

---

# Strutting and fretting, a drama education retrospective

---

## Lorraine Singh

---

### Abstract

This article views through memory work my own practice as a Drama Education lecturer and how it has come into being and evolved through the impact of influential teachers, events and processes. The theoretical basis is an existential one as I interrogate what it means to be – to be who I am, to be a teacher educator and to be a teacher educator in drama. I use a narrative inquiry approach, drawing on constructs of narratology in my methodology. A narrative approach recognises that identity is not constructed autonomously, but in relation to others (Nicholson, 2005). Now on the brink of retirement, I look back at my career and bring memory forward to try to arrive at an understanding of the forces that shaped my work and how the critical emancipatory pedagogy that I now espouse was an unforeseen yet logical outcome of my life's influences and my constant yearning towards self-improvement and self-awareness. I make use of a self-interview as a means of shaping memories into a story that captures significant periods and people in my education. Elements of critical events theory are employed to ask what I did, why I did it and what the implications of those actions are for my current and future practice and for drama pedagogy in general.

**We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.**

(T S Eliot)

### Introduction

Using the metaphor of photography, the novelist Isabel Allende says of memory, “. . .memory prints in stark black and white, the grays get lost along the way” (Allende, 2002, p.227). If this is the case, I believe that it is those shadings of gray that sometimes stir the mind to begin to focus and look more closely at what is remembered in black and white. I suppose this is what leads to focalisation in a story – the ‘prism’ or perspective through which the events are presented (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983). A choice is made from the various points of view from which the elements of a story can be presented. This

focalisation can be seen as the relationship between who perceives and what is perceived and colours the story with subjectivity (Bal, 1997). My focalisation in this article is that of remembering in story form why I do what I do as a drama educator and what I care about (doing). This narrative is an explanation and a sharing of my educational influence in my own learning (Whitehead, 2009, p.103), the kind of teaching I do and the field I contribute to and learn from.

## The narrative approach

In this narrative inquiry, I have used the method of a self-interview to tell my story. I did this because, I needed to organise and structure the memories that flowed once I began to question why I do what I do. A self-interview can be used as a tool at different moments in an inquiry process – as preparation, documentation or as a reflection tool once the work has been completed (Everybody's Toolbox, 2007). The self or auto-interview as it is sometimes called, is used by artists as a self investigatory tool to explain various influences and movements in their artistic development. I have used it as reflective tool to look back on my learning experiences in drama. It served as a technique to keep me focused on “critical events” (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p.71), selecting people, events and places that I believe have shaped my teaching style and my educational persona. “Specific events (and I would add specific **people**) are key determinants in how we recall our life experiences” say Webster and Mertova (2007, p.71). My evolution of self as educator is the aspect that I have focused on and tried to excavate. My intention is not just to tell my story, but also to show how educators can play a crucial role in what we choose to become. I anticipate critique that will help strengthen, challenge and develop my drama pedagogy even further as I see myself on an unending quest to “improve what I am doing” (Whitehead, 2009, p.106 ).

In the story below, the sense of place and time emphasised by narrative researchers such as Connolly and Clandinin (2006) is evident. I focus on South Africa in the 1960s and 70s to paint the landscape for the story. This provides a situated-ness to my experience. The trustworthiness of my story must lie in the ‘fabula’ – the actual events and real people used in the story (Bal, 1997). Since I am the researcher as well as the ‘researched’, the self-interview strategy helped with the question of trustworthiness or validity. Feldman says that issues of validity are important because when we engage in reflective processes that focus on ourselves (as in the construction of autobiographical

narratives), we cannot be sure of the accuracy of what we see. That is because when we reflect, we do not know if what we see in the mirror is accurate or the distorted view provided by a funhouse mirror. Our new knowledge, understanding, or insight may be flawed because it is based on a distortion of the world (Feldman, 2003).

In novels, says Carolyn Ellis, “you have the freedom to construct your own plot and character rather than the responsibility to connect your writing to your memory of actual people and events” (Ellis, 2004, p.333). Since this is not a novel, I had to be responsible by trying to recall events and people as accurately as I could, given that I am relying on my memory. I tried moving ‘beyond nostalgia’ (Mitchell and Weber, 1999) or self-indulgence and stayed within an academic parameter, hence the interview format. I have used my memory of poetry in the interview as it expresses better than I could the feelings and emotions that my memories of the past evoked. The academic quotations in the interview highlight the ‘then’ (experience) and ‘now’ (reflection) aspects.

The stylistic narrative decision to move between first and third person in the self-interview (being both interviewer and interviewee) helped me find what Ellis describes as a demonstration of “both strength and vulnerability” (Ellis, 2004, p.53). Writing about one’s own memories exposes one and leaves one feeling extremely vulnerable, particularly when writing for an unknown audience. The device of the interview provided the security of academic structure and the opportunity for reflection. Writing this article has helped me make my tacit knowledge explicit and therefore accessible for future use. As Perselli (2005, p.29) explains, “in autobiography... where the protagonist and author are the same person, it would seem as though the opportunity to stabilize these elements and make them knowable is maximized, so that the act of writing becomes the opportunity eventually for greater self-knowledge.”

## Reflecting on my practice

I am at a personal crossroads now since I am on the brink of retirement. I find myself asking questions about who I am or who I am still becoming. Palmer (1998, p.7) asks, “Who is the self that teaches?” This introspection has led me to ask what it means to be – in my case, to be a teacher educator involved in Drama Education. Why did I choose Drama and why did I want to teach it? So, I draw from my memories to find answers. At the same time, I examine

the kind of teacher educator I have become. What prompts me to support students in the way I do, why is it important to me to ensure that my students feel secure and affirmed and free to say whatever is on their minds? I also ask why I have moved away in my teaching from a rather colonially inspired approach to Drama in Education (DIE) to a more fluid, constantly evolving, contextually based methodology.

My recent publications in the field of Drama Education have made reference to an applied theatre (Nicholson, 2005) approach and the emergence of a critical emancipatory pedagogy. I refer also to the need to make space in my drama work for the voices of my students to emerge more constructively than I have before. Like bell hooks, I want to teach in a manner that “respects and cares for the souls” of my students so that I can “provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (hooks, 1994, p.13). I try to open young minds to the infinite possibilities of the world and their own ability to achieve so much. The content and theory of my teaching is of necessity discipline and curriculum driven, but the topics for drama exploration allow for much student input. I should feel ideally placed, and most times I do, but I came to realise that, although my students are very well prepared for their teaching careers (this is corroborated by reports from schools), there is often a lack of independent thinking and a poor commitment to social action. I saw that being compassionate and caring, allowing students to speak their minds and to have fun in my classes was not enough. They needed to be freed in other ways.

It was when the topics I chose to explore through drama making lay outside of my experience (risky sexual behaviour in young people, xenophobia amongst students, teenage pregnancy, etc.) that I found that I had to reverse the roles in my classroom in a way that I had not experienced previously. Heathcote’s (1995) ‘mantle of the expert’ belonged to the students in a totally different way. I had to trust my students implicitly when it came to selecting the content and the message of the plays on HIV and AIDS for example. It was the only way to arrive at knowledge that was situated, relevant and real (Nicholson, 2005). At the end of an article I wrote (Singh, 2011a), I confessed how difficult it was for me to let go the reins but how well the students picked them up and how glad I was that I stepped back from the playmaking process when I did. Abandoning my missionary zeal to help students meant I learned more about students’ attitudes towards HIV and AIDS than I would have in my own research endeavours as a middle-aged Indian woman lecturer. By resisting the impulse to censor or moralise about their main character’s sexual

permissiveness, I allowed the play to be truly their work and represent their take on the topic.

Looking at a book chapter I wrote earlier (Singh, 2011b, p.44), I noticed that I had used “we” quite frequently – as in “reflecting critically on the stories we encountered helped us understand how to use them creatively and responsibly”. But I was writing on my own about my own use of narrative inquiry. As I read further, I realised that the words ‘we’ and ‘our’ featured quite prominently. I saw that I had located myself in the midst of the young people with whom I was working and writing about. I could not separate myself from my students.

Recently, while working on a short arts-based project with a group of mature in-service teachers with little arts experience, I found that I had to forego the usual developmental approach to building confidence about performing. This is contrary to my usual (DIE) step by step process of play-building. Instead, I provided some clear cut performance techniques without too much ‘process’ input. I said to the class “you are all experienced and competent teachers with a wealth of knowledge. Just use the drama techniques I have introduced to help you tell the story.” They were very nervous about working on their own, but I quite literally walked away. When I returned, the piece had taken shape and was ready for refining. Why did this work? I had trusted in my own drama teaching and in my students’ ability to make the connections themselves. This trust freed me and the students to produce creative and thought-provoking drama. I moved my focus from perfecting the piece for the examination to allowing these adult learners a chance to ‘play’, to experiment and find a new way of expressing themselves. I believe that contextual conditions must be factored into outcomes. I had to allow adult learners the space to learn at their own pace and in their own way – not imposing my ‘standards’ of performance work at the cost of dignity and self-fulfillment. The ‘A’ or ‘B’ assessment was not as important as the freedom to make choices (and mistakes) and to take responsibility for their own learning. Had I insisted on polishing the piece, the joy of performing would have gone and the resulting stress would probably have reduced the good assessment they did finally achieve.

To sum up my practice, I would say that I have developed over the years a personal set of values or a “living theory” if you will (Whitehead, 2009, p.107) that informs and guides my teaching and social interactions. I espouse what I call my ‘ACTS’ as my personal pedagogic philosophy. This means I **affirm** my students in every way possible; I **care** about my discipline; I **trust** in my own ability and that of my students; I see education as a **service** to all.

## Focalising

These reflections on my pedagogy – the ability to ‘let go’ at the right moment, the curbing of my insistence on top marks for assessment and the location of myself in the midst of my students’ work made me think about what I do and why. In taking an existentialist stance towards this retrospective of a career in Drama Education, I am guided by Feldman’s three characteristics of personhood, viz. situatedness, the emergence of the self and freedom (Feldman, 2009). These three strands of enquiry flow through my story as I examine how I have constructed myself, the choices I have made, the beliefs that have sustained me and the values that underpin my teaching. I understand in this examination that it becomes necessary to know yourself and to make that knowing visible. I do this through the self-interviews that follow. Palmer says that this knowing of self is neither selfish nor narcissistic, and is as crucial to good teaching as knowing one’s students and subject (Palmer, 1998). Indeed, as Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008, p.17), highlight, “addressing the self can contribute to our understanding of teaching and teacher education”. Further, “removing the self from teaching makes it difficult if not impossible to theorize or understand teaching in any meaningful way” (Pithouse, Mitchell, and Weber, 2009, p.47). So, I embark on this “intentional reflective process” or narrative inquiry into self, as a way of “gathering up knowledge of practice, a way of knowing”, and of knowing that I know (Lyons and LaBoskey, 2002, p.3).

## The story

### Interview 1

**I remember, I remember  
The house where I was born. . .**

(Robert Hood)

*So tell me Lorraine, when did you first become interested in Drama?*

My interest in drama was born in the so-called elocution lessons that were given at primary school by a visiting specialist speech and drama teacher. I was fortunate I suppose that the colonialist mind set of the time made it important to the nuns who ran the school I attended that little ‘Indian’ children learn to speak ‘proper’ English. Middle class Indian parents were also anxious that their children had every opportunity to improve their chances in a world where race, ethnicity, class, academic prowess and language, especially

pronunciation, defined success. Cultural assimilation was not contested or even understood by my parents' generation. Were we conforming to a colonial mindset or trying to change our Indian identity by learning to speak standard English? Or was this an attempt at a kind of resistance by showing that we could speak the language of the 'oppressors' as well as they could? I am not sure but I do not regret my 'English' colonial-style school education. Because it was here in the elocution class as a shy ten-year-old that I first found (almost literally) my voice.

**Zimbabwean poet, Fungai Machirori (2011), writes of her remorse as she looks back at her early schooling which excluded African literature, philosophy, politics and history. But she says she does not regret her private school privileged education because in later years it helped her appreciate her African identity even more.**

*What was the teaching of elocution like?*

That one class was the highlight of the week, a space where we made lots of noise and learned through laughter and games – an unheard of concept in the 1950s in an Indian Catholic primary school in South Africa. Furthermore, the visiting teacher was someone who seemed happy to be there, who encouraged you to talk and who actually listened to what you said. This was even stranger and set her apart from the everyday reality of school. What was most strange was the fact that although she was a 'white lady' – a figure associated with fear and power, these were never evident in those classes. It was for her sake that I worked hard at my oral examination pieces. My first attempt earned me a B+ instead of the A the teacher expected. I felt her disappointment, although she said nothing. But to disappoint her was to reduce the joy we experienced in her lessons, so I had to succeed. It was because she believed I could get an A and not because I believed I could, that I made sure I had an A the next time – and all the times after that.

**Teachers, says Palmer, "possess the power to create conditions that can help students learn a great deal – or keep them from learning much at all" (Palmer, 1998, p.6).**

*You mention the issue of race difference. How significant was this for you as a child?*

It had a tremendous effect on our lives in terms of identity and how we saw ourselves. The subliminal message of our 'inferiority' was pervasive. It came

through to us in our education via our teachers and the curriculum content as it did in the laws and regulations of segregation. Whiteness meant superiority, knowledge and power. Anything else was second rate. Yet, in ourselves, privately, in our families and communities we knew we had knowledge and ability. So as children we began to develop that two-ness of being, the double consciousness that Du Bois (1903) wrote of. The danger remained of becoming what others perceived you to be.

*What was the lasting effect of the elocution teacher on you?*

It was in the last class at the end of grade 10, when she asked what some of us who were moving on to senior high school what we intended to do in the future that I found myself blurting out – much to my friends' surprise and my own consternation – that this was what I wanted to become – “a Speech and Drama teacher like you”. And I did.

*Did you continue with Drama at high school?*

There was no formal Drama at senior high school, but there were two strong influences that made an impact on the values I espouse as a teacher today and also helped me on the way to achieving my immediate goals. One was my teacher of English who inspired by her deep knowledge, her poise, elegance and confidence. Her English literature class introduced play readings to me – we went through our Shakespeare texts by reading aloud so that metre and rhythm and meaning became one. I can still quote lines from the plays and poems we studied – the written word and the spoken word came alive.

The second influence was the teacher who prepared the debating team and helped me through my public speaking events. Yes, ‘my public speaking’! – what a long way from the 10-year-old who froze on stage in her first oral exam. Gently, effectively and with great compassion she coached and tutored, all the while opening our minds to new thoughts and different perspectives. Our education at that time was still of the ‘banking’ (Freire, 1970) or transmission variety. We were empty vessels to be filled with the ‘right’ knowledge and the right forms of behaviour. But these two teachers opened a tiny window onto another world where our abilities and thoughts were sought after, valued and respected.

**“The power of our mentors is not necessarily in the models of good teaching they give us, . . . their power is in their capacity to awaken a truth”**

**within us, a truth we can reclaim years later by recalling their impact on our lives” (Palmer, 1998, p.21).**

But the battle was far from over and the butterflies in the tummy before a speaking event were more like clawing dragons that I had to slay. I remember being physically sick many times before an important inter-school debate or speech contest, but there was always this compulsion to go on because people expected me to succeed – the teacher who gave up her time to help me, the friends on the debating team and my family who supported all my endeavours.

**“As we live our situated existences and construct ourselves, we have an existential freedom to make choices about what we do, even when our ability to act is constrained” (Feldman, 2009, p.39).**

There were many constraints to overcome, personal and political, yet the greatest was my own fear – of failure, of inadequacy or public exposure.

## **Interview 2**

**It seemed that out of battle I escaped...**

(Wilfred Owen)

*How well did your university training equip you for a career in Drama?*

Emerging from the confines of high school to university did not automatically bring the kind of freedom enjoyed by varsity students today. In apartheid South Africa, every aspect of life was prescribed and proscribed. So, I was forced to attend the university for Indians, located at that time on Salisbury Island in the middle of Durban bay... I thought I wanted to become a speech therapist but the university did not offer it at the time. I enrolled for a BA degree majoring in English and Speech and Drama with a teaching diploma to follow.

The Drama department on Salisbury Island was headed by the renowned Durban actor, David Horner, who was as humane and urbane a man as one could hope to meet in that drab and desolate setting. The Island could only be accessed via a ferry across the harbour or a long car trip through insalubrious docklands. Very few students owned cars. As the ferries did not run all day, one could easily be marooned on the island if one (literally) missed the boat.

Speech and Drama was one of my major subjects, it was also one of my teaching methods and it was the subject I chose to take an Honours degree in. I say I chose this subject but I think I must agree with Palmer (1998) that we don't find a subject to teach – the subject also finds us. I knew very little about drama, about the world of theatre and performance, yet it drew me and I responded on an instinctual level – it seemed to fill a gap in my life somehow.

**“We were drawn to a body of knowledge because it shed light on our identity as well as on the world” (Palmer, 1998, p.25).**

*What did you enjoy most at varsity?*

Whilst I enjoyed many of my lectures and the new awakenings that came with academic learning and socialising with other young minds, it was the Speech and Drama department that became again the ‘safe space’ for me. I was in a place where creative engagement was encouraged, where fun and enjoyment accompanied learning and where the body, mind and soul were involved. A spirit of camaraderie developed amongst the students in that class which was not possible in other subjects. It was no wonder that I met my life’s partner in that drama department. Love was a natural consequence in that atmosphere.

Students in the class were accepted as individuals and their uniqueness was recognised and affirmed. In this period I discovered that apart from my public speaking voice, I also had an actor’s voice. The more roles and characters I played, the better I became at controlling the fear of performance. The more stage fright I experienced, the more exhilaration I felt when I overcame it. I discovered the value of good acting technique and preparation which hold a performance together whatever else may be going on.

*What motivated you during this oppressive era?*

Our hunger for knowledge, for a glimpse of the world outside our own confinement, made us accept many indignities that today we would question. All public entertainment, transport, education, places of worship – everything in fact, was organised along racially separate lines. The university staff controlled how we dressed, what we studied and who we associated with. Any deviation targeted one as a troublemaker – a candidate for expulsion or worse – investigation by the police Special Branch. The motivation for a good education included the idea that one’s qualification could provide a ‘ticket’ out of this cycle of oppression.

*Were there other lecturers who influenced you?*

My other major and teaching specialisation was English. It was the professor of the English method class, popularly known by his initials ptp (always in lower case), that contributed much to my style of teaching in the classroom and made me persevere as a novice teacher to challenge and stimulate my pupils' writing skills. He wrote poetry and very soon we were all writing haikus, his favourite form. All our experiences as students, and as people, became the content of the creative writing class. And he shared his own experiences with us, wrote about himself as well and taught that we should never ask of our students what we ourselves are not prepared to do. Every class became an adventure – we could never predict what would happen in his lectures. How lucky I was to have such a mentor. He said of marking our pupils' work that 'remarks' were more helpful than marks. It is something I still practice to this day.

**Like bell hooks, "I have been most inspired by those teachers who have had the courage to transgress those boundaries that would confine each pupil to a rote, assembly-line approach to learning" (hooks, 1994, p.13).**

### **Interview 3**

**New York, New York, it's a wonderful town...**

*Why did you go to New York?*

In 1978, after a year of teaching and four years as a junior lecturer, I won a Fulbright scholarship to study for my Masters at New York University. Having the opportunity to take a bite of the 'big apple' for almost two years remains one of the most rewarding events of my career. I could write volumes on my experiences there and what it was like to be in a class with an author like Nellie McCaslin whose work I had used in my own teaching. Drama teachers would be very envious to know that I saw people like Richard Schechner and Jersy Grotowski. The 'big names' in Drama were all at NYU in the late 1970s. It was the right place at the right time.

*What did you study?*

Doing a course work Masters gave me an opportunity to attend a range of classes with a number of experts. I soaked up every elective I thought would help fill the gaps in my training. I took courses in puppetry, creative drama,

special needs drama and a wonderful course on Indian Theatre and Dance with a visiting Professor from India that made me reflect on my ‘Indianness’ in a new way. All of this enriched and illuminated my Drama knowledge immeasurably. And I saw every play I could afford.

*So it was a wonderful experience?*

It would be wrong to present my New York experience as all smooth sailing without any “narrative wreckage” (Whitehead, 2009, p.116). I did experience isolation and difficulties with the new ways of learning. Culture shock permeated every aspect of life and the rudeness and indifference of the people would have sent me back home within a month if I was not there with my husband. We expected a warm reprieve from apartheid, but often found unfriendliness and arrogance. Together, we struggled to find our way and so supported each other. Being naturally shy and reticent was not helpful in that environment – even in educational Drama, there was a competitiveness that I found disturbing and destructive.

**“everyone has encountered difficulties that have required spiritual resilience and a connection with a loving energy to move beyond the difficulties” (Whitehead, 2009, p.116).**

*Did you have any particularly difficult moments in your study?*

My worst moments came when I went in as a student drama teacher once a week to a school in Greenwich Village. This was an ‘alternative’ school where there was no set timetable; children as young as six could choose what they wished to do and when. The learners in my class were not accustomed to being told what to do and they just wander away if they were bored or could not do a task. I soon became adept at not just having a plan B, but a plan C and D as well. I had to be on my toes to interest, entertain and extend these children whose ages ranged from six to nine in the same class. I told myself that if I survived that one semester in that school, I would be able to teach anywhere in the world. I re-thought all my idealistic notions of education. I began to see the merit of a structured curriculum and thought about how I could marry the chaotic ‘freedom’ of this open school with the stifling rigidity of the ‘normal’ schools I was used to.

*Do you have any regrets about New York?*

I wish now that I was more assertive and took more advantage of my foreign student status to network. But, I had a degree to achieve and a baby to care for, so my life was pretty full.

*Did you want to remain in New York or come back to South Africa?*

I wonder now how my life would have turned out had I accepted the offer from the university to complete my doctorate. It was tempting – we had grown to love New York – the heat, the cold, the glamour, the dirt, the constant noise and throngs of people. I am so grateful for that experience and the assurance it gave me. I began to feel that at last I knew my field well and could lecture from a secure basis. I had learned so much. But for all that, New York was not home and so we returned to start our careers all over again – where it really mattered.

#### **Interview 4**

**And that's why I have to go back  
To so many places in the future  
There to find myself...**

(Pablo Neruda)

*Was it difficult to adjust when you returned?*

Yes, I missed the freedom of New York and the countless number of things to do and see. But, I saw also when I returned how connected to life and each other people here are. I felt a tremendous pride in my heritage both as a South African and as an Indian, which I had not felt before. I realised how my double consciousness was strength to be used as resistance. I need no longer judge myself by others' standards and be found wanting. I cannot describe how liberating this near epiphany was for me. It certainly inspired a more critical approach to my work and my interactions with others.

*You must have been eager to return to lecturing then.*

Since I had to resign my position at the university (married women were appointed on a temporary basis only) when I left for the US, I had no job to come back to. I found temporary lecturing posts, and then finally I was appointed as a subject adviser for Speech and Drama in schools. I worked for almost twenty years amongst in-service teachers bringing this new subject into schools and seeing its many incarnations through new curricula, some of which I helped design. My stint abroad had given me a new confidence and belief in myself. I became friends with many of the teachers with whom I worked, in spite of difficult relations between the Department of Education officials and teaching corps. I tried to establish the *bona fides* of Drama as a school subject in the province.

*Why did you leave this post?*

There were a number of reasons I left the Department of Education, the main one being that I often felt an internal conflict between the policy I was forced to represent and what I actually believed in. Then I began to feel a little redundant as the Drama exam results were good and I could see the development and growth at all levels. Only very new teachers really needed me. The rest of the time, I was merely repeating the same work every year. I needed to grow. Finally, I saw an opportunity to lecture again in Drama Education – my first love – and prepare teachers to teach the new Further Education and Training (FET) Drama curriculum for schools. I thought I could offer something worthwhile based on my experience in the schools system. In addition, I had embarked on a PhD and felt I would like to test myself in an academic context. I am constantly driven by a need to learn something new.

**Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take**

(T S Eliot)

*Thank you Lorraine, for sharing your story.*

## **Analysis of the story**

Why did I write this story? Why did I choose certain people and periods? As I said at the start, I needed to come to understand how my current pedagogy evolved. I asked, “Who is the self that teaches”? To answer this question, I used memory to explore my early formative experiences. Telling the story through the device of an interview helped me step away from a purely subjective recounting. I was obliged to cast myself as an interviewer/researcher and think about the questions that I would ask a person with my background. The self-interview method “[facilitates] a stepping back, a reading of our situated selves as if it were a text to be critically interrogated and interpreted within the broader social, political, and historical contexts that shape our thoughts and actions and constitute our world” (Pithouse *et al.*, 2009, p.45). The interviews brought forward the “shifting aspects of self” and showed how the “othering” I experienced in the apartheid situation and my sojourn away developed my resistance and self knowledge (Hamilton *et al.*, 2008, p.22). In many ways, the title of this article indicates the contradictions in my personal and public life. Whilst I have to ‘strut’, that is, perform as an

actor, a teacher, an academic; I am constantly ‘fretting’, that is, consumed by insecurities. It also refers to my introspection about what I have achieved in my career.

The choice of questions for the interview is linked to Feldman’s (2009) notions of personhood – situatedness, emergence of self, and freedom. The situatedness or context comes through references to race and the Dickensian style of teaching in the 1950s and 60s, negated by the ‘elocution’ class. It also arises in the repressive atmosphere at university, again countered by experiences in Drama. The emergence of self comes from my account of the people whose personalities and practices had a profound influence – either on my self-esteem or on my teaching style. Lastly, the notion of freedom is found in the questions that allude to choices I made. I chose to teach Drama and not English, I chose not to continue as a school teacher (which then led to the Masters at NYU) and I chose not to remain in New York but to return to South Africa. I exercised the freedom to give up a career as an education official in my fifties and begin (again) as an academic.

Webster and Mertova (2007, p.73) note that “a critical event as told in a story reveals a change of understanding or worldview by the storyteller”. The only clearly delineated change experience for me was the effect of my stay in the USA. All my experiences there crystallised within a few days of my return into a newfound confidence and sense of worth. The other episodes in my story are not single events as such. The childhood influences were gradual and related to extrinsic events which refer to historical and political events (Webster and Mertova, 2007). If I question why I chose these early memories it becomes clear to me now that it was the larger context of the apartheid era oppression exacerbated by the strict Indian Christian cultural setting that made the contradictory experiences the more significant. Everything that occurs in the educational situation is “affected by the educator’s past and present... and of course the students with which they are engaged” (Feldman, 2009, p.39). I believe all of these factors, the repressions of apartheid included, have converged to form my pedagogic identity.

## Conclusion

Embarking on this retrospective narrative inquiry has led me to a better understanding of my practice and how I can still develop it. I have come to understand the effects of the repressive age I grew up in and use this as a means of connection with my students. I understand the tremendous influence

certain people had on shaping my self-image and my choice of career. The compassion, friendliness and difference they represented helped me develop these qualities in my own teaching. These qualities formed the basis of my own living theory. “Knowing more about ourselves as teachers and teacher educators changes us, provokes growth, jolts us out of complacency – and sometimes radically, in ways that can seem transformative” (Pithouse *et al.*, 2009, p.48). Self-knowledge gives me the ability to empathise more with my students and feel their uncertainties and so I constantly adjust the curriculum to be more inclusive.

What does it mean to me to be a Drama teacher educator? It means that one applies the techniques of Drama in Education in a way that releases the students and motivates them rather than reifying the theory. It means I push students to look “beyond my traditional notions about the learning-to-teach process” (Hamilton, 2006, p.113). It means that I have arrived at a way to help students “discover and explore educational issues that they genuinely care about and identify some practicable ways in which they might translate this concern into action within their own school and community settings” (Pithouse *et al.*, 2009, p.56). It means I know that I can find a balance between the ideas of world-renowned theorists like Heathcote, Bolton and O’Toole and the South African context. Moving constantly between content and context, my greatest satisfaction comes when I see the excitement and enthusiasm in my new students after a Drama session. I am re-affirmed by their awakening and joy in their own achievement.

More importantly, it also means I understand how the teachers who helped me ‘find my voice’, the lecturers who became the role models for my teaching style and my ‘exile’ away from South Africa, which helped me see so clearly who I really was, helped shaped the person I am now. But, I am able to resist being a composite or clone of others as much as I was able to resist what apartheid would have made me. In telling my story, I become more aware that I am responsible ultimately for who I am and what I have become (Feldman, 2009).

Looking back on my career, I feel a sense of self-worth, a pride in my pedagogy which takes the sting out of my concluding quotation:

.....a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more;  
(Macbeth Act V Sc V).

## Epilogue

“Memory is fiction. We select the brightest and the darkest, ignoring what we are ashamed of, and so embroider the tapestry of our lives” (Allende, 2002, p.303).

## References

- Allende, I. 2002. *Portrait in sepia*. London: Flamingo.
- Bal, M. 1997. *Introduction to the theory of narrative*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Connelly, F.M. and Clandinin, D.J. 2006. Narrative inquiry. In Green, J.L., Camili, G. and Elmore, P. (Eds), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research*. (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp.477–487.
- DuBois, W.E.B. 1903. *The souls of black folks*. New York: Bantam Classics.
- Ellis, C. 2004. *The ethnographic I: a methodological novel about auto ethnography*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Everybody’s Toolbox open source in the performing arts. 12/17/2007. Retrieved 03/19/2012 from <http://www.everybodystoolbox.net/?q=node/43>
- Feldman, A. 2003. Validity and quality in self-study. *Educational Researcher*, 32(3): pp.26–28.
- Feldman, A. 2009. Making the self problematic. In Lassonde, C.A., Galman, S. and Kosnik, C. (Eds), *Self-study research methodologies for teacher educators*. Rotterdam: Sense, pp.35–49.
- Freire, P. 1970. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.

Hamilton, M.L. 2006. Test driving the auto-: which offers a better fit – auto-biography, auto-ethnography, and auto-logy? In Fitzgerald, L.M., Heston, M.L. and Tidwell, D.L. (Eds), *Collaboration and community: pushing the boundaries through self-study*. Proceedings of the sixth international conference on self-study of teacher education practices, Herstmonceux Castle, East Sussex, England, July 30 – August 3 Cedar Falls, IA: University of Northern Iowa, pp.113–117.

Hamilton, M.L., Smith, L. and Worthington, K. 2008. Fitting the methodology with the research: an exploration of narrative, self-study and auto-ethnography. *Studying Teacher Education*, 4(1): pp.17–28.

Heathcote, D. and Bolton, G. 1995. *Drama for learning: Dorothy Heathcote's mantle of the expert approach to education*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

hooks, b. 1994. *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

Lyons, N. and La Boskey V.K.( Eds). 2002. *Narrative inquiry in practice advancing the knowledge of teaching*. New York and London: Teachers College Press.

Machirori, F. 2011. *Incompletely me*. Comment in Mail and Guardian (SA) March 18, 2011. Retrieved from <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-03-18-incompletely-me>

Mitchell, C. and Weber, S. 1999. *Reinventing ourselves as teachers: beyond nostalgia*. London; Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.

Nicholson, H. 2005. *Applied drama the gift of theatre*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Palmer, P.J. 1998. *The courage to teach: exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Perselli, V. 2005. Heavy fuel: memoir, autobiography and narrative. In Mitchell, C., Weber, S. and O'Reilly-Scanlon, K. (Eds), *Just who do we think we are? Methodologies for autobiography and self-study in teaching*. London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer, pp.22–33.

Pithouse, K., Mitchell, C., Weber, S. 2009. Self-study in teaching and teacher development: a call to action. *Educational Action Research*, 17(1): pp.43–62.

Rimmon-Kenan, S. 1983. *Narrative fiction: contemporary poetics*. London: Methuen.

Singh, L.P. 2011a. Drama education in the age of aids. *Perspectives in Education* (in publication).

Singh.L.P. 2011b. Stories Gogo never told. In Francis, D.A. (Ed.), *Acting on HIV: using drama to create possibilities for change*. Rotterdam: Sense, pp.43–53.

Webster, L. and Mertova, P. 2007. *Using narrative inquiry as a research method: an introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and teaching*. London: Routledge.

Whitehead, J. 2009. Using a living theory methodology in improving practice and generating educational knowledge in living theories. *Educational Journal of Living Theories* 1(1): pp.103–126. Retrieved from <http://ejolts.net/node/80>

---

Lorraine Singh  
School of Social Science Education  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

[singhl4@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:singhl4@ukzn.ac.za)

