

# A DRAMA TEACHER WITHOUT CAPABILITY; DO THE KIDS MISS OUT?: INVESTIGATING GENERALIST EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT.

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# KEY TERMS

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

**Specialist Educator:** A specialist educator is an individual with knowledge, training, experience and expertise within one major subject area.

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

**Arts-Based Research (ABR):** Research approach combining principles of creative arts in the research context (Leavy, 2019).

**Verbatim Theatre:** A form theatre that is constructed from spoken words of real 'ordinary' people responding to a particular issue or topic (Anderson, 2007).

# POSITIONING

## EMIC EXPERIENCE

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

- Passionate about drama/art education and believe in the benefits it can give students when they engage- passion comes from my own positive experiences and wealth of capability and training.
- My emic experiences as a specialist drama educator teaching lower secondary students has brought me cause for concern.
  - Across my teaching, I have had to navigate poor behaviour and lack of drama knowledge/skills amongst year 7-9 students arising from reluctance to participate.
  - Students are not equally accessing art education due to a deficit in specialist drama teaching- the skills and capabilities of the educator matter (Ewing, 2011; Kerby et al., 2021).
- My emic experiences will bring an insider's perspective to the research participants and help me, as a researcher, understand their “lived” experiences.



# BACKGROUND



## THE BENEFITS OF QUALITY ART EDUCATION

- Positive effects on a student's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development (Bowen & Kisida, 2019, p.2).
- Can develop lifelong, multifaceted skills (Teague 2016) that go beyond education & into their lives; including, compassion, empathy, perspective-taking, confidence, creativity (Bowen & Kisida, 2019; Schneider & Rohmann, 2021; O'Grady, 2019).

## EXAMPLES OF SKILLS WITHIN THE DRAMA CONTEXT

Creative  
Thinking +  
Imagination

Social +  
Communication  
Skills

Contemplative  
Thinking

Reflective +  
Planning  
Processes

Perspective  
Taking

Emotional  
Regulation

(Jarrah, 2019; Nurhasanah, 2022; Schiller, 2008; Kalidas, 2013).



# BACKGROUND

## EDUCATION SUBJECT HIERARCHY

- Strong focus and push of core subjects, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).
  - This practice has created a hierarchy of subjects, with the arts continually placed at the bottom (Bowen & Kisida, 2019).
  - “Gap filler or “extra-curricular (Baguley et al., 2021).
- STEM subjects dominate time allocations and timetabling decisions (Majoni, 2017; Darlington, 2017).

## NARROWING CURRICULUM

- •An Increase in empirical evidence and high-stakes testing (Gray et al., 2020).
- •Most value comes from its transferable skills toward better academic achievement in STEM subjects (Eisner, 1998).
  - •The pressure on the arts to advocate to keep their place within education is ever-increasing due to the devaluation of the disciplines and the potential of being condensed, side-lined or removed from the curriculum (Fürst & Nylander, 2020).



# BACKGROUND

## GENERALISTS TEACHING DRAMA

- Educators have an important role in engaging their students in meaningful drama learning experiences (Farmer, 2011; Tanriseven, 2013).
- The capabilities and commitment to of the educator teaching drama are critical factors in motivating students to engage in drama (McLauchlan, 2011).
- Educators come to class with their own perceived value of drama within education (Lummis et al., 2016; Leonard & Odutola, 2016).

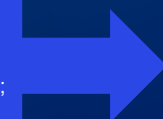
Not all educators share the same positive beliefs about drama as drama specialists do (O'Grady, 2019).

Literature suggests a range of factors that contribute to the perception that generalist educators lack the ability to teach drama. These influences include:

1

Lack of training  
+ support

(Lummis et al., 2014; Collins, 2016;  
Çayır & Yolcu, 2021; Stinson &  
Saunders, 2016; Ewing, 2020).



Lack of confidence

(Çayır & Yolcu, 2021; Ewing, 2020).

Lack of capabilities

(Lummis et al., 2014; Ewing, 2020;  
Carter & Hughes, 2016).

2

Past school  
experiences

(Lemon & Garvis, 2013;  
Kerby et al., 2021).

3

Prejudices

(Carter & Hughes, 2016).

# BACKGROUND

## WHY SHOULD WE WORRY?

- *The Australian Curriculum & Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* states that critical and creative thinking + personal and social capability encompass the knowledge, skills and behaviours that will assist students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century (SCSA, 2023). Skills that can be accessed and developed within drama education (Bowen & Kisida, 2019; Schneider & Rohmann, 2021; O'Grady, 2019).

The vision for Australian education is that all young people have a strong sense of identity, are confident and creative, and are effective communicators (SCSA, 2023).

- However, from my experiences as a specialist drama educator, I believe there are clear deficits in students' social, communication, critical thinking, creativity, and emotional expression, which is worrying.
- Many students, from my experience, lack the willingness to participate, have low self-confidence/are self-conscious and do not want to take risks (Pryor, 2018). Therefore not receiving the benefits of drama.

## THE EFFECTS ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

- Pryor (2018) supports that more exposure to authentic drama programs from a younger age gives students more opportunities to participate in learning experiences, resulting in greater interest, motivation and participation at the early secondary school level.
- However, generalist educators are filling the gap and delivering drama programs (Darlington, 2017) many of which lack capabilities to teach drama. Which as explored can be detrimental to students' engagement and motivation to engage in drama (McLauchlan, 2011).
  - Generalist educators who teach drama often lack knowledge which can negatively manifest students' subject experience and learning outcomes (O'Toole, 2011; Işyar & Akay, 2017; Pryor, 2018; Gray & Lambert, 2020) .
- Students are not able to access the potential benefits of drama education due to a deficit in specialised teaching which compromises its implementation (Ewing, 2020).

# RESEARCH GAP

- International literature suggests a correlation between inadequately trained generalist educators teaching drama and student reluctance to engage; however, it is unestablished within the Western Australian context.
- This research seeks to investigate what West Australian generalist educators think about the suggestion that generalists lack the capabilities to teach drama which can negatively impact student engagement.
- There is an absence of research regarding the thoughts and feelings of West Australian primary and secondary generalist educators teaching drama **post-university studies**.
- Arts-based research is well established internationally and within the Eastern States but less so in Western Australia.
- This research will contribute to the advocacy for Arts-Based practices and aims to see if arts based methods (performative strategies) will allow the participant's experiences, feelings and perceptions to be conveyed in a more authentic way that written words cannot alone communicate.

**Lummis, Morris & Lovering (2015)**, investigated the experiences of fourth-year B.Ed. primary students in Western Australia; exploring their self-efficacy, feelings and experiences toward drama teaching.

**Russell-Bowie (2013)** explored the background and confidence of preservice primary educators from five countries regarding drama education (Australia, South Africa, Namibia, USA and Ireland).

**Lovering (2015)**, investigated Year 1 educators' perspectives, practices and experiences in drama and their willingness to implement it.

**Gray, Wright & Pascoe, 2019** explored the support, professional guidance and modelling of teaching practices quality mentor educators in drama can give pre-service drama educators.



# RESEARCH AIMS

Investigate how Western Australian primary and secondary educators' think and feel teaching drama.

- Explore whether they feel confident in their capabilities;
- If they believe their lack of confidence and capabilities have negative impacts on students engagement.

# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

*Do generalist educators believe their lack of capabilities and commitment toward teaching drama affect students' learning experiences in West Australian primary and secondary schools?*

The objectives of this proposed research will be to:

- Examine if primary generalist educators believe their capabilities and commitment to drama affect their teaching.
- Examine if secondary generalist educators perceive that their lack of specialist training and drama knowledge impacts their efficacy in cultivating student learning and engagement.
- Examine what generalist educators believe the benefits are when students engage in high-quality drama education and what is lost when quality drama learning experiences are absent.



# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**Question 1:** Do generalist educators consider themselves equipped to teach drama well in upper primary or lower secondary years?

**Question 2:** Do generalist educators believe students miss out on the benefits of drama when specialist educators do not deliver it?

**Question 3.** Do generalist educators worry and feel there is a deficit in what they attribute to drama education?



# METHODOLOGY

## Qualitative Inquiry

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

## Arts-Based Research (ABR)

A participatory research design which seeks to explore and illuminate participants' insights and lived experiences of complex issues through forms of art (Morris & Paris, 2022).

## Emic experiences

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

## Arts-Based Education Research (ABER)

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

## ***Phase 1- Educators as a data source (1st participant group)***

- Two face-to-face interviews per participant
- Interviews will be audio-visual recorded

## ***Phase 2a- Data Analysis***

- Verbatim transcribe the interviews
- Thematically code the interviews against the research questions
- Analyse for shared or recurring ideas/perceptions amongst the participants

## ***Phase 2b- Script Development***

- Extract repeated words/phrases or important ideas expressed by the participants and convert them into embodied phrases (performance-based)
- Assemble phrases into scripted narrative vignettes for a performance to share the results

## ***Phase 3- Ethnodrama Performance***

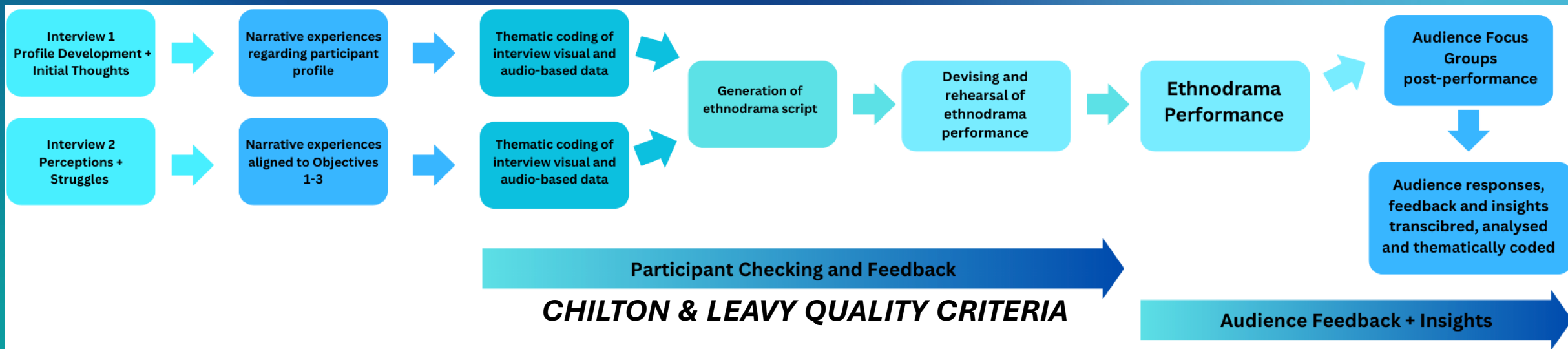
- Hayman Theatre to be booked
- Actors & lighting/sound technician will be recruitment
- Ethnodrama rehearsals & participant feedback on its embodiment/development
- Purposeful selection and recruitment of audience members
  - Perform ethnodrama

## ***Phase 4- Audience Focus Groups (2nd participant group)***

- Focus groups to occur post-performance
- Focus group's feedback, responses and insights will be transcribed, analysed and thematically coded against the research questions.



# INTERVIEW AND CREATIVE OUTPUT CYCLE



## ETHNODRAMA AUDIENCE SELECTION

1

GENERALIST EDUCATORS

10 Preservice generalist primary educators

10 Preservice secondary educators (outside the field of drama/arts disciplines)

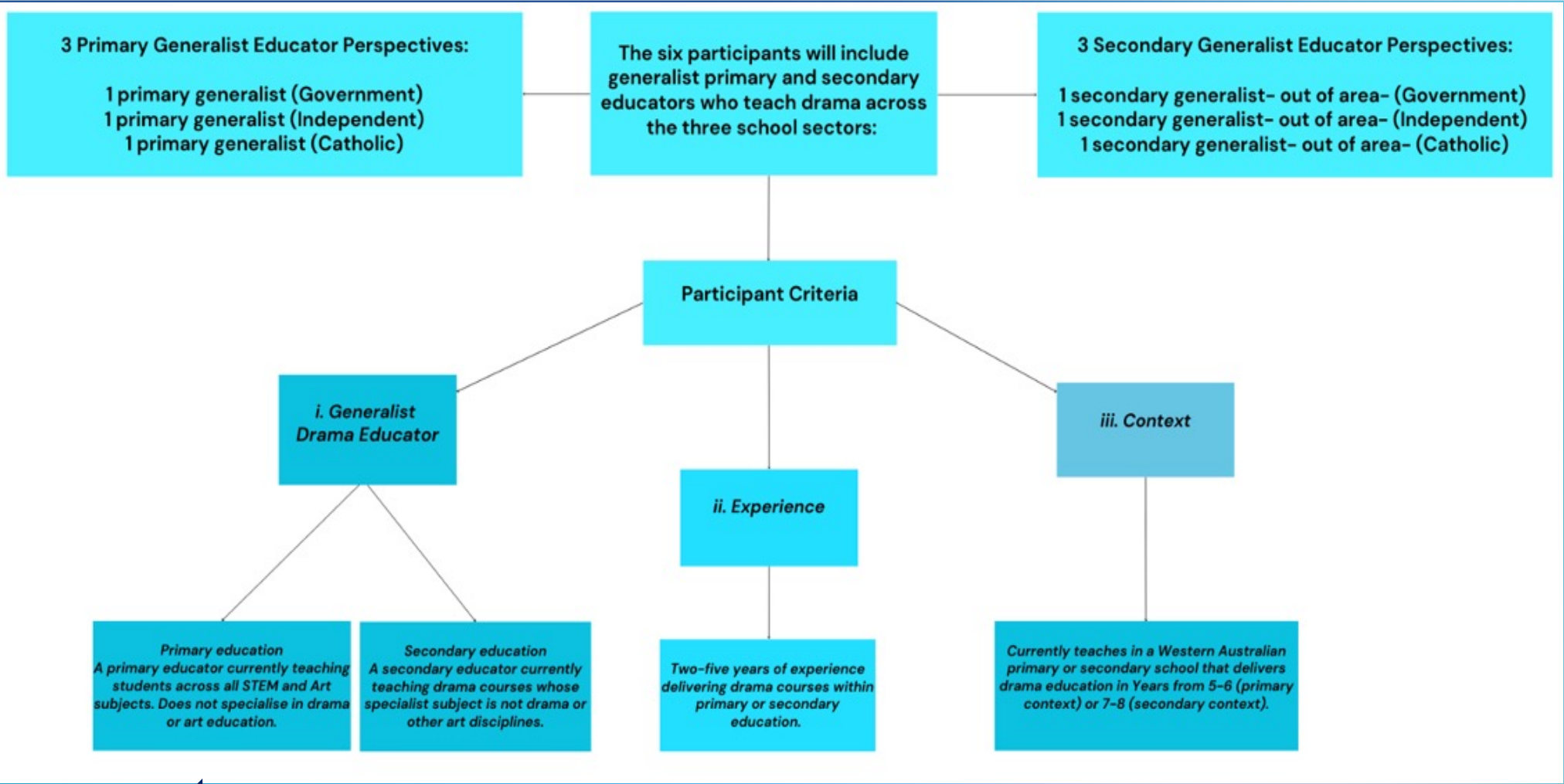
2

SPECIALIST EDUCATORS

10 Preservice secondary drama specialist educators

10 qualified specialist drama educators





**CHILTON & LEAVY QUALITY CRITERIA**

**SAMPLE SELECTION**

A purposeful, homogenous sample of six participants to investigate their thoughts about the proposed hypothesis and whether it correlates with their experiences and perceptions.

The six recruited participants have expressed concern about their capabilities and self-efficacy in teaching and delivering drama programs.

A smaller sample size is encouraged within ethnographic research to produce a depth of information relevant to educators in similar contexts (Cohen et al., 2018).



## WHY ABR?

- Performance is the most powerful way to explore lived experiences and their meaning (Bresler, 2011).
  - ABR can extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication to reveal and express meanings that words alone fail to convey (Barone & Eisner, 2012).
- Illuminates transcribed interview data and brings participants' nuanced responses to life (O'Toole, 2006).
- Reveals the uniqueness and complexities of interactions (Sajani et al., 2018).
  - ABR liberates the researcher's voice (Chilton & Leavy, 2020).
- ABR embraces a practice of collaboration. Research inquiry is formed through multiple perspectives, creating community partnerships (Chilton & Leavy, 2020).
- Greater community engagement. Accessibility of research findings outside academia (Chilton & Leavy, 2020).

# SIGNIFICANCE

This proposed research is completely perceptual.

Based on literature and my emic experiences as a specialist drama educator, I have theorised the hypothesis that many generalist educators lack the confidence and capabilities to teach drama, and students are becoming reluctant to participate in drama.

I will not find out exactly the influence generalist educators teaching drama have on students; however, I will reveal what the educators believe or perceive it to be.

Seeks to contribute to the current gap in research. Establishing generalist educators' lived experiences and feelings toward teaching drama post-university education and whether they believe their lack of confidence and capabilities toward teaching drama negatively impacts student engagement.

# METHODOLOGY SIGNIFICANCE

ABR is common internationally and in the Eastern states but is still emergent in WA (Paris et al., 2022). This research will contribute to the methodological innovation of drama education research in WA.

Theatre is a powerful place for meaning-making, and performance amplifies marginalised voices to gain insights into participants' experiences (Anderson, 2007).

Theatre can communicate the complexities of qualitative data – converting participants' experiences from spoken words and transforming them into embodied vignettes and phrases (Anderson, 2007).

Performance carries more than written words alone; sharing it with an audience encourages them to share their embodied responses and create dialogue for change (Anderson, 2007).



# ETHICS & DATA MANAGEMENT



Aligned under NHMRC Statement on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans.

- Informed consent from participants & gatekeepers.
- Anonymity of the participants and confidentiality.



Data management aligned with Curtin Research Data Management Guidelines.

- Physical data kept in a locked filing cabinet.
- Digital data to be stored on a password protected files and device, then uploaded to the Curtin R: Drive.



# TIMELINE

2023

*Jun-Sep*

Ethics application

Participant recruitment  
and approvals

Prepare interview  
schedule

Interview testing and  
question refinement

2023

*Oct-Dec*

Interview cycle 1

Data collection + coding

Synthesis of  
ethnodrama script

Interview cycle 2

Data collection + coding

Participant recruitment  
for ethnodrama

2024

*Jan-Aug*

MS2

Final Ethnodrama script

Devising and rehearsal  
of ethnodrama

Writing exegesis

Finalisation of  
ethnodrama

2024

*Sep-Dec*

Ethnodrama  
performance

Audience discussions +  
feedback

Refinement of Creative  
Practice Thesis  
(performance + exegesis)

MS3

# BUDGET

The *NVivo Home Use Agreement Form (Staff and Students)* will be submitted to Curtin University to access the software for transcription purposes. Equipment required for audio-visual recordings will be sourced from the Curtin's School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry to ensure recordings are of quality. This study will also require allocating the budget towards creative production, including props/set/costumes/lighting and sound production.

Items	Cost
Travel- fuel	150
Set + props + costumes for ethnodrama performance	500
Lighting + sound for ethnodrama performance	500
Ethnodrama script printing	200
Conference attendance fees	500
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1850</b>

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