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My worst ever night at the best school ball ever : creating taboo theatre for teenagers

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My Worst Ever Night at the Best School Ball Ever:

Creating Taboo Theatre for Teenagers

Exegesis

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ABSTRACT

My Worst Ever Night at the Best School Ball Ever (School Ball) is a new play for teenage audiences. The action takes place on the night of a ball for final year students. A prank with a goat goes horribly wrong, a photo of a girl pissing in a pot plant is widely circulated, and everyone finds out about the boy in a sexual relationship with a teacher. At the heart of the play are teenagers, armed with mobile phones, trying to find their way in a contradictory and confusing world.

The creative development of *School Ball* centred on practice-based artistic research into the field of theatre for young audiences (TYA) through my practice as a director. The research question was: how to produce taboo theatre for teenagers?

School Ball was conceived as a production that would tour to schools. The school ball concept was popular with teachers, parents and theatre company board members but I encountered strong resistance to the story of a male student in a sexual relationship with a female teacher. Even though such relationships were being reported weekly in the media, the content was perceived to be taboo for young audiences. Developing *School Ball* investigated the complex relationships between TYA and the education system, as well as artistic and production strategies to navigate *School Ball* past school gatekeepers and reach its target audience.

Young people are at the centre of the research practice, participating in workshops, collaborating with artists, and responding to the work. Their involvement helped make *School Ball* accurately reflect adolescent experiences, such as the centrality of text messaging – another taboo in the school environment.

Australian TYA is considered to be at the forefront of international practice: innovative in creative process and theatrical form, imaginative and daring in content. But TYA practice is neither homogenous nor self-contained. In artistic practice, means of production and competition for audiences, TYA intersects with Theatre in Education (TIE), Young People's Theatre (YPT), drama education, adult and commercial theatre. Part of the research aimed to understand the TYA landscape and the place of *School Ball* within it.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

i.   Incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

ii.   Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or

iii.   Contain any defamatory material;

Jeremy Rice
21 June 2013

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1. Introduction

In late 2006, the Australian Minister for the Arts, Senator Brandis, visited Perth and made himself available for a forum with local artists at the King Street Arts Centre. A colleague asked the Minister what support he could offer to youth performing arts.

BRANDIS   Youth performing arts… what's that?

ARTIST   It's performing arts produced specifically for young people.

BRANDIS   I don't agree with that. I would think that a young person wants to see real theatre, *Hamlet* and the like, not some children's pantomime.

I am reasonably confident that is what the Minister said. I wrote down as much as I could, word-for-word, despite my shock at hearing that the Minister responsible for funding my art form – and my job – disagreed with the art form's existence.

Fortunately, arm's length funding and a change of government prevented the Minister from taking action to save young audiences from pantomime and deliver them to Shakespeare. But his words implied a question that is rarely asked in Australia: why theatre for young audiences? At the beginning of my research, I had to answer that question, to justify both my area of research and twenty years' practice in the field.

Debates over government spending compel artists to articulate why the arts are necessary. In the wake of the global financial crisis, Cate Blanchett, then artistic director of Sydney Theatre Company, argued in her keynote address to the 2010 Australian Performing Arts Market (APAM) that, "the arts are more than just an industry" (Blanchett 2010:13):

> The arts operate at the core of human identity and existence… [They] give people the chance to make sense of the experience of their lives, and the tool to communicate that unique sense in another person or people (Blanchett 2010:13).

The International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ) is an umbrella organisation for youth performing arts national organisations, companies and artists. Its charter states: "ASSITEJ recognises the right of all children to enrichment through the arts and their own cultural traditions, especially theatre culture" (Omasta 2009:106). The Australia Council, the Australian Government's arts funding

agency, has enrichment in its mission: "To enrich our nation by supporting the practice and enjoyment of the arts" (Australia Council 2013).

The ASSITEJ charter and the Australia Council Mission Statement reflect the assumption prevalent among Australian governments, education systems and social institutions that the arts are good for society. Public debate focuses on levels of government support and the occasional sensational examination of what constitutes acceptable art, such as the Bill Henson controversy of 2009 (Levy 2010). Blanchett's APAM speech indicates that, while the positive value of the arts is a widely held assumption, artists must continually assert the value of their art to justify continued public funding and support.

Senator Brandis' contrariness raises another question: why do young people need dedicated artistic practice?

Creating theatre specifically for young people is not about cultivating future audiences. It is about all sectors of society having access to arts experiences that can help them to make sense of the feelings and actions that constitute their lives. Young people are bound together with commonalities specific to their age: the processes and experiences of physical growth, emotional maturation, being parented and formal education. Dedicated arts practice can delve more deeply into these experiences.

Young people occupy an ambiguous and contradictory place in Australia: economically powerful as consumers and, simultaneously, politically and legally marginalised on the basis of their age. "Live theatre has the ability to expose that ambiguity and the ability to deal with this is what humanises us as audience members" (Chance 2005:2).

1.2 Terminology

Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) is theatre produced by professional artists for audiences aged up to about eighteen years of age. In the United States of America and Canada, this is abbreviated to TYA. In Australia and Britain, the term Theatre for Young People (TYP) is more common. I prefer TYA, firstly for clarity: theatre for young people can be confused with young people's theatre (the difference is explained below); secondly, I prefer the acknowledgement and emphasis on audience as the key driver for this artistic practice.

Young People's Theatre (YPT) refers to theatre productions performed by young people, often created in collaboration with professional artists, and falls under the umbrella term, 'youth arts'. I have extensive experience in youth arts and bring some of the collaborative processes of YPT to creating work for young audiences, especially when producing work for teenagers.

Theatre In Education (TIE) refers to performances created for school audiences, often in close alignment to the school curriculum. Those of us in the TYA sector draw a distinction between TIE, focused on education, and TYA, focused on art, notwithstanding that most theatre for teenagers is performed for school audiences, often within schools. A more formal distinction in the past has been the source of government subsidy. TIE companies used to receive funding mostly from education departments, while TYA companies are subsidised with arts funding.

Some commentators see Young People's Theatre (YPT) as informing TYA, giving professional artists who produce theatre for young audiences an idea of what appeals to young people. In my experience, this is not entirely true since YPT participants tend to be theatre-literate, confident in artistic expression and often represent an "artsy" segment of the youth population. Their parents and families support their participation, transporting them to classes and rehearsals, attending performance and generally role modelling appreciation of the arts. These young people bring an understanding of contemporary professional theatre to the creative process rather than behaviour and values common in the non-theatre-going sectors. This group formed the pool from which most of the participants in my research workshops were drawn.

TYA audiences — especially teenagers — are usually captive audiences through the school system. They are not necessarily theatre-literate and are often suspicious of

artistic expression. They represent a broader socio-economic and cultural band of the population and are more likely to take their inspiration from popular non-theatre culture like mass-audience media including television, magazines and radio. This is relevant because there is often a judgment value placed on the superiority of youth performance— with its social action agenda — over TYA that is produced to entertain and engage a much broader audience.

Theatre for Young People (TYP) in Australia

TIE
Theatre in Education
Professional performers and other artists; curriculum based work.

TYA
Theatre for Young Audiences
Professional performers and other artists

YPT
Young People's Theatre
or youth theatre
or youth performance
Youth arts practice: volunteer young people creating work independently or in collaboration with professional artists.

SCHOOLS

TIE performances in schools

TYA school performances e.g. **SCHOOL BALL**

n3

NOT SCHOOLS
theatres, streets, festivals, etc.

n1

TYA performances in theatres and other public venues

n2

Youth performances in theatres and other public venues

These are porous categories: for example, many TYA companies run youth arts programs.
Note 1: some TIE companies present in theatres, e.g. Jigsaw in Canberra. This area of practice also includes performances in museums, galleries and other places visited by school groups.
Note 2: many TYA performances in theatre might be sold exclusively to school audiences.
Note 3: many youth arts organisations have direct links and programs with schools. Some schools have co-curricular drama groups.
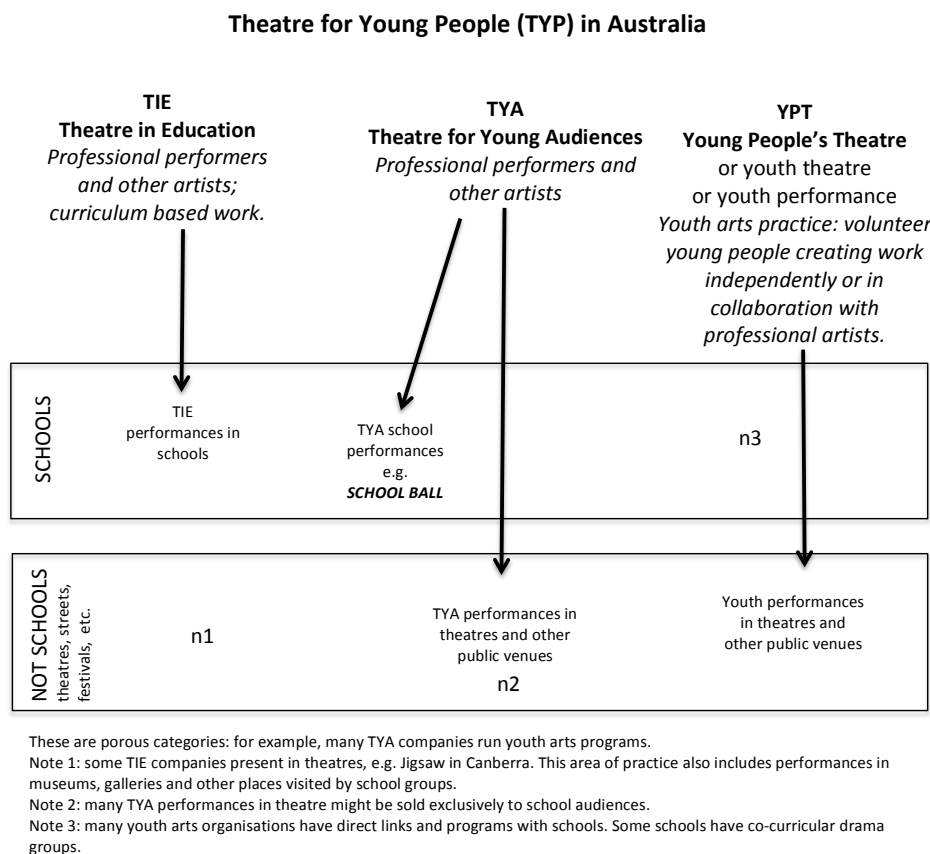
Figure 1.1 Theatre for Young People (TYA) in Australia

1.3 A Play About School Balls

In 2006, I became the artistic director of a TYA company, Barking Gecko Theatre Company (Barking Gecko) in Perth. The company's mission is to produce professional theatre for audiences from eight to eighteen years and their families.

Being new to the city and state, I set out to discover Western Australia's cultural landscape and understand its parochial icons within the frame of young people's experience. The ritual of the school ball was immediately evident. On Tuesdays The West Australian newspaper publishes a full page of photographs of school students at their school balls, featuring around twenty couples. These features add colour to the newspaper and give older readers an opportunity to comment on young people's deplorable fashion choices. The photo page also promotes the school ball as an important and quasi-universal coming-of-age ritual. The event transforms a private experience among school friends into a rite a passage of public significance, attracting media attention and academic research:

> The annual ball… provides an opportunity for young people to express their taste and sophistication, and to show that they can start taking their place as stylish, urbane adults in the world beyond school (Forsey 2009:2).

I formed an idea for a play about school balls, possibly a musical, with a title taken almost verbatim from a conversation with a high school student: *My Worst Ever Night at the Best School Ball Ever*. Long, unwieldy, difficult to abbreviate except into the depressing-sounding, *My Worst Ever Night* or the mundane *School Ball*, the full title captures something of the gushing enthusiasm of a young person and the hyperbolic response to one night in late adolescence.

Each year I would present an artistic plan for the following year to Barking Gecko's board of management, a volunteer body with ultimate legal responsibility for the company. After two years with the company, I proposed a new play for high school audiences: *My Worst Ever Night at the Best School Ball Ever*. Board members responded enthusiastically, speaking about the significance of school balls in their children's lives and the project's comic potential. But when I placed *School Ball* in the context of the company's overall artistic plan, I felt that the concept lacked substance and a compelling reason to be produced. The proposed play would merely add to the coverage of school balls – as though bringing to life the school ball photo page of The

West Australian – without enabling young audiences to interrogate through theatre the significance of their experiences or the consequences of their actions.

Figure 1.2 An example of the School Balls page in The West Australian *newspaper.*
© *West Australian Newspapers Limited. Reproduced by permission.*

1. 4 A Play About Teacher–Student Sexual Relationships

An article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* headed "Youth Crosses Over to the Dark Side" (Schwartzkopf 2009:14) features interviews with four Sydney-based TYA producers: Helen Hristofski (Sydney Theatre Company), Jane May (Belvoir Street Theatre), Noel Jordan (Sydney Opera House) and Tim McGarry (Monkey Baa Theatre). The shared position of the interviewees is that young audiences expect challenging and sophisticated theatre:

> Young people want to see drama with complex and interesting themes they can relate to. The kinds of ideas that have consequences in their lives (McGarry, quoted in Schwartzkopf 2009:14).

Theatre can create a special environment in which teenagers can engage with issues that they might not be able to discuss at school or home:

> Live theatre is such a visceral experience that it forms a communal relationship between the actors and the audience. It's a shared moment and that encourages an openness for discussion. That's not always easy for teachers and parents to achieve with teenagers (Jordan, quoted in Schwartzkopf 2009:14).

The article reflects the dominant themes in literature about TYA: the works must be about relevant and challenging issues and must provoke audience discussion. Popular issues include poverty (Monkey Baa's *Thursday's Children*, Angela Betzien's *Hoods*), children committing violent crime (*The Shape of a Girl* – Sydney Opera House), hard drug use (*Cranked* – Sydney Opera House) and date rape (Zeal Theatre's *Taboo*). One might infer that no topic is taboo in Australian theatre for teenagers.

At the same that Western Australian media covered school balls, reports surveyed another, darker phenomenon in Australian high schools: teachers engaging in sexual relationships with students. Headlines such as "Female teacher admits sex with student"(AAP 2006), "Make me your sex slave, teacher… allegedly said" (AAP 2008), and "Text flirtation led to teacher-student sex" (Collins 2008) were some of the many stories published in Western Australian and national media.

Obviously sex sells, and stories about teacher–student relationships appeal to dynamics of "fascination, eroticisation and anxiety" (Angelides 2010:71). Perhaps it is only "sex

panic" (Cavanagh, quoted in Angelides 2010:71), fuelled by commentators complaining that some teachers are "getting off more lightly" than they should (Overington 2006:2).

It is difficult to measure the actual frequency of teacher-student relationships but there are some indicators. Between mid-2004 and mid-2005, the Western Australian Corruption Commission and Crime (CCC) investigated the actions of the Education department in 54 cases of sexual contact between teachers and students in government schools. The Commissioner suggests that the number of actual cases is probably much higher (Corruption and Crime Commission 2006:50). The number of drug–related deaths and driving fatalities – two issues directly addressed by TYA productions – are around the same (CACH Policy Unit 2011:20-21).

My desire to produce a TYA play about a teacher-student relationship came from my artistic practice. The motivations were:

- Interest in the ambiguity in the representations of these relationships and questions such as, was it consensual, and who seduced whom?

- Fascination in the operation of power, especially in the unequal relationships that young people must negotiate;

- I did not know of other TYA tackling the issue: it seemed exciting and risky;

- Target audience interest in adolescent sexuality and in seeing teachers to be flawed and therefore human characters.

When I proposed the revised version of *School Ball* to the board of management, several board members objected strongly. One, a high school drama teacher, said she could not imagine school students taking it seriously. An advertising executive believed it would be impossible to sell to schools. A management consultant, who loved the idea of a play about school balls, said teacher-student sexual relationship were not relevant to students. Another thought it "morally ambiguous".

In the period between when I first proposed a play about school balls and my revised proposal for a play containing a teacher–student sexual relationship, Barking Gecko had been unsuccessful in applying for ongoing program funding from the Theatre Board of the Australia Council, the Australian government's arts funding and advisory body. Following the decision, Australia Council staff provided feedback via telephone: the

company's previous work was considered "lightweight" and my proposed program (including the first proposal for *School Ball*), fell short of Theatre Board's benchmarks for innovative practice.

I argued to the Board that the revised project would be better placed to address this feedback and that the project had the potential to make a significant impact on the company's place in Australian TYA practice. Unfortunately, the story I wanted to tell was deemed taboo.

1.5 Research Project

School Ball became a research project to investigate how to produce taboo theatre for teenagers, that is, a play that tells the story of teacher–student sexual relationship. The research practice was to develop the play from concept to a work-in-progress showing for an audience of young people and teachers.

As much as possible, I would follow my usual artistic practice as though I were producing *School Ball* for a government-funded TYA company like Barking Gecko. The production would meet the parameters of touring to schools: fifty minutes in duration, three performers, fit into a van, able to perform in non-theatre venues such as halls and gyms. I would fulfil the roles of director and creative producer: commission artists, manage finances, facilitate workshops, and direct rehearsals.

The process would be based on two sets of workshops using creative artistic practices: firstly, drama workshops with young people from the target audience; and secondly, creative development workshops with professional theatre artists. These two strands would be interwoven, involving young people as much as possible in creative development and engaging with artists. Group consultations with teachers and educators would complement the creative workshops. Research participants' responses would be collected through artistic practice in workshops, discussions and surveys, and be incorporated into the artistic work.

The artistic work – *School Ball* – is documented in:

- Prompt script (Appendix A)
- Video of the work-in-progress showing (Appendix B)
- This exegesis.

Ideally, a reader would first read this introduction, and then watch the video (Appendix B), read the script (Appendix A) and then read the rest of the exegesis. However, the body of the exegesis includes pivotal moments in the textual and production developments, a synopsis of the play on page forty-one, diagrams and photographs and other descriptions of the artistic work at work-in-progress stage, to illuminate the decision-making process and support the arguments in the text.

The exegesis is structured as follows:

1. This introduction

2. Literature Review: literature on TYA is reviewed to place *School Ball* and my artistic practice in the context of local and international TYA.

3. Artistic Practice 1: the creative development process is described in detail.

4. Artistic Practice 2: production elements – casting performers, set, props, costume, and music design – are described in detail.

5. Negotiating with Teachers: the relationship between TYA practice and schools provides the framework for discussing the response of teachers to *School Ball*'s treatment of the taboo of teacher–student sexual relationships.

6. Performing Text Messages: the process of investigating one taboo exposed another: student mobile phones. The decision to perform scripted text messages on audience-held mobile phones and its impacts are discussed.

7. Working-in-Progress showing: TYA that is to be performed in schools – such as *School Ball* – must engage both the target student audience and the educational gatekeepers who select school performances. Differences between these two audience groups are examined by comparing the responses of young people to the work-in-progress showing with the project dramaturge's final report.

2. Literature Review

My intention is to place *School Ball* in the context of contemporary theoretical commentary on the artistic practices of young people's theatre. I focus on four intersections of my research with writing pertinent to the field:

1. *School Ball* is positioned in the context of young people's theatre, including theatre for young audiences (TYA), youth performance, drama education and Theatre in Education (TIE). Extensive recent writing is available on Australian TYA, youth performance and drama education to situate *School Ball* as a TYA production using youth arts practices. However, since the decline of local subsidised TIE companies, there is scant Australian writing on TYA performances in schools. In the United States, where companies are more income–dependent on school performances and audiences, writers investigate many of the issues relevant to how *School Ball* might function as an in-school touring production.

2. My practice as a director in developing *School Ball* is compared to that of Rosemary Myers, one of the most renowned Australian TYA practitioners. Myers' practice prompts discussion of the relationship between artistic vision and youth culture.

3. *School Ball*'s taboo content is explored in relation to writing on sexuality and youth studies and popular culture; its narrative form and use of technology are placed in the context of current discourses on 'mediatised' and 'postmodern' performance.

4. Reflective research practice and artistic appraisal form two interwoven threads in the process of developing *School Ball* and bring into focus ongoing discussions of the role of young people as critics and arbiters of artistic value in TYA as well as the possible tension between 'expert' adults and the target audience.

2.1 TYA context

In 2003, the Australia Council and NSW Ministry of the Arts published their joint Review of Theatre for Young People in Australia (Positive Solutions 2003). The report, partly based on interviews with practitioners employed or contracted by funded companies, focussed on TYA and youth performance. The report reiterated widely held and oft quoted arguments for dedicated and funded youth arts practices:

> The arts are important because they socialise and civilise, and because they contribute to the development of healthy, adaptable individuals and societies.

> Children and young people are entitled to the same cultural rights as adults. They are not the audiences of tomorrow, they are the audiences (and participants) of today.

> Specialist TYP companies and practitioners are necessary because their "work is informed by an engagement with learning theory, and by a sophisticated level of interaction with young people, that is extremely difficult to sustain within a company which does not specialise in this field of work" (Positive Solutions 2003:4-6).

My experience and process, characterised by sophisticated interaction with the target audience, positions *School Ball* in the field of specialist TYA, the kind of production and creative team that one would expect from one of the funded TYA companies, such as Barking Gecko. Moreover, *School Ball* aims to give young people a satisfying cultural experience now, rather than recruiting them as future theatregoers.

The report's first statement, however, could possibly be problematic for *School Ball*, since its deliberately benign statement on the value of the arts aims to minimise the potentially disruptive social impact of artistic practice. Some teachers and other gatekeepers might regard the inclusion of taboo content and unsettling production strategies (audience mobile phones) as anti-social influences. *School Ball* depends on a more radical understanding of the value of the arts, summarised by photographer Bill Henson as the "ability to appear transgressive … part of the cloud of unknowing that comes with the territory (Quoted in Levy 2010:1).

The report acknowledges the importance of school audiences, both in schools and theatres: in 2001, school audiences were twice the size of theatre audiences for funded

TYA companies (Positive Solutions 2003:7). In some states, education departments regulate access to this audience, as in NSW where all performances are previewed and authorised before going to schools. A production is authorised "if it can value add to the curriculum" (Positive Solutions 2003:24).

However, the Australia Council policy position is expressed otherwise: "Performances in schools should be guided and judged by the same push for imagination, risk and innovation as other subsidised theatre practice in Australia" (Quoted in Positive Solutions 2003:40).

The two views encapsulate the conflict, then as now, between the agenda of the arts sector, embodied by the Australia Council, and the curriculum-based agenda of the education sector. Even though *School Ball* did not receive Australia Council or any other arts funding, it was intended to sit within the arts sector, embrace creative artists and artistic practice, and be recognised and assessed by peers on artistic, rather than educational values.

Despite the financial and statistical importance of TYA performances in schools, accounts of youth performances primarily trace the gradual extinction of Theatre in Education (TIE) through the 1980s and 1990s, without investigating the continuing practice of professional theatre in schools.

Milne notes the rise of youth performance (YPT) at the expense of TIE companies:

> From about the middle of the 1980s, TIE companies gave ground to a rapidly growing number of funded youth theatres: theatre performed and often created by young people up to about twenty-six years of age within professional company structures (Milne 2005:122).

The reality was that arts funding bodies progressively reduced and ultimately defunded TIE companies because funding for education was seen as the province of education and not arts. At the same time, arts funding to YPT companies increased. For example, Tantrum Youth Theatre in Newcastle received an increase of funding at the same time the renowned local TIE company, Freewheels, was defunded, leading to its closure. Some TIE companies reconstituted themselves as TYA companies: Perth's Acting Out, which began as the TIE wing of the state theatre company, became Barking Gecko, creating family shows for theatres and festivals.

Hunter and Milne identify the rise of drama education as another factor driving the demise of TIE: "The teaching of drama as a subject in its own right, which involved opportunities to attend theatre and to participate in theatre-making, overtook the importance of touring educational theatre" (Hunter and Milne 2005:4). Young people's experience and understanding of theatre would come from a new and sophisticated drama curriculum, delivered by skilled drama teachers. "By the late 1980s, touring educational theatre was no longer the main conduit for introducing young people to theatre and/or educating them through its forms and processes" (Hunter and Milne 2005:4).

The impact of these changes is complex. Drama enjoys increased profile and acceptance: in NSW there are now eight government schools specialising in performing arts (NSW Dept. of Education 2011:6). Students perform more in schools, but how often do they see professional theatre in schools or in theatres? The audience for Bell Shakespeare's Learning Programs in schools (2011-12) outnumbered its total theatre audiences (Bell Shakespeare 2013:60) suggesting that schools continue to be the company's main conduit to young audiences.

Some other statistics suggest that drama students comprise only a small part of the school population: in 2011, twelve per cent of Year 10 students and seven per cent of Year 12 students in NSW public schools studied dance or drama (NSW Dept. of Education 2011:30, 39). Around fourteen per cent of new teachers have creative arts qualifications, a rate that the NSW Department regards as an oversupply (NSW Dept. of Education 2012:10). But many TYA in-school productions are presented to whole year groups, not just drama students.

For my purposes, the question centres on whether or not the current school-touring theatre is different to TIE of the 1970s and 1980s. Milne's obituary to TIE only tells part of the story:

> In short, theatre-in-education, (theatre performed by professional companies for the entertainment and education of young people, mostly in schools)… has all but died as a form (Milne 2005:122).

But TIE is very much alive, in the phoenix-like emergence of productions by both arts-funded TYA companies and non-funded for-profit companies. In fact, funded TYA

companies complain of "the problem of competition from more commercial operators, offering lower-priced product into schools" (Positive Solutions 2003:39).

The significance of this background history to *School Ball* lies in the way in which TYA in schools has been reconstituted with young people at its centre. Hunter and Milne identify "a discernible shift in the perception of children and young people as artists and critics in their own right" (Hunter and Milne 2005:4). Exemplary practice in TYA, youth performance and drama teaching "places children and young people at the centre: as intelligent and critical audiences and as respected co-artists" (Hunter and Milne 2005:4). I aimed to test this proposition of performance within the education system that places young people at its centre with *School Ball*.

In the platform paper, *Not Just an Audience: Young People Transforming our Theatre*, the authors make a series of provocations, aiming to place young people not only at the centre of TYA discourse, but in the centre of "the act of transforming Australian theatre" (Bourke and Hunter 2011). But the authors make only passing reference to TYA performances in schools, and when they do, set-up a value-laden dichotomy between good "cultural action" and unwanted touring theatre:

> Young people want *into* cultural action, rather than have to wait for one-off tours by visiting theatre artists, tours that more often than not are decided for them by mediating adults and sometimes cautious gatekeepers (emphasis in original, Bourke and Hunter 2011:5).

Instead of rejecting touring theatre out of hand, I argue that it would be better to negotiate a pathway for productions such as *School Ball* into schools so that young people have access to cultural action at the place where they spend most time. The authors call for "multiple and diverse entry points for young people to enable them to extend their theatre experience" (Bourke and Hunter 2011:34) but do not examine whether schools might be one of these entry points.

British TYA is intimately connected with education, both in the context of current practice and in its recent history. Whereas Australian writers see TIE as necessarily compromised by the school system and education agendas, in the history of children's theatre in the UK, "more challenging political work emanated predominantly from the Theatre in Education movement" (Broster 2012:129). However, social and political changes, including the introduction of a National Curriculum in 1988 and increased

budgetary autonomy for schools, saw a shift towards "producing 'just say no' plays…
or alternatively, 'bringing to life' selected areas of the curriculum" (Broster 2012:132).
Economic imperatives – only six per cent of Arts Council England funding goes to
TYA – drive TYA companies to tour in schools. British TYA practitioners must, like
their Australian and American counterparts, negotiate the tension between artistic goals
and education agendas. The combination of history and current economics means that
TYA "practice in the UK is unusually constrained by what schools and teachers will
accept as useful to their primary educational aims and objectives" (Harmon 2011:2).

Writers in the United States delve deeply into the complex relationships and influences
bearing on TYA practice, including the cultural construction of "children" and "youth",
the dichotomies of adult versus youth theatre and art versus education. TYA practice is
characterised as a constant negotiation with external entities and influences, in addition
to the artistic processes at work in creating a TYA production.

Of these external influences and entities, schools are so significant that it is difficult
"even to envision a TYA company that does not gain much of its identity through an
intricate cultural discourse with the schools" (Bedard 2003:90). Arguably this is similar
to the way that funded TYA companies in Australia are in constant partnership and
negotiation with government arts funding agencies. Bedard investigates how "through
such negotiations … Theatre for Young Audiences becomes normalized, gains an
identity, and occupies its 'proper' cultural place" (Bedard 2012:29). This assessment of
TYA's relationship to pedagogy is particularly pertinent to *School Ball*.

Van de Water argues that TYA has neither a grand theorist, nor many researchers who
apply cultural theory to the field (Van de Water 2009:15). Van de Water proposes
examining TYA as cultural production, "a process that is influenced by the social,
cultural, ideological, and economic conditions under which it is generated and
perceived" (Van de Water 2009:18). Adopting Knowles' model for theatre as cultural
production, Van de Water examines TYA through the relationships between people,
performance and text. This approach is useful in addressing the tendency of TYA
practitioners to regard the target audience "as a homogenous group, a 'child' audience
differentiated by only target age, regardless of cultural background, ideological position,
or identity location" (Van de Water 2009:19).

Omasta identifies an implicit social contract between a producing TYA company and its constituents, "young people, parents and guardians, school teachers and administrators, politicians, media, and the art of theatre itself" (Omasta 2009:104). Examining TYA "reveals the unwritten but accepted and expected conventions that govern their relationships and guide how they 'ought' to behave" (Omasta 2009:104). In investigating three major American TYA companies, Omasta concludes that artists are expected to behave principally as pedagogues: "teaching children about theatre and aesthetics, contributing to their social development in a diverse world, and incorporating links to school curricula" (Omasta 2009:114).

Local and international writing helps contextualise *School Ball* in contemporary TYA practice which occupies a space between TIE and theatre-based TYA. This is a marginalised position in Australian TYA discourse. In the UK and United States, the space is no less conflicted but the issues are at the forefront of investigation into TYA practice.

2.2 Individual TYA Artistic Practice: Rosemary Myers

Rosemary Myers is Australia's leading director of theatre for young audiences. She was artistic director of Melbourne's Arena Theatre Company (Arena) and is now artistic director of Windmill Theatre Company (Windmill) in Adelaide. The International Association of Theatre for Young People (ASSITEJ) acknowledged Myer's work at Arena for its "inspiring and provocative ways of expressing a new theatrical language which genuinely engages young people in these contemporary times" (Australian Theatre Forum 2011).

Myers' practice bears considerable influence on Australian TYA discourse, through her speeches and writing and the research of others (Jordan 2001, Gattenhof 2004 and Anderson 2007). Myers' productions have won national critics' awards and, under her direction, Arena and Windmill have been funded as key organisations by state and national governments. One effect of awards and funding is to position Myers's practice as 'best practice' in Australian TYA. Her work represents some dominant themes in subsidised TYA, themes encapsulated in the terminology used in award citations and funding criteria, for example, "provocative", "new theatrical language" and "contemporary" (Australian Theatre Forum 2011). Published speeches and research allow me to unpack Myers' practice, in particular her approach to engaging young people both as participants in creative development and as audience members.

When arguing for the value of theatre to young people, Myers highlights "the power of the arts, by the nature of the audience experience, to nurture thinking at a deep and unique level" (Myers 2005:30). This suggests a commitment to creating theatre that both stimulates thought and, in some way, models or teaches young people how to think.

Myers also highlights the potential of the arts to "operate as a really positive intervention in the lives of young people who may be deemed disadvantaged or at risk" (Myers 2005:30). This argument is frequently employed to justify youth arts projects and programs to government and other funding bodies: the arts can perform a social function in helping individual young people and, therefore, contribute to society as a whole. It accords with the first statement from Positive Solutions that identifies the role of the arts to "socialise and civilise." Refreshingly, Myers explains that this social value

does not motivate her artistic practice: "As an artist I don't believe you can create work on the basis that it is worthy" (Myers 2005:30).

Instead, Myers and her collaborators choose to create work for young audiences "because that is what's exciting us artistically" (quoted in Anderson 2007:69). The relationship with the target audience, young people, is fundamental to her artistic practice:

> We need to find the points of engagement with the young audience that inspire our practice. This way, the work we create will become a transaction of mutual engagement or a dialogue between the artists - the creators of the work - and young people (Myers 2005:30).

For the development of *Play Dirty* for the 2002 Melbourne Festival, Arena held work-in-progress showings for school students, collected feedback through the company website and conducted post-show interviews with the assistance of the Australian Youth Research Centre, at Melbourne University (Myers 2005:28). The process did not involve young people as performers or creative development workshops with young people as active participants.

In Myer's practice, there is a connection between engaging with the audience and innovation in theatre form. She asks, "How can we engage in the forms of cultural expression that young people do participate in and allow them to inform the development of performance languages?" (Myers 2005:31) Motocross – small motorbikes ridden around a specially constructed course of jumps and other obstacles – was the form central to the production *Play Dirty* (2001). Large video screens, loud music and spectacular lighting complemented the live action on the motocross course. *Play Dirty* exemplified how, under Myers' direction, Arena "embraced youth culture, technology and multimedia" and "is attempting to create a new hybrid form that directly appeals to 'screenagers'" (Jordan 2001:71).

Skid 180 (2006), a collaboration between Arena and Contact Theatre in Manchester, adopted the forms of expression of skateboarding and the 'skate culture' idiom of fashion, music and attitude. This necessitated working with young artists, who were closer in age and interest to the target audience: "The young artists we employ here are responding to the world they are living themselves" (Myers, quoted in Anderson 2007:67). Anderson argues that "this new model of theatre has the potential to make an

impact because it respects its audience and listens to them in the devising process" (Anderson 2007:74) although he does not explain how the audience was listened to.

At Arena, Myers described this new model of theatre as: "Anthropop – Part docu-drama. Part rock concert. Part installation. All elements share equal importance and intensity" (Arena Company documents, quoted in Gattenhof 2008:2). Gattenhof describes it as "an exploration of the intersection of theatre and popular culture" (Gattenhof 2008:2).

From investigating Myers' process on the production, *Eat Your Young* (2000), Jordan concludes that Myers is a director in the practice of postmodern theatre which he describes as "focusing on the complex communication of visual and aural elements as opposed to the dominance of linguistic elements. The spoken word is no longer the central force" (Jordan 2001:71) The playwright, who might otherwise initiate and be responsible for the narrative cohesion of the work, becomes part of a collective of artists. However Myers, as director, negotiates the process of collaboration and "is viewed as the chief architect of the project" (Jordan 2001:72). It seems that in the absence of the playwright's voice, the voice of the director is "the central force"; as Jordan notes, Myers "became the through line, the common thread" (Jordan 2001:72).

There is some confusion in the commentary on Myers' practice and her own statements about the direction of flow of influence between artistic practice and the target audience. "It is partly through [her] desire to turn young audiences onto theatre that Myers has focused her vision onto technology and postmodern theatrical form" (Jordan 2001:71). The assumption is that technology and postmodern theatrical form is what young people want from theatre. Gattenhof attempts to link postmodern theatrical form to contemporary youth culture: *"Play Dirty* was more akin to gaming culture in which there is development of fictional worlds and actors work within these worlds as avatars of time, space and story" (Gattenhof 2008:8). I am unsure what Gattenhof means by "avatars of time, space and story," but contemporary gaming is more akin to traditional narrative storytelling than the theatre of avowed postmodernist directors such as Robert Wilson. In top-selling video games, a player's avatar is led through a linear narrative of trial and discovery, mimicking the traditional mythic hero's journey. The postmodernism of *Play Dirty* would not have necessarily been familiar to young audiences from playing video games.

Gattenhof quotes a young person's enthusiastic response to *Play Dirty*:

> I went to the play with my year 11 drama class, I thought it was just going to be a couple of petrolheads riding around on their bikes. I was so surprised about the stories and themes this play had to offer… We could understand the story because it relates to us the most… The motorbikes also made it more interesting to us (Quoted in Gattenhof 2008:8).

A possible reading of this response is that the young person was engaged by the narrative content through its relevance to his/her life experience. The unusual and innovative use of motorbikes was an added bonus, but not necessarily the main point of the young person's engagement with the work. How common is Motocross in young people's experience, as either riders or spectators?

On the one hand, (Myers 2005) makes some generalisations about young people and the way they 'read' meaning in artistic works:

> Our audiences are very postmodern, they can understand how meaning is created through the interplay of text…
>
> a higher level of sophistication in regard to media literacy…
>
> more fluid tools of deconstruction and symbolic comprehension gained from intense exposure to image and information saturation, rapid editing.
>
> read across mediums and to holistically view a much broader range of integrated forms.
> (Quoted in Jordan 2001:72)

On the other hand, Myers acknowledges that, "young people and children are diverse individuals not an amorphous mass or demographic, so the dialogues on the projects are wide ranging" (Myers 2005:29). I can see how these two perspectives can be reconciled through the practice of entering into a dialogue with an audience. My strong feeling is that the first set of quotations describes an idealised young audience, one that conveniently demands the postmodern theatrical form that the artist has already decided to practise.

This is not to diminish or devalue the artistic quality of Myers' work for young audiences or challenge how positively young audiences responded to Myers' *Play*

Dirty, *Skid 180* and *Eat Our Young*. Clearly, these works engaged young audiences and delivered a memorable theatre experience. But I think the causal link between young audiences and the shape of Myers' artistic practice is not as strong as Anderson, Gattenhof and Jordan suggest. Nor is the causal link necessary to validate her TYA practice: as she makes clear, her artistic practice comes first.

2.3 Form and Content

Taboo content

Literature on teacher-student sexual relationships reveals that the taboo on representing the student perspective of such a relationship extends to general public discourse. Jagodzinski reminds us why the taboo exists in modern western societies:

> The teacher is supposed to be a moral guide who leads the pupil to proper and acceptable conduct and wisdom … Any sexual exchanges between student and teacher are taken as fundamentally damaging to the self-esteem of the student, and are therefore grounds for dismissal and possible incarceration (Jagodzinski 2004:101).

School Ball is comprised of three narratives. One follows Leo, a year 12 student, who is in a sexual relationship Miss Justine Starkey, his female maths teacher. When the play starts, Leo has been keeping the relationship secret from everyone, including Jess, his best friend and partner at their school ball.

Jagodzinski's descriptions of the roles imposed on female teachers and adopted by male students match feedback from workshop participants. "Female teachers are caught… between being nurturing mothers and being dragon ladies" (Jagodzinski 2004:104): young people commented on Miss Starkey's ease at shifting between mothering Jess (about her lipstick), bossing the exchange student, and flirting with Leo. Workshop participants contrasted Leo's character with the imagined behaviour of boys they knew: as Jagodzinski writes, "boys who attempt to seduce their teachers… are trying to undo authority and re-establish male dominance. They perceive themselves less as victims than as victors" (Jagodzinski 2004:104).

Angelides, writing in the field of sex and gender studies, examines the case of teacher Karen Ellis who was prosecuted for having sex with student Ben Dunbar. Angelides describes the accepted public discourse:

> The language of the law … has, in almost all socio-legal commentary on this case, been taken at face value as the only accurate and possible representation of the relationship (Angelides 2009:350).

Because Dunbar's side of the story has been "erased" by "the hegemonic discourse of child sexual abuse and the law", Angelides decides to "narrate this story from the perspective of Dunbar" (Angelides 2009: 350) just as I intended to do with *School Ball*.

Angelides' analysis of Dunbar's case appears to support the appropriateness of an artistic response to the issue. He argues that, "the treatment of Dunbar and others like him demonstrates a failure to recognise subjectivity in representation" (Angelides 2009: 359). Gallagher uses two theatre projects in Canadian schools to examine identity, representation and subjectivity in relation to the dominant discourse of Canadian multiculturalism. Her research leads her to recognise "how drama … is an ongoing quest, an ongoing set of complex relations, an upsetting of notions of authority, and an art form which most certainly does not fit into tidy positivist scientific/educational discourses" (Gallagher 2007:330). In Gallagher's case studies, using drama as a method of research with young people had the effect of "rocking the boat". *School Ball* may also "rock the boat" because it presents an alternative representation of a teacher–student sexual relationship that does not fit within accepted public discourse.

A storyline in the Australian television series *Neighbours* followed a sexual relationship over 2007 and 2008 between sixteen year old Rachel Kinski and a teacher in his early twenties, Angus Henderson. When Angus meets Rachel at a swimming pool, he thinks Rachel is a university student and invites her to a party where they kiss. The next day Angus is shocked to discover that Rachel is a student at his new school. Initially he breaks off the relationship but later it resumes and becomes sexual. In the final episode of 2007, they are caught leaving a party together. In 2008, the relationship is exposed; Angus is prosecuted and serves six months in gaol. After his release, he asks Rachel, no longer a student, to move with him to Adelaide.

The *Neighbours* producers took deliberate steps to keep the narrative within accepted public discourse and *Neighbours*' G (General) rating under the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (Free TV Australia 2010:8).

Firstly, the relationship began outside the school environment so the audience encounters two young people falling in love before seeing them in the roles of paedophile–victim. Secondly, the story moved from the relationship to the legal process of punishing the teacher. As executive producer Ric Pellizeri states in an interview, "We fully explore the ramifications of their actions" (Williams 2008:1). Thirdly, through

media coverage and interviews, the storyline was framed within the discourse. Caitlin Stasey, the teenager playing Rachel, simultaneously appeals to the viewing audience's understanding of young love and their familiarity with the language of the education system: "The age difference is not that great but, as a teacher, he has a duty of care" (Williams 2008:1).

Finally, the producer explains that the show is produced within a system of publicly regulated discourse: "We've taken our censors through it and I think we've handled it OK" (Williams 2008:1). Had anyone complained about the suitability of the story to its G-Rated broadcast time, the Code of Practice would have afforded the broadcaster a loophole:

> 2.13.2　　Program material dealing in a responsible way with important moral or social issues: A program may be broadcast outside the times appropriate to its classification only if:
>
> > 2.13.2.1　it deals in a responsible way with important moral or social issues.
>
> (Free TV Australia 2010:12)

Although *School Ball*'s storyline is similar to Neighbours, the means of production are fundamentally different. *School Ball* cannot use media coverage to facilitate acceptance and, in Western Australia, there is no formal system of regulation that might be used to endorse the work. Perhaps the crucial difference is narrative: unlike *Neighbours*, *School Ball* does not show the teacher being punished.

Technology and 'Mediatised Performance'

Initially, *School Ball* was to be produced with minimal technology to facilitate easy touring into schools and performances in non-theatre venues. Then, during creative development, mobile phones became an integral part of the production. Thus *School Ball* would include an element of 'mediatised performance.'[1]

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[1] I use the British English spelling 'mediatised' except when quoting directly from the American original.
[2] Writing in 1999, Auslander expressly focuses on "what may now be called 'old media'

Auslander borrows the term 'mediatised' from Baudrillard "to indicate that a particular cultural object is a product of the mass media or of media technology" (Auslander 1999:5). [2] For Auslander, it is not the use of media technology in performance that makes it mediatised: "it is also a matter of what might be called media epistemology" (Auslander 1999:32). Auslander quotes Bolz and van Reijen to explain how live performance is now read within a mediatised culture: "we often perceive reality only through the mediation of machines (microscope, telescope, television). These frameworks...preform our perception of [the world]" (Bolz and van Reijen quoted in Auslander 1999:32).

Gattenhof employs Auslander's terminology to discuss contemporary TYA audiences: "young people are embracing mediatised culture and technology to write the poetics of their own lives" (Gattenhof 2004:11). For Gattenhof, mediatisation has a significant impact on theatrical form in the practice of TYA: "Companies and young performers have usurped traditional performance forms and incorporated pervasive mediatised culture to re-interpret what performance is and can be" (Gattenhof 2007:19).

How "pervasive mediatised culture" might impact on *School Ball*'s audience preceded the decision to use audience mobile phones. However, mobile technology provides a useful focus for examining how *School Ball* fits into the discourse on mediatised cultural forms especially in relation to the target audience's denomination as "digital natives" (Prensky 2001:1). How does mediatised culture impact on theatrical form? Answering this last question leads into a discussion of the use of linear narrative in *School Ball*.

American writer Marc Prensky coined the term "digital natives" in 2001 to describe the new generation of students in American schools who "are all 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet" (Prensky 2001:1). As a consequence, it is argued that "today's students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors" (Prensky 2001:1). The challenge for American schooling is that "Digital Immigrant instructors… speak an outdated

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[2] Writing in 1999, Auslander expressly focuses on "what may now be called 'old media' (e.g., television, film and sound recording). Others have begun the project of theorizing performance in the environment of advanced information technologies" Auslander, P. (1999). <u>Liveness: performance in a mediatized culture</u>. New York, Routlege.

language (that of the pre-digital age)" (Prensky 2001:1). Adults can neither communicate effectively with young people nor engage their interest through existing teaching practices.

This idea has been embraced by a number of writers on Australian TYA. Anderson examines the work of three theatre companies – Arena (Australia), Contact and Blast Theory (United Kingdom) – to see "how TYP is responding to Digital Natives" (Anderson 2007:63). Bourke and Hunter warn that theatre faces "a generationally-defined culture-shift associated with vast technological change" (Bourke and Hunter 2011:3). Gattenhof asserts that "globalisation, innovation in cultural forms and the pervasive use of technology are part of the experience of young people" (Gattenhof 2008:10).

There are problems with uncritically applying Prensky's 'Digital Natives – Digital Immigrants' dichotomy to an Australian context. Research in Australian youth studies appears to contradict his arguments: in the daily activities of Australian teenagers, Facebook and computer games ranked ninth and tenth respectively after spending time with family, homework, watching television, playing sport, seeing friends and reading (Macpherson 2013). Some American research also suggests the generationally-defined dichotomy might not be so clear-cut: Bayne and Ross quote research that found the highest levels of usage of the internet at home in the US is among 35-44 year olds (Bayne and Ross 2007), the age bracket of playwright and director of *School Ball*. Particularly significant to Gattenhof, Bourke and Hunter's arguments are Bennett and Maton's findings that,

> Content creation activities (as measured by items such as creating text, graphics, audio or video) are consistently lower than might be anticipated given many claims about what young people are doing with technology. In fact, with the exception of social networking, most activities associated with Web 2.0 are engaged in by a minority of respondents on key large-scale surveys (Bennett and Maton 2010:324).

The implication is that a TYA audience might not be as "tech-savvy" as some commentators suggest. Nor do they see the latest web-based technology in terms of creative practice. Internet and mobile technologies are mostly used "for accessing

information and communicating" (Bennett and Maton 2010:324). However, mobile phones appear to be pervasive among Australian teenagers.

> 95% per cent of students owned a mobile phone, and 64% of students slept with their phone turned on next to their bed either all the time, or "sometimes". This habit developed with age through the sample, and by 18 years of age, 82% slept with their mobile on "always" or "sometimes" (Macpherson 2013:15).

Research suggests that the use of mobile technology in *School Ball* would reflect the experience of many target audience members. The absence of other mediatised cultural forms would not necessarily diminish the closeness of the production to adolescent experience.

Theatrical Form

Anderson suggests that the question of "how to connect with [TYA] audiences" (Anderson 2007:63) can be answered by investigating the use of mediatised performance: "At the heart of this discussion is the question of how technology is used to create meaning for young audiences" (Anderson 2007:65). Both are important and related questions for the TYA practitioner but one question does not answer the other. Using technology to create meaning is only one of many possibilities of connecting with a young audience. Contact Theatre's artistic director, John E. McGrath, presents a more nuanced view of the place of technology in TYA:

> I don't think young people come into the theatre wanting to watch cinema or emanating to watch a video AT ALL. I think the worst work we can create imitates those media. They can have it better online. I think we need to find ways of viewing the world that can interact in live stage spaces. The theatrical event is an incredibly valid thing to do with young audiences (Quoted in Anderson 2007:67).

In other words, technology does not have to determine the theatrical form of a TYA production in order to engage its target audience.

Gattenhof takes a more radical position, arguing that "Australian Theatre for Young People is at the vanguard of performance-making" (Gattenhof 2007:1) because of its use of mediatised performance. TYA and youth performances "are drawing upon and

mutating a variety of art forms and cultural practices which mirror the fragmented, non-linear way in which humans encounter the globalised world" (Gattenhof 2008:11).

> This has given rise to what has been defined as multi-layered or multi-storyed narrative. These forms of narrative are most common in television and film. The multi-layered narrative is a-linear and may be considered to be without time. The action and events are not related in terms of past and future or cause and effect. Rather they are collaged or layered in a timeless dimension, accumulating at a single point in time (Gattenhof 2007:10)

I suggest that Gattenhof is incorrect in her claim that 'a-linear' narrative is most common in television and film. I cannot think of any television drama that has an 'a-linear' narrative. Even reality TV programs, which are promoted as mirroring the way in which humans encounter the world, are edited and produced adopting a linear narrative structure (Holmes 2004:157, Turner 2005:417). Young people may be producing performances with multilayered and non-linear narratives, but these works are not modelled on the dominant mediatised cultural form of television.

Of course there is a place for non-linear narratives and mediatised cultural forms in TYA practice, but these are artistic choices. Some aspects of youth culture might inspire an artist to pursue a postmodern theatrical form, but the form is not an inevitable product of working with young people, nor is the form an essential ingredient for engaging TYA audiences.

My artistic choice for *School Ball* was to tell the story through a linear dramatic narrative, produced in a naturalistic style. I felt this would be the best form to communicate with my audience what I wanted to say about adolescent relationships and responsibility. A contributing factor was my desire to reach a young audience that is not necessarily theatre–literate. A linear dramatic narrative would resonate with young people's experience of television and film drama.

Omasta argues that a theory of literary readers can be applied to how young people respond to a theatre performance: "when a reader feels that she has experienced realistic narrative events, the lessons implied by those events may seem more powerful" (Green, quoted in Omasta 2011:40). Omasta found that teenagers who watched a TYA performance responded most strongly to "characters and situations [that] seem plausible and realistic"(Omasta 2011:44), leading him to conclude that "*realistically staged*

drama may be the most effective performance mode to affect adolescent spectators'
values" (emphasis in original, Omasta 2011:44).

My experience has been that adolescent audiences appreciate naturalist drama in
theatre, as much as postmodern theatre. Jordan notes that, "Arena is creating theatre that
is postmodern in form and challenging for young audiences. Its work… is not easy to
digest or universally applauded" (Jordan 2001:74). While I do not see that engaging
theatre and challenging theatre are mutually exclusive experiences, my preference is for
engagement and applause over alienation.

2.4 Artistic Research

My aim was to follow the process of producing a play. Time and financial resources would limit the research to producing a work-in-progress showing.

The rehearsal room and development practices I intended to follow were not unique in the field of TYA. The investigation of incorporating taboo content for in-schools performances was the area in which I hoped to make useful discoveries in practice. In his contribution to the book, *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts,* Sullivan notes,

> Imaginative investigations that breach accepted practices and challenge assumed canons contribute in a profound way to the core of our understanding. This is the legacy of what artist-researchers have to offer (Sullivan 2009:49).

My research methodology would be based on ethnography: "the art and science of describing a group or culture" (Fetterman 1998:473). Ethnographical methods typically include interviewing group members, observing and recording behaviour, and reviewing relevant records. I intended to collect data from participants through feedback forms and online surveys, and through conversations in workshops. Throughout the project, I would attempt to maintain a detailed artistic journal, informed by McAuley's methodology of rehearsal analysis, which employs anthropologist Clifford Geertz's concept of 'thick description':

> careful observation of the minutiae that constitute the life and work processes of the group being studied and an attempt to understand what the details observed mean to the people involved and in the broader cultural context (McAuley 2008:264).

Two researchers into TYA practice – Burton and Jordan – use Wolcott's scheme of researcher roles to describe their relationship to the TYA project under investigation. Jordan, who observed rehearsals and interviewed project artists, defines his role as "Privileged Observer … where the researcher is familiar and trusted and allowed access to information" (Jordan 2002:111). Burton, who directed a YPT production, defines his role as "Active Participant: The researcher functions as a full and effective member of the group, performing functions significant to the group's purposes and sense of identity" (Wolcott quoted in Burton 2002:65). Like Burton, I would be an active

participant. But, whereas Burton was investigating the experiences of the adolescent participants in his theatre project, I would be investigating my practice and my experiences in the project. In doing so, my research would be autoethnography:

> Auto-observation (or autoethnography) is a technique that moves the unit of observation from groups in public or semipublic places to the individual and his or her intimate relationships. More often than not, the individual in question is the researcher himself or herself (Angrosino 2004:756).

This would require self-reflection that was not part of my usual directing practice. As a director, I am sometimes called to justify my creative decisions to others, for example, to a performer in rehearsal or to the board of management at a company meeting. Sometimes, I may be more pragmatic than honest when reflecting on my practice, inventing a rational justification after the fact for a creative decision that, at the time, may have been a gut instinct.

Rossmanith suggests that a practitioner is not necessarily best placed to investigate his or her own practice, because there are "particular knowledges available to participant observers who are not directly involved in the production. For it is the case that the practitioners' own practices and discourses may not be transparent to those practitioners" (Rossmanith 2009:4). Jordan uses a quotation from an interview with British theatre director Deborah Warner to illustrate the same point:

> I can't accurately describe what takes place in the rehearsal room because it depends on what happens in front of me. This determines how I react and how I channel what I witness. Rehearsals are complex and organic processes which defy definition as much as they resist formal or intellectual structure ... It's like asking Picasso what he painted. If there is an answer, it lies in what he removed, scribbled out or painted over (Warner quoted in Jordan 2002:108).

It was my intention to apply McAuley's two-stage methodology of rehearsal room ethnography to my own work, in the hope of making transparent my own discourses and practices:

> Observing behaviours and understanding what is going on in as complex and multilayered a way as possible is only the beginning of thick description. It also

involves writing, attempting to convey to others the nature of the processes observed and their import (McAuley 2008:286-7).

Through this self-reflexive process, with myself as principal researcher and subject, I would attempt to understand what the minutiae meant to me, from the moments when I felt doubt to those when I felt validated. On reflection, the most difficult moments – those moments when I doubted the effectiveness of my artistic practice – occurred when audience members and artistic colleagues were watching a performance and, presumably, judging my artistic practice and ability against the perceived quality of the work being shown.

When writing about his youth arts research project, Burton quotes Woods to acknowledge the impact of complex relationships between researcher and participants on the research methodology: "By participating, one both acts on, and is acted upon, by the environment" (Woods quoted in Burton 2002:34). In my research, age would constitute one of those complex variables: I would be older and (purportedly) more experienced than all of the participants and most of the project artists. Angrosino, in describing observational research methods, notes that:

> Field researchers … are also redefining the people they study. They prefer to avoid the traditional term for those people, "subjects," and refer to them instead as "partners," "collaborators," or "participants" in research (Angrosino 2004:73).

This terminology will be used to describe the people involved in my project: the artists (performers and creative staff) as collaborators and young people (audiences and workshop participants) as participants who, through the process of their participation, become collaborators as well. My status as director would have more impact on my relationships with collaborators and participants than my role as researcher. I would be, like Myers, the "Chief Architect" (Jordan 2001:73) of *School Ball*: producer, director and researcher.

There was an additional role that emerged during the research which was that of carer of the young people participating in workshops. My normal practice working in TYA is to avoid acting or being seen like a teacher by young people. I ask them to call me 'Jeremy'. Mostly, young people, confused by the ambiguity of my status, avoid using

any term of address. Accepting feedback and maintaining an atmosphere of collaboration and openness would be crucial to the success of the project.

Artistic Appraisal: what makes high quality TYA?

Veteran South Australian TYA director, Chris Tugwell, was asked to respond to the challenge of change:

> In re-thinking theatre we are asked to take into account the children who are our audience, to imagine ways that allow for children to discuss, to comment, to get up and walk around. This is presented as a challenge that we must take up and if we don't, we are tired fuddy-duddies clinging to our sad old fashioned black spaces, our seats and lights and who refuse to expand to include this innovation.
>
> It is an elegant lie. It is the kind of tempting lie that makes us stop and think perhaps we have been doing it wrong all these years (Tugwell 2005:1).

Tugwell suggests that discourse around constant re-thinking and innovation could be counter-productive to arts practice. Nelson argues for the importance of knowing and understanding established forms: "I am more likely to find the inventive core of the conception and execution of my work by sympathetically addressing myself to the comprehensiveness of past practice" (Nelson 2009:95).

The current emphasis on innovation in TYA practice is justified by a claimed connection between youth and new artistic techniques. But focussing on innovation might cloud assessments on how young audiences respond to artistic experience. Examining TYA as a "humanising" experience, Tugwell concludes, "there are no new ways of being human, merely new vehicles to be human with" (Tugwell 2005:2).

Reporting on the same conference as Tugwell, Held documents some "common principles" (Held 2005:2) that, TYA practitioners agree, govern their work:

> The participation and engagement of young people in developing the work and as an audience; a response to the physical environment and space; the type of content in a piece; the relevance of this content to its chosen audience; the form of the performance; a strong consultation process with and observation of young people during the creation of the work; the encouragement of ownership by

young people as performers and/or audience; a tolerance of the unfamiliar (Held 2005:2).

As Held observes, these principles are "not new information … merely a consolidation of facts already known" (Held 2005:3). The principles outline elements of ideal practice, without addressing the artistic quality of the work.

The Theatre Board of the Australia Council has a significant impact on Australian TYA through its funding of TYA organisations and projects. The Theatre Board "supports activity that contributes to the development of high quality and diverse contemporary theatre" (Australia Council Theatre Board 2013). The term "contemporary" is so contested, that the board provides a definition: "Contemporary means investigating, testing and taking artistic risks in the interests of creating work that is authentic to the present" (Australia Council Theatre Board 2013). Meeting this criterion of 'contemporary' is crucial for the TYA practitioner who hopes to get Australia Council funding. But I do not understand its crucial term, "authentic to the present." Does this mean postmodern performance? Verbatim theatre?

The Theatre Board provides further guidance: contemporary "means relying on established ideas and forms only to the extent that they are pertinent to this task" (Australia Council Theatre Board 2013). The emphasis appears to be on form and ideas about form and process, rather than content. *School Ball*'s taboo content would appear to align with "taking artistic risks" while its linear narrative might make the play as overly reliant on "established ideas and forms."

The Theatre Board's description and explanations of what constitutes "contemporary theatre" do not refer to theatre audiences. It appears that the Theatre Board does not use audience demand for or response to artistic work when assessing applications[3]. This runs counter to nearly all discourse on TYA, a field defined by its audience. From a US perspective, Lorenz outlines what effective TYA might be:

> The best of contemporary theatre for the young does reflect the lives, concerns, issues, and feelings of the young with respect for their youth, intelligence, and

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[3] Theatre Board does not assess performances; its members may attend performances but applications are assessed on the basis of materials submitted.

sensitivity. It shows rather than teaches. It raises questions but doesn't always answer them. (Lorenz 2002:107)

The values in this statement are reflected in the questions I asked young people who participated in *School Ball*.

Allowing young people to critique and assess TYA is the logical consequence of their role at the centre of TYA practice. Klein and Schonmann note that "few reception studies have been conducted with child spectators" (Klein and Schonmann 2009:60) in order to understand the meaning of young people's responses to a performance. Young people's aesthetic values present problems for these authors:

> We question the generally accepted view that children will not tolerate a "poor" production, having witnessed children's enjoyment and boredom during countless examples of trivial kitsch or superficial schlock that we both detest (Klein and Schonmann 2009:62).

Or as a Barking Gecko board member said to me, when I argued that audiences of children had responded enthusiastically to one of my productions: "Just because kids like McDonalds doesn't mean it's any good." However, after conceding that "the reasons for and the sources of their enjoyment are, in many ways, quite different from those of adults' pleasures" (Klein and Schonmann 2009:62), the authors consider the problem of TYA's competing stakeholders:

> How shall we go about distinguishing between "good" and "poor" art for young people, and primarily for whom? For theatre artists? For parents and teachers who accompany children to theatre? Or for child spectators for whom TYA is ostensibly intended? (Klein and Schonmann 2009:64).

In *School Ball,* I found myself allied with either the first and third groups: artists and spectators. For the most part, I was aligned with the young people, taking up their cause in the challenge of "how might child critics persuade adults that their artistic criticisms are just as (if not more) viable and valid as adults' judgments?" (Klein and Schonmann 2009:62). However, I acknowledge that often I rejected young people's ideas in favour of my artistic choices, in line with the dominant ideology that "adult expert critiques are more viable and trustworthy than children's judgments" (Klein and Schonmann 2009:62).

Klein and Schonmann conclude that TYA artists and adult gatekeepers need to privilege the audience response above all else: "We subscribe to Moses Goldberg's view that "the response of the audience is never wrong—they are responding to what they are experiencing in the way that they must"" (Klein and Schonmann 2009:74). The cynic might say it is then a process of finding the right audience rather than creating the right work and, in consequence, I have discussed below the impact of the narrowness of the demographic of young participants and audiences in *School Ball*.

Since 1995, I have been using the following quote from Fanny Brice when developing the skills of young performers. She was one of the best and most concise theorists of directing practice and artistic assessment: "Your audience gives you everything you need. They tell you. There is no director who can direct you like an audience" (quoted in Katkov 1953:71). I think this is true. My preference is to work for the approval of the target audience. Their responses may be difficult to read or discern in detail. They may be contradictory, confused and inarticulate. Their responses are likely to be complex and therefore difficult to unpack. Young people as an audience define the field of TYA; therefore they should also be its principal assessors.

3. Artistic Practice I

Timeline of Development

2–4 December 2010   Stage one drama workshops with young people

Script development

Artist meetings

31 March – 2 April 2011 Stage two drama workshops with young people

6 April   First consultation with teachers

First draft of script

Artist meetings

Director and playwright observed John Curtin Secondary College school ball

2–6 May   First creative development with professional artists

Second draft of script

Artist meetings

4 June   Stage three drama workshops with young people

Second draft of script

Production meeting

13–17 June   Second creative development with professional artists

Second consultation with teachers

20 June   Work–in–progress showing

Project Artists

Director	Jeremy Rice
Playwright	Kate Rice
Dramaturge	Sven Sorenson
Sets & Props designer	Patrick Howe
Costume designer	Cherie Hewson
Composer	Katie Campbell
Graphic designer	Finn O'Branagain
Stage manager	Kirsty Marillier
Asst. stage managers	Violette Ayad
	Jordan Nix
Performers	Mischa Ipp
	Bethany, Miss Starkey, goat, police officer
	Rhoda Lopez
	Amy, Jess, Larissa, Hyun Jae
	Josh Marshall-Clarke
	Jack, Leo, Dev

Synopsis

Amy's Story

Amy and Bethany have paid Jack to be their date to the Year 12 school ball. While cooling off outside, they pee in a pot plant to avoid the toilet queue. Bethany takes a photo of Amy with her dress up and underpants down, and 'accidentally' sends it to every contact in Amy's phone. Then BANG! The sound of a car crash interrupts their fight and Bethany goes to investigate. Meanwhile, the photo has gone viral, Amy is humiliated but Jack convinces her to face the crowd. She says they should all be grateful because, in a way, she's made their night special. Everyone applauds.

Leo's Story

Cool kid Leo arrives with Jess, who's secretly liked him since Year 8. Leo leaves Jess on the dance floor to meet up with his maths teacher and lover, Miss Starkey, and go for a drive. Leo and Miss Starkey are arguing about their relationship when, BANG! Miss Starkey hits something but drives on. Leo, disgusted by her selfishness, demands to be taken back to the ball. Their relationship is over. At the ball, Jess confronts Leo. Everyone's getting SMSes about him and Miss Starkey. Are they true? Leo admits it. It is time to tell.

Larissa's Story

Larissa plans to protest the sheep mentality of students going to the ball but Dev brings a goat instead of a sheep, which escapes. BANG! A car hits the goat and the driver keeps going. Larissa is about to run when Bethany arrives to help. The goat is dying, so Larissa breaks its neck. Bethany accuses her of murder. A passing police officer could not care less. Finally Dev stands up to Larissa and she agrees that maybe the protest was not such a good idea anyway. They hit the dance floor.

3.1 Director – Playwright Relationship

The first step was to commission the playwright, Kate Rice, to work alongside me in creative development process. Kate is an established writer of theatre for young audiences. Her play *The Dead Zone* won the 2005 Australian Writers' Guild Award (AWGIE) for Best Play for Young Audiences. *Sweetest Things*, a finalist for the 2013 AWGIE for Best Play, was based on interviews with the victim, defendant and others involved in the prosecution of a male teacher for having a sexual relationship with a female student.

Kate and I are married and frequently collaborate on performing arts' projects. For example, I commissioned Kate to write *The Dead Zone* when I was artistic director of Corrugated Iron Youth Arts and I directed the premiere production. The personal relationship inevitably impacts and colours the professional working relationship. The discourse between us about a project is continuous: we frequently talk about scripts and projects in our shared domestic life, away from rehearsals and workshops.

When commissioning work from playwrights for a company to produce, I prescribe the parameters of the production: duration, cast size, target audience, scale of production design. Often I create the title before starting work with any other artists, on the basis of how I think the production should be marketed to its target audience. With Kate, I am more prescriptive about the structure, content and style of the script than I am with other writers. For example, I commissioned Tiffany Barton, a playwright the same age and similar back ground to Kate, to write a play for teenage audiences for Barking Gecko. I conceived the title (*Run Kitty Run*) and the theme (teenage fashion models), and then commissioned Tiffany to write a script for three to four performers.

For *School Ball*, I conceived the title and prescribed the production parameters, including the number of performers. I determined in advance that the play would be comprised of three interweaved stories, including a story involving a male student and a female teacher. There were many changes to the narrative concepts, inspired by our creative thinking and the workshops with young people, and facilitated by our personal relationship. I documented some of these changes in notes to Kate:

> I like Leo and Larissa's stories. I like the way the goat accident ties the three stories together (like the gunshot in Jim Jarmusch's *Mystery Train*). I'm looking for more cross-over between the three stories.

Amy's story seems low stakes (I thought you didn't like stories about money?) and the parents' splitting up seems too convenient, either inconsequential or melodramatic

You haven't included the band members (personal notes 2011).

Ultimately, I was the dominant voice in the creative process, and Kate was writing a script to help realise my artistic vision of *School Ball*.

Kate's process is to write alone, away from the workshop / rehearsal room. She participated fully in the drama workshops with young people. She attended the first day of both creative development weeks with professional performers, and returned for run-throughs and showings. Kate would take copious notes in workshops and follow up with questions for me at home. She delivered script material according to a schedule: scenarios for stage one drama workshops, detailed synopsis and draft scenes for stage two drama workshops, first draft script for the first creative development, and so on.

The chronology of script development privileged the script and the playwright's work over the work of other artists. Kate delivered her first draft of the script two weeks before the first creative development week with professional artists, to allow everyone to be familiar with the script. The script was the main stimulus for creative work with the artists. Kate would observe and discuss the work of other artists – principally the performers – and subsequently deliver script amendments and rewritten scenes.

As with all the project artists, Kate had limited time to work on the project. In section 3.6 Second Creative Development, I detail my difficulty staging the opening scene. As detailed below, the problem lay in my direction, rather than the script. In any case, at that stage in the process, Kate was only available to make minor amendments before the work-in-progress showing.

3.2 Stage One Drama Workshops

The first stage of my practice research comprised of drama workshops with young people from the target audience, held at the Western Australian Academy of the Performing Arts (WAAPA).

The workshops had two aims: firstly, to get young people's input into the creative development of *School Ball*; and secondly, to gather data for observations and conclusions about the relationship between TYA and its target audience.

I asked participants to respond in groups to three scenarios:

- The boy who kissed the teacher

- The girl who got smashed

- The prank that went wrong.

In response to "the boy who kissed the teacher", one group devised a scene that showed the emergence of a toxic dynamic between the student in a relationship and her peers. Another group devised a subtle and amusing twist on the scenario: a female teacher asks a male student to stay behind in class, and once the other students have left, she tells him he needs to concentrate on his work. Later the student tells his friends that she showed him her breasts. The student is fantasising, and his friends know that he is, but they start treating the teacher differently anyway.

Participants said they found this scenario interesting and believable and described teachers who were rumoured to be having affairs with students. In one workshop, two rural participants admitted that teacher-student relationships were common knowledge in their towns. They felt that the scenario would be unusual in a TYA performance and envisaged a school audience's shock at seeing teacher and student characters kissing. Participants discussed what would motivate the student, Leo, to be in a relationship with his teacher, Miss Starkey: the thrill of conquest? Sex? Or was it simply true love? Curiously, participants saw the relationship as indicative of Leo's maturity and Miss Starkey's immaturity. One group devised a complicated and dramatic back-story for Miss Starkey to explain why she would risk her losing her career and going to prison.

Another participant felt that it was important to have the other two proposed script scenarios to balance the teacher-student sexual relationship. The "boy who kissed the teacher" was a powerful story, but also an exceedingly rare occurrence.

In other improvisations, participants emphasised the humour in the scenario of "the prank that went wrong", for example, pretending to be the runaway goat and playing up to the stereotype of the antisocial "Goth" teenager. In discussion, many participants commented that every school has a marginalised sub-group of students who wear black, listen to loud music, have poor personal hygiene and oppose the dominant culture.

A significant discovery from this process related to the "the girl who got smashed" scenario. It was based on a news report of a teenage female who had been photographed and sexually assaulted while passed out drunk at a party. The scenario suggested the school ball as a location for social embarrassment that could change a young person's life.

Alcohol and drunkenness dominated both the improvisations and discussions around this scenario. But the social embarrassment aspect that interested us, as artists, was lost in the young people's enthusiasm for drunk–acting and didacticism: alcohol is bad, getting drunk leads to bad things, young people should not drink, adults should not give young people alcohol.

Figure 3.1: Participants' diorama of "the girl who got smashed" scenario.

Figure 3.2: Participant drawing of Dev and Larissa, "the prank that went wrong."

Participants related incidents in which mobile phones had been used to snap embarrassing photos of friends and then posted on Facebook or sent as multimedia messages. This sounded interesting: I had contacted most of the participants through Facebook and sent confirmations and directions via SMS. Facebook and text messaging were integral to the administration of *School Ball*. Now they entered the creative development as potential narrative and thematic material.

I recognise that the sample size of participants is too small for my data to have any statistical weight and I had made no attempt to recruit a representative group of research participants. The workshop process was intended to inform my creative vision for the project rather than be the basis of a youth-led collaboration or statistical overview of teenage concerns.

At the end of stage one, I had gained young people's perspectives on TYA generally, the three scenarios in particular and the future direction of the project:

- Young audiences have low expectations of TYA in schools: it is didactic, boring and poorly produced;

- School ball are important and significant to the target audience;

- "The boy who kissed the teacher" interested participants as something that is fraught with danger and mired in moral ambiguity;

- Most participants recognised – and some shared – the attitudes towards balls and political action in "the prank gone wrong";

- "The girl who got smashed" elicited didactic responses and was less dramatically interesting than the other two;

- The way adolescent relationships and power dynamics can play out through social media and mobile phone communication offered dramatic potential.

3.3 Stage Two Drama Workshops

The main aim of this stage was to test the artistic work so far with young people. For the workshops the playwright provided a detailed scene breakdown for the whole play and three draft scenes, one scene for each of the three stories:

- Leo's story ("the boy who kissed the teacher");

- Larissa's story ("the prank that went wrong"); and

- Amy's story (a reworked version of "the girl who got smashed").

Scene One: Amy's Story showed three teenage characters – Amy, Bethany and Jack – arriving at the ball, gushing with excitement, comparing outfits and checking their mobile phones. Participants said they loved the humour in the scene and recognised and identified with the characters and the idiomatic language.

Scene Two: Leo's Story showed Leo at the ball with his friend and ball-date Jess. Jess tries to get Leo to pay her attention when Miss Starkey interrupts. Participants found Miss Starkey's character type familiar: "a bit scary" with a reputation for strictness, meaning she can flirt with students without being challenged.

Scene Three: Larissa's Story showed Larissa berating Dev after turning up with a goat instead of a sheep. While they argue, the goat runs away. Again, participants enjoyed the humour. They liked Larissa, recognising her character as a would-be activist: "every year has someone desperately trying to be a rebel".

While we were working on this scene, I had the idea of asking two participants to perform the dialogue in mobile phone text messages. They translated the dialogue into text messages themselves, abbreviating some words and phrases, omitting others. Participants responded extremely positively: it was exactly how they used mobile phones every day.

I had become increasingly interested in the power relationships in the script, especially between the student and the teacher. After the workshop, I reflected on the power-relationship between participants and myself, noting how that affected the creative development process. I felt that I was making myself vulnerable by inviting young people to come to a workshop and judge my artistic concepts. Even though I retained

control of the workshop process, I was giving participants power to criticise my artistic work. The productivity of the workshop process depended on how open I was prepared to make myself to feedback, criticism and judgment.

Participants arriving with résumés reminded me that, for many participants, these participatory workshops were like an audition, an opportunity to impress a director who might further one's acting career. As I tried to engage with their perceptions, I was their audience. Possibly some participants softened their feedback out of fear of offending me and jeopardising how I thought of them as actors.

My age and sex also affected the dynamic. I was considerably older than all the participants, likely around the same age as their parents. In the first two stages of workshops, I was the only male non-participant. There was a risk that I would seem out-of-touch with youth culture or that I would sound like a teacher in a student-management or disciplinary role. I might be perceived to sympathise with male characters and participants and be insensitive to females. If I tried too hard to speak in the idiom of young people, I might be judged to be pathetic. If I was overly friendly, I might come across as "creepy" (a favourite word of participants to describe certain male teachers).

I wanted the workshops to be enjoyable but I had to remember that my main objective was to create an artistic work. Maintaining participant interest and involvement was one strategy to engage effectively with my target audience. This was not a youth-arts project in which I facilitated and supported young people in their artistic practice. This strategy sought to improve the quality of my artistic practice and its chances of success with an audience. Through the workshops, I sought young people's responses and ideas and, also, their approval.

This complex interplay of power relationships, rife with contradictions, goes to the heart of my practice as a theatre maker who creates work for young audiences. I have to get my work past the adult gatekeepers, teachers and school administrators, who regulate the theatre that their students see. In this instance, I was trying to engage the workshop participants as co-conspirators in my assault on the gatekeepers.

At the end of stage two, I felt I had made significant artistic progress:

- Positive responses to the draft scenes and revised scenarios (including Amy's story

about an embarrassing snapshot) indicated that the script was developing well;

- Text messaging was integral to young people's lifestyle and would add credibility to the action and a unique youth idiom to the dialogue;

- Humour was an essential element for young people;

- A key aspect to young people's participation in the workshops was the opportunity to perform and work with a professional director;

- In negotiating the complex relationships between participants and my target audience and myself, I had to remain focussed on my artistic vision.

3.4 First Creative Development

For the first creative development, three professional actors would work with me for a full week, with the playwright, designers, composer and young people participating at various times. The aim was to collaborate with professional artists on further developing *School Ball*, as though working towards a full production. The research would bring into focus my artistic practice:

- What is the response of professional theatre artists to my concept?

- What artistic strategies should be employed to make the play engage its target audience?

- What rehearsal room processes work best in developing the work?

The specific objectives of the creative development included:

- To test the first draft script with professional performers and young people;

- Experiment with design concepts for set, props, costumes and sound;

- Document discoveries made in the rehearsal room to inform continuing creative development, especially the next draft of the script.

My method would be to direct the performers as they worked with script on the rehearsal room floor. Other artists would contribute props, sets, costumes, music and new script materials. I organised for young people to participate as performers on two afternoons and to watch a rough work-in-progress showing on the last day.

There was no available rehearsal room or studio at WAAPA, so I hired a small rehearsal room at the Blue Room theatre in Northbridge. Moving to the Blue Room signified a shift in the project's position in the Perth theatre landscape, from an anonymous student project at WAAPA into the midst of Perth independent theatre. Blue Room staff and Perth independent theatre artists visited the rehearsal room to watch showings. Probing artistic criticism from other artists – especially the Blue Room executive producer – was brought to bear on the work and my artistic practice.

The change of location to Northbridge also affected the relationship of young people to the project. Northbridge is Perth's nightlife district, regularly portrayed in the media

as dangerous after dark. I had to work harder to encourage a smaller number of young people (some relying on their parents to drive them) to watch and participate in the creative development.

The first area of investigation was how to play the teenage characters truthfully, so our teenage audience would identify and empathise with the characters. We understood "truth" to mean that a character's actions were consistent with both the internal logic of the character and the logic of the world of the play – Stanislavsky's "magic if" (Mitter 1992:7).

The first area of investigation was the dialogue. Until we had teenage audience members in the room, we relied on our instinctual responses to hearing the dialogue. The performers would use terms such as "clunky" and phrases such as "doesn't work" and "wouldn't say that" to describe dialogue that they felt was inconsistent with the sought-after closeness to adolescent experience. We made minor changes to the dialogue in the rehearsal room. After the first day, we had a sense that most of the dialogue worked well: the rhythms appeared natural, the meaning was clear and there was humour and surprise in what the characters said and the way they said it.

Another area investigation was the truth of characters' actions. Were the performers building characters who would make the decisions and take the actions dictated in the script? We discussed moments when characters did surprising things that, on first reading, might appear contrived for the sake of the dramatic narrative. What would motivate Bethany to send the photo of Amy urinating to everyone in Amy's address book? Why would Leo turn down sex with Miss Starkey? What would Larissa do after killing the goat: go home, go to the ball or, as scripted in the first draft, turn herself in to the police? This last question prompted the most discussion and, ultimately, several rewrites during and after the creative development.

Another pertinent question was, are the characters true to the world of teenagers? Until the arrival of young people in the creative development, we could only test the truthfulness of our work in relation to our experience of young people outside the creative process and our recollections of being teenagers. These discussions raised questions of socio-economic class and cultural background relating to the characters and our target audience. We acknowledged that our participants represented a narrow and perhaps privileged sample of Western Australian teenagers. Our target audience

was likely to be much more diverse.

Performer Lopez's Filipino-background provided an opportunity to focus some discussion on how culture and race might intersect with the school ball experience. In informal feedback sessions, young people said that a performer of Asian appearance did not have any impact on how they received her performance of three different characters. In fact, one young person said, in reference to one of the characters portrayed by Lopez, "Amy is a total blonde". We moved on quickly from this issue in the rehearsal room but it would return later in the process for deeper consideration.

Portraying multiple characters, three teenage boys, Jack, Leo and Dev, was the greatest challenge for Josh. A tuxedo (Josh brought his own to the creative development) worked as a costume for Jack and Leo and swapping his tuxedo jacket for a duffle coat worked for Dev. We looked at voice to differentiate the characters, bearing in mind that Josh was the performer in our cast who had not had the benefit of voice training. The solution would come in working on the character's physicality. We discussed and experimented with the physicality of each boy: Jack, awkward and a little clumsy; Leo, strong and comfortable in his movements, happy to be "touchy-feely" with both Jess and Miss Starkey; and Dev, always on the move to escape his father, follow Larissa and chase a goat.

At the end of the fourth day, an audience of young people, all participants in development workshops, watched a run-through of most of the play. The discussion after the showing gave rise to a standard of narrative clarity that we named "the Zoe test" after one of the young audience members. The post-show discussion revealed Zoe had not realised that Jack and Leo were two different characters, even though she had participated in the previous development stage. From that point onwards, we were determined to make our performances and plot clear enough for Zoe to understand; "the Zoe test" became a threshold of audience understanding.

Six young people – including Zoe – participated in the creative development as performers, working alongside Ipp, Lopez and Marshall-Clarke. They worked with the scripts on the rehearsal room floor and gave feedback, as the professional performers had been doing throughout the week. This part of the creative development produced two significant discoveries: firstly, that the dialogue seemed equally natural and engaging when performed by either young people or professionals; and secondly, that

the characters appeared more alive and engaging when performed by the professionals.

The aesthetics and practicalities of production design were investigated through both discussion and rehearsal practice. There was spare theatre lighting equipment in the room, including a sound-sensitive chaser, which we used to create some of ballroom ambience. We tried different options for staging the scenes in Miss Starkey's car and the car accident. We settled on using an industrial-strength platform trolley, carrying two chairs, moved by Lopez across the floor.

Figure 3.3: trolley with chairs and balloons: car and podium for speeches?

Figure 3.4: Lopez (behind) moving the trolley as Miss Starkey 'drives'.

For the goat, Howe and Hewson attached a goat facemask (originally made for a children's theatre production) to a sheepskin rug, to be used as both a costume for Ipp and a puppet. Joanne Foley, an experienced puppetry director, volunteered to work with the performers on puppetry techniques. Foley's particular contribution was to direct the staging of the accident so that the target audience would be more likely to feel the pathos of the goat's suffering.

Figure 3.5 The goat as a costume.   *Figure 3.6 The goat as a puppet.*

We experimented with the feasibility of performers changing costume for different characters during a performance. Major costume changes worked against the interwoven narrative structure and fluid scene and character changes that I wanted. We settled on the performers wearing one ball outfit and changing accessories. This approach still limited the actors' flexibility. For example, the ball gown was right for Ipp as Bethany but wrong for Miss Starkey who would not wear a ball gown and high-heeled shoes. A ball gown was right for two of Lopez's characters – Amy and Jess – although each would wear different types of gowns. Lopez's third character, Larissa, was ideologically opposed to the school ball phenomenon and its focus on dress and appearance.

In the interim, I resolved the contradiction of the costumes suitability for some characters and not others by reframing the costume concept as follows: the ball gowns and tuxedo supported the overall production aesthetic of school ball glamour. They were integral to the narrative of Amy's story and its three characters (Amy, Bethany and Jack). Whether they were distracting in Leo and Larissa's stories was a question left for further investigation.

On the last day of the creative development, we presented another run-through to a small audience of young people, project artists and theatre practitioner colleagues. There was considerable discussion and experimentation with how to resolve Amy's story and specifically, how to stage the photograph that Bethany had sent to all the people in her address book. The solution for the read-through was that Amy, confronted by her peers making a pissing sound, makes a speech in which she cowers

her detractors by giving a detailed description of what could be seen in the photo of her urinating.

Blue Room artistic staff and independent theatre practitioners asked hard questions about the cultural values embedded in the play. Coming at the end of the creative development, their questions would have to be pursued in the next stage of conceptualising the work and in the further creative development scheduled for six weeks' into the future. The immediate discoveries were specific to our testing of the first draft script with performers on the rehearsal room floor:

- Artists and young people responded positively to the language and characters of the first draft script;

- Performers playing multiple roles presented ongoing challenges in terms of performance, costume and narrative clarity;

- I needed to structure a source of artistic criticism or dramaturgy into my creative process.

3.5 Stage Three Workshops

Four weeks after the first creative development, the playwright delivered a second draft of the script, to be tested in a drama workshop with young people.

Questions for the participants were grouped into three areas:

- Response to the concept:
  What do you think of the idea? What about the play would make you interested / not interested in seeing a performance?

- Response to the script:
  How believable is the dialogue? How believable are the characters, stories and situations? What would you do if you were in one of these situations?

- Ideas for the production:
  How do you imagine the play would be staged in your school – the set, costumes, and music? What things about a school ball should we have in the production?

The workshop started with a reading of the script followed by a wide-ranging group discussion. The key responses to come from this discussion included:

- Jack was a wimp and Amy a bitch; Bethany must really hate Amy to send the photo; Amy would never forgive her;

- Jess was also a bit of a wimp, perhaps she could get together with Jack (from Amy's story);

- None of the participants could imagine being in Leo's situation but thought it was believable;

- It was important to show Leo and Miss Starkey being intimate, kissing and touching;

- Miss Starkey's line, "I can't just let you out on the freeway, I've got duty of care" was typical of how teachers talk to students. One participant said, "teachers are always going on about 'duty of care' and using it to justify not letting us do anything";

- It was good that Larissa spoke used big words and spoke French – there are

students like that;

- The goat is both funny and sad how it dies, but how come Larissa knows how to break a goat's neck?

The play's full title, *My Worst Ever Night at the Best School Ball Ever*, was enough for participants to want to see the production: "worst ever night" suggested plenty of drama and the whole phrase suggested comedy. Everyone agreed on the significance of the school ball to young people, even the two participants who said they "hate" school balls. They liked that it was about something that was relevant to them, and not another play about bullying, drugs or Shakespeare. In the online surveys, most respondents judged Amy's story as "most believable", Larissa's story as "funniest" and Leo's story as "most unexpected".

Participants' ideas for the production focused on aspects of their school ball experience that they thought should be incorporated into the production: clothes, decorations, music, and texting among friends on mobile phones. Participants asked how we intended to do the goat – would it be a real live goat, a puppet or a costume? Most understood from the structure of the script that one of the female performers was free to play the goat in Larissa's story.

Participants also spoke at length about two aspects of the school ball experience missing from the play: (1) pre-ball parties with parents and other family members; and (2) ball 'after parties', held without school supervision or approval, often at someone's house. I suggested that any one of the three stories could include a line referring to after parties. Workshop participants seemed to appreciate that I responded immediately with suggestions of how to incorporate their feedback. Survey respondents confirmed that they felt "listened to" and that "ideas were taken seriously".

In the discussion, two participants – the oldest in the workshop – took up my position and defended the draft of the script and the omission of parties. They argued that the play's focus should be on the event at and during the ball. There was no time for before and after. These participants had participated in the first and second stage drama workshops and their inclusion in the creative process had given them a sense of ownership over the work, demonstrated by their willingness to defend my artistic

choices as their own. As much as I appreciated their contribution to the discussion, I had to be mindful that their vocal support might inhibit the responses of participants who were new to the project.

Participants used peer group labels to discuss characters: Amy and Bethany were "wannabe plastics" (from the film *Mean Girls*), Jack was a nerd or a gamer (obsessed with video games), Leo might be a jock or an indie kid, Jess seemed like a nerd, Dev and Larissa were "emo" kids. We used this taxonomy of adolescent stereotypes to measure the credibility of the script and whether our audiences would see the characters as we had intended.

Some of the participants' responses seemed contradictory or vague. When enjoying participants' praise for the script, I had to distinguish between participants' genuine enthusiasm and their eagerness to please. I had to distinguish between their enjoyment of the process – in which they got to perform and speak and be watched and listened to – and their engagement with the script and the project. I had to discern whether their awkwardness with parts of the script was due to a problem with the script or their performance ability.

There were many instances of participants making specific and useful suggestions: 'giney' is a more current colloquialism for vagina than 'fanny'; Jack would be the type who plays World of Warcraft (a computer game); and Miss Starkey would be one of those teachers who is always patting students on the back and arm to encourage them.

Participants' responses suggested that the script was in good shape for the second creative development. Areas of work included:

• Make the characters of Jack and Jess stronger and more memorable; and Amy more likeable;

• Add pre- and after-ball parties to the context to school ball;

• Include in the script and action more references to our character's social groups, and develop the impact of these social groups on the narrative.

This feedback would inform the next draft of the script and the next creative development.

3.6 Second Creative Development

Held in a rehearsal room at WAAPA, the week was structured like the beginning of rehearsals for a new theatre production: full company reading on the first morning, then performers rehearsing with time set aside for design meetings, wardrobe fittings, and music spotting. Consistent with my youth-centred practice, young people from the workshops were welcome at all times and were specifically invited to attend the first reading and showings towards the end of the week.

In the discussion that followed the script reading, young people gave background to script changes that had been prompted by participants' feedback. The designers, Howe and Hewson, explained the props and costumes to be tried. We looked at draft marketing images for the production, produced by a young graphic designer, composer Campbell played some of her music, and the performers danced and posed for photographs. Thus the week began with a great feeling of creative energy and collaborative spirit.

Figure 3.7 Young people's preferred title design.

The first question for consideration was, what was on the table for discussion and change? The work-in-progress showing was in a week's time and we already had a draft script, costumes and set elements. To what extent would artists' creativity in the room be limited by creative decisions that had already been made?

One of the performers summarised our situation succinctly: "no one wants to give an audience a shit performance." Everyone was motivated to create the best possible work-in-progress *School Ball* for the audience at the showing and this determined the framework and process of the week's activities.

The room was arranged as a performance venue, with three quarters of the floor area marked out as the performance area, desks for the stage-manager and director set

alongside a few chairs in the position of the audience, and props and costumes set to the sides. The stage manager was on book. She documented staging, blocking and cues, marked up the prompt script, organised lists of props and costumes and operated sound as needed. As the work-in-progress showing approached, I would have to make many decisions in a short timeframe about aspects of the performance.
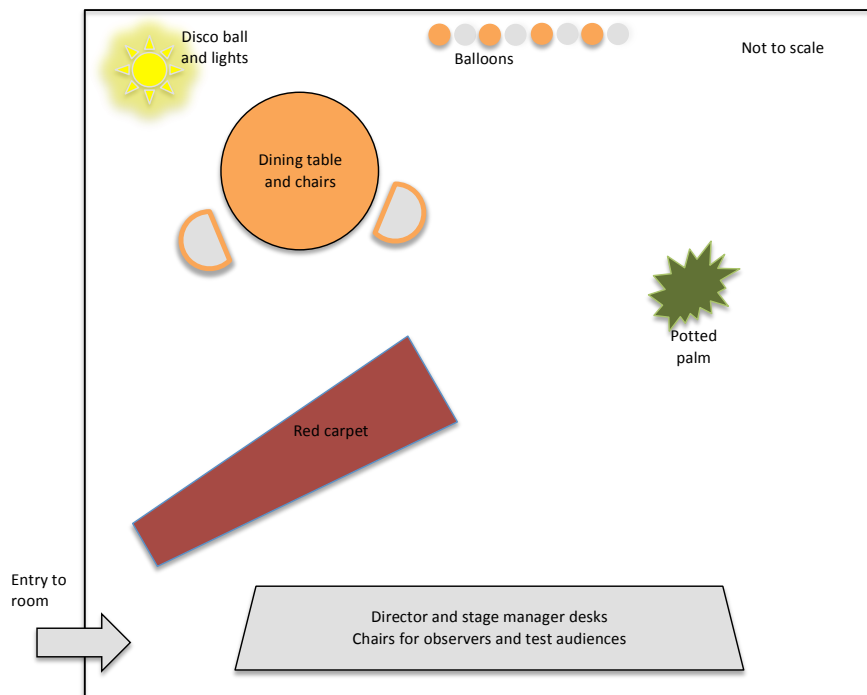
Figure 3.8 Arrangement of the room by the end of the creative development.

We embarked on this process aware of the advantages and disadvantages of the research process. The pressure of the showing kept the relationship between the work and its target audience in the forefront of my mind. Artistic creativity would not spring from playfulness; instead we would work by the proverbial saying, 'necessity is the mother of invention'. A risk to the research was that my creative decisions would not be creative at all, but only technical solutions to the immediate challenge of having a performance ready for showing. The input of dramaturge Sorenson would help mediate the competing pressures of producing the performance and maintaining rigorous investigation worthy of artistic research.

We established some parameters for creative process at the start: firstly, performers would work with scripts-in-hand. Secondly, as the timeframe prohibited the

playwright to work on another draft for the showing, performers were free to explore, adapt and change dialogue throughout the week. Thirdly, the key narrative points and cast of main characters would not change. I was confident that the overall structure of the script was sound.

Other production elements, design, sound and technology, were in a more fluid state and needed exploration and choices to be made. We started with only a rough concept of how audience mobile phones might function and their impact on the performance. Working versions of the costumes arrived on the first morning and would be refined during the week. For the set, we began with a table, chairs and staging blocks. The trolley from the first creative development was discarded. The set elements used in the work-in-progress showing – large table, red carpet and potted palm – were introduced during the week and the layout of the performance area finalised on the last day. The composer delivered vocal and instrumental versions of *The Best School Ball Ever* on the first morning but was unavailable for most of the week.

The frequent presence and contribution of young people in the room encouraged us to focus on the seven teenage characters. As we developed these characters, the adult characters other than Miss Starkey seemed peripheral and less interesting. Parents were cut from the opening scene. The draft monologue for the school principal was pre-recorded and incorporated into the sound design, thereby keeping the focus on the teenage characters. We considered the character of the policewoman: was she essential to the story or just cheap comic relief? The young people wanted the character to stay because she encapsulated a particular adult disconnection from teenagers and their concerns.

We spent a lot of time working on the beginning of the play: a montage that introduced key characters and the three separate stories. The playwright's vision was for rapid-fire scenes, inspired by what she had witnessed at the John Curtin College ball. Teenagers emerging in camera flashes of the official photographer, parading down the red carpet, shouting out and sending text messages to their friends overlaid on awkward interactions with parents at home over family photographs, corsages, friends and after-parties.

This was the one area where I feel I became trapped in immediate solutions for the showing. I did not dig sufficiently deeply into the work and question what the opening

needed to present. Instead of discarding unnecessary ideas, I stuck with the script we had and tried to make it work.

On reflection, I wanted an explosive theatrical moment that announced to our audience that *School Ball* would be a 'not-what-you-expect-from-TYA' experience. At the time, I knew the best part of the opening was Larissa playing a loud, harsh-sounding guitar and singing her angst-ridden teenage lament to YouTube. The simultaneous action – Bethany's monologue on the table, and Dev talking to his father – was distracting and lessened the impact of Larissa's performance. Jess and Leo on the red carpet, immediately after Larissa's song, also lacked the necessary energy and theatricality that the playwright had envisaged and the performance required.

Yet in the rehearsal room during the week, we spent more time on this part of the play than any other. It was hard work and my direction felt uninspired. That should have signalled to me that I was working on small solutions and not addressing the larger artistic question of how *School Ball* could immediately engage its audience.

The rest of the creative development was more enjoyable, playful and productive. Mucking around with the mobile phones was fun: performers sending each other rude text messages, young people in the room laughing at the texts they received and trying to send replies. Little ideas and phrases came up in rehearsal, such as Larissa signing off her song with "later haters", typical teenage idiom that received an immediate positive reaction from young people. We enjoyed testing different methods of staging the goat's blood: paint, tomato sauce and, finally, aerosol-propelled 'silly string'. Facebook conversations with young people revealed current slang terms for vagina, sex and male attractiveness.

Working the end of the play was almost as time-consuming as the beginning but was conducted in a more exploratory and productive atmosphere. We felt as though we were investigating possibilities and not just finding a quick solution before the upcoming showing.

As a researcher, the experience of the second creative development was significantly different to the first. The pressure to prepare *School Ball* for the showing intensified my concentration on directing. It minimised the available time and mental headspace for reflection. Soon after the showing, I collected the dramaturge's final report, artists' and audience's feedback from post show discussions and online surveys. A few

months later, I revisited *School Ball* to investigate mounting a full production with the support of a Darwin-based young people's theatre company. With this time lag, I was then able to reflect properly on the second creative development and analyse my practice, identifying the flaws that I have discussed above. The discoveries I made included:

- On balance, the pressure of preparing *School Ball* for the showing was more limiting than inspiring creatively;

- It was possible to adopt a rehearsal room framework and process that allowed artists to experiment and explore while we worked;

- The greatest level of exploration took place in relation to the performance practice with which we least familiar (the mobile phones – discussed in detail separately);

- The aspects of the production that we hoped would excite the audience, such as costumes, live music, dancing, special effects and mobile phones excited us in the rehearsal room;

- The continued presence of young people added to the creative energy in the room and broadened the size and scope of the artistic community around *School Ball*.

4. Artistic Practice II

4.1 Performers

The BBC television comedy series, *The League of Gentlemen*, features sketches about a fictional Theatre-in-Education company, 'Legz Akimbo', that performs didactic plays with inappropriate adult content to primary school children. The performance style of Legz Akimbo matches the workshop participants' improvised parodies of TYA. The basis of both parodies – Legz Akimbo and the student presentations – is the perceived absurdity of adult performers playing child and teenage characters.

School Ball's student characters would be sixteen or seventeen years old in the real world. The male performer plays three teenage boys. One of the female performers plays three teenage girls. The other female performer plays a teenage girl, a female teacher, a police officer and a goat. I decided that I wanted young looking but experienced performers, between twenty and thirty years of age.

Audiences are used to seeing children in musical theatre such as *Billy Elliot* and *Annie*, and in film and television roles. Some main-stage theatre requires children, for example, Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*. Younger looking adults have advantages over teenage actors: they can work longer hours than juveniles and, ideally, bring greater experience, maturity and stamina to the filming process. For *School Ball*, I wanted to work with performers who could play the roles and had the maturity and experience to contribute to the creative development process.

I felt justified in having taken this approach after observing the young people working alongside the professional performers. Participants made valuable contributions to the creative development but the professional performers worked faster, responded more quickly to the artistic provocations embedded in the process and had a greater affinity with me and the other creative artists.

Adults playing children

Year Nine Are Animals by ToE Truck Theatre[4] was my first experience of professional in-school theatre. I vividly recall telling my parents how the balding middle-aged

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[4] "ToE" in ToE Truck Theatre stood for "Theatre of Education" – synonymous with TIE – Theatre In Education.

performer was able to transform from a mean-spirited maths teacher to a nervous school student just by changing his voice and manner. Even though I am convinced his performance would still amaze today, participants in my research seemed to regard a mature person playing a teenager as a flawed approach.

I would like to think that any good performer playing a teenage character could convince and impress a young audience. Touring to schools has a low status in the acting community so young audiences have seen many second-rate performers in touring TIE and TYA productions. Perhaps the satire is not necessarily aimed at performers being old, but at performers being ineffective.

Barking Gecko has sufficient respect in the acting community to be able to employ skilled performers of all ages. Still, there was an observable difference in the response of students when younger performers were employed for *The Buzz*, a play about safe driving for high schools. For five years, performers in their early thirties played the roles of two sixteen year olds. Then a new director cast performers in their late teens. Teachers and Barking Gecko artists observed that young audiences were more engaged and more appreciative of the play when the performers were closer in age to their characters and the audience. Insurance Commission of Western Australia, which funded the play, documented a higher penetration of the play's message.

I wanted *School Ball* to engage its audience through a process of identification with familiar characters and experiences. Audience members would recognise themselves in the characters and be fellow travellers on the characters' journeys. This called for naturalistic performances to maximise emotional impact with the target audience. Casting experienced professional performers would facilitate the development process, while casting as young as possible would maintain connection with the audience.

Cast Size

At the outset of the project, I determined that *School Ball*, as with most school touring productions at Barking Gecko, would have a cast of three performers. Each performer would play multiple roles.

I had set myself the challenge of developing *School Ball* as though I were producing a production for a subsidised TYA company. At Barking Gecko, even with a fifty per cent subsidy on tickets, productions with more than three performers were prohibitively expensive. For private TIE companies, which operate without

government subsidy, a cast of one or two performers is the norm. Five hundred dollars is the typical minimum charge for a school performance so a performer in a two-hander may earn just over one hundred dollars a day, after deducting administration charge (usually fifty per cent), royalties and transport costs.

I wanted the cast size limitation to inspire creativity. Perhaps with the memory of watching *Year Nine Are Animals* in mind, I believed that the target audience would enjoy and be impressed by the acting virtuosity of performers as they changed seamlessly from one role to another. Performers playing multiple roles would expose some of the mechanics of the production process – how one performer creates and differentiates between roles. This could be interesting to students who wanted to understand more about the craft of acting and useful to teachers who may want to use *School Ball* as a tool for teaching theatre-making. Three stories and nine main characters (including a goat) in fifty minutes would infuse the performance with energy and theatrical cleverness.

I resisted pressure from the playwright to try two alternatives: firstly, to produce a play with only the three characters in Leo's story (Leo, Jess and Miss Starkey); and secondly, to increase the number of performers to four or five – a second male to differentiate Leo and Jack, and another performer to play the goat and other smaller roles.

My objections to the first alternative were artistic and conceptual: focussing the entire narrative on the illicit and illegal relationship ran the risk of creating melodrama. It would emphasise the unusualness of the scenario, perhaps distancing and alienating our target audience. As one of three narrative strands, Leo's situation would be seen in the context of more common and recognisable instances of young people dealing with responsibility and the consequences of actions. Seven adolescent characters would enable us to represent an array of typical peer groups, and perhaps enable more audience members to identify with characters.

My problem with a larger cast was mainly pragmatic: it would be difficult to find five performers who were available to work on the project for a fee that was even smaller than the token fee that I was able to pay three performers. But I also had an artistic problem with a large cast size: it would rob the production of the theatrical cleverness and performing virtuosity that would come from working with a cast of three. It could

be conceptually "messy" – to have some performers playing two roles and others only one, or a cast of nine, leaving some performers "off stage" in a production that would perform in non-theatre venues.

My determination to have three performers playing multiple roles would have consequences that arose continually in the development process, mainly around the audience understanding the transitions between characters. This is discussed in more detail below.

It is also possible that having one performer to play both adult Miss Starkey and adolescent Bethany would diminish the impact of Miss Starkey being in relationship with her younger student. The moment of the audience first seeing Miss Starkey and Leo kissing might not produce the desired "ew" and "wtf?" responses if the audience has ceased to believe the ages of the characters: there is nothing taboo about two performers aged in their twenties kissing. Although I aimed for a naturalistic performance style, performers quickly changing between differently aged characters could compromise the realism of the situation for the target audience.

Rehearsal Room Process

My process is to get performers on their feet and performing scenes as soon as possible, rather than spending time in discussion around a table. I like to suggest blocking (the performer's positioning and movement onstage) almost immediately, and work on line readings. I know some performers find this too fast. I need to explain that this is the first stage of an ongoing process of practical – instead of intellectual – exploration and discovery. Nothing is set in stone: with input from other artists and audience members, we assess how effectively a scene is working and then rework.

A performer's preferred way of working might need to be discovered and negotiated in the course of rehearsing. For example, when directing *Run Kitty Run*, a play for young audiences at Barking Gecko, I worked with two performers with very different approaches. One performer had just graduated from the WAAPA acting course and expected to break the text into units, beats and identify actions. Another performer had started acting professionally as a teenager, with no training, and wanted to know whether he should act sad, angry or another emotion. My role as director was to negotiate a hybrid rehearsal process that allowed both performers to develop their characters and performances.

Mischa Ipp, Rhoda Lopez and Josh Marshall-Clarke were the performers contacted to work on the development of *School Ball*. Lopez and I knew each other's rehearsal room practices and idiosyncrasies from working together on a children's play the previous year. Lopez will try anything suggested, as well as contribute many creative ideas. She possesses many performance skills, including dancing, singing, movement and physical theatre.

Ipp had worked for me at Barking Gecko as a drama workshop leader, and alongside me as a freelance drama workshop leader for Propelarts. A significant reason for contracting Ipp was her commitment to collaborative creative development, demonstrated by her membership of an independent collective, Little y Theatre, and as a student and graduate of Curtin University's Hayman Theatre.

To find a young male was harder. Good-looking and masculine young male performers leave Perth for better opportunities interstate and overseas. Most of the young men I had directed in similar productions at Barking Gecko were now based on the east of coast of Australia. One was studying full-time at WAAPA, while another had a full-time job and only accepted work in television commercials.

One of Perth's talent agencies, RGM WA recommended Marshall-Clarke, a twenty year-old who had been a successful child performer. He was the youngest of the three performers and, at twenty years of age, only a year older than some of the participants in the drama workshops. He had attended a ball at a private girls' school just the previous year, as the date of one of the year twelve students. It felt as though we had a teenager in the cast, someone close to adolescent experience and in touch with contemporary youth culture.

My greatest concern was Marshall-Clarke's lack of stage experience. Video examples of his television work showed his ability to give an engaging performance of a character very close to his own. For *School Ball*, Josh would have to play at least three roles, all teenage boys, just a couple of years younger than himself. He would need to find ways to differentiate the characters through his performance. Lopez and Ipp both had professional experience playing characters far from their own age and experience. They possessed the skills to consciously but subtly work voice and physicality in creating a character.

I expected to apply different rehearsal methods and terminologies simultaneously, as I

had done on *Run Kitty Run*. With Lopez, I would converse as we had done when creating *The African Magician*: constantly exchanging suggestions for interpretations and actions while she worked on the floor. A favourite expressions would be, "try…" and "I could try…" Ipp and I had discussed different approaches to performer training and rehearsals. I expected that we would use Stanislavsky terminology, and talk about actions and objectives. With Marshall-Clarke, I expected to use a combination of suggestion and more prescriptive instructions based on playing the actions in a scene.

The impact of my choice of performers was not limited to the work they would do in the rehearsal room. For example, Lopez is a WAAPA graduate, a respected and much employed performer in Perth's small theatre community. Her involvement would signal to other theatre practitioners that *School Ball* had artistic credibility and was worthy of support.

4.2 Production design

Costumes

I had previously worked with costume designer Hewson on *Run Kitty Run* by Tiffany Barton for Barking Gecko. *Run Kitty Run* is a play about teenage fashion models, produced for audiences in high schools. The play is comprised of a series of fashions shows and takes place on a catwalk with frequent costume changes. The costumes for *Run Kitty Run* had received resoundingly positive feedback from teenage audiences and I hoped that Hewson could repeat this success with *School Ball,* producing flamboyant costumes that were suitable for quick changes in a school touring production.

Hewson does not document or present her design ideas in drawings, preferring to make working costumes inspired by references from photographs, magazines, websites and videos. The main advantage of this non-standard approach was that the costume designs would be based on the latest in contemporary fashion. The main disadvantages to this method were, firstly, I would not know what to expect until the costumes arrived in the rehearsal room and, secondly, I would have to budget for Hewson to make final costumes for the work-in-progress showing.

Hewson delivered partially finished costumes for the start of the second creative development and worked on them during the week so the performers would have finished costumes for the work-in-progress showing. Though finished, they would not necessarily be the final design of costumes for a full production. The constant feedback integral to Hewson's method meant that the work-in-progress showing would inform the final costume design.

Figure 4.1: costumes on the first day of the second creative development, before being broken down.

Central to Hewson's design concept was to 'break down' the ball outfits: the hems of the gowns and cuffs of the trousers were dirtied and torn, as though the costumes had been dragged through mud. Each character experienced an unravelling of their hopes, each was stuck in a bad situation, and each would, at some stage, feel like 'shit.' Their shiny costumes with dirty edges would visually represent their tarnished school ball dream.

For character differentiation, Hewson supplied accessories – tiaras, clutch-purses, corsages and jewellery. The performers felt they had neither time nor opportunity to change accessories during the performance, particularly as they were working with scripts-in-hand. Marshall-Clarke swapped his tuxedo jacket for a duffle coat when playing Dev and Lopez wore a leather jacket as Larissa. The performers were confident that they could differentiate the other characters in performance with voice and physicality and action. However this was the only criticism of the performances volunteered by young people in post-show surveys (four out of seventeen respondents). They said that it was sometimes "hard to tell the difference between the two boys at the ball" (Jack and Leo) and between Amy and Jess. This was an issue

with the performance and script that could be partly addressed by changing costume accessories.
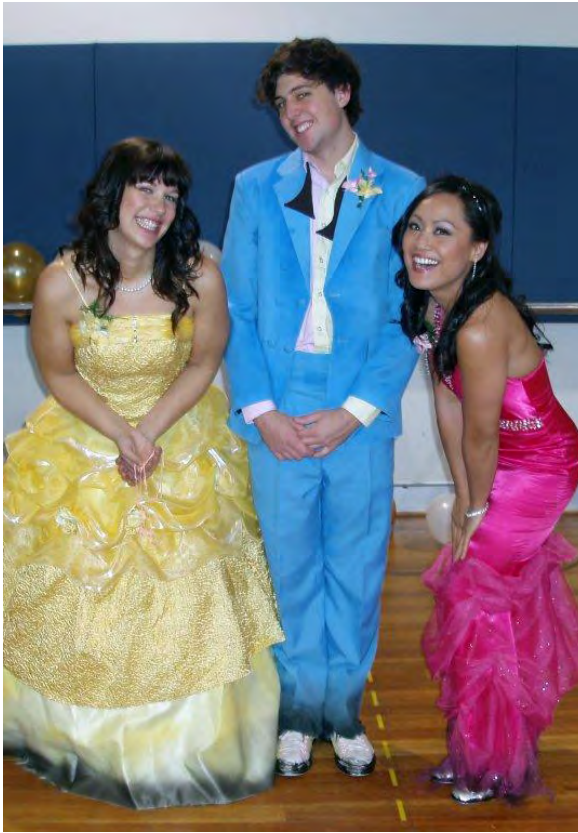
Figure 4.2: costumes at the work-in-progress showing; note breaking down and staining of hems of the dresses and cuffs of the trousers.

Figure 4.3: Lopez wearing a leather jacket while playing the character of Larissa.

Set and Props

For the design of the set and props, I was recommended a 'young' and 'starting out' designer, who I hoped would, like the young actors, have recently experienced his/her school ball and be up-to-date with current school ball styles.

Having left school to complete a carpentry apprenticeship, Howe bore a remote and dispassionate view of TYA, school balls and student-teacher relationships. From his perspective, creating the world of school ball was a design task and not, as it was for some of us, a journey into nostalgia.

Howe's different life experience turned out to have at least two advantages. Firstly, Howe focussed on finding solutions to the theatrical challenges and opportunities inherent in the script, instead of recreating a past experience of a school ball. Secondly, his participation helped to expand the perspective of the artistic team beyond its middle-class and tertiary-educated demographic. In his artistic feedback, Howe attributed knowing how to get cheap mobile phones and SIM-cards which later became pivotal to the work to his "streetwise" background.

Howe based his design on the idea that the producers of *School Ball* would be a de-facto ball-organising committee, setting up each performance venue for our fictional event. The production would travel with the essential items: balloons, a table, chairs, a disco ball, a couple of lights, a sound system for music and speeches, a decorative pot-plant and a red carpet. Audience members would walk the red carpet when entering the performance venue, like special guests at our school ball.

The performers would be on-stage at all times. When not in a scene, a performer would do what any friendless ball-goer would do: sit at a table and play with his/her mobile phone. All props and costumes would be pre-set, on stage, mostly in full view of the audience. The goat's head puppet was the only 'surprise' prop, to be kept hidden from audience view until its first appearance.

We used the three key set elements – the large round dining table and chairs, the red carpet and the potted palm – to mark out and border a central playing area. Conceptually and narratively, this central area was the dance-floor, one of the key performance areas at a school ball where young people display their style and personality through costume and dance.
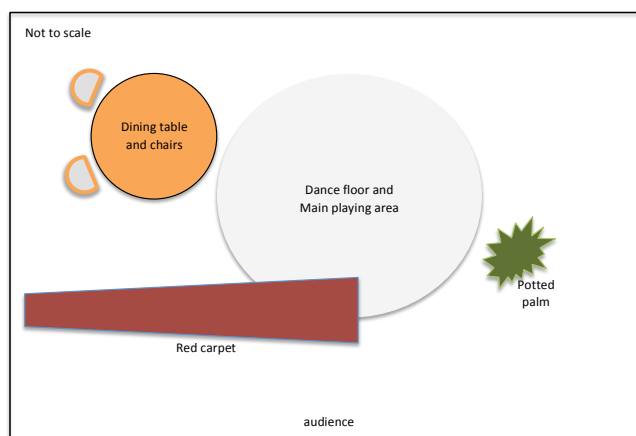
Figure 4.4 Playing area indicated by three set elements: table, pot-plant and red carpet.

The table served as Miss Starkey's car, a props table and a performer rest area. Placing chairs on the table to represent the car was initially intended to create a playing area separate to the ball. Young people commented that raising Miss Starkey above floor level appeared to be symbolic of her position of authority over students in the school hierarchy. Chairs placed upside-down on the table, as though being stored, indicated a storage room where Leo and Miss Starkey met in secret.

The front edge of the dance floor was bordered by the red carpet, marking the entranceway to the ball. The red carpet also indicated the pavement for the roadside scenes in Larissa's story and, we hoped, might be seen as 'blood-red' in colour or a 'river of blood' after the goat had been hit by Miss Starkey's car.

Figure 4.5: Bethany arrives on the red carpet, which marks the entrance to the ball and the performance venue.

Figure 4.6: Miss Starkey driving her car with Leo in the passenger seat.

A flashing blue light on the table indicated a police car. Ipp sat on a chair beside the table as though in a police car. The table's position on the edge of the main playing area helped convey the police officer's distance from both the action and the world of the teenagers.

A (fake) potted palm marked the prompt side downstage edge of stage. It joined the red carpet, the decorative tablecloth and seat covers and the balloons in conveying the visual aesthetic of a school ball. Narratively, it indicated an outside garden area, just away from the noise and heat of the dance floor. Practically, the plant served as masking for Ipp and Lopez when, as Bethany and Amy, they squatted to urinate on the ground.

The performance area also accommodated Larissa's electric guitar, a microphone for speeches, and a lighting stand with a disco ball. Party balloons were placed around the room to link the disparate set elements, their silver and gold colours matching the decorative covers on the table and chairs and their shiny, metallic quality referencing the performers' costumes.
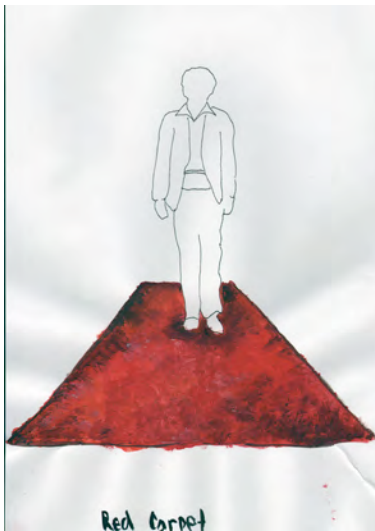
| Red carpet | Potted palm with fairy lights | Mirror ball and balloons |

| Dressed table | Dressed chair |
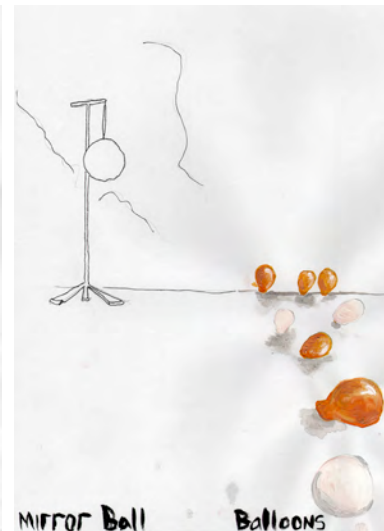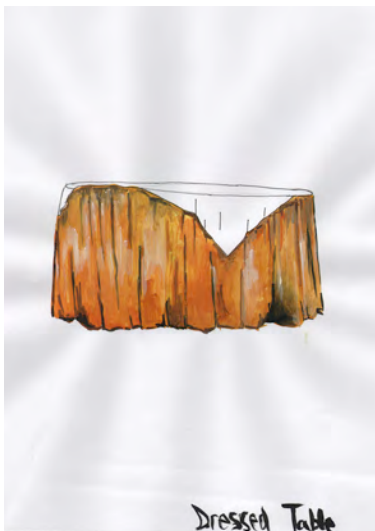
Figure 4.7: Howe's concept drawings for set elements.

I minimised the number of props and maximised their use to deliver a clean and refined production aesthetic and allow the performers to move between characters and scenes quickly and fluidly. This approach aimed to imbue the production with some theatrical cleverness or ingenuity. The best example was the use of the balloons to underscore two dramatic moments: firstly, Lopez underscored the moment of Leo and Miss Starkey kissing by popping as many balloons as she could during their embrace.

Secondly, when Larissa broke the goat's neck, Marshall-Clarke twisted a half-inflated balloon behind his back until it burst. The audience heard the squeaking rubber and then a pop, perhaps a last cry of pain from the goat followed by the sound of its neck snapping.

Audience feedback on the sets and props was positive, commenting on how "just a few balloons and the ribbons on the chairs made it look like a ballroom" and "I loved actors on the red carpet." Several survey respondents commented on the clever use of the table and chairs to make Miss Starkey's car. Two respondents wanted to see table decorations, cutlery, crockery, food and drinks on the table. They suggested some of the characters could incorporate these items in the action, such as the knives when arguing. Young people said they would love to see a limousine arrive and real camera flashes.

Figure 4.8: Perth school ball photos supplied by workshop participants: a pink stretch Hummer, a stretch limousine in the driveway of a suburban Perth home, with red carpet.

In discussing what was missing from the design, Howe and I returned to the issue of the limousines. One idea was to tour the production in a bright pink stretch Hummer, just like the ones that some of our drama workshop participants had experienced at their school ball (figure 4.8). The vehicle would drive into a performance venue and the performers would emerge in costume to perform the play. I would pursue this concept if I had sufficient resources to re-develop the production, for example, with the support of a major theatre company or venue.

The conclusions drawn from the design process included:

- The production benefitted from having a "streetwise" designer with a distanced perspective on school balls;

- Costumes were an important factor for the audience to differentiate between characters played by the one performer;

- The target audience did not expect a large set, but responded very positively to cleverness in the design and use of props and set elements.

4.3 Music and Sound Design

I have observed increasing use of underscore in contemporary plays, in the style of film or television, often with music under dialogue. For example, award-winning Sydney composer Kerry Ryall composes "soundtracks" for theatre productions by Bell Shakespeare, Griffin Theatre and others (Blake 2012:15). My aim was to work towards a full underscore for *School Ball*, integrating the narrative music and sound effects with a dramatic and thematic underscore.

Listening to music is central to the lives of adolescents, as a form of self-expression and a tool for mediating experience: "For the average teenager, it would seem that music is an increasingly accessible and much enjoyed medium for improving a good mood and for passing time" (McFerran, O'Grady et al. 2012:11).

For *School Ball*, I intended taking advantage of this link between mood and music to engage with the play's teenage audience. The sound design would not be minimised or secondary to the text. The playwright, sharing my view of the importance of music in the production, scripted a loud song in a minor key as the best way to introduce the character of Larissa to the audience and encapsulate her personality and motivation in thirty seconds.

As well as the question of *how* music would be used in *School Ball*, there was the question of *what* music to use. I wanted a contemporary sound, something that young people would respond to as their kind of music. In discussions and surveys, young people indicated their preferred styles of music and their favourite music performers. There was a confusing diversity in their responses but the common thread seemed to be current well-known artists but not the most commercially successful, and skewed towards Australians such as Angus & Julia Stone and Perth band Tame Impala.

I originally intended working with frequent collaborator Ash Gibson Greig as composer for *School Ball*. Our approach to music composition was genre-based: I would give Greig examples of young people's favourite genres and he would compose original music that imitated or paid homage to the suggested music.

It eventuated that Greig was unavailable, so I approached a young musician and songwriter, Katie Campbell, who had been a work experience student at Barking Gecko. Campbell was now a first year composition student at WAAPA and keen to be

involved. She had attended her school ball the previous year and was still attending school balls at the invitation of friends in year 12. She was living the experience I was investigating.

Campbell's self-proclaimed 'indie pop' style of music was similar to that of some artists mentioned by participants: Feist, Little Birdy and Regina Spektor. Admittedly her musical style did not match the most popular choices from young participants; nor was her music the type normally played at a school ball. I was particularly interested in the narrative potential of Campbell's compositions. Like the abovementioned artists, Campbell wrote lyrics that told stories of events or relationships between young people. Campbell's music was melodic and catchy; I was confident that she could compose a theme for *School Ball* that audience members would remember long after the performance.

Campbell's lack of experience in composing for theatre would be a challenge. We would both need time to develop a shared understanding of the creative process and build a collaborative working relationship. I had to acknowledge that our existing relationship was based on Campbell's time as a work-experience student at Barking Gecko which amounted to an unequal relationship in which Campbell might feel intimidated by my authority. I planned to have a composer such as Greig as mentor for Campbell but could not find anyone in time. The impact of this was to limit Campbell's contribution to the work-in-progress showing.

Campbell participated in the first creative development, observing the professional performers at work and contributing her experience of school balls to the general discussions. In the rehearsal room, we used recordings of Campbell's current songs as temporary underscores.

We identified the goat chase as a section that would benefit from music to hold the production together as the performers separated and spread out through the performance space. One possibility was to use fast, rhythmic music, like the participants' suggestion of the theme from *Mission Impossible*, to build the tension. Another possibility was to consider this section like a film montage sequence, appealing to our target audience's familiarity with contemporary film devices.

Campbell would compose a song with lyrics about how young people feel about school ball. She would perform on the dance floor of the ball, like a music student giving a

special performance, while the three performers playing Larissa, Dev and the goat ran around the periphery of the performance venue. Audience members would have three things to watch, the performance, the goat chase and their mobile phones, displaying the text messages between Larissa and Dev.

Campbell's song, titled *Best School Ball Ever*, did not directly address the taboo content in the play. Nor did the process or production of sound design engage in artistic practices that might be considered taboo in TYA in-schools performing, in the manner of the mobile phones. But Campbell's participation as a composer and performer did have a positive impact on the potential of *School Ball* to present taboo theatre in schools:

- Campbell's song was well received as a creative work by young people; its placement in the production was a directorial problem;

- Campbell's performance in the showing engaged the empathy of young people in the audience;

- Campbell's participation provided a model for the development of young creative artists, aligning *School Ball* with values in youth arts practice and drama education.

5. Negotiating with Teachers

Teachers and school administrations are the gatekeepers with whom a TYA producer must negotiate in order to present a performance in a school.

Roger Bedard in *Negotiating Marginalization: TYA and the Schools*, (quoting in part Doyle), summarises the difference in agendas:

> …schools operate within ideological agendas often in conflict with the stated artistic goals of theatre production. To put it simply, schools train young people *how to* function within dominant ideological perspectives; the art of theatre, in its historical ideal, offers schools 'the power of critique and possibility' (Bedard 2003:91).

The tension between social conformity and its critics is exemplified in the discourse on teacher-student sexual relationships. The dominant ideological perspective holds that the teacher bears sole responsibility and power of agency and the student must be treated as a child. This is unambiguously encoded in law:

> A person who procures, incites, or encourages a child who is under his or her care, supervision, or authority to engage in sexual behaviour is guilty of a crime (Criminal Code 1913:XXXI.322.4).

For this section of the law, 'child' means a person less than eighteen years of age. The law excludes the possibility that the child-victim could be considered an adult:

> It is no defence to a charge under this section to prove the accused believed on reasonable grounds that the child was of or over the age of 18 years (Criminal Code 1913:XXXI.322.7).

In short, the law does not allow a child to consent. The Western Australian Department of Education explains the rationale in its Child Protection Policy: "Under no circumstances can a child consent to a sexual relationship with an employee, by virtue of the fact that the employee is in a position of authority" (Dept. of Education 2009:9). A teacher's formal authority over a student makes any relationship illicit, even if the student is legally an adult: "It is also considered a breach of discipline to have a sexual relationship with a student over 18 years of age" (Dept. of Education 2009:9).

In the Victorian case of Michelle Alleri, the Victorian Institute of Teaching indefinitely cancelled her registration to teach after finding that she had conducted a sexual relationship with an eighteen year-old male student. Evidence that the relationship was consensual and that the student was an adult was irrelevant:

> A teacher having a sexual relationship with a student amounts to serious misconduct regardless of whether that sexual relationship is consensual. … If and when teachers exploit, inappropriately influence and harm students, they should be held accountable for their actions (Victorian Institute of Teaching 2005:10).

The roles of paedophile and victim are repeatedly affirmed in public discourse, as shown in an exchange from the television current affairs program *Sixty Minutes* (Australia) between reporter Liz Hayes and teenager Ben Dunbar. Hayes interviewed Dunbar and his former teacher and lover Karen Ellis, after Ellis' release from prison.

> BEN DUNBAR: In the way it happened, you could say I was a predator. I mean, I went after her.
>
> LIZ HAYES: But you know that that's impossible. You can never be the predator. You know that, don't you?
>
> BEN DUNBAR: Well, apparently I'm the victim. You know that's...
>
> LIZ HAYES: But you are. Not 'apparently'. You are (Sixty Minutes 2005:1).

The interviewer would not accept the young person's participation in the discussion. The adult, Hayes, assumed the role of teacher and schooled the child, Dunbar, on the law and would not accept any contradiction or argument from her student.

A comparison between *Sixty Minutes* and *School Ball* illustrates how the play's artistic goals are in conflict with the dominant ideology of teacher–student relationships. *Sixty Minutes* presented a real case within the dominant ideological framework to its television audience; *School Ball* aims to offer school audiences "critique and possibility" through fictional characters.

Firstly, in *School Ball* it is possible to hear the voice of the student, embodied in the character of Leo. The audience sees Leo engage intimately with Miss Starkey and

argue with her about their relationship. Leo's best friend Jess demands that he respond to the rumours that she's heard about him and Miss Starkey. Leo's narrative journey provides a significant contrast to Dunbar's experience on *Sixty Minutes*.

Secondly, *School Ball* offers a critique of the teacher-student relationship that, as Dunbar attempted to do, identifies a current of ambiguity. *School Ball* allows for the possibility that the student does not see him/herself solely as a victim or the teacher definitively as a paedophile. Leo engages Miss Starkey in conversation and argument about his role in their relationship:

> LEO: I just told you I love you.
>
> JUSTINE: So what do you want me to say?
>
> LEO: I don't know! That you love me too?
>
> JUSTINE: Hey, I'm here, aren't I?
>
> LEO: Or are you only into me when it suits you? (Appendix A:151).

In the same *Sixty Minutes* story, Professor Michael Carr-Clegg forcefully expressed a dominant ideological perspective on adolescent intelligence: "An adolescent is an adolescent. The brain is a work in progress. They can't make the same judgments as adults and any adult who exploits their vulnerability is doing the wrong thing" (Sixty Minutes 2005:2).

I recognise that, in deciding to examine this issue in *School Ball,* I could be accused of advocating for the teacher's position and challenging Carr-Clegg's position that the adult is always in the wrong. The position I wanted to maintain was that it was possible to regard the teacher as wrong while still allowing for the student's decision to be explored and understood. Certainly, whenever the question of the rightness of Miss Starkey's actions came up in discussion, artists and participants were unanimous in agreeing that she was wrong to have entered into a relationship with Leo. The play was not intended to advocate changes to the existing laws governing student-teacher sexual relationships.

My intention was to critique the idea that "[adolescents] can't make the same judgments as adults" (Sixty Minutes 2005:2). Carr-Clegg appears to deny the validity of a young person's decisions within such a relationship on the basis of biological

development. The strong implication is that decisions made by young people, such as Dunbar, to enter into a sexual relationship with a teacher is not to be given any weight or, as Liz Hayes demonstrated, any form of public consideration.

I agree that, in general, students are likely to have less life experience, intellectual and emotional maturity to inform their judgment than do their teachers[5]. This difference in capacity for making sound judgments does not mean that the decisions of students are unimportant and/or unworthy of examination. *School Ball* aimed to investigate the teacher-student sexual relationship from the student's perspective. The narrative was pitched to focus on Leo's experience of the ongoing relationship with Miss Starkey and how that might inform his judgment. The main turning point in Leo's story would be his decision to end the relationship. In Bedard's analysis, Leo's story is in conflict with how students are taught to function according to the dominant ideology.

It is difficult to ascertain what students are actually taught in schools about teacher–student sexual relationships. The Western Australian Education and Health departments jointly publish a pamphlet for young people titled What the Law Says About Sex:

> In WA, the law protects children and young people. It says that: Adults are not allowed to have sex with a person if they are younger than 16… If you are someone in authority, like a teacher, a pastor or a community leader, you aren't allowed to have sex with a person younger than 18 (Dept. of Health 2007:2).

The beginning of the paragraph is addressed to young people but then shifts to addressing adults. The reader is told that teacher-student sexual relationships are against the law. Similarly, the advice on 'Get the Facts', a government information website specifically for teenagers, discusses only the consequences to the adult:

> If you are 16 or 17 and have sex with someone who has a relationship of care, supervision or authority over you (e.g. they are a teacher, step-parent, guardian, foster parent, sports coach, doctor etc.), they can be charged with a

---

[5] In Australian cases of teacher-student relationships, judges frequently draw attention to offending teachers' immaturity.

criminal offence (Dept. of Health 2013).

In *School Ball* the consequences to the teacher were not of significant interest. Our artistic goals were to critique a complex and difficult situation for the student and imagine possible ramifications or alternative understandings. Ideally, young people in the audience would ask themselves: "what would I do in Leo's situation?"

Bedard observes how TYA companies in America usually reconcile the conflict between a project's artistic goals and school agendas: "Many theatre companies must explicitly foreground their work as educational to catch the attention of school gatekeepers" (Bedard 2003:97). One strategy to establish the educational credentials of *School Ball* was to seek feedback and advice from teachers and educators through a series of consultations. I hoped that some of the teachers who participated in the consultations would be persuaded to become advocates for *School Ball* and help navigate its way into schools.

The first formal consultation took place at WAAPA the week after the second stage of drama workshops, with five current teachers, two education academics and a teacher on sabbatical, Sven Sorenson, who would later join the project as dramaturge. Teachers had the research project information sheet, detailed synopsis and three sample scenes. The format of the teacher consultation was to be open–ended discussion around a conference table.

My opening question to the group was, "what would help or hinder getting *School Ball* into schools?" Initial responses conformed to my experience of touring plays to Perth schools and to Bedard's description of the American TYA landscape:

> In the case of the prevailing traditions of TYA in and for the schools, the ubiquitous TYA play scripts restricted to 60 minutes to conform to school and bus schedules – scripts purged of any language or content that might close the school gates – testify to the power of the dominant school ideologies (Bedard 2003:97).

The teachers were unanimous on the number one factor for obtaining approval from the school administration: *School Ball* must align with one or more of the five Core Shared Values contained in the Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia:

1. A pursuit of knowledge and a commitment to achievement of potential;

2. Self-acceptance and respect for self;

3. Respect and concern for others and their rights;

4. Social and civic responsibility;

5. Environmental responsibility (School Standards Curriculum Authority 2005:11).

Teachers felt they did not have sufficient information about *School Ball* at this stage of development to talk in detail or with absolute certainty on which values might be addressed by the play. There was general agreement that TYA for school performances usually ticked the second, third and fourth values. For example, Angela Betzien's *Hoods,* in its portrayal of poverty, marginalised and at-risk young people was aligned with values three and four; likewise Shirley Van Sanden's play about racism, *Trains of Thought*; and *Run Kitty Run*, a play about teenagers in abusive relationships, aligned with value two.

Certain 'hot topics', falling under values two, three and four, were said to be very persuasive when seeking approval for incursions: for example, alcohol and other drugs, bullying, cyber-safety, racism and sexuality. Good materials and performances about sexuality were said to be rare and one teacher suggested the taboo content in *School Ball* could be "tweaked" to focus on adolescent sexuality: change Miss Starkey's character to a male teacher who is the object of Leo's infatuation. There would be no need for an actual relationship between teacher and student: the story would focus on Leo's inner conflict as he struggles to come to terms with his homosexuality. The narrative would become 'safe' for schools.

An education resource kit, comprised mostly of lesson plans, is often produced with a TYA production to make explicit the link between the artistic work, the hot topic and the Core Shared Values. Each lesson plan identifies the relevant Core Shared Values and Learning Areas and Outcomes from the WA Curriculum Framework. Teachers emphasised the importance of schools receiving a well-written, readable and useful education resource kit in advance of a performance of *School Ball*. The content of the education resource was equally as important, if not more so, than the content of the script in winning the confidence, support and bookings of teachers.

How much to reveal of a play's content in advance can be a vexed question. After reading the words 'rape' and 'condom' in the script of *Run Kitty Run,* the Roman Catholic Bishop of Geraldton vetoed performances at local Catholic schools. In contrast, a teacher at a Perth private girls' said she asked to have the script in advance to contextualise the controversial material for students. Some teachers said they would not have taken students to Barking Gecko's *Driving into Walls* at the State Theatre Centre had they known the language and concepts contained in the play (Bevis 2012:3).

The teachers suggested a way around the challenge of aligning with the Core Shared Values: target drama classes. *School Ball* would be an opportunity for drama students to experience and investigate professional theatre. Drama teachers could obtain approval on the basis of the performance being an example of theatre practice, and not have to link the artistic work to the Core Shared Values. I felt narrowing the audience to drama students would lessen the reach and impact of the work. Focusing on the craft of producing the work might preclude meaningful engagement with its content.

Teachers agreed that students' taste sometimes impacted on teachers' selections of in-school performances. The teachers were aware of the negative stereotypes of TIE cited by young people in the drama workshops and shared the view of Rosemary Myers of Arena and Windmill theatre companies that, "young audiences have a pretty high bullshit radar" (Quoted in Anderson 2007:67). Students would be unenthused by shows whose titles and marketing materials were "daggy" and "obviously educational", for example, *Bully Busters* by Class Act Theatre. Students always liked shows with live music and young performers: for example, Barking Gecko's production of *The Buzz*. However, students rarely see marketing materials before teachers book a performance, only being privy to them later as part of their study of theatre practice. Non-drama students are unlikely to see any marketing materials.

The consultation with teachers confirmed the lessons of my experience and suggested that in order to get *School Ball* into schools, I would need to package the artistic work into a multifaceted education product. The package would include marketing materials directed at teachers and an education resource kit for teachers that referenced the curriculum framework with the artistic work.

This was a Trojan horse strategy: *School Ball* would be a gift to teachers, wrapped in

Curriculum Framework language and presented as an educational tool. Under the cover of performance, my taboo themes would emerge and engage directly with the students. The *School Ball* package would partly reconcile and partly hide the contradictions between artistic and educational goals, "a 'safe' educational tool, a commodity to be consumed in and for education – a commodity that sells best if configured and signified as theatre-but-not-theatre" (Bedard 2003:91).

Response to the Artistic Material

The teachers responded enthusiastically to the possibility of the play critiquing the school ball phenomenon. School balls were said to be a problem, a distraction from the task of teaching and a source of conflict among peer groups which placed stress on individual students: "while school balls are fun for many, for others they are traumatic occasions which only emphasise some students' lack of sophistication" (Forsey 2008:2).

The ritual of the school ball, in the experience and opinion of these teachers, undermined Core Shared Values. Self-acceptance and respect for self were diminished by the emphasis on appearance and the pressure to participate and conform. Respect and concern for others was confounded with individual and peer group rivalries. Social and civic responsibility was challenged by illicit behaviour such as drinking alcohol and smoking. Environmental responsibility was ignored in favour of hiring stretch limousines.

Worst of all was the impact of balls on the pursuit of knowledge and achievement of individual and unique potential which most teachers pursue as ideals: one teacher described the school ball as "the epitome of cliché and conformity", causing otherwise intelligent and enquiring students blindly to follow ball traditions and succumb to marketing messages. Most schools now scheduled balls late in year eleven or early in year twelve to minimise the distraction from study.

The teachers saw the potential of *School Ball* to assist schools in facilitating discussions with students about ball-related issues, preferably before students had attended or even started organising their own school ball. At the same time, the teachers responded least enthusiastically to Larissa's story in which Larissa articulated

and acted on many of their concerns. They felt that direct political action by students was rare and likely to be of minimal interest to student audiences.

Amy's story was seen approvingly as engaging with the hot topic of 'sexting' – young people exchanging risqué photos via mobile phones and social media. Teachers asserted that this is a major problem among adolescent students. Amy's story was instructive and her experience encapsulated the negative consequences of sexting.

Leo's story was seen as problematic for schools for a number of reasons:

1. The play did not show the legal ramifications of the sexual relationship for Miss Starkey, nor the social and administrative ramifications for Leo once the relationship was exposed;

2. Catholic and other religious schools would not approve of the implied pre-marital sex;

3. Leo's story incorrectly suggested that a teacher and student could establish a functional relationship. Any pleasure that Leo took from the relationship was illusory and irrelevant to the fact that the teacher is always wrong.

4. Full extent of the psychological damage to Leo could not be revealed within a narrative timeframe limited to one night at a school ball.

Sorenson's participation as dramaturge kept these concerns in the forefront of the development process and encouraged us to find solutions, for example, point one: showing the legal ramifications of the relationship.

In a text sent to Leo (and the audience), Miss Starkey uses the word 'proof', demonstrating her awareness of the inevitable legal process that would follow if the relationship were exposed:

> TEXT: If you tell anyone I will deny it. You've got no proof.

Jess, a student speaking in young people's idiom, articulates the perspective of teachers and the education system in the final scene of Leo's story. First, Jess outlines the dominant ideology of teacher–student sexual relationships:

> JESS: …it's creepy, and she's taking advantage of you, and it's against the law.

Jess then instructs Leo how to function within this ideology:

> JESS: You know you're going to have to tell someone.

Then she assumes a role model of the ideal response when encountering a taboo situation:

> JESS: Because if you don't I will.

In conclusion she makes Leo (and the audience) aware of the mandatory legal response to the situation:

> JESS: There's a whole system and it's going to take over (Appendix A:176).

Making Jess the voice of reason maintained the student perspective on the situation. It felt like an artistically satisfying solution to an educational issue that did not compromise the closeness of the work to its target audience.

Point two: religious schools

Minor script amendments would not necessarily make *School Ball* acceptable to all religious schools, a position that I knew from my encounter with the Bishop of Geraldton over *Run Kitty Run*. I was not prepared to have a second, bowdlerised, version of the play as Class Act Theatre has of its plays about teenage sexuality, *Boys Talk* and *Girls Talk*. Nor did I agree that all religious schools would refuse *School Ball* because of the implied pre-marital sex or illegality of Leo and Miss Starkey's relationship. At the same time, schools with a set of values informed by religion could also be susceptible to the same strategies applied to government schools. In fact, the two teachers at Catholic schools thought that *School Ball* would be acceptable for year eleven and twelve students. It was an issue to be tested later, when marketing the full production.

Point three: the illegal relationship

In discussing this issue, one of the drama teachers raised 'ideation', a term used to describe the process of placing ideas in the minds of the students. For example, suicide is taboo in schools: it can only be discussed within the framework of suicide prevention. From this perspective, studying *Romeo and Juliet* may be a problem

because the play shows two teenagers choosing to commit suicide. Perhaps *School Ball* would inspire students to approve of sexual relationships with teachers?

My feeling was that dramatising the abusive relationship did not endorse it. But to make the relationship credible to the target audience, we had to understand Leo's motivation. Young people suggested possible advantages to the relationship with a teacher: being able to boast about sexual conquest, being treated and feeling like an adult, feeling superior to friends, love, sex, the thrill of keeping a secret and, once we had the scenes in Miss Starkey's car, access to free transport. At the same time, we aimed to make clear the abusive nature of the relationship and the correctness of Leo's decision to end it.

The feedback from the teacher consultation did not dissuade me from my artistic goal of critiquing the ambiguity in Leo's story. But it did significantly inform my practice through the rest of the development of *School Ball*, reminding me of the educational framework in which I intended to produce my artistic work.

6. Performing Text Messages

The second draft of the script contained fifty individual text messages. How to perform these text messages in *School Ball* dominated the second creative development.

There were two types of text messages: firstly, messages sent between the characters, for example, "babe, I need to c u now. Leo x" (Appendix A:145); and secondly, messages sent by unnamed students to other unnamed students at the school ball, for example, "find some1 wit an iphone. AMY MIDDLETONS VAGINA" (Appendix A:140).

The playwright was not to worry about how the text messages would be incorporated into the production. Her focus would be to make the text messages appropriate to the moment, for example, when Larissa and Dev separate in search of the goat:

> TEXT: lost da goat. U seen it?
>
> TEXT: WTF?? u fuk evrythn up
>
> TEXT: u can at least help me find it. Yr idea
>
> TEXT: I see it. shit it got away again :S
>
> TEXT: I c it too. Its headn to da road (Appendix A:157).

The playwright would also consider how text messages might, in preference to spoken dialogue, enhance particular moments in the drama, for example, when Miss Starkey is flirting with Leo while he is conversing with Jess. Because Miss Starkey flirts via text messages, Leo is able to keep the identity of the 'other woman' a secret from Jess.

> *Leo's phone goes off and he goes straight for it – reflex action.*
>
> TEXT: I can still taste you :P
>
> JESS: Are you even listening to me?
>
> LEO: No. Yes!
>
> JESS: Are you seeing someone else?
>
> *Leo quickly puts his phone back in his pocket.*

LEO: No.

JESS: Who's that from then?

LEO: No one. Macca.

JESS: Then can I see? (Appendix A:144).

Amy's story turned on the multiple features of a modern mobile phone: Amy's phone is a photographic camera, a media-sending device and an address book. With just a few clicks, Bethany can comprehensively ruin Amy's reputation across the entire school.

Howe and I would solve the challenge of performing the text messages, mindful that "the use of mediatised culture within performance has to be integral and not an add-on to the performance" (Gattenhof 2008:9).

The Web (2009) by Kate Mulvaney is a naturalistic drama about a teenage boy who meets his first girlfriend online and communicates with her through chat sites and emails. Black Swan's production used mime and imagination to represent online communication. A wooden drawer in the kitchen table represented a computer keyboard, the actors looked into the middle distance to imagine the screen, and 'read' aloud chat posts and emails. Speaking the online text seemed inconsistent with the naturalistic form of the production and I felt diminished the impact of the play. In *Cyberia*, a popular TIE production about cyber safety, performers read aloud text from an imagined computer screen, complemented by recorded sound cues of computer system messages and sound effects. As with *The Web*, speaking digital text jarred with the naturalistic performance style.

When directing *Cyber Busters* for Class Act Theatre, I directed the performers to perform online text in a machine-like artificial style, as though they embodied the internet. For *School Ball,* I wanted a naturalistic performance style similar to *The Web* and I wanted this naturalism to extend to the technology. Miming phone conversations and declaiming text messages would feel like TIE practice and potentially alienate *School Ball*'s target audience.

Howe and I discussed options such as one large projection screen or several flat-screen televisions. My feeling was that the audience needed to engage with the technology in the same manner as the performers. Then Howe, mobile phone in hand, suddenly said,

"give audience members mobile phones. You can buy five-dollar SIM cards. Get a stack of second-hand phones from Cash Converters. And nearly every kid will have a mobile phone anyway." It was an example of a spontaneous idea springing forth from an open conversation between artists.

The starting point of our discussion had been that *School Ball* needed to be close to young people's experience. Howe's age and sensibility was closer to the target audience than mine. He pointed out why text messaging is so common among young people: teenagers can afford prepaid plans with unlimited text messages and they can text undetected by teachers during classes and other boring activities. As a WAAPA student, Howe knew how to live frugally and simultaneously maintain contact with his large social network: sourcing cheap mobile phones and plans was part of his world.

Audiences for in-school performances were usually comprised of 120 to 150 students. We reasoned that three students could share one phone, so the production would need around 50 phones in total. This number could be reduced if we were able to include student phones. Howe believed that second-hand phones could be purchased for as little as twenty dollars and a total expense of around a thousand dollars seemed feasible.

When I floated the idea with teachers, they had concerns:

- Mobile phones and other mobile devices such as iPods and iPads are seen as a cause of conflict and misbehaviour in schools.

- Schools strictly forbid students to use or carry mobile phones at school during school hours; they must stay "out of sight" in bags or lockers and, at some schools, are forbidden completely;

- It would be "impossible" to allow students to bring their own mobile phones to the performance;

- Students would misuse and steal phones; they would check for games and try to make calls; they would ignore the performance and play with the phones;

- Allowing students to use production phones would challenge the authority of teachers and undermine school policy.

These responses reflected Department of Education policy: "Under the Department's existing Behaviour Management in Schools policy all schools MUST ban mobile phone use in the classroom" (original emphasis, Swan Valley SHS 2009). The teachers' objections were similar to the arguments employed in schools' phone policies:

> Mobile phones can disrupt and distract students and staff in a variety of learning environments and hence are regarded as a safety hazard (Carine SHS 2011).

> Mobile phones have become a part of everyday life. However, at St Mary's we are determined to maintain a focused classroom environment uninterrupted by external communications… Therefore, mobile phones must not be taken into classrooms, assemblies, chapel or any other meeting (St Mary's 2013).

In this area, theatre norms and education policy coincide: mobile phones are also taboo in theatre for all audience members, whether they are young people, adults, teachers or doctors. For example, Black Swan State Theatre Company (BSSTC) states on its website: "Please remember to turn off all mobile phones and other electronic devices before the performance" (Black Swan 2012). The BSSTC website has a "theatre etiquette" page directed at students:

> Mobile Phones and Pagers: Please ensure these are turned off. If they do ring or beep in a performance it can be very embarrassing for you and distracting to cast and audience members. Please be aware that it is inappropriate[6] to text message during any live performance (Black Swan Education 2012).

These objections did not dissuade me from attempting to place mobile phones in the hands of audience members. The teachers' responses changed how I viewed the idea. What had begun as a technical solution to a production problem evolved as central to my research question, how to produce a taboo performance in schools?

School Ball was now engaging two taboos and there appeared to be some parallels between them. One teacher said, "Students can't be trusted with mobiles." This was reminiscent of the mistrust in young people's ability to speak about sexual relationships with teachers. Social media access and intimate relations with teachers are two activities

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[6] "Inappropriate" is a code word for "taboo".

that challenge systems of authority in schools. Both involve communication and relationships beyond the immediate control of school authorities.

The legal ramifications of a teacher–student sexual relationship are very severe, at least for the teacher. Some schools point out to students that using or misusing mobile phones can also have legal consequences:

> The posting of images of people without their permission onto the internet, through YouTube, MySpace or the like, or the transfer of images taken without permission of the person whose image has been taken, has the potential of being illegal under the Telecommunications Act and could result in charges being laid by the police (Carine SHS 2011).

The Carine policy does not point out that posting photos of others without their permission could be hurtful and humiliating. The social and emotional aspects of phone misuse are not discussed. Instead, as with teacher–student sexual relationships, a black and white legal framework is applied.

The more teachers objected, the more indignant I became on behalf of students being denied contemporary mediatised TYA. Mobile phones are a reality of today's world. Like any other medium of communication, they can be used for good or bad. Admittedly, my artistic pride was wounded as well: I was determined to prove that my artistic practice could engage students' attention and support.

The system

At the time of the second creative development, a telephone service provider was selling a simple but effective handset for $10. These handsets came with a mobile number and could be set up to receive text messages at no additional cost. The same telephone service provider offered a mobile broadband service that included unlimited text messaging within Australia, with software for sending SMS messages from a computer. We purchased three mobile broadband services for sending messages and ten mobile phones for receiving.

Our main problem was the time it took to send one message to many phones. Each mobile broadband service was a single phone number. We could address a message to many receiving numbers, but the broadband service would send the same message to each phone individually and sequentially, not simultaneously. We judged that a 90

second delay, taking into account six recipients, was the maximum time that we could allow for sending each message. For the work-in-progress showing, we had six sending devices: three Apple MacBook computers with mobile broadband services and three prepaid mobile phones with all the text messages pre-loaded.

Stage management desk   Audience

SENDER #1
mobile broadband
04XX 123 123   six audience phones

        mobile   SENDER #4
                  mobile phone   six audience phones
                  04XX XXX XXX

SENDER #2
mobile broadband
04XX XXX XXX   six audience phones

        mobile   SENDER #5
                  mobile phone   six audience phones
                  04XX XXX XXX

SENDER #3
mobile broadband
04XX XXX XXX   six audience phones

        mobile   SENDER #6
                  mobile phone   six audience phones
                  04XX XXX XXX

For example:

Stage Management
11.00:00
Sender #1 sends message from mobile broadband service number 04XX 123 123 to six audience phones.

Audience
11.00:15 audience phone 04XX XXX XX1 receives message from 04XX 123 123
11.00:30 audience phone 04XX XXX XX2 receives message from 04XX 123 123
11.00:45 audience phone 04XX XXX XX3 receives message from 04XX 123 123
11.01:00 audience phone 04XX XXX XX4 receives message from 04XX 123 123
11.01:15 audience phone 04XX XXX XX5 receives message from 04XX 123 123
11.01:30 audience phone 04XX XXX XX6 receives message from 04XX 123 123

Notes:
1. We tested the Stage Manager sending the texts that Leo receives from Miss Starkey to the performer's phone but it was impossible to time when the message would reach him.
2. With this set-up, we could vary the text messages sent to the different audience groups to reflect the different peer groups in a school.
3. We wanted to vary the order of the receiving numbers in the messages, otherwise one audience phone (in each group of six) will always be the first to receive the latest message, and one will always be the last. Is this a problem or does it also reflect how peer groups work: someone is always the last to know?

Figure 6.1: test messaging system at the work-in-progress showing

We had to redraft the scripted text messages so that they could be performed within the timeframe determined by the technology. This was a collaborative effort involving the playwright, performers, other project artists and young people. The length of the texts needed to be abbreviated and comprehensible. The language needed to be idiomatic and, yet, understandable. While it was fun to devise short messages that would amuse

our young audiences, the tone of the texts needed to be consistent with the characters who 'sent' them.

Developing a smartphone application was an intriguing possibility, but at the time we could neither afford to provide the audience with smartphones nor expect many students to have smartphones of their own. Since then, there has been a huge growth in smartphone ownership and communication applications such as Instagram, Kik and Snapchat.

This rapid turnover of technology raises one of the challenges of incorporating 'new' technology in theatre productions. Some of it does not stay new for very long. In the production *Cyberia*, characters mention MySpace, the near-defunct social networking site that preceded Facebook. This anachronism provoked laughter among students at the performance I attended. The full production of *School Ball*, planned for 2014, will likely require a combination of communication technologies, including from text messaging, smartphone applications and social media websites.

The audience mobile phones produced an unexpected and positive impact on the under-developed sound design, creating an underscore of mobile phone ring tones. For example, Amy becomes distressed when she realises that Bethany has sent the photo to everyone in her address book. Her distress and panic was underscored by the sudden explosion of ring tones in the audience, each one signifying another recipient of the photo and a jump in the magnitude of her humiliation. On the whole, the ring tones were unrelated to the dramatic narrative but contributed to the general aural ambience of *School Ball*, perhaps making it reflective of the contemporary noise environment of adolescent experience. This would impact significantly on the conception and composition of an underscore for a full production.

This led to a consideration of the impact of the mobile phones on the audience experience.

1. The sound: some adults in the audience complained that the noises were distracting. Young people commented that it was normal to hear mobile phones constantly ringing.

2. How would students react to being allowed to break the taboo on mobile phones in school? Would this excite them? Win their trust? Inspire bad behaviour?

3. Did audiences think the phones were gimmicky? Did the novelty wear off during the performance? In post showing interviews and online surveys, several young people cited the mobile phones as 'the best thing' about the production. The downside of this enthusiasm is the potential of the messaging to take over from the ideas generated through the production.

4. The suggestion of interactivity: some audience members tried sending messages back to the characters. Did they feel cheated because the communication was one-way? Could *School Ball* be developed to allow audience-generated messages or is this a concept for a different show?

The participants felt respected by the *School Ball* creative team because we had trusted them with the phones. They conceded that there would always be some young people who would want to test the limits of authority by misusing and stealing phones but they thought that most students their age would respond as positively and responsibly as they had done.

Performing text messages on mobile phones raised intriguing issues for TYA practice about technology in performances, schools and the lives of young people. Some of these issues are discussed below in relation to the work-in-progress showing. Others will need to be investigated in a future performance in a school setting.

7. Work in Progress Showing

School Ball was performed to an invited audience of young people, teachers and artists. Performers had their scripts in hand, sound design was limited, key props – such as the goat puppet – were temporary. Nevertheless, Sorenson observed in his dramaturge's final report: "The performance was polished and did feel like a complete event, not a moved reading" (Sorenson 2011:3).

The work-in-progress showing would not greatly advance the investigation of taboo narrative content in schools. Put simply, the work-in-progress showing was not in a school and the audience was not a supervised school audience. The showing would test *School Ball*'s narrative content for credibility and effectiveness: did the audience find the story believable? Was it true to their experience? How did it make them feel?

Audience

The young people in the audience could be divided into two groups: firstly, young people who had already participated in the project and who, therefore, had quite detailed prior knowledge of the content and some of the production strategies; and secondly, ten young people who were new to the project and seeing *School Ball* for the first time in any form. The former group would be able to comment on the realisation of artistic goals I had stated more than six months before; the latter group would provide a fresh response to *School Ball* as a performance.

Prior knowledge of the project was similarly varied among the adults and artists attending. Some had previously contributed to the project as independent adult observers at workshops and supportive partners of project artists. Two audience members had participated in the first teacher consultation. Two parents who had transported their children to the venue stayed for the performance. Young people were treated as privileged audience members and allocated the first two rows of seats. In the post-show discussion, adults were asked to wait until young people had had their say before contributing to the conversation.

The same biases from the drama workshops characterised the young people at the showing: more females than males, an existing interest in performing arts, in some way connected to my youth arts and Perth theatre networks, and generally confident and articulate in discussions. The adults too – with the exception of the two parents who

attended – had a personal connection with me or another project artist. How young people in schools would respond to *School Ball* would remain the subject of speculation until I was able to organise a showing in a school to a general student audience.

Some of the adults were gatekeepers – teachers at schools in a position to book *School Ball* – but it is fair to say that their attendance at the showing indicated their interest in the project and their support of TYA in schools. The educational strategies for getting past the gatekeepers, discussed in the teacher consultations, were not tested at the showing. Education materials that identified the relevant Core Shared Values and Learning Areas from the Curriculum Framework were absent. Consequently, teachers at the showing might be expected to reiterate the concerns expressed at the teacher consultations.

Taboos in context

Producing the showing at WAAPA distanced *School Ball* from its intended context of secondary schools. Narrative content that was expected to be taboo or problematic in schools was acceptable at WAAPA where audiences could often expect to see productions with nudity, drug use, sex, suicide and violence. I did not think at the time to ask audience members how the non-school venue might have affected their response to taboo content.

The non-school venue and the privileging of young people in the audience meant the usual power relationship between teachers and students was absent. Young people watched *School Ball* unsupervised. Teachers and other adults had neither the authority nor a mechanism to stop the performance or manage audience behaviour. With previous productions, I have sometimes observed tension and awkwardness between students and teachers when watching 'mature' content together. For example, a loudly responsive audience for *Run Kitty Run* at a Catholic school went silent in the presence of the school principal[7]. The two young people whose parents stayed said they did not feel inhibited by the presence of their parents.

The atmosphere in the room before and after the showing was dominated by conversations between young project participants and artists. The young people were

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[7] Afterwards the supervising teacher and student drama captain told me they had feared the principal would stop the performance during the sexual assault scene.

comfortable with the artists, knowledgeable about the production, and appeared to feel a sense of ownership over the project – a significant positive outcome of the development process. It prompted me to consider another strategy for getting *School Ball* into schools, one that exploited the positive relationship between the project and young people: student advocates to endorse the production, recommend it to their teachers and brief teachers from other schools on how their students might receive the play.

Venue

The work-in-progress showing took place in Studio D at WAAPA, a large rehearsal room with a timber floor, white walls and an abundance of natural and fluorescent light: similar in look and feel to a school hall. The room had no pre-defined performance or audience areas. For the artists, the experience of entering the space at 9am was like arriving at a school for a performance: the first task was to decide on the layout of the space.
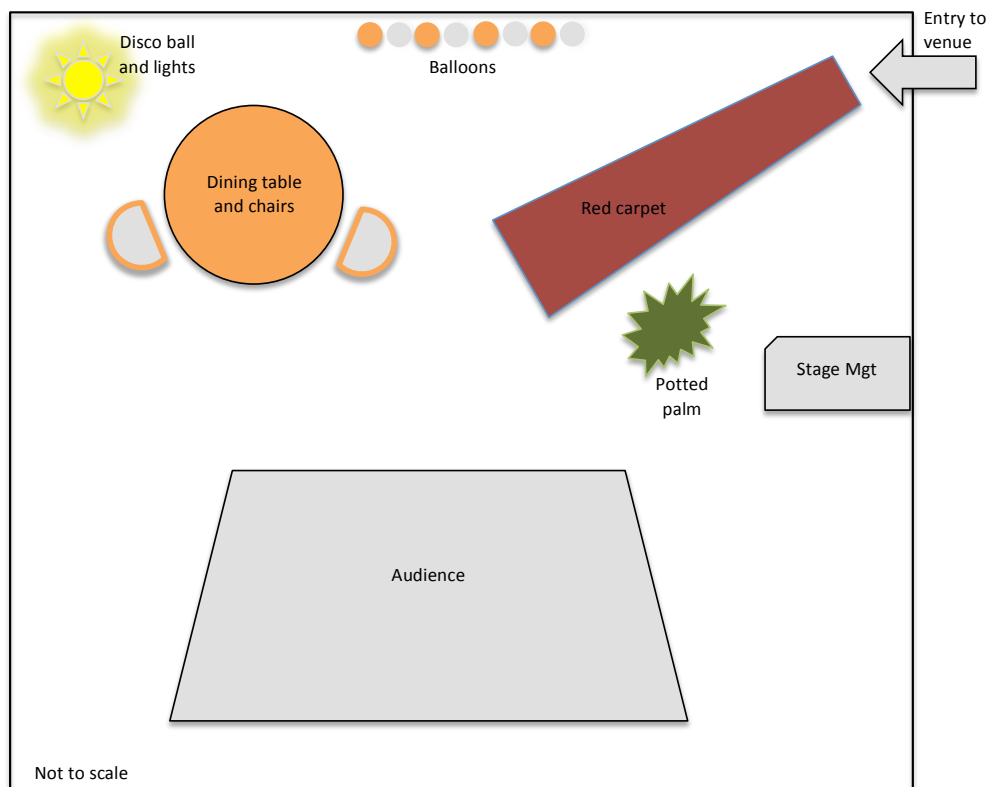
Figure 7.1 Plan view of layout for work–in–progress showing

The direction of the light from the windows determined the orientation of the room: the audience would sit with their backs to the windows so that the performance area would

have maximum natural light. This placed the entrance to the space in the upstage prompt side corner, opposite to the layout used for the previous week's creative development. Flexibility with performance venues is one of the factors that will endear a TYA production to schools. The door's position in this space was advantageous, in that the audience walked the length of the red carpet from the entrance to their seats, immediately positioning them as ball-goers at our fictional school ball.

The showing was the first opportunity to test our system of audience mobile phones with an audience close in size to a small school audience. In the previous week's creative development, we had tested our system during a couple of run-throughs with about ten audience members. For the showing, we expected an audience of around 50 people. The showing would reveal whether our production strategy of audience phones was technically feasible. Audience behaviour during the performance would reveal how the phones impacted on audience engagement. Post-show responses would tell us something about the effectiveness of the mobiles in performing the text messages.

The mobile phone system required a stage manager and two assistants to operate. The first audience members to arrive were asked whether they wanted to use their own mobile phone during the performance; if yes, the stage manager collected their phone numbers. In addition, some audience members had given their phone numbers when accepting their invitation. The rest of the audience were supplied mobile phones from the production.

Showing

I introduced the showing, contextualising the performance as a work-in-progress. I asked audience members to imagine they were students in a school watching a visiting performance with no prior knowledge. I asked audience members to leave their mobile phones switched on, but to refrain from taking outside calls during the performance. While I was still talking, the first text messages bleeped on audience phones, indicating the beginning of the performance.

My usual practice during a run-through in a rehearsal room is to assume the role of the 'typical audience member', and assess the performance by way of its clarity and impact. During the showing, I directed my attention to the young people in the first two rows as much as possible: what made them laugh? When did they seem disengaged or bored? How did they use the mobile phones? Which moments, if any, appeared to unsettle

them or provoke a noticeable reaction? The dramaturge, too, directed most of his attention to the audience. I did not take notes on the performance and tried to not concern myself with performer missteps or technical problems.

In watching the young people in the audience, I observed a high level of engagement with a fictional world. The audience's enjoyment in the use of the mobile phone technology was palpable, firstly, in the novelty of having a new gadget and, subsequently, in this unusual way of watching a performance, eagerly checking new messages, and then quickly returning to the performance. I did not observe any signs of boredom or detachment from either the mobiles or the narrative. The audience laughed at key moments of humour, particularly in Amy's story. They were quiet and attentive during the moment of the goat's death and during high-stakes scenes in Leo's story. During the song and the goat chase, I noted that some audience members appeared to be confused about where to focus their attention. There were audible responses at Miss Starkey's meanness to Leo. Amy's description of the photograph held their attention and amused them. Most young people seemed to understand the moment when the play ended. The applause was enthusiastic.

Responses

From the responses to the showing, I distilled the following key feedback on aspects of the production requiring further development:

1. Character differentiation: audience members still found it hard to distinguish between two of Lopez's characters – Amy and Jess – and between two of Marshall-Clarke's characters – Jack and Leo. One audience member confused Jack for Leo in a scene with Miss Starkey and concluded Miss Starkey was sleeping with several students. Young people suggested costume accessories such as wristbands and performance strategies such as accent to help differentiate characters. Unsurprisingly, there was an alternative voice: one participant said she really liked the subtlety and fluidity of the character transitions.

2. The song, *Best School Ball Ever* by Katie Campbell was "random" which I interpreted to mean that its position and style was not consistent with logic of the play. One person suggested it could be a slow song for Leo to dance with Jess or Miss Starkey.

3. Stereotypes: one audience member disagreed with her friend that the play "summed up the school ball": she thought it summed up stereotypes. This was picked up in the surveys with two respondents expressing a concern that Bethany and Amy's characters could become clichés of superficial adolescents.

4. Participants were intrigued by our decision to have Larissa record her performance on an iPod, as though streaming directly to YouTube. They suggested YouTube accounts and Facebook pages for the characters that students could view after the performance.

5. Staging: in response to a question about the set, I described one staging idea that we had not had time to investigate: setting the performance space up as a ballroom, with the audience seated in groups of ten around dining tables. The performance would take place on and around the tables. There was an audible "ooh" from the young people, suggesting that this was a good idea to develop.

In the post-show discussion, all feedback was welcomed and everyone's opinion accepted. It was important to facilitate an atmosphere of openness, to maximise feedback collected and to encourage quieter voices to speak up and be heard. After about thirty minutes of discussion with young people, adults were invited to join the conversation.

The dichotomy of teacher and student was evident in the responses to the showing. Some of the views of teachers, summarised and articulated in Sorenson's dramaturgical report, were in conflict with the responses of young people given in the post showing discussion and online survey. It was another demonstration of the paradox at the heart of producing TYA in schools: the disjuncture between target audience and ticket buyers. On some key artistic issues, detailed below, it would be necessary for me to choose between engaging with the responses from the target audience and addressing the concerns of the gatekeepers.

As a TYA director, my practice is to prefer the response of the target audience. Young people would always be the dominant dramaturgical voice throughout the development of *School Ball*. Admittedly, I was often looking for young people's responses to validate artistic decisions that I had already taken: this was not a group devised or youth arts project in which the adult director's artistic voice might be equal or subservient to the young people. But their response was always the measure of success to be applied to

our artistic work on *School Ball*. The feedback from the showing indicated both the aspects of *School Ball* that were good and the aspects that needed more work.

Mobile phones

The showing could not directly test the taboo of phones in schools, but the responses did highlight the disparity between teachers' and young peoples' perspectives. Sorenson commented,

> Schools are struggling to keep students focused in class thanks to student phones, Facebook, Tumblr and other Web 2.0 phenomena. Would they welcome this event therefore? (Sorenson 2011:4).

While teachers might not welcome or want the mobile phones, young people said they would: the phones made them feel "involved" and "connected". They predicted that "students will absolutely love" the mobile phones. One explained how the mobile phones deepened the experience and engagement with young people:

> I loved how [*School Ball*] used technology to reach the audience. It wouldn't have the same depth without them. Being able to see the texts the characters were sending really did help my involvement in the play.

Sorenson observed:

> [Young people in the audience] were clearly excited by receiving the texts, many of which sounded like young people and featured the kinds of social events that would interest them [but] the focus was more on their phones and other people's phones around them than on the action, which may challenge comprehension (Sorenson 2011:4).

Some of the young people's feedback contradicted this observation. One commented, "the messages could be distracting but the play was really interesting so I would try to read [the latest text] quickly and to find out what's going to happen." Another said, "other people's phones going off created anticipation." One young male commented how the audience phones replicated real life practice: "it works having people looking at different phones. I do that all the time with mates. Someone'll say, hey check this out and lean over like that." Text messages were said to help audience members to "understand and get things", specifically, who the characters were, the transitions

between scenes and characters and what was really happening between Leo and Miss Starkey.

While acknowledging the positive response of the young people in the showing, Sorensen made clear his view on the feasibility of the phones in schools:

> Test the phones idea with bigger audiences of mixed abilities. I have taught in large state schools, low socio-economic schools, elite private schools and independent Christian schools. It isn't hard to predict what could happen (Sorenson 2011:5).

I take from this that Sorenson is doubtful. I disagree: the evidence from the development is that students would respond positively. Consistently, the young people predicted a positive outcome in schools. As they said in the discussion, "you're winning the students instantly" and "you'll have them onside." One explained in detail:

> If I was told I was going to see a play, I would expect it to be boring. But when you give them mobile phones, as soon as they come into the space, they'd be like this is going to be good.

I too have experience in many different types of schools: I can see the challenge of winning the trust and cooperation of students who are otherwise distrustful and disruptive of authority. I believe the challenge is not insurmountable, indeed, it is an essential part of youth-centred TYA practice.

The suggested alternative, "the simplicity of using screens instead" (Sorenson 2011:4), provides an artistic choice that would be inconsistent with the goal of creating contemporary theatre that is close to the life-styles of the target audience. Young people do not exchange or receive messages on a projection screen. One young person in the discussion pointed out that "if you didn't have the texts, you would have to read it out like 'oh did you see this text?'" She was highlighting the artificiality of this option. It was the same artificial solution that I had disliked in *The Web* and *Cyberia*.

Audience mobile phones challenge the authority of teachers over students in two distinct ways: firstly, the mobile phones facilitate a plethora of intimate relationships between the production team and individual or trios of students in the audience. It would be extremely difficult for a teacher to intervene and manage the behaviour of the mini-audience attached to each mobile phone as the text messages were performed

simultaneously with the action of the play. Secondly, *School Ball* shows students an alternative functioning of mobile phones within a school. In the performance, mobile phones are not a distraction from teaching, or tools of disruption, or a source of conflict among students; rather, they are a necessary and positive aspect of the production. *School Ball* undermines the rationale for a policy of zero tolerance of phones in the classroom.

Reflecting on the mobile phones prompted one young audience member to introduce the word "taboo" into the post-show discussion: "It's so taboo to have your phone on in the theatre, it's so embarrassing." He described automatically going to switch off his phone every time it sounded during the performance when he received a text. Designer Howe pointed out that audiences being silent is a relatively modern phenomenon, observing that it was not taboo for the audience to speak during Elizabethan theatre performances. TYA playwright Tiffany Barton commented that she "loved how the phones breached the fourth wall." For school audiences, the mobile phones could encourage drama students to reflect on theatre history and the rationale and impact of modern theatre etiquette on the audience experience.

The teacher student relationship

Performing Leo's story outside a school context lessened the impact of dramatising a teacher-student sexual relationship. The moment Leo kissed his teacher did not have the shock value for which I had hoped. The girls sitting in front of me looked at each other and smirked during the kissing, perhaps more from embarrassment at the immediacy of the intimacy, than from discomfort at the illicit relationship.

At the beginning of the discussion, one young person volunteered that, "the relationship between the student and the teacher kind of made me wonder if that's happening at my school." This got a big laugh from the rest of the audience, as though this was an absurd message to take from the play. In fact, it was one of the dramaturge's main concerns about performing *School Ball* in schools: "The show… has a lascivious dimension that encourages gossip and speculation. In other words, the show may victimise teachers who would be sensitive to this" (Sorenson 2011:5). Sorenson suggested this might undermine artists' relationship with teachers: "Should TYA bite the hand that feeds it by creating speculations that lead to false teacher accusations?" (Sorenson 2011:5).

Firstly, the laughter in response to the abovementioned comment suggests that this is an unlikely scenario. But what if *School Ball* prompts students to question the behaviour of their peers and teachers? Is this better or worse than criminal behaviour continuing unseen and unchecked? Students have the right to complain about teachers' bad behaviour (Dept. of Education 2009:13); *School Ball* could be seen as a way of making students aware of that right. Perhaps the problem is that teachers may want to preserve the "significant power imbalance [that] exists between teachers and students" (Corruption and Crime Commission 2006:9).

When prompted, young people reflected further on Leo's story. One liked how *School Ball* "touched on issues that are taboo and people don't talk about… teachers in relationships." They found the character of Miss Starkey to be realistic: the way she switched from treating Leo like a lover to treating him like a student when it suited her; using teacher phrases like "duty of care"; and her dismissive attitude towards the random character of the Asian student who interrupted her conversation with Leo. Some audience members said they wanted to see the consequences for the teacher: "losing out, being fired – something that makes it really bad."

One young person said a message of the play was "don't sleep with your teacher." Again, her response prompted laughter, possibly because that message is so obvious that it was absurd to say it out loud. It seemed young people already understood that teacher-student sexual relationships are illegal and abusive and Leo's story dramatised that experience. *School Ball* did not appear to role model risky behaviour by students. Perhaps teachers' problem with Leo's story is that young people found the portrayal of a manipulative and abusive teacher more or less credible.

The photograph of Amy exposing herself

A young person asked whether we had considered sending an actual photo of Amy urinating. One of the project participants recalled the conclusion of a discussion from the third drama workshop wherein sending a censored image would be cheating; to maintain a level of consistency with mobile phone use, an actual photo needed to be sent.

I explained the potential illegality of sending a photo that matched the description in the dialogue. It could be construed as sending pornography and, even worse, child pornography over the mobile phone network. A young audience member pointed out the

advantage of not seeing the actual photo: "you can come up with the worst picture possible in your head." Playwright Tiffany Barton observed how the narrative of the photo provoked in her what she described as a moral reaction: "I wanted to find someone with an iPhone and see the picture and then I felt really bad for wanting see a poor girl humiliated. We are drawn to [humiliating] photos like a car crash."

Figure 7.2 What the some of the audience could see (left), and the actual photo (right).

The fact that adolescent characters are responsible for the taboo acts in Amy's story makes this narrative acceptable to teachers, projecting a moral lesson for young people on the risks of improper use of mobile phones. The teacher who was new to the project asked about the educational value of *School Ball*. Sorenson answered the question in relation to Amy's story: "It hits a lot of areas we think are topical – the sexting phenomenon, privacy versus the online world, bullying with technology and so on." This encouraged me to think that the educational value of Amy's story could be used to overcome teacher resistance to the presence of mobile phones. Mobile phones were integral to the storytelling, prompting young people, an experienced TYA artist (Barton) and an experienced teacher (Sorenson) to reflect on the sort of issues that TYA is traditionally expected to address.

Killing the goat

Young people responded to the theatricality of the death of the goat: "I really liked the use of the balloons, when you popped one when the goat's head snapped – that scared

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the crap out of me." The artistic intention was for Larissa's killing of the goat to be a dramatic turning point in which she was forced to take responsibility for her hotheadedness, the accident and the goat's dying pain. But the issue of Larissa's responsibility did not come up in audience responses.

Larissa's story did provoke some comment about the school ball experience and ideology. One young person nominated the scene as a favourite moment: "when the Goth characters came back in to dance [they showed] the fact that some people do enjoy the ball in a non-superficial way." Some audience members identified Larissa's political stand as the message of the story: "everyone at the ball is like a flock of sheep". Others liked the journey from outsiders to ball-goers: "[Larissa and Dev] were strong in their beliefs. I know a lot of people like that. Then you showed them letting that go, enjoying the ball for what it's worth." Or, put simply, "the goat died but they still had a good time."

Larissa recording herself at the start of her story prompted audience members to think creatively about *School Ball*'s future development. One respondent said, "I liked the way she was making her YouTube video, saying, "I've got something planned for later". I was just imagining it going on YouTube." Others picked up the idea that audience members could read Larissa's video blog after the ball and watch some other videos. The concept could be expanded: "It would be kind of cool if all the characters had a Facebook page. You could have an app and look at it during the show."

Figure 7.3: Lopez as Larissa hands her mobile phone to an audience member to record her performing her song for YouTube.

The acceptability of depicting animal cruelty appeared not to interest young people. The simple theatrical device of asking an audience member to record a snippet of the performance for YouTube inspired audience members to push *School Ball* into more technology-based performance and, possibly, into more conflict with the gatekeepers of TYA school performances.

In the final analysis, did the audience find the story believable? Responses such as "Miss Starkey is such a typical bitchy teacher" suggested so. Was it true to their experience? Young people saw themselves in the roles: "I was the dude version of Jess" and "I kept thinking, 'Oh my goodness, I remember doing that.'" How did it make them feel? Their responses suggested that they felt connected and involved. It prompted them to reflect on their own attitudes and actions: "it made me wish I hadn't taken my school ball so seriously." One young person said that she "liked how there wasn't a moral."

The work-in-progress showing was the final stage of the practice-led research. It produced four sets of valuable outcomes to inform the future development of *School Ball* as a touring TYA production:

• Clear and detailed feedback on aspects to be improved, such as the character differentiation;

• Creative ideas to pursue and develop, such as setting up the performance venue as a ballroom;

• An understanding of the aspects of the production that required testing in a school, such as mobile phones in the hands of student audience members.

• The delicacy of presenting taboo and controversial issues in school productions both in terms of pre-performance marketing and in the reception of the production itself.

8. Conclusion

This project is representative of my work as a director of TYA, a specialised genre which sits in a marginalised space whereby it is funded, created and valued as art for young audiences, while its parameters are set by schools who demand value as education. These parameters have a significant impact on its content and form.

My practice, aligned with others working in the field, is strongly informed by the interests of the target audience. My practice is characterised by a conscious choice of content that is relevant to young audiences and created in ongoing consultation with the audience to ensure the work's affinity with adolescent experience. Like Myers, I am the Chief Architect who leads the creative process towards artistic goals, allowing input from young audiences to inform rather than direct the work.

Unlike Myers and other contemporary commentators in the field, I do not subscribe to the assumption that young audiences have a particular preference or alignment with postmodern or, for that matter, any particular theatrical form. I recognise young audiences as a diverse group whose reception of the arts is more often related to socio-economic and educational factors rather than age. However, my experience suggests that young audiences seek to engage with linear narratives in spite of their mediatised environment of layered and perhaps fragmented experience.

After twenty years of working in youth arts, I chose to structure my Masters project around the creation of 'taboo' theatre, enabling an examination of my practice while pushing against boundaries of what is considered possible within the art form. I am driven to create work that empowers those who are marginalised by the existing ideology to question its power structures. I aim to create work that engages a teenage audience with both a recognisable voice and an entertaining theatrical experience that reaffirms a worldview where we all have the power to question authority.

This work challenges the dominant ideology surrounding sexual relationships between students and teachers. The presented story challenges the existing ideology by placing Leo at the centre of his story and shows him making the decision to end an abusive relationship. By empowering Leo to say no, the story implies that he is also empowered to say yes. This is the crux of the taboo.

Throughout the development process, young people were enthusiastic contributors to discussions about the teacher-student sexual relationships, but it remains problematic to present a young person's perspective in this way in schools. The story potentially undermines teachers' authority (and responsibilities imposed on them by the educational system) by exposing an instance of abuse and a young person's response to such a situation. This story is framed with two other stories in which young people are forced to deal with difficult situations, for which they are wholly or partially to blame. While the other two stories met with student approval, teacher resistance to Leo's story remains a major hurdle to overcome in order to achieve my goal of obtaining approval for *School Ball* to perform in schools.

A second taboo, which emerged during the development of the project, was the use of mobile phones. As with the taboo in Leo's story, teachers resisted giving young audiences mobile phones because the devices challenged their authority within schools to manage behaviour. To give students phones was to empower them to make a decision about how to use them, a decision that students are usually denied as a matter of policy. While input from young audiences has been consistently positive about using mobile phones, teachers have continued to resist the usage without vetoing the production altogether. If the first taboo of content could be overcome, I believe that the second taboo of form would not be an obstacle to performance.

The development and showing of the work has substantially achieved its intentions. *School Ball* fits within the formal parameters required of TYA in schools, a small cast and a portable design, while satisfying my artistic vision of a theatrical, engaging show. It incorporates design elements of costume, set, music, and technology that work both to support the narrative and engage with its themes on a metaphoric or conceptual level. The development process was structured around ongoing consultation with members of the target audience who inspired creative ideas and confirmed its relevance. The engagement displayed by audience members in the showing and the interest emerging in the following discussion and surveys confirm for me that *School Ball* captured its audience's attention and also conveyed its themes in a meaningful way.

The showing also revealed the two areas which need more attention: the ongoing difficulty of distinguishing the discrete stories and characters, and the seamless incorporation of music and soundscape into the work. The former requires some more

thought and development to come up with solutions that sustain the genre of the performance. Financial limitations and my artistic choice both call for a fluid style of presentation that is, at once, naturalistic and theatrical. I am confident that further work will reveal solutions that will clarify narrative threads while remaining consistent with the style of the piece. Further work with a composer would also lead to more satisfying incorporation of music within the fabric of the play.

The ongoing sensitivity of teachers to the content of Leo's story suggests that the play has retained its status as taboo. The development process exposed particular issues, both ideological and practical, in obtaining teacher endorsement of the production. One solution is to address the educational outcomes in promoting the play to schools. Emphasising the play's alignment with educational imperatives and framing Leo's story within existing guidelines for teacher behaviour could become a strategy to explore the complex issue of taboo behaviour. Another less satisfactory solution is to market the play to drama students rather than a general student population. While this strategy appears more achievable, it goes against my stated aim of creating taboo-interrogating theatre for schools by reframing theatrical treatment of a taboo topic as something only appreciated by those with specialist knowledge.

Another solution suggested by the development process is to attempt to market *School Ball* directly to students. Ideally students would approach their teachers to ask for performances of *School Ball* in their school. This approach is consistent with the themes of the play and the underlying thrust of empowering young people to make decisions for themselves, whether those decisions are about using mobile phones, engaging in illicit relationships or choosing what theatre they would like to see.

Removing the taboo content is the simplest answer to the question of how to produce taboo theatre in schools. But then *School Ball* would not have the complexity and ambiguity that makes the work close to adolescent experience and meaningful to young audiences. The youth–centred artistic practice of *School Ball* was integral to creating a work that challenged artists and excited young audiences. While young people's involvement and endorsement does not negate the taboos or teachers' concerns, it might suggest to the gatekeepers that *School Ball* would be a rich theatrical experience for students, one that "raises questions but doesn't always answer them" (Lorenz 2002:107) and might help them to make sense of their lives.

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PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

MY WORST EVER NIGHT AT THE BEST SCHOOL BALL EVER

WORK-IN-PROGRESS DRAFT

BY

KATE RICE

CHARACTERS: *Actor One plays:*
                     Jack, 16
                     Bethany's Dad, 50
                     Leo, 17
                     Dev, 17

                     Actor Two plays:
                     Amy, 16
                     Bethany's Mum, 41
                     Jess, 17
                     Hyun Jae, 16
                     Larissa, 17

                     Actor Three plays:
                     Amy's Mum, 44
                     Bethany, 16
                     Miss Justine Starkey, 23
                     The Goat
                     Police Officer, 50

SETTING: A Hotel in the City and surrounds.

                     The audience members have mobile phones. Texts are sent to
                     their phones during the performance.

SCENE ONE

TEXT: im not wearing any underwear tonite

TEXT: OMG I just got a spray tan and I look like an oompa loompa

TEXT: Shotgun 2^(nd) from left. Great rig

Bethany stands resplendent in her gown and poses for photos.

TEXT: Uploading my latest vid now. Larissa x

Dev's speech and Larissa's song happen simultaneously as Bethany poses.

Dev gets ready in his room. He looks at himself in the mirror and adjusts his tie.

DEV: *(yelling to his Dad)* No I won't take drugs. No I won't get anyone pregnant.

                               No thanks. I can drive.

                               It's a school function, Dad, there isn't any alcohol.

                               I don't know. Late. There's parties and stuff afterwards.

                               No they don't have any alcohol there either.

                               So can I have the car or what?

                               Now. I've got a thing to do first.

                               Granddad's suit.

                               It's not like he died in it.

                               Yeah there'll be photos.

                               Can I have some money?

                               A couple of hundred? That's what the others get.

                               Thanks Dad.

Larissa sets herself up for her weekly video blog.

LARISSA: Hi again, it's me Larissa with my regular Friday night music video update. Dev says hi. He's not here because tonight is the night of my high school ball and we've got a little something special planned. As I record this, there are a couple of hundred

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kids from my school going beserk over their hair. And that's just the boys. This song is dedicated to them.

(singing) My head is full of thoughts
But they just go round and round
I try to get them out
But I'm lying on the ground

My eyes are full of sights
That I just can't really see
My ears are full of sounds
Someone's calling me

But I'm too too sad
'Cos I'm too too dumb
And my life is numb
'Cos I'm still on the run
And I'm oh so lonely
Though I'm caught in a crowd
And my thoughts are all bloody
I'm beaten – but I'm not down.

Thanks for all your support I really appreciate it.

Later haters. Love ya raters.

BETHANY: Come on, enough with the photos! We'll be late –

Bethany turns quickly to go, gets her heel stuck in her dress and falls over.

BETHANY: Ow!

TEXT: Have u seen bethany? Yellow dress. Looks like a pineapple.

TEXT: Amy & bethany scored a hottie. Hes defs not in our yr

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SCENE TWO

Amy and Jack arrive in the foyer together and pose for an obligatory arrival shot.

Amy suddenly screams. She has seen her friend Bethany, who is screaming too. They run to each other and hug as though they haven't seen each other in a million years.

AMY: Bethany!

BETHANY: Amy!

AMY: Omigod!

BETHANY: Omigod!

AMY: You look amazing!

BETHANY: You look amazing!

AMY: I know! Your hair!

BETHANY: Your dress!

AMY: My nails.

BETHANY: This tape!

AMY: I can't breathe.

BETHANY: I can't walk.

AMY: How uncomfortable are these shoes?

BETHANY: I've fallen over twice.

Bethany shows her injuries.

                Elbow.

                Nail. My Mum was such a bitch about it.

AMY: Hey, I'm doing the announcement!

BETHANY: I know.

AMY: It's freaking me out.

BETHANY: You'll be fine.

AMY: I am so scared.

BETHANY: I could do it.

AMY: No you couldn't.

                       I mean, why would you want to?

BETHANY: I just thought –

AMY: It'll be over in like two seconds.

BETHANY: I know.

AMY: But for those two seconds, the whole school will be looking at me. So. Yeah.

Amy screams. Bethany screams. They hug again.

JACK: Hi Bethany.

BETHANY: Hi Jack.

AMY: So. What do you think?

BETHANY: He's wearing converses.

AMY: I know. He wouldn't listen.

BETHANY: But the hair.

AMY: Totally works.

JACK: Guys!

BETHANY: Totally.

JACK: I'm right here.

AMY: When we came in, everyone was looking at us like, omigod, who is that guy? Did you get this?

She shows Bethany a message on her phone.

BETHANY: I know! Scored a hottie! Everyone else is totally with who you'd expect.

JACK: Hello?

AMY: This really stands out.

Jack turns away and starts to head off.

BETHANY: Hey!

AMY: Where's he going?

BETHANY: Jack!

AMY: Where are you going?

JACK: I thought you were finished.

AMY: You're my partner.

BETHANY: And mine.

AMY: Second partner.

BETHANY: I paid for half his suit.

AMY: But not the limo. The real partner goes in the limo.

JACK: Real partner? You paid me twenty bucks.

AMY/BETHANY: Shhhhhh!

AMY: Someone could hear!

BETHANY: Don't you get it?

JACK: No! I am completely confused. Is this real or pretend?

BETHANY:}   Real.
AMY:}   Pretend.

AMY: But I'll pay you another twenty to make it look real.

JACK: Does that mean happy ending or what?

AMY: Don't be disgusting!

BETHANY: It's just about appearances.

JACK: Isn't that a bit superficial?

AMY: It's the school ball.

BETHANY: It's supposed to be.

Jack contemplates.

JACK: Another twenty?

AMY: Really real. Looking.

JACK: How's this?

Jack offers his arms to Amy and Bethany.

BETHANY: You are so cool.

AMY: I love being original.

The three enter the ballroom.

Jack and Amy become Leo and Jess.

SCENE THREE

TEXT: hipster kids are here. Are jess & leo together?

Leo and Jess arrive at the ball. They are completely relaxed, and they look amazing.

LEO: And it's Leo arriving on the red carpet.

JESS: With the lovely Jess. She is most likely not wearing any
                        underwear.

LEO: He's definitely not wearing any.

JESS: They're asking for something. What? What's that they're
                        saying?

LEO: Show us your –

JESS: Kiss? Are they saying kiss?

LEO: I don't think so.

JESS: Oh come on. For a photo.

LEO: All right. But no tongue.

They kiss chastely.

JESS: Ball photos.

LEO: West Australian.

*He leads Jess into the room. They both make eye contact with friends and chat with
them as they go.*

LEO: Macca! Howsit!

JESS: Hey! Love your dress.

LEO: Wassup?

JESS: That colour is so good on you.

LEO: Photo shoot. I swear someone put eyeliner on me.

JESS: King's Park.

LEO: Yeah I'm going to the afters.

JESS:	We're going to the afters together.
LEO:	That's why I'm here.
JESS:	Who? Amy and Bethany?
LEO:	This is like foreplay. Fun, but really, it's only for girls.
JESS:	They are so wannabe.
LEO:	Are they with a Year Eleven?

Miss Starkey, a maths teacher, looms up behind them.

JUSTINE:	Leo. Jess.
JESS:	Miss Starkey! Wow I would never have recognised you!
JUSTINE:	I hope that's a compliment.
JESS:	You look amazing. Don't you think?

Jess and Justine look at Leo.

LEO:	Uh – I guess.
JESS:	Leo!
JUSTINE:	That's quite all right.
LEO:	What? She's a teacher.
JESS:	Don't listen to him, Miss Starkey, he's just a boy.
JUSTINE:	He certainly is.
LEO:	Sorry miss.
JUSTINE:	Forget it. Have a good night. Oh, and Jess –

Justine makes the sign that Jess has lipstick on her teeth, and then disappears.

JESS:	Oh my god.
LEO:	Yeah bye.
JESS:	That is so embarrassing.
LEO:	What?

Leo takes his mobile out and starts texting.

TEXT: Fark u look hot.

JESS: You didn't even notice did you?

LEO: Notice what?

JESS: Nothing.

LEO: Wanna hit the d-floor?

Leo takes Jess onto the dance floor and they start dancing together. Music is loud and upbeat. They're both really cool dancers.

JESS: Leo.

LEO: Jess.

JESS: Can I tell you a secret?

LEO: Only if I can put it on Facebook.

JESS: I'm serious.

LEO: Okay but it better be nasty.

JESS: It is. I planned my school ball when I was in Year Eight.

LEO: That is so pathetic.

JESS: I know. I was going to wear a full-on princess dress.

LEO: Funny, so was I.

JESS: I even picked my partner.

LEO: You picked your partner in Year Eight? Who was it? Macca?

JESS: No. It was you.

LEO: *(can't hear)* What?

JESS: It was you!

LEO: Seriously?

Jess nods.

LEO: We weren't even friends then.

JESS: I know.

LEO: So why me?

JESS: Because.

Jess kisses Leo on the lips.

Leo stares at her. His mobile buzzes in his pocket.

TEXT: I'm hungry for you.

LEO: Shit. Sorry.

Jess stands awkwardly as Leo takes his mobile and looks at the message.

                Hold that thought.

He charges off.

JESS: Leo!

LEO: Nah, it's cool, I'll get you a drink.

JESS: Don't –

LEO: Okay I'll get chips.

Leo is gone.

Jess looks around her, aware that people could have seen. She smiles and dances a bit.

JESS: He's gone to get chips.

Jess becomes Amy.

SCENE FOUR

Amy wanders out into a garden courtyard.

BETHANY: Hey Amy! Where did you go?

AMY: Out on the balcony! Come on Bethany!

BETHANY: Is this out of bounds?

AMY: Look! I can see all the way down to the river!

Leo comes out onto the balcony. He's texting. Amy flutters with excitement and holds onto Bethany.

AMY: Hi Leo.

LEO: Oh. Hey.

Leo goes back to texting, with his back to the girls.

AMY: *(mouthing)* He is so hot.

BETHANY: *(mouthing)* Check out his arse.

Amy sends Bethany over to stand next to him for a photo.

AMY: Leo!

Leo turns around and Amy takes a snap. The girls giggle.

LEO: Good one.

Leo wanders off, still texting.

AMY: Look! Fairy lights! I love fairy lights.

BETHANY: Bit cold.

AMY: It's like everything tonight is perfect and all lit up just for me.

Amy offers Bethany her camera.

                    Take one.

BETHANY: Can we go back inside?

AMY: I want a princess photo.

BETHANY: Later.

AMY: But it's our magical fairy garden moment!

BETHANY: Come on.

AMY: Don't be mean. I took one of you!

BETHANY: I'm dying for a pee.

AMY: Oh my god.

BETHANY: I know!

AMY: Do you have to?

BETHANY: I'll be quick.

AMY: But the queue is ridiculous.

BETHANY: Please don't make me go by myself.

AMY: Just go here.

BETHANY: What?

AMY: There's no one around.

BETHANY: In my dress?

AMY: Why not?

BETHANY: In the perfect magical fairy garden?

AMY: Go on.

BETHANY: You're crazy.

AMY: I'm not going inside.

BETHANY: But I really need to go!

AMY: Then go!

Bethany desperately looks around for a concealed spot.

                    Omigod are you really going to?

BETHANY: You better keep a good lookout.

AMY: You really are!

BETHANY: I'm desperate.

Amy squeals as Bethany squats down and does a wee behind a big potted plant. Amy laughs. Bethany joins in.

AMY: Omigod!

BETHANY: I can't help it!

AMY: You look so trash.

Amy whips her mobile out and takes a photo. Bethany pulls a face for the photo; pretends to pick her nose. Amy kills herself laughing as she takes pictures.

BETHANY: Yuck!

AMY: Stop! Oh no!

BETHANY: What?

AMY: Now I've got to go too!

Bethany sorts herself out, leaps up and grabs the phone.

AMY: Ew germy hands!

Bethany wipes her germy hands on Amy, Amy wipes the germs back and gives her the phone and then she does a wee as well. She takes off her undies and pulls her dress right up.

BETHANY: You've pulled it right up!

AMY: It cost six hundred bucks, I'm not going to pee on it!

Bethany lines up the phone.

                        Don't you dare.

BETHANY: But you look like a princess!

AMY: I am a princess!

Bethany takes a photo of Amy.

BETHANY: I can't believe you're doing this.

AMY: Ew it's gross.

BETHANY: This is the most hilarious thing –

AMY: You started it.

BETHANY: You started it.

Amy has finished now and goes to take the phone. Bethany holds it up so Amy can see the photo.

AMY: Give me –

BETHANY: No way, it's too funny.

AMY: Let me –

BETHANY: I haven't finished.

Bethany keeps the phone to herself and looks at the photo. Amy tries to snatch it from her but Bethany keeps it out of her reach. She's pressing buttons.

AMY: What are you –

BETHANY: I'm deleting, that's all –

AMY: But I didn't –

BETHANY: I'm just –

Bethany stops and gasps. Then stifles a giggle.

AMY: What?

BETHANY: Nothing.

Bethany presses a few more buttons and then hands it over.

AMY: What did you do?

Amy looks at the phone.

BETHANY: I deleted them.

AMY: But I didn't get to see it!

BETHANY: Let's go back in.

AMY: It's sending.

BETHANY: Come on.

AMY: What's it sending?

BETHANY: Is it?

AMY: Oh my god. Oh my freaking god.

BETHANY: It's not –

AMY: Did you send the photo?

Bethany smiles and giggles.

TEXT: find some1 wit an iphone. AMY MIDDLETONS VAGINA

TEXT: OmG hav u seen da pic!? u can c her fanny

SCENE FIVE

Leo is examining the picture of Amy on his phone in an empty function room.

Justine comes up behind him and puts a hand on his shoulder. He jumps and hides his phone.

LEO:	Miss Starkey.
JUSTINE:	What are you doing in a deserted function room all by yourself, Leo?
LEO:	Nothing. Just – um. You know.

He gestures to his phone briefly then puts it in his pocket.

JUSTINE:	Where's your partner?
LEO:	She – um. Yeah. Bit awkward.
JUSTINE:	Nothing serious?
LEO:	Nah, not serious, no.
JUSTINE:	So what then?
LEO:	Nothing.
JUSTINE:	I might be able to help.
LEO:	I don't think so.
JUSTINE:	I might surprise you.

Hyun Jae wanders in.

HYUN JAE:	Oh, hello Miss Starkey, where the photographer?
JUSTINE:	Out the door to the left and left again, Hyun Jae. Go on. You're not supposed to be in here.
HYUN JAE:	Sorry Miss Starkey.

Hyun Jae wanders off.

JUSTINE:	You were saying?
LEO:	Jess just told me that she liked me.

JUSTINE: So what did you do?

LEO: I ran away.

JUSTINE: So I take it you don't like her?

LEO: Well – no. Not in that way.

JUSTINE: In what way?

Leo looks at Justine and she returns his gaze. They both check to see that they are completely alone. Then Leo lunges at Justine, pins her to the wall and kisses her passionately. She reciprocates.

Then she finally manages to extricate herself.

JUSTINE: Leo!

LEO: It's all right, no one can see.

JUSTINE: Please!

LEO: But I can't stand it.

JUSTINE: You have to stop.

She lets him kiss her.

LEO: I can't stop thinking about you.

JUSTINE: No!

He stops.

                  We'll hook up later.

LEO: Why not now?

JUSTINE: Because. It's better if we wait.

Leo lets her go and they contemplate each other.

                  Lover.

He goes for her and she evades him.

                  And… you've already got a date. I hear she's hot for you.

LEO: But I don't –

JUSTINE: Text me.

Justine goes back into the ballroom and almost bumps into Jess.

JESS: Miss Starkey have you seen – oh.

Justine is gone and Jess is left alone with Leo.

Leo smiles at her awkwardly.

LEO: Hi Jess.

JESS: Leo, what's going on?

LEO: Are they serving dinner (yet) –?

JESS: No. Leo.

LEO: Because I am desperate for – (some food)

JESS: Stop it!

LEO: Hey, we're friends, right? We don't have to do all that talky
                   stuff.

JESS: Leo, you can't do this. For months you've been distant and
                   weird, and then when we finally hung out together you asked me
                   to the ball. I thought it meant something.

LEO: It did. It does. It means that – we're partners at the school ball.

JESS: Something else. Between us.

LEO: Right.

JESS: But it doesn't, does it?

LEO: What?

JESS: I thought it was awkward because you saw me as more than just
                   a friend.

Leo's phone goes off and he goes straight for it – reflex action.

TEXT: I can still taste you :P

JESS: Are you even listening to me?

LEO: No. Yes!

JESS: Are you seeing someone else?

Leo quickly puts his phone back in his pocket.

LEO: No.

JESS: Who's that from then?

LEO: No one. Macca.

JESS: Then can I see?

Leo hestiates.

LEO: Nah, it's rude. It's a picture of some girl taking a leak.

JESS: We all got that half an hour ago.

She goes up to him and tries to take his phone. He pulls away.

LEO: All right, I'm seeing someone.

JESS: Who?

Leo doesn't answer. His phone goes off again.

TEXT: I want you to taste me.

JESS: Is she here?

LEO: Um –

JESS: Is she?

LEO: It's kind of a secret.

Jess nods and tries not to cry. Leo goes to her.

                        I'm really sorry, Jess, it's got nothing to do with you. I'm – oh
                        man. Here, let's go and line up for a photo. Catch up with your
                        friends?

*He starts to comfort her and lead her back into the ballroom but she angrily shrugs him
off.*

JESS: Don't.

LEO: Jess, I didn't know. Can't we just forget it? Hey?

JESS: No.

LEO: We can still be together for the night.

JESS: That's all you want to do, isn't it? Pose.

LEO: I thought you liked it.

JESS: Then you're a dick.

Jess leaves him on the balcony.

Leo takes out his mobile and starts to text.

TEXT: babe, I need to c u now. Leo x

SCENE SIX

Amy furiously flicks through her phone trying to stop the sending process.

AMY: Stop. Please stop…

BETHANY: I don't think you can.

Amy throws the phone at Bethany, then buries her face in her hands.

                            Ow!

Bethany picks up the phone and looks at the photo.

                            It's not that bad. No one will probably even look at it. Not until
                            tomorrow anyway. And – um – then they'll just delete it. I
                            mean these are your friends, right?

                            They'll understand.

                            Come on Ames. It's not that big a deal.

                            They won't forward it. I wouldn't.

                            Anyway, there's no point getting upset.

                            Ames? Why are you so upset?

Amy snatches the phone from her and points out the features.

AMY: That is me. That is my piss. That's my thigh, there's some
                            cellulite, and yes I'm pretty sure that is most of my giney.

BETHANY: Is it?

AMY: Everyone is going to look at it, everyone is going to laugh, and
                            then, they are going to forward it.

BETHANY: The one of me was worse.

AMY: Then let's send it.

BETHANY: I think I deleted it.

AMY: I know you deleted it.

BETHANY: I didn't do it on purpose.

AMY: Really.

BETHANY:	Why would I?
AMY:	Because you're a jealous bitch.

Bethany gasps in horror.

	Just face it Bethany, you've been jealous of me since Year Seven.
BETHANY:	Oh my god.
AMY:	I'm prettier than you, I've got a better house, I look better in skinny jeans, and I lost my virginity to a boy you liked.
BETHANY:	I never liked him!
AMY:	Don't lie. I did you a favour anyway, he was an arsehole. Not once have I been anything but ridiculously nice to you, and then you go and ruin my life.
BETHANY:	You are such a –
AMY:	And you know you only do better in school than me because you work like an absolute dog.
BETHANY:	stuck up –
AMY:	I do no work. None.
BETHANY:	No, 'cos I do it for you!
AMY:	Not that it matters 'cos school's finished for me anyway.
BETHANY:	Jesus, Amy, you're not dead!
AMY:	I might as well be.
BETHANY:	Will you shut up?
AMY:	Why did you do this to me?
BETHANY:	Amy! Not everything has to be about you!

Amy takes the phone and tries to shove it up Bethany's skirt to take a photo.

AMY:	All right. Come on. Smile.
BETHANY:	Amy!

They struggle together, each mindful of their heels and hair. There is a loud screeching noise of brakes, followed by a bang, a scream, and tyres squeal to a halt. The girls stop struggling and listen as the car is silent, then guns its engines and roars off.

Amy lets go of Bethany. The girls look at each other.

BETHANY: What was that?

AMY: Don't change the subject.

BETHANY: That was a crash.

AMY: So?

BETHANY: So we should go.

AMY: Why?

BETHANY: They might need our help.

AMY: It's none of our business.

BETHANY: Come on!

Bethany goes to leave.

                    Are you coming?

AMY: So you're just going to leave me here?

BETHANY: Unbelievable.

Bethany heads off.

AMY: You are!

Amy sits down and buries her face in her folded arms.

SCENE SEVEN

TEXT: Leo where r u? my cars on level B. hurry up.

TEXT: foods ready. Where the fuk r u bro?

Justine sits in her car in the car park. Leo comes running up.

JUSTINE: Leo! I did not get dressed up to spend my entire night waiting for you in the car in an underground carpark.

LEO: I ran into Macca and that, I had to come up with an excuse.

JUSTINE: This is so irresponsible.

LEO: I had to see you.

He goes to kiss her but she evades him.

JUSTINE: You can't just text me like that and expect me to wait for you. I'm not here for your convenience.

LEO: Then why are you here? Why am I here? It's a joke.

JUSTINE: Leo! Tonight isn't about you, it's about the school community.

LEO: I despise the school community.

JUSTINE: Well that's a nice attitude for a member of the student council.

Leo's phone goes off and he reaches for it.

                        Turn that off.

LEO: You think anyone would care if I left? My friends just want to get pissed and Jess hates my guts. There's nothing here for me, babe. Only you.

He leans in and kisses her. She submits.

JUSTINE: We can't do it here.

They keep kissing.

                        Someone could see.

They keep kissing.

LEO: Like who?

JUSTINE: The car-park attendant!

She pushes him off.

Then grabs him again and kisses him.

LEO: Let's go to your place.

JUSTINE: We'd never make it back in time.

Still kissing.

                        I left my dinner on the table.

They break away from each other.

LEO: Okay fine.

Leo makes to get out of the car.

JUSTINE: No, wait.

Justine puts on her seatbelt and starts the car.

JUSTINE: You are so bad.

She drives through the hotel carpark.

LEO: But it feels good.

He puts his hand on her knee.

                        I told Jess.

JUSTINE: What?

LEO: That I was seeing someone. I didn't say who. But you know
                        what? It felt great. Made it real.

Justine doesn't reply.

                        This is real, isn't it?

JUSTINE: Car-park attendant. Turn away.

Leo does so. They pull up at the boom gate.

JUSTINE: *(to the carpark attendant)* Hi.

(to Leo) Gimme ten bucks.

Leo does so. Justine pays.

(to the carpark attendant) Thanks.

They drive on; Leo turns back.

LEO: I'm tired of the sneaking around, babe.

JUSTINE: What's that supposed to mean?

LEO: I need to get it out.

JUSTINE: Out where?

LEO: I think I love you, babe.

JUSTINE: What are you saying?

LEO: I do. I really do.

JUSTINE: Because it sounds like a threat.

LEO: What?

JUSTINE: You said you want to tell people.

LEO: Don't you?

JUSTINE: No!

LEO: So – we're going to sneak around forever?

JUSTINE: You want to break up?

LEO: I just told you I love you.

JUSTINE: So what do you want me to say?

LEO: I don't know! That you love me too?

JUSTINE: Hey, I'm here, aren't I?

LEO: Or are you only into me when it suits you?

JUSTINE: Who started it then? Hey? Leo? Who pressured who here?

LEO: Just drop it.

JUSTINE: I never started anything and you know it. And if you think I
                    forced you then we can just end – (this right now) –

LEO: STOP!

JUSTINE: Fuck!

Justine swerves and brakes.

There is a loud thud as the car hits a body on the road.

There is a scream.

The car swings to a sudden stop.

Justine stares as if in shock.

JUSTINE: What was that?

LEO: It was a –

JUSTINE: Just tell me.

LEO: It's okay –

JUSTINE: What have I done?

LEO: It's okay, babe. It wasn't a person, it was some kind of –

JUSTINE: I am so screwed.

LEO: It looks like –

JUSTINE: Just tell me.

Leo opens the door to get out of the car.

LEO: I think it's a goat.

JUSTINE: A goat?

Justine looks for the first time and sees.

Justine guns the engine, the car screeches off, Leo shuts the door in a panic.

LEO: What are you –

JUSTINE: A goat. I hit a goat!

Justine starts to laugh.

SCENE EIGHT

Larissa waits for Dev in a gloomy car-park somewhere between the city, the river and oblivion.

LARISSA: *(singing)* But I'm too too sad
      'Cos I'm too too dumb
      And my arse is numb
      'Cos I'm sitting here waiting… for that idiot… who is my only friend…

Dev parks the car.

LARISSA: About time!

DEV: Hey Larissa. Check this out! So funny!

Dev runs up to Larissa with his phone and shows her the photo of Amy pissing.

LARISSA: Why is that funny, Dev?

DEV: 'Cos she's – you know – you can see her – yeah well. Where are we even?

LARISSA: In a creepy deserted carpark on the edge of the CBD, Dev. In the dark. For half an hour. Where've you been?

DEV: In conversation with my Dad. No I won't do drugs. No I won't get anyone pregnant. Gimme the car. And then – wasn't I supposed to negotiate a certain something?

LARISSA: And?

DEV: And what?

LARISSA: Did you get it?

DEV: Did you ever doubt me?

LARISSA: Stop talking in questions. Where is it?

DEV: In there.

LARISSA: In your car?

DEV: Yes.

LARISSA: Really?

DEV: You stop talking in questions.

Dev opens the boot of the hatchback and leads out a goat on a lead. The goat stares at them.

GOAT: Maaaaaaaaa.

LARISSA: What – the – ?

DEV: It's a goat.

GOAT: Maaaaaaaaa.

LARISSA: What?

DEV: A goat.

LARISSA: I know it's a goat, you retard, you were supposed to get a sheep!

DEV: It was all I could get.

LARISSA: Zut alors –

DEV: What's the difference?

LARISSA: Quel espece de –

DEV: The sheep weren't available. I was using my initiative.

LARISSA: Dev, this is a conceptual political protest. You can't substitute things. It changes the message!

DEV: Calm down. They're practically the same anyway.

LARISSA: No, they're different. They're an entirely different species.

DEV: From a distance –

LARISSA: Sheep flock, they follow each other, they're known for their stupidity. That's the message. We stand at the door to the hotel, holding a sheep, we remind everyone that they are mindlessly following the flock. The FLOCK, Dev. If we stand there with a goat they'll think we're devil worshippers.

DEV: Well a goat is what we've got.

GOAT: Maaaaaa.

LARISSA: I might have known you'd ruin it.

DEV: Right, well what have you done to contribute?

LARISSA: I had the idea.

DEV: So you get the credit and I get the blame.

LARISSA: "Oh, Larissa, that is such a good idea, I know someone who has sheep! I can take care of everything!"

DEV: "Oh, Dev, I could never do this without you!"

LARISSA: I did not say that.

DEV: Some protester you are.

LARISSA: I'm a conceptual artist.

DEV: So what am I?

LARISSA: You? You're nothing.

DEV: No need to be rude.

LARISSA: No need to be an incompetent fucktard.

Larissa storms off.

Dev looks around. He is suddenly aware that while they were fighting, he let go of the goat's lead and the goat is now gone.

GOAT: *(in the distance)* Maaaaaaaa.

DEV: Oh no. It's gone.

GOAT: *(a long way off)* Maaaa.

                        Larissa! Larissa, come back! I've lost the goat!

Dev runs off into the dark in search of the goat.

SCENE NINE

Back on the dancefloor at the ball.

PRINCIPAL (V/O):   Your attention please students. It's come to my notice that some
                     people have been behaving inappropriately with the balloons
                     and quite a lot of them have been deliberately popped. Now
                     these balloons have been provided by the ball committee, a lot
                     of work has gone into them so please, do NOT touch the
                     balloons, they are only for looking at.

The singer takes centre stage and sings. The dancefloor is full of groovy dancers.

TEXT: lost da goat. U seen it?

TEXT: WTF?? u fuk evrythn up

TEXT: u can at least help me find it. Yr idea

TEXT: I see it. shit it got away again :S

TEXT: I c it too. Its headn to da road

The song ends. Applause.

SCENE TEN

The goat is standing on the edge of the road.

Dev and Larissa meet up a few metres away from it.

LARISSA: There it is!

DEV: Quick –

He goes to run towards it.

LARISSA: Don't do that, you'll scare it!

DEV: So?

LARISSA: I've been chasing it, dumbarse, it'll run onto the road!

DEV: So what do we do?

LARISSA: I don't know!

They stare at the goat.

                    Hey goaty! Goaty oaty oaty! Come on! Come to mummy!

Dev looks at Larissa.

                    You got a better idea?

DEV: Come on Choc-top!

Larissa looks at Dev.

                    That's its name.

LARISSA: Choc-top! Good Choc-top. Come on!

Dev and Larissa advance slowly on the goat.

DEV: Nearly there, you shit of a thing –

LARISSA: Slowly does it –

They are just about to grab it when they hear a car descending on them at speed.

DEV: No –

LARISSA: Look out!

The tyres screech, the goat is hit, Larissa screams.

They watch in disbelief as the car stops – someone starts to get out –

LEO (V/O):   I think it's a goat.

JUSTINE (V/O):   A goat?

Then the engine revs, the door shuts as the car zooms off into the night.

DEV: No way!

LARISSA: Selfish bastards!

DEV: Murderers!

LARISSA: Completely gutless.

They stare down at the goat. She is covered in blood, quivering and panting.

LARISSA: Oh no.

DEV: It's still alive.

Dev and Larissa look at each other. They look back at the goat.

Larissa starts to back away. Dev stays there staring.

LARISSA: Dev. Dev! We have to get out of here!

DEV: I can see its brains.

LARISSA: Come on!

DEV: But – what about –

LARISSA: Leave it. There's nothing we can do anyway, and if we're
                   caught –

DEV: Choc-top.

LARISSA: Just say you lost it. Come on!

Larissa drags Dev away.

They run into Bethany.

BETHANY: Are you guys okay?

LARISSA: Yes.

BETHANY: There was a crash, I heard a scream –

LARISSA: Just forget it.

BETHANY: Hey I know you. You're Larissa. You're in my Maths class.

LARISSA: Hi.

BETHANY: But you're not at the ball. Are you?

Bethany sees the Goat lying on the road behind Larissa and Dev.

                    Oh my God.

DEV: Don't look.

LARISSA: It's awful.

BETHANY: What happened?

DEV: Hit by a speeding car.

LARISSA: Bounced off it.

DEV: Flew through the air.

LARISSA: Landed on its head.

DEV: Broke everything.

BETHANY: Is it yours?

LARISSA: No.

Bethany kneels down next to it.

BETHANY: It's still breathing.

LARISSA: They just left it here.

BETHANY: What are we going to do?

Dev and Larissa look guiltily at each other.

                    We have to do something! Look at her, she's in pain!

LARISSA: She?

DEV: Choc-top's a girl.

BETHANY: You know her name?

DEV: I just made it up.

BETHANY: We'd better go and get someone.

LARISSA/DEV: No.

DEV: I mean – why?

BETHANY: We have to help her.

LARISSA: But there's nothing we can do. Except just – be here.

They all look at the goat. Her breathing is coming in short, rattly gasps.

Bethany stands up and backs away.

BETHANY: Can we get her off the road at least?

The others just look at her.

                    Guys? She might cause another accident.

LARISSA: I'm not touching it.

Bethany goes up to the goat and gingerly tries to pick it up without getting blood on her.

The other two watch in horror. Dev starts to heave and goes off to be sick.

BETHANY: Larissa! There's a car coming.

Larissa goes to her aid. She leaps in and gets bloody; Bethany follows her lead.

The two of them hold the goat on the edge of the road. The car whizzes past. The goat is breathing noisily.

DEV: Oh yuck!

BETHANY: What do we do now?

LARISSA: Let's just – hold her.

DEV: It's gross. Smells.

BETHANY: Noisy.

LARISSA: Shut up. She's dying.

DEV: Yeah well how long's it going to take?

LARISSA: Show some respect.

The goat gasps.

BETHANY: Oh God! We have to do something!

Larissa gently cradles the goat and pats her head. Then with a swift movement, she breaks her neck.

SCENE ELEVEN

TEXT: Has any1 seen Leo? Jess x

TEXT: Na. Ask Miss Starky ;p

Justine speeds away from the scene of the accident.

LEO: You have to stop.

JUSTINE: What are the chances.

LEO: Babe.

JUSTINE: That is hilarious.

LEO: Babe, I'm serious! You have to go back!

JUSTINE: Calm down. It was only a goat.

LEO: It belonged to someone.

JUSTINE: They let it on the road. What am I supposed to do?

LEO: It might not be dead.

JUSTINE: What are you dense?

LEO: They might need our help.

JUSTINE: Leo, if I go back I'll get a fine.

LEO: So?

JUSTINE: And points.

LEO: You're worried about points?

JUSTINE: If I lose my licence I won't be able to get to work.

LEO: You're supposed to go back.

JUSTINE: You are so selfish.

LEO: We could save its life.

JUSTINE: I don't know about you Leo, but my life is more important than
                         a goat.

Leo goes silent.

It's not just the fine.

No reply.

We can't be seen together, Leo. You know that.

Nothing.

Look, babe, I'm sorry, okay? Let's not fight.

Leo puts the CD on.

Justine turns it off.

Leo puts it on again.

Justine turns it off again.

Leo puts it on and turns it up.

Justine presses eject and chucks the CD out the window.

LEO: Hey! I paid for that!

JUSTINE: My car, my rules.

LEO: You owe me thirty bucks.

JUSTINE: Grow up.

LEO: Can you stop the car please?

JUSTINE: Babe –

LEO: I want to get out.

JUSTINE: What, here?

LEO: Now.

JUSTINE: No.

LEO: Now!

JUSTINE: No!

LEO: So you're forcing me.

JUSTINE: What? No! I'm not – Geez, Leo, I'm only driving you because
                       you told me to. I can't just let you out on the freeway, I've got
                       duty of care.

LEO: Then take me back to the ball.

JUSTINE: Okay then, I'll take you back to the ball.

Justine turns the car around.

                       We'll hook up later. When you've calmed down.

TEXT: Has any1 seen leo? Jess x

TEXT: Na. ask miss Starkey ;)

SCENE TWELVE

Larissa stands holding the dead goat.

Bethany and Dev stare at her in horror.

DEV: You killed it.

LARISSA: No I didn't.

Larissa drops the goat in a panic.

BETHANY: Yes you did. You just broke her neck.

DEV: You're a killer.

LARISSA: I am not.

BETHANY: With your bare hands.

LARISSA: It was euthanasia. That's different.

DEV: Now you've really done it.

BETHANY: I can't look.

LARISSA: Then why don't you leave.

BETHANY: I only came here to help.

LARISSA: There's limits to what you can achieve in taffeta.

BETHANY: It's chiffon.

LARISSA: Like it matters. Piss off back to the ball where you belong. I'm
                  sure there's some vital discussion about hair or nails or dresses
                  that needs your contribution and we sure as hell don't want it
                  here.

DEV: Larissa!

Bethany slowly goes over to the goat, and pats its head.

BETHANY: I'm sorry for you, Choc-top. I think they brought you here and
                  that you died because of them. Because I don't think this kind
                  of cruelty is an accident.

LARISSA: You don't understand.

BETHANY: I understand why you don't have any friends.

Bethany leaves.

LARISSA: Va te faire foutre! Stupid cow. She doesn't know me. She's not even a person. She's just a symptom of a bourgeois culture of mindless consumerism. "I understand why you don't have any friends." The only thing she understands is nailpolish. She wouldn't know an idea if she fell over it!

DEV: Will you shut up?

LARISSA: I beg your pardon?

DEV: Shut – up.

LARISSA: Don't talk to me like that.

DEV: You'd rather I said it in French?

LARISSA: I'd rather you were supportive.

DEV: Supportive? I got you tickets, car, livestock, and all you can do is whinge.

LARISSA: I witnessed a fatal car accident.

DEV: So did I.

LARISSA: My artistic vision has been completely ruined –

DEV: Get over yourself.

LARISSA: And now that goat's blood is on my hands.

DEV: So? I'm the one who borrowed it.

LARISSA: Nobody forced you.

DEV: No. I did it to please you.

LARISSA: But – you wanted to –

DEV: I wanted to go to the ball.

Larissa looks at Dev in horror.

LARISSA: Seriously?

DEV: I know it's a lame ritual for Americanised sheep-flocking
                        consumer stupid people. That doesn't mean it can't be fun.
                        Why do you have to make everything so terrible?

LARISSA: I don't! I want to make things better.

A burst of a siren. A police car pulls up and a Police Officer leans out the window.

POLICE OFFICER: Evening. How's it going all right?

DEV: Yes Officer.

POLICE OFFICER: What's this? Got a body?

DEV: Car accident. Hit and run.

POLICE OFFICER: Get the plates?

DEV: No. Too dark.

POLICE OFFICER: Nah you wouldn't get the plates, too dark. Yours is it?

DEV: Belongs to a friend of my Dad's.

POLICE OFFICER: Looks like you've got a bit of explaining to do when you get
                        home then Sunshine.

DEV: Yep.

POLICE OFFICER: Off ya go then. Take your goat. You too Morticia.

DEV: Thanks Officer.

They go to leave but Larissa turns back in a panic.

LARISSA: It was my fault. I planned this whole stupid –

POLICE OFFICER: Uh uh uh uh. Last I looked there's no law against excessive
                        melodrama.

LARISSA: But I –

POLICE OFFICER: Uh uh. Don't want to hear it. I got real work to do. You look
                        like you're dressed for a party; do yourselves a favour and go.

She indicates the goat.

                        It's what the goat would have wanted.

The Officer leaves.

Larissa and Dev look at each other.

LARISSA: Okay. One dance.

DEV: Without irony?

LARISSA: I'll try.

SCENE THIRTEEN

Justine and Leo stand next to the car on the street.

LEO: You're not coming back in?

Justine doesn't respond.

                         So you're just turfing me out on the corner?

JUSTINE: It's only half a block away.

Leo gets out of the car. Justine follows him.

                         Leo.

Leo doesn't pause. Justine runs after him.

                         Leo!

Justine grabs his arm and pulls him towards her. She kisses him slowly and passionately. Leo doesn't respond.

                         Text me when you get to the afters and I'll come pick you up.

LEO: I'm going with my mates, so –

JUSTINE: So ditch them.

Leo doesn't reply.

                         Leo, you need to work with me on this relationship.

LEO: Fine.

JUSTINE: It's not just what you want or what I want. We have this connection, you know, and it's deep. And we've got to honour that. Because it's not going to go away. We belong together, babe.

She goes to kiss him but he evades her and pulls away.

                         I'll see you later then?

Leo starts to walk off. He stops and turns back.

LEO: I don't want to see you later.

JUSTINE: Yes you do.

Leo shakes his head.

LEO: I don't want to see you at all.

JUSTINE: Seriously?

Leo shrugs.

                        Why? Because you made me hit a goat?

LEO: No.

JUSTINE: That is so immature.

Leo stands with his head down.

                        All right, piss off back to your stupid party.

Leo turns and starts to head off.

                        Hey. You can't do that, you know, you can't just walk away.

Leo keeps walking.

                        We're adults, Leo, we need to communicate!

Nothing.

                        Don't make me chase you.

Leo is gone.

                        Leo? I'll call you later!

Bethany takes her phone out and starts to text.

TEXT: If you tell anyone I will deny it. You've got no proof.

SCENE FOURTEEN

Amy sits alone in the courtyard garden and cries. Jack comes out into the courtyard looking for her.

JACK: Amy!

Amy wipes her tears away and pretends to be fine.

                    I've been looking for you everywhere. It's Jack. It's time for
                    the announcement.

AMY: I'm not doing it.

JACK: But – the teachers said –

AMY: I need to be alone.

Jack sits down next to her.

                    Don't look at me.

Jack stops looking at her but stays where he is.

JACK: So you don't want me to do the partner thing anymore?

AMY: Go away.

JACK: Do I still get my twenty dollars?

AMY: Look, tonight has become very complicated for me. Kind of –
                    devastating. It's got nothing to do with you.

JACK: Is this about that photo?

Amy looks at him with horror.

AMY: You know?

Jack shows his phone.

AMY: Oh my god.

JACK: Yep. It's made it to Year Eleven. Actually I got this from
                    someone in Year Ten.

AMY: Year Ten??

JACK: They're people too.

AMY: No they're not! I am people, Jack. I am known. And now I'm known as the girl who went to the ball, and took a leak.

JACK: Then go back in there and do something else.

AMY: You totally do not understand.

JACK: You think I don't know social death? I hang out in the library. I play Wow.

AMY: Which is why you don't get it.

JACK: It's a good game, okay?

AMY: I have been violated.

JACK: No, you've been published.

Amy sulks angrily.

                Why did you ask me to the ball?

AMY: Because you'd look good in the photos.

JACK: No, really.

AMY: That is really. And because I thought you'd keep your mouth shut and be nice.

JACK: Funny. I thought you wanted to make a statement. Be original.

Amy doesn't reply. Jack gets up to leave.

                Fine then. Be gutless. Tell your children you left your school ball half way through because everyone saw your vajayjay.

AMY: I'm not gutless.

JACK: Then prove it. Do the announcement.

AMY: Jack, I can't face this right now.

JACK: Then you never will.

Jack waits for Amy's decision. She doesn't move. He shrugs.

                I'll go and tell them you're not coming. I'm really sorry, Amy.

He heads off.

AMY: Wait.

She runs after him.

They become Dev and Larissa.

SCENE FIFTEEN

TEXT: who invited Dev & Larissa? freaky goths

Dev and Larissa dance together.

LARISSA: Everyone's looking, Dev.

DEV: Can't imagine why.

LARISSA: What? I'm blending in! I am so blended!

DEV: Must be the outfits.

LARISSA: The personality.

DEV: Or the blood.

LARISSA: Choc-top made it to the ball after all.

DEV: And how does she find it?

LARISSA: Well. It's a bit cheesy. The music's terrible. The balloons are
                    childish. The food stinks and the clientele is really annoying.

DEV: But?

LARISSA: But – for some reason – I think she likes it.

Dev and Larissa separate and become Jess and Leo.

TEXT: still lookin for Leo? Hes gone starkers lol

JESS: Where've you been, Leo?

LEO: Just needed to clear my head.

JESS: Macca and Jonesy said you probably went off with Miss
                    Starkey. I got this.

She shows Leo a text.

LEO: That's ridiculous.

JESS: That's what I said.

LEO: Good.

JESS: I said that you'd never be so stupid as to get involved with a
                    teacher. Because it's creepy, and she's taking advantage of you,
                    and it's against the law. I defended you.

LEO: Thanks.

JESS: It's true, isn't it?

Leo doesn't reply.

                    You know you're going to have to tell someone.

LEO: I know.

JESS: Because if you don't I will. There's a whole system and it's
                    going to take over.

LEO: Probably a good thing. She's not nice.

Jess goes to Leo and hugs him.

JESS: I'm really sorry.

LEO: Me too.

Leo and Jess become Jack and Amy.

TEXT: check out piss girl and random juvie dude

PRINCIPAL V/O: Attention please people. Everyone. Pay attention to Amy.

*Amy walks the gauntlet through the crowd with Jack. When she gets to the podium,
Jack lets her go.*

Someone starts making a pissing noise.

PRINCIPAL V/O: Shush please.

Giggles. The pissing noise starts up again.

PRINCIPAL V/O: Who's doing that?

*The pissing noise reaches a crescendo. Amy stands at the podium, a picture of pure
terror.*

PRINCIPAL V/O: People, stop it! What are they doing, Craig? What's it
                    supposed to mean?

AMY: It's… because –

PRINCIPAL V/O: No, get down, Amy, they've all gone strange.

AMY: It's because I did a wee!

The pissing noise stops. Someone giggles.

Just in case you didn't know. Like if you're a teacher. My best friend took a photo of it and forwarded it to all my other best friends. Who forwarded it to everyone else. You can see my knickers. Pink G-string, to match my dress. You can see the wee. And pubes. I did get a wax, just not a brazilian because that would cane. But yes, that is my vagina. Not all of it. My knee is a bit in the way and also my hair, which I did spend quite a bit of time on.

I was supposed to let you all know that it's time for the group photo. I thought you would all look at me and talk about how pretty I am. But no. I've gone and given you something much more interesting to talk about.

You know you should thank me. In a really twisted way, I've actually made tonight special.

Jack starts clapping. Bethany joins in.

The entire audience erupts in applause.

TEXT: hurry up! Your about to miss the group photo

Jack embraces Amy.

They get into place for the big photo.

Bethany is on the other side of the room looking at them sadly.

AMY: Bethany?

BETHANY: Great speech, Amy.

JACK: Is that blood?

BETHANY: I went and rescued a goat from a hit and run and then that Goth girl from Maths broke its neck and she called me stupid and then I got lost in the dark on the way back and now it's time for the photos and I've got nowhere to stand. I'm so sorry, Amy.

JACK: You're standing with me. With us.

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Jack checks with Amy.

                Isn't she? Aren't I like – being shared, or something?

BETHANY: Just for the photo? It is the school ball.

*Amy and Bethany look at each other. Amy breaks into a smile. Bethany smiles too.
Amy starts to scream. Bethany screams. Jack screams. They all hug each other.*

They settle themselves into a pose together.

The flash goes off.

END OF PLAY.

APPENDIX B. Video: Work–in–Progress Showing 20 June 2011

Accessible at: http://youtu.be/0Zkbqy38b38