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'I JUST HAVE THESE IDEAS': BEING AND BECOMING AT A PERFORMING ARTS SCHOOL

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Abstract

This paper explores ways that a small group of young adolescents talk about their futures within the context of their schooling at a performing arts secondary school. The data gathered for this project stem from pictures participants drew when asked to 'draw themselves in the future' and was enhanced by interviews in which participants spoke about issues they found of interest when thinking about their futures and schooling. My research interests relate to ways narratives of the self are constructed within and outside schooling and the role that the middle schooling period can play in enhancing the exploration of futures.

The research methods underpinning this paper explore student voice, a familiar theme in middle years education. I also consider the research interview as a generative space to encourage reflection by participants, as well as the researcher. Such methods draw from feminist, poststructural methodologies and explore the poststructural notion of 'becoming a person' through discourse, narratives and storylines. Inverting some of the messy, partially stitched and *un*finished projects of the self, and looking at ways these samplers come together, offers a view into the process of becoming for young adolescents at a performing arts school.

Introduction

For most students, making decisions about the curriculum to study when options are given allows a small but important window from the world of school to that of the future. Students who elect to attend a specialist secondary school, such as a performing arts school, engage actively in decision making processes as they embark upon enrolment. Keystones of this process include co-curricular interests shifting in scope to occupy a significant proportion of the emerging sense of self, parents supporting their child's interests by facilitating the change of school, and parents and students agreeing that nurturing a talent in the arts will compensate for any compromises that need to be made in other areas of education.

The 'Australis School' (a pseudonym) is a co-educational, non-denominational K-12 school located in an inner-urban area of an Australian capital city. It is a small, relatively new independent school which offers a regular school program that runs alongside daily classes in classical ballet, contemporary

dance, acting, music and musical theatre. To accommodate its blended curriculum, the school day is longer than at most schools and students follow a schedule of academic work interspersed with performing arts production and performance weeks. As well as undertaking further training and finding employment in the arts/entertainment industries, Australis students embark on careers representing all types of university faculties, TAFE courses and employment. Australis has become known as an alternative school welcoming to all types of students, especially those who have found traditional models of schooling to be difficult for various reasons.

The type of performing arts training explored in this paper follows a vocational model of 'highly specialized and intensive curricula designed to teach students the necessary technical and artistic skills of their respective disciplines' (Levy, 1992, p. 36). This is quite unlike arts programs which enrich and supplement other areas of education (Warwick, 2008). Specialist performing arts education at the primary and secondary level is relatively unique as, although most schools offer some form of drama and dance, only a small number combine conventional academic pathways with the level of expertise and artistry expected of performers undergoing a professional audition process.

Literature Review

Bronwyn Davies (1990, p. 506) writes of the notion of 'becoming a person', especially regarding ways we internalise discursive practices and begin 'positioning ourselves in storylines and categories'. When most young people are negotiating schooling with an eye on the more distant future self (Beavis, 2006; Croll, Attwood, & Fuller, 2010), talented Australis students may have already 'taken up a particular position as one's own, [where they see] the world from the vantage point of that position' (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 46). Some young adolescents, such as 'David' in this study, work their secondary school years around an already strongly defined sense of who they wish to become. Such clarity of career dreams, although open to artistic variations, raises questions about what Davies and Harré's (1990, p. 46) notion of the self as 'an open question with a shifting answer' may look like

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in this context. The subject position held by David, who wishes to be a musician, for example, reveals a dynamic interplay between a singular, highly desired future and discursive recognition of the shifts and openness required to enact his own becoming (adult/musician). Gilles Deleuze (Boundas, 1993, p. 40) describes the process of becoming as one which eludes the present to set up an 'infinite identity of both directions or senses at the same time – of future and past, of the day before and the day after …'. This view of identity in perpetual motion, with pressure coming to the individual from all sides, results in a 'restlessness' (Sutton & Martin-Jones, 2008, p. 45); a concept explored in this paper.

The extent to which young adolescents, especially those with a passion for a certain trajectory, can (or should) remain open to alternatives is very relevant in the context of a specialist performing arts school. Allowing previously unheard narratives (stemming from incidents of injury, rejection, failure, change of heart etc) to trouble what has been held for a long time as the singular, privileged story can present profound challenges – and opportunities - to young adults engaging with their future (Thomson & Holland, 2002). By holding to Deleuze's (Boundas, 1993) view of identity as a state constantly in motion, the resulting frisson, or 'the newness that is created' (Jackson, 2010, p. 581) , emphasises the new relations and trajectories made possible within projects of becoming. The task, however, for aspiring young performers is complex. As they advance towards realisation of their artistic goals, some changes in identity are welcomed and celebrated. Other shifts challenge the familiar images-of-self and long held dreams around which childhood and adolescent identities had foregrounded.

The struggle to streamline multiple or conflicting selves is made more complex by expectations to manage one's own biography. This task is now considered a responsibility which must be continually revisited in order to maintain re/production of the self (Beck, 1992). Following a neoliberal framework, academic decision making has been identified as a skill which can be explicitly taught to students (Blenkinsop, McCrone, Wade, & Morris, 2005; Morris, 2004) and to parents, especially working-class parents who are increasingly excluded from the specialised decisions made in schools (Connell, 2003; Hill, Ramirez, & Dumka, 2003; Perkins & Peterson, 2005). Educating for an

appreciation of chance with an increased tolerance for career uncertainties, known as 'planned happenstance', offers an alternative approach although one more commonly used with adults than young people (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). The concept of multi-potentialities illuminates another aspect of the individual's portfolio, particularly for gifted students, as having many skills and passions usually forces foreclosure on some areas of genuine interest so as to facilitate practical academic decisions (Maxwell, 2007; Rysiew, Shore, & Leeb, 1999).

The influence of the family's social class has been found to both limit and enable the decision making of children in more affluent families (Allatt, 1993; Reay, 2005). The Australis context is of interest as, at this independent school, middle class parents support their children's interest in the arts at a time when other parents begin limiting the time children spend absorbed in dance and drama in order to ensure the academic and social successes expected by middle class families (Allatt, 1993; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001). From literature relating to young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds emerge themes suggesting disadvantaged children may benefit from programs which highlight a rationale for educational decision making at earlier stages (Bryce, Anderson, Frigo, & McKenzie, 2007). Ensuring opportunities for students to remain actively engaged in school is of key concern in this context and provides the middle years movement with impetus to reform programs and curriculum to achieve this goal (Black, 2007). By giving voice to the 'enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears and threats' that constitute one's 'possible selves' (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954), young adolescents make sense of and negotiate their futures in a public domain. Voicing the future is a concept highly relevant to middle years educators who are seeking to continually engage learners with curriculum and pedagogies which are future-focused, relevant and durable (Carrington, 2006) and which provide avenues through which young adolescents can experiment with new languages of the future (Loch & Makar, 2008).

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Narrative inquiries

Researcher positionality and methodology

My relationship with 'Australis School' has moved through a number of formative iterations. I was a student of the school for my final years of secondary schooling in the acting program; at the commencement of my teaching career I completed a short practicum placement in the English/History Department; and more recently, I was a member of the school board. Never destined for a career on the stage, my attraction grew from a childhood love of ballet and an enduring interest in the arts. My reason for selecting Australis as a site for research was partly because of convenience and the access I could organise, but also because I believed the mindsets of the students would offer alternate insights into the research questions I had begun pursuing at another school (Loch, 2009).

Throughout the data collection period, I was connected to the school via my role on the board but participants had minimal awareness of what this role entailed. Over these years, I attended school performances and read school newsletters where my attention would be drawn to 'my students'' achievements and I sometimes referenced these in interviews. Of more interest to the group was my relationship to the school as a former student, although they never asked about my own experiences and I decided not to offer my recollections so as to focus more strongly on the students' stories. In retrospect, following Patti Lather's (1991) insights into data gathering, being more forthcoming about my own story may have enhanced the trust, rapport and collaboration I was able to engender in the participants.

The participants

Participants were identified with the return of consent forms and the completion of their drawing following a pastoral care activity in which all Year 8 students (n=40) were invited to take part. Ten students emerged with these two criteria and were invited to participate in an interview. The

coordinating teacher arranged the students into pairs, trios or groups of four based on their availability

and nine students (six girls and three boys) attended the initial interviews in late 2009. Subsequent

interviews were mainly individual, excepting two students who always attended as a pair. Over the

course of the study, three participants left the school. The stories of two boys ('Matthew', a dancer,

and 'David', a musician) and one girl ('Virginia', a ballerina) are represented in this paper. All were

interviewed in late 2009, then Matthew and David in early 2010 (as Virginia was not available on the

day of the interview), and all three again in early 2011.

Data collection: Principles and problems

A simple instrument entitled *Draw Yourself in the Future* was used to collect students' pictures in July

2009 when they were in Year 8. Students were given blank paper with instructions to draw a picture of

themselves at some stage in the future. This short activity took place during home group time and was

supervised by class teachers. Semi-structured interviews were then held with pairs or small groups of

students in November 2009 (Year 8), March 2010 (Year 9) and February 2011 (Year 10) and all

interviews were digitally recorded and manually transcribed. *Draw Yourself in the Future* was

administered a second time to the students remaining in the study in February 2011 but this time

students were given a copy of the instrument to take home, complete in their own time and bring along

to the interview, which four participants did.

Inviting the student voice: Feeling empowered?

The notion of student voice is frequently cited in educational research and practice concerned with

empowering participants. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989, p. 309) outlines how using what she describes as

'authentic voices' in teaching and research marks an attempt to position students as visible, vocal and

capable of 'self-definition and agency'. The methodologies used in this study, such as semi-structured,

open interviews and visual representations, aim to encourage participant-led conversations by leaving

space for a 'rupture of the ordinary' (Fielding, 2004, p. 296). However, even though the act of encouraging student participants to voice their opinions on the school experience may seem to empower, the researcher's embodiment within the study must become part of the analysis of interpreting what is heard if the narratives are to resonate more deeply (Walshaw, 2007).

The interviews for this study were guided by a set of prepared questions drawn from my queries about participants' pictures or previous interview comments. Questions included asking participants what thoughts came to mind when they looked at their pictures and whether they saw their future as clear or foggy. I was also interested in what participants felt about the notion of a 'Plan B' career plan, a concept mentioned in many interviews. Julie McLeod's (2000, p. 49) observations of the role of the interview in youth research raises questions about 'what kind of knowledge and identities are actually being produced in the encounter between researcher and participant'. The construction of a 'communicative format' (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 3) which acts 'as a vehicle for [the participant] … to face the task of producing her own subjectivity for someone else' (Walshaw, 2007, p. 155) is an artefact which both drives and emerges from the research act.

My other source of data, the visual images drawn by participants, were initially conceived of as my primary data collection tool (Rose, 2001) but analysis proved problematic. My first 'readings' of the images led me to what I saw as relatively straightforward snapshots; a ballerina on a stage, a guitarist in a spotlight, a news reporter; however, in my first couple of interviews, participants pointed out my over-analysis and misunderstandings of their pictures. Reflecting on issues of authority in narrative and how meanings are framed in empirical data (Lather, 1991), in all subsequent interviews I asked participants to talk me through their pictures and to point out what they noted as interesting (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). I could, thus, observe participants' meaning making as they interpreted their drawings. The three 'stories of becoming' which follow explore this reflexive approach to data collection and analysis.

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Discourse analysis: Dreams and decisions

Data were analysed through a lens which sought to understand how the process of 'becoming a person' (Davies, 1990) was enacted by young adolescents in a particular school context. To this end, sensitivity was raised to language which indicated participants' strength of vision and sophistication of expression regarding biography building (Beck, 1992), especially when apparently confident notions of the future were in the process of being challenged by alternatives, setbacks or emergent ideas (Sutton & Martin-Jones, 2008). Understanding the concept of multipotentialities has also assisted in the analysis of these data by offering insight into ways that unvoiced anxieties can shape the decisions of young gifted adolescents as they attempt to avoid the 'wrong' choice and the possibility of 'failing' (Maxwell, 2007). Aspects such as these have problematised the tidy and sequential, albeit sometimes multi-strand, storylines of dream fulfilment which at first glance dominated participants' storylines and narratives.

My initial analysis cycles intended to explore students' views on the elective curriculum choices provided by the school, however, students frequently answered such questions by referring to their co-curricular performing arts choices. This re-routed my initial focus from issues of concern in traditional schooling structures to analysis which sought to explore the language of hopes, dreams and futures more expansively. By appreciating the limited importance of 'school' in relation to the emerging self of these students, I untethered my questioning from the approach I had effectively used with the other school in my study (Loch, 2009; Loch & Makar, 2008) and focused instead on ways these students wove together, whilst at other times deliberately kept separate, notions of education, future and identity.

The themes guiding my analysis are echoed in poststructuralist literature which encourages a focus on subjectification, or ways that people take up subject positions which constitute them through discourse (Davies, et al., 2001). Another aspect is conveyed by Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius' inquiry into 'possible selves' (1986) which advocates for awareness not only what people hope, but also of what they fear becoming. The iterative and longitudinal process underscoring my data collection has

attempted to encourage analysis of students' thought and language patterns, especially during times of

change when they are considering or are being forced to (re)locate themselves in new discursive

positions (Jackson, 2010; Thomson & Holland, 2002). Building on discursive threads used by the

participants themselves, I have foregrounded the positioning of uncertainty by adopting the language

of contingency ('back ups', 'fall backs', 'Plan Bs') in my interrogation of data and subsequent

interview questions. Discursive constructions of uncertainty suggest participants sometimes

simultaneously see themselves in a range of storylines and categories and are ready to assume

responsibility and agency for decisions relating to their freedom, autonomy and rationality (Davies,

1990, 1991).

Matthew, David and Virginia: Stories of becoming

The following section introduces and offers analysis of three students' stories so as to explore ways

that young adolescents simultaneously hold and work towards performing arts career dreams whilst

working through school.

Matthew, the dancer: 'I'm trying like really hard to keep the academics up cause if something happens and I didn't make it in the business, I can get a real job' (interview, Year 8, 2009)
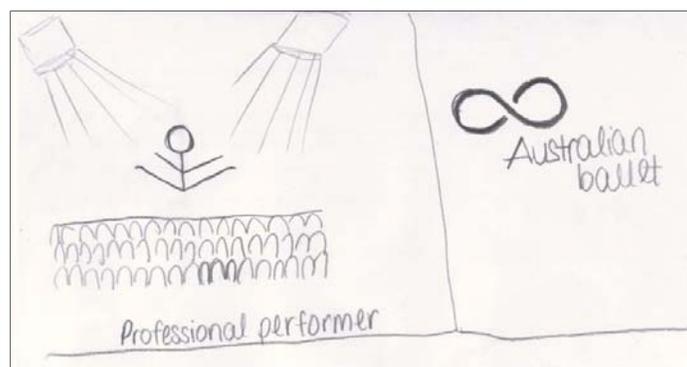

Figure 1: Matthew, 2009

Matthew took a measured and thoughtful approach to my interview questions. He clearly enjoyed school, related well to his teachers and found the curriculum relevant but as an aspiring professional performer, Matthew's assessment of dance as not a 'real job' was intriguing. He defined the latter as one that would bring in money - 'if I get paid like … because I need to like save money for the future and stuff' (individual interview, March 2010). After noting this, Matthew found no other conflicts with working towards a career he believed would be financially unrewarding. He was much keener to explain that since drawing his picture, his interests in dance had broadened from the classical style of the Australian Ballet to more contemporary styles of hip hop and jazz. Through the early interviews, Matthew spoke decisively about his dream to dance professionally before running his own dance studio. By Year 10, Matthew was taking daily dance lessons as part of his school day, extra-curricular classes each afternoon and he had also joined another dance studio where he danced two evenings a week and on Saturdays in order to broaden his professional connections with different teachers. Even with a heavy dance schedule, a striking feature of Matthew's discourse about his future was his concern to maintain his academic standards in order to make the most of his education and enable a 'Plan B'.

During our final interview, Matthew framed his past, present and future with the comment, 'Everything I could imagine to be doing is dancing' (individual interview, 2011), thus evoking Deleuze's sense of mobility, energy and motion in the infinite process of becoming (Biehl & Locke, 2010). Further into the interview, however, Matthew revealed some anxiety over how he would balance dancing with an increasingly heavy study load. He mentioned 'stress, 'trying my hardest', being 'confused' and 'tired' (individual interview, 2011). When I asked Matthew if he had done a second drawing for me, he said he was unable to do so; 'I was trying to, I was thinking about it … but I wasn't sure' (individual interview, 2011).

I became conscious that 'an open question with a shifting answer' (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 46) was emerging as we spoke but, for Matthew, the shift was as yet inexpressible – visually and verbally. Through an 'answer between words' (Mazzei, 2007), Matthew hinted at the deep conundrum of

knowing when to move on from a goal and when to readjust and continue. Recalling a core theme of

previous interviews, I asked him about 'Plan B – good academics' but the 'Plan B' which Matthew

had oft spoken of drawing upon had as yet no form. 'Is that because you have been so clear about

dance for so long?', I asked. 'I haven't thought about anything else', Matthew replied (individual

interview, February 2011). Matthew summed up his situation by explaining what I was not sure he

could give voice; that he no longer enjoying dancing as much as he used to now that the academic

workload was more intense.

David, the musician: 'It's kind of like tunnel vision for music' (interview, March 2010)
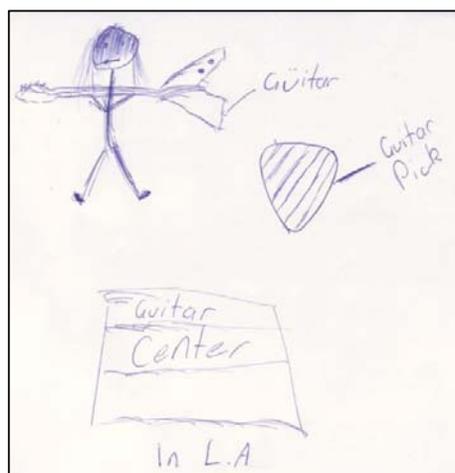

Figure 2: David, 2009

David's explanation of the emergence of his identity as a musician was visceral. 'I haven't pictured

doing anything else other than music' (group interview, November 2009) and 'music's always been

my goal in life. I've been playing it since I was six so like … that's where I want to be' (individual

interview, February, 2011). David had transferred to Australis School in the year I first interviewed

him (Year 8, 2009) where he enjoyed being in an environment 'more accepting of my music needs'

(individual interview, March, 2010). His initial drawing (Figure 2) depicted a rock n' roll guitarist

with 'his hair all grown out, he's too like crazy for me' but in his first interview David explained he no

longer wanted to be 'as mainstream as this dude is portrayed. I want to be more, like, laid back with

my music' (group interview, November, 2009).

David frequently alluded to doing his 'research' into specific career pathways he might follow; such as doing 'a course in music tech-ticianship' which is 'well paying and not really hard to get into', doing 'commercial writing which is like $200 000 a year if you get in', being 'a music advertiser' and 'making a lot of money', doing 'a proper degree … in recording management' and winning a guitar pick design competition like the guitarist from ACDC, 'he did a competition in America which got him pretty well renowned' (interviews 2009-2011). David's father, whom he describes as 'a real business man', 'doesn't really look upon music as being a whole job or anything, or being an income, or a possible income', but David is optimistic he will one day 'enlighten' his father (group interview, November 2009). Comments like these suggest the easy, discursive control David has over a future viewed by many as risky, unstable and unacceptable. By appearing to empathise with the subject position of his father (hard working, manual labourer, migrant, 'really old fashioned') and the father's fears for the son, David positions himself as the competent neoliberal subject, succeeding by demonstrating his willingness to shift (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Another aspect of identity explored within David's story is his alignment with admired teachers, musicians, musical styles and subcultures, and the references he makes to the male role models (cousins, teachers and well known musicians) who have inspired him to be a better musician and a better man. David offers a quote his father says to him - 'having great dignity is not being obnoxious and arrogant'– to define the type of man and performer he wishes to become, namely 'humble and 'a great guy' (individual interview, February 2011). It is within this context that David's discursive positionings can be aligned with the feminist poststructural notion of 'reality [as] fluid in nature, forever in process, continually being reshaped by [the] changing categories individuals use to understand themselves, others and the space that they share' (Walshaw, 2007, pp. 151-152). Thus, whilst holding tightly to the image of himself as a guitarist and by remaining open to shifts and opportunities, David's notion of himself in the future spirals outwards from a core point. The story he tells others, and which he appears to vigorously enact, is one which embraces 'the newness that is created' by the process of becoming (Jackson, 2010, p. 581)

Virginia, the classical ballerina: 'I know I can get there but I don't know whether, when I am at the age to make that major decision, whether I will choose it or not' (group interview, November 2009)
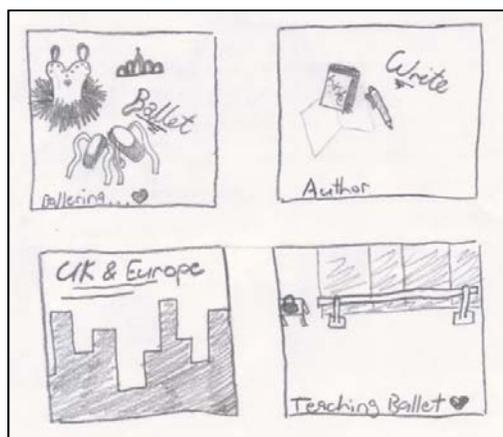

Figure 3: Virginia, 2009

Virginia is typical of many classical ballet students at Australis in that she is dedicated, precise and astute. Her drawing (Figure 3) depicts four neat squares with scenes of 'ballet', 'UK & Europe', 'write/author' and 'teaching ballet', however, her academic abilities have lead Virginia to also consider being an occupational therapist, child psychologist and a paediatrician. Concerned not to waste any of her talents, much discussion during our interviews centred around how she could fulfil all her interests. Articulating in detail how ideas and plans develop, Virginia said 'I'm not really sure how my life will end up, but I just have these ideas that I want to do these things, but if they don't work I have these ideas behind me that I can back up' (individual interview, February 2011).

Virginia's ballet program at Australis reduces school work to minimal requirements and increases ballet training hours over the final four years of secondary school. Joining this program was 'actually kind of a hard decision for me and my parents because I'm quite academic as well and so we kind of had to sit down and sort of think over what to do' (group interview, November 2009). When I interviewed her two years later, Virginia declared she was 'really, really happy with the choice' to join the program, especially as she'd now figured out a way to achieve a full HSC after all by taking three years instead of two to complete her subjects. She had also been thinking about ways to belong to a

European ballet company and 'study at university through correspondence' (individual interview, February 2011). The storylines in Virginia's data reflect the challenges of multipotentialities (Maxwell, 2007) as well as her conscientious approach to building a well organised, comprehensive biography of the self (Beck, 1992). They also highlight an interesting relationship to the discursive construction of the self as 'scholar' (Jones & Jacka, 1995; Walkerdine, 1989), a role that Virginia saw in herself, yet was comfortable running parallel to other narratives, including the intensely physical and aesthetic narrative of ballet.

Virginia's ease with the language of education and careers is revealed as she discusses the ways young people move through and from school. This has likely been influenced by her parents, who are secondary teachers, and her siblings, who have all attended university. She spoke with certainty about tertiary study, explaining it as a matter of 'when, and not if' but recognised her immediate task was to decide 'when I finish Year 12, to go straight to university or to go straight into auditioning for companies' (group interview, November 2009). Engaging proactively in a discursive construction of the self supported by an agentive ability to direct her future (Ellsworth, 1989), Virginia explained she had an individual appointment with the ballet teacher to decide on the auditions she would attend and she planned to book an appointment with the school principal 'to talk about what I want to do as I'll need the school's help to do it' (individual interview, February 2011).

Virginia's plans, however, were cast in a new light after seeing a contemporary dance performance which 'ignited this whole idea about choreography in me' (individual interview, February 2011). She spoke about how, until this point, she had her 'whole life mapped out', knowing 'exactly what I wanted to do'. Using 'a book at home that I write down all these different ideas', Virginia had been considering how a career in choreography may enable her to work in the dance world for longer (individual interview, February 2011). Uncertainty over how to incorporate choreography into her career schema has lead Virginia to consider dropping the idea of being a paediatrician, saying 'it's a good idea but maybe it's better I keep with the dancing' (individual interview, February 2011).

Concluding thoughts

Outlined above are brief insights into the ways three young adolescents at a performing arts school are building possible futures through an ongoing interplay of language and experiences. As this group encounter decision making junctures in their schooling and performing arts training, it becomes clear that they are expected to have mastered elements of the 'grown up' discourses of employment, careers and training, whilst at the same time staying attuned to personal narratives of hopes, passions and dreams which have accompanied them for most of their young lives. In this way, the students enact a moment within 'the essence of becoming to move and pull in both directions at once' (Boundas, 1993, p. 39). They must also negotiate a way to remain faithful to their child-self whilst acknowledging the adult-self on the horizon.

Feelings of fatigue, time pressure and body changes which may influence a young adolescent to drop an after-school activity are magnified for Matthew, David and Virginia as falling 'out of love' with the performing arts and 'in love' with something else are events destined to precipitate significant transformation. Opening oneself to the possibilities held by 'an open question with a shifting answer' (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 46) means being prepared for discomfort as changes which have been denied, ignored, held at bay or rejected for some time are reconsidered, allowing for a new trajectory to find voice. Recognising changes in the adult one sees oneself becoming has the potential to open up new directions, as well as grief over what might have been.

The positioning of 'school' holds an interesting place in these data as, apart from Virginia's ability to get what she needs from school, there exists a notion that whilst academics are important, school is not of great concern in the present. For example, absent are any mentions of extrinsic school milestones such as moving up into a higher class, achieving a certain rank or standard of numerical grade (Husman & Lens, 1999). The focus instead appears to be on the authentic position of the self in relation to learning and motivation (Csíkszentmihályi, 1982). Perhaps such perspectives derive from the public sphere of the performing arts where putting one's physical and emotional artistry forward for judgement by an audience is considered the most authentic form of assessment (Moon, Brighton,

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Callahan, & Robinson, 2005).

An outcome of this study suggests that generating space for student engagement with languages of the future in the middle years of schooling may increase opportunities for discursive pathways which support divergent, multi-layered and non-linear goals. In addition, enabling young adolescents to voice their dreams through dialogue about the notion of becoming may promote deeper awareness of states of openness, flux and transition.

This study is limited somewhat by its positioning in time. Claiming as it does to be only a snapshot and not extensively longitudinal in design, it cannot track which ideas eventuated and which fell away to allow new interests to emerge. It also reflects limitations within current paradigms to capture and respond to the complexities and nuances that these stories illuminate. There appears, for instance, a paradoxical reliance on 'schooling' to both set and guide options and choices, and then to move aside to reveal the scope of imagined futures. By exploring a 'knotty' time of life and following the ways one group of young adolescents deploy visual and spoken language to map out, choreograph and compose futures, this study hopes to contribute to an understanding of the process of becoming.

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