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Re-Presenting And Representing With Seven Features: Guiding An Arts-Based Educational Journey

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Abstract

This paper outlines a journey of arts-based inquiry into teacher education and identity transformation in the transition to teaching, guided by Barone and Eisner's Seven Features of Arts-Based Educational Inquiry. Employing a theatre-based research approach the researcher investigated teachers' epiphanic or revelatory *first* moments of identity transformation, culminating in the creation of the play script and performance: *The First Time*. The article discusses what Barone and Eisner's works offered this arts-based researcher on their journey. Outcomes of the research include the value of working backwards from this frame for further data elucidation and analysis and presenting research to relevant 'expert' audiences.

A Well-Travelled Route

With a background in performing arts and locating myself in the field of teacher education I set out on my doctoral research journey. This began by searching for a method that could assist me to question what has remained concealed with regard to beginning teachers' experiences. To explore such a well-researched phenomenon as beginning teachers' experiences in a different way I viewed my journey as a well-travelled route, where each traveller's experiences differ and reveal new ways of looking at the world. Barone and Eisner's Seven Features of Arts-Based Educational Inquiry allowed me to reconcile the phenomenon under investigation with the research method, assisting me to analyse the data, to re-present and represent the participants' experiences ethically and richly, and disseminate my findings to a relevant audience. Barone & Eisner's Seven Features of Arts-Based Educational Inquiry (1997) include: 1. The Creation of a Virtual Reality; 2. The Presence of Ambiguity; 3. The Use of Expressive Language; 4. The Use of Contextualised and Vernacular Language; 5. The Promotion of Empathy; 6. Personal Signature of the Researcher/Writer; and 7. The Presence of Aesthetic Form. These features are intended to clarify what arts-based education research looks like. They are posited as an effective means of characterising research as arts based. In addition, I used their Seven Features to frame my research design, and to guide the way. This article discusses the way the framing worked for me during my research journey into beginning teachers' identity transformation.

A Guidebook For The Journey

Barone and Eisner (1997; 2012) contend that arts-based research is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and the writing. The Seven Features assisted my use of theatre-based research into questions around early career teachers, to satisfy the requirements of my doctoral research. Thus, my use of this method assisted the audience (the reader of the script and those attending the performance) to see that these educational stories, told in this manner, were credible and transferable (Barone, 1995a, 1995b).

Throughout the research phases of data collection, analysing and interpreting the data, reporting and evaluating research, and communicating the research findings, I felt like the research path was not a stable land-based path but more like a perilous sea voyage where the boat contains the ideas and is at the mercy of outside forces. It was my job to navigate the research through rough seas and calm waters in order to reach the destination safely. The Seven Features guided me through the research journey waters of, at the beginning stage, quite murky depths. Like Barone, I agree that there is a fundamental human predisposition toward inquiry that is often overlooked—an inclination to give more than a single meaning to an experience. Barone (2001) recognises:

[w]hen some educational researchers engage in research we are inclined, not toward the securing of even a semi-permanent truth, but, in a playful, exploratory spirit, toward uncovering and expressing alternate (sometimes even conflicting) interpretations of the phenomena under scrutiny. (p. 24)

In my earlier research I had dabbled in Forum Theatre as a means of encouraging early career teachers to explore prospective situations of managing challenging student behaviour. I had also worked with classroom teachers who possessed some expertise in acting (teacher-actors) to develop a short video as a provocation for mentoring practices with first-year teachers. I knew that my doctoral research would involve a theatrical aspect, though in the beginning the theatre-based map of the project was not yet fully formed in my mind. It was when I began my ethics application, and then as I started interviewing the first-year teachers, I began to think more clearly about how the theatre-based research method was going to play out. Framing my research around the Seven Features assisted me to explore the possibilities of re-presenting and representing research about teachers in a form that was often viewed by others with more than a little scepticism. The Seven Features provided me with an understanding of what the theatre-based research might look like, particularly when viewed in combination with Barone and Eisner's "General criteria for judging arts based research" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, pp. 148-155). Both aspects assisted to guide the research, giving me a (relatively) clear map of where the research journey was heading.

Since the emergence of the Seven Features in 1997 there have been a number of researchers whose work references Barone and Eisner's. Many who reference the Seven Features tend to do so after the fact, for example Quinn and Calkin (2008) discuss how their understanding and use of Research-Based Art (RBA) compares and contrasts with Barone's and Eisner's Seven Features of Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER), reconceptualising the Seven Features to reflect on non-linguistic forms of RBA. Other researchers such as Michelle Forrest (2007) have drawn on the Seven Features to address Eisner's assertion that research needs and/or should be open to new tools and that these tools, among other things, are heuristics. Forrest recognises that artistic data presentation as a tool has been used in the social sciences to stimulate investigation within the parameters of experimental methodology.

Sinclair (2012) employed the Seven Features to 'read' my own theatre-based research work. She presented her paper at the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) conference after a performance of *The First Time*¹. The teacher-actors replayed key moments during Sinclair's presentation to highlight how a piece of research can include the arts and

¹ Watch 'The First Time' at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLB1ED0FDEF2AA8836>

“still be substantive and useful to academic and lay audiences in education” (O’Donoghue, 2009). Such researchers generally employ the Seven Features as a reflective tool once they have arrived at the destination. My theatre-based research approach differs from many who reference Barone and Eisner’s work in that I employed the Seven Features as my guidebook when developing and enacting an itinerary for my journey of discovery. I was also guided by the works of fellow ‘explorers’ van Manen (1984, 2006), Saldaña (1999, 2003), Mienzakowski (1997, 2009), and Ackroyd and O’Toole (Ackroyd, 2007; Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010).

My Travelling Companions – Twelve Beginning Teachers And Ten Teacher-Actors

I interviewed twelve participants employed in a variety of schools in Victoria, Australia throughout the perilous and exciting journey of their first year of teaching. I invited graduate teachers from a Bachelor of Education degree at a Melbourne university where I had taught to participate in the year-long research period. I selected a sample of respondents who had gained a teaching position upon graduation (Ludecke, 2013, pp. 106-7). In the interviews I asked the participants to describe their epiphanic or revelatory moments of identity transformation through their first experiences, subsequently referred to as *firsts*. These *firsts* indicated phronesis, the intertwining of theory and practice into practical wisdom, described by Field and Latta (2001) as a compelling way to think about what counts as experience in education. Experiencing phronesis arises when something happens that is beyond being anticipated. In a journey, when taken outside of a familiar environment, these revelations can be particularly illuminating. The processes of scripting, rehearsing, and performing were utilised to highlight the participants’ experiences of phronesis, analyse the data, and represent it to ‘expert’ audiences. The play script and performance *The First Time* formed part of my doctorate titled ‘Firsts: Performing Ways First Year Teachers Experience Identity Transformation’ (Ludecke, 2013). ‘The First Time’ is a 40 minute non-naturalistic performance of a prologue and twelve vignettes, each representing an individual participant’s *firsts*, using only the words of the beginning teacher participants.

There have been a number of approaches taken to understanding teachers’ work and lives, and the tempestuous journeys early career teachers experience. Some discourses, such as the ever-prevalent ‘sink or swim’ discourse, often centre on the difficulties early career teachers face, and more recently how these difficulties impact on the teachers’ willingness to remain in the profession. The Australian Education Union (AEU) for example, set out to answer why 50% of early career teachers say they will leave the profession within five years. They examined a wide and varied range of questionnaire respondents from across Australia. Their data revealed a number of areas of concern, but I posit that early career teachers are not merely a homogenous group with statistically proven tendencies, although such empirically based studies are the norm. I used a phenomenographic approach, which investigates the differences

between and within individuals' experiences. This methodology enabled categories of description to emerge from the data. What remained concealed within statistical analyses was brought to the fore. Emergent categories were the participants' *firsts*, and they became my specific controlling insight or issue. The participants' *firsts* were revelations and epiphanic moments (Denzin, 2003) that showed aspects of participants' practices and identities. These *firsts* were also temporal in that they were frozen in a particular moment in time and place, and they were also highly dramatic anticipated or unpredictable liminal moments.

Firsts, as revelations, speak to the heart of practices as embodied, shared discourses of in-being (Heidegger, 1985, p. 161). The discourses shape, and are shaped by, what practitioners do at specific moments. The aim in employing *firsts* was to unearth questions that had been clouded by perceived 'problems' of beginning teachers as identified in the literature. *Firsts* are individual. Their study facilitates the emergence of variation between participants' experiences in the understanding and categorising of meaning of the phenomenon. The participants' *firsts* were re-presented and represented in the theatre-based research performance *The First Time*. I took a theatre-based approach to my research for two reasons: as a means of analysis, and to bring research to relevant audiences. Ewing (2010, p. 204) proposes drama as a "corrupting medium" that distorts the certainties of established truths and identities, that shows both commonalities and differences, and provides us with the shock of recognition that we are involved in the stories and complicit in their manufacture as much as their performance. The theatre-based research I employed was also a form of "transformative learning" (Ewing, 2010, p. 33) for audiences that involved experiencing a deep structural shift in core thoughts, feelings and activities.

In the past I have worked on projects where actors portray teachers. These experiences gave me cause to reflect on the way teachers are represented, often stereotypically, by actors. The participants did not want to perform, so I made the decision to employ different teachers with drama method backgrounds, whom I had worked with in various teaching contexts, so I knew they had the skills to portray the participants' experiences sensitively and ethically (Ludecke, 2013, pp. 133-4). My intention was to encourage these teacher-actors to bring their own personal histories to the performance and offer suggestions as to the interpretation of their characters. I wanted the experience for the audience to be as authentic as possible, to speak to teachers from teachers, and to counter the pitfalls experienced when employing actors who know little about those they are representing (for example Ackroyd & O'Toole, 2010, p. 14-15). I cast the teacher-actors in roles that I believed would be similar to their own teaching journeys, to work more sensitively with the contextual and vernacular language. The latter helped to express the epiphanies of the participants. The triad or chorus of Interviewee characters represent each participant as they described their *first*—as a 'me' of the present—in the interviews. The Teacher characters represent each participant's *first* as the 'I' of the

past. The Teacher roles were cast on the basis of similarity to the characters, and two teacher-actors were in their first year of teaching at the time of the premiere performance.

Stage 1: Scripting

I used the Seven Features to assist me in developing a method for data collection, analysis and interpretation, reporting and evaluating research, and communicating the research findings. These aspects of the research unfolded through three stages in the journey: scripting, rehearsal, and performance. Like many journeys these phases evolved in an integrated manner through a spiral of reflection and action. Barone describes this as the process of feeling “unmoored, drifting in a sea of possibilities” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 50), going on to illustrate the phases he experienced in encountering his research subject—the uneasiness and wonderment at starting with an empty canvas, the emergence of themes, the crystallisation of components, qualitative control, and completion though never really, finally ‘complete’. These phases resonated strongly with me, and it was during this first phase of uneasiness I depended on the Seven Features to help light the way.

The data-related part of my journey involved individual semi-structured interviews with each participant during the first year of their teaching. I conducted three interviews with each participant, and these were interspersed with ongoing email communication. Hundreds of thousands of words of data accumulated over the year until I felt like I was drowning in a sea of data. I needed something to cling to in order to remain afloat. The construction of the play script from the verbatim data served as an effective tool for data reduction and analysis, particularly while developing an understanding of the process of data reduction. Initially I was dissatisfied with the notion of data reduction, believing the reduction to be counter-intuitive to a rich description. At the same time, I understood the importance of honing in on their meaning (Saldaña, 1999). Scripting allowed me to condense concepts down to their essence. The result was more power and less padding. This process was more about the aesthetics of good editing than the reduction and excising of the full record of experiences. The process of scripting allowed me to reconcile these thoughts by creating a snapshot of each participant’s *first* as representative of their experiences. During the interview process I began to visualise the virtual reality I could create. When transcribing participants’ words I formatted our conversation as a play script, which included the interview dialogue and my notes that read like stage directions, including the participant’s expression and what was happening in and near the interview room.

In working with verbatim data I had little influence over the choice of words to form the text. However, I employed several rhetorical strategies in the shaping of the verbatim data by considering the intended audience, the selection of thematics, and the juxtaposition of stories both within the scenes and between the vignettes. The navigation through the sea of data was

crucial; the choices I made would shape both the journey and the end result. The predominant strategy employed was to compare and contrast in order to discover, analyse, and express meaning. For example, the creation of three Interviewee characters as narrators represent the way participants compared and contrasted their current knowledge and understanding with their past selves. In analysing the first-year teachers' experiences of identity transformation and in response to the way the first-year teacher participants described their *firsts*, I separated the character of the Interviewee into three. I created the triad to emphasise the way the interview participants often spoke in different voices. They would make a statement, then explain or expand on their statement, then consolidate their meaning. The Interviewee characters act as a third-person omniscient in that their story is being told by themselves as a narrator with an overarching point of view, seeing and knowing everything that happens within the world of the story, including what the participants were thinking and feeling at the time, with the benefit of hindsight. The Interviewees begin the play in the prologue as polyphonic voices—an amalgamation of the participants' interview data. The Interviewee characters as a chorus of narrators (as the 'old me') represent each participant, and capture how these teachers looked back on their *firsts*.

During the interviews, and analysis of the transcripts, I noticed they held aspects of monologue, soliloquy and recreated dialogue in addition to our interview dialogue. These devices revealed the way each participant thought about their practice and their identity. Monologue revealed the telling of the story as thick description. The monologue aspects of the interviews and transcripts then formed the majority of each vignette. Soliloquy revealed the thinking aloud—where the participant expressed phronesis, and guided the creation of the Interviewee characters. Aspects of dialogue in our interview conversations and dialogue where participants described and re-enacted the sayings of others formed the basis of the other characters present in the vignettes. In script form the stage directions within the text, the majority of which were derived from the participants' exact words, assisted the reader to understand the context. For performance the play script needed to be altered to include context specific information, while allowing the audience to fill in the gaps with their own experiences. Rhetorical strategies and devices, metaphorical and evocative, were employed to “call forth imaginative faculties, inviting the audience/reader to fill in the gaps with personal meaning” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 75). The combination of verbatim and expressive ‘language’—not only words but also the way individuals express themselves through body language, facial expression, gesture, movement and stillness—encouraged me to plunge into the depths of the data for a deeper analysis.

I also employed evocative rhetorical devices in making decisions about what verbatim data could be transformed into stage direction and action. Language, in this sense, can also be understood as the employment of artistic devices, in this case non-naturalistic theatrical

conventions such as manipulation of time and space, stylised movement, transformation of character (multiple roles), narration, choral speaking and direct address, minimalist staging, slow motion, self contained episodes, and visible staging such as lighting and no backstage or offstage. All teacher-actors remain on stage throughout the performance. They change costume and move props in full view of the audience. This convention represented the contemporary notion that teaching is a highly visible practice. There is no backstage in teaching.

Feature 1, the Creation of a Virtual Reality, involves pulling the person who experiences the art into an alternative reality through creating verisimilitude. In creating the virtual reality it was important to encourage the audience to recognise some of the portrayed qualities from his or her own experience. They would then be able to believe in the possibility of the virtual world as an equivalent to the real one where they may find that the “performed world becomes a kind of heuristic device that speaks directly to familiar, nearby concerns as it raises questions about them” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 74). A virtual reality assists the audience to vicariously inhabit a location near enough to a previously experienced one to recognise it, but far away enough to place it in a revealingly (sometimes startling) new context. To create a virtual reality the participants’ experiences as told to me were re-presented and represented in the play script (Ludecke, 2012), for the purposes of illuminating pertinent aspects of their identity transformation, and enlightening an audience of readers at this stage. The participants’ words were re-presented verbatim. In the beginning I chose exemplars from the participants’ data for what they promised to contribute to the enrichment of understanding about first-year teaching. In the creation of the virtual reality, the world of the first-year teacher, I sought to recognise the ‘truths’ in the participants’ words based on my own journey undertaken when I was a first-year teacher.

In seeking to recognise such truths I exercised Feature 2, the Presence of Ambiguity, by carefully positioning blanks or gaps in the text to be filled in by the audience with personal meaning from their own experiences outside what is represented (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 75), and to persuade the audience to contribute answers to the dilemmas proposed in the performance. The script writing aimed to express *novelness*, a type of writing that inspires readers to enter into a dialogue with it. This is a characteristic of writing that encourages a multiplicity of readings and a variety of interpretations of the phenomena (Bhatkin 1981 in Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 75). As a text to be read, the script served to highlight the stories of first-year teachers as told by the teachers themselves. I developed the text through the phenomenographic approach of allowing a set of categories or meanings to emerge from the data, yet remain reasonably ambiguous so as to encourage the audience to fill in the gaps in the play and performance in light of their own experiences. I prepared the script for the next stage of the journey—rehearsal.

Stage 2: Rehearsal

I have had a wealth of experience directing productions, so I was fairly confident that this phase of the journey was going to be smooth sailing. Yet this was different from the other journeys I had undertaken in the past. A number of challenges emerged, mainly concerning the ethical nature of the work. O'Donoghue (2009) believes that researching in and with art requires different ways of thinking about ethics. I now recognise that ethical considerations in theatre-based research are paramount. I employed a number of strategies to work ethically with the participants' contextualised and vernacular language. I addressed ethical issues of representation and representation, the question of validity, and notions of accessibility through *The Use of Expressive, Contextualised and Vernacular Language*. This included the use of strictly verbatim data in the script, a validation rehearsal, and the employment of teachers who could act, in order to bring authenticity to the performance.

Participants had previously been sent a copy of the draft script as an initial step. At this stage the participants and teacher-actors noted that the verbatim data contained a considerable amount of vernacular language. Vernacular forms of speech are more directly associated with lived experiences, and are more likely to be useful in expressing the meaning of school experiences than are theoretical forms of discourse. Vernacular language often contains metaphorical allusion that is thickly descriptive of what may be called the dailiness of, in this case, school life. The dialogue in the script was highly accessible to non-researcher audiences who could easily participate in making meaning from the performance in its thick description of teachers' experiences. For example:

INTERVIEWEE 2

I reckon I felt like a real teacher after the first day!

INTERVIEWEE 1

Just having my class, they're really beautiful. I think it's because I had such a naughty class last year, I was expecting the worst.

INTERVIEWEE 3

They're really lovely, and me being in control, and no one watching me, I was just like yeah 'It's all mine!'

INTERVIEWEE 1

I can do this!

INTERVIEWEE 2

I still feel like I'm learning a lot but I feel more comfortable calling myself a teacher now.

INTERVIEWEE 3

And I feel like this is my job, whereas before I was a bit – I don't know if I can do it, but now it's just... not second nature because I'm still learning how to do things, but yeah.

Feature 4, The Use of Vernacular Language, prompts the recognition of parallels between the participants' epiphanies and the audiences' own experiences. It was important to maintain the special epiphanic quality of language the participants used in order to bring about, in the audience, a phenomenological reverberation (van Manen, 2007). For example, in arranging the dialogue addressed directly to the audience, they are asked to consider the voice of the participant, first through what is said and also through the silence around what is said (Sinclair, 2012). The Interviewees ask the audience to see the event, and also hear the moments of realisation. The use of sarcasm, under- or over-playing, and techniques of suspense employed by the participants in the interviews in describing their epiphanic experiences were re-presented in the performance to capture the contextual aspect of not only what was being said but also how it was said.

I took care in the selection of phrases and the context they were nested in, to avoid simply looking for and using 'sexy quotes' (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 237). I achieved this by specifically looking at identifying key words within phrases that indicated *firsts*, for example the use of rhetorical questions, identifying common terms that emerged such as 'real' and 'grad', and pinpointing heightened emotions. The selection of words and phrases to include in the play were, by their verbatim nature, accessible to audience members. Yet the Use of Vernacular and Contextual Language also assisted in the use of feature 5, Promotion of Empathy, by speaking to the audience using a common language, in order to elicit their acceptance and acknowledgement that these experiences are 'normal'.

Participants attended the validation rehearsal (Anderson, 2007, p. 87) where the teacher-actors did a reading of the play. Ethical considerations emerged during the validation rehearsal where a participant became uncomfortable about the way her colleagues were portrayed, and was concerned that she would be identifiable. We explored making the delivery of the dialogue less aggressive in order to get closer to her intended meaning at the time. Upon the participant's request during the validation rehearsal we discussed changing a word. This example draws attention to the power and problem of vernacular language when interpreted by another. In encouraging audiences (including the teacher-actor portraying this character) to bring their own personal meaning to the text the reader or audience member may attribute a different tone or emphasis than the one intended. While I was conscious that the play script should be wholly the participants' exact words, some refinements such as this, and others including change of tense and removal of words such as 'um', 'like' and 'you know' seemed appropriate at the time, even though I felt like this was cheating (Soans, 2008, p. 41). On a

reading of the script these omissions were less apparent. But in rehearsal their absence was felt. The dialogue sounded too slick and contrived. Like packing for a journey, it seemed appropriate to leave out such seemingly extraneous things at the time, but soon became apparent that I should have left these in. I gave the teacher-actors direction to add a few hesitational words.

Throughout the rehearsal process aspects of what the participants communicated were revealed as situated in different times. The notion of ‘looking back’ had emerged as a strong theme, and a personal signature, accentuating the themes of transition and transformation. Feature 6, Personal Signature of the Researcher/Writer, in my work is a stripped back, minimalist look that employs symbolic use of colour, choreographed movement, symbolic use of space, and transformation of place and character. Stripped of all extraneous matter I can focus on getting straight to the point, to say ‘look here’, much like searching for land through a telescope. I scrutinised the participants’ personal experiences through laying bare the essence of each incident. This approach to staging encouraged the audience to focus on the quintessential, filling in the peripheral through personal experiences. This Personal Signature also helped unify the episodic vignettes in preparation for presenting to the ‘expert’ audience at the premiere performance.

Stage 3: Performance

Throughout the rehearsal stage it became progressively apparent that the power of the performance would come from showing rather than telling, from hinting rather than explaining, and from inviting rather than dictating. A powerful aspect of working with a theatre-based method is that people outside the research team can access the research and interpret the data. The audience’s interpretation of the data encouraged me to consider the data in a different light, one that acknowledged a diverse range of personal histories (and perhaps biases) other than my own. The theatre-based research performance helped the audience examine a variety of possibilities before reaching a conclusion (Dewey, 1933) in order to consider multi-faceted experiences of first-year teachers and to identify the underlying assumptions governing their actions (Griffin, 2003). *The First Time* has been performed for a variety of ‘expert’ audiences consisting of in-service teachers and teacher administrators, teacher educators, and pre-service teachers, at the premier performance, at conferences, and in teacher education workshops. It continues to provoke audiences to question, recognise and respond to the lived experiences of first-year teachers.

The connection between my Personal Signature present in the work and Feature 7, Presence of Aesthetic Form, emerged through the use of the performance space. The space was a new lecture theatre, very stark and crisp. The space ended up suiting the performance well, reflecting both my combined identity of researcher and performing artist, and the ambiguous

nature of theatre-based research. It was both academic and theatrical. The space heightened the purpose of the performance as artistic and educational. My intention was to explore an integrated and complementary approach where the processes of creating and performing the theatrical work are interwoven with the processes of conducting and disseminating the research. I aimed to challenge the notion of ‘writing up’ my research by investigating the subject matter in a manner that generated more questions, and that encouraged the reader or audience to consider their active response to the material. The aim of employing a theatre-based method was also to consider how this method might broaden and *complement* traditional ways of thinking about and doing educational research (Eisner, 1997). This could be likened to undertaking a well-travelled journey and adding my own observations and discoveries to the map.

My own theatre-based research method is in essence an artistic endeavour that attempts to somehow capture individuals’ experiences of a certain phenomenon of life that is “both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and eloquent” (van Manen, 1984, p. 6). The Promotion of Empathy was required in order to produce powerful representations of the perspectives *of teachers by teachers for teachers*. Empathic understanding encourages audiences to participate vicariously in another form of life and to reconstruct the subjects’ perspective within themselves. The Use of Expressive, Contextual and Vernacular Language, which I consider to include non-verbal language, contributed to this important dimension of theatre-based research. Pathic knowledge, which is pre-reflective, pre-theoretic and pre-lingual, does not only inhere in language and the body but also in the things of our world, in the situations in which we find ourselves, and in the very relations that we maintain with others and the things around us (van Manen, 2007). With these words in mind I aimed to lead the audience to recognise reflexively what the experience may have been like for these first-year teachers, and to also consider what these first-year teachers were asking of the audience. In doing so the audience members are reminded of what it is to experience a *first* in their own practice. This Promotion of Empathy was not to be confused with the promotion of sympathy. While I was very sympathetic towards some of the participants’ more challenging experiences, the play and performance seek an *understanding* from the audience, an understanding of the meaning of the events as represented in the script and on stage.

Working within a phenomenographic paradigm I presented in performance descriptions that search for meaning, variation in meaning, and structural relationships between meanings through pathic images, which were accessible through the text that spoke to the audience and made a demand on the audience. Through such a text “the more noncognitive dimensions of our professional practice may be communicated, internalized and reflected on” (van Manen, 2007, p. 21). In the search for meaning, as a researcher I made the decision to vary the

examples (van Manen, 1984, p. 25) so that the invariant aspects of the phenomenon itself come into view. I achieved this by showing how *firsts* differ between participants, yet contain recognisable essences with which the audience could connect to, internalise, and reflect on. *Firsts* can be dramatic, symbolic, positive, and negative, as reflection, as action, controllable, predicted, and spontaneous. The variation between *firsts* and vignettes also served to promote empathy not necessarily in all instances, but with the aim that some would speak to each audience member, encouraging them to participate vicariously in the participants' experiences and to reconstruct the experiences within themselves.

Staging a representation of the world, like creating a map, is based on the practice of selection and explanation to form a mirror of reality (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 89). Mienczakowski (2009) contends that audiences of all live performance works “witness, engage with and gain interpretive cues (subtle and coded) from fellow audience members” during a performance (p. 322). He describes the act of being part of an audience as one that “arguably, generates a subtle overlaying and emotionally reflexive interpretation and emphasis to the meaning of an ethnographically derived performance work” (Ibid). The performance asked audience members to witness the stories of first-year teachers, to consider who and where they themselves are in these stories, and to consider their own relationships with the data—with how they come to understand it and what they might do with it in an ongoing act of seeking understanding.

The thesis is “a pervasive quality in the text that serves to structure the various components of the work” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, pp. 77-8). This tentative personal statement also serves as a mediator for choosing what to include or exclude from the text, particularly in creating the Presence of Ambiguity. In reading the performance the audience co-constructs meaning, filling in the gaps with their own knowledge. I recognise that my thesis for *The First Time* was to capture the way in which all participants in this study balanced the positive with the negative. I aimed to demonstrate how their stories of woe were opportunities for recognising transition and transformation, and that positives were celebrated, though often guardedly. My intention was perhaps an attempt to regulate the peaks and troughs of first-year teaching.

There are positives and negatives that occur sometimes simultaneously, or at least juxtaposed against each other in a relationship of balance and tension. My thesis is a personal statement arising out of the negotiations between myself and the scrutiny of the phenomena of first-year teachers' experiences. My own voices as a first-year teacher, a teacher educator, a researcher, and a performing artist are combined and present in the text and performance through the selection and shaping of the verbatim data. Each journey embodies the unique vision of its explorer. In that sense each work displays the author's personal signature (Barone & Eisner, 1997, pp 77-8). In the same way my research journey will differ from another traveller's

journey, even if our origins and destinations appear similar.

For my part I am happy to have made this journey and the revelations found along the way, guided by Barone and Eisner's Seven Features. Like on any journey, a map and some information before you set out can prepare you somewhat for the way ahead. Specifically, the Seven Features assisted with the navigation through waters unknown to me. I began planning the journey with the map I was given, and made many discoveries of my own along the way. I feel as though this journey was, and is, unique. The Creation of a Virtual Reality allowed the audience to vicariously inhabit ideas close enough to previously experienced ones to recognise them, but far away enough to place them in a revealingly new context. The Presence of Ambiguity, the positioning of blanks or gaps in the text, were filled in by the audience with personal meaning from their own experiences, and expressed through their exclamations during the performances. The Promotion of Empathy produced powerful representations of the perspectives of teachers for teachers by teachers. Empathic understanding encouraged audiences to participate vicariously in another form of life and to reconstruct the subjects' perspective within themselves. These three Features could be likened to showing photographs of my journey to a group of people who had undertaken a similar one. Their pathic knowledge inhered in language, body, things, situations, and relations was awakened through the pathic images of the noncognitive dimensions of teaching practice in the performance.

The combination of the use of Expressive, Contextualised and Vernacular Language, not only words but also the way individuals express themselves through body language, facial expression, gesture, movement and stillness, spoke to the audience with more clarity than the written text alone. My Personal Signature in choosing what to include or exclude from the text was guided by my own revelations and epiphanies on developing the play script from the sea of data. This thesis will never be the same as another researcher's, and in acknowledging this I understand that there are often multiple versions of reality. Each work embodies the unique vision of its creator; just like other navigators embarking on a well-travelled path will create their own versions of that reality. My version of understanding beginning teachers' experiences came through the Presence of Aesthetic Form: a stark, crisp, blank piece of paper for me to create a map of my journey on, which I created from the words of the participants, on the bodies of the teacher-actors, for those with an investment in teachers' work and lives. This was a re-presentation as much as it was a representation. A moment in time arrived at via the Seven Features, capturing a single drop of a reality that, with thousands of other drops, makes up the vast ocean of teachers' work and lives.

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