

**Repurposing performed research texts for new audiences: the  
'Colin' monologue**

**Richard Sallis**

Melbourne Graduate School of Education, the University of Melbourne,  
Victoria, Australia

**Abstract**

This article is based on my recent work as an ethnodramatist where I have been exploring the benefits of repurposing existing performed research texts for new audiences. I have found that a sense of audience and its requirements primarily dictate the modifications that need to be made to the original ethnodramatic text. Other important considerations that inform the repurposing process include who will perform the text and in what context the performance will take place. The script on which this article is based is a monologue I wrote and performed to teacher candidates. It is about 'Colin', a drama teacher candidate. His story first appeared in an educational ethnography I wrote for my doctoral studies.

**The script**

I wrote the following ethnodramatic monologue in 2014 with a specific audience in mind. It was based on an ethnodramatic play I wrote several years earlier as part of an educational ethnography I conducted for my doctoral studies. In this article I discuss the genesis and evolution of the monologue and focus on the effect the perceived audience and their university studies had on the crafting of the text.

**ARE YOU TAKING PART, THOMAS?<sup>1</sup>**

**A monologue from Colin, a teacher candidate**

**DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

**COLIN:** A teacher candidate in his mid-twenties.  
He is Caucasian with an Australian accent.

**PERSONS REFERRED TO IN THE MONOLOGUE**

**SARAH:** Colin's mentor drama teacher on his  
current teaching round.

**THOMAS:** A boy in one of the Year Seven Drama  
classes.

**KATE, KIM,  
JOSIE, ALAN<sup>2</sup>** Other students in Thomas' year seven class

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<sup>2</sup> The names of the characters are pseudonyms.

*(COLIN is teaching one of Sarah's Year Seven Drama classes at a Secondary school, in Melbourne, Australia. It is the start of the class). (Claps hands to get attention. COLIN is full of enthusiasm) Right Year Seven; it's time for some "drama" in your life. (Sound effect of a couple of students laughing politely at his joke. Pause. As if responding to three of the male students sitting on the stage in the Drama Room) The boys sitting on the stage come down here please. (Pause) It's your private space is it, Thomas? Yeah, well you can go back there and be private later on. Right now I want you down here with the rest of us. (As if responding to three female students who are talking) Kate, Kim, Josie. Ladies, quiet please. (Pause. COLIN steps downstage, as if out of this scene, and delivers an aside to the audience) I cannot believe I just called them "ladies". Why did I do that? I mean, where did that come from? Sometimes, when I'm teaching a class I open my mouth and I'm shocked with what comes out. Sarah, my Mentor teacher, will have taken note of that for sure. The other day I told her I'm a feminist but with that last remark she probably thinks I crawled out of the Ark. (Pause) She's supportive towards me but I can't help feeling I'm being judged whenever I teach one of her classes. At the moment I can't seem to get that out of my head when I'm teaching. Maybe I'm worrying unnecessarily but there are lots of expectations placed on you when you're on your teaching rounds. It doesn't sit well with me when I do things that don't show me at my best.*

*(COLIN sits down as if in the staffroom. He has a coffee mug in one hand and his teaching portfolio in the other. He talks to the audience as if they are confidants) Well, I'm about half way through my teaching placement at this school. I am teaching junior Drama and senior Media Studies and it's really opened my eyes to what it's like in a government school. I went to a private school so I haven't had much experience of government schools. I did my first teaching placement at another government school down the road and it was very academically focused and traditional. I expected this school to be like that one but my preconceptions have been blown out of the water. Here there's a much freer relationship between the staff and the students. It's a lot more personal. The teachers get called by their first name. There is no school uniform; that kind of thing. From what I've seen, the vast majority of students here seem very mature for their age. They talk to the teachers like they're peers and expect to do [the same] with teacher candidates too.*

There are some really challenging students at this school. I got a big shock when I started teaching here because the students would constantly challenge me as to why we were doing things. Like I'd say to Year Seven, "I want you to come up with a scene that brings a fairy tale into the modern day" and they would ask, "What's the point of that?" or "Why do we have to do that?" I saw this as a challenge to my authority but Sarah pointed out that they're just looking for the relevance. So now I've taken the initiative to tell them the aims of an activity before we get started on it.

*(Pause. COLIN gets up from his chair and moves towards the audience)*

Another thing I've noticed is that the boys don't seem as mature as the female students. In junior drama a lot of the boys have a tendency to perform violent [scenes]. I have to keep reinforcing that I don't want there to be violence in the classroom. I have to work much harder to engage the male students, so I've been trying to find ways to get them to contribute more to the class. Like, take Thomas in Year Seven for instance. Some of the teachers have branded him as a naughty child. Well, I disagree. I think he just needs encouragement. When I first started teaching him I spoke to Sarah about how he was not engaging with the material and was more than happy to just stuff around<sup>3</sup>. I really wanted to get him involved in the class and make him more accountable because he was more than happy to sort of sit out of the group. Whether that was a lack of confidence or whether he thought, "I don't want to do this drama stuff". Anyway, I've tried to really engage him and bring him forward and draw on his examples. Like, even if he makes an off-the-cuff comment, I still try to respond to him to show I value what he has to say. And in one particular class he actually asked the other students to be quiet, when I was trying to talk to them! Having said that, he still throws [out] a lot of challenges during the class. But now I don't seem to have the same battles to get him involved.

*(Picking up where he left off with the class)* Okay, Year Seven now lots of fairy tales have friends and enemies in them. So, I want you to walk around the room and when I say, "stop" I want you to greet whoever is nearest to you, as friends. *(COLIN notices that most of the students shift where they are standing so they are near to a student of the same gender)* Hey, come on. Mix it up a bit; not just boys-with-boys and girls-with-girls.

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<sup>3</sup> Waste time.

(Pause) And ... stop! Now, what did you see? "Lots of hugs". Good observation, Alan. (Pause. Responding to a comment from Thomas) Right. So, does anyone agree with Thomas that if two boys hug they must be gay? Thomas, hugging can be homosexual, heterosexual, whatever. And, what does it matter anyway? (Pause) Now let's do it again but this time when you pair up, you're enemies. So, running around the room. (He shouts over them) Be careful not to bump into anyone! (Pause) Are you taking part, Thomas? (Pause) Come on Thomas! Are you going to run for us? (Pause) It's fun to run. Imagine you're going for a touchdown. (Pause. Thomas joins in. COLIN, a little over-congratulatory. Sounding a bit desperate) That's a solid effort, Thomas. Well done, mate. And ... stop.

(The students perform their greeting) Boys over there by the stage; next time try doing it without violence involved. (Pause) Okay, this time when I say 'stop' I want you to greet each other as if you are penguins. (To the audience) Where on earth did that idea come from? (Pause. Responding to a question from Josie) I'm sure there are penguins in fairy tales, Josie. (Explaining to Thomas) Come on, Thomas, sure you know how penguins move. They waddle. (To the audience) I have absolutely no idea where this is going. (Back to the students) And let's start. (Pause) Good waddling, Josie and Kim. (Pause) A flying penguin, Alan? Okay. (Pause) Thomas? Any chance we can get a waddle out of you?

(COLIN sits back down in his chair. He appears dejected) I really think I need to talk to Sarah about this class. One of my problems has been to pin her down so we can have a decent chat about how I'm going. Don't get me wrong, Sarah is really supportive. It's just that she has a lot of demands [placed] on her and I can rarely find her between classes. She's always running rehearsals, or working with her year twelve students on their exam preparation. We don't always get time to debrief after each lesson. Maybe I am being too demanding or optimistic to expect that level of attention. I can see how busy Sarah gets so I don't want to appear needy. She gives me a lot of freedom with what to teach but I wouldn't mind some more guidance, some more structure, basically, some more mentoring! (Pause) I kind of figure that if Sarah has a problem with me she'll tell me. But what if at the end of my placement Sarah says, "and why didn't you come to me earlier if you needed my help?" I often think Mentor teachers don't appreciate what's at stake for us. They forget what it's like to be a teacher candidate.

But, I'm pretty sure the students appreciate what I'm trying to achieve with them. When they get involved in what's going on and take part, that's what's really lovely. I'm even making in-roads with Thomas. The relationship I've developed with him is quite good now. He's become more personable, you know. I think he's happier at school. The other day I passed him in the hallway and he actually said, "Hello".

## **A Reflective and Critical Overview**

### **Conceptualisation and writing**

As an ethnodramatist I bring to my work my experience as an ethnographer, educator, and theatre creator. My work accords with Prendergast and Belliveau's assertion that ethnodramatic works have "the potential to expand understandings, engage audiences, and provoke new learning experiences through the dramatization and performing of research" (2013, p. 200). When writing the script of *Are You Taking Part, Thomas?*, my particular interest was how to repurpose an existing ethnodramatic text and the material on which it is based for new audiences.<sup>4</sup> When embarking on this venture I found this quotation from Johnny Saldaña to be significant:

most ethnodramas are signature works, meaning that they are produced once by a particular individual or company and will more than likely not be produced by others (Saldaña, 2011, p. 157).

It reminded me that few ethnodramatic texts have repeat seasons and even fewer are repurposed for *new* audiences and *new* intentions.

As Ackroyd and O'Toole (2010) observe, the purposes for staging ethnodramatic plays are many and varied in education settings (p. 5-16). Some ethnodramatists use performed research to report on the findings of a research project (originally conducted by themselves or by another). Others go further and in the traditions of critical ethnography (Madison, 2011; Madison and Hamera, 2006) and emancipatory theatre (Mienczakowski, 1997, 2007) they create works to provoke a change within the community being researched and/or the wider one.

My main purpose in turning my research findings into ethnodramatic texts has been to report on and inform drama teaching and learning practices. In particular I have been interested in issues of gender and sexuality in drama education. In each case I have asked some of the participating drama teachers and students to collaborate with me on the creation and staging of an ethnodramatic play. In this process I have written a draft of a script and then worked with my participants to develop the final draft, which they then performed.

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<sup>4</sup> According to the Oxford Dictionary online to 'repurpose' is to: "adapt for use in a different purpose" (2014).

The monologue I have reproduced here came about by repurposing research data from a larger ethnodramatic script generated as part of my doctoral research. For my PhD (Sallis, 2010), I conducted an ethnography and an associated ethnographic performance project based on the Drama department at an inner city government secondary school in Melbourne. My focus was the Drama program, the boys' participation in it, and what factors influenced their involvement. I was also interested to see how the boys' participation in drama affected other students and their teachers. The findings of the original study were shared with the school community via an ethnographic performance entitled *It's A Play for Us* (Sallis, 2009). The play focused on how boys engaged in the Drama program at an inner-city government Secondary school in Melbourne, Australia. There were approximately twenty characters based on teachers and students involved in the Drama classes in years seven, nine, eleven and twelve. The play was performed by some of the research participants to members of the school community as a piece of Readers' Theatre.

Since then I have had an increasing interest to create a piece of performed research that I could perform *myself* as a solo performance. When considering what the topic could be I had a Eureka moment. I decided I would repurpose material from *It's A Play for Us* into something that *I could* perform. One of the participants in my PhD project was a teacher candidate, Colin<sup>5</sup>. However, because the focus of the project was on the drama students and their *regular* teachers, very little of Colin's story made it into the play. Colin was early into his teacher training with limited classroom experience and I remember thinking that his experiences at the school would make an interesting ethnodramatic piece that could be appreciated by teacher candidates and experienced teachers alike.

Subsequently I decided that I could repurpose the material I had collected on Colin as the basis for a new ethnodrama that I could perform for a new type of audience. But who would the audience be? It is now well-documented that the needs of an intended audience play an important role in shaping ethnodramatic plays and that a key purpose is often to produce a play which will be relevant to and speak to that audience (Alexander, 2005; Saldaña, 2005, 2008, 2011). Ackroyd and O'Toole (2010) note, when creating a piece of performed research, the ethnodramatist often responds to the "needs, demands or expectations" of their envisaged audiences (p. 8). According to Denzin (2003) and Saldaña (2008) without an on-going awareness of audience an ethnographic performance loses its sense of purpose.

Since 2013 I have written two versions of *Are You Taking Part, Thomas?*, each for a different audience. Initially my intended audience was attendees at the IDEA drama/theatre in education Congress held in Paris in July in 2013. The most recent version (the one reproduced here) was written in 2014 for teacher candidates who are studying at my place of work, the Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) at the University of Melbourne.

Early in 2014 a fortuitous incident provided me with the audience for the most recent mounting of this work. Dr Nigel Lutensz in the MGSE runs a subject that assists students from overseas who are training to be teachers in Australia (especially those

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<sup>5</sup> For the sake of clarity 'Colin' refers to the research participant and 'COLIN' to the character in the ethnodramatic play.

for whom English is not their first language). Many elect to enrol in Nigel's program because they: a) have little or no experience of contemporary Australian schooling; b) experience classroom management issues, c) have trouble communicating with their Mentor teacher and d) struggle to modify their language when talking to professional colleagues, parents and their students. Nigel asked me if I would run a drama-based workshop as part of his program to help address some of the problems his students were experiencing. Significantly, Nigel told me that he had found that some of his students had trouble communicating with their mentor teacher on their teaching rounds. This put the idea in my head to perform a repurposed version of the COLIN monologue as part of the workshop. Even though Colin did not share the same cultural background as Nigel's students, he experienced many of the same problems on his teaching round. In consultation with Nigel it was agreed that as part of the workshop I would perform the monologue. Nigel mentioned that some of his students felt isolated on their teaching rounds and worried that the problems they experienced were unique to them. He hoped that seeing the monologue based on Colin, they might identify with his story and be willing to share their own experiences with each other as part of the workshop. This approach is similar to the pedagogical intentions within Tara Goldstein's (2008) ethnodramatic work.

With this particular audience in mind I wrote a new version of *Are You Taking Part, Thomas?* To do so I drew on some of the ethnodramatic text based on Colin that was in my original play (Sallis, 2009), the original version of Colin's monologue that I had written (Sallis, 2013), as well as the original ethnographic data I had collected on Colin. Here by way of example is an excerpt from an ethnographic interview I conducted with Colin, which can be compared with the section of the monologue where COLIN talks about his dealings with a student called Thomas.

*(Colin talking to Richard about Thomas after class today)*

68 Well some of his teachers have branded him as a sort of naughty  
69 child.

70 Well, I disagree with that. I think he just needs encouragement.

84 I really wanted to get him involved in the class and make him  
85 accountable in a way because he was more than happy to sort  
86 of sit out of the group.

87 Whether that was a lack of confidence or whether he thought, I  
88 don't want to do this Drama stuff.

98 I'm trying to really engage him and bring him forward and draw  
99 on his examples and even if he makes a kind of like, off-the-cuff  
100 example I still use that to kind of illustrate what we were looking  
101 at. I want to respond to him to show I value what he has to say.

139 The relationship I have developed with him is quite good, you  
140 know. Um, like, in one particular class he actually asked the other  
141 students to be quiet, when I was trying to talk to them so he could  
142 hear what I was saying and because he wanted to be involved!

(Interview transcript with 'Colin' 01-03-2007)

When writing the monologue I reordered these lines and interspersed them with other text I recorded from interviews with Colin. In doing so I was careful to maintain what I determined to be the original meaning and intent behind the lines. This is consistent with the arrangement I came to with the participants during my ethnography. We agreed that when writing my ethnodramatic text I would construct the dialogue by quoting verbatim from what they had said and would maintain the original context in which it was spoken. When writing the ethnodramatic text I decided not to add fictional lines of dialogue. However, I took dramatic licence to create fictional settings for the scenes. For example, the dialogue spoken by COLIN in the staffroom scene was originally spoken by him in another location at the school.

As it is, I have not been entirely satisfied with my writing of *Are You Taking Part, Thomas?*. In the past I have made it a part of my writing process to have my informants comment on the script before it is staged and to suggest possible modifications. During the creation of the monologue I could not reconnect with Colin and so I missed out on the opportunity to ask him for his feedback on how I had represented him. To address this problem I trawled through my fieldnotes and analytic memos to help ensure that the character of COLIN, as represented in the monologue, was faithful to the data, rather than some abstracted version of him and his experiences that was merely there to serve the needs of my writing. Even though I had the intention to represent Colin as faithfully as I could I was still concerned that a writer or performer of an ethnodramatic text can never have total control as to how an audience will interpret and respond to it. I hoped that an audience of teachers could relate to COLIN and empathise with his dilemmas and predicaments.

Another tension for me has been the concern that when repurposing Colin's story for a particular audience I could be in danger of reading too much into the original data to suit my new intentions. I worried that spoken words and actions 'performed' by Colin at the time of the original research could be given an undue emphasis. I found what I refer to as Saldaña's (1998) "juicy stuff" test to be useful. That is, I tried to ensure what COLIN said and did in the monologue was typical of what I saw and heard from him and was not there to merely "enhance the dramatic impact" (Saldaña, 1998, p. 192) of the performance.

### **Into rehearsal**

As I discovered, creating the *script* of COLIN was one thing but the *performance of* the character presented new challenges. I found I benefitted from the knowledge I had being the researcher of the original research project. In order to re-capture the physical and vocal qualities of Colin for the performance I found I needed to carefully scrutinise interview transcripts, classroom observation notes and audio recordings based on him. I was particularly interested to capture his speech patterns - his intonation including vocal pitch, rhythm and other such characteristics. I also searched through my fieldnotes for adjectives and verb phrases to help me re-capture Colin's mannerisms and gestures. I uncovered other details that helped me create COLIN on stage. For example he rolled up his sleeves to teach his classes and was very animated when speaking to his students. Such points were subsequently transformed into stage directions. However, given that Colin's monologue was pieced together from more than one interview and from several class observations, I needed



to make artistic decisions in regard to the staging of the piece such as the setting of scenes, the blocking and Colin's body language.

When I came to rehearse my performance I learnt another important lesson in regard to repurposing ethnodramatic works. Having staged a form of *Are You Taking Part, Thomas?* the previous year, which was similar but not the same as this version, I had a very strong performance memory of the COLIN character. This gave me a useful head start into the rehearsals but initially I found it difficult to grasp the subtleties between the character in the original version and the new one. For example, in the revised version of the monologue there is more detail about Colin's relationship with Sarah, his Mentor teacher. I found that when I performed the monologue I needed to capture the various facets and intricacies of that relationship. I disciplined myself to convey the COLIN character from the script rather than the overall impression I had gained of him from the wider research project. This was because this latest monologue version of COLIN was more particular in its intent and brought his relationship with Sarah into sharper focus.

### **The Audience's the thing**

As Saldaña contends (2008), the "true test" and the "ultimate merit and success" of a piece of performed research is "constructed by the audience in attendance – the final arbiters of a play and its production" (p. 204-205). Likewise, Alexander (2005) argues those for whom an ethnographic performance is intended, are best situated to determine whether or not it is likely to make a "substantive contribution" to their knowledge. The performance should be reflexive and enable the audience to judge for themselves its effectiveness (p. 429).

I performed the monologue for Nigel and his twenty-five students in the second half of the workshop. Leading up to the performance I was unsure how Nigel's students would react to it. None of them were training to be drama teachers. Some were to become primary teachers and others were in disciplines as diverse as maths, science, and geography. However, in the workshop prior to the performance I had them engage in role-plays and other drama activities. I made a conscious decision as to when to perform the monologue within the class. I reasoned that having been performers themselves in the first part of the workshop they would likely be more responsive to my performance. Additionally, by running activities with them first, I got a sense of how much I would need to explain to the students the context of the monologue and the reasons why I had prepared it for them. Given that the students effusively took part in the drama activities, I did not feel the need to justify why I would be performing to them. However, before performing I talked to the class about how ethnographic performance can be an effective form of reportage of research findings and about the ethnography that led to the monologue.

The audience was quiet but attentive during the performance except for the occasional laugh of apparent recognition of Colin's unfolding story. Afterwards the students engaged in an animated discussion about COLIN and his situation where they compared his experiences to their own. I found this gratifying because it validated the appropriateness of the content for the chosen audience. The students' initial feedback was consistent with that expressed in a questionnaire Nigel asked them to complete

the week after the workshop. Here is a sample of the responses from the questionnaire:

When Richard acted as his student, it also reminded me that since I am struggling with my relationship with my mentor teacher, I can't wait for things to happen and I need to start taking action to make the most of my placement

Richard's performance was so vivid that I could totally relate myself [sic] to the character in the story and reflected on my own relationship with my mentor teacher.

The "Colin" monologue highlighted for me again that I am not alone in this journey and that many who have gone before me have also experienced the same challenges that I am going through now. When we were "unpacking" it together afterwards, it also allowed for some self-reflection on the similarities and differences between myself and "Colin", and what I might learn from them.

## **Conclusion**

My performance to Nigel's university students has affirmed for me that it can be worthwhile to remount and perform previously staged ethnodramatic texts for new audiences. I have come to realise that ethnodramatists can develop a different understanding of the characters they create if they have the opportunity to perform them. By *performing* COLIN, rather than only writing the script about him, I have found myself identifying more closely with the real-life Colin. I found that performing the monologue necessitated that I needed to better understand what it *felt like* for Colin when he had trouble communicating with his mentor teacher, when he had difficulty teaching his classes and when he experienced moments of self-doubt. By becoming COLIN I developed a greater appreciation for what was at stake for him. Like the students in Nigel's class, he was experiencing many problems with his teaching but possessed the determination to overcome them. It appears that several years after Colin appeared as a research participant in my PhD thesis and as a character in *It's A Play for Us* his experiences as a teacher candidate are still relevant and his story is now speaking to new audiences in a repurposed form.

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## **Bio**

Richard Sallis is a lecturer in Arts education at the University of Melbourne. He has a background in drama teaching and theatre for young people. He is a former president of Drama Australia and the current Director of Publications for IDEA (International Drama/theatre in Education Association). His research interests include global education, gender identity and schooling, performed research and drama/theatre education. His PhD thesis, *The Drama of Boys: An ethnographic study and its performance* was awarded the 2012 AATE Distinguished Dissertation Award.