys’ school, situated in Lane Cove on Sydney’s North Shore. It has a strong tradition not only in sports and academia, but also in drama and
debating – notable old boys being Nick Greiner, and Nick Enright. Students are generally grouped into the day students and the boarders – those who live on campus during the term. The school had recently completed building a new drama theatre. This is a lovely fully equipped theatre with comfortable raked seating.

I had given the project a catchy title: K4K. An acronym for Kids For Kids – the idea being that young people will eventually perform for young people. While not good English, there has also been a trend in the toy industry towards snappy names such as Toys R Us, and World 4 Kids so I suppose K4K did not seem at all out of place. It had, I noted, the same phonetic rhythm as TIE. The term ‘kids’ does sound a little juvenile, but almost all titles would have some sort of pitfall.

Anthony had to ‘pitch’ the project to the school, and it is a credit to them that they have such an active and innovative drama department to “try something different”. There was an objection to the title of the script, “If Johnny Jumped Off the Harbour Bridge, Would You?” as apparently a student from the school tragically did jump off the Harbour Bridge. The new title became the straightforward, “Parents - a kid’s eye view”.

Over a coffee shop meeting with Anthony Renshaw, we worked out the logistics of the project. The following was planned: Two casting sessions, one orientation session, 3 rehearsals, a technical rehearsal, a dress rehearsal, 3 performances and one performance for the school. We were aware that working within a school environment would mean dealing with issues such as exams, major assignments and sports activities. As the project was an extra-curricular activity for the school, we were limited in what time we had available – essentially after school and weekends. Our scheduling had to consider the reasonably regimented timetabling of student’s hours after school, for example dinnertime and study periods, and the predominance of sport on Saturdays. Rehearsals after school were not practical as the only time available for students was between 3.30 and 5.00 pm. This time could be well utilised for short meetings and discussions but would not leave enough time for a productive rehearsal. It was decided that Sundays would provide the best opportunity for a full day rehearsal.
Scheduling fixed dates for all the rehearsals and meetings was crucial, as Anthony needed to book the theatre and promote the show, and I had to confirm dates with my colleagues Lyn Wallis and Brendan O’Connell. In addition, it would be important to emphasise the rehearsal and performance dates to students auditioning. Those unavailable for key dates could clearly not be selected no matter how appropriate they may be.

Casting was scheduled for Sunday 16 October 1994. We planned for a full day between 10.00 am and 4.00 pm. A further casting session after school the next day would enable us to announce the final cast. An orientation session was scheduled for the following Monday, again occupying a few hours after school. This is where scripts would be handed out and various scenes allocated to each student. The students would have just less than one week to begin familiarising themselves with their scenes, the first rehearsal being Sunday 30 October. There was a two-week break before the next full day rehearsal, that time being used for the students to learn lines. The week following, Sunday 20 November, was the third and final full day rehearsal, with a technical rehearsal on Monday, a dress rehearsal on Tuesday, and performances from Wednesday to Friday.

It was agreed that the actors and director would be paid $150 per day for rehearsals and $25 for incidental rehearsals, with the actors getting a further $50 per performance. I would attend all rehearsals and performances but, as this was part of my research, would waive any fee apart from a small royalty on the paid public performances. The total cost of the project was $1766.80. This included the payment of full equity rates for the professional actors for a performance to the school on 29 November. A total of $1040 was received from box office takings. The total cost to the school was $726.80 which, if divided by the number of students involved in the project (12), results in a cost of just over $60 per student. In financial terms, K4K would represent a relatively inexpensive workshop if each participant were charged a fee.

The tickets were priced at five dollars, which meant that the show would break even at 354 tickets sold. Discussion of concepts like ticket prices with the students
was a further benefit of the project – students were even encouraged to participate in the financial planning and promotion of the show.

AUDITIONS

I must confess I entered Riverview with preconceived ideas of it being a privileged school with fairly upper class people who won’t be representative of the general public. While there often were a number of BMW’s in the parents’ car park, my perception was perhaps a little simplistic. In terms of socioeconomic background, middle to upper middle class would be an accurate cross section of the parents and students we met. Many students related stories of their parents working very hard to send them to this school. As Anthony Renshaw confirmed, it wasn’t unusual for parents to do without luxuries in order to send their children to a ‘good school’.

Notices for upcoming auditions for the project were posted on school noticeboards. Students would be given some class time, but most of the time spent would be after class and on the weekends. Anthony was worried that as much of the time spent on the project would be extracurricular, there might be little interest. I asked students what the general feeling about project was when they first heard about it. I was surprised to learn that there was quite a high level of enthusiasm. Much of the interest was because Riverview’s sister school Ravenswood Girls would also be involved. That was a big attraction for the boys (and girls). Many were at the audition because their friends were there. Others genuinely had a keen interest in drama and saw the project as a good opportunity. The fact that students would be working with industry professionals was one of the aspects that most excited them. However, the real drawcard seemed to be the fact that they would be working with members of the opposite sex!

It is interesting to note that throughout the project any excitement was well disguised. I suspect that a prerequisite to being a teenager is not getting overly excited about anything. It was only once we got to know the students a little better that we were able to ask them candid questions about the project, and even then
answers varied, depending on whether or not they were in the company of their peers.

Sunday 16 October was the casting day. It involved Anthony Renshaw, Lyn Wallis, Brendan O’Connell, and me. We were surprised to see a turnout of about 30 students. As English and Drama Coordinator, Anthony said he already had “a rough idea of who would turn up”. What surprised him was the presence of a number of ‘trouble students’ and those who had expressed no interest in drama whatsoever. He very diplomatically didn’t single anyone out as he felt it might prejudice our opinion. Of the 30 students, about six were girls from Ravenswood. This was a reasonably fortunate ratio as we thought of having roughly seven male and three female parts.

Based on the Dramaworks experience, I felt that the K4K Project would be able to teach the students about the dramatic process in a way ordinary TIE could not. For example, comments from the Johnny project confirmed that most of the kids, even those who did not get parts, found the auditions a very valuable experience. Similarly, we wanted all 30 students who attended the auditions to benefit from the experience and perhaps learn a little more about theatre, even if they were unsuccessful in their audition.

Lyn Wallis and I selected an audition piece which we felt was appropriate given the time restrictions of getting through 30 students, and one that was representative of the general tone of the script. We chose a segment from the scene, “Zits”. Its appeal was that it was fun to perform, included both interaction with another character (Mum), and direct address to the audience, and gave students plenty of creative liberty to ‘set the scene’ for us. Another point, which I often overlook, is that all my scripts (except as mentioned in the previous chapter, the published version of Fossils) have the line breaks placed between specific words according to my perceived rhythm of speech. Some actors (and directors) consider this, while others don’t notice it. Lyn was curious to see if any of the students would notice it. Interestingly enough, quite a few did.
I printed two versions, one for boys featuring Patrick, and one for girls featuring Rebecca. The dialogue for both was the same, only the gender changed. The following is the audition script for boys:

(PATRICK LOOKS INTO A MIRROR.)

PATRICK Oh no, a huge zit!
I've plastered four layers of Clearasil on it
and it's still getting bigger!

(MIMICKING THE "WE-CAN'T-SHOW-YOU-HIS-FACE",
DENTIST TV AD.)

Hi, meet Patrick. Patrick's a student,
but we can't show you his face.
That's because he's got a volcano
about to erupt on his forehead.

Oh, it'll clear up in about fifteen years.

He'll be married by then,
so he won't care what he looks like...
but Patrick cares now,
tonight's the night he needs to make a big impression!

MUM Patrick.

PATRICK Yes, Mum?

MUM You're not squeezing pimplies?

PATRICK No ... But, I'd like to. Just one little squeeze
and all that gunk sitting in my face would go ... splat! ...
out onto the mirror ...

MUM ... because I'm not going to clean a mirror
with 'popped' pimplies all over it.

We were given two areas to work in. One was a large carpeted music room, and the other was a smaller theatre with a small proscenium arch stage. We gathered initially in the music room. After initial introductions, we stressed that as three working professionals we would be treating the students as colleagues, so industry rules would apply. We explained that lateness to rehearsals would not be tolerated, and then discussed exactly when the rehearsal dates would be. All the students were already aware that participating in the project would mean giving up a number of Sundays and a few evenings after school. Nonetheless the importance of being available for all the rehearsals and performances was
stressed. Any student who had a problem with the dates was encouraged to audition anyway for the experience, but to let us know they had a problem with availability.

We decided to have a brief general ‘warm up’ then distribute copies of the “Zits” script to students. There was no direction given to them whatsoever, as we felt it would be important to see how they interpreted the script. The students were broken up into four groups. One group was directed to the smaller theatre space where Anthony, Lyn, and I would act as an audition panel. The other three groups remained with Brendan who ran an impromptu drama workshop. He was experienced at working with large groups and judging by the comments, most of the students found his workshop worthwhile.

In the small theatre, we auditioned students one at a time. Lyn was very generous and encouraging with her comments no matter the standard of the performance. A little like NIDA, we gave those with some potential a call back for the afternoon. We were left with a list of about 15 students for about 10 roles. Those who were not chosen could go home, and those with callbacks were given another script to ‘cold read’. For the boys it was the opening of the scene “Fights”. We felt the scene would highlight another dimension of the students’ acting ability.

PATRICK  Johnny was my best mate,
but like best mates often do ... we argued.
Except this time he starts pushing me around.
I say, “Watch out mate!” But Johnny keeps on pushing me.
And I say, “Watch out, or I’ll punch ya face in.”
He laughs.
That’s a big mistake. But, you know, he laughs anyway.
Then he pokes me.
Right here, he just pokes me.
So I say, “One more time...and I’ll flatten you.”
So he does it again. So I hit him. I just hit him.
Whack! It’s a solid sort of thump.
Hard to explain ... a bit like hitting a wet sack of rice.
Johnny looks kind of stunned.
Oh sure, I’ve said I’ve been in fights before, but not really.
I’ve never really hit anyone
It was interesting to see that many of the students, who handled the humour of “Zits” very well, were unable to make the transition to the poignancy required for a scene such as “Fights”. For the girls we selected a section from the opening of the scene “Worrying”. Lyn read Mum and Anthony read Dad.

REBECCA: I went shopping with Julie last week, and we missed the 5 o’clock bus home. Mum and Dad freaked. They worry about everything. They even worry about worrying so much.

They worry about my homework.
If I do too much, it’s “Rebecca, you work too hard”.
If I don’t do enough, it’s “Rebecca, why aren’t you doing your homework?”

If I don’t care about the environment, I’m apathetic.
If I get involved in a Greenpeace group, I’m a radical.

Then they worry about food.
If I eat too much, it’s “Rebecca, you’ll get fat and flabby”.
If I don’t eat enough, Mum thinks I’ve got anorexia!

If I’m being silly, it’s “When are you going to grow up,” or “Act your age!”
If I try to be mature, it’s “Don’t grow up too quick, darling,” or “Act your age!”

They worry if I try to be like everybody else.

MUM: Why do you have to do what everyone else does?

DAD: Can’t you think for yourself?

REBECCA: And, of course, they worry if I dare to be different.

MUM: Why can’t you just be like everybody else?

Again, this scene required a little ‘something extra’ from the actor. It is a good example of a scene that would benefit from the actor playing the ‘truth’ of the situation rather than the humour.

Determining the final cast was a difficult process with quite a number of ‘close call’ decisions. I had videoed all of the auditions, which helped refresh our memories. Videotaping the auditions was yet another way in which students had access to as professional a process as possible. It was a long day with the casting running well over the scheduled time of 4.00 pm. Lyn, Anthony and I found a local coffee lounge for well deserved nourishment and a debriefing of sorts. We
found the time spent working with the teacher was very valuable. Anthony Renshaw approached the project with the view that it was a learning experience for him, and this outlook was a great benefit to the process. The final credits on the program reflect the spirit of the project, "Workshops directed by: Lynette Wallis, Brendan O'Connell, and Anthony Renshaw."

As with any professional casting process there was a host of criteria used to select the ten parts we had available. In some cases, it was sheer talent. In others it was a mixture of talent and enthusiasm, while in one case it was a gentle hint from Anthony that "his father is quite influential in the school", so it might be politically correct to include him. I certainly had no ethical problems with issues such as that. In Dramaworks it manifested itself in Robyn Dixon's reminder to consider the parents when auditioning, and in professional castings I can recall many a role landing in the lap of a 'well connected' actor. In some instances students who had no acting experience whatsoever displayed remarkable talent. 'Discovering' students such as these is always exciting. In the Riverview project two discoveries spring to mind: Andrew Cleary, who played Scott, and Andrew Salter, who played Steven. Another important attribute was enthusiasm. Some students while not naturally gifted were bursting with enthusiasm. In these cases we felt that the benefit the student would derive from working on the project would outweigh any difficulties they might face. A final aspect we took into consideration was the chemistry between the male and female members in the cast - specifically, making sure there wasn't too much 'chemistry'!

Our final list included three girls and eight boys of whom two were understudies. We felt there were a number of advantages in including understudies in the project. Firstly, they fulfilled the practical function of replacing anyone that was ill or suddenly had to pull out of the project. Their presence was also a constant reminder to the cast that, quite literally, no one is irreplaceable. Finally, the understudies were able to participate in all the rehearsals and workshops, and apart from the final performances gain valuable experience.
We announced the final cast the next day after school. It was quite touching to see not only the disappointment of those who missed out, but the understated excitement of those who were selected.

Anthony Renshaw sums up the importance of the audition process in a letter he wrote endorsing the K4K project (Appendix 4):

Workshops targeted specifically towards preparing students for their auditions and the fact that the students have been supervised through a professional casting process has given them invaluable insights; and as the rehearsals proceed, their insights continue.

ORIENTATION

Allocating the Scenes

Before the orientation session on Monday afternoon, the task of assigning particular scenes to the cast needed to be finalised. Our familiarity with the play meant that we already had certain students in mind for certain scenes, but there was still the task of logically distributing the scenes so that no one actor was considered the ‘star’ of the show. We may have been familiar with the scenes, but Anthony knew the students better than we did, so together we mapped out a rough strategy. We each had a sheet of paper that listed the scenes we would be using from the resource script. Based on our impressions of the audition, Lyn, Anthony and I each wrote the name of the student who we thought was best suited to each scene. We compared notes and very democratically determined which student would be offered which scene. Naturally, the decision was not written in stone – we were quite prepared for the possibility of changes once rehearsals had commenced.

The criteria that were used to allocate the scenes highlight the importance of a full day casting session where the K4K team members can spend as much time as possible getting to know the students. Certainly, a primary factor we considered was ability. Some of the students had clearly had previous acting experience and in many cases, it showed. It made sense that the more experienced performers should tackle scenes that were dramatically more complicated. While admittedly
most of the short scenes are deliberately very basic in terms of dramatic structure, it would be wrong to simply play them on one level. A scene such as “Fights” has proven to be very powerful in performance. Some scenes, like “Brothers and Sisters” required more tempo and timing rather than subtlety and were perfect for students who were a little less confident on stage than their peers. In other cases a student simply “seemed right” for the part.

Whatever methods we each used, it was interesting to note that for many of the scenes we had unanimously selected the same student. When opinions differed wildly, a brief discussion would usually result in a mutual decision. In many cases, a number of students would be allocated the same scene so we were able to compare their performances as they developed through the rehearsal period.

The scripts were copied and distributed to the students. Only the scenes they were involved in were given to them. In hindsight, it would have been easier to copy the whole script for each student. While it uses more paper, the resulting confusion in calculating exactly how many copies were needed, and the inevitable miscounts meant valuable time was wasted on a relatively menial task. In addition, the students had not had any contact with the script apart from the audition scenes. By giving them only their selected scenes, rather than the whole script, they had no way of understanding the context of their performance or the overall structure of the play.

The K4K Teams Relationship with Staff and Students

One aspect that was fundamental to K4K’s success was the successful integration of our team into the teaching environment. Brendan, Lyn, and I had all had teaching experience through TIE workshops, summer schools, acting classes and in my case also as a TAFE teacher. An understanding of the education system culture is vital. According to Anthony, our presence was certain to “ruffle a few feathers” because we were allowed to use the prestigious drama theatre that had only just been built, while other members of staff were offered ‘lesser’ venues. In addition, although we were all working for well under award rates, the very fact that we were being paid was questioned. “Why,” some asked, “do we have a drama department, if we still need to hire outsiders?”
We had to remember that as far as the school was concerned we were representative of ‘the professional theatre’ at large and it was important to convey good public relations on behalf of Anthony Renshaw, who was initiating the project, and for ourselves as representatives of the entertainment industry. When senior members of the school hierarchy dropped in on rehearsals, it was important that we not only made them feel welcome, but also tried to involve them in the process if possible. During an impromptu visit by the school principal we managed to cobble together a quick ‘command performance’. Another incident I recall was after one rehearsal, a student’s mother was running late to pick him up. Rather than have him wait alone, a few of us waited with him until his mother arrived. Often even simple things like taking the time to talk to the parents when they picked their children up, was much appreciated. As so much of the entertainment industry is shrouded in ego and glamour, we felt pleased that the perception of us was, to quote one student, “down-to-earth and accessible”.

Our relationship with Anthony was also vital. It’s ironic that although the TIE concept is designed to supplement dramatic education, sometimes the drama teacher’s relationship with the TIE team can be strained. While most of my experience with school visits and workshops have been positive, there have been situations where my views have clashed with the teachers’. In a number of cases, the scenario was almost identical. Some teachers were involved in theatre in a professional or semi-professional capacity and have perhaps felt the need to emphasise that fact to both the TIE team, their students, and sometimes, fellow staff. While at times these clashes could be counterproductive, the best strategy was to politely agree to disagree.

In a residency project such as K4K, it is crucial that any major differences in approach to drama should be clarified in the planning stages of the project. Happily in our case, no such problems existed. Anthony Renshaw was very gracious and cooperative in his approach to the project and we were able to work together based on mutual respect. Our familiarity with the methodology and content of the project could easily lead to a sense of alienation with those not as familiar. We made sure he was an integral part of the casting process, rehearsals and general planning of the production. As the students’ teacher, we felt it was
appropriate for him to make most of the major announcements, and ultimately take care of any matters regarding discipline that might arise. It was agreed however that Lyn Wallis would have the final word on directorial matters, and similarly I would have the final say in matters involving the script.

Anthony noted that the students related to Lyn, Brendan, and me quite differently than they would to ‘normal teachers’. He felt we were perceived as ‘real people’, or perhaps put differently, people from the real world – working professionals, as opposed to just teachers. This luxury is often afforded to guest teachers of any description. My experience as a guest teacher lecturing on my play *Fossils* also supports this view. Being an ‘outsider’ in the eyes of the students resulted in a status not afforded to the regular teacher. Troublesome students often surprised their teachers by not only being on best behaviour, but actively participating in class discussions and activities. Naturally, there is also a hierarchy among ‘outsiders’. For example a bank manager would not rate as highly as a actor currently in a play, who would in turn not rate as highly as a young actor who appears on television!

At Bradfield College in North Sydney, I was teaching a Year 11 Entertainment Studies class. Although I only taught at Bradfield one day a week, and was regularly visiting other schools as a guest teacher, my role in terms of the student perception was as their permanent teacher for that subject. In that context, lessons that would ordinarily be greeted with wrapt attention became ‘just another class they had to get through before lunchtime’. The following anecdote illustrates the point. I had recently given a lesson on film and television terminology, and one student who had spent the weekend on a film shoot approached me after class. She was genuinely surprised that all the things she found on the shoot were as she had learned in class. It was almost as if some students expect the things they learn from their teacher to be of no real practical value – it is, as one student put it, “just stuff we have to learn.” Perhaps if a film-maker had come to class and taught film and television terminology, my students’ reaction would have been different. This phenomenon is quite an important aspect of the K4K concept as it is my belief that the project would not work as well if a teacher simply obtained the resource script and attempted the project on their own. While certainly achievable, I doubt
the speed and theatrical success of the K4K team in residence could be replicated. This issue is discussed in the following chapter in greater detail.

One point that Anthony didn’t hesitate to stress to the students was that they were now working with industry professionals. The concept of ‘professionalism’ was certainly high on the agenda for all of us. We treated our cast and crew exactly like professionals – not like students. For example in schools such as Riverview and Ravenswood, students have to address the male teachers, “Sir” or “Mr Aston” in my case, and the female teachers “Miss” or “Miss Wallis” in Lyn’s case. I suspect this is the norm in many schools. In ordinary theatre practice no one would be called Sir unless they had been knighted, so students naturally called us by our first name. It’s interesting to note that in discussions after the project many students commented on the impact of being able to call us by our Christian name. It broke down many of the barriers of unfamiliarity, and without doubt made us, as one student aptly put it, “more human”.

The idea of professionalism also manifested itself in issues such punctuality, discipline and commitment. It was our philosophy to teach the students a way of working and approaching their craft, not just “doing what needs to be done” for the final performance. It was stressed that although much rehearsal work needed to be done in their own time, the cast and crew were a team, and as with any kind of team, teamwork is essential.

Finally on a more practical note, students were told to arrive at the first rehearsal on the following Sunday on time, which meant about 15 minutes before 10.00 am, wearing comfortable clothes, and to have a pen, paper and a folder. The motto for the approaching rehearsals was “arrive on time, and arrive prepared”.

**THE “PARENTS” SCRIPT.**

The construction of the script “Parents: A Kids Eye View” was similar to that of *Johnny*, only this time there were a pre-existing set of scenes to work with. Essentially the play was made up of original scenes from *Johnny*, scenes taken from *Fossils*, and a number of new scenes that were written for the project. Initially a resource script was created for the Riverview K4K project that was
made up of 25 short scenes including the “Prologue” and the “Epilogue”. Each was titled and arranged alphabetically. Many of the scenes were modified slightly to suit the predominantly male cast of this production.

**Prologue and Epilogue**

As with Dramaworks and *Johnny*, the lines that comprise the prologue and epilogue were devised during rehearsal. Some of the lines from *Johnny* were used as examples of the type of lines that were appropriate, however it was important to encourage the students to use their own lines as it gave them a sense of ownership from the outset. As described in the next section, devising the Prologue and Epilogue was one of the first tasks in the rehearsal as the results are very quick to see.

The aim was to generate a number of lines that students will repeat in a series of rhythm rounds or chants. The easiest way to generate these lines was to ask the students to think of typical things their parents say to them. This exercise is most effective if there are some parameters set, for example, students are to write only two lines and they have five minutes to do so. One rehearsal prerequisite was a pen, paper, and a folder – it is remarkable how quickly a good idea is forgotten. The students then read their lines out aloud to the class. In some cases, their lines will be perfect, in others they may need a little work on the syntax. For example, “Go into your bedroom and study”, is rhythmically a little cumbersome, and can be shortened to “Go to your room and study!” or “I’m not your taxi” sounds better if it’s “I’m not your personal taxi.” Sometimes the line may just need a little tag, for example “This isn’t a hotel” becomes “This isn’t a hotel, you know”. Then there are situations when the line simply isn’t suitable. A good example was a wonderful line delivered with great gusto by one of the understudies, Roghan McKerlie, obviously imitating his father, “Roghan, you don’t know your arse from your elbow, son!” In our production this line was used, as it was one of our favourites, however in some schools the use of the word ‘arse’ may be considered improper. The use of first names should be avoided so a student or his family is not identified – parents may well be horrified to have family secrets blurted out on stage! Similarly, the line “Doesn’t that school teach you anything?” was not used
as it could be considered derogatory to the school. Some students found it difficult to come up with any lines so we just used suggestions from other students. The title of the play was used as the last line to lead into the first scene of the play.

As an interesting aside, these lines can often be quite revealing in social and economic terms. A number of lines referred to behaviour, "Discipline son, that’s all you need," eating habits, "Get your elbows off the table," or finances, "Where did all your money go?" and "I’ll take your bankcard off you." These last few lines were often the only reminders that some of the students did in fact come from a privileged background.

The lines for the epilogue were generated in the same way as for the Prologue and as with Johnny, the following ending was used:

ALL KIDS But as we keep getting told ...
MUM & DAD It’s only because we love you, dear.
ALL KIDS Yuk!

This ending worked very well in production and would be suggested as a standard ‘tag’ ending.

Scenes from Johnny

Only three of the scenes from Johnny, namely "Boyfriends", "Phones" and "Homework", remained completely unchanged. Interestingly enough, these scenes all centre on the scenario of Julie’s horror of poor Dominic, and her determination to attract Johnny. In addition, these are the only scenes that need to be placed in a certain order, as there is a through-line of action. In "Boyfriends" we learn that Julie’s mother wants to pair her up with Dominic, who she finds totally undesirable; while Julie has her heart set on the legendary Johnny. In "Phones" Julie tells Michelle of her predicament, and in "Homework" the issue is happily resolved.

In scenes such as "Fashion", "Shoes", "Tidy Rooms", "Brothers and Sisters", "Careers" and "Fights", the only changes were the name of the character, but not the gender. The scene "Worrying" remained exactly the same as the Dramaworks version, however the name of the band Michelle refers to was updated, as were a
few of her expressions such as “Mum and Dad had a cow.” This was replaced by another teenage expression like “… went ballistic”.

In some scenes, the gender of the character was changed. Usually the only impact this had was obviously a change in the character’s name, and the accompanying pronouns as in the case of the scene “Adopted”. Sometimes the gender change had other subtle impacts on the script. For example in the scene “Fame” the original version, featured Julie striking model-like poses, using her mother’s make up, being interviewed by Jana Wendt, dating Jason Priestly, and accepting the first ever Oscar to be won by an Australian Actress. The male version, featuring Robert has him also in the bathroom, only now he is using his father’s electric shaver, being interviewed by Ray Martin, dating Elle McPherson, and accepting the second ever Oscar (after Peter Finch) to be won by an Australian Actor. In fact, that would now have to be updated to the third Oscar bearing in mind Geoffrey Rush’s effort for Shine, and of course, Elle McPherson, unfortunately for Robert, is now taken.

In the case of the scene “Pets”, we aged the character via a few simple script changes. The student who played this role, Andrew Cleary, quite rightly felt that it was written for a younger child about ten years old, which of course it was. During the rehearsal, I spent some time with Andrew reworking the monologue, and the small changes we made added a completely different feel to it. For example, “When I was little” was changed to “When I was younger.” The inclusion of “yeah right …” after the line “Fluffy thought Myran was kind of a large Wiskette” gave a cynical slant to something a parent might say to a child but ‘the kid knows better’. In addition, Andrew delivered the names Fluffy and Myran with a tone dripping in sarcasm, the subtext being, “Who would call their pet Fluffy.” “Daddy” was changed to “Dad”, and maintaining the cynicism, we added “Grow up Dad”, after the line “Dad told me Myran was happy in Fluffy’s tummy”. Andrew suggested a few changes that he felt would make the writing smoother, such as replacing the line “We buried Fluffy in the garden in the backyard”, which he felt was too clumsy, with “We buried him in the back garden.” He was perfectly right. Finally, after the line “Mum said Myran and Fluffy would help the plants grow”, we added the rhetorical question, “good
fertiliser, eh Mum?" The transformation of this monologue is a good example of the K4K process at work. By changing a few words and phrases, we turned a cute young kid who accidentally lost most of his pets, into a somewhat sinister little boy whose animals may not have had 'accidents' after all.

The scene "Sandwiches" was rewritten in consultation with Jonathon Paul, who played Patrick in the Riverview production. Jonathon was of Indian decent, so the Italian food would not have been appropriate. We kept the same structure, just changed the food types to Indian food. The original opening of:

DOMINIC Sandwiches.
All I want Mum is a normal sandwich.
I want something Australian like peanut butter ... or vegemite.
I get gherkin and cucumber ... cheese and salami -
and it's not even Kraft cheese ...
it's those great big chunks of fetta,
or Gorgonzola, or Gouda.
Most of the time,
I can't even pronounce what I get on my sandwiches.

was given an Indian transformation to:

PATRICK Sandwiches.
All I want Mum is a normal sandwich.
I want something Australian like peanut butter ... or vegemite.
I get brinjal and pappadam ... masala on pittu,
roti and prontah, payasam and rasam
sothy on late!
Most of the time,
I can't even pronounce what I get on my sandwiches.

"Goats cheese and liverwurst" became "Mango chutney and lime pickle", sprouts and soy milk" turned into “rambutan and karapinche” while “eggplant and spinach on whole grain” manifested itself as “samosa and sambol on idily.” In this fashion, almost all of the food presented in the scene was translated to Indian dishes. Jonathan’s mother helped him name the variety of foods, and I worked with him to place them in the scene without losing any of the original rhythm. Jonathan stressed that he didn’t normally eat this food at home.

Not only was this scene very popular, but it also seemed to contribute a little towards a greater sense of understanding on a personal level within the cast. After
the production, Anthony Renshaw mentioned that his peers had always perceived
Jonathan as being a little aloof. The subtext of “Sandwiches” is simply a young
fellow wanting to be like everybody else. As often happens in theatre, perhaps
some of this subtext filtered out into the real lives of the cast.

Scenes adapted from Fossils.

A number of scenes in the Parents script were ‘lifted’ from the pre-publication
version of Fossils. A few of the scenes such as “Games” and “Goldfish”, while
included in the resource script, were not suitable as the characters were too young
for our Year 9 cast. I felt the scenes from Johnny alone would not be enough to
chose from, and it seemed a pity to forego suitable scenes from Fossils only
because they were now embedded in the larger structure of a soon to be published
play. The solution was to find a few scenes within Fossils that were easily adapted
to the Riverview project. An obvious choice was a segment from the start of the
play, Julie’s breakfast scenario, only the character of Julie was changed to Scott.
The scene runs well at the start of the show, as it does in Fossils, as breakfast is a
natural start to the day.

The scene “In Public with Parents” was taken from Fossils unaltered; the scene
“Zits” also remained unaltered apart from a name change from Franky to Patrick;
and “Parent Teacher Night” changed Julie into Mark. The only impact the change
in gender had on that scene was Julie’s “Why not buy me clothes instead?” to
Mark’s “Why not buy me a car instead”.

New scenes

Although the scenes imported from Fossils gave us a greater choice of material to
allocate to students, two boys were still in need of more scenes. Michael
MacRitchie played Brett in the scene “Shoes”, and had a cameo part in
“Sandwiches”, however apart from that had little else. Worse still, one student,
Imre Hunyor, had been given no scenes at all! We were pleased with the way the
scenes were distributed to the rest of the cast, and any further shuffling would
have created confusion, and only left other students with too few scenes. The
solution was to simply write three new scenes by the first rehearsal.
In the few days I had before first rehearsal, I managed to resurrect two scenes from my archive material, and write one completely new scene. “Grandparents” was written for Johnny, and subsequently not used. The original scene featured Franky getting the blame for not meeting his grandmother after school, although she was the one who got lost. Franky was changed to Martin, and a segment was added to the start of the scene, which showed the difficulty of living with a grandparent who doesn’t speak English. Imre, who was to play Martin, was a good choice for this scene as he is from a Hungarian background, and indicated that he identified with the situation. It was a slight departure from other scenes in that either Mum or Dad would have to play a very ethnic Grandma. In the case of our production, Brendan O’Connell played a superb ‘toothless Granny’. The other resurrected scene was “Potential” which was also in the original version of Johnny, but was cut because I felt it was not a very well written scene. When we gave it to Michael MacRitchie to read, it seemed to suit him, so it was also included.

Finally, I wrote a new scene called “Music”. This scene was written specifically for Imre, who for some reason struck me as the type of kid who played the violin. Here Martin’s father, remembering his tastes in the 1960’s and 1970’s, wants his son to be a little more radical in his musical tastes – he should join a rock band and play electric guitar rather than play classical music. It’s a role reversal with Dad preferring Led Zeppelin to Beethoven, until Martin reminds him of a few other prerequisites of being a rock star. The scene worked very well in performance with Imre eventually confessing that he did in fact play the violin.

REHEARSALS AND PERFORMANCE

Apart from the technical and dress rehearsals, there were three full day rehearsals scheduled on Sundays from 10.00 am til 4.00 pm on 30 October, 13 November, and 20 November 1994. The performance dates were fixed at Wednesday 23 to Friday 25 November.
First Rehearsal

Brendan, Lyn and I arrived at Riverview College at 9.30 am to meet Anthony. We were allocated the new Drama Theatre for our rehearsals. This was a pleasant surprise as the space was not only well appointed and practical, but very comfortable. For most of the students, it was their first time in the space, so there was a palpable air of excitement. To their credit, the cast was assembled and ready to rehearse by 10.00 am sharp. While most were dressed in comfortable clothes, a few were dressed as if ready to go out on a Saturday night. A solid workout at the rehearsal would cure them of that, we thought.

Brendan led us all through a series of warm up games and actors exercises, which occupied most of the morning. Essentially it is personal choice as to exactly which of the many games and exercises are used. Broadly, the aim at this stage is to have fun, get to know each other a little more, to run around, and to act like children.

We had decided to work on the Prologue and Epilogue, or the ‘top and tail’ as I like to call it, before the lunch break. In fact, we’d set a target of having it up and running before lunch. The top and tail can be rehearsed and performed in a remarkably short period of time, and is worth doing early as students often surprise themselves by the results. As outlined in the previous section, we compiled a list of ‘parent lines’ for the students to use in just under fifteen minutes and spent about half an hour experimenting with the rhythm rounds and blocking.

The afternoon session started with a quick lesson on the concept of actions and objectives. For our purposes, an action is generally what you want another person to do or feel. For example, “I want that person to suffer.” An objective is the motivation or the reason why you want a person to do or feel these things. If your action is you want someone else to suffer, then your objective might be “in order for me to feel a sense of justice.” The students tried a number of exercises relating to these concepts. In one exercise the action was to get into the bathroom and look in the mirror. The objective was to ‘check out’ a new haircut. To this we added the concept of an obstacle, being something you have to overcome to reach your
objective. In our exercise the obstacle was not letting anyone see you enter the bathroom for example.

A basic understanding of action and objective, no matter how simple, enabled us to give each student a method of approaching their scene – they were to work through their scene line by line and write down what the actions and objectives were for each character. Lyn, Brendan, Anthony and I split up and made sure the students kept to the task at hand. It was important to see if they were on the right track, as the next rehearsal would be in two weeks time, and it was important to give them as much help and encouragement to enable them to rehearse on their own. The last hour was devoted to performing, script in hand, their scenes to fellow students. At this point, we stressed the concept of respecting their fellow performers by being a good audience for them. We ended the rehearsal congratulating the students on a job well done, and reminded them that we would see them in two weeks time, at 10.00 am sharp. Their homework was to have their lines remembered. Anthony would work with some of the students in school time. As there were only two more rehearsals left, it was vital that this valuable time was not spent on the tedious task of learning lines.

We felt it had been a successful and exhausting day. Anthony was amazed by how well the students responded to the various demands we placed on them. He couldn’t believe that the ones he expected to be ‘troublemakers’ were the most cooperative and diligent. The first rehearsal is clearly vital to the K4K process. It not only establishes a group dynamic, but sets up a way of working that the students can use for future rehearsals and perhaps future careers in entertainment. As the students began to feel more comfortable with each other, it was interesting to see the flirting, shuffling of alliances, and general group politics being played out. As long as it didn’t interfere with the quality of work and level of concentration, we could only look on and remember our own time as teenagers.

Second Rehearsal

The second rehearsal began with a few latecomers, but by 10.30 am we were all being put through our warm up paces again led by Brendan. Before rehearsals started in earnest, I noticed Anthony huddled in discussion with Lyn. We were
presented with the first of our dramas so typical of most of productions. One of
our female actors had informed Anthony that she couldn’t stay for rehearsal
because of a prior family commitment. As the rehearsal schedule had been
prepared before anyone had been cast, one of the main casting criteria was
availability for the dates as outlined. Accordingly, we took a hard line to any
absence from rehearsals. Our only option would be to cut the scene and possibly
the character, or for me to modify a few scenes to allow one of our understudies to
step in. Unfortunately, we didn’t have any understudies for the female roles so
rewriting a few scenes would have been our only option. Eventually the matter
was resolved with our young actor calling home and managing to get out of her
commitment. While our reaction may seem somewhat draconian, it really was the
only way a decent result could be achieved in such a short time.

As with the first rehearsal, the opening exercise was a general warm up. Then we
went over the start again. It took a few runs before everyone remembered what we
had done two weeks ago. Each of the students then had to perform their scenes –
almost like a show and tell. The surprise was just how many of the students had
their lines learned. Those that hadn’t were obvious indeed and when it came to
performing their scene – they were the ones who felt bad. Nothing much needed
to be said – letting down the team was perhaps their best lesson.

As with the Dramaworks project Anthony, Lyn, Brendan, and I worked with a
group of students on the details of their scene. For example, Andrew Cleary and I
reworked “Pets” as described. Often just by re-establishing their actions and
objectives of each character the scene would improve dramatically in a few hours.
It is one of the most satisfying points of the process to see everyone hard at work
in different areas of the room. Fellow students are encouraged to offer
suggestions; quite a few great ideas to improving a scene came from the students
not us.

The success of this process depended to be the nature of the interaction between
the facilitators – particularly the actors – and the students. Our relationship with
the students was at this point as fellow performers. This equality also carried with
it a sense of responsibility. Discussions with students backed up this point – most
were determined not to let us down. I made a point of spending some time with the students on a more informal basis, for example chatting to them during the lunch breaks and so on. Even this ‘off duty’ interaction contributed to the success of the rehearsal process.

At this stage, most of the students had no real idea of the format of the show. Although we did our best to explain it to them, they were used to working in the ‘big school musicals’ and many had doubts about how the show would be received. In fact, Anthony Renshaw was in a similar situation. The fact that we were not using an elaborate set and the play had no real story concerned them. Even the concept of direct address to the audience took some getting used to. A familiar comment from the students after opening night was, they were surprised to see the show come together the way it did.

Before the end of the rehearsal, we ran through the play. We had already put the scenes in some sort of rough order, and these runs were helping us decide as to whether they were appropriate or not. A scene that was beautifully enacted would usually get a solid round of applause. A healthy sense of competition was established. This gave the teenagers, always keen to impress their peers, a target to aim for. Learning how to be an audience is as much part of the K4K process as is learning to be a performer.

Finally, we discussed any logistical and planning details. It was also important to involve the technical crew. From this point, they would begin to play a more vital role, and it was important to make sure cast and crew were all aware of the general direction of the production. Again, we felt satisfied with our efforts during the second rehearsal. In a short debriefing over a coffee at the end of the day we planned next weeks third and final full day rehearsal.

Third rehearsal

The third rehearsal started well with all students punctual and by now quite familiar with us, and their fellow cast and crew. It was always gratifying to see some of the students chatting to the actors generally asking for advice about their own careers. In many ways the time spent just chatting before the official start
time and during short breaks was just as valuable as time spent working on the play. It was fortunate that all the actors were happy to spend time with the students.

This was the first rehearsal that Rosalie Lester attended. It not only gave us an extra person to help with the scenes, but it was the first time the students would be working with the full cast, as Rosalie was playing Mum.

A final order was presented to the group and we worked on entrances and exits. The plan for the afternoon was a full run and then notes. The individual work we did on scenes was now more a question of ‘tidying up’. Most of the students had done remarkably well in learning their lines and in applying the performance notes given to them. To avoid confusion if we had established a rapport with one of the students when working on their scenes, we would continue to work with that student. For example, Anthony Renshaw worked with Michael MacRitchie on “Potential”, I worked with Andrew Cleary on “Pets”, and Lyn worked with Andrew Salter on “Fights”.

The students were encouraged to organise their costumes and any props they needed gradually throughout the rehearsal process. By this stage, most of the students were well prepared. The afternoon run through surprised us all. It’s quite normal for a first run to be patchy, however the student’s performance was excellent. For the first time, we felt, the students could see the shape of the show.

Technical and dress rehearsal

While the technical aspects of the production were not the focus of K4K, the availability of a fully equipped theatre gave us an opportunity to expand the scope of the show. A number of students were keen on stage management and technical production, and had been involved in the rehearsal process as crew members from the beginning. As we were making full use of the lighting equipment available, some sort of technical rehearsal was required. It gave us an opportunity to impress on the cast exactly how important the role of the crew is. The actors soon learned to appreciate how difficult a scene could be if a lighting cue was late, or if a prop was not left in the right spot. The technical rehearsal, much to everyone’s relief,
went without a hitch! The dress rehearsal is also an essential part of the dramatic process. Again, we kept to the same guidelines as would be followed by a professional production – no stopping for forgotten lines, no prompts, all the props had to be organised, and everyone had to be in full costume. In terms of the staging, the parents’ relationship to the kids was the same as the one used for Dramaworks’ version of *Johnny*. Two large throne-like chairs were placed upstage, and the parents read their scripts from these chairs for the whole play. With the dress rehearsal complete, all was in readiness for opening night.

**Performances**

*Parents* opened on Wednesday 23 November 1994, to an audience of family, friends, fellow students, and college staff. The standard of performance was quite remarkable both technically and artistically. It was hard to believe this had been achieved with only a handful of rehearsals. One of the comments after the show by a friend of ours who was a professional in the entertainment industry was quite interesting. She said that there is probably no way we could have got adult actors on equity wages to produce a performance as polished as this with only three days of rehearsal. That is perhaps one of the many advantages of youth.

The audience response to the play was excellent. As one parent put it, “I can’t believe I actually enjoyed myself. Usually I’m asleep by the end of the first act.” One of the parents I spoke to after the performance confessed that they almost knew the lines by heart because of quite a few evenings spent rehearsing with their children. Backstage, the excitement was palpable. Many of the cast were genuinely surprised by the response. One of the students expressed it this way, “I’m just out there having a chat to the audience, and they love it!”

Based on a discussion I had with the students after their brief season, their surprise at the success of the show could be summed up by the comment, “This was a very different theatrical experience than what we’re used to.” Students were “used to” plays that often had giant casts with only a handful of lead roles, were about issues that were far removed from their own experience, had massive sets, and required months of rehearsal. In *Parents*, every actor was the star of the show, it was about issues students were all familiar with, they spoke directly to the
audience, there was virtually no set, and the performance required only five rehearsals in total.

Many positive aspects of the experience at the Australian College of Entertainment were mirrored in the K4K project, namely: the focus on the process approach, the role of the professional actors, the flexibility of the scenes, the minimal staging and technical requirements, and the emphasis on private rehearsal. An added benefit was the in-built professional development for the teachers who also worked closely with the actors, writer, and director.

I leave the last word on the project to Anthony Renshaw, who has expressed the objectives and results of the K4K Project very eloquently in his program notes for “Parents: A Kids Eye View.”

The project was begun on the understanding that as far as possible, every stage of its development would follow the professional pattern, from auditioning, through to casting and initial workshops. The students involved with this production have had the opportunity of direct contact with four professionals and because of this they have gained a real insight into the theatrical process, from original concept to final performance: they have even had the writer on hand to rewrite monologues to suit the different context of a school performance.

The students themselves have expressed their delight at working with professionals, and their experience has confirmed the adage that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. ... The boys of Riverview and the three girls from Ravenswood will leave this production with a very practical and clear understanding of how an idea can grow into the makings of a script and how a script can be transformed into theatrical reality.
7. WORKBOOK TO WEBSITE:  
THE RESOURCE MODULE

You sell a screenplay like you sell a car. If someone drives it off a cliff, that’s it.


The Resource Module is integral to all three projects discussed in this thesis. It was used by the K4K team at Riverview College, and was central to the development of the play, *Parents*. Similarly, an earlier version of the Resource Module was the basis of the *Johnny* script. The Resource Module was also the foundation of the first draft of *Fossils*.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first looks at the further development of the Resource Module after the K4K project at Riverview. The second section examines a number of alternative methods available to present the Resource Module to the educational community using new technologies such as CD-ROM and the Internet. Finally, the third section views the Resource Module within the context of available educational drama resources.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESOURCE MODULE

Resource Module – Version I

The Resource Module, as used in the K4K Project at Riverview, consisted of 21 short scenes plus a prologue and an epilogue. The scenes were printed on single sided A4 paper, and ordered alphabetically according to the title. The prologue and epilogue were structured more like a set of guidelines rather than a scripted scene. The idea was that using rhythm rounds and vocal chants, groups would create their own opening and closing scenes. Each scene began on a new page and most scenes were one to two pages long. The top right hand corner had “PAGE ____” printed on it. The bottom left hand corner – I felt this was the least obtrusive place on the page – had a reference number printed in the following
manner: “REF#1”, then “REF#2”, and so on. Although each page was referenced, the ultimate order of the scenes could be ‘shuffled’ to suit the demands of each particular group. Once a final order was established, the page numbers would be simply written in the space provided in the top right hand corner. A title page identified the collection of scenes as, “If Johnny Jumped Off the Harbour Bridge, Would You? Resource Module”. The same page contained my contact details and a standard copyright notice. The whole bundle was placed in a standard two-ring A4 binder.

The success of the Resource Module within the framework of the K4K Project at Riverview College could largely be attributed to the content and structure of the scenes and the expertise of the team of people that worked with them. The scenes were not only funny, but provided short vignettes of teenage life that were easily recognisable by teenagers and their parents. The structure allowed one actor to ‘dominate’ each scene while the Mum and Dad characters served as a ‘back-up’. The team was familiar with the scenes and knew how they could be adapted to fit a particular ‘school situation’ – they were aware of the probable audience reaction, and indeed had a good concept of suitable casting.

I was interested in seeing how the Resource Module would fare when used by those not familiar with the material. My ultimate goal, at that stage, was to create a workbook for teachers that would accompany the scenes. By way of research, the module was given to a number of educators to trial. Some used selected scenes at various workshops and conferences, while others used the scenes as discreet units that were the foundation of in-class drama exercises.

The response to the module was uniformly positive with most teachers feeling that the scenes were easy to work with and popular with the students – the most common comment was that “the students could relate to it.” A number of teachers decided to mount public performances using the module. One teacher, who worked with Willoughby Youth Theatre, planned a performance at the North Sydney Community Centre. Another teacher from McDonald College, Strathfield presented a version much like the original Dramaworks production, also titled If Johnny Jumped Off the Harbour Bridge Would You? Alice Coventry and her
drama students from New England Girls School Armidale presented their play titled *Kids R Us*, in their school drama theatre.

**Willoughby Youth Theatre**

Willoughby Youth Theatre is a small drama group situated in Sydney’s northern suburbs. The group had a half a dozen committed members with about the same number of ‘nomadic’ members. Their ages varied from 14 to 17. Most were keen on pursuing careers in acting, and the Youth Theatre was both a social outlet for them as well as an avenue for vocational training. Many of the students were involved with school drama, some playing lead roles in their school musicals. Those in senior secondary school were studying drama as an elective.

The group director was looking for some material to use for a short production she planned for the group. I was keen to observe another public performance of the Resource Module scenes, however this time without the input of the team as in Riverview. I felt the Willoughby Youth Theatre production would be a perfect opportunity.

The rehearsals were held at North Sydney Community Centre with a public performance scheduled for family and friends at the same venue. Rehearsals were run in the same manner as countless other youth groups – one evening a week, after school. I attended most of the early rehearsals on a weekly basis. The first term (about eight weeks) was taken up in reading the scenes, determining characters, allocating the scenes to various actors, and planning a rough scene order. Eventually my attendance became a little less frequent as the progress made was painfully slow. It was clear that the only work the students did on their scenes was at the Community Centre rehearsals – there was obviously very little rehearsal in their own time. Each rehearsal was a continual repetition of their scenes with notes from the director at the end. There was no real structured process with defined goals, dates, and deadlines. Students not involved in a scene either worked on their own scenes or acted as audience. However, often it was a time for them to catch up with the weekly gossip. It was quite difficult to simply observe the process without being even peripherally involved. I soon found myself working with some of the students on their scenes.
As with all the performances of the Resource Module material, when the K4K team was not involved, students played the Mum and Dad characters. This represented a significant departure from the project as performed at Riverview. One of the crucial aspects of the K4K Project was the interaction of the students with the professional actors both in terms of rehearsal and in performance.

It was rare to have all the members of the group present at one rehearsal. In many ways, this was not surprising. Anyone who wanted to be in the drama group, and had paid their fee, was eligible to be in the production – it was up to the director to ‘fit them in’ somehow. There was no real sense of ‘teamwork’ among the group members. Unfortunately, the concept of arriving to a rehearsal prepared and focussed was not promoted. Ultimately, school commitments led to the withdrawal of a number of the key performers and eventually the cancellation of the planned performances.

It was clear that a lack of any defined goals, structured tasks, and commitment on the part of the young actors contributed to a lacklustre experience for all concerned. The material was “just another script” to work on, and the presence of the writer, apart from a few basic workshops on the epilogue and prologue, was never really exploited.

**McDonald College**

A drama teacher at McDonald College, Strathfield had seen the original Dramaworks production of *Johnny* at Theatrefest. She approached me shortly after the Willoughby Youth Theatre rehearsals had ended, wanting the rights to perform *Johnny*. I explained that *Johnny* was not assembled as a performable play, however sprang from a series of scenes. I gave her a copy of the module and explained how it could be used, and some of the ways in which the scenes can be altered.

This time I was not involved in the rehearsal process at all, and only saw the production for the first time at the public performance. Rehearsals were a combination of in-class and extracurricular activity over the period of a semester (18 weeks). There were three public performances mainly to family and friends at
the drama theatre at McDonald College. It was disappointing that not only was the same title used, but also the play was very much a recreation of the original Dramaworks production with many of the scenes in the same order. It seemed that the students had no real input into ordering the scenes, and most of the character names and indeed gender remained identical to the Dramaworks production. The play itself was very enjoyable, however ultimately it was clear that the process the students went through did not exploit much of the flexibility of the script. It's interesting to note that as with most non-professional productions of the play, there was generally no character doubling. Obviously as there are no equity rates to pay the actors, the idea is to give as many people roles as possible. Again students played both the Mum and Dad characters. The students involved seemed very keen and committed, with a number of quite inspired performances. My disappointment was more with the way in which the module was used, rather than the resulting play.

On the night that I was there, we had an impromptu question and answer session (or perhaps forum) with both the students and the audience. Many of the questions from the students were about how I came to write certain scenes, or whether any of the characters were based on real people, and so on. Many parents in the audience commented that they identified with most of the scenes.

Resource Module – Version II

At this stage, it was clear the module still needed revision. The layout of the pages was again modified. The epilogue and prologue was removed from the scene structure and included as an optional production suggestion. The scene “Homework” was deleted and five other scenes were added. Finally, a general section called Production Notes was placed at the start of the module.

In terms of the page layout, the reference number, previously on the bottom-left of the page, was relocated to the top left-hand side. The bottom of each page now contained copyright information. The logic was that a published play, or any script that is professionally bound, would remain bundled together. Therefore, the copyright information only needs to appear once in the traditional place on the back of the first page (the inside fly). However, as the Resource Module would be
presented in a ring binder, it would be easy to separate each individual scene. Consequently the copyright information was now placed on the bottom of each page.

Most of the scenes were revised in order to simplify them and make them more ‘focused’ and ‘neutral’. One method of ‘focussing’ a scene was to cut gratuitous dialogue between the Mum and Dad characters. For example, the following exchange at the start of the scene, “Adopted”, was cut entirely without any significant impact on the scene

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MUM</th>
<th>I don't know where he got that from ... not me.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DAD</td>
<td>He got that from your side of the family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>He's definitely your son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAD</td>
<td>I don't know ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A greater ‘neutrality’ was achieved by eliminating any residual stage directions that were not essential. For example, the opening to the scene “Worrying” had the direction, “MICHELLE PUTS HER SHOPPING BAGS DOWN.” Often directions such as these were left over from the original production – the director obviously capitalised on a line in the scene, “I went shopping with Julie last week”. Michelle’s shopping bags have very little to do with the action and any stage direction referring to them may force a less imaginative director into collecting unnecessary props. Similarly, some scenes still contained entrances and exits, for example “RACHEL ENTERS”, or “FRANKY EXITS”. These were also remnants of the original production and could possibly hinder a director if followed blindly. Some directions were simply stating the obvious, for example “JENNY STANDS IN FRONT OF THE BATHROOM MIRROR”, or “MICHELLE IS ON THE PHONE TO JULIE.” In both these cases, the setting is obvious once the scene is read.

The general revisions highlighted a few problems with the scene “Homework”. In the original Dramaworks version the scene was a very handy way of tying up all the loose ends – Julie realises that the dreaded Dominic was really a nice kid after all. Unfortunately, the action of the scene was unclear without the context of the Johnny/Dominic scenario. For example, it would be hard to open the play with
that scene. The McDonald College production reinforced the notion that ultimately any flexibility the script has would be lost if certain scenes have to go in certain places because of plot considerations. The simplest solution was to cut the “Homework” scene. This left only 20 scenes. I felt the module needed five more scenes to give the teacher a better selection. If all the scenes were used in a show, it would run for just over an hour.

Three of the ‘new’ scenes were taken straight from *Fossils*. “First Day At School” which is an exchange between Franky and his Mum, “School Dances” in which the characters discuss the etiquette of the school dance, and “Yuppy Breakfast” which is the morning exchange between Michelle and her ‘corporate’ parents. “Television”, the scene that didn’t work in *Fossils*, fitted quite nicely into the Resource Module structure. Finally “Games” which was in the early Dramaworks version was rewritten to suit an older boy rather than a young girl. Annie became Peter, and lines like, “That’s very good, sweetie.” Became “That’s very good, mate.” Annie’s exuberant game of hide and seek in the original version was revised to the following exchange:

```
PETER     Hey Dad, you want a game of cards?
DAD       I’m pretty busy, mate.
PETER     Let’s play poker.
DAD       I’m not quite sure how to play that.
PETER     You know, full house, flush, straight, two of a kind and all that. Hey we’ll play with all those five cent pieces you’ve got!
DAD       You’re Mum won’t like us gambling in the house.
PETER     How about Gin Rummy, then?
DAD       It’s been years since I played that.
PETER     Five Hundred?
DAD       I never could play Five Hundred.
PETER     Canasta?
DAD       No idea, mate.
PETER     Aw, come on. There must be a game you know.
DAD       Not cards.
```

M S ASTON – DCA 2000 – CHAPTER 7
In the Dramaworks version Annie selects the game “I Spy.” The module version has Dad selecting “I Spy” because it’s one of the only games he knows (or thinks he knows) how to play. Peter’s response to his father’s choices is dripping with cynicism – “You’re kidding.”

An essential element of the module was flexibility – if necessary, teachers should be able to change a character’s name, or even gender, relatively easily. One method which I thought would help teachers do this, was to indicate character names using a number and a blank space, and to have a choice for the pronouns. The following dialogue illustrates my point:

(1) _______ Everyone’s got a boy/girl-friend except me.
    Oh, I could get one if I wanted one ...
    It's my parents ... they won't let me have one.
    Mum/Dad, can I have a boy/girl-friend?
MUM/DAD You don't want to grow up too fast, (1) _______.
(1) _______ Mum/Dad, can I have a boy/girl-friend?
MUM/DAD You're too young for a boy/girl-friend.
(1) _______ You said you had a boy/girl-friend when you were fifteen.
MUM/DAD That's different.
(1) _______ Why?
MUM/DAD Because I'm your father/mother.

A character’s name would be written in the blank spots, for example (1) _______ becomes (1) ANGELA, and if there are more than one character (apart from Mum and Dad), (2) _______ becomes (2) JAMES, (3) _______ becomes (3) JENNY, and so on. In the case of the ‘alternatives’, either Mum/Dad, girl/boy, or he/she is chosen – the inappropriate term is simply crossed out.

The only advantage with this layout was that teachers didn’t have to use correction fluid. In practical terms however, this system was fraught with difficulties. One director felt that it was very time consuming to fill in the blanks, then cross out all the relevant alternative pronouns — particularly in a more involved scene. One of the young actors commented that the resulting script had
an “untidy” appearance with the combination of handwriting and all the corrections. As she said, “the script didn’t really look like a script – the layout was confusing”. A further logistical dilemma was that students preferred to ‘name’ their characters after they had read the scene. However, any initial reading of the script was extremely laboured because, as one student said, she found it hard to read “blank spaces and ‘he or she’s’.”

At the time, I was quite keen on the character names being represented by numbers as I had thought of a catchy title for the concept – “Numbered Shorts”. Unfortunately, though it may have had a clever marketing twist, in practical terms the numbers and ‘alternatives’ were awkward and confusing.

I tried further variations using symbols such as ■, ●, ×, instead of the numbers, only as is readily apparent, it complicated matters far more! Another variation was omitting the character name altogether with the direction that each paragraph was a new character. That limited me to only two-character dialogue, and still didn't solve the problem of prepositions. In a final attempt to solve the issue of ‘gender flexibility’ within the module, I wrote two versions of the same scene, one for boys and one for girls. This certainly solved the gender problem but resulted in a final script that was too bulky and cumbersome.

In the end I simply left the scenes as they were originally written, complete with character names and predefined gender. In practice, there was some reluctance by teachers to alter the scripts as presented in the module – they simply selected those scenes that were appropriate to their circumstances. This was probably because the groups involved were quite large and the teacher had plenty of students to chose from. It may also stem from the notion that traditionally a completed script is rarely altered.

The prologue and epilogue were also proving problematic. Their function was simply to put a neat ‘top and tail’ on a proposed production using a series of rhythm rounds or ‘madrigal-like’ chants. My observations indicated that most groups found it difficult to interpret the directions as presented in the module. It struck me that perhaps it was too restrictive to try to define the start and finish of the play. The solution, I felt, was to include a note on possible approaches to the
play's opening and closing in the Production Notes section. This would give the teachers and students a greater range of options including omitting the top and tail entirely.

My early drafts for what eventually became the Production Notes section were quite comprehensive, with details on casting, staging, and performance styles. In reviewing the notes, I felt they were possibly more restrictive rather than instructive. Teachers would feel they had to 'follow instructions' rather than simply consider various options offered. Ultimately, I felt that an imaginative teacher would seize any performance and production opportunities with or without directions on my part. The resulting section in the module was a brief one and a half pages under the title, "Production Notes".

After a brief introduction, the nature of the copyright imposed on the module is discussed. It is different from the standard copyright because teachers are allowed to make unrestricted copies of the script within an 'educational context' such as classroom use and so on. Any public performance, however, still attracts a standard royalty fee. Unfortunately, it is quite common for amateur and school groups to think the writer is not due any royalties because their actors and director are not being paid, or because the audience is not being charged admission, or simply because the audience consists of parents and friends.

The page layout and referencing system is described, as are the options for modifying the scenes. Teachers are encouraged to 'modernise' any dated expressions, and experiment with a variety of settings and contexts. The scenes themselves remained in alphabetical order.

New England Girls School

My first opportunity to trial this new version of the Resource Module was with the New England Girls' School. This is the largest girls' boarding school in Australia, situated in Armidale, New South Wales. Their production is interesting because in order to make use of the play, teacher Alice Coventry, needed to create fifteen parts for females.
Alice had attended a drama workshop where some of the Resource Module scenes were used as exercises for the teachers. It’s encouraging to note that since the workshop, a number of teachers have called me wanting to use the scenes in their class. Alice Coventry was the first to call so I sent her the revised prototype Resource Module on the understanding that there would be no fee attached, as long as we could discuss her experiences with the module throughout the rehearsal process.

Her first task was to modify some scenes to suit females. The only scene she had trouble with was “Fights” which did not easily shift gender and was ultimately omitted from her version. However, with most of the other scenes she simply changed the names and pronouns using correction fluid. Her only comment on this process was that it was tedious.

As the girls also played the parents, Dad’s lines were sometimes deleted, sometimes substituted by Mum, or sometimes by a character Alice added, called Nan. The grandmother role blended well within the module as she had placed the “Grandparents” scene at the start of the play.

As I was unable to attend the performance in Armidale, I was sent a copy of the complete revised script. Interestingly, Alice had written lighting, sound, and stage directions in the script, and changed the odd line to reflect the situation at New England Girls. For example in the scene “Parent Teacher Night” instead of Mr Lyons (who was actually one of my maths teachers at school), the New England Girls School Maths Coordinator’s name was used. From what Alice told me, the production seemed quite inventive, including a group called ‘The Troupe’, who acted as sound effects, background, small roles, and even kitchen appliances in the “Yuppy Breakfast” scene.

Her response to the module was very positive. I asked if she felt the need for more instructions and suggestions. She confirmed my suspicions, indicating that as a drama teacher she was more interested in the material (the scenes themselves) rather than information on how to use it. The girls were involved in selecting the order of the scenes, and indeed had a significant input into selecting the
character's names. Alice felt it would be interesting to try the same material with another class of students the following year.

Observations

The aim of my involvement with the three groups using the Resource Module was to observe the differences between their experiences and those of the K4K team at Riverview College. In all of the ‘post Riverview’ projects:

- There was no external involvement of anyone other than the teacher.
- There was less emphasis on self-directed learning.
- There were no auditions required to be part of the process.
- Students always played the Mum and Dad roles.
- The rehearsal period was quite long – up to 18 weeks.

The response to the resource script was remarkably similar from all of the groups. The teachers unanimously felt the Resource Module was exactly what was needed in an educational environment. The flexibility of the concept was seen to be one of its primary advantages. The comments from the students were that they could relate to the scenes, they were funny, and most of all, fun to perform.

The physical manipulation of the scenes using correction fluid, ring binders, and a reasonably complex set of rules seemed to be the only barrier limiting the flexibility of the system. For example teachers would cross out names, and replace them, but should one escape detection, it would be quite common for a character’s name (and sometimes gender) to suddenly change midway through the scene. The solution seemed to lie in the emergence of the computer-based technologies.

COMPUTER BASED TECHNOLOGIES

The importance of computers in education is well recognised. They are the source of vast amounts of information, whether on disks, CD-ROMs or through telecommunications, in the form of graphics, video and sound, as well as text. In terms of both hardware and software, computers can expand the range of opportunities for students to learn. Most students have access to computers at
school and are able to use a great variety of programs to do everything from composing music to directing plays. Many of these programs are now available on CD-ROM.

In recognition of the value of incorporating computer-based technologies into all aspects of the curriculum, the Curriculum Support Directorate has developed one primary document and eight KLA-specific (Key Learning Area) secondary documents such as *Computer-based technologies in the Creative Arts KLA*. The Foreword to the publication (1997:3) describes the NSW Government’s *Computers in Schools Policy*. This is a comprehensive four-year strategy building upon the expertise and infrastructure in computer-based technology that has been developing in schools in recent years. The policy aims to improve learning outcomes for all students, in all key learning areas from Kindergarten to Year 12. Computer-based technologies provide a significant educational resource for achieving this aim. The highlights of the *Computers in Schools Policy* include the training and development of teachers in the use of computers in all key learning areas. It recommends providing additional personal computers to schools and additional support in technology to teachers, students and schools. The policy also recommends developing curriculum support materials to enhance teaching and learning in all key learning areas. A further goal of the policy is the connection of all schools to the Internet.

Given the obvious support for the computer-based technologies within the education system, CD-ROM seemed to be the natural progression for the modular theatre concept. Many of the logistical problems encountered with customising scenes for particular students would be solved by what, I imagined, would be a relatively simple software program. The program would prompt for a character name, then prompt for gender, and at the push of a button, the scene would be altered. As the script is on computer, it would be a simple matter of printing copies for the students to use. A workbook with detailed instructions would guide the teachers through the modular theatre process, complete with a myriad of examples, exercises, and teaching suggestions. Short video clips could be included to illustrate how some of the scenes look. Costumes could be viewed on ‘virtual characters’ with perhaps some scenes being blocked on a ‘virtual stage’. 
There are already CD-ROMS available that focus on theatre and drama. For example NIDA has an award winning interactive CD-ROM called “Stagestruck”. Students can direct and design their own show on computer screen, choosing from genres as diverse as drama, dance, opera and musicals. They can work with the performers, choreography, sound, music, sets and costumes. As part of the program, students can gain a wealth of information on Australia’s entertainment industry via ‘backstage tours’ and visits to the ‘green-room’.

While my idea as outlined, remains to an extent valid, there were a number of difficulties forecast. To begin, the Resource Module only contained 25 scenes and I felt that a CD-ROM package would need 50 or even 100 scenes to choose from. In addition, the cost of developing the program in terms of software programming would be quite high. Finally, the time needed to implement a project of this nature was substantial.

The expansion of the Internet sees the possibilities for computer assisted learning rise exponentially, and is therefore the logical successor to the CD-ROM concept. The ‘net’ has grown explosively in the 1990s. According to a web publishing programs guidebook, there are now more than twelve million server computers on the Internet, each providing some type of information or service (Microsoft, 1997:90). The number of Internet users is harder to measure since many people use each service. As the number and variety of the various services continues to grow, the number of users will increase. The Microsoft guidebook continues:

Perhaps the most popular Internet service, the World Wide Web, has accelerated the growth of the Internet by giving it an easy to use, point and click, graphical interface. Users are attracted to the World Wide Web because it is interactive, because it is easy to use, and because it combines graphics, text, sound, and animation into a rich communications medium.

The obvious advantages of ‘the web’ as a learning tool led to the development of Building Blox Theatre. This is a website aimed at drama teachers and students. The site operates on a membership basis – members will have access to a ‘scene-base’ which is a database of scenes, any of which can be downloaded to the school’s or individual’s computer. I am currently developing the site, which at this stage, consists mainly of the scenes and notes from the Resource Module. Each
scene links to a separate page which contains workshop notes such as: when the scene was added to the site; a short synopsis; the characters; suggestions for variations to the scene; and general notes about themes or performance ideas and so on.

The following page is an example of the workshop notes for the scene, “Adopted”. It also shows the current layout and design of my web pages, including the various sections within the site.

Fig 6. Web page from Building Blox Theatre’s Internet site.
Currently there are sections containing information about the author, news about performances, updates and general information, membership information, opportunity for feedback, information about royalties, and of course the scene-base. As the site is still in its embryonic stages, I’m sure these sections will be modified.

All the advantages of the workbook, and the CD-ROM concept are paralleled in the website, with three major improvements. Firstly, using the Internet, I am able to add new scenes to the ‘scene-base’ on a continual basis, while of course, with the ring binder system and CD-ROM the number of scenes is limited when the product is completed. Once the site is running smoothly, I envisage adding one new scene each week. The scenes can be downloaded to school computers in text files which they can then alter via the search and replace function on any standard word processing package.

Secondly, it is possible for both teachers and students to contact me via email. It is quite conceivable that students or teachers could even request I write a scene about a specific issue, or for students with special needs. The interactivity of the medium effectively delivers a writer-in-residence to each school involved.

Finally, the Internet provides access to sites that contain valuable reference material for topics related to theatre and the arts. It also promises exciting possibilities for students and teachers to interact with each other and with professional practitioners from interstate and around the world.

One word often used in association with the Internet is ‘interactivity’. The word describes a theoretically desirable quality of communication, a two-way quality which is often absent from face-to-face teaching. A lecture, for example, is not necessarily interactive. It is interesting to note that while many purists distrust any form of teaching that isn’t face-to-face, many students relate more to computer controlled arcade games than they do to teachers because the games are interactive and some teachers, unfortunately, aren’t.
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Prior to the advent of the Internet, CD-ROMs, and computers in general, the bulk of a teacher’s resources could be found in the curriculum section of the library. In the TIE field, theatre companies would supplement the general drama resources with more specific ones in the form of teacher’s guides. Workbooks, teacher’s guides, and similar resources have always been closely linked not only with TIE but also with educational drama in general. A browse through the shelves of any library usually reveals a proliferation of ‘how to’ books on drama in the classroom, playbuilding, collections of scenes, approaches to theatre, new theories, old theories – the list is overwhelming. If the possibilities offered by the Internet are included, the range of information available is staggering! Even a brief browse through some of the easily accessible Internet websites on ‘educational drama resources’ reveals countless listings of seminars, conferences and events; further online resources; other sites of interest; and sites which function solely as an exchange of information. When it comes to the sharing of information, International boundaries have all but disappeared. A teacher could exchange lesson plans with another school in another hemisphere. Students can not only exchange information with other schools, but collaborate in projects. Computers and the Internet have in many ways changed the nature of the ‘follow-up’ in TIE. For example, after watching a particular play, teachers and students could use the Internet to access information about the playwright, the theatre company, or even the individual performers. The advent of digital audio and video technology means that information is no longer restricted to the printed word. Perhaps the field of ‘technology in educational drama’ may well be worthy of another thesis!

There are also numerous performance projects in the Internet such as virtual theatre, and interactive theatre, one example being the “Venew” website and Byte Sized Theatre. Jason Wheatley (AFTRS) and Amanda Morris (NIDA) developed this site “in response to the shortage of engaging interactive Australian entertainment on the Net”. According to information on their site, the creators of Byte Sized productions are from all over Australia, most with backgrounds in the performing arts, screen media and multimedia. To again quote the web page
"These pioneers are carving out new directions for dramatic expression on the web". The nature of this ‘dramatic expression’ is to use the video players now readily available on most computers as a ‘virtual stage’. An example of the type of ‘show’ on offer is “Love Cuts”, written by AFTRS graduate, David Lowe.

Following the stormy break-up of their relationship, two friends harangue you, the hapless editor of their recent wedding and honeymoon footage, to re-interpret their personal video history. (www.venew.com.au)

The work is of course highly experimental in nature. It aims to fuse high level interactivity with the dramatic and production values of Australia’s best television traditions. The producers acknowledge that they are not sure if projects like this will be “viable enough to win an enduring place in the mix of media available in Australia’s future”. However, they feel that

National institutions like AFTRS and NIDA should take creative risks with aim of generating expertise and stimulating further Australian experimentation in the new interactive medium. (www.venew.com.au)

In attempting to place the Resource Module in some context, I have tried to roughly classify some of the wealth of resources available. Most books (and indeed Web sites) can be divided into two categories: those about drama and stagecraft in general, and those that aim to help teachers create drama in the classroom. In the latter category, there is again a proliferation of books available. Marketed mainly for English and Drama teachers these books encompass subjects such as play-creation, creative dramatics, improvisation, playbuilding, and so on. Errol Bray is probably the most experienced playbuilding director with young people in Australia, and has an international reputation in the field. The term ‘playbuilding’ is used to describe

The creative process of assembling a dramatic performance or presentation from the building blocks of drama and theatre, through improvisation, discussion and rehearsal. The process involves rehearsing the play as it is created thus developing a strong presentation that comes to belong to the group in a very personal and committed way. (Bray, 1991:1)

Similar to playbuilding is ‘process drama’. Championed by Canadian, Cecily O’Neill, process drama, like improvisation, proceeds without a written script but
includes important episodes that will be composed and rehearsed rather than improvised. The essential difference between process drama and improvisation is that as the term suggests process drama is not limited to single brief exercises or scenes. Instead, like any conventional theatre event, it is built up from a series of episodes or scenic units.

This episodic organisation instantly entails structure because it implies a more complex relationship between parts of the work than the linear connections of sequence or narrative, where segments of the work are strung together like beads on a chain rather than being part of a web of meaning. (O’Neill, 1995:xvi)

The Resource Module in a similar fashion has an episodic organisation, however to extend O’Neill’s analogy, the beads themselves do not need to be created as in playbuilding and process drama.

The books, CD-ROMs and websites that are perhaps the closest to the Resource Module, then, are those that use existing scenes as a basis for creating classroom drama. These resources can again be divided into three categories:

- Those which are simply a collection of scenes with perhaps a short commentary at the start.
- Those which are a collection of scenes with a slightly more detailed commentary, involving questions and answers and suggested activities, and
- Resources which involve not only existing scenes but a ‘system’ of some sort along with a detailed commentary.

There are many books available which are simply a collection of scenes. A trip to Sydney’s Performing Arts Bookshop unearthed over 100 titles of collected scenes and monologues. Often these are audition guides and manuals for acting students, such as Dean Carey’s Masterclass series, however sometimes they are targeted at a specific market such as Drama and English teachers. Even in this section, there is a wealth to choose from: Two Character Plays For Student Actors, Duologues For Young Actors, Scenes For Kids, Scenes For Teenagers, the list is extensive.

Usually the scenes are grouped according to how many characters are involved – there is a section for monologues, one for two character scenes, three characters
scenes and so on. Sometimes they are classified according to themes; sometimes according to complexity; sometimes according to age, intended audience, or genre.

Even within this specific type of resource, there are variations. For example, some are simply collections of scenes compiled from various existing plays, while others are written by a single author and therefore have a 'unifying voice'. A good example of this is *Get In The Act – 60 Monologs Dialogs And Skits For Teens* by Shirley Ullom. The back cover neatly summarises the appeal of such scenes. They require “no special settings, props or costumes” and are “excellent for drama starters, variety shows, and classroom use”. Like an earlier version of the Resource Module, *Get In The Act* has some scenes with numbers instead of character names, while most scenes include a setting and time.

Another example is Carol Tippit’s *Red Licorice: Monologues For Young People*. This collection contains scenes with titles such as “Llama Love”, “A Case Of The Flu”, “At The Beach”, and “Mr Manners”. Again the back cover advertises the main appeal of the scenes: they “have definite points of view, are written in today’s speech, have beginnings middles and ends” and represent “fresh slices of modern life”.

In some audition manuals, there is a commentary on the process of auditioning, and often a short discussion of the scene and various approaches to it. In the case of teacher’s resources, there are usually questions and answers about the scene, and ideas for discussions and further class activities. One such example is a scene workshop book soon to be published by Currency Press, *Scenes For Young Actors*, by Tony Woollams. The author has collected scenes from contemporary teenage plays including *Fossils*. The following is the introduction for a scene from *Fossils* where Franky and the girls meet at the train station.

A story of how to, or how not to, get quickly into the ‘in crowd’. This is always a challenge, particularly for teenagers. The issue is given another possible level for the student actor to develop, given Franky’s ‘ethnic’ origins. (Woollams, *still in publication*)

Many of the scenes are followed by questions to assist the student or teacher. In some cases, the questions are of a general nature to stimulate thought about the
scene and the play. Other questions are really suggestions for preparing to act out the scene.

Slightly less common are resources where the scenes presented are part of a larger structured process or 'system'. One 'system' book that deserves mention is *Dramakit*, by John Seely. Published in 1978, it is the only resource I have unearthed throughout my research for this thesis that is similar to the modular theatre concept. I'm sure there are other similar systems in existence, however I suspect they may be hard to find. I stumbled upon *Dramakit* almost by accident in the Curriculum Resources section of Sydney's Macquarie University library. *Dramakit* is intended for use with 10 to 15 year olds in a variety of different classroom situations and by teachers with a wide range of experience (Seely, 1978:v). It is presented in a ring binder (although the copy I found was coil bound) and divided into sections including scenemakers, predicaments, groupwork, and playkits. Each section represents a greater deal of complexity, for example, *scenemakers* offers simple activities for pairs and small groups, while *playkits* offer a broader, project-style organisation and lend themselves to presentation to an audience.

Each unit is divided up into six parts: who, when, where, actions, snippets, problems, and happenings. The concept of *who, when, and where* is self-explanatory. As is evident from the examples on the following pages, a series of options are presented, for example the people in the scene (*who*) could be a Headmaster, a cleaner, a prefect, "Old Bedsocks", or "Spud". The scene can be taking place (*when*) at dinnertime, 8.55 am, after school or midnight. The setting (*where*) for the scene could be a classroom, a corridor, a lab or a library. The *actions* list gives the most obvious starting points for drama, for example the characters may be "drawing a map," or "walking to school" or "having a fight." The *snippets* are segments of short snappy dialogue with the characters represented by a simple "A" or "B". According to Seely (1978:14), the *snippets* can either be the basis of further improvisation or remain as the actual script if unaltered. They essentially fulfil the same function as the scenes in my Resource Module, only at a far more rudimentary level. The *problems* represent a point of conflict; for example, "something very valuable to you is suddenly missing from
your desk”. The *happenings* seem to present a further obstacle, such as “the fire alarm goes off.”

The following two pages are an example of one unit from the *scenemakers* section, “At School”.

---

### at school

**Who**

- Headmaster
- Science teacher
- Dinner lady
- Cleaner
  - "Spud"
- First year caretaker
- "Duffo"
- Secretary
- Prefect
- Games teacher
- Sir
  - "Basher"
  - Fourth year "Old Bedsocks"
  - "Fluke"
  - "Nail"

**When**

- Dinner time
- 8.55 a.m.
- Half term
- Morning break
- Between lessons
- After school
- Saturday afternoon
- In a lesson
- Midnight

**Where**

- Classroom
- Corridor
- Lab
- Library
- Field
- Art room
- Bike shed
- Gym
- Playground
- Head’s study
- Craft room

**Actions**

- Drawing a map
- Walking to school
- Marking books
- Tidying the classroom
- Doing homework
- Doing an experiment
- Waiting to see the headmaster
- Playing football
- Doing needlework
- Doing woodwork
- Painting a picture
- Having a fight
- Queueing for dinner

*Fig 7. Page from John Seely’s “Dramakit”*  
snippets

A: I'm not going to tell him.
B: Well, I'm not.
A: You wanted to see me?
B: Yes I want a word with you.
A: Leave him alone, can't you?
B: He started it.
A: Not me.
B: Yes it was.
A: No it wasn't.
A: Go on, don't be a coward.
B: All right then, coming?
A: Yes.
A: What's that supposed to be?
B: I should have thought it was obvious.
All right - own up - who was it?

problems

Something very valuable to you is suddenly missing from your desk. You are fairly sure you know who might have taken it. Conversations with: a friend, a teacher, the suspect.

You accidentally break a window - it isn't really your fault, but because you have been in a lot of trouble recently you don't want to own up. Conversations with: a friend, a teacher, the caretaker.

happenings

The fire alarm goes.
'A and B are to see the Headmaster at once.'
There is a loud crash and the sound of shouting.

Dramakit is an ingenious system that is designed to help teachers create drama within the classroom. An introductory chapter titled, "Using Dramakit" contains notes on general planning and classroom organisation, detailed notes on the

organisation of a lesson, and a section on introductory games and exercises. By comparison, the Resource Module contains only a few pages of instruction to the teacher. Unlike Dramakit, however, the scenes in the module need far less explanation — each is a self-contained complete scene that can be used individually or combined with other scenes to make a longer program. More importantly, the scenes within the Resource Module were primarily designed to be delivered by a group of professionals who are already familiar with the material.

The case studies highlighted in this chapter fall within the category of Drama In Education — they were simply educational programs conducted within schools. There was no input from industry professionals which would classify them as Theatre In Education. When viewed in the context of other educational resources the Resource Module is deceptively similar to many other collections of scenes on offer. What sets it apart, however, is the way in which it can be used. The Mum and Dad characters, for example, were written specifically with the professional actors in mind. The Resource Module represents the material needed for a project such as K4K, however the material alone is not enough — there needs to be a method. This will be explored in the following chapter.
8. LECTURES & WORKSHOPS: REFINING THE ‘MODULAR’ METHOD

The world of knowledge takes a crazy turn; when teachers themselves are taught to learn.

* Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), German dramatist, poet. The Life of Galileo, sc. 6 (tr. by Howard Brenton, 1980).

In many ways the methodology for the modular theatre concept was established with the K4K project at Riverview however, a number of other factors contributed to its development. The numerous TIE productions of *Fossils*, and various related discussions, lectures and workshops all enabled me to identify the elements that contributed to the K4K Project’s success.

This chapter looks at aspects of various school lectures on *Fossils* that were ultimately incorporated into the modular theatre concept, and similarly discusses a number of key workshops, namely the Young Dramatists Page to Stage, Jigsaw Theatre teachers workshop and the Bradfield College residency program.

Based on a rise in playscript sales, and an increased rate of schools productions and enquiries, it seemed that *Fossils* was becoming more popular. I found myself running drama and writing workshops with groups such as Australian Theatre for Young People (ATYP), Bradfield College, Jigsaw Theatre, Young Dramatists, youth groups, and various schools throughout the state. The workshops were aimed not only at the students, but the teachers as well. The Young Dramatists Program focused on the development of a play from page to stage. It was a one-day workshop culminating in a performance of a short scene, and so has similarities with modular theatre in that it is a) focussed on process and, b) is run over a short period. The Jigsaw Theatre workshop introduced elements of the flexibility of the short scene concept, while the Bradfield residency highlighted some of the possible pitfalls of the residency concept.
"FOSSILS" RELATED LECTURES

*Fossils*’ inclusion as an elective in the NSW HSC Drama syllabus in 1997, meant that I would often be asked to give informal lectures to schools where students were studying it. For the last three years, the play has been and elective component of Topic 2, Theatre In Education, which in turn is a part of Topic 4 of the Drama syllabus. The question in the 1997 Exam for example was:

"Theatre in Education should have only one role – to entertain. It is not the role of theatre for young people to raise issues." Discuss this point of view in the light of the study you have made of Theatre in Education and with reference to the TWO plays you have studied.

*Fossils*, along with David Holman’s *No Worries*, Peta Murray’s *Spitting Chips* and Nick Enright’s *A Property of the Clan*, were the texts students could chose to study. A standard lecture or school visit is generally an extended question and answer session. In order to give the lecture some structure I plan to discuss the TIE genre, text and performance, and the general process of writing a play. This is usually altered depending on the demands of the students and the teacher. A past HSC Drama question relating to TIE is usually a good starting point, however often teachers like to capitalise on the fact that they have the writer in class, so the discussion moves towards the writing process.

As the modular theatre concept is based on a ‘process’ approach, an insight into what aspects of this process interests a class is worth examining. Much of the following is anecdotal and based on observations of several dozen lectures. Fortunately, I developed a habit of writing down my impressions of a particular lecture or workshop. I viewed this as mainly ‘professional development’, the idea being to note what worked well, what I could have done better, and how to improve my lecture for the next time.

One of the questions I am frequently asked is, “Our teacher told us Michelle’s breakfast scene *(for example)* is all about ‘lack of communication’ *(for example)*. Is that what you really meant?” Being careful not to directly contradict the teacher, I make the point that a playwright usually doesn’t set out to write “meanings” or themes, but rather dramatic action. I tell the students that in my opinion the audience interpretation is the only one that really matters – that’s what
makes action *dramatic* action. Another area of interest was the development of ideas for stories, characters, or situations – the background to a particular scene, for example, fascinated most students. They were amused to learn that my own dear mother was very much the inspiration for the character of Franky’s mother, and that the sandwiches she made me for school lunch were almost as frightening as depicted in *Fossils*!

The mechanical process of writing also interested students – for example, they were keen to find out where I write, do I write every day, and how long did the play take to write. These are, of course, relatively easy questions to answer. Many students wanted to know how a play gets to be published and how much money a writer makes. This usually leads to the all too familiar question, “Is writing your real job?”

If a writer were to be included as part of a TIE team, questions about the writing process are easily addressed. Certainly the practical process of choosing scenes, modifying them and then determining their placement within given dramatic structure further reinforces the writers role.

**YOUNG DRAMATISTS’ “PAGE TO STAGE” WORKSHOP**

The Young Dramatists’ “Page to Stage” is a Youth Arts project in which young people explore their views of the world through the theatrical process. Theatre practitioners, Anne Grigg and Eileen Hoare started the project in 1994. One of the key events is a workshop day, in this case held in May 1998, at North Sydney’s recently refurbished Independent Theatre. I first ran the playwriting component of the workshop in 1996, and happily, a positive response from the students and the committee ensured my continued involvement. The workshop day gives young people a chance to see their work transformed from words on a page to drama on stage. All participants are encouraged to write a short scene under the guidance of a professional writer. A professional director choses a few appropriate scenes, forming the basis of the performance workshop. With simple lighting and basic props these scenes are performed for the participants. What is unique about this workshop is that the whole process takes only three hours. It is a wonderful
chance for participants to gain a broad understanding of the dramatic process, guided by industry professionals. Opportunities like this are invaluable to students whose only contact with drama is often through school concerts and classroom English activities where the primary objective is evaluation, not creation.

Within the modular theatre concept, there is plenty of opportunity for the students to write some of the scenes in a particular module — ideally, this would involve workshops with the writer. In the “Page to Stage” workshops, very short scenes were produced in under an hour and it is worthwhile to examine the process used to achieve this. There are many methods of play (or in this case, scene) creation, and the following description is simply one that I found effective.

The first step is to ‘get something on paper’ using the burst-writing (or spontaneous writing) technique. In a short workshop, such as “Page to Stage”, the exercise alone has no context, so it is important to supply one. In a residency project such as K4K, the theme of the module would probably define the subject matter for the students. As most good drama stems from conflict, I usually begin by encouraging students to write down a few examples of conflict that they have experienced, using the four types of conflict as a guide (conflict between a person and themselves; another person; society; and nature). Their burst-writing exercise has to be based on one of their conflict situations. This in effect forces the student to ground their writing on a ‘real’ experience rather than complete fantasy. Students often want to write a spy thriller or a version of *Pulp Fiction*, or a bank robbery — in other words, something they know nothing about. While fantasy and imagination are naturally encouraged, sticking to something ‘closer to home’ is easier when starting out. Generally, students are encouraged to write for two characters, as it is perhaps easier, but if they feel the need to have more characters, there is no restriction.

After a brief introduction, students are given five minutes to write as much as they can. There are only two rules: 1) don’t edit yourself, and 2) don’t stop writing. Students are reminded that they should not consider meaning, structure, grammar, punctuation, or even character. Rather, they should simply start writing “whatever comes into their head.” This exercise, by itself, is not designed to produce a play.
It does, however, help overcome the hesitation of starting something and it allows students to write without the pressure of thinking what they write "has to be good".

The following is a typical example of the result:

A  Come one, we've got to go.
B  Nah, not yet.
A  Yes now.
B  Come on, ten more minutes.
A  No we've got to go now.
B  Hey look, ten minutes won't kill anyone.
A  We'll be late.
B  Fashionably.
A  Not really.
B  A party doesn't start until an hour after the official time anyway.
A  Yes it does. Heaps of people will be there.
B  Not really. Look, trust me.
A  (TURNS AWAY) Yeah sure.
B  Look chill, it's fine Okay?

This student did well in dramatising a situation of conflict. Because of the five-minute deadline, most burst-writing contains similar characteristics. As there is little time to write the characters' full names, they are usually represented by either 1 and 2, or A and B, or simply the initial of their name. In most cases, the gender of each character remains neutral, as in the example above, unless of course the dialogue indicates otherwise. Similarly, there is not enough time to write too many stage directions so quite often the context, or setting of the scene is also 'neutral'. The result is that in performance we were able to create many different combinations and variations.

Often, if students are unhampered by the conventional constraints of meticulously planning the plot, characters, and dialogue, they will discover a depth of feeling previously unknown about a subject. The following is an interesting piece, again written in five minutes by one of the Year 11 students from the workshop:
IN SHRINK'S OFFICE

GIRL  The window is the key to freedom. The escape I've longed for.

SHRINK  Freedom from what? Why do you feel trapped?

GIRL  I am trapped. I'm trapped in this hollow shell of a body. The skin is tight, it's tough too. Never surrendering to many attempts at forced exit.

SHRINK  Tell me about the window. Why do you like the window?

GIRL  Through the window I can see the others. The ones I'm supposed to be helping. The others he told me I couldn't help. I'm not allowed to help.

SHRINK  Who's he? Why did he tell you that you couldn't help?

GIRL  He's the one that trapped me, like he wants to trap the others on the street.

SHRINK  Do the people on the street see you looking?

GIRL  No. No one sees me. The world wasn't ready for me. The window is the only insight to the world I have.

Naturally further work would be needed on the scene to develop it properly, however the use of the window as a dramatic image is excellent. It's interesting to note that the psychiatrist/patient scenario is quite a common one in student workshops, particularly in the HSC Year!

Burst-writing can also unearth a few surprises. One particularly scruffy student looked so totally disinterested throughout my opening lecture, that I was curious why he had attended – the workshop was on a Sunday and students had paid $40 each to attend. He announced proudly that he hated drama and had only turned up because his parents made him. Rather than give up on him, I made sure he at least attempted the burst-writing exercise, then if he wanted, he could leave. The irony was that his piece showed a remarkable ear for colloquial comedy and was easily one of the more popular pieces when performed. This student named his characters Larry and Mick, and then subsequently wrote L and M to signify them. I have included the full names for all of the dialogue:

"LITTLE CHAMPION"

LARRY  Hey, it's the Little Champion!

MICK  Shut up.
LARRY Deadset, you're the Little Champion!
MICK Out of my way.
LARRY Few words of wisdom Little Champion?
MICK Yeah, if you don't move I'll punch ya in the face.
LARRY That's a gem Little Champion.
MICK You don't understand, do ya? I'm really gonna hit ya.
LARRY Right between the eyes, eh Little Champion. Right on the nose?

MICK HITS LARRY IN THE FACE
Whoa! That was a cracker. Right on the ol' schnoz. That was a corker of a hit. Onya Tyson. Little Champion.

MICK KICKS LARRY IN THE GROIN
Hey! Right in the Jatz Crackers. There goes Father's Day. That was a Maradona of a kick, Little Champion.

MICK Shut up.
MICK LEAVES
LARRY Yep ... he's really something that Little Champion

The short scenes are not necessarily finished products but rather starting points that can be further developed. In my experience of burst-writing exercises with hundreds of students most manage to write very interesting work. The following not only works well as a light comedy, but also has an interesting style. The student initially wrote A and B as character names, but as she has indicated who the characters were, I have included their full names in this example:

CHERYL WAITS FOR A BUS

CHERYL Great. Great. Fantastic. Fine. You go to Michael's. Oh, no ... I love going there for dinner. His charming table manners don't repulse me at all. I find it really inviting when he hands me lettuce with his fingers after he has just had his fat finger up his fat nose.

A MAN ARRIVES

MAN You waiting for the late bus?
CHERYL Yeah.
MAN Which one?
CHERYL The late one.
MAN Hmm ... You married?
CHERYL  Excuse me?
MAN    Attached? Engaged? Occupied? Detained?
CHERYL Yeah.
MAN    Hmm ...
(SILENCE)
You look distressed. Fight with the spouse?
CHERYL Well ... Yes.
(SILENCE)
I'm Cheryl.
MAN    Hi.
CHERYL He comes home fifteen minutes late from work and tells me we are going to Michael’s for dinner ... that’s his best friend’s brother-in-law. Anyway he’s a real pig, he lives in some filthy hole, and I hate going to his place. I mean he has those hypnotised bunnies that sit in front of his TV twitching. So I say I’m not going. I say let’s go to my mother’s instead. Then he says I’m being a hypocrite, and that I’m neurotic, and that I speak too fast, and that he hates my mother. So we had a huge verbal bash at each other and I left. Now I’m waiting for the late bus to go to my mother’s.
MAN    Oh ... the late bus has just gone.

It is interesting to note that with most scenes various thoughts are held together by an association of words or ideas much like links in a chain. The phrase “Little Champion” is a good example, as is the image of the window in a previous scene. However, sometimes words and ideas move along on one track and then all of a sudden jump to an entirely different topic – a break in the chain. In the ‘bus stop’ scene the man arriving breaks Cheryl’s soliloquy, and the man’s question “Are you married?” also breaks the direction of the conversation, and finally Cheryl’s lapse back into her soliloquy, again breaks into what seemed the natural end of the conversation. Creative theorists suggest it is important to cultivate those breaks in the chain. Jumping tracks from one category to another, is the beginning of what Edward de Bono calls ‘lateral thinking’ (de Bono, 1975). Indeed, there are some that define creativity as the ability to break away from conventional sequences of thought.
Sandra Bates, Artistic Director of Sydney’s Ensemble Theatre, ran the performance component of the workshop. She scanned through the collected burst-writing exercises, and during the lunch break selected a few to work on in the afternoon. At the end of the day, all the workshop participants gathered in the theatre as an audience to watch the selected scenes performed. Basic lighting was used to enhance the scenes, and the results were astounding. Seemingly ‘harmless’ words on scrappy paper had leapt off the page, in some cases creating quite a ‘professional’ theatrical experience. Needless to say most of the participants were pleasantly surprised — none more so than a particular ‘scruffy looking’ student who earlier on declared he hated drama.

**JIGSAW THEATRE’S SCRIPTMASTER WORKSHOP**

In August 1997, I ran a series of workshops for Jigsaw Theatre around the time *Fossils* was being performed. The “Scriptmaster” workshop was aimed directly at teachers and writers, and as the promotional leaflet suggested, was aimed to give them “more great ideas to use in the classroom”. There were about fifteen participants in each workshop – all of them teachers with backgrounds varying from amateur to professional theatre.

The bulk of the workshop featured discussion of the ‘modular theatre’ concept, as used in the K4K project at Riverview College. This was greeted with a great deal of enthusiasm. The teachers were very excited by the prospect of a collection of short scenes that they could manipulate to suit their needs. My experience with the project so far had indicated that the more practical the idea, the more enthusiastic the teachers were.

One of the exercises from these workshops is appropriate to discuss within the context of modular theatre – “The Shuffled Scenes” – as it introduced the mechanics of short scenes presented in any number of different combinations. I wrote eight short ‘scenes’ each consisting of four lines of dialogue. These were pasted on to eight cards and each card was numbered. Each card had the following characteristics:
There were no character names

The was no setting

There were no stage directions

Each line represented one character’s dialogue

The dialogue could apply to almost any situation

The following is an example of the cards used in the workshop.

Card 1

No way!
Go on...
No way!
Ten bucks.

Card 2

Let’s make it twenty.
That’s too high.
Okay ... fifteen.
What are you waiting for?

Card 3

Hang on ...
I’ll jump!
No don’t!
You’re a wimp.

Card 4

Okay ... here goes nothing.
One ... two ... three -
Whhooaaaah!
Are you okay?

Card 5

(SILENCE)
Hey ... I was only kidding ...
(SILENCE)
It was just a joke.

Card 6

Ha ha! Fooled you.
I knew you were joking.
You were freaking out.
I was not.

Card 7

You owe me fifteen.
I’m broke.
A deal’s a deal.
Yeah?

Card 8

I’m gonna thrash you.
Who says?
I say.
I reckon I’d thrash you first.
The cards were shuffled, the workshop participants were paired, and each pair selected a card. They had to find a context for the short scene, develop characters and perform it for the group. The sheer diversity of interpretations and responses to these relatively simple lines of dialogue was astounding. The teachers were asked to establish the main action of the scene, determine the conflict, and describe the characters. The cards were reshuffled and the teachers selected another card. This time both scenes were combined and performed with the new card being added to the beginning or end of the previous one. Again, the diversity of responses was quite impressive. The final variation to this exercise was reshuffling the set of cards and taking a third card, again adding it to the beginning or end of the existing set. With each extra card, the scene took on a new context and complexity. Some of the scenarios generated by the teachers included: partners learning to square dance; patients at a psychiatric ward; baking a cake; kids playing computer games; two gravediggers; even, two chipmunks getting nuts from a tree. The variety of course, is endless.

The purpose of the exercise was to highlight the effect of reorganising the order of scenes within a set group – the content remains the same, but the result is very different. The shuffling of the cards in the exercise, was a blueprint for the shuffling of scenes in modular theatre.

**BRADFIELD COLLEGE RESIDENCY PROGRAM**

In 1997, I was involved in a residency program at Sydney’s Bradfield College. The project was not featured in this thesis, as the script created was produced mainly by the students. Nonetheless, a brief description of the project is valuable as it highlights some of the pitfalls of self-devised scripts within the context of modular theatre.

Bradfield College, in Sydney, provides vocational courses that are accredited by both the Board of Studies and TAFE. One such course is in Entertainment and Performing Arts – the Entertainment Industry Skills Certificate. This course provides training and experience in the mediums of television, radio, and theatre. Students learn about the historical, social and industrial issues that shape the
Entertainment Industry in Australia and are introduced to a range of practical skills for each medium including production, writing, and performance. I was teaching a group of Year 11 students the writing component of the course and was involved with developing the framework of the course. To that end, I had numerous discussions with Paul Weingott, the Learning Coordinator of the Entertainment Course. The modular theatre concept seemed appropriate to the learning objectives of the course, however in order to integrate it within the writing component, it was decided that the students would write the scenes themselves. I would oversee the project in a similar capacity as K4K at Riverview, and Brendan O’Connell would be recruited to rehearse the students once their script was completed.

The aim was a ‘self devised’ show where I would act as the facilitator. I had expected the final performance would be a reasonably low-key in-class production. However the school wanted to see the scenes generated in class, reflected in a public performance. Focussing on the process was well and good, however as I was constantly reminded, “we have to show them something”. Naturally the desire for a “stunning production” was not just artistically motivated. An impressive production would mean greater bargaining power for the Entertainment Department in terms of their budget allocation.

Some of the difficulties encountered in creating the script highlight several points made in this thesis about group devised scripts. A major obstacle, and by far the most compelling, was the inordinate amount of time it took to generate the material. What we had initially planned to complete in four weeks of class time, took almost eight weeks. In addition, many substandard pieces of work were included on the grounds of equality.

The theme of the project – after much discussion – was ‘being a teenager’. Students engaged in numerous burst-writing exercises and were given time in class to refine their scripts. There were some extremely cathartic scenes presented – clearly some of the class had found a medium to express themselves, their fears, and indeed their views on the world.
Progress on the script was painfully slow. Once the initial euphoria of creating a scene had worn off, it was difficult to motivate the students to \textit{revise} their scenes. Students were expected to work on their scenes 'in their own time'. Unfortunately this never eventuated – put simply, they didn’t do their homework. As a consequence, an inordinate amount of time was spent refining and modifying the scenes in class. I would basically act as dramaturg on the students’ work – a process which, often led to conflict. While many students were thrilled at the opportunity of working with a writer to improve their scene, others were resistant to any change and indeed felt it an affront to their creativity to have their work tampered with. Naturally, in these cases, their work was not altered.

As a writer, I found the process challenging but not overly taxing. It may be harder, however, for a teacher with little or no playwriting experience to make similar revisions. Paul Weingott was running the same project with his class; although he is an experienced teacher and an actor with an impressive background, he is not a writer. He felt working with the students on their script was the hardest part of the process.

A further difficulty encountered was that every student’s work had to be represented in the final production in order to give each one a meaningful grade. This meant that many substandard pieces of writing were included. An egalitarian outlook would say that the overall standard of the work would benefit from those who were more creative. However, in reality, the standard of the script was lowered by the inclusion of some scenes on the grounds of fairness – often proving a disillusioning experience for all concerned.

Certainly, in the context of modular theatre and the K4K residency process, pre­scripted material is far more suitable than self-devised material. It could be argued that the writing process allows for self-expression. That is certainly true. Some of the work the students created was excellent. The problem was that much of it wasn’t – unless of course you took the view that “It’s really great ... considering they’re only students”.

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The rationale that “a good actor can make anything work”, seems to be at odds with the concern over the quality of the work. The salient point is that not all students are good actors – most will need the added security of strong material.

The blame here ultimately rests with me as the dramaturg of the project. I brought to the project the skills of the writer, but not necessarily those of the drama educator. Even in my capacity as facilitator, my lack of experience in group-devised work probably led to a somewhat limited approach. It is important to stress that the problems with group-devised material as encountered in the Bradfield project are only relevant when viewed within the context of modular theatre. No doubt, there are many examples of highly successful and entertaining group-devised projects within the realm of drama in education.

In terms of the rehearsals, the process was similar to the one used for both K4K and Dramaworks. Unfortunately, the level of discipline and commitment was not the same – the students were expected to do a bulk of the rehearsal in their own time, however, most clearly placed it very low on their list of priorities. To an extent this was understandable as many were coping with quite heavy study workloads.

Brendan O’Connell and Paul Weingott did a wonderful job getting the class ready for a short series of performances to parents, friends, school staff, and fellow students. With the reality of ‘opening night’ looming, the last few weeks of rehearsal were quite intensive with students rehearsing after school and on weekends. The final performances were a great effort from the class, and a credit to Brendan and Paul. Nonetheless, in terms of the script, I was left with the uneasy impression that, “It’s really great … considering they’re only students”.

The various lectures on Fossils, the Young Dramatists’ “Page to Stage” workshop, the Jigsaw Theatre teachers workshop and the Bradfield College residency program all highlighted a few concepts and exercises that could be successfully incorporated into the modular theatre concept, namely:
Students would benefit from some discussion of the mechanics of the writing process.

Exercises such as “The Shuffled Scenes” are most useful as a prelude to working with the scenes within the module.

Burst-writing exercises and various script workshops may generate additional scenes that could be integrated with the Resource Module.

The pre-scripted Resource Module should be the foundation of any modular theatre residency project, rather than group-devised material.

With the material, in the form of the Resource Module, completed; and a methodology established, the following chapter outlines a possible approach the ‘modular theatre’ process.
9. K4K: TOWARDS AN APPROACH TO MODULAR THEATRE

Drama is life with the dull bits cut out.


The projects examined in this thesis represent two different approaches to TIE. Firstly, there is the more traditional *product* based approach as with *Fossils*, where a play is performed for a school, with any further activity usually taking place without the involvement of the TIE team. Secondly, there is the more experimental *process* based approach such as *Johnny* and the K4K Project that, over a set period, integrated a team of theatre professionals within a school environment in order to produce and perform a play.

Both *Johnny* and *Parents* are in a sense ‘snapshots’, of a particular production. They are the result of a particular rehearsal process and represent the collective decisions of those working on the project. The teachers and the team working on the project coordinate these decisions. Both projects would come under the banner of residency programs as discussed in this thesis, however there is a fundamental difference with the K4K Project – most residency programs create the script, while K4K is based on a script which is already written: the Resource Module. Interestingly enough, I am not aware of many such residency programs operating within the school environment in Australia – this is perhaps a reflection of the limits of my personal experience. I am aware of youth theatres engaged in playbuilding and collective group devised projects; and no doubt there are many examples of similar community theatre projects. There seems to be even fewer projects within schools, where theatre professionals are integrated with the teachers and students over an extended period of time.

This chapter examines residency projects such as K4K and proposes a model that could perhaps be implemented in our schools. The chapter is divided into four sections, each addressing fundamental questions regarding modular theatre,
What are the raw materials needed to implement modular theatre within our schools? Who needs to be involved? What is the process? And, what are the benefits of modular theatre?

I will use a fictitious school, Bayfield High (appropriately the name of the school used in *Fossils*), to illustrate many of the points made. Bayfield High, then, is a moderately large school with about 500 students. It caters for both boys and girls from Years 7 to 12. It is situated in one of the larger towns of regional NSW.

**WHAT IS NEEDED?**

The aim of modular theatre is to introduce a selected group of school students to an intensive theatrical process that ultimately culminates in a public performance, and to integrate professional theatre practitioners (the K4K team) in that process. I use the term 'K4K team' to differentiate practitioners working with the prescribed Resource Module, from the standard TIE team.

The raw materials needed for a project such as this are the Resource Module itself, time, space, and money. While the concept of having time allocated and space available within a school may seem obvious, good planning and a suitable work environment are essential elements to the success of the project. So too is funding, particularly as the input of professional theatre practitioners is a fundamental requirement.

**The Resource Module**

The Resource Module itself is clearly central to the modular theatre concept. The K4K team and the teachers would work with a module that contains about 25 scenes. Each collection of scenes (or module) would be linked by a common theme. In the case of the projects in this thesis, that theme has been 'parents'. Further modules could focus on issues familiar to TIE, such as self-esteem, drug awareness, and so on. Each module would have a title to identify it, for example the *Parents Module*, the *Drug Awareness Module*, or simply *Resource Module*.

A summary, outlining the contents of each module would be available to teachers.
so they are able to decide on an appropriate module for their school. Bayfield High has decided to work with the *Parents Module*.

While theoretically the number of scenes in each module is flexible, around 25 is an ideal number. If there are too few, the possibilities, combinations and variations are reduced. If there are too many, the alternatives increase to a point where they become unmanageable. Also there is the temptation to use *all* of the scenes, simply “because they’re there”. As it stands, the 25 short scenes could be performed in just over an hour.

The scenes within the module have a number of common characteristics in terms of structure and content. Generally, each scene has one ‘featured’ character and a number of ‘support’ characters; most scenes contain an element of direct address; and only essential stage directions are included.

While the featured character is the ‘star’ of the scene, the ‘support characters’ are also important. The support roles have been written with the professional actors in mind. A good example from the *Parents Module* is the Mum and Dad characters – the ‘generic’ parents. In the productions of *Johnny and Parents*, Mum and Dad were seated upstage in the background. In both performances the actors read from their script even though they knew their lines. This ‘rehearsed reading’ technique reinforced the characters supporting role – the focus remained on the young performers. The support characters need to successfully blend into the world of the play. To use an example outside of the ‘parents’ concept, if the theme of the module were ‘school related’, then obvious support characters might be a teacher, sports coach, librarian, maintenance person or even the principal.

The use of direct address by the featured character is another important stylistic consideration. It creates an immediate connection with the audience, which is vital when presenting essentially a series of vignettes. It also eliminates the need for cumbersome exposition.

It is important that the script allows a variety of interpretations. For this reason most scenes have no indication of the setting, unless it is vital to the context of the action. Similarly, only absolutely essential stage directions are included.
In terms of the module itself, there should be some variety within the 25 scenes. Some scenes may be monologues, others duologues, and some with multiple characters. Some scenes should be short and to the point, while others can be a little longer and more complex. This gives greater scope for the teacher and K4K team when allocating scenes to students, and gives the audience some welcome variety.

Apart from varying the number of scenes used, teachers and students are able to change the character’s gender, for example, to suit the needs of the group. Jargon and slang can be modified and updated, character names changed, scenarios developed and expanded, and of course, the overall order of the scenes is completely flexible.

Depending on the duration of the residency, a writer may be involved in creating student-devised material that may also be incorporated into the Resource Module. The main difference between this and a completely self-devised show is that the student’s scenes would only be included if they were of a high enough standard. A good incentive for the students to produce quality work could be a program credit and proportional share of the royalties. For example: Parents, by Manuel Aston, with additional scenes by Adam Smith and Eve Brown. In some cases, issues specific to a particular school can be addressed in an appropriately written scene. For example, perhaps a football accident has left a student confined to a wheelchair. The K4K team may devise a scene that focuses on some of the difficulties faced by disabled people. Theatre in this context is a tool for understanding as much as entertainment.

**Time and Space**

In terms of space, a rehearsal area and a performance area (they can both be the same) is essential. This may be a classroom, a school hall, or perhaps even a professional theatre. The beautifully appointed Drama Theatre at Riverview College certainly made the rehearsal process easier. The access to first class technical facilities, and the ambience of a ‘real theatre’ without doubt had a major impact on how the performers felt about the project. Rehearsals in a crowded annex or on one half of a basketball court can be quite frustrating. Performing in
the same venues would be even worse! I recall one TIE performance of *Fossils* situated in the common area between the sports storeroom and the canteen. Fifteen minutes before the end of the show the lunch bell sounded leaving the actors valiantly performing over demands of “sausage roll and chips”! Practically, though, the minimum requirement in terms of ‘space’ is the provision of an area that is preferably indoors, uncluttered by tables, desks and chairs, and of sufficient size to allow free movement.

Basic amenities like a rest room and perhaps tea and coffee facilities (generally in the staff-room) are always appreciated. For a project like K4K, the provision of these amenities take on a greater significance as the team will usually be there for a full day as opposed to a few hours. While at Bayfield High, the professional actors have access to the staff room. In terms of basic stage equipment, any resource available to the school – such as moveable rostra, lights, props, and so on – is useful.

Bayfield High will use an area called the music room for rehearsals. Their production will use a minimal set and very few props, so the room is ideal for rehearsal. The final performances will be in the Bayfield Civic Theatre. This is a small thrust stage with raked seating, which has the capacity to seat up to 250 people. It is used mainly by professional touring companies, the University drama society, and amateur drama groups.

**Money**

Ideally, the funding for a project such as modular theatre would be generated by box office takings, and some form of financial support from the school – some schools may have a performing arts budget to draw on. The public performances give the school an opportunity to raise revenue to fund the entire project.

The issue of funding is one that the students should also be involved in. A true-to-life approach would have students apply for funding from the school. They could prepare a budget and including anticipated expenses such as ticketing, posters, programs, theatre hire and so on. Naturally, the cost of the K4K team would vary depending on the number of intended performances, workshops, and actors.
involved. The students would then find ways of raising the money needed by determining ticket prices and devising various fundraising options.

For larger theatre companies donations and fundraising represents a smaller percentage of their revenue, however for school and amateur groups this is often their main income apart from box office takings. Most of the money that was used to fund Johnny came from a number of ‘charity performances’ where parents paid a slightly higher ticket price, and various raffles and competitions. The play was also entered in a number of festivals, such as Theatrefest, which offers cash prizes. The money was then used to fund further performances. This ‘lamington drive’ approach to funding is shunned by most professional theatre companies as it is considered mainly the domain of amateur groups, however any further cuts in arts funding may see an resurgence in this style of fund raising.

The drama students at Bayfield High spent some class time preparing a budget. Based on the Riverview project the following budget would be a reasonably conservative estimate of Bayfield High’s expenses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>TOTAL COST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation – meetings and planning sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 actor</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditions and casting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 actors @ 300 per day each</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehearsals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 actors @ 300 per day each</td>
<td>1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical and dress rehearsal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 actors @ 100 per rehearsal</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 actors @ 100 per performance</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royalty Payments</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs, tickets and posters</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>printing and copying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL COST</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The school has decided on three performances at the Bayfield Civic Theatre. The Theatre’s association with the school’s Drama Department has meant that there were no charges for the theatre hire. Printing costs were kept to a minimum because a student’s father worked at the local printers. The students and their teacher decided on a ticket price of $10, with a target of 300 tickets to be sold. The remaining $1,500 shortfall in the budget would be raised by collecting $1,000 from fundraising efforts and $500 representing a combined payment from those students selected to perform – in other words, each student (of say a total of 10 students) would pay $50 towards the K4K teams’ fees. This method of direct payment is quite common for students involved in representative sport for example. The students also decided to print the tickets early so they are able to pre-sell them to parents, friends, and relatives. In event of a financial loss (itself a learning experience) the school has agreed to make up the difference.

Perhaps if the modular theatre concept is embraced by educational institutions, there may some scope in a K4K team funded by Australia Council or the Department of Education. The dilemma then is that although enjoying greater financial security, the K4K team’s work would be subjected to greater control. The various funding decisions that have to be made can be an invaluable learning experience for the students. They would at least understand that theatre does not operate in a vacuum – it may be artistic, but it still needs money to survive.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

The K4K team

The concept of integrating industry professionals within the school environment has been mentioned often in this thesis. It is a fundamental aspect of most residency programs, including modular theatre. While this integration occurs with a standard TIE performance, it is usually limited to questions and answers after the show, and at best perhaps a workshop. In modular theatre the actors and students work together throughout the rehearsals and on stage during the performance itself. The background and qualifications of the K4K team are of course crucial.
In traditional TIE, the team member’s acting ability is a primary consideration, while teaching experience a bonus. In modular theatre, teaching experience is essential. A gifted actor who is unable to teach and inspire the students is of little use to modular theatre. The emphasis of process over product is once again highlighted. Interestingly enough, quite a few actors and directors have a background in education – the two disciplines do, after all, have quite a few similarities. Teachers ‘perform’ to an ‘audience’ of sorts. Similarly many actors and directors turn to teaching as a way to supplement their income.

Ideally each team member would also have skills in writing, directing and acting. Writing skills are in a sense optional, however can add to the experience by allowing the team member to run writing workshops, ‘customise’ a scene if necessary, or even facilitate a number of new scenes written by the students.

In Bayfield High, there is particular excitement because one of the actors in the K4K team was a regular on one of the evening soap operas in the mid 1990’s. She has since then completed the NIDA Director’s Course, acted in and directed many fringe theatre shows, and has recently written and directed a critically acclaimed one woman show. She runs regular workshops at NIDA and the Australian Theatre for Young People. The other member of the K4K team originally trained as a teacher. He taught in schools for a few years, where he was heavily involved in the school drama scene, particularly the Rock Eisteddfods. He left teaching to pursue a career in acting. After the usual array of commercials, walk ons and bit parts he took on the role of Education Officer for a professional young people’s theatre company. There was enough flexibility in the company for him to act in, direct, and even write a few of the company’s plays.

Students

At the primary school level of education, experiences in drama and theatre are usually available to all students, both as viewers and participants. Beyond the primary school, a process of selection begins as students plan individual programs of study that may or may not include courses in theatre or any of the arts. The study of drama then becomes a matter of choice, and performance activities in general are also voluntary and usually limited to those students whose inclinations...
and talents lead them to seek continuing experiences in the art form. It would be wrong however, to assume that projects such as K4K should be offered only to these students.

At Riverview, quite a few students auditioned to be part of K4K even though, according to their teachers, they had expressed no real interest in drama. It is important that projects such as modular theatre should not exclude the general student body – in a sense it should be geared to serve the cultural needs of the entire school community. There are many opportunities for students to be involved in the project even though they may not actually be performing in it. The production roles such as producer, production manager, poster design, ticket distribution, stage management, props, lighting and sound, are good examples.

Determining the optimum number of performers can be difficult. The problem with large casts is the same as when there are too many students in a class – the teacher cannot give each student individual attention. The more students there are the greater the logistical problems in rehearsing the play, and in performing it – rehearsal would become more an exercise in crowd control rather than a productive event. While it is rarely an issue, the opposite is also a problem, if there are too few students then the process becomes far too elite and naturally the performance demands on each student is greater. The experiences of past productions would suggest an ideal number of between 8 to 12 students. This is based on the number of scenes available and the duration of an average show – a 50 minute performance is, in my opinion, long enough for this style of ‘direct address’ theatre.

In Bayfield High, the auditions are open to all Year 10 students. Notices have been placed on the school noticeboard, in the newsletter, the school paper, and generally posted in various locations throughout the school. It is anticipated that about 8 to 10 people will be selected to perform.

School Staff

Naturally, the school teaching staff play a vital role as the link between the K4K team and the students. Generally, one teacher would be responsible for the project
and act as liaison. In that capacity, they would help the K4K team to understand more fully the organisation and policies of the school.

In the case of the K4K Project, early discussions with the drama coordinator at Riverview, Anthony Renshaw, were vital to the team’s understanding of that particular school environment. In the quest for efficiency, standard TIE teams often have little or no time to interact with the teachers. They are usually preoccupied with arranging and constructing the set, changing, and doing all the many technical preparations necessary for the performance. Teachers for their part, are busy rounding up students. In this crucial period, therefore, both sides are almost totally concerned with their own organisational problems, wanting to be separate when the emphasis should be on coming together. One unfortunate effect of this separation is to increase the ‘magic’ of the team’s image, especially in the eyes of the teachers. In my experience, very few actors have ever been in the staffroom for example before the performance (unless of course the staffroom was the dressing room, in which case the teachers were bundled out). This statement is not made as a criticism, but it does draw attention to the need for closer relationships between the teachers and the TIE team. The link between the team and the teachers in the schools must be a good one, and one that works both ways.

The teacher involved in the Bayfield High project has suggested a ‘coffee and a chat’ with the actors before the process begins. The members of the K4K team welcomed this as it gave both parties a chance to establish a relationship before working with the students. The meeting was very productive, with the K4K team members finding out that the teacher has quite a reasonable string of professional credits. On the other hand, the teacher learned that both actors have a background in teaching.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS?

At its simplest, the modular theatre process can be a modest one-off production in class with only a select group of students involved. Alternatively, it can be a comprehensive production in a professional theatre with an audience of family and friends, complete with tickets, posters, publicity, and the general fanfare that
surrounds a larger theatrical event. Whatever the case there needs to be preparation which includes the planning process, auditions and casting, rehearsals, performances, and finally the follow up.

**Preparation**

The preparation phase is in some ways the most important. Much like pre-production in the film industry, it is where the ultimate success of a production is determined. It includes the planning, promotion, and orientation session.

The organisation of a theatrical program within a school makes extra demands on time, space, and resources. Usually, the more innovative the program, the more complicated the logistics. A straight one off performance of a play such as *Fossils* is relatively simple to factor into the timetable, whereas a project like K4K is likely to take considerable effort in planning. A good plan would include for example, the dates and times for meetings, rehearsals and performances, areas allocated for rehearsal, and so on. Any schedule should be agreed on and put in writing. This is vital, as all involved need to know the relevant details before the project commences – just like any professional production. Weekend rehearsals depend on parents and grandparents to bring the students – most families appreciate adequate notice.

At Bayfield High, the teacher responsible for coordinating the project has done most of the planning. Some aspects were completed in class time with the help of the class. The result was a plan that was submitted to the principal in order to gain approval for the project, and obtain some sort of funding within the school arts budget.

The aspect of promotion is often overlooked, yet is another crucial component to the modular theatre process. The whole project itself needs to be promoted in order to encourage a good response for the auditions. Then, once committed to a public performance, the school also needs to promote their event. As discussed earlier in the chapter, determining a budget and raising money is vital to the project’s success. I recall a lively debate with a group of students who felt my
emphasis on ‘getting an audience’ was being too ‘commercial’. I put forward the view that theatre, by definition, needs to have an audience.

Promotion could be through editorials in the local newspapers, school newsletters, posters, radio programs, and so on. In the case of Johnny, promotion was mainly through ‘word-of-mouth’. The Australian College of Entertainment had a large and loyal group of supporters made up mainly of family and friends. For performances at the Opera House, a poster was designed, and a reduced version was distributed as a flyer. For Riverview’s production of Parents, a poster and leaflets were distributed around the school and the local area. This was all organised by the students. They also designed the poster and accompanying flyer. No doubt, these activities contributed to a greater understanding of the theatre experience. Bayfield High, similar to these examples, has produced a poster designed by the students, printed tickets to be pre-sold, and copied and distributed audition notices throughout the school.

It is interesting to note that in many of the TIE programs I have been involved with, the use of programs was not particularly common. Generally, it was seen as an extra expense that the company could do without. A well presented program is as much of a promotion for the school as it is for the K4K team. The lack of professionally produced programs for so many of the professional TIE companies is disappointing as it implies that TIE is somehow of less value than it’s mainstream counterpart.

Bayfield students designed and printed their programs. Each program would be sold for two dollars. Local businesses paid for advertising space including the printer who in exchange for his advertisement, produced the program at cost.

Some form of orientation session is vital to again clarify the essential dates and agree on the ‘ground rules’. This is usually most effective after the initial casting has been completed, but before the first rehearsal. The ground rules usually include issues such as lateness, correct clothing for rehearsals, general behavioural issues, and not least, the student’s responsibility for private rehearsal. Students need to be disciplined in their approach to learning lines for example, as a lot will be expected off them in a short time. Most students react very well to what may
seem like a reasonably strict set of guidelines. The key is making clear exactly what the parameters are – what will and what will not be tolerated.

Based on the auditions and final casting, the teacher and team members need to allocate the scenes. This is also best done in the orientation session. Usually the suitability of various students to various roles will be obvious, and the scene allocation and naming of characters will be relatively quick process. Scenes can always be reallocated later in the rehearsal process if glaring errors are detected. A team member would then generate the revised scripts, with the appropriate gender and names. Revised scripts can be sent to the school via email for copying, or simply given to the teacher on a standard floppy disk.

Auditions and Casting

The audition process that was used in the K4K project at Riverview serves as a good blueprint for Bayfield High. A date for auditions should be set, and then be well promoted. Students should arrive with a prepared piece and in addition, be given one of the scenes from the module to cold read. The teacher and team members need to determine how long they can spend on each student based on the number of people auditioning. After each student audition, the rehearsal dates needs to be confirmed. It would be pointless to discover an exciting new talent only to find they won’t be available for rehearsals. The criteria used to select students will of course vary from school to school, and project to project. In some cases, the main factor is simply raw talent; in others, it may be boundless enthusiasm.

The teacher at Bayfield is certain that at least 20 students will audition. He is pleasantly surprised on audition day with 35 students attending. Some are there out of curiosity – they just wanted to meet the professional actors. Others are there because of their friends, however most are keen to be involved in the project. At the end of a long and busy day, 12 students are selected with two as understudies. These students are notified by a telephone call from the teacher. An official ‘list’ is posted on the school noticeboard.
Rehearsals

The major considerations regarding rehearsals are — *how many* should there be, *when* should they take place, and *what* is the process?

The results from Riverview College’s K4K project would indicate that three full day rehearsals are adequate. This may seem like an impossibly small amount of time given the public performance looming at the end. One major consideration, of course, is the budget. Each full day rehearsal involving two actors would cost at least $600. In addition, it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking, “the more rehearsals, the better”. The following experience at Bradfield College illustrates my point.

Students seem to rise to the ‘challenge of the impossible’. In 1997, I was called in to Bradfield College to take their Entertainment students for two 2 hour lessons, as the regular teacher was ill. My task for the students was to write and complete a short video documentary. The general feeling from my colleagues was that this was impossible. My strategy was to tell the students that although most people thought we couldn’t do this, I wanted to create a short documentary in just two lessons. The reaction was one of enthusiastic solidarity — “we’ll show them.” Students ignored break times and fervently went about the task of making their video. In two lessons, four groups each managed to shoot a short three-minute documentary. The documentaries were very basic, but quite presentable. The Entertainment faculty at the college was so impressed with the results that the following year the ‘documentary project’ became the major assessment task for a subject on video production. The logic was “if the students can create this in two lessons, imagine what they can do in 18 lessons”. Unfortunately, the result of the semester’s work was only marginally better than the ‘two-class’ documentaries. There was probably a myriad of reasons for this. As a formal assessment task, the documentary became bogged down with scripts, treatments, progress reports, homework, assignments, evaluation sessions and so on. Perhaps the lesson learned from the Bradfield experience is that a clear and challenging goal will often produce the best results.
The timing of the rehearsals is also important. School students, unlike professional actors, spend most of their weekdays in class. Should rehearsals therefore be in school time or outside of school time? Based on my own experience, those projects where the bulk of the work was conducted in class time were far slower and ultimately more inefficient than projects run outside of class time. In-class rehearsals run the risk of becoming nothing more than “another class activity” and therefore simply a way of passing time – for both students and the teacher! As an extracurricular activity, rehearsals could only be held after school or on weekends. In my opinion, full day rehearsals give the students a better sense of what a professional rehearsal would be like – most students involved with the Riverview project found the full day rehearsals productive and rewarding. Naturally, full day rehearsals can only be programmed on weekends.

Each rehearsal will probably involve two – sometimes three – team members and the teacher, all working with the students in one large area. The atmosphere should be very busy and active. The actors would take students through a series of warm-up games and various exercises that complement the nature of the scenes in the module. The perception of acting, for many students, may be simply remembering lines while a director tells them what to do and where to stand. The early rehearsals should give them exercises to help understand the way their character thinks. Some students may also have problems with the concept of direct address, so any exercise designed to give them confidence in talking the audience, is useful.

There should be great emphasis on the students rehearsing in their free time. For example by the second rehearsal, it would be reasonable to expect them to have their lines learned. Students should be given around two weeks break between the rehearsals. Any less than that and they would probably find it hard to achieve the goals set for them. Any longer than two weeks, and the process runs the risk of becoming too protracted and stale.

If a fully functional theatre is being used for public performances, then a technical rehearsal should be incorporated into the schedule. It is important for those involved as crew to also get a chance to ‘rehearse’ as well.
Bayfield High had three full-day rehearsals scheduled on Sundays, two weeks apart. As the performance would be in the Civic Theatre the last full-day rehearsal was in the theatre itself, with a technical and a dress rehearsal also scheduled.

**Performances**

Naturally, the highlight of the project is the performance. Like professional theatre, the final production is what the process is all about. It gives the students an opportunity to gain recognition and kudos for their performance, and it gives the school an opportunity to pay for the project via ticket sales. The performances at Bayfield Civic Theatre were well received, with an enthusiastic response from students, staff, and parents.

**Follow-up**

While the performance may be the highlight of the modular theatre process, it certainly should not be the end of it. It is very important to have some sort of evaluation and follow-up. For example the performances themselves can be reviewed, perhaps through a video record, or perhaps through the general response of those who saw the play. Teachers can focus on issues such as what was learned? Has the student’s views on theatre changed as a result of the project? The whole class should be encouraged to participate by perhaps writing reviews of the play, and evaluating the performance. Those who were involved in the rehearsals should share their experiences with the rest of the class.

Financially the project was a very pleasant surprise for Bayfield High. They managed to pre-sell 200 tickets and a further 50 tickets at the door bringing in $2,500 of box office revenue. A number of complementary tickets were distributed to the program advertisers, local newspapers and radio stations, and school board members and benefactors. Program sales and advertising generated $600, fundraising efforts $600 and direct payments by the project participants netted $500. The total income for the project was $4,200. The expenditure was exactly as budgeted, at $4,500. The school’s arts fund paid the extra $300. It was money well spent according to the principal. Not only did the selected students
gain a valuable insight into the theatrical process, but also the school and the K4K team gained positive publicity for the whole project. The performances themselves were well received by the parents and students alike.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?**

All the benefits and enrichment of any theatrical program is contained in the modular theatre process – it provides a means of expression and communication, explores personal issues, and develops social skills. The NSW Board of Studies 2 Unit Drama Syllabus states that by studying drama, students can acquire skills in

Interpretation, communication, performance and critical analysis, and

become aware of the technical processes and new technologies which may be used to heighten dramatic presentation.

“Drama,” it continues, “develops the potential talents and capacities of all students – physical, emotional, intellectual, social, creative and expressive.”

Modular theatre offers students the following *added* benefits:

- They gain a realistic view of the theatrical process from planning, to performance, to evaluation.
- They develop the discipline of the actor’s craft through emphasis on private rehearsal.
- They have the opportunity to perform with professional actors.
- They gain a greater understanding of the structural decisions involved in creating a play through the flexibility of the scenes within the Resource Module.

The benefits to the teacher may be summarised as follows:

- They benefit from the interaction with theatre professionals.
- The modular theatre program is comprehensive and flexible learning tool that can be adapted to suit various class sizes and various levels of experience and understanding.
- The program is easily integrated into the school environment.
The model for modular theatre presented in this chapter is, in a sense, merely a blueprint that can be revised and built upon. Nonetheless, it provides students with a realistic process-based approach to theatre. Drama in general provides an experience of theatre in school – where for many children attitudes to the arts are first formed. If the arts flourish in the schools there will be greater prospects of it flourishing in the community.
10. CONCLUSION

We are not certain; we are never certain. If we were, we could reach some conclusions, and we could at last, make others take us seriously.

*Albert Camus (1913-60), French-Algerian philosopher, author. Jean-Baptiste Clamence, in The Fall (1956).*

The arts are an integral part of all human societies. They are symbolic forms of explanation, understanding, and communication that we engage in to make sense of the world. They give expression to our experiences and perceptions. They provide ways by which we can acquire and develop new understanding, imagine new possibilities and reaffirm or challenge standards and values. The arts reflect and depict the diversity of our world, its cultures, lifestyles and traditions, historical contexts and belief systems. The arts engage our skills, abilities, intellects and judgements and can lead to vocations and recreational pursuits. They offer us numerous modes for receiving making and sharing meaning.

Drama is one of the oldest art forms known, and appears to have its origin in the impulse to imitate, symbolise and ritualise experiences in an attempt to understand and control them. Each culture has developed and explored drama in different ways for a variety of purposes — including social, political, religious, entertainment, and educative.

Schools provide a basis for life-long learning. Students encounter the effects and products of the arts throughout their lives. They develop ideas about the nature and range of the arts from a variety of sources. Education in the arts highlights the role the arts play in society and highlights its place in our cultural heritage. It encourages young people to make informed decisions about the role it can play in their lives.

Theatre In Education attempts to marry together the didactic, the polemic and the aesthetic to create a piece of work that encourages an active approach to learning rather than a passive one, whilst also ensuring that the work itself is vibrant, contemporary and fresh. The fact that TIE plays seek to educate a young audience
provides the director and cast with a purpose and a unique set of demands and constraints. The communication technology of the modern world has created an audience more sophisticated and cynical, and also less familiar with traditional methods of entertainment such as theatre.

This thesis has documented the creation of three projects that reside within TIE’s framework, then discussed the development of a related Resource Module, and finally has proposed a way of working with that module – modular theatre. The three projects evolved with each building on the strengths of the former. When I embarked upon this thesis, more than five years ago, the idea was to document the development of a series of short scenes collectively titled If Johnny Jumped Off the Harbour Bridge, Would You? The scenes were intended for use in the classroom as the basis of drama exercises, and eventually as the foundation of a short play suitable for public performance. The ‘pilot’ project was at the Australian College of Entertainment with students who had already demonstrated a strong vocation for the performing arts and were furthering their acting, dancing and singing skills through extra-curricular classes. The methodology in developing Johnny provided a framework for further projects, an important consideration being the use of a team of professionals including an actor, director and myself as writer.

The idea at the time was to observe and document the way in which different schools responded to the group of scenes presented to them. Early attempts to formulate a working hypothesis resulted in criteria that were impossibly broad. What after all could my thesis hope to find? Would there be any basis to conclude, for example, that a girls’ school was more successful in working with a script than a boys’ school, or a school in a higher socioeconomic area produced a better result than a lower one. And even if differences were observed, it would be difficult to gauge their significance. As indicated in Chapter 1 when referring to Arts Education Research, drama is “a non-reproducible experience” (Carroll, 1996:77). Every performance and indeed workshop process would be unique, depending on the personalities involved, the nature of the team, the teachers – the list of variables is exhaustive!
A more appropriate approach to my thesis, and one that sat far more comfortably within the guidelines of a DCA submission, was to document the genesis, theoretical framework, and eventual performance of a selected creative work. Initially that selected work was *Johnny*, however Theatre South’s encouragement for me to develop a new play based on *Johnny*, expanded the scope of the creative work examined in the thesis. The resulting play, *Fossils*, and its enthusiastic reception from students, teachers and the arts community in general, presented a golden opportunity to analyse a more traditional TIE touring program. The method of working with the short scenes as used in *Johnny* was once again observed at Riverview College resulting in the play *Parents*. The focus of this project, however, was the integration of a team of industry professionals within the school environment. The three projects led to the creation of the *Resource Module* – 25 short scenes based on the relationship of parents with their teenage children. The module was revised as a result of comments from teachers and students who worked with it. The emergence of computer based technologies – in particular the Internet – will no doubt lead to further changes to the *Resource Module*.

The primary objective of this thesis however, as set out in Chapter 1, has been to document selected creative work and to demonstrate that the work itself and the use of that work is an original and significant contribution to the field of Theatre In Education.

I respectfully submit that the objectives of this thesis in terms of producing an original creative work have been met. This is evidenced by the work itself, which comprises Volume 2 of this thesis. The significance of this work is perhaps best judged by its acceptance within the education and the arts communities. *Fossils* now sits on the shelves of countless school libraries and is performed with a reassuring regularity by schools throughout Australia. It has sold just over 5000 copies to date, which is a modest but encouraging effort in publishing terms. Its inclusion as a selected text in the HSC Drama Syllabus along with an enthusiastic reception by teachers, parents and students attest to its artistic merit. *Johnny*’s success in various drama festivals and as the foundation of the Resource Module also confirms its artistic integrity. Similarly, the response to *Parents* as performed
at Riverview College was a very encouraging testament to the strength of the material. Many felt that the script itself was easy to relate to – it was concerned with issues they could readily identify with. Perhaps the aspect of the material that was most commented on was the familiarity of the situations and the characters. Gavin Bolton, commenting on drama, feels it is

not so much concerned with the uniqueness of the individual as with the meaning created when a participant aligns his individuality with whatever is universal in the subject matter, topic or theme. (Davis, 1986: 219)

Certainly the subject matter of the creative works in this thesis – parents and their relationship with their teenage children – is universal. A creative work that generates a universal appeal through empathy with its characters hopefully can be labelled significant.

Is the use of the material presented in this thesis original? To the best of my knowledge, there is no TIE program such as modular theatre operating in the Australian educational drama framework. Without doubt, many aspects of the modular theatre program are already in existence – residency programs, workshops with professional actors, collections of scenes in books, and so on. Based on my own experience with TIE, and on research conducted while preparing this thesis; I don’t know of any other structured program based on a set of pre-scripted scenes, which integrates theatre professionals with students, and which is designed to create a play suitable for public performance in a relatively short time.

Is the use of the creative work documented in this thesis significant? In other words, is the modular theatre concept as outlined in this submission, a significant contribution to Australian TIE? I believe that for the young students involved in the original production of Johnny, and the students of Riverview College who participated in the K4K project, the projects were indeed significant.

A common response by students was that their experience with the K4K team and indeed the whole project, was very different to what they were used to. This “difference” was, according to the students, as a result of the nature of the short episodic scenes, the prominence of direct address to the audience, the interaction
with the professional actors, the brief but intensive rehearsal period focussing on self directed learning, and ultimately the style of production presented to the audience. Many students somehow feel that the ‘opening night scene’ lies at the core of the theatrical experience. They leave their courses with unreal perceptions based on the myths and stereotypes surrounding the industry – perceptions that are often encouraged and backed up by the teacher. This is often more so for those students who are perhaps interested in a career in the performing arts. The reality of a competitive environment with long rehearsals, the quest for funding, and the battle to get an audience is often not reflected in the large scale school musicals involving orchestras, dancers, singers and a cast of hundreds.

Projects such as modular theatre focus on the theatrical process from script development, structuring, to audition, through to rehearsals and production. A process approach to theatre in education of course is in itself not new or even significant in terms of a doctoral submission such as this. The Young Dramatists’ “Page to Stage” workshop is based on a process approach, as are numerous workshops run by such prestigious institutions as NIDA and Sydney Theatre Company. However, the nature of the pre-scripted material in the form of the Resource Module and the resulting plays generated from it, the fact that students will perform on stage with professional actors as their colleagues, and the potential for involvement of the computer-based technologies, in my opinion combine to make the creative work in this thesis a significant contribution to Australian Theatre In Education.

Any significance beyond this can only be determined in terms of the project’s potential. The possibilities offered by the Internet is something this thesis has only begun to explore. No doubt, technological advances in the field of Information Technology will lead to further development of projects like those outlined in this submission.

The projects outlined in this thesis can do much to give a broader overview of the theatrical process. Gordon Vallins, a pioneer in the UK TIE movement, suggests in his article “The Beginnings of TIE” (Jackson. 1980:13), that the universally
expressed goal of TIE groups is "to harness the techniques and imaginative potency of theatre in the service of education". The modular theatre concept provides a significant addition to many of the existing TIE programs. Hopefully, the various TIE programs experienced by students will increase their understanding and appreciation of theatre, and ultimately be a valuable event in a longer unit of learning.
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APPENDIX 1: “FOSSILS” SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

The following is a detailed documentation of the various drafts and revisions that transformed the Dramaworks version of Johnny into the TIE play, Fossils. I was fortunate to have kept all the various drafts in separate files on my computer, so a reasonably comprehensive analysis was possible.

First Draft

The New Scenes

The first version of the play, at this point, was still called If Johnny Jumped Off the Harbour Bridge, Would You? and contained a number of new scenes written especially for the Theatre South project. Each scene was titled not only because titles provided a useful summary indicating what the scene is about, but when using the outline function on a word processor, their order could be shifted around very easily. The following are brief descriptions of the new scenes in the order that they appeared in the first draft script.

Waking Up

The opening scene was titled “Waking Up”, and is structured as a series of vignettes where the audience sees the three bedrooms of each character.

WAKING UP

(SOFT LIGHT INDICATING MORNING. GENTLE SNOOZING, LOW HUM OF SNORING.)

(ALARM CLOCK RINGS AT MICHELLE’S BED. SPOT LIGHT HEIGHTENS THE RUDE AWAKENING. QUICK REACTION - HAND FROM UNDER SHEET SHUTS THE CLOCK UP. LIGHTS DOWN.)

(ALARM CLOCK RINGS AT JULIE’S BED. AGAIN SPOT LIGHT UP. RING LASTS A LITTLE LONGER. DISGRUNTLED MURMURING - “Alright, alright ...” ALARM IS TURNED OFF. LIGHTS DOWN AGAIN.)

(ALARM CLOCK RINGS AT FRANKY’S BED. SPOT LIGHT UP. HE TURNS THE ALARM OFF. LIGHTS DOWN.)

(SILENCE. SOME MORE GENTLE SNOOZING.)
I imagined there would be three beds on stage (or blocks etc representing beds), with the three kids asleep. One at a time, each alarm clock would ring. The kids simultaneously turn them off, muttering. The setting is the general chaos of a morning routine. Notes at the end of the play indicate the structure being defined chronologically - possibly like a diary, a school timetable, or “a day in the life of”. The most logical place was to start in the morning. The dialogue is fairly short and rhythmic:

DAD (F) Wake up, Michelle.
MICHELLE (STILL SLEEPING) Okay.
MUM (J) Breakfast is ready.
MICHELLE Okay Mum.
DAD (F) Your toast will go cold.
MICHELLE Okay Dad.
MUM (J) You’ll be late for school darling.
MICHELLE Thanks Mum.
DAD (F) Michelle, I’m coming up with the video camera.
  (MICHELLE SITS BOLT UPRIGHT.)
MICHELLE I’m up! I’m up!
  (MICHELLE BECOMES MUM, JULIE SNUGGLES BACK TO SLEEP.)

Michelle’s first four lines are: “Okay”, “Okay Mum”, “Okay Dad”, “I’m up! I’m up.” Mum’s line, “You’ll be late for school, darling” indicates it’s a school day; and Dad’s threat about coming up with a video camera sets the comic tone early in the play. It also defines Michelle’s Dad as being somewhat eccentric. The stage directions indicate that Michelle becomes Mum and Julie (who was playing Michelle’s Mum) snuggles back to sleep, ready to be woken up by her parents. In this manner, we see the three separate households of each character.

Julie’s household is represented by the following vignette:

DAD (F) Up an ‘em, Julie.
JULIE (STILL SLEEPING) I'm awake Dad.
MUM (M) Come on sleepy head.
JULIE Okay Mum.
DAD (F) The early bird catches the worm.
JULIE I hate worms Dad.
MUM (M) Julie, it's a beautiful morning.  
You're missing the best part of the day.
JULIE Get real, Mum ...
DAD (F) You'll miss your lift to school.
JULIE Get real, Dad ...
DAD (F) You'll miss going out Saturday night ...
   (JULIE SITS UP.)
JULIE Okay Dad, I'm up.
   (FRANKY GOES TO SLEEP, WHILE JULIE BECOMES DAD.)

Again the dialogue is reasonably short and snappy. Julie's parents speak in cheery cliches while Julie plays the nonplussed teenager. Rhythm plays an important part in this section as well, for instance Mum and Dad's lines stress the words "You'll miss", in three beats - You're missing the best part of the day," "You'll miss you're lift to school," and "You'll miss going out on Saturday night," which is matched by Julie's "Get real, Mum," "Get real, Dad," and "Okay Dad ..."

It's interesting to note that this version contains Franky's Dad, as indicated by the stage direction "Julie becomes Franky's Dad, however I was obviously avoiding Julie speaking in a fake male voice by not giving Franky's Dad any dialogue at this point.

MUM (M) Franky ... I'm not going to call you again!
FRANKY Okay, Mum.
MUM (M) Come on Franky ... rise and shine.
FRANKY I'm 'shining' Mum.
MUM (M) If you're not up in five minutes, I'll send your father in!
FRANKY Okay, okay.

These quick changes of character established in the early drafts remained with the play until it's final version.
This was a monologue written for the original version of *Johnny*, but was not used. It features Franky, who notices a huge pimple on his forehead. Against all known medical advice he tries to squeeze it - “It’s like trying to push a bowling ball through a button hole!” - leaving big red marks. He hopes no one will see it. As I was still using the “day in the life of” structure, I thought I could incorporate this scene into the morning routine. At this stage of the writing process I made no real attempts to link the scenes in any way, I was merely trying to determine a rough sequence for useable material.

**Michelle and Franky**

This scene established a few simple character relationships: Michelle likes Franky, and Franky likes Julie, and Julie likes Johnny, who is liked by everybody, but nobody likes Dominic. This rough character dynamic remains with the play until its reincarnation as *Fossils*. In fact, Julie’s single-minded and somewhat selfish obsession with Johnny becomes the driving force for much of the action. The day has now moved away from breakfast to the schoolyard.

**Arriving at School Late**

In this scene Julie outlines the trauma associated with a parent accompanying her to school - in particular when an ankle sprained during netball meant her Dad had to carry her bags. The wild exaggerations like the ‘slide show’ segment of *Fossils*, was not yet included in these early versions.

**Hip Parents**

In this scene Michelle’s parents try to convince her that they too were her age once, however the concept is lost on her. Parents, no matter what, will always be singled out as such. As Michelle points out, “It’s this ‘parent’ look that you develop. This permanently concerned look. A ‘responsible for my welfare’ look.”

The kids wildly distort a story Michelle’s parents told her. This part of the scene worked much like the game, Chinese Whispers, where a story is passed on from person to person.

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DAD (F) Remember that time we spent the night in jail.
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MICHELLE  Jail?
MUM (J)  Your father ran out of money in a small town in France.
MICHELLE  Hey that's cool. My Dad was in jail.
JULIE  Jail?
MICHELLE  Oh yeah ... it was really cool.
        He robbed someone in a French antique store.
JULIE  Hey did you hear about Michelle's Dad.
FRANKY  What?
JULIE  He's a criminal. He broke out of jail, robbed a bank
        and then shot some French bloke.
FRANKY  You're kidding.
        Did you hear about Michelle's Dad?
JULIE  No.
FRANKY  He murdered a whole heap of people
        in a French cake shop,
        then robbed an antique store, then escaped from jail!
        Now he's on the lose!
JULIE  Hey did you hear about Michelle's Dad ...
        how he's got all these tattoos,
        and went to get them removed
        and shot everybody in a French restaurant
        then he went into a cake store and robbed it
        then blew up an antique store
        then escaped from jail
        and came to Australia from France!
FRANKY  I heard he's wanted by Interpol. And the CIA.
JULIE  That's so cool.

While this did not end up in future versions of the play, the concept of a parent
being mistaken for a criminal became an important plot development in *Fossils*.

*Grandparents*

This scene was placed near the end of the play. It was also written for the original
Dramaworks group, but not used in performance. Julie, has her grandmother
staying over. Grandma gets lost on her way to pick Julie up from school and Julie
gets the blame.
Original Scenes from Johnny

The rest of this first draft was basically the original scenes from *Johnny*, virtually unaltered - except for the required changes the character’s names. No real links between scenes were attempted at this stage.

For a teenage play, certain scenes were not appropriate. For example both Games and Goldfish were far too juvenile. Scenes like Brothers and Sisters were also too juvenile, as was Pets. The early drafts included these scenes, but by way of a flashback featuring the main characters as children.

The following is the order the original scenes from *Johnny* were placed in this draft. The brackets indicate the characters involved each scene: Worrying (Michelle), Boyfriends (Julie) and Phones (Julie and Michelle), Fashion (Franky), Fame (Michelle), Brothers and Sisters (Franky as Julie’s little brother, and Julie), Adopted (Julie), Shoes (Franky), Goldfish (Julie, as a child), Careers (Franky, Julie and Michelle), Pets (Franky as a child), Sandwiches (Franky), Fights (Franky), Tidy Rooms (Michelle), and Homework (Michelle & Julie) which ends this draft.

Second Draft

Essentially the structure of the second draft remained much the same. Changes were usually embellishments. A good example of this would be the opening. Added to the breakfast scene (Waking Up) was the following exchange between Franky and his parents:

```
FRANKY Oh yuk, porridge.
MUM It's good for you.
FRANKY Can I have Coco Pops.
MUM That's not a real breakfast.
DAD When I was a boy we didn't have any of these coco pops.
      Lard on bread. That's what we had for breakfast. And cold
      tea. We were lucky to get breakfast.
```

While this segment was changed a number of times before the final draft, this short exchange formed the basis of the ‘concentration camp’ routine in *Fossils*. I
usually type notes as I work, about improvements or changes needed for future drafts. For example, with this scene, the notes read:

More blur at breakfast. Dad off to work - "Bye Franky." Perhaps can lead to comment about how Dad’s aren’t seen all that much.

Clearly, I hadn’t given much thought to the role of Franky’s father. The only way to stage this would be to have one of the girls play Franky’s Dad.

A new scene called Parent Teacher Night was added. Michelle laments on the trials of parent teacher night. The opening of this scene was a reworked version of a scene called Potential, which was originally written for Johnny, but not used.

MICHELLE Parent Teacher Night.

Don’t you just love parent teacher night?
"Tries hard ... could do better."
Every teacher tells that to my parents.
They say how much potential I’ve got.
Great! Potential. Potential what?
Potentially dangerous. Potential genius?
Potential what?
Six teacher say how well I could do,
and what high hopes they have for me ...
they still give me a terrible grade.

I’d rather they tell my parents I was a moron
but give me really good grades ...
So, Mum and Dad go home feeling that they’ve failed somewhere in the scheme of things.

This is followed by Michelle recalling via a flashback how her father helped her with homework, and managed to get both of them completely confused.

DAD Michelle lets do some maths.

MICHELLE So then Dad sits me down to do homework. It was far better when he didn’t know what I was doing. Then at least I could get some work done.

DAD Now ... what’s this algebraic formula mean?

MICHELLE I don’t know Dad?

DAD Well it’s simple isn’t it.

MICHELLE Not really ...

DAD If A equals B, then AB is really only B times A which is the coefficient of C. Is that clear?

MICHELLE Not really Dad.
DAD Why not?

MICHELLE If it was clear, I wouldn't be struggling with maths!

Mum and Dad then discuss the merits of getting a tutor which leads to a humorous recollection about the things they had available “when I was your age”. This, along with refrain, “And we were grateful” became a running gag throughout the play. The essence of this scene remained throughout the drafts of *Fossils*, however the scene was transferred from Michelle to Julie. Once the characters became more defined, it was clear that Julie’s Dad would be more likely to help her and get confused in the process.

This was followed by a segment produced by burst-writing. It was very raw, reflective if the ‘stream of consciousness’ approach. The exercise was based around the concept of each characters fear of losing a parent. In Franky’s case it was stumbling on some old boxes his mother had put away, presumably after his father’s death. Franky on the one hand wants to know more about his father, but on the other is too scared to.

FRANKY I just wanted to know more about him that’s all.
We were packing all this stuff away.
I never even knew most of it existed.

Boxes. Boxes of stuff. It looked like junk, but there was a story to everything.
Mum could never throw it away.
It was easier to put it out of sight. Out of mind.
That way she wouldn’t have to remember.

You know ... I was scared.
Scared of walking in the room and looking around.
I guess I was scared
I might finally get to know my Dad.

Photo’s of Mum and Dad when they were young.
I wasn’t even around. Wasn’t even born.
Hard to believe they had a life then.

There’s Dad on a motor bike.
I wasn’t allowed to have a motor bike. Too dangerous.
You had one.
You rode it ... nothing happened to you when -

Franky pauses in reflection. A motor bike is considered dangerous, however the irony remained that his father way taken from him in some sort of disease that may have been cancer.
FRANKY Dad was feeling a bit off colour. Off colour.
How you feeling Dad?
Better. Great. You start to worry when they're sick.
Like what if something happens to them
and you're left on your own.

Franky’s fear probably reflects that of many children, and to an extent was probably based on my own fear. Even though the idea of Franky losing his Dad remained in the script, none of this scene was left in Fossils. The tone of the writing seemed far too serious for the style of the play, and I felt would ultimately be somewhat contrived.

Similarly I translated this fear into a dream for Julie:

JULIE I had this dream as a little girl
that there was no one left to protect me
and I was chased up this tree by a huge lion.
I had no where else to go except up this tree.
I wondered where Mum and Dad were.

Again, I was drawing on personal incidents, the dream being one I recalled from my childhood. While perhaps having a brief cathartic effect during the burst writing, ultimately this type of work was, if not too personal, perhaps a little too cryptic.

Similarly, I wrote a short sequence depicting a dream Michelle had. Again, it drew on a vague memory of one of my childhood dreams:

MICHELLE I came home from school just like I always do
except it was a little darker than it should be
for that time of year. A lot darker actually.

There were lots of cars at my house ... lots of cars.
There was an ambulance ... police cars ...
something was wrong.

I knew something was wrong. Then I woke up ... sweating.

As with the other sequences, while perhaps interesting to a psychologist studying dreams, I felt the dramatic value of these ‘personal’ images were limited.

The remainder of the second draft included the following scenes unaltered from the first draft: Worrying, Dominic, Fashion, Fame, Adopted, Shoes, Careers, Sandwiches, Fights, Tidy Rooms, Grandparents, Homework.
The scenes, Brothers and Sisters, Goldfish and Pets were cut. The concept of including flashbacks of the characters as children seemed far too complicated in a play where the main characters were already doubling as parents and other sundry characters.

**Third Draft.**

The third draft heralded substantial changes to both the structure and content of the play. While in essence many of the original scenes still remained, they were now housed in a rough outline of an emerging story. The alarm clock opening did not change, however it was established that this wasn’t just any day, it is the start of a new term, and it is Franky’s first day at a new school. The first day of a new term always carries more dramatic significance – there is scope for stories about the holidays, new hairstyles, and new friends. The conflict with Julie having to go out with Dominic is re-introduced at the start. It is, as she says: “D-day. Disaster day. Dominic day. Dag day. Dominic the disastrous dag day.” As a variation, Julie’s offstage little brother, Scott is introduced.

In this way, the household scenario for each character is established - Julie and her Dominic predicament, and Michelle with her ‘reasonable’ parents:

```
MICHELLE    I've got no real problems ...
            and when you're sixteen, that's a problem!
            I don't have zits,
            I'm reasonably good at school,
            I'm reasonably popular,
            even my parents are reasonable,
            which is reasonably incredible.
            My Mum is so reasonable I could go crazy.
```

The dialogue for Franky’s Mum was altered slightly to reflect her ethnicity, for example “You’ll make friends in no time,” become “You make friends in no time.” Also a few clues were given to the fact that Franky has lost his father. The most obvious being that the other two characters have both parents represented in the morning scenes, whereas Franky only has his mother on stage. A further clue is the stage direction that she is wearing a black cardigan signifying the possible loss of a family member. Also Franky’s mother would be more likely to fuss and
worry over him, now that he is all she has left. Finally Franky is the only one who makes his own breakfast.

The scenes Fashion and Shoes were moved forward to the breakfast routine, the logic being that they would form part of Franky’s pre-school roll call – a final checklist by his mother before he is deemed fit to attend. My only reservation about this was that it made the opening routine a little too long.

The scene following this one in the third draft establishes a new location, the train station, where the three main characters meet before going to school. I’ve simply titled it, The Train Station. The titles now no longer served as scene summaries, but rather main indicators of the action. Michelle and Julie catch up on their holiday adventures and gossip mainly about guys. The Hip Parents scenario is inserted here and Johnny is firmly established as the object of Julie’s desire.

At this point in the script there are two short vignettes, where the girls relate how their respective fathers would meet a prospective boyfriend – the dreamy Johnny for the first time. It is in the same style as what appears in the published version of Fossils, however much has been cut. This is a good example of the ‘kids-eye-view’ where the girl’s impression of their father’s reaction is wildly over exaggerated. It also illustrates the direct address technique, where in this case Julie is cutting in throughout her Dad’s meeting with Johnny to give the audience – who in this case represent an enthralled Michelle – a description of what might happen.

DAD (F) Hello son.
JULIE So Johnny just shakes Dad’s hand.
DAD (F) Nice to meet you. You got a car? Because if you have ... Julies not getting in it.
JULIE I mean what sort of introduction is that?
MUM (M) Nice to meet you Johnny.
JULIE I mean what sort of introduction is that?
MUM (M) Thanks Mum.
It’s lucky Dad didn’t check for needle marks ...
DAD (F) Give me a look at your arms son.
That’s it roll up the sleeves,
The cross examination continues. Needless to say, Johnny is exemplary on all counts, however, Julie’s father keeps digging. The following section was cut:

DAD (F)   So what are you doing in the mountains son,  
pretty pictures, lots of sky ...  
you’re not one of these alternative lifestyle people, eh?  

What’s that badge on your jacket?  
You belong to some political party do you?  
Or is it a religious cult!

I felt, it may be viewed as a negative reflection on alternative lifestyles, belonging to a political party or possessing strong religious beliefs.

Still at the train station, the girls notice Franky and he approaches them to talk. Franky is sinking fast in his quest to impress them. Hearing Johnny’s name he realises it is obviously an advantage to know him, and feigns being Johnny’s best friend. Michelle thinks Franky is quite ‘spunky’, however Julie is only interested in him for his contact with Johnny. A deal is struck - Franky can walk to school with the girls, a distinct social advantage it seems, in return for finding out Julie’s romantic status with Johnny.

The ‘day in the life of structure was proving quite successful in not only ordering the scenes, but as a guideline for writing new ones. The next location is established as the school.

Both girls are in class. I made a note in the script that perhaps Franky, as the new boy, should be introduced to the class. The mystery about Franky is, “Why is he transferring schools mid year?”

While the third draft had progressed quite nicely up to this point, the following scenes are fairly haphazard, reflecting the basically raw state of the previous draft.

The following are notes made in the script regarding possible future scenes to be written:

Girls ask if Franky managed to talk to Johnny. Franky makes up a pile of compliments to Julie. The three talk about what arriving home from school is like:

MICHELLE Mum will probably be standing ... She has her own business at home. She’s motivated.
Julie on her parents:

**JULIE** They just sit there ... I don't know what they do. They're just there ... I guess. I see Dad for about five minutes in the morning ... then he's off to work. He's comes home late, has dinner then goes to sleep in front of the TV. I talk to him sometimes ... but not that much ... I mean not about the sort of things we talk about ... real things. I don't think Mum and Dad would understand things like that.

Michelle has something in common with Franky. They're both latch-key kids (they've both got keys around their necks!) how romantic. Julie can't cope with the friendship. She's off home. Her mother would freak if she's late. Hybrid version of the Worrying scene except she's late because of the chat with Franky.

Most of the scenes were ultimately written as indicated above. The latch-key syndrome didn't eventuate, but Julie's comments about her parents not having the time for her were translated into Michelle’s difficulty in communicating with her yuppy parents – “we don’t talk, we negotiate.”

The script, although not nearly complete, was still suffering from a lack of any real conflict or climax. I felt one potential area for conflict would be a misunderstanding between Franky and Michelle about Franky’s father. Kids are often very protective about the way their parents are perceived. However if the conflict was to be between Michelle and Franky, the relationship between them needed to be far stronger than just first day acquaintances. At the very least, time was needed for their relationship to develop. The following are more notes made on the script regarding this issue:

There has been a time shift - it’s nearing the weekend. (perhaps stage change) Franky and Michelle are sort of an item. Julie is still after Johnny. The saga with Dominic continues. Franky and Michelle talk - Michelle is going on about Dads. Somehow the conversation shifts towards Franky’s Dad having died. Michelle is upset that he hadn’t told her earlier. She thought they were good enough friends for him to trust her. She exits - the friendship is over.

The following is a segment of this scene as it appeared in the third draft:

**MICHELLE** You know it's amazing how well we get on ... considering it's only been ... what ... four days.

**FRANKY** Three and a bit.
MICHELLE I'm looking forward to tomorrow.
FRANKY Me too.
MICHELLE Do you think we're getting serious?
FRANKY I'm not sure. I guess that depends on what serious is.
MICHELLE I'm not sure either. Look... everyone's been talking about us you know.
FRANKY Yep.
MICHELLE You're sort of this mysterious person... you don't have to worry about being the new kid any more because everybody thinks you're cool. Almost everybody knows about your Dad.
FRANKY (SERIOUS) What?
MICHELLE I thought I'd better tell you so it doesn't come as a shock to you.
FRANKY I didn't think it was anybody else's business
MICHELLE Everybody's curious. Besides it's not your fault your Dad's in jail.
FRANKY Jail? Who told you that?
MICHELLE Melissa.
FRANKY My Dad died. He never went to jail... he never did anything wrong. He died.
MICHELLE Franky I didn't...
FRANKY That's why we moved. Mum got a job here... she didn't want to stay in the same house...
MICHELLE I feel so stupid... Why didn't you say something.
FRANKY Why didn't you mind your own business? You and everybody else!
MICHELLE But couldn't you trust me? I can't believe you wouldn't trust me.

The misunderstanding about Franky's father having been in jail is central to the scene. The rift between Franky and his new found 'soul mate' now act as a catalyst for a number of the other scenes planned for act two. Again my script notes indicated what I had in mind:

Interval - then a scene between Julie and Michelle re. the incident.
Parent scene - Cranky Franky and his Mum - she often finds it hard to understand his moods. Franky argues with his Mum. Michelle argues with her parents who are so reasonable. Julie somehow is drawn into the mood of things and argues with her parents - the arguments should not only be the parents fault, but be seen through kids eyes. Julie must play a role in some sort of reconciliation. While Julie and Michelle commiserate, Franky enters. He bluntly talks about his Dad. It’s a heavy scene that stresses: seize the opportunity to say things now, more understanding. This prompts realisation on all parts.

New scene: Julie different with parents, as is Michelle.

Happy endings all round - Julie & Dominic and Franky and Michelle.

A number of ‘moody’ teenager scenes were written, highlighting some of the unreasonable arguments that parents and kids often engage in. My main concern with these scenes was that I was unable to inject the appropriate level of humour in them. If the scene was too funny, it trivialised the argument. If the scene was too serious, it changed the tone of the play considerably. Also I found it difficult to justify a misunderstanding between relatively recent friends causing such upheaval. Further the second act of the play would contain no significant event other than Julie’s role in some sort of reconciliation between Franky and Michelle. Franky’s recollections about his father had the potential to be a powerful scene, but it’s basis was founded on memory, not dramatic action.

Fourth Draft.

As with the previous drafts, I titled each scene mainly for my own reference, however I was at that point considering leaving the titles in the play. I recalled titles used effectively in classic plays such as The Glass Menagerie, and felt that perhaps they could be used to advantage in a play whose genesis was a collection of short scenes. Perhaps, I reasoned, a creative director could use a ‘vaudevillian’ approach. A purely practical title like “Waking Up” was changed to the slightly more elaborate, “The Wake Up Routine”, and so on.

In this draft the play could be divided into a number of well defined ‘phases’: the opening, before school at the train station, at school, and after school. This was still in keeping with the early ‘day in the life’ structure.
The Opening

The opening was breakfast at each of the three character’s households – Julie, Michelle and Franky, respectively. The stylistic alarm clock opening was cut, in favour of Julie’s direct address to the audience. This enabled me to establish her as the principal narrator, and incorporate the new title into the opening line.

JULIE  My parents are fossils.

Records of things that lived in the past.
That's my parents.
The olds, oldies, relics ...

We had Dad carbon dated,
and they discovered he's from the stone age.

Let me give you an example.
Fossils in action.

This is followed by the various examples of ‘fossilisation’ her parents display, such as a planned trip to the Blue Mountains, their love of old musicals, or even their idea of an evening tenpin bowling.

The “Brothers and Sisters” scene from Johnny was translated into the following exchange between Julie and her offstage little brother, Scott:

JULIE  Rack off Scott, I'm in the bathroom.
MUM (M)  Julie, Scott needs to use the bathroom.
          He hasn't dried his hair yet.
JULIE  Tell him to stick his head in the microwave!
          I love mornings ...
          especially when my little brother is acting like an android!
          Alright! I'm almost ready you little snotball!
          What?
          Mum, Scott just called me a fart.
          At least a fart disappears, Scott. A snot-ball just sticks to things!

Michelle, like Julie, also opens with direct address to the audience:

MICHELLE  My parents are fossils.

They're not quite as fossilised as Julie's parents,
but they're still pretty prehistoric.

Again the title is reinforced as is the concept of parents as ‘fossils’.
Michelle’s morning is typified by a scene titled, “The Half Breakfast.” The following dialogue resulted in the creation of Michelle’s father’s defining mannerism:

MICHELLE On Monday mornings
Dad normally has half an hour to eat half his breakfast,
drink half his coffee, and read half his paper.
Half of this time he spends talking to me and Mum
usually in half sentences.

During the next reading, Caroline, who played Julie, suggested that Michelle’s mother would probably correct her grammar regarding “me and Mum”. This was included in the next draft. The stage direction for Michelle’s father indicates his action:

(DAD INTERRUPTS EACH HALF SENTENCE WITH AN
ACTION SUCH AS ADJUSTING TIE, SIP OF COFFEE,
EATS A BIT OF TOAST, TURNS PAGE OF NEWSPAPER,
TAKES VITAMIN PILL, ETC.)

Michael Coe played this extremely well, and the sequence of frantic half sentences snatched while running out the door to work, always strikes a chord with an audience.

The introduction to Franky’s household begins with his mother fussing over him,

MUM (J) Franky, why aren’t you awake?
FRANKY (OFFSTAGE) I’m awake, Mum.
MUM (J) Are you sick?
FRANKY I’m fine.
MUM (J) You sound sick.
FRANKY I feel great Mum.
MUM (J) I’m bringing up some vitamins.
(FRANKY ENTERS.)
FRANKY I don’t need any vitamins.
MUM (J) Why not? Are you sick?

It was necessary for Franky to be offstage, as in the previous scene he was playing Michelle’s Dad – the few lines of dialogue giving him only enough time for a quick change of clothes and props. It was important at this stage of the writing to remember to give the actors time to change character.
The Train Station (before school)

The next stage takes place before school at the train station. This location is established by using a State Rail announcement, complete with bad acoustics and a crackly loudspeaker.

(VOICE OVER)
Attention platform two.
The eight fifteen express to (A 'STATIC' NOISE) grrrfeld,
all stations to (STATIC) srrcolm ...
then orssdale, krfllm and willsgate ...
will be running about (STATIC) minutes late.
Repeat.
The eight fifteen express to ... (STATIC) grrrfeld ...
all stations to (STATIC) srrcolm ...
then orssdale, krfllm and willsgate ...
will be running about (STATIC) minutes late.
Thank you.

In all the performances of the play I have seen, this announcement was pre-recorded. It was always very popular with the audience, particularly the repeat announcement with identical static. The location was one that would be quite familiar to the intended audience - and one I myself vividly remember. Being the product of a Catholic boys school - much of the socialising with girls and general peer interaction was before and after school at the train station. It is also the obvious place for Julie and Michelle to meet in the morning, and subsequently meet Franky.

By the end of this section, the status of the three main characters is firmly established with Michelle and Julie at the social nucleus, as Julie says to Franky,

JULIE If you walk in with us, it would look good for you ...
know what I mean. Michelle and I are ...
well put it this way ... we're in demand.
You'd look cool.

Franky is still on the outside, with his supposed association with Johnny his key to 'get in'. Finally, the dance is established as the central social event,

MICHELLE Everyone's going to be there.
JULIE It's going to be really 'bad'.

M S ASTON - DCA 2000 - APPENDIX 1
At School

The next stage is located in school. The transition from train station to school is helped by Julie’s recollection of getting to school late because of a sprained ankle, and the trauma of having her father help her into class.

JULIE Can you imagine that ... my Dad actually on school property.
(RE-ENACTING THE INCIDENT.)

DAD (F) Which class Julie?
JULIE It’s okay Dad ... I’m fine now.
DAD (F) Which class?
JULIE Over there ...

(AUDIENCE) Nothing worse than arriving late. Everybody’s already in class and the whole place looks so deserted.

Oh no ... Mary spots me.

(AS MARY) Is that your Dad, Julie?
What a cow.

He’s an orderly from the hospital.

It is interesting to note that in the published version all superfluous stage directions, such as “re-enacting the incident”, were removed. Julie panics as the teacher, Miss Rosa, invites her father into class and actually introduces him.

MICHELLE (PLAYING MISS ROSA) So ... this must be your father.
JULIE He’s an orderly, Miss.
MICHELLE (MISS ROSA) You must be Julie’s father.
DAD (F) Hi ... I’m Julie’s Dad.
MICHELLE (MISS ROSA) Class ... this is Julie’s Dad.
JULIE God! This is a nightmare ... please let me wake up!

The situation deteriorates rapidly with Julie’s Dad threatening to bring out family photos, eventually settling for a slide show of Julie’s most embarrassing moments.

DAD (F) Here’s Julie as a flower girl at her Uncle Stan’s wedding.
(CLASS YELL AND CHEER.)

And this is Julie playing the melodica at the opera house.

Oh ... I love this one. Isn’t she cute?
Julie’s first day as a Brownie.
Julie being rescued from the pool at last years swimming carnival.

Here's Julie in nappies ...

JULIE Dad!

DAD (F) ... and here's Julie without nappies.

And I've got a little surprise for you Julie.

This one's of you and Dominic at the Blue Mountains!

JULIE Stop!

Clearly Julie’s imagination has run rampant.

To set up the school itself, another announcement was used, this time by the principal:

FRANKY (AS PRINCIPAL, OVER MICROPHONE)

I want the attention of the whole school.
Could I have the whole school’s attention.
Everyone in the whole school please listen ...
Would Johnny Johnson please go
to the principal’s office. Johnny Johnson.

The announcement was a recollection of director, Des Davis’ school days, however no doubt familiar to most students.

With the locations clear in my mind, I was able to in a sense see which of the scenes I had not yet placed, would ‘fit’, For example Michelle and Julie could gossip about Franky while they are in class, and the ‘sandwiches’ scene would fit perfectly during lunchbreak. Clearly the next stage would be after school.

After School

After school was the perfect opportunity for Franky to strike up a friendship with Michelle. At this stage I was still working with the latch-key kid concept, as mentioned when discussing a previous draft. It also allowed me to revisit each of the three households, however the main point of discussion is the dance on the weekend.

Franky tells his mother he met a girl at school. She worries:

FRANKY When I don't meet girls,
she worries there's something wrong with me.
Then when I meet girls
she worries about it becoming too serious!

Then he tells her about the dance:

MUM (J) Dancing, dancing!
We arrive here last week and already you go dancing!

FRANKY I'll get to know everybody.

MUM (J) You get to know people who go dancing.
Good students don't go dancing. They do homework.

Michelle’s parents when confronted with the prospect of yet another social function worry about the cost, and the boys she might meet.

Julie’s parents launch into the “Parent Teacher Night” scene brought about by a discussion on homework, and then Michelle and Julie on the phone from the scene “Phones” leads in to the interval.

After the Interval

The interval marks a shift in time, the second act opening on the night of the dance. This act also had a number of sequences – before the dance, during the dance, and after the dance – however most were not completed. A number of the existing scenes from Johnny now took on greater significance within the context of an important social event. The presence of a ‘zit’ would be far worse if before a big night out. Fashion is not so critical if going out to visit relatives, but becomes vital when going out with friends. Even a tidy room can become a tool of blackmail for parents if the kids plan on going out. Apart from the remainder of the Johnny scenes, the second act was basically a collection of notes punctuated with short segments of dialogue.

Fifth Draft (Rehearsal Script)

With the clear vision of the characters and main events, many elements fell into place in this draft. The opening sequence was still problematic. The main criticism was that it was way too long.

The following segment was cut from Julie’s opening sequence:
Take my name ... Julie Jones.
If you've got a name like Jones, why call your daughter Julie?
Why not Imelda, Chloe, or Claudia!

Julie Ann Jones! Dad picked the 'Ann'.
Everybody's got an 'Ann' in their name, Dad.
Can't think of a name? Just call her Ann!
Mary Ann, Ann Maree, Tracy Ann ... Julie Ann.

Apart from reinforcing Julie’s name, it really wasn’t going anywhere. The following segment was also cut:

(DRY) I love morning.
Staring into the mirror is a little like
staring at one of those police line ups.

That's the one officer ... Julie.
She's the one who did it.
Guilty of looking like Godzilla!
Look ... bed-face all puffed up,
pillowmarks stencilled into all seven chins.
Charming.
You're a charming sight, Julie.
I look like the Bride of Frankenstein.

At this stage, Michelle’s family was quite complex:

Breakfast with my family is like living with the Brady Bunch ...
without all the kids.

Mum was married before, Dad was married before,
and they've each got three kids
from their first marriage.
I'm the only kid from the second marriage.
All the others are older ... they've left home, left the country,
three are even married.

So I guess you could say I'm an only child
with six brothers and sisters.

I was toying with the idea of having Michelle coming from a family where both parents are divorcees, in contrast to Franky’s recently widowed Mum, and Julie’s painfully ordinary family. This section was cut as I felt I could not do an issue as complicated as divorce any justice. The stereotyping seemed to imply my ‘yuppie’ family is more likely to end in divorce as opposed to the ordinary working class family.

This was cut from Franky’s morning routine.
FRANKY (AUDIENCE) These are supposed to be the best years of our lives. What if it's a con? What if in ten years time we find out these weren't the best years of our lives at all. Worse! What if we find out they were! What's that leave us with... a whole heap of not so great years. Then maybe a couple of rotten ones.

It was replaced by the radio blaring and Franky’s rock star opening as is in the published version of Fossils. Also, the school announcement has now evolved into what is in Fossils.

I cut the following school lunch scene:

MICHELLE Don't tell me you're on a diet. You don't need to be on a diet?

JULIE Why not? Everybody's on a diet.

MICHELLE But you're so slim.

JULIE I'm slim? You're slim!

MICHELLE I'm fat.

JULIE You're not fat. I'm the one who's fat!

MICHELLE I'm just a big fat blimp.

JULIE I'm fatter than fat.

MICHELLE I'm huge.

JULIE I'm fatter than Mary Parker.

MICHELLE No one's fatter than Mary Parker.

JULIE I'm 'chunky'!

(BOTH LAUGH.)

The changes from this point on are documented in reasonable detail in Chapter 5 of the thesis.
APPENDIX 2: "FOSSILS' PRODUCTION HISTORY

Professional productions are an exciting and satisfying part of any playwright’s career both creatively and financially. *Fossils* has had quite a few professional productions, however Theatre South’s relationship with the play cannot be understated. It was Des Davis who encouraged me to complete the script, produced the first season of the play, and lobbied with Currency Press when the play was being considered for publication.

Theatre South

The first schools season of *Fossils* was scheduled between mid October and mid November 1993. The initial flyer promoting the play was still using the original title of *If Johnny Jumped Off the Harbour Bridge, Would You?* and used a few selections of humorous dialogue from the play placed in cartoon like dialogue boxes. The graphics feature a cartoon teenager with a baseball cap on backwards; a T-shirt with ‘cool’ printed on it, standing in front of a Harbour Bridge background. The marketing focussed on the tag line “a light-hearted look at parent-child relationships”. To add a little depth to the show, the following description featured in bold type:

“A play that focuses on the point in kids lives where parents are desperate to retain control and authority ... and kids are desperate for freedom and individuality.”

At the time this flyer was produced, the play was still in the draft stages, so the summary of the play was quite general, highlighting some of the more popular scenes. As soon as we had the new title for the show, and a near complete script, new flyers were printed and distributed to media, patrons, and schools. The copy reintroduced a tag line, “a kids-eye-view of parents”, which I felt gave a good impression of the style of the play. Tim Moore designed the lettering for the title. Tim, among other tasks, designed most of Theatre South’s promotional material. The letters were in a bold three dimensional stone-age type, with ‘fossilised’ footprints – some large, some small, presumably representing parents and kids –
scattered over the page. In the notes page of the rehearsal script I had added a few lines: “Fossil. (noun) Colloquial. An outdated or old fashioned person or thing. Slang. Parent.” The colloquial definition is quoted from the Penguin Macquarie Dictionary, while I supplied the slang component. The dictionary definition remains in the character page of the published version of the play, and has been used in many of the leaflets and programs advertising the play. Again, two segments of dialogue featuring Julie and Michelle are used. The copy line summed up the main idea of the play, “Julie, Michelle, & Franky try to solve the world’s oldest problem: How do you survive growing up with ‘fossils’?” Even the copy in the program reflected the ‘Fossils’ concept. For example in the credits after my standard biography, we included the line, “His mother thinks he’s too skinny, and his father is still waiting for him to get a real job”. For Des Davis, the directing credit included, “... while he has a special dedication to plays for young people, his family still regard him as a ‘fossil’”, and actor Michael Coe’s biography opens with the lines, “We didn’t have TV when I was a kid. We played with wooden blocks!”

The first performance to a school was on Wednesday 20 October 1993. A number of shows to schools and selected patrons served as preview to the ‘official’ opening night on Saturday 23 October. As indicated in Chapter 5, the opening night was very well received, however the short school season was a little disappointing for Theatre South in terms of their bookings.

While perhaps not financially successful, the opening season of Fossils was artistically extremely successful. The response from student and adult audiences were very positive, and encouraged Des to program the play for another season in February and March 1994. Thursday 10 February 1994 was the unofficial ‘launch’ of the play at the Zenith Theatre in Chatswood. A mail-out was sent to school teachers and local press, but with limited budget and little time, there wasn’t as much publicity interest as hoped. The response from the teachers to the play was excellent, with a number already booking the show.

In February, the play toured the New England region of Armidale, Tamworth, Glen Innes and neighbouring towns as part of a co-production with the New
England Theatre Company. By all accounts this was a terrific season with the cast reporting full houses, encores, and on some nights even a standing ovation! On this tour, the play was performed to a family audience, rather than just schools. It has always been my feeling that the play’s true niche was within the family market. This season also resulted in the first official review in the Armidale Express. Under the banner “Stage Show ‘Good Fun”, Rosemary Mort writes:

Playwright, Manuel Aston, has some of the scalpel skills of Barry Humphries, but without the underlying cruelty. He turns the knife just enough to reveal the anxious underlife and illuminating moments which bond the species in common behaviour patters.

It was a good review, which I felt neatly summed up the essence of the play. My own opinion of the play, which is that its main strengths are humour and recognition rather than depth, was echoed by the reviewer’s closing paragraph:

Although the play is not D & M in the strictest sense, it is good natured and good fun and no parent or teenager could sit in the audience without sharing and laughing at some very familiar situations and manifestations which they might previously have imagined were unique to their own experience.

This season of *Fossils* received quite extensive press coverage in most of the metropolitan and regional newspapers. The focus was on the humour of the play, however many articles also capitalised on Caroline Johansson’s role as nurse Donna Manning in television’s *A Country Practice*. Banner headings such as “Fossils plays on bones of contention,” “Fossils digs up dirt on parents,” and “Fossils: what a name for a brand new comedy,” toy with the archaeological connotations of the title. Other headings such as, “Comedy about generation gap”, and “Witty comedy starts 1994 theatrical year”, emphasise the humour of the show.

After a short rest, the cast and crew started their metropolitan schools tour in early March at the Zenith Centre in Chatswood. Rather than the standard ‘in-schools’ performances, Theatre South booked larger central venues such as the Enmore Theatre, Bankstown Town Hall, Joan Sutherland Centre in Penrith, the Riverside Theatre in Parramatta and Sutherland Entertainment Centre. Des preferred these shows, as he felt students would experience more of the spectacle of theatre —
professional lights and sound in a professional venue rather than two lights and a tape recorder in the school hall. Local schools arrived in buses, with audiences of up to 500 students.

Currency Press had already confirmed in January that *Fossils* would be published as part of their teenage series and without doubt, that would give the play’s profile a substantial boost. If Theatre South’s metropolitan schools tour in March was any indication, a ‘substantial boost’ was much needed. Unfortunately, although again the response to the play was excellent, the bookings were not enough to justify the expense of hiring the larger venues, resulting in the cancellation of a few shows.

While reaction to the play was almost uniformly positive, the first season wasn’t without incident. In early April, Des telephoned me and asked me to contact the Office of the Member for Hawkesbury, The Honourable Mr Kevin Rozzoli, MP. Apparently there had been a complaint lodged about *Fossils* from a constituent who, we were led to believe, represented a number of teachers. I contacted Mr Rozzoli’s office and was informed that the complaint was based on the feeling that *Fossils* contained “anti-family” views and “incites students to rebel”. I was both staggered and amused to think that given the variety of plays touring schools that deal with often harsh and unsavoury issues, a relatively harmless play such as *Fossils* should be targeted for criticism on these grounds. Needless to say I responded to the complaint, concluding in my letter that, ... the intended message of the play is “appreciate your parents – and this is the message audiences have responded to.” A copy of the script and a selection of reviews and articles were included with the letter, and no more was heard about the issue.

Theatre South’s next season of *Fossils* was in May 1997. Again, it was a combination regional and metropolitan schools along with a few performances at the Bridge Theatre. The bookings for this season were far more impressive. This was no doubt because of the Currency Press publication that was launched in September 1995, and the play’s inclusion on the text list of the 1997 HSC Drama Syllabus. Des chose a young and enthusiastic cast with Kylie Burgess as Julie, Raechelle Lee as Michelle and Adam Hedditch as Franky. Michael Coe although not acting in the production updated his design of the set. The three geological
eras that were written on back wall of the set below the word ‘fossils’ were removed, and the whole set was given a new brighter coat of paint – the word ‘fossils’ repainted on the back with a new style lettering.

The flyer advertising the show was now double sided, one side featuring various still shots from the first season, and the reverse containing the copy. Based on the higher profile of the play, the copy was far more persuasive:

Long before the International hit film “Clueless” ever made the big screen, there was Fossils – a hip and sassy Australian play from award-winning writer Manuel Aston which has taken Australian schools by storm.

The examples of dialogue featured on previous promotional material was replaced by a very up-beat ‘teen-speak’ style copy which sums up each character, their parents, and the plot in a few sentences:

Sixteen year old Julie Jones is one of the most popular girls at Bayfield High, but she is desperate to avoid her mutant mini-miser kid brother Scott, her stone-age parents, her would-be boyfriend ‘zit head’ Dominic and ‘social-Siberia’ in general. She is also living a teenage fantasy about the cool but academically challenged sports hero Johnny Johnson.

Julie’s best friend Michelle Watson is not so superficial, but she has problems of her own, like how to communicate with her yuppy power parents who negotiate with her over breakfast in between consulting filofaxes and mobile phones.

Then there’s the new kid at school, aspiring air guitar legend Franky Zeferrlli who, when he’s not avoiding a beating from the local football team, is dodging his over-protective Italian mother and her goat-cheese and gorgonzola sandwiches.

This season was again remarkably well received with the advantage of excellent bookings and full houses. A review of the production in the youth theatre journal, Lowdown, was very impressed with the play:

Manuel Aston’s script bubbles with clever witticisms and a wonderful visual language which places us immediately on each characters wavelength.

Unfortunately, the review was less than flattering about the production:
Theatre South’s production of *Fossils* has hit and miss quality about it because of its low production values. A little more attention to detail would allow for greater absorption and enjoyment of this wonderful script.

In defence of the production, the Zenith Theatre, Chatswood is quite notorious with its steeply raked seats and small stage. On a technical level, ordinarily impressive productions can end up looking less than perfect. The reviewer, Antonietta Morgillo, also comments about the Franky’s Italian mother – the portrayal with heavy accent being, she felt, “slightly out of date” and “unnecessary considering most Italians migrated in the 50’s and by the 90’s can in fact speak English well.” The responsibility for the accent lands with me, as it is written into the script via the syntax of the dialogue. While the reviewer makes an excellent point, I feel given the stereotyping of all the parents, Franky’s Italian mother, complete with accent, is not out of place. The reviewer also makes another very valid point:

> With so many options to choose from to illustrate cultural conflict in this multicultural country of ours, the “goats cheese sandwiches” is a poor example, especially since most kids would consider them gourmet food.

I must confess that as the sandwiches were an exaggeration of the ones my own mother gave me, I have often felt she was ahead of the times, as I stare at the menu of a gourmet sandwich shop.

**Bennelong Program**

In June 1998 Theatre South again produced the play in co-production with Sydney Opera House’s Bennelong Program. While Adam Hedditch who played Franky remained in the cast, Leanne Brockenshire replaced Julie and Kathe Thomas replaced Michelle. As with most of the casting, I was not involved in the process, although for the initial season, Des spoke to me at length about the actors he proposed. In addition, apart from the first season, I rarely attended rehearsals, however I have managed to see each of Theatre South’s productions of the play. I, along with Des and the production team, felt that the “Opera House” ensemble was the best cast so far, in terms of the elusive ingredient, “chemistry”.

**M S ASTON - DCA 2000 - APPENDIX 2**
The Bennelong Program’s publicity for the play included a cartoon-like teenager with cartoon parent over a wallpapered background of the ‘fossil dictionary definition’ as illustrated by figure 6, and the copy borrowed the trendy ‘teen-speak’ synopsis from Theatre South’s flyer.

![Fig. 9. The Bennelong Program's leaflet design for “Fossils”.](image)

Again the season was very successful with strong school bookings and sold out public performances on Saturday. I have to admit to feeling quite excited about going to the Opera House to see my own play. I was thrilled to see a long queue of parents and children, winding about 100 metres from the door of the Reception Hall to the top of the main stairs. My initial reaction as a playwright, was an overwhelming urge to shake everyone’s hand, one by one, and say, “Thanks very much for coming”.

The response was excellent with the public performances being sold out. The Bennelong Program management confessed they were a little surprised, as the show was not advertised apart from a mail-out and inclusion in the 1998 Program booklet. Theatre South is currently contemplating another touring season in 2000.

**Queensland Theatre Company – Explosions**

In October 1996, Queensland Theatre Company (QTC) approached me, through Currency Press, regarding the rights to perform a number of extracts from *Fossils*
for a QTC Education project called Explosions. The QTC, according to its 1999 education brochure, sees its role of attracting and engaging young audiences as an important one. This is reflected in its “qtc-ed” education program, which includes a show called “explod-ed” (previously called Explosions) as part of its repertoire. Explosions was a 90 minute performance-demonstration-workshop for Year 8 to 10 high school students which used excerpts of Fossils, Romeo and Juliet, and a QTC devised piece to explore the jump from page to stage. A director, three actors, and an academic presented key scenes from the selected texts and demonstrated how meaning is made in theatre, and discussed the elements of drama, interpretation, and the roles and responsibilities of actors and directors. The project was scheduled to run for 10 performances from 14 October to 25 October. Unfortunately I was unable to attend the performances, however was able to meet the cast during the rehearsal period. Michael Futcher, the director of the project told me that sections of Fossils were used, mainly to highlight the way in which three actors could change characters quickly and were able to create a number of different households functioning simultaneously. The “explod-ed” package, including extracts of Fossils was again produced in 1997, and once more in 1999.

Jigsaw Theatre Company

Jigsaw’s 1997 program consisted of four productions, including Fossils, and a comprehensive series of student and teacher workshops to accompany them. Jigsaw Theatre Company, based in Canberra, has provided a full time, professional theatre for young people and the general community for over 20 years. In schools and theatres, Jigsaw continues to present innovative and original theatre pieces. The Company’s workshop program is further complemented by tailor-made workshops, designed and run to suit the specific needs of schools and organisations dealing with young people.

During July and August 1997 Jigsaw Theatre Company produced Fossils for schools in Canberra and the neighbouring regional area. As there was a crossover between this season and Theatre South’s season, both companies had come to an agreement on exactly which areas each would cover.
My past creative association with Lyn Wallis, who was then artistic director of Jigsaw, was obviously helpful in getting Fossils on the company’s 1997 program—nonetheless, I knew it was a play she quite liked. Although Lyn had directed many of my previous plays, Greg Lissaman, Jigsaw’s education officer, directed this production. Lyn was the assistant director to Des Davis on the original production, and she felt would not be able to distance herself from it, and contribute a new approach to the play.

Jigsaw’s major promotion consisted of a mail-out and the play’s inclusion in a very professional fold-up brochure outlining the theatre’s yearly program under the banner of “Interactive: Theatre with Energy.” There were no images, only copy, which echoed the back cover of the Currency Press playscript “... in the tradition of Dags and Boss of the Pool. Fossils takes a hilarious look at the relationship between parents and teenagers”, and continued:

Exploring themes of conformity, self expression, respect, and conciliation, the play revolves around three teenagers and their families. Julie is embarrassed by parents that drag her on trips to the Blue Mountains, Franky must deal with the anxieties of his Italian born widowed mum, and Michelle longs for her executive parents to pay her some attention.

The cast was Sarah Snell as Julie, Danielle Antaki as Michelle and Edward Wightman as Franky. The designer was Gordon Burns. Gordon graduated from NIDA in 1995 and already had an impressive list of credits to his name. He also designed the set for my play, Mercury, which was produced by Jigsaw in 1996. The design for this production featured a black and white background covered with outlines of dinosaur bones with an overlay of gridlines. The effect was that of a map from an archaeological dig. The props were again mounted on the set except this time labelled as museum artefacts on a grid drawing.

The play was once again extremely well received by teachers and students alike, but Jigsaw Theatre struggled to get bookings as the play was not as well known as in New South Wales. I was lucky enough to see one of the performances and was treated to what I thought was overall one of the best productions of the play I had seen to date.
The production evaluation forms returned to Jigsaw Theatre were very positive towards both the play and the production. One teacher from Caroline Chisholm High wrote, “The students were unanimously positive. Some identified their own ‘fossils’ in the characters.” Another teacher from Dixon College noted that the students “were goggle-eyed at the efficiency of the quick character changes”, and “they loved the scenes involving young love.” These comments were typical of the type of response the play generated.

The review in Muse Magazine praises the cast and the director and has the following to say about Fossils:

The play’s success is firmly grounded in Manuel Aston’s sharply observant script. The snappy dialogue provokes loud guffaws and the thrill of recognition from the audience. ... The story’s warmth encapsulates the question that everyone must have asked at one stage – does anybody in the world have parents like mine? ... Neither patronising nor ridiculing, Fossils is exactly what a play for young adults should be.”

Apart from co-productions, no other Australian professional theatre companies have produced Fossils, although with the plays increasing popularity, perhaps this situation will change.

Platypus Theatre - Berlin

In June 1998, my agent informed me that Platypus Theatre, a TIE company based in Berlin, wanted the rights to Fossils. They planned on an extended season of shows beginning in October 1998 and ending in January 1999. Platypus Theatre performs shows in English for German school students between the ages of 11 and 14. The education context of their work falls between both drama studies and English studies. The artistic director of the company, Peter Scollin, is an expatriate Australian (hence the platypus). Platypus Theatre was started in 1984 and until 1992 performed mainly group-devised shows for younger audiences between three and nine years old. In 1991, the company decided to shift their market to students who were in their third and fourth years of learning English, which broadly speaking meant they were between 11 and 15 years old. Again most of the shows were group-devised – Fossils is the first play the company has
produced that is not group-devised. This was partly because, as Peter wrote to me, “devising plays takes a long time, and it doesn’t always work.” They found out about *Fossils* by reading the review of the play in Lowdown Magazine, and felt it had potential in terms of their target audience.

Figure 7 illustrates the front and back cover of the program for Platypus Theatre’s production. The front cover features a collage of kids and parents, one kid with headphones on, one Dad with a mobile phone, and in the middle one kid with a thought bubble reading, “does anyone in the world have parents like mine?”

The back features some interesting quotes, presumably from students, in response to questions which are highlighted in black boxes, and the answers are in handwritten, kid’s writing. My father, Fernando Aston, is fluent in German and he kindly translated this section of the program for me. To the question, “What expression is typical of your parents?” one answer read, “Clean your room. (*Raum dein zimmer auf*)”. When asked “What do you think when your parents try to talk to you about love?” one reply was, “They don’t talk about it (*Sie reden nicht über...*)”.
To the question, “Do your parents try to enlighten you?” was the wonderful reply “its already too late (Es ist sowieso zu spät).” Obviously, the ‘fossil’ concept is universal!

Peter Scollin directed the play, and the cast included Nichola Ransom, Ilya Parenteau, and Frank Bruckner. Judging by the biographies in the program, it is quite a cosmopolitan cast, with the actors’ backgrounds ranging from London, Chicago and Frankfurt, and the director originally coming from Adelaide.

When the play is booked, each school receives a ‘preparation sheet’. This includes a brief synopsis of the scene and example of the dialogue and a selection of words that the students may have trouble with. Appendix 16 is an example of the first page of the sheet. It is interesting reading – particularly the Australian slang that has been identified, such as “yep”, “mate”, “g’day”, and “dag”.

Although the play was being performed in English, a number of changes needed to be made to ‘translate’ the play so that it remains relevant to the students. The nature of these changes is fascinating. For example, Franky Zeferelli became Franky Winterstein, and his mother rather than being Italian is naturally, German. So when noticing a zit on his chin, the line “What is that, on your chin?” becomes the Anglo-German combination “Vas ist das, in your schin?” Peter comments that “the kids just love that kind of thing and laugh”, which he continues, “is an important aspect of our work”. To suit the school scheduling the play needed to be abridged, which meant cutting a few scenes, and slightly altering the dialogue to reflect the cuts. My role in this process was more that of dramaturg than writer, as naturally Peter and his company had a greater understanding of the demands of the German TIE system.

Peter sent me a selection of comments from both teachers and students. The similarity of responses from the Berlin production and the Canberra production are worth noting. For example, one of the kids found it “(translated) highly entertaining that the three actors could change roles so quickly”. Inge, from class 6A felt that, “(translated) it’s a pity we can’t see what Dominic looks like!” Without doubt, my favourite comment is by Anne who wrote, “(translated) Fossils was super! I didn’t understand much of it, but it was super.”
LETTER FROM CURRENCY PRESS

13 January 1994

Manuel Aston
Big Hand Theatre Co
PO Box 363
Epping NSW 2121

Dear Manuel,

We are pleased to say that we would like to publish your play Fossils in our teenage drama series and I enclose our standard contract.

We enjoyed reading your play and look forward to working on the preparation for publishing with you.

If you have a copy of the play on computer, we'd appreciate a disk to work from.

If you have any queries about the contract please telephone me. Otherwise, return the second copy of the contract with your signature to us.

Best wishes,

Sandra Gorman
Publishing Director
Dear Manuel,

Thank you for your tremendous contribution to our workshop day at the Ensemble. Feedback from the students has been extremely positive and we feel that your enthusiasm, professionalism and sense of humour were a source of inspiration for them. This was despite the fact that you had to contend with a very tight schedule and a HUGE number of participants.

As you are no doubt aware we are on a steep learning curve and will streamline the structure of the workshops for next year. If you have revived sufficiently we would be delighted to have you involved once again.

We look forward to seeing you at the performance on September 16.

Yours sincerely,

Eileen

Co-ordinators
A PLAY BY MANUEL ASTON

Manuel Aston's play for young people was written after discussions and improvisations with a whole range of High School students. His research has produced a light-hearted look at parent-child relationships. Familiar issues such as 'the untidy room', 'careers', 'what are you wearing?' come to life in a series of scenes which are bound to be familiar to students and painful and humorous reflections of moments in their own lives.

Three actors (one male, two female) change roles to become parents, students, friends and teachers.

Music is a strong component of the play and underscores a number of scenes.

BOOKINGS
and
ENQUIRIES

(042)296144
or 296758.
FOSSILS!
a kids-eye-view of parents
A play by Manuel Aston

Dear Diary, does anyone in the world have parents like mine? If I try to be like everybody else, it's "Why do you have to do what everyone else does?" and "Can't you think for yourself?" If I dare to be different it's "Why can't you just be like everybody else."

Julie, Michelle & Franky try to solve the world's oldest problem: How do you survive growing up with 'fossils'?

Julie wants a date with Johnny (he's so cool);
Mum wants to set her up with daggy Dominic.
Julie: He's got zits Mum!
Mum: He's a lovely boy...he wants to be a doctor.
Julie: He'll need to be a doctor to treat his face.

Entertaining for adults and young audiences alike, 'Fossils!' takes an hilarious look at how parents and kids attempt to live with each other.

DON'T BE A FOSSIL! BOOK NOW!
Ph (042) 296144 or 296758
PLAYING AT THE BRIDGE THEATRE, CONISTON.
OCTOBER 23rd to NOVEMBER 7th

PRODUCTION FLYER 1994
Theatre South is a professional theatre company, subsidised by the N.S.W. Ministry for the Arts and the Australia Council. As well as its mainstage program it has, over the years, established a fine reputation for work for young audiences. In the last couple of years thousands of young people have seen and enjoyed productions such as 'Five Times Dizzy' and 'Hating Alison Ashley' in theatres around Sydney, in non-metropolitan N.S.W. and in Melbourne.

This production has been made possible with the assistance of the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body and the New South Wales Government Ministry for the Arts.

1994 SEASON

VENUES  DATE  TIME

Zenith Theatre, Chatswood.  March 1st  9.45 & 12.45
Bookings: Ph (02) 411 7011

March 2nd  9.45 & 12.45
March 3rd  9.45 & 12.45
March 4th  9.45 & 12.45

Enmore Theatre, Enmore.  March 7th  12.45
March 8th  9.45 & 12.45

Bankstown Town Hall, Bankstown.  March 9th  12.45
March 10th  9.45 & 12.45

Joan Sutherland Centre, Penrith.  March 11th  9.45 & 12.45

Sutherland Entertainment Centre, Sutherland.  March 14th  12.45
March 15th  9.45 & 12.45

Riverside Theatre, Parramatta.  March 16th  12.45
March 17th  9.45 & 12.45

Camden Civic Centre, Camden.  March 18th  9.45 & 12.45

Bridge Theatre, Wollongong.  March 21st  9.45 & 12.45
March 22nd

Length of Show: 90 minutes (no interval).
Cost: $7.50 per student (teachers free).
Suitable: Secondary students, years 7 to 10

Bookings for all venues besides Zenith & Riverside can be made with Theatre South on

Ph (02) 411 7011
Ph (02) 683 6166
Fossil. (noun) Colloquial. An outdated or old fashioned person or thing. Slang Parent

FOSSILS!
A play by Manuel Aston

DON'T BE A FOSSIL
BOOK NOW!
LOWDOWN MAGAZINE REVIEW

THEATRE SOUTH COMPANY
NSW
Fossils
by Manuel Aston

‘Fossils’ is a delightful play which addresses the parent-child generation gap felt by young people during their teens. A time of psychological, physical and social growth makes for a great source of conflict, joy and a rich recipe for theatre. Manuel Aston’s script bubbles with clever witticisms and a wonderful visual language which places us immediately on each character’s wavelength. This is a play about the difficulties young people have communicating, being understood and accepted by their “fossils” ie. parents: “homo-parentificus”.

Three types of “fossils” are introduced by their respective children with the three actors taking turns at playing the parents. Julie Jones (Kylie Burgess) has old fashioned parents: a father who fixes things and has a passion for old musicals and a mother who loves crosswords and is on many organising committees. Julie’s interpretation of them as “Gestapo thought police” is hilarious when the scene culminates in the story of the uncle who had been in the concentration camp.

Michelle Watson’s (Raechelle Lee) yuppie executive parents consist of a father who is perpetually on a mobile and a mother who is the publicist of a woman’s magazine. The clever dissection of half sentences that the father (Hedditch) uses to communicate with his wife, his daughter, his mobile and newspaper are performed with a great sense of timing and fun.

Franky Zefferelli (Adam Hedditch) is the new kid in school. His mother reluctantly combines traditional Italian values with contemporary Australian life. Hedditch’s characterisation of the guitar hero kid is charming. The portrayal of the Italian mother is slightly out of date. Lee’s poor Italian accent is unnecessary considering most Italians migrated in the 50s and by the 90s can in fact speak English well. With so many options to choose from to illustrate cultural conflict in this multicultural country of ours, the “goats cheese sandwiches” is a poor example, especially since most kids would consider them gourmet food.

The journey is motivated by Julie Jones’ desire to increase her popularity and have a date with the spunkiest boy in school. Delightfully naive and superficial, this accurate portrayal of a young person learning the value of true friends is undermined by Kylie Burgess’ self-conscious performance. Many ironies are thrown away as Burgess plays out the superficiality rather than the truth of the feelings of her character.

The growing romance between Michelle Watson and Franky Zefferelli also drives the story. The awkwardness and insecurities of a first love are played out beautifully by both Lee and Hedditch. A lot of issues are covered with wit and fun: drugs, cleaning your room, fashion (if your parents don’t like it then you know it’s cool), to an hilarious rendition of a birds and bees chat where, if ignorant, one would think children were conceived by eating delicious food and drinking Rosemont Chardonnay.

The best moments were well performed scenes like Julie’s Dad taking her to school because of a sore ankle and ending up showing slides to her English class. What begins with innocent snap shots escalates into classic embarrassing moments like Julie being rescued at the swimming carnival, Julie with nappies and Julie without nappies.

The set designed by Michael Coe is simple and effective for touring. The use of individual pieces of costume to transform into different characters makes for quick scene changes which helps the pace of the whole piece.

Unfortunately the company did not use the opportunity of working in the Zenith Theatre to their advantage. The sloppy lighting design and cuing was amplified in this environment, as was the poor direction by Artistic Director Des Davis. The scene in which Julie’s parents are helping her choose a career by talking about when they were her age is an example of this. Instead of the actors playing the truth of the situation for each character, they played the nagging parents and so the audience immediately switched off missing the point of the scene.

Theatre South’s production of ‘Fossils’ has a hit and miss quality about it because of its low production values. A little more attention to detail would allow for greater absorption and enjoyment of this wonderful script.

Antonietta Morgillo
The most recent offering in Jigsaw Theatre’s interactive season, Fossils!, explores the often tricky relationships between teenagers and parents from the point of view of the youth. Directed by Greg Lissaman, and starring Danielle Antaki, Sarah Snell and Edward Wightman, this most amusing play ought be seen by parents and kids alike.

The story rotates around three central characters — Julie (Snell), Michelle (Antaki) and Frankie (Wightman), each of whom has their own particular cross to bear with respect to ‘the fossils’ — their parents. Julie’s are remnants of another era, over-protective and trained in advance methods of torture. Her Mum in particular is on the organising committee for everything. Michelle’s power-parents barely have time to talk, epitomising the modern yuppie rushed pace of living. Frankie’s widowed Italian immigrant mother has her own frustrating idiosyncrasies. We follow the three of them as Frankie begins at his new school, and encounters the girls. The play culminates in a confrontation at the school formal which forces each of the teenagers to re-examine their relationships with each other and their parents.

These three talented actors take on all roles, adult and teenager alike, and manage to effectively skip between the characters. This ability is particularly evident as the trio are seen preening themselves in readiness for the dance. Weaving in and out, swapping from anxious parent to anxious teenager and back again, the actors hit a chord with the audience as the scene ends with all three teenagers hearing the shouted command ‘...and be home by twelve!’. Director Greg Lissaman’s clever direction enhances the dialogue, the audience responding well to the neat little transitional tricks.

The play’s success is firmly grounded in Manuel Aston’s sharply observant script. The snappy dialogue provokes loud guffaws and the thrill of recognition from the audience. The lines coming from the cast’s lips had surely at one time or another escaped from our own. The realism of scenes such as the girlie gossip in the back of the class, the treatise on sandwiches, and, in particular, Julie’s interaction with her parents, strikes a chord.

The story’s warmth encapsulates the question that everyone must have asked at one stage — does anybody in the world have parents like mine?

The play is also effectively and simply staged, the props suspended from hooks on the wall. Neither patronising nor ridiculing, Fossils! is exactly what a play for young adults should be.
For parents and their offspring, teenage years provide generation gaps as wide and deep as the Grand Canyon. A new play, *Fossils*, brings the antagonisms on stage in an attempt to bridge the gap with comedy. 

DENISE EVERTON reports.

NO MATTER what generation you belong to it seems parental attitudes never change. There is always a point in a teenager's life when he or she is desperate for freedom and individuality while parents are equally desperate to retain control and authority.

You may scoff at such a suggestion. Maintaining you would never be like that as a parent but think about it for a minute. Does this next statement sound familiar?

Julie thinks her parents worry too much. "If I cry to be like everybody else, it's 'Why do you have to do what everyone else does?' and 'Can't you think for yourself?' If I dare to be different, it's 'Why can't you be like everybody else?'"

Admit it, you've been through this scenario. Now Manuel Aston has compiled this and other generation-gap gems into a witty play about family and friendships called *Fossils: A Kids' Eye-View of Parents*.

Designed in the tradition of *Dads*, the play revolves around three teenagers — Julie, Michelle and Franky — who try to solve the world's oldest problems. "Fossils* plays on bones of contention and trends have changed since they were young," Angela said.

"It gives parents a chance to look at their kids in a new way while also making the kids look at the parents. It's all done in a hilarious way with the whole situation being sent up dramatically."

Playing dual roles as 16-year-old teenagers and their parents, a commitment which is testing their skills to the limit.

"A three-person show is exhausting because we're each in almost every scene and we're always changing character," Caroline said.

"Because the older we are, the more we get used to seeing things from the other person's point of view."

Angela and Carol became friends while working on Theatre South's production of *Five Times Dizzy* and attribute their ability to work well off one another to that closeness.

Their roles in *Fossils* are actually a step up in age from the 12-year-olds they were playing in *Five Times Dizzy* and both admit they can understand the teenage dilemma.

"I relate to the script 100 per cent the first moment I read it," Carol said. "I remember all of this happening and it's scary to think one day I'll be like this too."

Carol, who is best known for her long-term association with *A Country Practice* in the mid 1980s, has since studied overseas and written and performed a cabaret show based on the zany world of show business called *Naked Ambition*.

Angela originally had her sights set on a dancing career but injury forced her to change her allegiance to acting. She performed in *Charlie's Aunt* at Sydney last year but while she enjoys comedy, wants to tackle Shakespeare in English repertory theatre.

*Fossils* opens at the Bridge Theatre in Coniston tomorrow and runs until November 7. For tickets, contact Theatre South.
Theatre South comedy appeals to all ages
Fossils digs up dirt on parents

By JANINE OLDFIELD

Some children describe them as fossils, while the rest of us use the relatively boring term, parents.

The comedy Fossils is Theatre South's exploration of the view children have of their parents.

Originally promised as a show to tour schools, the appeal of the production and skill of writing made a full-scale play viable for adults, director Des Davis said.

"We commissioned the play from Manuel Aston — an extremely talented young writer — because we wanted to do a play for youth since most of what we do for young people does not reach the adolescent age range," Mr Davis said.

"But as the material developed, we realised the appeal of the play would have to extend to adults and so decided to do a longer version."

The play affords a running commentary on the interaction between three main characters (played by Michael Coe, Caroline Johansson and Angela Karagianis) and the relationships they have with their parents (also played by the three actors).

Julie's (Caroline) ambition is to date Johnny Johano, the school hunk and sports star. She enlists her friends, Michelle (Angels) and Franky (Michael), to catch her prey that culminates in a spectacular dance scene. (Both actresses have dance experience).

Being a well-written fully-Australian production, Mr Davis anticipates a positive and welcoming response.

"People want to see images of themselves and be inspired — which you won't necessarily get in the media.

"The justification and rationale for a theatre like ours is providing entertainment that says what it is to be Australian here and now.

"We want to hold up a mirror to ourselves, as Shakespeare said, and this play contributes to that."

Although the cast is relatively young, they've had considerable experience on stage and screen. Michale Coe is a graduate from Wollongong University's Creative Arts Department and is a permanent fixture of Theatre South's — performing in most major productions.

Angela Karagianis was a nominee for the Young Achiever Nissan Arts Award, and Caroline Johansson played Nurse Donna Manning in A Country Practice.

Fossils will run from October 23 to November 7 and bookings can be made through 29 6144 or 29 6758. Tickets range from $17 to $20 (Friday and Saturday nights) and concessions are available.
FOSSILS - Preparation  English Version

fossils - austr. Jugendslang für Eltern
yuppy fossils - young urban professional person (jung, erfolgreich, städtisch)
fossil attack - Angriff
fossil territory - Gebiet
fossil guilt trip - Schuldgefühl
herd of fossils grazing in the Alps - grasende Fossilherde in den Alpen
stone age - Steinzeit

Australischer Slang
yep- yes
mate - Kumpel
g'day - Tach
pretty - sehr (z.B. pretty good - sehr gut)
dag day - Scheißtag

I. Julie Jones' family

FOSSILS begins one Sunday morning in Julie Jones' bedroom. She is fifteen and hates family picnics. On this particular Sunday, her parents want her to go with them to the Blue Mountains. Julie wants to stay in bed. In her eyes, her parents are old fashioned, therefore fossils. Her mother is a well organized housewife but Julie resents her mother for interfering in her private life. Julie's father is well meaning but rather helpless both in his attempts to communicate with his daughter and to repair things in the house.

Mum: Your hot chocolate will go cold.
Julie: Get real, Mom, can't I have a cappucino?
Dad: When I was a boy we had cold porridge...

M S ASTON - DCA 2000 - APPENDIX 3
If "Fosters" is Australian for "beer", then "platypus" must be their word for 'good English'.

The idea of improving your language skills by watching plays about the things that really matter in the modern universe, i.e. (the other) sex, getting into trouble, spots, parents (often referred to as 'boobs' down under!) and social acceptance, then leap an eye out for the Platypus theatre.

This plucky little group is now touring its first ever tour outside Berlin. They're on the road with their hit comedy "Kisses and Cokes", which is about a German girl who has just moved to Texas. Her parents, 50,000 people have seen it since its premiere in 1992.

I saw them perform "Fossils". It's an energetic comedy with serious touches and demands a lot of fast costume and accent changes from its 3 actors, who each have to play 3 roles. A good way to keep fit! I hadn't enjoyed myself so much at the theatre for a long time. (That's because you've never grown up, Dan Ed.) They were professional without being slick, humorous without being stupid and sometimes quite rude - but don't worry, only to each other!

Two scenes I recall particularly well is one in which a self-obessed young couple demonstrated to their frustrated daughter how she was conceived ("blow me a kiss!"), and another in which the hero had to squeeze out a massive chin spot (you know, the ones which suddenly appear by evil magic the day before you're finally going out with the girl/boy you've been chasing for months). It was so realistic I got worried about sitting in the front row.

I also liked the fact that the actors seemed to enjoy themselves too which makes a change from a lot of modern theatre.

My only reservation was that some of the English was a bit difficult, especially for younger learners. However, as I wrote above, they're touring with "Kisses and Cokes", which I am told is easier. In this respect, it's worth noting that they have plenty of written material to accompany the plays (Are you listening, teachers?)

All that remains is to say "well, what are you waiting for?" Contact one of these numbers for a seriously good time. G'day!

Dun Aire Platypus phone: (030) 252 25 98 fax: (030) 252 95 615 Easy Office (bookings) 030/61-40 19 20

Anspielung auf "Jo"* under, Australia ("your mother") - Australien
"Anspielung auf "Jo"* under, Australia ("your mother") - Australien"
LETTER FROM PETER & KATH ENGELBERT

The following is a copy of a letter received from Kath and Peter Engelbert regarding their son, James', involvement in Dramaworks.

9 Kethol Road,
Cheltenham. 2119.
14/6/93

Dear Manny,

We sincerely appreciate the opportunity you gave James to perform in your play, "If Johnny Jumped Off the Harbour Bridge Would You?" James gained a great deal of teamwork skills and self-confidence from working with a small group and then performing in front of an audience on a number of occasions. Being part of your production was fun for him and has helped him to feel important, working closely with adults and other children.

This project has extended James to a level of skill far beyond our expectation. He has shown commitment, an ability to memorise, discipline, stamina and many other characteristics which are not normally achieved in a typical classroom environment.

Thank you for your time and genuine interest in helping James to grow.

Yours sincerely,

Katherine & Peter Engelbert.
THEATREFEST ADJUDICATORS' REPORTS

The following is a copy of the Theatrefest '93 Adjudicators’ Report, as presented by John Krummel.

THEATREFEST '93

ADJUDICATORS REPORT

ADJUDICATOR: JOHN KRUMMEL

DRAMAWORKS
If Johnny Jumped Off The Harbour Bridge Would You?
by Manuel Aston
Directed by Lynette Wallis

THE PLAY:
Absolutely delightful play. Witty, perceptive, economical, hugely entertaining.

STAGE PRESENTATION:
The stage presentation was indeed exciting, with all the elements blending to produce a unified whole. Very high standard indeed.

PRODUCTION:
A knockout production, with very tight and seamless direction. Pacing smooth, unhurried, engaging.

Fantastic teamwork with very clear interpretation. This was one of the best drilled productions (professional or otherwise) that I have seen in a long while. Full marks to the director.

ACTING:
ALL the young cast were delightful. The director seemed to be able to highlight their respective personalities and fuse them with the script. Very impressive and entertaining. And a word for the two oldies – a tower of strength for the kids. Their contribution cannot be undervalued. Superbly supportive.

Marvellous.
The following is a copy of the Theatrefest '93 Adjudicators' Report, as presented by Lynette Curran.

THEATREFEST '93
ADJUDICATORS REPORT

ADJUDICATOR: LYNETTE CURRAN

DRAMAWORKS
If Johnny Jumped Off The Harbour Bridge Would You?
by Manuel Aston
Directed by Lynette Wallis

THE PLAY:
This play is excellent schools performance material. Apart from that, this production would work anywhere I believe.

Intelligent humour. Compassionate - easily related to.
Positive & humanitarian. The dialogue rooted in reality and economics.

STAGE PRESENTATION:
I can't fault anything here. It was a delight. Lighthearted and informative.

PRODUCTION:
So well directed, choreographed. The kids played truthfully - so refreshing to not see any cutesy mugging.

Well drilled and done with such enthusiasm. Carefully cast - a sure delight.

ACTING:
Was beautifully done. I did wonder at the parents reading the script? These performances were both spot on. Technically and emotionally with such precision.

Julie and Michelle played to a T.

I have seen many professional productions that would not rate with these performers.

This production cannot stop here...BRAVO!
The following is a copy of the Theatrefest '93 Adjudicators' Report, as presented by Patrick Guerrera.

THEATREFEST 93 : ADJUDICATOR'S REPORT
ADJUDICATOR: PATRICK GUERRERA

Session 3, #4
Theatre Group: Dramaworks
Name of production: If Johnny jumped off the Harbour Bridge would you?

Comments...

I don't know what else I need to say about this production. Did you guess I adored it?

The beauty of this production was its simplicity and truth. Every single person in the auditorium could empathise with almost every monologue, every choice, every parental statement. It was more a celebration of childhood, innocence, family and life itself than a piece of youth theatre. What a joy to actually be part of such a feeling of communion than an adjudicator at a theatre festival. It's a simple fact: connect with the most universally human and truthful moments in life, and you will hold any audience in the palm of your hand.

The greater joy of this production was obviously, also, the performances. There is no question that Lynette worked long and hard to get the cast to the level she did. Of course there are some incredibly gifted actors in this cast - but it takes a director/artist of great heart, patience, instrumentation, method and love to inspire such performances. Nothing short of inspiring.

To be slightly picky, why were the parents reading their lines? Were they ringins or what? I would love to see mum and dad playing solid clear actions. It would boost the production to even greater heights. This doesn't mean the spacial concept of the production would have to change, it would just mean physicalising the parent's thoughts to a level which is some what more theatrical!

Thank you - I can't wait to see it again on Saturday.
THEATREFEST ARTICLE ON WIN

The following is an example of one of the various newspaper articles that the Theatrefest win generated. It appeared in the Parramatta Advertiser on Wednesday 15 September, 1993.

Multi-award winners

by NANN WEBBER

YOUNG Parramatta acting group, Dramaworks — the youth theatre company for Australian College of Entertainment — scooped the pool at the prestigious Theatrefest '93 Awards.

The seven young actors aged between 11 and 16, all from the Parramatta and Hills area, are Karen Costa, James Engelbert, Amanda Jermyn, Sacha Manietta, Sam Nerello, Kristie Sands-Wade and Richard Sedin.

Adult actors Rosalie Lester and Bruce Love won the prize for their exciting performance of Manuel Aston's new play, If Johnny Jumped Off the Harbour Bridge Would You? which was also named Best Unpublished Play.

Manuel is Dramaworks' resident writer.

Director Lynette Wallis won a special Adjudicator's Award and Best Director trophy.

Theatrefest is the largest amateur drama festival in NSW and this year attracted 24 well known metropolitan and country groups.

Adjudicators were theatre professionals John Krummel, Lynette Curran and Patrick Guerrera.

After Dramaworks' performance Theatrefest adjudicator and Sydney Theatre Company Assistant Director Guerrera leapt on to the stage calling for more applause for "the most wonderful afternoon I have experienced in the theatre, for some time."

He went on to say "these actors are our future... and a very exciting one at that."

Lynette Wallis was elated over Dramaworks' multiple win. "Being one of only two youth groups in such big competition, we didn't expect to do so well," she said.

Their $1000 prize will go towards the cost of their next production.
24 October, 1994

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Manuel Aston has been involved in piloting the Kids For Kids (K4K) Project at the College for the past two terms. I had initial meetings with Manuel early in second term of this year and the project has proceeded through several stages since that time.

The project has been launched with students from the Middle School (Year 9), and has so far incorporated several planning meetings as well as a workshop, auditioning and casting sessions with approximately thirty students, including several girls from Year 9 at Ravenswood School. We are working towards three evening performances in late November and a daytime performance for the whole of Year 9.

The project has been extremely successful to date and has generated great enthusiasm amongst the students. Workshops targeted specifically towards preparing students for their auditions and the fact that the students have been supervised through a professional casting process has given them invaluable insights; and as the rehearsals proceed their insights continue.

The students will no doubt come away from the completed project with a far more perceptive attitude towards the process of theatre, and an understanding of and confidence in their own ability to contribute to the translation of an idea into a creative and effective performance.

Anthony Renshaw
MIC Drama, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview