

## Chapter 3

# The DRACON Project in Brisbane

The involvement of Brisbane's Griffith University researchers John O'Toole and Bruce Burton in the DRACON project described in the previous chapter commenced when John O'Toole was approached by Dale Bagshaw of the University of South Australia on behalf of the Project, to provide some drama advice and possibly input in an Australian component of DRACON, exploring the possibilities of drama for conflict resolution in schools. As it happened, Griffith university was very well placed to respond. The relationship between drama and conflict was one which it was already investigating on a long-term basis in two contexts, one not dissimilar to DRACON.

Two years earlier, we had been approached by Shirley Coyle, a drama-trained education officer working for the Northern Territory Department of Education, proposing a program using drama to mitigate inter-racial conflict in schools there – many of them with an uneasy mix of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal students. Owing to financial exigencies the plan had been shelved pro tem. However, Shirley Coyle was to make another vital appearance in this narrative, detailed in the next chapter.

Meanwhile, for over a decade Griffith University researchers had been running drama-based training exercises for the local Police Academy, which were aimed at helping trainee and probationary officers with communication skills, and to manage conflict of various kinds. The training consisted of a whole day off the Police Academy campus in the apartments and salons in the halls of residence of the University, where the trainees had to deal in quick succession with four 'calls', of the kind that officers might receive over a police radio: one each dealing with domestic conflict, with a victim of crime, with a suspect of crime, and with a sudden death enquiry or notification. The drama students had backgrounded these fictionalised situations in great detail, each based on real stories collected from serving officers, and each with plentiful sub-texts and human relations complications. By 1996, the Police training and the Human Relations work had been incorporated into the University, and the Griffith researchers had learned a great deal about HR and the theory and practice of conflict management in real-life contexts.

However, we were deeply concerned from the start by the phrase ‘conflict resolution’, which was part of DRACON’s original aim for using drama. We were aware that in the connected world of psychodrama and drama therapy, dramatising real-life situations of stress, conflict and trauma is frequently seen as a way of helping clients to resolve, exorcise or at least manage them (for example Blatner 2000, p. 124; Nolte 2001, pp. 211–218). However, some practitioners in these fields are also aware of the possible hazards (eg Landy 1994, p. 134). For us as drama educators, we believe that drama cannot help in the resolution of real-life conflicts, at least in ‘normal’ situations, and might actively exacerbate them, because of the very nature of emotion in the art form, and how it works. This may seem odd, when it is a truism to state that conflict is usually at or near the centre of any drama.

However, drama demands emotional identification or *empathy* – that participants step into another person’s shoes; conversely, drama also demands emotional *distance*, the capacity to reflect coolly and as it is an imagined world, without the fear of real consequences following the drama. In serious real-life contexts, the antagonists are rarely if ever capable of either empathy or emotional distance, or freedom from the threat of real consequences following turns in the drama. This does not mean, however, that drama has no place in helping to *understand* and *manage* real-life conflicts in schools, just as in the police service. The key is in that first characteristic: we can certainly suspend the real world to explore fictional or fictionalised conflicts, in order to get to understand the nature of conflict, feel with the protagonists, experiment with changing viewpoints and try out possible solutions. So long as it is fictional, the emotions and changing viewpoint are all vicarious, and there need be no repercussions in the real world when the participants step back – obviously vital in school classrooms where students and teacher are engaged in long-term relationships, some of which might well contain real conflict.

Accordingly, before we agreed to join the DRACON Project, we insisted that for our part of it at least, we would be investigating conflict *management* or *handling*, and definitely not *resolution*. The Swedish and Malaysian drama specialists on the DRACON project backed us up, the psychologists accepted our reasoning, and without dispute or fuss the whole project became about conflict *management*. We then had to work out what we might mean by this. The notion of *managing* entails the ability to understand and control – and effective management means understanding and controlling consciously: in other words acts of cognition. Could drama – more readily recognised in school contexts for providing emotional expression – provide cognitive knowledge and explicit skills practice instead? If so, might that knowledge and those skills be transferable, so that students could call on them when they were involved in a real conflict? Our aim crystallised: to investigate the use of drama to give students the tools for them to manage the real life conflicts which they encountered or in which they were involved.

Through our work with the Police trainees, we had ourselves learned quite a lot about conflict. Conflicts do not arise by accident, and they have causes, elements and structures that can be recognisable. Gaining the cognitive understanding and skills to manage conflicts among the public with whom they deal was the prime purpose of our long-running Police drama work. Together with Merrelyn Bates, our

Human Services adviser from the Police, we sat down and identified a set of key concepts which we thought needed to be taught, in as simple a form and sequence as we could. These concepts have remained unchanged throughout the formal project and beyond to the present day, and have proved a sufficient cognitive basis through all its iterations, and with all the age groups and cultural groups involved.

- Conflict develops through clashes of rights, interests and/or power; as a result of misunderstanding, misplaced expectations and/or stereotyping.
- Conflicts develop in three discernible stages:
  - *latent* (when the conditions – the clash or misunderstanding – are present, but those involved are not conscious of it or explicitly responding to it);
  - *emerging* (when some of the participants are aware of it and beginning to respond to it – in the early stages of the project we used the term *brewing*);
  - *manifest* (when most or all of the participants are aware of and responding to it).
- Responses to conflict fall into four categories:
  - *avoidance* (withdrawing or pretending the conflict is not happening);
  - *accommodation* (giving in and yielding);
  - *fronting* (facing the problem, highlighting the differences);
  - *aggression/confrontation* (returning antipathy in equal measure).
- Any of these responses can lead to *escalation* (worsening) or *de-escalation* (lessening) of the conflict, depending entirely on the context.
- Some conflicts can be resolved by the parties themselves through negotiation and trade-offs; some need a mediator to resolve them.
- Some conflicts – particularly those involving multiple clashes and deep misunderstandings – cannot be resolved, but all can be de-escalated.

To these basic definitions, at the end of the first phase of our investigation, we added one more:

- Conflict is natural and not always a bad thing.

Before we tried out any of these theories that we were developing, we needed to take stock of how conflict was managed in schools at the time, and whether in fact it needed improving. From our own observations and the literature we identified that some schools and education systems already used a range of strategies and behaviours to deal with conflict. However, we also identified a number of shared and more or less unspoken assumptions, which we felt might be worth questioning or even countering. In the years since the program started, many of those assumptions have been widely questioned and more schools are explicitly addressing both conflict and bullying, but they were current at the time in many schools and systems:

- That schools are or should be basically conflict-free sites, and conflict is an unnatural state;
- That adults understand more about conflict and how to deal with it than young people, who need to copy and learn from them.

- That conflict management strategies are top-down, and involve invoking various forms or levels of authority, usually teachers and ‘the school’ – though this frequently clashes directly with the strong cultural imperatives among children and adults alike not to ‘dob’ or tell tales.
- That conflict is best left unacknowledged and suppressed, until it becomes manifest, so conflict management strategies are reactive and ad hoc rather than integral to school structures;
- That learning about conflict, if dealt with at all, is extra-curricular, not part of the school’s core business to teach.

Methods are being tried in schools to make the management of conflict more democratic, particularly *peer mediation*. Though widely used in primary schools, its results are equivocal, and it is proving less successful in secondary schools. The reasons can be summed up as many conflicts in schools not responding easily to appeals to authority, for reasons of student culture and of the imbalance of power that is often integral to conflicts. Peer mediation seems to some students just to impose another level of authority figure, one whom they perceive as not having the experience or skills to address serious conflict (Powell et al. 1995).

We decided that a worthy aim for our project would be to challenge all of these assumptions, and seek to offer the alternative of providing some tools for young people themselves to manage (i.e. gain understanding and take control of) their conflicts. To begin with, we had little idea of how to go about this, but decided to take on the last one first, and find a place in the curriculum to teach it.

### 3.1 1996: The Pilot Project

We also decided to start with a pilot project, with the odds on our side, in a school supportive of drama and without exceptional conflict issues, and approached Morag Morrison, head of drama in a local secondary school with a performing arts speciality, that we will call ‘Thistle State High’. She offered us her mixed Year 11–12 Drama class (senior students), who were studying Greek Tragedy, which we figured would be an excellent starting place to explore the nature and causes of conflict. We experimented with various drama forms and techniques, exploring the themes of the plays and the genre they were studying, through improvisation, process drama, rehearsal exercises, working with script, and forum theatre.

The students enjoyed it and felt they were still learning their drama curriculum and more, till two factors stopped us: the students’ need to concentrate on their final assessment, and our own growing realisation that while Greek tragedy was good for exploring the causes of conflict, it was not so good for exploring effective human management of the conflict! Nonetheless, in externally conducted interviews following the teaching, the students not only approved of our teaching, but a surprising percentage explicitly described, unsolicited, what they had found useful in dealing with their own real conflict issues – a strong preliminary affirmation.

*I've started to define conflict better for myself at home and at school. I can see something happening and say 'hey, that's a latent conflict – look out' or 'We're into a manifest conflict – better butt out of this'. (Year 11)*

*I've talked to my sister about it. I was using some techniques on her and asking her if it would help. She was very helpful in that way and she even understands a little bit of it too, just by me understanding what I do to create conflicts, that has stopped a lot of fighting at home. Yeah, if I know there's going to be an argument with my mom I'll just walk off and I'll just think of a few things to say and then I'll come back with a few different points I can say instead of my bad temper. (Year 11)*

They also expressed regret that they could not continue. More than one suggested that the work would be useful for younger students and because of the drama both engaging and easily grasped. One even suggested that she felt confident enough with some of the drama techniques and her understanding of conflict to run some sessions, given time. This brave offer triggered the brainwave that we immediately had together with Morag the teacher in our follow-up discussion, which became the vital second component of the project: *peer teaching*.

The use of peer teaching to enhance learning is not uncommon in primary and secondary schools in the field of sports coaching, and more occasionally in a range of other formal and informal learning environments. Although peer teaching can involve students of the same age teaching each other, or even younger peers instructing older students, the most common and successful application in schools has involved older peers teaching younger students. There has been considerable research into its effectiveness in schools as educators search for more effective ways of engaging students in their learning (eg. Bilson and Tiberius 1991; Goodlad and Hirst 1989, 1998). These studies have found clear and convincing proof that peer teaching can be an extremely effective tool for improving learning in the classroom, in a wide a variety of subject areas and teaching environments.

Major educational benefits have been identified in all these settings (Svinicki 1991; Rubin and Herbert 1998). For those doing the teaching there are: an increase in both social and intellectual awareness; significant gains in empathy; the clear recognition that they can change habitual patterns of behaviour; and finally, evidence that peer teaching empowers the students, increasing their sense of mastery and self-esteem. The writers conclude that it would be hard to think of another method that would enable so much intellectual, social and personal growth.

Other research has focused on the effects of peer teaching on the students being taught, producing clear evidence that teenagers often learn more effectively from their peers than from traditional, teacher-centred instruction. Simmons et al. (1995) found that this was particularly evident with students with low academic achievement and learning difficulties. Despite clear evidence that peer teaching is effective in both enhancing learning and empowering students, it has been a neglected resource in the field of conflict management. In particular, when we took up the suggestion of those students, there was little evidence in the literature on conflict in schools that peer teaching had been empirically tested as a mechanism to address cultural conflict or bullying – two kinds of conflict that were already showing themselves to be of major concern to the students in our pilot class.

## 3.2 1997: Taking Shape

The following year, armed with a small faculty research grant, we returned to Thistle High school, Morag and her senior drama class (including some of the previous year peers than from Year 12), whom we dubbed the ‘Key Class’. This year we picked a curriculum unit much more amenable to exploring conflict: Political Theatre. We narrowed the drama techniques down to two extended improvisational forms, *process drama* and *forum theatre*, which we taught not only to embed the conflict understanding, but also with an eye to making the techniques and skills that were involved in using and managing these two genres transferable to the students themselves.

- *Process drama* is a genre of drama mainly used in primary educational settings, with no outside audience, where the participants use a range of types of role-play interspersed with theatre techniques to explore a dramatic situation or a story by enacting it, with no predetermined conclusion. The central method is usually experiential role-play, where the participants together identify and empathise with the characters and step into their shoes to act out their roles in the story.
- *Forum theatre* is a participatory theatre technique mainly used in adult educational settings, made popular by the Brazilian founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal. A group of actors creates and performs a scene depicting oppression of some kind, introduced and controlled by a ‘Joker’ or ‘Host’ as we re-christened the role. Members of the audience are invited by the Host to stop the scene at any point in order to intervene as ‘spect-actors’ by stepping into the role of the oppressed protagonist in order to lessen or overcome the oppression by behaving differently. If the intervention is far-fetched or right out of character, the audience is encouraged to shout ‘Magic!’ and the scene starts again from where it was interrupted.

Using both of these genres entailed identifying what the students regarded as significant conflicts, ensuring that they were thoroughly fictionalised, and then problematising them, leading always to complex dramas and much reflective discussion, which became the place where the learning crystallised for the students. We then divided the class up into four groups of about six students, two groups each to devise a piece of forum theatre and a process drama, through which they would teach conflict management to younger students. At the same time, Morag lined up for us four Year 9 (14 year old) English classes whom we called the ‘Focus classes’. We chose another subject rather than drama, to make the statement that study of conflict has a broader curriculum application; conveniently, these students were already studying ‘Conflict in literature’! Before sending the four Key class groups into the firing line with their prepared drama work, one into each Focus class, we in-serviced their teachers. Two of these were ignorant of practical drama, and one very doubtful about the wisdom of delivering their classes into the hands of other students. We were ourselves somewhat apprehensive, but tried not to show it, and we spent time worrying about how the three of us could accompany and support the four groups for the whole time in separate classrooms. More than one of the Key class students later admitted in interview that

*...we were terrified, when we walked over to that Year 9 classroom...*

They remembered only too well the volatility and potential unruliness of themselves as Year 9 students (famously defined in a contemporary piece of Theatre in Education as *Year 9 are Animals*).

None of us need have worried. In the event, all the classes went off without a hitch; there were virtually no instances of misbehaviour at all during the fortnight; we needed to intervene only very occasionally, and the class teachers not at all. The Focus class students were enthusiastic, co-operative and participated in everything willingly. We noticed a spin-off effect: that some of the Year 9 students (especially the girls) started hanging around the Key class common room hoping to engage the older students in conversation (especially the boys). While this was in itself charming, it gave us the seeds of a vision which was to become a major focus of later stages of the project, the idea that this work could begin to change the culture of a school (see Chap. 5).

Where the Key class students became stuck, they invariably found their way out – one or other would come to the rescue. An interesting observation we made in several classes was that some Key class students who had taken a back seat in the planning and initial contact gradually grew in assertiveness and leadership. It was the Year 12 students who had led all the planning, and initiated the first peer teaching – in three of the four classes, it was Year 11 students who ended up the team leaders. The exception was in one class where an exceptionally capable Year 12 student ended up voluntarily coming back the following week for the next two sessions and teaching them solo, while the Focus class teacher looked on admiringly. Those non-drama Focus class teachers, including the two who had initially expressed reservations, all ended up extending the drama work with their classes. Most important, there were a number of significant effects identified in the externally conducted interviews with all the Key class students, selected students from all the Focus classes, and the questionnaire used with one class:

- strong evidence of the Key class students having reinforced their own learning by having to teach it to other students;
- further evidence of the Key class students applying their learning to their own real-life conflicts;
- evidence that the Focus class students had learned quite accurately the basic concepts about conflict from the Key class students;
- explicitly stated evidence that the Focus class students had felt that being taught by their peers was in this context preferable to having teachers, because the Key class ‘teachers’ were much closer to themselves, and better understood their problems, attitudes and conflicts;
- strong evidence that the Focus class students had both enjoyed the experience and felt they had learned from it. (In the questionnaire, every student expressed strong approval for the peer teaching, and all except one expressed at least approval for the drama – who said s/he hated it but felt s/he had learned a lot from the peer teaching!)



In our evaluation of this cycle, we began to give consideration to the possible further downward extension of the project, with the Focus classes peer-teaching primary students. We also felt it was time to expand the project beyond the protected walls of this school, with its Performing Arts focus, its helpful and flexible administration, its relative freedom from major contexts of social conflict and its exceptional drama staff. However, neither opportunity nor funding presented themselves immediately, and we found another line of practical action research with Morag's class the following year: to peer teach not downwards, but outwards and upwards. The conflicts that the students were intent on exploring were by no means restricted to school settings – many of them focussed on family tensions. We wondered: what if the students could impart their new understanding to their families – teach their parents? This demanded a new strategy, and we were fortunate to have available a distinguished British theatre-in-education director, Steve Ball, to provide a different kind of drama expertise. We withdrew, and Morag took over, as she will now take over this narrative.

### 3.3 1998: A Step Sideways

In this project we were working with my Year 12 Theatre class, a group of students who included both those involved in Theatre Arts, the specialist Performing Arts students in the school, and a general cohort of students who had selected Theatre as a subject from a wider range of other options. This group were more mixed than the previous 2 years' DRACON classes in terms of their ability and motivation as drama students, and in terms of gender and ethnic diversity. In retrospect it became evident that this serendipitous situation impacted on the evolution of numerous wider insights into how exploring conflict through drama opens up a range of wider personal learning for adolescents. In fact, three of the young women involved in this project became the focus for my own doctoral research, their experiences providing significant insights into gender, self-esteem and empowerment.

The central aim of the 1998 project was not only to continue to explore, through drama, conflict management issues relevant to the young people participating in the project but also to develop a form of dramatic performance in which their insights could be shared with others (and not just other students in the school through peer teaching). As a result, this third project was very different in structure to its predecessors and successors, and in many ways stands alone in terms of its form. Unlike the approaches of the previous 2 years, which focussed on the learning of the participant students, this project sought a wider audience for learning and it was decided activities should culminate in an interactive performance for an audience of parents, school peers and the community in a setting outside the school. This 'performance' outcome has not been replicated in subsequent approaches, and indeed from the next year onwards the research returned to the shape of the earlier peer-teaching project when exploring conflict management in schools and subsequently in other contexts. There were, nevertheless, some critical lessons learned for DRACON in the evolution of the performance, *As One Door Closes*.



This decision to shape a performance was in large part driven by the demands of the curriculum for the Year 12 Theatre students involved i.e. there was an expectation that their year should end with a performance for an audience, and while the group did explore conflict through process drama and other strategies, the end game was to transform their insights into something to be shared. A modest amount of funding was available for research, and this allowed the employment of English theatre-in-education specialist Steve Ball as director/artist in residence, and he played a significant role in shaping the final production. Also valuable here and in the following 2 years was the involvement of Griffith PhD student Anna Plunkett, who co-planned and taught some of the earlier sessions in the project, and gathered data throughout, including conducting pre- and post-project student interviews. Anna's work has informed many of the insights in this discussion.

*As One Door Closes* focused on the specific conflicts that adolescents experience as they reach the end of school and begin to make the transition away from the influence of parents and seek to find their identity in the wider world. At the beginning of the project the Year 12 Theatre class had been given a questionnaire which asked them to identify any issues or conflicts at home or in school that concerned them. Interestingly, it was not social problems or school conflict that were most worrying them but inner, emotional issues, particularly the pressure to do well in their final year. One student in pre-project interview, following up the questionnaire, asked how she was coping with Year 12, responded

*Stressing out. I've had breakdowns every so often – I just can't handle it very well. There's a lot of emotional stresses when you get to Grade 12, a lot more stress than people realise and I think that most people go through that.* (Kelly)

The feedback also indicated that one of the biggest battlegrounds for adolescents was at home where conflicts often erupted with parents:

*I just can't handle it at home. I come home and just start fighting with everyone.. My Dad told me to revise my studies that (I) have just done...they just come down on me at one time, you know?* (Mark)

DRACON research found fertile ground at Thistle High for exploring adolescent experience, and family conflicts clearly emerged as a key focus for exploration. It is significant that the Thistle students chose to focus on personal adolescent conflict, rather than bullying or peer related conflict. The research of authors such as Bagshaw (1998) and Bagshaw and Halliday (1999) has identified that although students and teachers are aware of and concerned by conflict, they often feel powerless and ill-equipped to deal with it. Rigby (1996, p. 276) reinforces this concern: 'many students are, in fact, deeply concerned about seeking solutions to the problem'. He suggests (p. 6) that the best way to empower young people is to teach them how to understand conflict and tackle the problem for themselves. This research indicates that conflict management education was at that time and, we believe, still remains a vital component of the curriculum, but one neglected in most secondary schools in Australia. In fact DRACON and subsequent project work, in school contexts in all its incarnations in other parts of the world too, has tapped into an essential need.

As in previous years, we began with a series of workshops that introduced students to the conflict management concepts described earlier in this chapter: e.g. the

*latent, emerging and manifest* stages of conflict. As in previous years the students seemed to enjoy learning the terminology and they were able to call on key words as they identified the stage of conflict operating in shared performances. We were off to a good start, further supported early in the project by the success of a process drama we devised to explore the kinds of issues they had raised in their surveys. It was entitled the *Leaving Home Drama* and used the Lennon and McCartney song *She's Leaving Home* as a pre-text. The process drama engaged the students very deeply, with positive outcomes. It provided them with an opportunity to reflect on their own conflicts and it had a deep and lasting impact on several students, one of whom in an essay written much later recalled it vividly:

*The process drama ended in listening to the song (pretext) for one last time, was the icing on the cake. The uproar of sensation I had never felt or experienced during the process drama. Feelings and emotions had come together to create a dramatic tension that words can't even describe. As the song went on so did my emotions for this girl Charlotte that (it) felt as though I had knew her and in some cases felt like her. Only realise when the song had ended that this girl was just make believe and only existed in the fictional world. (Tina)*

For the students the situation held an element of truth and was therefore not entirely fictional in terms of their own experiences, so it was unsurprising that they identified with roles explored in the process drama.

It was about half-way through the project that we were joined by Steve Ball, our artist in residence, and planning began on the shape of the performance that the students would develop. At this point students were developing a series of short scenes, based on their own experiences of conflict, to explore through forum theatre. Steve as director considered how the range of ideas explored could be narrowed down into possibly four key situations. It was decided that each of these would form the basis for an interactive theatre performance and that if all were performed in the same space, a kind of promenade theatre approach could be taken i.e. where the audience could move from one scene to another to watch the action and interact with the cast. Four scenarios of conflict were developed and in each the adolescent was the central figure.

*A young man of migrant parents frustrated and limited by his parents' reluctance to let go of traditional values, and their continued reliance on him as English translator.*

*A young woman in constant dispute with her parents because of their lack of trust and unwillingness to offer the freedom she felt she needed to be regarded by her peers as a young woman and not a closeted child.*

*A young man who, despite his own desires, was being pressured by parents into a applying for a university course he did not wish to do.*

*A young woman of migrant parents required to take on considerable responsibility for her younger siblings on top of the weight of expectation from her parents to achieve outstanding academic results.*

Although the students had enjoyed exploring their ideas through Forum Theatre in class, they were not confident that it would be an appropriate form to utilise in a public performance. It was hard for them to let go of more traditional approach to taking something out of the classroom, as Anna noted:

When forum theatre was first introduced at Thistle in 1998 the ease, confidence and swe the students from Thistle displayed towards process drama was noticeably lacking when attention was focused on forum theatre. In fact they were very wary and on occasion even hostile towards the concept of non-realistic forms of drama, which aim to release audience members from what is traditionally a passive role of receiver of information. (Plunkett 2002, p. 197)

The students, very conscious they would be performing for an audience, had a tendency to concentrate on form at the expense of the content and considerable work had to be done to ensure they did not push roles and situations into exaggerated, one-dimensional or stereotyped forms. The interactive performance, under the guidance of the experienced T-I-E director, had taken a very flexible approach to forum theatre, which had added further challenge. In traditional or more classic forum theatre, audience members are limited to stepping in and taking over the role of the central protagonist (in this case it would have been those four adolescent main subjects of the scenarios), to try and impel the other characters to offer alternative responses to drive the scenario toward resolution. In the form developed for our performance it was decided that not only could the audience (the spect-actors) replace any character, they could also stop the action to ‘hot-seat’ any of the characters to ask them questions about their perspectives, background and motivations (a technique borrowed from process drama). Thus students were left without the security of preset dialogue or predetermined pace and structure, and were expected to prepare and think through multiple possibilities in terms of audience response. Students found it difficult to let go of more traditional performative aspects, and so the form was challenging:

*The performing was hard and it's unusual for me to be nervous about performances – but the actual performance was difficult. It was so personal with the audience – how we had to get them in groups. It was (a) little intimidating to have to get so close to them and to have to deal directly with the audience. (Mary)*

Despite their misgivings, the final production was deemed a success and they did appreciate the journey in hindsight:

*Like, that actually turned out really well. I didn't know that it would turn out that good... I wasn't very keen on doing that. I was more keen on doing, like, just like a realistic play. (Tina)*

Students only really learnt the potential power of the form from the experience of actually performing the scenes and interacting with their audience. The realisation that the form could have a strong impact on their audience was only identified later because during preparation the challenge of rehearsing interactive elements, and their inability to control or anticipate the outcome of those, overshadowed for them the more positive and concrete aspects of the dramatic form:

*When we actually did the performance, when I saw the responses of people, I saw that they actually meant what they were saying; they actually tried to help. (Goran)*

Goran, whose story one of the scenarios was based on, subsequently made the link between the fictional world and his own experience in recognising the audience had offered insights into his own behaviour, not just that of his character.

*I never expected what other people were going to ask me as a character because, like I just never knew what they were thinking about me. And when they made those suggestions I was thinking 'wow, you know, this is really...' I was thinking, 'Is that what they really think?' It made me realise what people really think about what I'm doing. (Goran)*

In the performance the less tightly structured forum theatre and the elements of process drama, hot-seating in particular, encouraged audience members to be more responsible for shaping the performance. This seemed to foster more critical reflection from students as they considered how audience interventions revealed some of the complexities of conflict.

*Like the protagonist could be the one that's causing the problem, or the protagonist could be the one that's the victim. (Emily)*

Another student reinforced this view, offering further justification for why Boal's limited intervention opportunities may not be ideal.

*One person can't fix a conflict. All parties have to be willing (to modify their behaviour and conduct). (Mary)*

Bolton (1995) has questioned Boal's preference for allowing audience members to identify with only the victim(s) of oppression in Forum Theatre, and suggests a more meaningful approach would enable participants to identify and respect *both* sides involved in a conflict, offering the observation that, 'Curiously, taking the conflict *out* of an event can be very exciting' (p. 33). Although a less flexible approach to forum theatre may have worked extremely well in South America with dispossessed and oppressed peasants i.e. where there was clear injustice and immediate action necessary, it was less successful in classrooms in the economically developed world for the conflict management purposes of the DRACON Study. This theme and its implications for the ongoing project will be explored further in Chap. 3. The way forum theatre was structured in the 1998 project provided insights into how drama could be used to open up rather than close down explorations of conflict.

All the drama approaches used had the potential to foster dialogue. Anna recognised the significance of this evolution and offered the following observation in her thesis:

Fortunately, the existing dramatic structures are extremely flexible which readily allows for fine-tuning and other experimental approaches to be added to the mediation repertoire. Had the research placed a direct emphasis on resolving conflict, this could have proved restrictive by concentrating on the very limited applications of drama that can operate in forum theatre. (Plunkett 2002, p. 214)

In the 1998 DRACON study, the pressure of developing a final polished public presentation did ultimately prove a challenging but revealing decision. This third project in Thistle High School provided some very significant insights, and indeed influenced the shape of what was to be one of the central components in much of the later work, the key drama strategy that evolved into what we labelled 'Enhanced Forum Theatre'. On the other hand, some of the issues and questions that arose from the pressures which the students faced leading up to the performance did, at the

time, pull focus away from other key insights. We felt the public production approach had not been ideal in providing the deepest levels of conflict learning, and so some of the most valuable things that were embedded in the structure of the project were overlooked or undervalued. The full significance of this project to the development of key ideas in later research was only fully recognised in hindsight, as Anna points out:

At this time the research had not yet evolved to the extent that the drama had, and as a result, I did not recognise the importance and significance of this innovative approach until after almost another year of further research. Although it was these factors which led to the development of *Enhanced Forum Theatre* (sic) by the researchers following the 2000 phase of the research, it is extremely important to note that in actual fact it had already been implemented – albeit sub-consciously – at Thistle State High School during *As One Door Closes* in 1998. (Plunkett 2002, p. 208)

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