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JACE is a peer-reviewed journal published twice each year that explores issues of artistry and creativity in contemporary research and teaching, and the interface between them. The journal seeks to promote praxis, to provide an evidence-based bridge between arts and artistic practice, creative practices in educational contexts, and learning research and theory in all these areas.

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Discussions of creativity have considerable currency in the fields of education and artist scholarship at present. Educators (and artists) have a vested interest in the question of whether creativity can be taught, nurtured or simply recognised as innate. Selzer and Bentley (1999) writing ahead of Ken Robinson's highly influential *All our Futures* (1999) addressed the debate head on, arguing persuasively that creativity "is the application of knowledge and skills in new ways to achieve a valued goal." Robinson later elaborates on qualities identified as characteristics of creativity: *using imagination; pursuing purposes; being original; judging value* (Robinson, 1999). What these and other critical inquiries into the nature and practice of creativity served to do for those of us working in the creative arts was to provide an impetus for critical inquiry into the pedagogies of creativity. If we are to accept that creativity is not an inherited characteristic or an innate skill but can indeed be fostered, supported and generated then there is clearly a role to be played by educators in this endeavour and by scholars and practitioners associated with the materials of innovation and imagination – frequently found in the creative arts. The Journal of Artistic and Creative Education is a fitting place for continuing and broadening the discussion around creativity and implications for a creative/creativity pedagogy and this issue takes up this opportunity. Five highly individual papers each present a way of thinking about creativity, education and artistic practice, and the relationship between these elements.

Louise Katz, in *Doubt, Ambivalence, And Creativity In Academia*, directly tackles the still contested territory of how creativity is defined as she lays the foundations for her discussion of the role of creativity practice in the academy. Katz argues for a reconsideration of traditional approaches to scholarship in the humanities and social science research, suggesting that it is in the liminal spaces that original thought and the generation of new knowledge can be fertilized. In a direct challenge to the values of traditional scientific methods, these spaces, Katz proposes, are characterized by playful encounters, by embracing doubt and ambivalence, by the pursuit of creativity

in practice. Katz examines a range of creative writing processes adopted in academic contexts, and makes a powerful argument for the adoption of paradigm-shifting, rhizomatic exploration within scholarly inquiry. In exploring the use of the journal in post-graduate study, Katz explains, they provide "a creative space 'betwixt and between'"(Turner, 1987).

A team of authors from the Eastern Kentucky University in the U.S. is also considering the place of creativity in the academy. The authors, **Sweet, Blythe, Carpenter and Zimmerman** have a specific interest in how creativity can be taught in a university context. To that end, they have developed and implemented a Minor in Applied Creative Thinking under the purview of the university's Noel Studio for Academic Creativity. In an important contribution to our community's understanding of a 'creativity pedagogy', the authors have documented their ongoing inquiry into the efficacy of the teaching of 'applied creativity.' As they continue to seek a reliable instrument to measure student progress through their Introductory unit in Applied Creative Thinking, they applied a research lens to their practice and investigated not only how effective their unit was, but how well served they were through the assessment tools they were using to measure growth in creative and critical thinking. In developing a new program, in a new field of academic inquiry, the authors articulate their commitment to establishing a meaningful program, which can be subjected to productive scrutiny. Their article documents their evaluation of a newly developed test instrument implemented by the authors in one semester of their new program. With refreshing candour, the authors share their unfolding journey into uncharted territory of implementing a creativity pedagogy at their university. They tell us, "we were much like Bonnie Tyler—living in the dark and wondering what would happen to the sparks our new powder keg was giving off."

The third article in this issue of JACE reminds readers of the scope and breadth of research in the artistic/ educational sphere, and of the ways in which knowledge and insight into creative and artistic practices can inform both artists and educators. Sallis, Anderson and Ewing,

the authors of *Young People's Theatre Attendance: Perspectives From Theatre Company Workers In The Theatrespace Project* are arts and drama educators working in the university sector in Australia. They turn their attention to the question of how young people engage with creative enterprises, in particular professional theatre and how this is supported and scaffolded (or otherwise) by educators and the theatre industry. Drawing on the findings from a major research project investigating young people's attendance at mainstream theatre in Australia, Sallis et al discuss the practical and pedagogical imperatives associated with young people attending theatre as part of their school experience, and they suggest that there are perhaps some unfulfilled opportunities in the nexus between theatre event and student engagement. In settings where the theatre professionals are seen as the 'creatives' and teachers are seen as the educators, the authors highlight that an emphasis on the gap between these two functions – the creative and the educational – can lead to a disconnect. I am reminded of a pertinent quote from Communications guru Marshall McLuhan: *Anyone who tries to make a distinction between education and entertainment doesn't know the first thing about either* (Marshall McLuhan).

Peter Gouzouasis and **Chris Regier,** also North American contributors to JACE, bring a deep understanding of two aligned research traditions to this issue: A/r/t/ography and autoethnography. A/r/t/ography frames research within the construct of artist – teacher – researcher in the exploration of educationally oriented enquiry. The authors Gouzouasis and Regier, as artists, educators and researchers, use an autoethnographic lens in considering questions of teaching, learning and love from the perspective of the music student and his teacher. Their story "examines, elaborates, and (de/re) constructs music making through the eyes, ears, heart, and mind of the young learner", but equally importantly, it draws on the personal and professional experiences of two researcher educators who are also musicians, in order to balance important questions of artistic learning with those of artistic pedagogy.

The concluding paper draws together many of the strands laid down in the earlier pieces in this issue. In their intimate exploration of creative practice employed as a method of inquiry, Crowhurst, Chancellor and Lemon, all tertiary educators, focus on the nature of education from an educator's perspective. They choose a fundamentally creative mode of inquiry to consider the generative and productive elements of their own reflective practices, to produce a model of research methodology which they have called 'collective arts-based methodology' (CABM). In doing so, they offer a critical, artistic meditation on personal educative practices. While not claiming to specifically pursue creative pedagogy or a/r/t/ography, these authors touch on both of these paradigms in this iteration of collaborative self-study (Samaras, 2010). In seeking to move the discourse about arts-based and arts informed research methodologies, Crowhurst, Lemon and Chancellor advocate for a 'collective' approach, which proposes that practitioner researchers are producers of knowledge and that the arts serve researchers as means to "explore, work through, clarify and communicate complex ideas and spaces" (Crowhurst et al).

This proposition is a fitting conclusion for this issue of JACE, as each paper and artwork (image, text, poetic) contributed to the journal does just this – explores, clarified and communicates complex ideas. I am indebted to the authors of this paper for reminding us of this.

Christine Sinclair
September, 2015

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DOUBT, AMBIVALENCE, AND CREATIVITY IN ACADEMIA

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ABSTRACT

Humanities and Social Science disciplines are fundamentally about people – fallible, uncertain, inquisitive, perverse, creative human beings - thus subjectivity, doubt, and ambiguity are not impediments to be overcome in such studies, but are approaches and strategies, to be used creatively. After contextualising notions of creativity itself with an overview of anthropological, mythic and philosophical perspectives, I consider certain means towards reinvigorating creative aspects of writing and research in the academy. These include the use of subjectivity, of apparently 'risky' departures from traditional scholarly writing, and of pleasure and play.

KEY TERMS: Creativity, subjectivity, play, Humanities and Social Science scholarship, creative research

Introduction

Creativity relies upon an interplay of senses and intellect, an imaginative and intellectual correspondence that cannot function in overly circumscribed environments, and may not necessarily answer to scientistically formulated criteria. Creative writing and research requires use of the personal, the subjective – which may be considered inaccurate and unreliable by those who require figures to recognise value. For a number of political and economic reasons beyond the scope of this essay, humanities and social science scholars increasingly find themselves gathering and then interpreting information by means of objective measures, when in fact the areas with which they deal might be better served by, for example, narrative or the use of a personal voice. These may enable the expression of, and access to, more profound truths about human beings than the scientism of quantitative approaches; thus in these pages we explore a number of approaches to writing and researching creatively. Firstly, however, it may be useful to look at the nature of creative process itself, presenting it as a liminal activity that occurs in ambivalent conditions and spaces. I then go on to discuss the importance of subjectivity, play, pleasure, and risk in academic praxis.

Creativity as a liminal activity: linking an anthropological model to creative and scholarly writing practice

An image of a space or condition in which creative activity can take place without constraint may be borrowed from van Gennep's anthropological model of liminality. Van Gennep (1960) outlined phases of initiation in tribal cultures; firstly, the initiand is separated from the group then enters a marginal area, the limen, before re-emerging to be reintegrated to the community. During this marginal phase, the 'liminar' is neither what he once was, nor yet what he will be. Or, as writer and educator Rob Pope might say, he is engaged in "a movement from 'the known' to 'the unknown'" (2005, p. 11). "Liminality," historian Ingvild Gilhus explains, "is basically

characterised by being without structure, but is the source and seedbed of positive structural assertions" (1984, p. 107). That is, this ambivalent territory is comprised of a kind of nourishing 'creative mulch' which contains future acts, artefacts, notions, *in potentia*.

We might draw a parallel between such symbolic ritual pursuits and the mental activity of a writer who is 'wool-gathering', in that both tribal initiand and writer enter a zone dominated by yet to be conceptualised ideas or impressions, hoping to emerge from this transitional period with a reinvigorated understanding of cultural, social or personal concerns. This creative 'inbetween' is the field in which we may be accosted by intuitions, by images, which may later become concepts or actions, pictures or words. It may be the 'fourth world' that novelist Dave Eggers imagines, where we go to "create the things that will happen" (2003, pp. 140-141). Entering this field involves more of quest driven by curiosity or wonder rather than a desire to satisfy a predetermined and clear-cut goal. It is also a place where objectivity must be temporarily deferred.

Creative subjectivity and ambivalence: mythic and philosophical models

Aisthesis – as opposed to aesthetics, or beauty - involves the exercise of physical, emotional and mental volitions simultaneously, an interplay of intellectual and instinctual impulses. Intellectual activity is enquiring and requires objective distance, but while it is in operation, one is alienated from the experience of total engagement with the task, unable to access what, in Jewish occult terms, has been referred to as "the first face of eros", which means "being fully present on the inside, traversing the chasm that separates subject and object". (Gafni, 2003) In this view, one must suspend objectivity to fully enter that liminal state, for this is the domain of Eros and participation in the erotic means entering "the inside of the moment, the text, the relationship..." (Gafni, 2003). There are similarities between descriptions of this liminal state and Roland Barthes' (1975) *The Pleasure of the Text*, where he suggests that rather than seeking a final meaning, one may 'drift' – a concept we will revisit later. Or,

as Nicholas O Pagan phrases it when trying to make Barthes, that "reveller in irrationality...face up to the rigors of logic": Barthes certainly has "a predilection for inconclusiveness and paradox" (Pagan, 2000, pp. 95-111).

Similar perceptions have been presented in the work of other writers and philosophers: James Hillman, renowned for his work in archetypal psychology, speaks of a space that exists "between outer tangible reality and inner states of mind" and of finding a means by which this gap may be traversed, as with the experience of tribal liminars (Hillman, 1977, pp. 67-68). Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, on the subject of creativity, describes a state of concentration so focused that it amounts to absolute absorption in an activity, a state he calls 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). So also with S.D. Conrad, whose phenomenological analysis of creative activity suggests that rather than trying to consciously push an idea towards resolution, "I wait ... there is the sense not of creating the story, but of watching it unfold. When it begins to roll, there is tremendous excitement, one is keyed up with a feeling of wild exhilaration. Everything clicks"(cited in Schulz, 2006, pp. 217-239). Time is required, in novelist Sue Woolfe's words, for "imaginative meandering and play" (2007, pp. 2-3) between conscious and unconscious, and during this time, rather than being *dis*tracted from reality, we are allowing ourselves to be attracted toward a dormant idea, or one not yet realised, like a grace note that, far from being superfluous, makes sense of the whole composition. Here, we avoid premature analysis or rationalisation, untimely concern with criticism or the concerns of readers or experts in our field of endeavour or enquiry. It is later, having exited this state of mind, that it is useful to re-engage the intellect to review and edit. It may then be submitted to the scrutiny of one's evaluative faculties and to the attention of others. Until then, instead of rigid deliberation and planning, one works with uncertainty, which can sometimes be a vehicle of transport towards the production of some surprising, possibly useful, potentially contentious or even domain-changing idea or object.

Uncertainty and subjectivity in critical and creative writing processes

When investigating information research practices, Theresa Anderson (2011) discusses the productive aspects of uncertainty in her field. She found that "dealing with inconsistencies, favouring chance, random stimulation", supported creativity, as did allowing apparently peripheral and "seemingly discontinuous" information into the process; that is, "engaging with inconsistencies or speculative material: information which we might consider imperfect or ambiguous" stimulated divergent thinking and therefore, creativity (Anderson, 2011, n.p.). Rather than having one's creative and critical faculties suborned to acquisition of immediate, quantifiable objectives, the writer benefits from participating in ambivalent space between certainties. As a liminal activity, creativity depends of finding an *aisthetic* balance between intellect and intuition.

Uncertainty is an essential aspect of creativity - not simply a difficult phase to be borne before coming out into the blessed light of certitude. It is, in Eric Eisenberg's phrasing, "a source of possibility and potential action" (2006, p. 540). In explicating the relationship between uncertainty and creativity, Nicholas Burbules (2000) focuses on Plato's 'transitional stage', or *aporia*, that moment when we admit that we are stuck at an intellectual impasse. This, he claims is "the moment ... where a clean terrain now exists for the reconstruction of knowledge" (Burbules, 2000, p.172). Although one may experience the feeling as paralyzing, it is here - in Turner's "realm of primitive hypothesis" (1967, p.106) - that we are forced to work with the possibilities of accident, of chance, and to seek what Matisse has called "the desire of the line" (cited in Flam, 1995, p. 48). Matisse was discussing visual art, but the image may be applied to writing: one may follow a linear direction of thought, or one may enter a system of interconnections that Deleuze and Guattari (1983) have described as 'rhizomatic'; that is, like a root system, branching out as it spreads through this fertile in-between ground, and which Burbules likens to the process of surfing the Net, creating sense from the mass of possibilities through the links one makes between them.

The connections one chooses to make – why this nub or node and not that? Why this direction and not another? – will depend on the subjectivities of the author, or maze-navigator.

Nevertheless, there is ongoing debate regarding subjectivity in scholarly research. An early but exemplary case is outlined in Pagan's (2000) analysis of Raymond Picard's 1964 attack on Roland Barthes, when Picard claimed that Barthes should be censured for "taking literary criticism along a questionable 'new' path" rather than focusing on "objectively verifiable meaning." Where Picard argued for objectivity, Barthes saw criticism as a creative endeavour that was bound up with the critic's subjectivities. The scholarly context was literary criticism, but the arguments relate to other areas of the humanities where distinctions have formed between what Barthes framed as the 'interpretive' and the 'academic', with the interpretive allowing for contingency, and traditional academia following a scientistic approach so as to satisfy the demands of logic which, Pagan (2000) insists would 'enhance' the status of criticism. However, he fails to explain in whose eyes it would be enhanced, or to what end, but seems to accept that logic is somehow worthy of greater respect than, for instance, playfulness.

Linking play and the erotics of writing, and considering its opposite: boredom

Here I would first like to exercise some rhizomatic connections across disciplines, beginning with Rob Pope, who has written extensively on the relation of creative and critical writing practice, and whose principal pedagogic strategy is of re-writing - or "challenging and changing" texts. Pope insists that to "play around ... to intervene, and then try to account for the exact effect of what you have done" leads to a strong understanding of how the text works. (Pope, 1995, p.1) Re-writing places the reader, as Ron Carter puts it in his introduction to Pope's book, "on the inside of the text." This turn of phrase echoes - rather fascinatingly - Rabbi Gafni (2003) describing the condition of being "on the inside of the moment, the text..." wherein he asserts we may experience the erotic life force itself. And yet another (though

less numinously-charged) connection may be made between this evocation and the claim of media critic, Brian Ott, (2004) that "it is vital to affirm that an erotics of reading is a critical *practice* … not a critical methodology" for there is, he tells us, "no surer way to kill a piece of research … than Method" (p. 202). His idea might in turn be linked to ethnographer Laurel Richardson's discussion not of reading, but of writing, and her insistence on writing *itself* being the method of inquiry – rather than being consigned to a formulaic report composed at the end of the research process.

Pope's re-writing is one strategy, and another well worth mentioning for its merging of analytic, reflective and creative writing skills, is the use of reflective learning journals. Employing Winnicott's (1971) idea of 'transitional space', Phyllis Creme describes journaling as "a form of writing that stands in between life narrative and the university essay … that enables adult play and creative activity" (2008, p. 49). In my experience of teaching postgraduate students, presenting journals as places for freewriting first and critique later enables the chance to tease out ideas before formulating them into more conventional forms. Here, rationality and argument supported by evidence meet narrative in a week by week exploration of ideas alongside metacognitive analysis of students' own progress. Journals can foster students' confidence and creativity in experimenting with concepts, working their way through cultural paradoxes, sifting through the material they're trying to pack into their brains, or seeking "the desire of [their] line" of thought without anxiety about whether they're right or wrong. It is, after all, hard to "be genuinely critical [when one is overly concerned with] 'getting it right' for examiners" (Creme, 2008, p. 52). The journals are a creative space "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1987) where we are allowed, in poet John Keats words, "to be in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason"(Keats, Gittings, & Mee, 2002).

Laurel Richardson writes on the subject of dullness of much of the prose within her discipline, ethnography, claiming that the topics themselves may be fascinating, but the books lack vitality.

She laments the problem that although social scientists could be reaching a wider audience, instead they speak to a few professionals. Thus, she suggests that instead of 'writing up a report' according to static, scientistic models, that the writing itself ought to be seen as a creative process that is at once interpretive and reflective. Richardson discusses the practice of what she calls 'evocative representation' which might include autoethnography or ethnographic fiction or poetic representation. She sees it as a "striking way of seeing through and beyond so-called scientific naturalisms ... by a playful thinking that is more compelling than the rigor of science." (Richardson, 1994). Effectively, she is advocating a kind of liminal approach where poetry becomes "a *practical* and *powerful* method of analysing social worlds."

Such learning and teaching strategies and attitudes are means towards reinvigorating academic writing that otherwise may run the risk of becoming a joyless task; or that may reduce the act of reading to mere 'consumption' – as Roland Barthes has warned. If this happens, we are confronted with that existential monster who, often as not, manifests itself as boredom - and "to be bored means one cannot produce the text, play it, release it, make it go" (Barthes, cited in Pagan, 2000).

Brian Ott laments that "despite its many variations, critical theory ... has, I fear, become stagnant ... even stereotypical" (2004, p. 2). Perhaps, if this is so, it is due to what we might refer to as a problem of 'frock dearth'. To explain: in *Looking for fun in cultural science,* Alan McKee (2008) contrasts Guns and Frocks as a metaphor he came across in an interview with a *Dr Who* author. The author refers to a tension between two main groups of *Dr Who* fans: those in favour of more science and blowing things up (the 'Guns') and those keen on emphasising the playful and ironic aspects of the show, (or 'Frocks,' who thought that the series was taking itself too seriously, when actually, the fun is every bit as important as exterminating daleks). McKee extends this image to describe tension between attitudes to seriousness and pleasure within his field. Indeed, pleasure in writing and reading, and a respect for subjective strategies of communication

are essential in the humanities where a greater emphasis on a kind of frock/gun meld in academic discourse would be enlivening.

Ott (2004) mentions the argument that "contemporary critical media studies … has attacked the pleasure of language's structuring function while simultaneously repressing the pleasure of language's dismantling function" (p. 194). He refers to Barthes' concepts of 'cruising' and 'drifting' as ways to approach textual play, and explicates these concepts by relating them to the way children approach play with particular emphasis on transforming rules themselves into a game. Barthes, he reminds us, would have critics engage imaginatively and experiment with a text, to drift "in the space, the gap, the seam between language as structured and language as infinite" (Ott, 2004, p. 205). This gap creates two surfaces, two edges —"one, a conformist edge, the language as culture decrees its use, the other, a subversive edge, the violation of convention." (Barthes, 1975, p. 6) It is this gap that opens the space for the critic to engage in what Robert Ivie terms 'productive criticism', a creative process that "originates insight … It manufactures practical wisdom rather than deriving conclusions from observed phenomena. It's active, not passive, intelligence" (Ivie, cited in Ott, 2004). Thus, regardless of discipline, rather than privileging the analytic over the creative, conscious analysis over intuitive playfulness, work over 'drifting' or 'musing', or 'Guns' over 'Frocks', we might instead advocate an interplay of these apparent contraries. After all, an ability to find a balance "between the irrational and the rational … between passion and discipline", as Csikszentmihalyi found, were common traits among creative people he interviewed, as was the capacity to keep openness and critical judgment in "constantly shifting" balance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, pp. 263-264).

While creativity is used to solve problems, or to reach pre-determined goals, it is not advisable to see it solely as a means to an end or as a product for evaluation. If we do, it then becomes an anodyne performance concerned with bright people coming up with revised versions of ideas or artefacts in their particular areas of expertise – whether the field is academic or industrial. Creative verve is a

dynamic force. It may be utilised, but utility as a goal constrains what Raymond Williams (cited in Milligan, 2007) called a "struggle at the roots of the mind" (p.73). One cannot necessarily predict its results: creativity is a risky business.

Objectivity, subjectivity, and risky departures from traditional scholarly writing

Legal studies professor Dennis Fox points out that the emphasis on objective, quantitative approaches to research can inhibit the production of analyses that can lead to changes in the domains of politics or social science, which is in fact antithetic to any kind of creative practice. Furthermore, Fox claims that it is 'the pose of objectivity' masking the personal, which dampens the fervor that initially motivates researchers to enter into controversial territory. In other words, the creative strategy of risk taking is essential to good scholarship, when 'good' means an impulse towards making positive changes in the public realm (Fox, 2009, pp. 152-153).

Strategies that attend to both subjectivities and objectivities are, however, more apparent in other disciplines. For instance, feminist philosopher Anna Gibbs, refers to the early work of Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous for inspiration towards a form of writing that enables the writer "to both theorise and to dramatise the nature of the relationship between women and philosophy" (Gibbs, 2003, p. 309). Feminist fictocritical writing, utilising subjectivity, was taken up by anthropologist, Michael Taussig, who became a polarising figure in the late 1980s with the publication of *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild* Man (1987) a study of atrocities committed against South American Indians by rubber traders in the nineteenth century.

Taussig perceived a rupture between the thing in itself – torture and monstrous abuse of human beings by other human beings - and the way it has been narrated by more traditional scholars. He found that removing the monstrosity from discussion of terror; that is, speaking of it - or even attempting to think of it in a purely dispassionate way - failed to provide a truthful understanding of what it means to the

victims, the perpetrators, the scholars who record and document it, or to the readers of those documents. Thus, rather than putting aside his ambiguous reactions of repulsion and fascination when researching ways to write against terror, he decided to use his personal responses as key to understanding the violence, and to write about terror in a way that would not sacrifice truthfulness to accuracy. Taussig utilised subjective accounts alongside authorised reports so as to tell a true story. He writes, 'The meticulous historian might seize upon the stories and fragments of stories ... to winnow out truth from distortion, reality from illusion, fact from myth ... Alternatively, we can listen to these stories neither as fiction nor as disguised signs of truth, but as *real'* (Taussig, 1987, p. 75 italics mine).

My purpose here is to highlight that a refusal to engage personally and creatively, and to take risks in research, may represent a failure of imagination that does a disservice to scholarship and its purported aim of truth-telling. Given that all writing genres are fundamentally concerned with the development and communication of ideas, if one overlooks subjectivity in conceiving or interpreting ideas the resultant work may not only lack the life with which it might otherwise be endowed, but may actually be grossly misleading.

Conclusion

This discussion was based on the assumption that creativity involves a movement away from the familiar towards the unfamiliar; that it means refreshing and as well as extending knowledge, and that this refreshment is inhibited if we are compelled to work within overly constraining expectations – of ourselves and of others. I looked at creativity from a number of different angles so as to provide a broad understanding of the cultural role of creativity and ultimately, of how this it may be treated within the context of teaching and learning. In order to teach creativity – and to teach creatively - it is necessary to align creative and critical skills.

Creativity we have seen as a process that, in Yeats' phrasing, occurs "between the conception and the creation", and that while here on

"inside of the moment, the text, the relationship..." we may experience what we referred to as "the first face of eros" (Gafni, 2003). Hillman's notion of a space between inner and outer reality was likened to Sue Woolfe's place for 'musing' and 'sifting,' which was seen as akin to Barthes' 'drifting,' which in turn was paralleled with Victor Turner's discussion of the liminal experience of tribal initiates. Indeed, Brian Ott references Turner's classification of "such fleeting, fragmentary, and imaginative forms of play as 'liminoid phenomena' because they exist in/at a threshold, 'an interval, however brief, of *margin* or *limen*, when the past is momentarily negated ... and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance'" (Ott, 2004, p. 204).

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IN SEARCH OF AN EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT FOR AN INTRODUCTORY COURSE IN APPLIED CREATIVE THINKING: AN ON-GOING EXPERIMENT

ABSTRACT

CRE 101, the introductory course in Eastern Kentucky University's (EKU) new Minor in Applied Creative Thinking (MACT), needed to be assessed after it was taught for the first time in Fall 2012. Unfortunately, the domain-general field of creative thinking is so new that model assessments were non-existent, so an assessment instrument was created and evaluated against the course's student learning outcomes. Results of the initial assessment generally indicated a growth in relevant skills and knowledge.

KEY TERMS: creativity, assessment, creative thinking, assessing creative thinking

Introduction

I don't know what to do, and I'm always in the dark.
We're living in a powder keg and giving off sparks.
(Bonnie Tyler, *Total Eclipse of the Heart)*

Creativity has become a hot-button educational concern. Internationally, countries once part of the old British Empire have made its being taught integral to national policy. In the United States, the creative campus initiative has drawn much higher education interest. At Eastern Kentucky University, evolving our Quality Enhancement Plan[1] of developing informed critical and creative thinkers and inspired by meeting with creativity scholar, Erica McWilliam, reading her book *The Creative Workforce* (2008) as well as some of her other writings, and even collaborating with her on a couple of articles, we created a new 18-hour Minor in Applied Creative Thinking (MACT) that consists of six hours in domain-general courses and 12-hours in domain-specific courses from across the campus. MACT is administrated through Eastern Kentucky University's (EKU) Noel Studio for Academic Creativity, which was also tasked with creating the two required domain-general courses: the Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking (CRE 101) and the capstone, Creative Projects (CRE 400).

In developing the courses, we recognised the importance of assessing their effectiveness. In fact, since the publication of *Academically Adrift* (Arum & Roksa, 2011), higher education has been put on notice as to how little American college students have improved their skills in critical thinking and writing as well as the general importance of assuring learning. For a number of reasons, however, especially the newness of our enterprise, we were much like Bonnie Tyler—living in the dark and wondering what would happen to the sparks our new powder keg was giving off. Still, when preparing the first iteration of the course in Fall 2012, we knew we minimally needed to design a

[1] The QEP: Quality Enhancement Plan is mandated by our accrediting agency

pre- and post- instrument as at least a partial assessment of our CRE 101 students. In retrospect, although our intentions were good, we were hindered by a number of forces:

1) the aforementioned newness of the minor and the course;

2) the relative newness of creative thinking studies in general and domain-general courses specifically (i.e., in the past, domains such as psychology might teach creativity their way, while education and business looked at such courses in other discipline-specific ways);

3) the lack of research in such courses as the introductory, domain-general CRE 101 (e.g., little preliminary data on whether this field is best assessed through the person, press, product, or process); and

4) the lack of background in creativity studies by the MACT creators (and authors of this article), especially in matters of assessment (two of the directors came from a creative writing-faculty development background, while the other was in his second year of helming the newly-developed Noel Studio for Academic Creativity; even our graduate student was from outside the field of applied creative thinking).

Nonetheless, to demonstrate the viability of CRE 101—i.e., its students were not academically adrift, but improving their applied creative thinking knowledge and skills—we created an assessment instrument. First, we developed a pre-test that we gave to 18 students in the opening moments of the first session of the CRE 101 class; second, the same test was also given to those who attended the class' final meeting. While the Pre- and Post-Test combination was not the only metric (we also had tests, quizzes, exercises, transcripts of work sessions, and an end-of-the-semester project), we have tried to determine what this initial assessment suggests about our students' improvement in creative thinking.

Review of Literature

Before developing our test combination, we surveyed the field. Obviously, as this class was not intended for a population of gifted students, we focused more on so-called "little c" creativity and therefore did not opt to use major assessment instruments (cost was, of course, a factor) such as the Torrance Tests for Creative Thinking or the Consensual Assessment Technique (CAT), wherein experts rate the amount of creativity on a scale. "Little c" assessment is informal, has no specified test, but is undertaken to render a judgment on the four Ps–a person, process, product, or press. We began with several works in the field: Carpenter, Sweet, & Blythe's *Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking* (2012); Kaufman, Plucker, & Baer's *Essentials of Creativity Assessment* (2008); and Plucker & Makel's "Assessment of Creativity" in *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity*. Unfortunately, despite their reputation and general thoroughness, none of the works dealt with assessing course Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) in creativity. In fact, most of the assessing contained therein was focused on the creative product.

We turned to various articles that revealed other disciplines were encountering some similar problems in assessment. Kohl (2011) discusses developing an instrument for measuring creativity in physics. Mishra, Henriksen, & the Deep-Play Research Group (2013) explore a similar problem, assessing artifacts (e.g., lesson plans) in educational technology. Horng & Lin (2009) document developing a scale for evaluating creative culinary products. Oman, Tumer, Wood, & Seepersad (2013) focus on methods of assessing creative products in engineering design. Sternberg (2012) comes close to a universal assessment instrument by detailing what-if essay questions that he believes appropriate for a range of courses from those in literature, language, physics, political science, music, and linguistics. Ultimately, we found ourselves agreeing with Koestler (1970) that "the criteria for judging the finished product differ of course from one medium to another" (p. 200).

Our Assessment

In developing our assessment, we had several general factors to consider.

Informality: we wished to avoid traditional psychometric assessments that we neither truly understood nor could afford.

Brevity: in order to encourage students to do something that did not count for their grade, we wanted an instrument that could be undertaken in 10-15 minutes.

Supplementality: this pre- and post- combination was only part of the way we evaluated our students' progress or lack thereof.

Measurability: we wanted an instrument that we could actually code to interpret it, and we wanted a combination of quantitative and qualitative factors.

Dual Focus on Knowledge and Skills: we wrote the course textbook to focus on background knowledge that led to the development of skills, so we wanted our assessment to focus on both knowledge and skills.

Simplicity: not being experts in the field, we wanted an assessment that we could understand.

Avoidance of Press and Product: as our students were a mixture of majors and classes as well as high school backgrounds, we weren't concerned with their previous learning environments. Moreover, as they had no pre-class product and would be creating a class project that would be evaluated separately, we did not want to ask about product.

Another group of important factors key to our new instrument was the course's Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)—what the student is expected to know, be able to do, and value of the course's conclusion. Here is the course description as it appears in the syllabus:

> The Introduction to Applied Creativity course establishes a foundation in creative thinking through instruction in basic theories and practices. Students will develop fluency in basic language and fundamental and powerful concepts of creativity studies.

Among the six course SLOs were the following two:

Upon completion of the course, students will 1) demonstrate knowledge of the basic vocabulary and concepts of creativity study and 2) apply the design of the creative process to educational experiences and the creative endeavor generally.

> The main goal of our assessment, then, was to answer two basic questions: are students leaving CRE 101 more knowledgeable about creative thinking, and are they better able to skillfully apply that knowledge than when they entered? To assess the first SLO ("knowledge"), questions 1-4 were developed, and to assess the second SLO ("apply the design"), questions 5-6 were created.

The Assessment Instrument

Before the start of the Fall 2012 semester, we developed the following six-question instrument to focus on each person's knowledge and skills with each student's creative **process** being part of that skill set. In addition to true/false and short-answer questions, the survey also asked students to create visual representations using two figures, drawing from visual exercises to assess skills related to creative concepts of piggybacking, for example.

The assessment instrument is as follows:

CRE 101 Assessment—Pre-Course & Post-Course

1A) I would consider myself a creative thinker.
T F

1B) Why or why not?

2) Provide a one-sentence definition of creativity.

3) Define the concept of piggybacking in one sentence and provide an example of how it can be used to facilitate creative thinking.

4) Define the concept of perception shift in one sentence and provide an example of how it can be used to facilitate creative thinking.

5) List as many uses of a paper clip as possible in the space below.

6) Complete the drawings for A and B.

The Rubric

As mentioned, the students were given the CRE 101 assessment on the first day of class, and again on the last day of class. The initial number of students in the class was 18; however, due to students preparing their final projects for the end-of-semester showcase, the number of post-tests received was only 10. To account for the difference, percentages were used in the results to accommodate the different base numbers.

Due to the qualitative nature of several items on the survey, the responses were coded, and answers were given a numerical "score" to determine a right or wrong answer. For instance, question number 3 has two parts: to define piggybacking and to provide an example of how it can be used in creative thinking. The elements of piggybacking involve using a pre-existing idea to build upon and develop a new or different idea. The three words we were looking for in the students' answers were "idea", "build, add, change, etc.," and "new" or "different." If the student included all three elements of the definition, s/he received a score of 3. If a student mentioned only one or two of these words, s/he received a score of 1 or 2, and a definition that did not include any of the words led to a 0. A score of 1 was also added if the student provided an example, regardless of the answer's accuracy.

Question 5 and 6 were assessed differently. Question 5 asks students to list as many uses of a paperclip as possible; ultimately, the number of uses were counted and used as the student's score for that answer. For question 6 A and B, students were asked to complete two drawings of abstract shapes, which required students to generate visual iterations and interpretations. Moreover, the drawings asked students to formulate complete ideas visually so that they were interpretable by the assessment team.

Results and Discussion

The CRE 101 assessment instrument provided a useful means to gauge the students' preconceptions about topics in creativity. As seen in Table 1 and throughout the figures presented in this section, the students' perceptions changed quite a bit throughout the course. At first, nearly all students felt they were creative individuals, yet only 22% of the students used the word "try" when describing why they were creative (Figure 1). As we saw in the post-test, all students felt they were creative in the end; however, the percent of students who used the word "try" in describing why decreased to only 10%. This phenomenon might indicate improved confidence; at the end of the course students felt that their attempts at new things were more studied, less "shots in the dark."

Questions		Pre-test	Post-test
1.a	"I am creative"	94%	100%
1.b	Used the word "try" when explaining creativity	22%	10%
2	Adequately defined creativity	22%	73%
3.a	Adequately defined "Piggybacking"	46%	73%
3.b	Provided an example of Piggybacking	33%	70%
4.a	Adequately defined "Perception Shift"	50%	50%

4.b	Provided an example of Perception Shift	55%	40%
5	Average number of uses for a paperclip	6.88	6.40

Table 1: Results of CRE 101 pre and post-course assessment

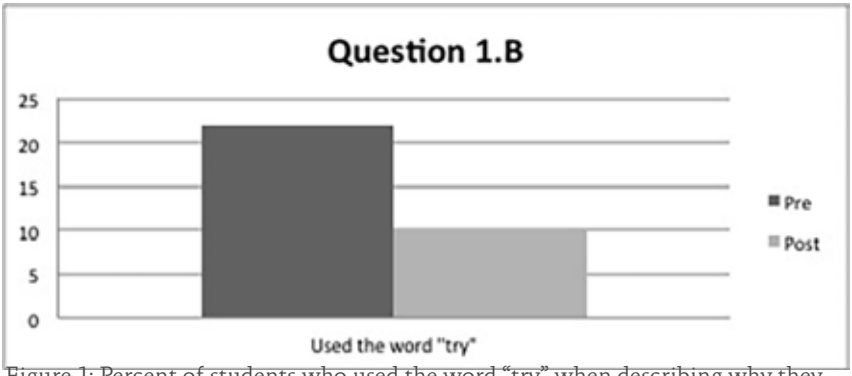

Figure 1: Percent of students who used the word "try" when describing why they are creative.

Mindful of Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow's (2004) admonition that a failure to precisely define creativity accounts for a preponderance of myths and stereotypes about the subject, we asked students to define creativity (along with two topics related to creativity). For the definition of creativity, we were looking for whether students mentioned two universally accepted factors in creativity, "new/different" and "useful." If a student included these two terms in the definition, it was considered a correct response. Figure 2 shows an increase from only 22% of students who could correctly define creativity in the pre-test, to 73% in the post-test. This response indicates growth in knowledge and terminology.

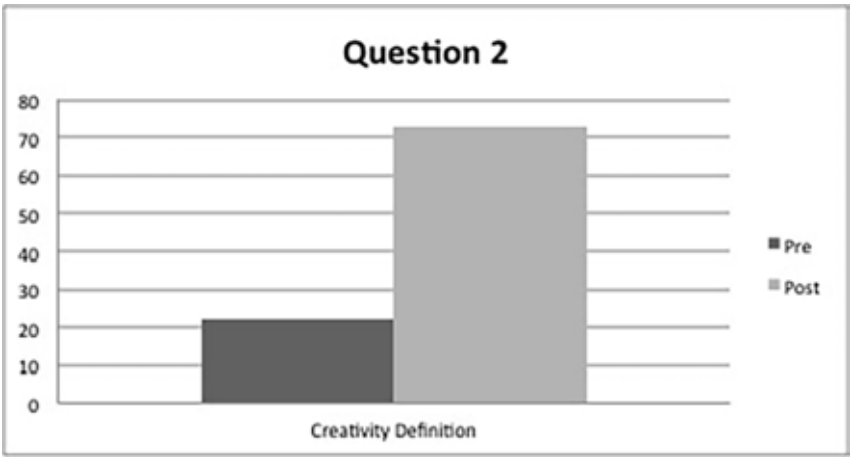

Figure 2: Percent of students who adequately defined creativity.

Questions 3 (a) and (b) asked students not only to provide a definition, but also an example of how piggybacking could be used in creative thinking. Piggybacking, a creative concept that can be performed independently by students, is a cornerstone of the pre- and post-assessment. Students can also show their knowledge of piggybacking through a paper-driven assessment. As mentioned above, scores were based on coded values of important words related to the correct definition, while any attempt to provide an example was considered a correct response. Figure 3 shows the increase from 46% of correct responses to 73% from the pre-test to the post-test definition of piggybacking. Subsequently, an increase in the number of the students who could provide an example of piggybacking from 33% in the beginning of the course to 73% at the end of the course indicated a fuller knowledge of one of the course (and minor's) fundamental and powerful concepts.

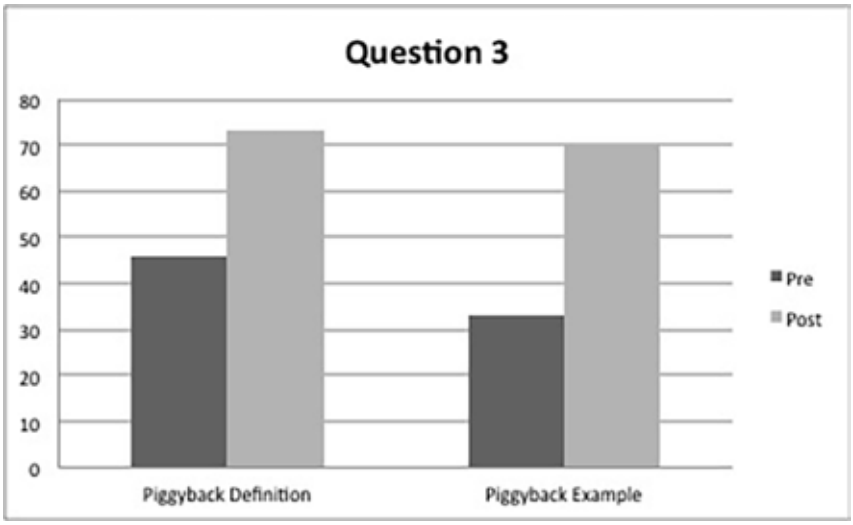

Figure 3: Percent of students who adequately defined piggybacking and provided an example.

Similarly, for questions 4 (a) and (b) students were asked to define and provide an example of the term perception shift. Figure 4 shows no change in the accurate definition of perception shift from the pre and post-tests (50%). However, students were less able to provide an example in the post-test than they were in the pre-test as seen by the decrease from 55% in the pre-test to 40% in the post-test. This result may simply reflect the decreased post-test N or indicate the course's need to concentrate more on this concept and its implementation.

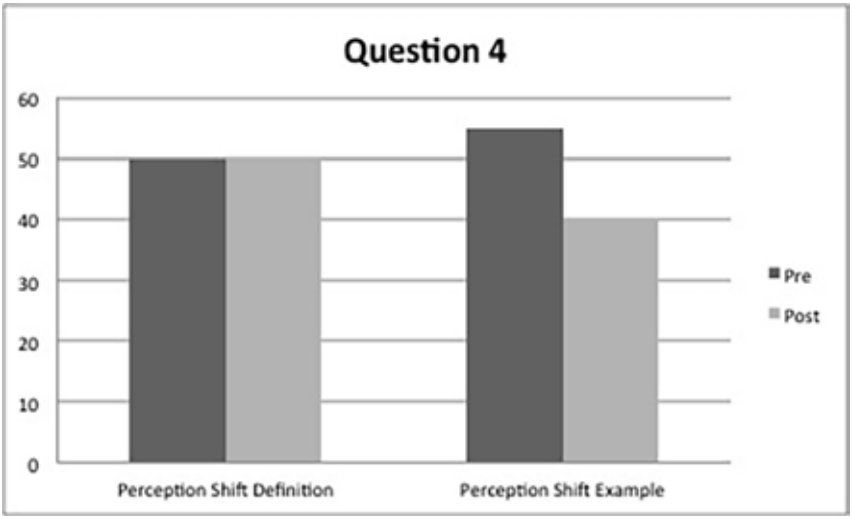

Figure 4: Percent of students who adequately defined perception shift and provided an example.

Questions 5 and 6 were focused more on application of creative thinking and asked students to display their creativity rather than their knowledge or attitudes. In question 5, we asked students to list as many uses for paper clips as they could think of. As indicated in figure 5, not much change occurred from the pre- to post-test, with a small decrease from an average of 6.88 uses in the pre-test, to 6.40 in the post-test. This result may indicate that students were more critical of their answers than they were in the pre-test. However, it might also suggest that students felt more comfortable with the material during the post-test than in the pre-test and did not find the questions as intellectually and creatively challenging.

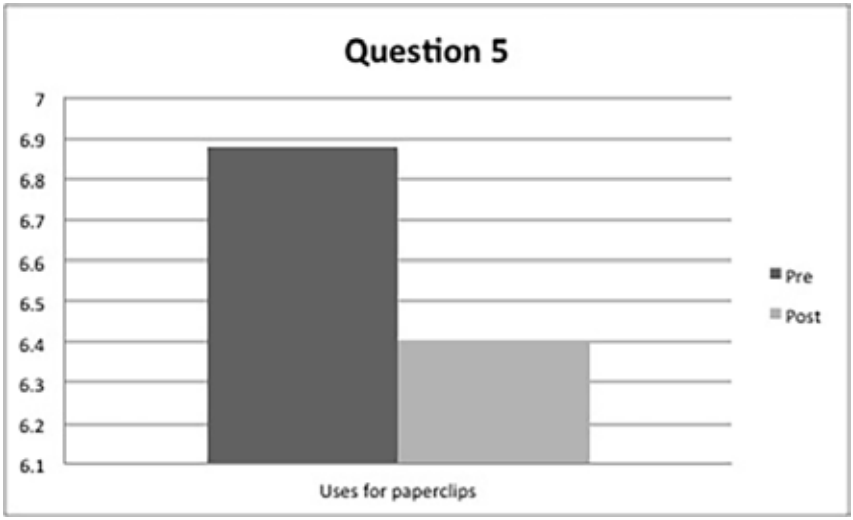

Figure 5: Average listed uses for paperclips

Finally, question 6 asked students, when provided two seemingly unrelated shapes, to complete the drawings. In the post-test, students often found interesting, visually engaging ways to arrange the shapes in relation to one another. Students were able to see connections and possibilities not previously revealed. These questions were intended to assess a different set of skills among students—including play.

The challenge of measuring the amount of growth from the pre-test to the post-test for the drawings exercise was to determine criteria and appropriate scoring based on those criteria. As such, the drawings were assessed by the following scale:

1 = drawing not attempted

2 = drawing is distinct

3 = drawing is complex

4 = drawing is elaborated (as opposed to stereotypical object without background)

5 = drawing possesses a sense of character/environment or is 3-dimensional

6 = drawing develops a new universe.

Figure 6 shows the differences in scores on drawings A and B from the pre-test and the post-test based on the criteria listed above.

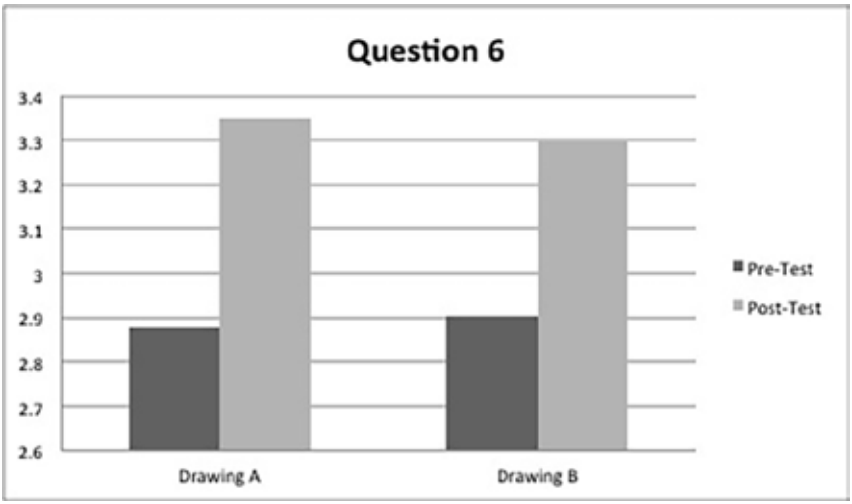

Figure 6: Average scores of students' pre and post-test drawings

The results indicate a development from simple and stereotypical images from the beginning of the semester to complex, dynamic, and elaborative creations by the end of the semester. Students often associated drawing or doodling with the creative concept of play, sometimes considered to be unstructured free or "fun" time. Unlike the others, this question might not have carried associated pressures of generating a "correct" answer or "enough" content. Although challenging to calculate, open space intended to facilitate visual

idea generation can serve as an important indicator in the creative-thinking course. It requires that students create a visual concept—or ideation—using their own creative thinking. Throughout the course, students are asked to develop ideas visually, at times brainstorming and in other cases sketching their concepts before they create them. Drafting took on new forms and often led to the design of prototypes.

Looking Ahead

Obviously, our instrument was only one part of our assessment, and just as obviously it has shortcomings. Perhaps the best indicator of our students' progress in the course was their sometimes amazing projects (e.g., one student created a web application--an app--to help students mix and match clothing), but, on the other hand, we had no comparable pre-course item to the project so as to measure progress (if that's even possible). Future iterations of the assessment will incorporate 1) additional reflection that allows for further analysis on the creative process of students in the course, 2) a low-tech, pre-test project, and 3) a more detailed portfolio process that will assist us in tracking students' creative development over time. Ongoing assessment at milestone stages throughout the CRE 101 course will allow us to archive creative projects while also assessing the decisions and developments students make during each project. By integrating a project-based portfolio assessment with the assessment discussed here, we might better connect and explore students' creative development.

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YOUNG PEOPLE'S THEATRE ATTENDANCE: PERSPECTIVES FROM THEATRE COMPANY WORKERS IN THE *THEATRESPACE* PROJECT

ABSTRACT

This article examines some of the key views that theatre workers hold about why young people, especially those in schools, do or don't go to the theatre. It considers how views held by theatre personnel about young people's theatre attendance informs theatre company programming and marketing and how such views may foster or restrict young people's engagement with their programs. The article draws on data and associated findings from the four-year *TheatreSpace* research project, which focussed on the theatre attendance of young people (aged 14-30) including those in schools. It focuses particularly on those young people who were attending school during the study and highlights that there is some disconnect between key theatre personnel and these young people given that teachers are often the major decision-makers in their theatre-going experience.

KEY TERMS: theatre; young people; teachers; curriculum; theatre workers; theatre programming and marketing.

Introduction

This article examines the perspectives of theatre personnel from partner theatre companies in the *TheatreSpace*[1] research project relating to the attendance of young people to productions in their performance programs. As such it presents a snapshot of the beliefs that creatives[2] and those in administrative positions in theatre companies hold regarding why young people, especially those in schools, do or don't go to the theatre. It was found that such viewpoints are either borne from personal experience or informed by internal market research. Given that these viewpoints directly influence programming, marketing and advertising decisions made by theatre companies, it is important to critically examine this decision making process including how particular plays and other events are targeted for young people. The data also suggests some disconnect between young people at school and theatre programmers given the critical role played by teachers in making decisions about their theatre going experiences.

Initially a brief review of relevant literature sets the stage for an outline of the *TheatreSpace* Project and the methodological approach. Key findings around the major elements concerning the attitudes of theatre workers to young theatre goers that emerged from the study are then discussed.

Review of Literature

In his report *Australians and the Arts*, Paul Costantoura (2000) notes that any discussion about theatre activity in Australia must take into account young people as a particular theatre-going demographic with particular needs, likes and dislikes. According to Brown and Novak (2007) a better understanding of young people's theatre attendance is vital and warrants closer scrutiny by those both within and outside of the theatre industry given young people are to be found in most

[1] *TheatreSpace* was an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage funded project, which ran from 2009-2012. The investigators were from The University of Melbourne, The University of Sydney and Griffith University.

[2] That is, those who are involved in the artistic development of theatrical productions.

theatre audiences. In their study, young people comprised 7%-29% of the theatre audience. Similarly, Reason (2006) argues that research into youth as audience members is long overdue. He suggests that such inquiries need to examine how young people participate in theatre activity and what they find engaging or disengaging. He stresses the importance of student entitlement to theatre and that students can experience a negative response to live performances when they perceive a lack of ownership of the physical theatre space and the activity that takes place there (2006, p. 230).

For many young people theatre attendance occurs as a mandatory school excursion and therefore it is the curriculum and teachers that are often mediators and facilitators of the experience (Sinclair and Adams, 2011). Teachers and curriculum requirements appear to have a significant influence on how students 'read' the theatre experience (2011, p.72). The *TheatreSpace* project found that many theatre companies target their programs to teachers. Aside from parents, siblings and peers, teachers are amongst the key decision-makers when it comes to young people's theatre attendance and it is usually with them rather than students that theatre companies liaise.

Theatre administrators responsible for programming theatre for young audiences articulated a range of motivations for their choices including: cultural reinforcement of hegemonic values; an educative role to consolidate societal norms and values through theatre; and, as an exercise in marketing (Sinclair, 2006, p.14). Those responsible for programming must attract new audiences and this involves marketing directly to these new potential attendees and 'rewarding' those who respond to such invitations (Brown and Novak, 2007, p.20).

Fallens (2002) examined and compared the marketing and programming decisions pertaining to audience development of a youth market (18 – 35 years in her study) within the international Arts community. She recommends that "arts administrators and executives who make decisions for an audience they do not understand and are out of touch with" need educating about young audience members. She also suggests that theatre personnel should

create "specific programming aimed at the youth market" (Fallens, 2002, pp. 26-27). Similarly, Brown and Novak argue that those who program live performance events can often have well entrenched beliefs, which underpin their decision-making and which are not evidence based or critically challenged (2007, p.5). They assert that until recently theatre personnel have lacked "reliable information about the impacts of their programming decisions on a regular basis in a way that would enhance, not subvert, their programming choices" (2007, p. 40).

The *TheatreSpace* project aimed to:

- assist theatre-makers and programmers to understand what attracts young people throughout and beyond school years to live performance, and what are the inhibiting or exclusory factors;
- provide an evidence base to assist public arts and cultural agencies to develop *new and better informed* policies;
- produce findings to assist performing arts companies and educators to develop *improved* policies, programming choices and practices for theatre for young people, thus redressing the lack of youth-oriented policies and practices in this field

(*TheatreSpace*, 2012, p.6).

Background: The *TheatreSpace* Project

TheatreSpace: Accessing the cultural conversation was a four year large-scale, longitudinal study (2009-12) that investigated the responses of young people to live theatre performances by flagship theatre companies and cultural centres in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. The central research questions of this Australian Research Council Linkage project were:

- What attracts, engages and sustains young people of school age and post-schooling to theatre in major performance venues?
- Why do some young people choose not to engage and what factors might exclude them?

The research explored the theatre experiences of young people aged between fourteen and thirty years of age from diverse backgrounds. In-depth case studies of specific theatre productions identified by the industry partners in major performing arts venues provided a central focus for this research project which examined the cultural choices that young people make or that adults, including teachers, make for them. It also investigated young people's real and perceived access to major theatre arts providers. This article focuses particularly on the young people in schools who are also theatre goers and the decisions made about programming and marketing by theatre companies to this demographic.

The main participants in the *TheatreSpace* research project were: young people, including those in schools who attended one or more of the case study performances; teachers; family members and friends of young people who came to the theatre during the project; and creatives and other theatre personnel who were employed by the partner theatre companies. As part of the *TheatreSpace* research, theatre personnel were interviewed on a range of topics related to young people, especially those in schools, attending performances produced by their respective companies. Views were captured from staff working in areas such as programming, marketing and education (school liaison). Issues relating to attracting youth audiences to theatre productions were a particular focus. There were three types of partner theatre organisations in the *TheatreSpace* project: main stage theatre companies; large performing or 'arts centre' venues that schedule/commission works by other companies, and one Theatre for Young People (TYP) company.

Methodological approach

TheatreSpace was a $3.3-million dollar Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project. Funding for the project included cash contributions from the ARC, eleven of the thirteen Industry Partners and some additional direct funding from two of the universities. There were two main research strands in the *TheatreSpace* project: individual case studies that were integrated through national cross-

case analysis and a longitudinal component conducted across the eastern states of Australia: Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. These states represent 72% of Australia's population. Both strands involved qualitative and quantitative data gathering and analysis.

Twenty-one case studies of performance events were undertaken with industry partner theatre companies and venues. A case study research night or matinee performance was selected in most cases by the partner theatre company. The performances were, where possible, chosen to maximise the likelihood of young people being in the audience. At the selected case study performance, as many young people (defined in the project as being in the age range of fourteen to thirty years) as possible were surveyed in the foyer before the show. Young people were also invited to participate in an interview directly after the performance, and if not convenient, then over the phone or [if a student or teacher] face-to-face in their school in the days following the performance. School groups attending the designated case study performance were contacted by the Industry Partner prior to the performance and once consent was granted the *TheatreSpace* team liaised with that school via its principal and relevant teacher(s). Young people attending in school groups were generally interviewed twice, directly after the show or in the days following the performance, and where possible, two weeks after the performance. Six month follow-up interviews took place with a sample of respondents, subject to availability and willingness to participate. Interviews were also conducted with twenty-five teachers who had organised theatre excursions with their students on the day of the case study performance. In addition, interviews were conducted with theatre company personnel. These included artistic directors, actors, directors, producers, playwrights, designers as well as education officers, program directors, marketing managers and other company staff.

The case studies were analysed with the assistance of the qualitative research software NVIVO 8 and 9 and SPSS, to organize the data and allow for thematic analysis of it, which emerged from agreed common questions in the study. From this scrutiny the researchers identified key themes relevant to the attendance of school-aged young people at theatre performances, the venues at which they were presented and the companies that presented them.

Theatre personnel connected to education, programming and marketing were interviewed in some, but not all, of the case studies. Those featured in this article represent some of the commonly expressed opinions of staff at the main stage theatre companies in each of the three states and one commercial, entrepreneurial organisation responsible for mounting a production of a large-scale popular musical. The core business of these companies is to stage plays that are for a general public audience rather than to produce Theatre for Young People (TYP) productions. However, some of the main-stage partner organisations commission/produce theatre for young audiences as an adjunct to their main production season.

As well as interview questions that focussed on the particular research case study productions, creative and education theatre staff were asked more generally about young people's attendance, or lack of, at their venues. Even though all of the theatre personnel referred to non-school based young people, overwhelmingly they concentrated on the impact school groups had on their marketing and programming. Interviews with theatre personnel revealed valuable information about how their respective companies intersected with schools and the importance they placed on school-aged young people being connoisseurs of their program. Theatre company personnel noted that, while the attendance of students in their program (performances, forums, workshops and the like) has some impact on their programming and promotional strategies, the schools' market is only one of the many factors companies need to consider when planning their annual program.

Discussion

This article is predominantly based on interviews with participants from main stage theatre companies and large arts centre venues because, while the youth market is certainly not their sole focus, they are interested in broadening their appeal to this demographic.

Theatre staff members who were interviewed shared a range of strategies their company employed to attract young people in general, and school audiences in particular, to their productions. They commented on how successful, or otherwise they believed these strategies to be. Although there were some differences between partner organisations, overall the perspectives, perhaps borne out of industry-established beliefs, were strikingly similar.

Below are some of the major areas that emerged from analysis of the interviews with theatre personnel:

- beliefs about why teachers bring their students to the theatre;
- strategies that may attract young people to theatre events produced by the company;
- advertising and programming;
- drama curriculum requirements and theatre attendance;
- theatre as homework;
- educational resourcing for theatre;
- teacher decision-making;
- venue, and
- barriers that discourage young people, including those in schools, from attending theatre.

Each of the major areas identified is discussed in more detail below.

Beliefs: why teachers bring school groups to the theatre

Many of the theatre staff who were interviewed asserted that their companies did consider the attendance of young people as important. How this belief is actioned, however, and the degree of importance attributed to young people's attendance in regular planning and programming appears to vary from company to company. It is evident that whilst, for the most part, marketing may focus on the elements of a production which might appeal to a youth market, more often than not advertising material is sent to teachers in schools and emphasises the links between relevant performances and the mandated curriculum. Most of the partner theatre companies employ staff whose job it is to encourage the attendance of young audience members including those in schools.

Many of the participating theatre personnel expressed long held beliefs about why teachers bring their students to the theatre, and what students need to gain from the experience. For example, one commonly held opinion was that teachers in particular schools build up connections to a theatre company over time and can become attracted to its reputation or body of work. Familiarity with a theatre company was cited as a key factor for the return attendance of groups from particular schools. A playwright whose work was being performed as part of co-production between two of the partner theatre companies described the thought processes he believed some teachers go through when selecting which theatre venue might best suit their students:

> … what's on at [the theatre venue], because I've seen some stuff there before that the kids have liked. And … it kind of feels contemporary to them. And then some … may know of [the company's] work over the last ten years and kind of be seeking [it] out. (Creative, *TheatreSpace* research participant)

However, one theatre education officer in NSW argued that students might exhibit more commitment towards a theatre experience and be engaged by it if their teachers gave them a greater choice:

> If you gave the kids a program of all the theatre activities that would be in Sydney this year and said pick which one you want to go to, they [would] own their choice … If teachers can think about allowing young people to choose and make a decision about their own theatregoing experiences, I think that can benefit us. But that said, [the] curriculum [is something] they don't really have a choice over these days. (Education Officer, *TheatreSpace* research participant)

Strategies that attract young people to theatre events

There was a commonly held view that by taking students to theatre performances teachers (often drama and English teachers) introduce their students to the 'world of theatre' and in doing so foster an on-going love of, and engagement in theatre experiences. As one theatre company education officer commented, when teachers make going to the theatre 'a positive experience' then their students 'will tend to go back'. It was thought that teachers play a significant role in shaping the theatregoing experience of their students and this includes modelling how to positively engage with a theatre event.

> The most obvious thing is if [students] have a positive theatre going experience at school then they're highly likely to want to replicate that when they go out into the real world. Because for many [young people]… leaving school it's a safe mini-community, so whatever you do there if it happens once you're outside in the big wide community of the whole world then you've got some personal security. (Head of Education, Touring theatre company)

Another Education Officer at a major theatre company explained her decision-making when promoting plays to schools:

> I just want something that I think will be really good because I think if it's going to be an early experience of theatre, it has to be a positive one. I think going back to one of the factors [is] that if people have a bad experience with theatre that seems to stay in their

> mind - young people, particularly if they've paid money for a bad experience. (Education Officer, *TheatreSpace* research participant)

Teachers (drama teachers in particular) in this project were very conscious of providing their students with theatre experiences that would excite and engage them and foster an on-going love of the theatre. A theatre teacher from an independent girls' school in suburban Melbourne saw it as her role to foster a culture of theatre-going in her students. She said that one of the benefits of taking her senior students to the theatre was that:

> They love it. And they're aware of its existence. They know where to find it ... I think there's also a culture of ... socialising that revolves around it for them ... I think it's got an importance to it. I think they do view it as important. They really do ... You give them opportunity and you give them encouragement and they themselves will grow ... It's about giving them tools and then they build their own things ... it's a social learning ... it's a beginning. And I don't think we often think of teaching them beginnings in social behaviour necessarily in high school.

According to the Manager of Education at a performing arts venue, an appreciation for, and engagement in the arts more broadly at school may also lead to a future interest in theatre:

> You know they might be in the school band or the 'Rock Eisteddfod' or you know be interested in animation and film but I think an on-going [interest in] some form of the arts, even visual art potentially predisposes a young person to continue to engage with theatre as one of the many forms. (Education Manager, Performing arts venue)

Advertising and Programming

Overwhelmingly even though the partner theatre companies market their plays to young people, most of their promotional material for the youth market is actually aimed at teachers in schools. Even so,

according to the director of one of the plays in this study, advertising to schools often has 'a youth aesthetic about its presentation' to emphasise its 'youth edge'. Usually the same material is designed to attract both a schools' audience and a more general youth market. The producer of a play at a major performing arts venue in Melbourne believed that:

> if a young person picked up our Schools' brochure – they would be inspired and excited and look through it as though it was a kind of a funky magazine or something.

Main stage partner companies annually program, and sometimes commission, works for young audiences. However, often such productions do not form part of their core business, ie. public or subscriber program. Whilst all of the partner theatre companies in the *TheatreSpace* project acknowledged the value and importance of programming for youth audiences, it was also clear that the needs of young people were just one consideration amongst many that contribute to the season's scheduling. As one Programmer commented:

> In terms of the main stage, there's a whole lot of things that goes into programming and yes you look at audience appeal, but we also look at the artistic parameters of new work, old work, what's around, what's available, what's current, what's going to resonate, what can we afford … what artists are available … In terms of young audiences there is a commitment … that we will commission a new work every year. (Programmer, Mainstage theatre company)

Drama curriculum requirements and theatre attendance

> At least you know with curriculum that … you're going to get teachers interested. (Education Liaison Officer)

Whilst at this time[3] there is no uniform curriculum for senior drama students in Australia, in each of the three eastern Australian states featured in the *TheatreSpace* project, students attend theatre performances as part of their studies. The NSW senior Drama syllabus prescribes plays for study in class and teachers tend to take their students to performances of these or associated plays when possible. In Queensland whilst there are no set plays for study, there are genres of theatre that are consistently popular with school audiences including the 'classics'. In Victoria the state curriculum board annually produces a *Prescribed Playlist* containing about fifteen choices of plays produced at local venues (VCAA, 2014; VCAA, 2014a). In that state, teachers of the final year (year twelve) Drama and Theatre Studies courses are required to take their students to at least one of the plays on the Prescribed Playlist for Drama and two for Theatre Studies. In 2014 in Victoria alone there were approximately 5,000 students taking these subjects in Year Twelve. In that state it has become common practice for mainstream, commercial, fringe and touring theatre companies to send in applications to the VCAA[4] to have their plays considered for inclusion on the annual Playlist.

TheatreSpace found that the mandated curriculum in each state, especially in the senior years of secondary schooling, significantly influenced the decision-making of drama/theatre teachers in regard to what productions to select for their students. It seems that theatre companies were not only aware of this but actively promoted the possible or probable curriculum connections of their productions to teachers. For instance, the Artistic Director of one mainstream company identified aspects of his most recent production that he believed would appeal to teachers because of its curriculum links:

> Like it could be Australian, it could be, you know, naturalism … or even political theatre to some degree because there are

[3] The Australian Curriculum in the Arts will be progressively implemented in different states at different times from 2015.

[4] The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

> Indigenous issues, mateship and all that kind of stuff. So I think you can, in many ways manipulate the arts experience and relate it to back to the curriculum.

Similarly, a programmer at a major arts venue explained his strategising regarding programming a play by linking it to the local senior curriculum, something he envisaged would attract a sizable school audience.

> Knowing that there are requirements that the VCAA has for its selection committee and that the students are actually working on specific areas within their unit of study. I felt that this was the most appropriate offer to make to the curriculum authorities selection committee because of the non-naturalistic style, the skill of the performer, the nature of the acting that the kids could see. And obviously to that end, you know we were keen to have the Q&A and to support our VCE[5] teachers and – by doing the recording of the question and answers and putting it up onto our website and so on.

Whilst many theatre personnel spoke of using links to the curriculum as a marketing tool, it was evident that many see this as an inevitable part of their job rather than something that they prefer to do or think theatre companies should be doing.

> … you know going back … it was actually okay to bring your kids to the theatre once a year as an experience. Now, you know, it has to tick 70 different boxes and 47 different learning outcomes, or it's not worth it.

The Artistic Director of a major theatre company lamented that the 'art' can sometimes get overlooked when linking plays to the curriculum:

[5] Victorian Certificate of Education

> ... that art exists inside our curriculum is kind of non-existent. It's always off to the side or attached to English or attached to something rather than art literacy if you like, as a kind of fundamental, with kind of producing creative thinkers. But we kind of don't do that very well, so it's always for us as theatre makers we're always attached to something else. The theatre experience is attached to something else rather than just being about you know, art.

For many teachers in this study, excursions to the theatre were often aligned with curriculum requirements and some students viewed the experience as a task or chore that had to be completed for assessment purposes.

Theatre as homework

The *TheatreSpace* project revealed that whilst play reviews and theatre production assignments can enhance young peoples' understandings of, and appreciation for theatre, over-emphasis on curriculum tasks can adversely affect students' enjoyment and engagement in the experience. This approach to theatre attendance was labelled 'Theatre as Homework' by some research participants. This view was shared by many of the theatre personnel:

> ... you know, we're looking to the curriculum and where we find our relevance and that's how we're going to be programming in the future ensuring that we have that relevance so that when teachers decide I'm going to take my students to the theatre or a museum, or an experience outside the school environment, I have to tick the curriculum box or the principal won't let me do it. (Education Officer, Mainstage theatre company)

> And I know when I went to the theatre as a young person it was only if I had to write an essay on, you know the techniques used, that I would be deliberately looking for them. (Playwright, *TheatreSpace* research participant)

The Education officer of a main stage theatre company expressed the thoughts of many when she noted that:

> And I guess one of the things is, it's the teacher who chooses the show if they're coming with school groups, so [the students] may not necessarily be seeing things that they themselves … would be interested in seeing. So it's a bit of a 'Catch 22', you need the drama teachers and theatre studies teachers to be engaged and bring in their students to see theatre, but by the same token those students need, off their own bat, to see theatre at more venues, where they find interest.

Resourcing plays – theatre companies as educational producers

Some partner theatre companies produce educational resources and notes, either in hard copy or online and run pre-show lectures or post-show workshops which relate to productions. This appears to be in response to an increasing demand from schools, especially when teachers are conducting an assessment task or unit of work on the play their students are attending. They view these as being not only a marketing tie-in but also as an audience development tool. The resources are 'branded' with the company's identity and serve to widen the awareness of schools to its program. Often printed resources are linked to a website which further develops an interactive relationship between the company, teachers and students. Interestingly, participant teachers did not provide much evidence that these resources were widely used.

Whilst theatre companies acknowledged the mutual value of producing school resources those interviewed mostly viewed this as a 'service' they provided given that the costs of production were carried by the company:

> That's big because what tends to happen in terms of funding is that an awful lot of education work is not actually specifically funded from the government. The companies do it on their own and reach out on their own to do that because it's in their

> own best interest to try and bring people through ... and so often the credit for that is not necessarily given. (Artistic Director, Independent theatre company)

However, it was noted by many of the theatre personnel that sometimes the requirements of the school curriculum to analyse or 'dissect' a production can be at odds with the artistic process and that not all teachers and students appreciated this:

> ... when we have done some of these forums, some of the questions they are asking which are to do with syllabus questions are kind of not the point. It's not how we make the work, so the students are looking at it through this prism that's kind of uninteresting. So, we try and certainly the actors are very good at that. They say, 'I don't understand the question'. (Artistic Director, Independent theatre company)

In response to such concerns at pre or post show forums some theatre companies have their Education Officer facilitate the communication between the creatives and the school audiences. As one Education Officer explained, this helps to 'translate' the curriculum 'jargon' for the artists who often "don't speak that language". (Education Officer, Mainstage theatre company)

Teacher decision-making

It was evident that it was predominantly to teachers, not students, that the partner theatre companies marketed their plays. As such, the views and needs of students were sometimes misunderstood or not taken into account. This is perhaps not surprising given that in most instances students do not directly transact with the theatre companies.

> I think educators have a different attitude to the theatre than theatre makers, and I think that sometimes there's a disconnect about that. I know when you're selling a show that comes up a lot. The person buying the show is not the person consuming the show.(Artistic Director, Theatre Company)

A number of theatre staff observed that some schools' policies constrained teacher decision-making (Smith and Lovat, 2003) by limiting the type, range and frequency of theatre productions seen by their students. They reported that teachers frequently contacted theatre companies, often through the Education Officer, to ascertain information about the content, themes and sometimes the staging of a production to judge whether it would be suitable for their students. Theatre personnel cited instances where the school administration had censored or prohibited teacher choices because a particular play was perceived to contain material that may be at odds with the ideology of the school culture. One education manager from a company in Victoria referred to this as being "the conservative school mind set". The Marketing Manager from a performing arts venue related one such instance:

> Last year we had *Holding the Man*[6] performed and there was one school group that actually wanted to book in, that came from an all-boys Catholic school but unfortunately that booking had to be cancelled due to the school putting a stop to the excursion. So there [are] some difficulties I guess in what teachers can choose because they do need to get approvals and that obviously affects what they end up going to and deciding on.

Conversely, some theatre staff noted occasions when they had been surprised when teachers had brought their students to see a production that the theatre company had not marketed to schools because it assumed it was unsuitable. As one Marketing Manager noted:

> We had one school group come to a performance that [was set] in a spa in Bangkok with two naked Germans discussing sex and genocide, we had one school group come to that and we were actually quite concerned about them coming but she, the teacher, actually said that she's trying to take them to a variety

[6] A play based on the true story of a relationship between two gay students at an all-boy Catholic school in Melbourne in the 1990s.

> of theatre pieces throughout the year so she wanted things that were completely different from each other.

Upon request some of the partner companies will inform teachers of any potentially offensive or inflammatory content in their plays. As this comment from one of the theatre education managers highlights, marketing a play to schools can be difficult because by its very nature it evolves through rehearsal:

> So my ... expectation of the piece changed every time we got a new draft of the script, to how well it would be received by schools and each time a scene that I thought may have caused an issue with certain school types, was eliminated from that development process the more I anticipated a very favourable response from the schools coming.

Some theatre personnel were emphatic that teachers should not shy away from taking their students to plays containing challenging ideas and that they should be prepared to discuss and unpack the content with their students.

> And I think challenging them is key, but providing a context for that, making sure that, their accompanying adults, whether that's teachers or parents are prepared for challenging experiences for young people ... to drive discussion and dialogue between young audiences and adults about particular issues or content within the artwork. (Producer, *TheatreSpace* research participant)

Sometimes partner theatre companies offered teachers preview tickets and/or a complimentary copy of the script as a way to both entice them to book a particular play for their students and to give them an opportunity to view its content so they could make an informed booking decision. It appeared that on balance the educational and marketing departments of the participating theatre companies were in favour of this approach even though there was a risk that once they had been exposed to the play teachers would not book it or cancel an existing booking. An Education Officer from a mainstage theatre company described one such occasion:

> [The play] had quite good pick-up with school group bookings, we also did have a few cancellations after some of the teachers had seen it in preview, and they [decided that it had] moments that were too inappropriate for their [school].

The venue

According to Matthew Reason the physical layout and attributes of a theatre venue have an impact on the way in which young people experience the theatre event. In his study the experiences of the young audience members "were almost completely dominated by the physical experience of being in the theatre [as well as] the otherness of the theatre audience" (2006, p. 227). Similarly, the *TheatreSpace* project found that the total theatre experience including the venue, the theatre staff and the other audience members all impacted (positively or negatively) on a young person's theatre going experiences. A significant finding was that a theatre venue could be an important social and communal space for young people including those who visit the site on a school excursion. Theatre personnel appeared to be very much aware that the physical attributes of the theatre venue and its overall atmosphere leaves an impression on young audience members. These elements were also seen to have a bearing on whether teachers bring their students back to a venue and whether young people may wish to independently return to it. In making the point that the physical environment of a theatre can have a lasting impact on young people, one education staff member recalled her own first theatrical experience when she was taken to see a play as young child.

> I think it was *Peter and the Wolf* and the music ... I can still hear it in my head and I hear it when I listen to ABC[7] and they will play the music and I will be like oh, I'm back there again sitting at His Majesty's Theatre in Perth. And in that experience I came to respect the theatre venue. His Majesty's Theatre for me was a very beautiful red velvet environment, and I always wanted to go back there because of my experience.

[7] The Australian Broadcasting Corporation

A number of theatre personnel described features of their own venues, which they considered appealing for young people:

> The heritage nature of [the theatre venue] is attractive. Attractive to young people; attractive to old people. It's across the board interesting, because it's not just some new building. It has character by the buckets really. (Artistic Director)

> I think it's a great venue for young people, the whole theatre … it's got a nice welcoming open feeling to it … I think it's a non-threatening environment … the staff are also really lovely. I always see responses to the wall, you know the wall of words [inside the theatre]. Young people seem to like it and go 'oh, wow, cool'. (Education Officer)

> The building is just really egalitarian and it's hopefully a building that the door is kind of always open … it's not about being pretentious it's a jeans and t-shirt kind of crowd … I mean it doesn't talk down to [youth audiences] at any point. It really makes a real invitation to people to come along and have a look. (Theatre Company Programmer)

However, some theatre staff members asserted that a barrier to young people's attendance was the location of the theatre venue, including how easy, or otherwise, it was for young people to access it. Notably it was remarked that the situating of a theatre; its proximity to public transport; the perceived ease with which patrons could be dropped off and picked up; and car parking facilities were all factors that teachers considered when choosing where to take their students. Costantoura (2000) recognised that people residing in regional centres including school aged people can be disadvantaged when it comes to access to cultural events (p.293). Similarly teachers in regional schools participating in the *TheatreSpace* project reported that it was particularly cost prohibitive to come to city theatre venues with transport being an added cost to factor into the excursion. In addition, buses sometimes struggled to find parking near to the theatre. Given that young people, including those in schools often

travel to the theatre via public transport, how readily this is available can also be a factor to attendance. One Artistic Director cited what he considered to be the difficulty of access to the theatre venue at which he worked:

> [The theatre is] hampered by location. Like really hampered. Public transport is bad. Parking is really [difficult] and I know for younger people that's usually not such an issue, but it's still an issue if you are driving. And it feels like that you're at the arse end of something.

Similar concerns were expressed by the artistic and administrative personnel at other participating theatre companies. Concerns about location included:

- that from the street the theatre building looks uninviting and this may adversely affect young people's expectations of the type of work that is produced;
- the venue not having street appeal during the day because it operates principally at night;
- perceptions amongst young people that the venue is designed for older or 'high class' patrons, and
- travel to the venue other than by car is difficult for young people.

The Education Manager of one performing arts venue summed up the feelings of many of the theatre staff that were interviewed when she highlighted what she viewed as the difference between students coming to a venue with their teacher and coming of their own volition:

> [young people] are unfamiliar with the setting so they are not as free or able to engage in the kind of social engagement, connection that they are comfortable with. You know, it doesn't look like a mall. It doesn't look like a skate park. It doesn't look like school … I think the fact that their teachers choose for them,

> when they attend an excursion means they have less voice in the decision-making and I see that as a barrier because it's not even like being at home where your mum and dad might say, do you want to see this concert, or do you want to see you know a play with me, or do you want to go to the footy with me? At least they feel that they can contribute to some extent in their family setting, but at school the decision is made for them and I think that can potentially create a barrier for their sense of what is possible here.

Barriers to attendance

Researchers into youth and their cultural choices, White and Wyn (2013) argue that there are certain features of spaces which young people identify as being 'youth friendly'. One of these which is considered key is a low admission price. In her study into audience development in music Kawashima (2000) noted that even when teachers were keen to take their students to live events, budgetary restrictions were often a factor that prevented them from doing so (p.43). Cost was mentioned by both teachers and theatre company personnel as being an on-going issue. However, while some teachers complain about the cost of tickets, students rarely do because the decision as to whether or not to attend a play is often made for them by their school and they have little say in the cost of the excursion.

Administrivia was also cited as a barrier. Theatre company personnel spoke of schools that made changes to their bookings due to fluctuating student numbers and others who were slow to pay for their tickets. Similarly, teachers talked about the problems of collecting money from their students or securing funding from the school to pay for the excursion. Staff in partner theatre companies in the *TheatreSpace* project were often sympathetic to the time consuming bureaucratic procedures required of teachers when organising theatre excursions:

> So that when teachers decide 'I'm going to take my students to the theatre or a museum, or an experience outside the school

> environment, I have to tick the curriculum box or the principal won't let me do it'. Then you have to ask the students or the students' parents to pay money to do it. So again, it comes back to the cost … a teacher has to find the money for a bus, and that sounds a bit ludicrous but that's a cost you then have to put back to the kids. The big one, of course, is say you're the Year 11 teacher and you're taking 20 students to the theatre for a matinee or a show during school hours she has to leave behind her … classes and … the principal has to pay for a relief teacher … or find someone in-house to do it. (Education Officer, Touring theatre company)

Some teachers spoke of the disconnect they believe exists between the payment structure imposed by theatre companies and the realities of how schools often raise money for theatre excursions. One teacher shared his experiences of trying to collect money from his students in a timely manner to meet a payment deadline imposed by one of the partner theatre companies. He observed:

> You need to give the information about the excursion, the theatre trip to the students, gain permission from the parents, get them to pay money, then you can pay. But if, that takes time, and if you've got to put up money up front and then, or pay, within this really restrictive time frame that's really problematic … I mean we have problems with our students, getting them organised, getting them enthused, getting them organised. We have students saying yeah I'll go, they just forget to bring the money or they do bring the money, they forget to turn up on the day. (English teacher, TAFE College)

When it comes to young people deciding on their independent entertainment choices many theatre staff emphasised that 'value for money' can be a key criterion they use, and this includes theatre as well. However, a programmer from a major theatre company encapsulated the thoughts of other theatre staff when she noted that there were often apparent misconceptions and misguided assumptions in young people's attitudes to the cost of attending a theatrical performance.

> ... you know the standard kind of ... easy answers of that it's elitist or it's expensive or it's not for me, or I won't understand it, those kind of concepts don't really hold up, once they've started to engage with us. So you know, there are $20 tickets. There are $30 tickets ... it's not actually the cost of the ticket. It's the value of the experience. They'll pay $85 to see a day/night match at the cricket. Or they'll pay $100 to go and see a band. It's not always cost. It's the risk.

White and Wyn (2013) noted that when young people organise social events they want to ensure that there is a low risk of having a bad theatre experience and this affects their choice. According to Brown and Novak, "the expectation of an enjoyable experience is the single best predictor of a satisfying [theatre] experience" (2007, pp. 10-11). The Visitor Services Manger at a theatre company stated:

> If you've been here once and your experience wasn't a positive one, it will have a bearing on what you term as value for money and it will have a bearing on whether you actually choose to see that product ... But, is it value for money? 'No. You know, I think I'd rather go and see Katy Perry'. So it's also about whenever we have the opportunity of having a younger person here, making sure that experience meets their expectations, but they have fun, that it is a social event because they tend to talk more about their experiences, even on the way out. It's making sure that we actually live up to those expectations.

Views such as this highlight the need for theatre companies and theatre venues to live up to young people's expectations while taking into account the other entertainment choices that are available to them.

Conclusion

It is clear that the education system and the theatre industry must work together to attract young people to the theatre and to enable them to feel valuable as audience members. *TheatreSpace* revealed that whilst young people are at school, teachers play a significant

role in fostering their introduction and continued engagement with theatre. It also confirmed that a commonly held belief amongst theatre company personnel and teachers is that if young people have had a positive theatre experience when at school they are more likely to continue coming to the theatre once they are in a position to make independent judgements about the cultural activities they may wish to attend. As reported by theatre personnel, teacher choice when selecting a play for their students to attend, is often governed by curriculum needs and the working relationship that exists between the school and the theatre company.

Theatre staff identified what they considered to be barriers to theatre attendance by young people. Cost was noted as a possible factor for young people who are no longer at school but so too was the associated factor of young people's sense of value for money and their preconceptions about whether or not a potential theatre experience will be a rewarding one. Whether or not a venue is youth-friendly was also seen by theatre staff as being a significant factor in regard to whether young people would return to it once they were independent theatre goers.

Theatre personnel who participated in the *TheatreSpace* project acknowledged the need to attract young people to the theatre and to maintain their attendance over time. Whilst many asserted that the interests of young theatre goers informs their marketing and programming some acknowledged the disconnect that exists between the ways theatre companies and schools function and how this can jeopardise the attendance of young audience members. While the *TheatreSpace* project recognised the growing relationship between theatre companies, teachers, schools and young people, much more can and should be done to improve the way each intersects and communicates with the other.

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ADOLESCENT LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS:

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AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF SONGWRITING AND GUITAR PLAYING

ABSTRACT

The crux of this inquiry is an autoethnographic tale of a teacher and an adolescent student. Together, we take a journey that explores the difficulties of love and relationships that teenagers express through their song lyrics, the challenges of playing guitar, and how often these difficulties occupy their attention throughout a typical school day. Through an etymological exploration, we theorise how autoethnography becomes a polydimensional form of research inquiry. What differentiates the present inquiry from existing literature is that it is told from the perspective of teachers *and* young learners engaged in classroom and studio music making. Also, our focus moves from the self, to include the other, as well as the (s)p(l)aces in which we live, and we approach our tale in a relational manner. Our story examines, elaborates, and (de/re)constructs music making through the eyes, ears, heart, and mind of the young learner. As such, we are concerned with developing a new way of conceptualising and writing about music pedagogy for the pre-K through Grade 12 learner.

KEY TERMS: autoethnography; arts-based research; pedagogy; music education; teacher identity; student identity

Prelude

We have studied and performed the lyrics and music of many songs over the years, including repertoire from the 1920s to present day. We both have our favourite singer-songwriters, and they are as diverse as what is represented in Western music popular songbooks and digital access points. We write the present inquiry as teachers of a songwriters' circle for grade 8 through 12 adolescents. In many Canadian and international secondary schools, students are required to take a Fine Arts elective. In our teaching experiences, we have noticed that music classes often focus too much on the technical aspects of playing an instrument, yet that is not what adolescents are looking for in songwriting and guitar classes. Through our engagement with learners in many classroom and studio teaching and learning experiences, we have noticed that secondary school music classes often focus too much on note reading, theory, and the techniques of playing an instrument and not enough on personal expression and making music in ways that are meaningful to 21st century youth. By the very nature of the music making involved, guitar classes and songwriting circles have a very different feel and attract a very different group of adolescents to participate in making music and composing songs.

Many introverted adolescents are better with their words and music if they are given a safe space to place the words on paper, learn to play guitar, and perform amongst peers. Regardless of gender, there is a lot of love in all their hearts, as well as a lot of heartbreak. Through poetry and song, experiences with love and heartbreak have been written about for centuries. It would be easy to document and codify the student experiences that we have read in thousands of songs about love and happiness, however, adolescent love and heartbreak are not quantifiable topics. We believe autoethnography is better put to use when we dare to openly share the dark and difficult sides of life that adolescents bravely attempt to face every day.

Through personal experiences, we have found that adults commonly trivialise and undermine a teenager's feelings about love because they

believe that teenagers are "just going through a phase." That said, we have not once met a parent who had all the answers, who happened to be a guru sent from heaven to explain the secrets to maintaining a loving relationship with an adolescent son or daughter. In other words, the rough stuff teenagers face is just as real as the difficulties adults experience, and we should learn to empathise with and understand, not criticise adolescents and their relationships. Living the life of a 17 year old can be complicated, but then again, being an adult is not so easy, whether one is married, divorced, partnered, or single.

The present inquiry is an autoethnographic account of an interchange between a teacher, Mr. John Phillips[i] and one exceptionally bright and wise student, Andy. Andy is an exceptional singer, guitarist, and songwriter. He's the type of kid who has been using writing as a catharsis since he was 9 years old and he has developed his own understandings of songwriting as an art form. For over ten years, Mr. Phillips has taught in this kind of classroom environment, and the story of this one student beautifully frames both the melancholy and tranquillity of love that hundreds of adolescents have expressed over the years.

Our intention is to explore, through the dialogue between Andy and his teacher, the difficulties of love and relationships that teenagers express through their song lyrics, the challenges of playing guitar, and how often these difficulties occupy their attention throughout a typical school day. We will share the moments leading up to our discussion; the highlighted lyrics Andy shared in one of his songs; the discussion and insights about his song; the epiphany he experienced in opening up his voice with guitar; how Andy found his own voice through discussions with his teacher; and, how the power of the songwriters' circle gives students the opportunity to resolve socioemotional and psychological confusion that is rarely addressed in schools, yet arguably occupies the majority of a teenager's concern during school. The two portions of this story are a factional[ii] (Haley, 2007; Gouzouasis, 2008a, 2008b) encounter with Andy, followed by an explanation of the nature and function of this autoethnographic encounter.

The autoethnographic process

> Autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness. (Ellis, 2004, p. 37)

The following dialogue between Andy and his teacher, Mr. Phillips, was designed in a manner that, as Ellis notes, "[does] not do the usual 'interviewer asks questions, interviewee responds,' but instead [is framed as] a conversation" (2004, p.65) about the complications of being in love, and how these thoughts and emotions interfere with a student's ability to concentrate during class time. We would like the reader to focus on the dialogue between Andy and Mr. Phillips and observe the nuances in their relationship. Moreover, "the words, thoughts, and feelings of the researcher [should] also [be] considered" (Ellis, 2004, p.62) for the reader to empathise with the hardships and insights that enable deeper understandings in adolescent relationships. In other words, we will highlight the discourse between Andy and the teacher, Mr. Phillips, but we have also woven into the dialogue some of our own internal thoughts and feelings, as researchers, that we had as afterthoughts to these conversations. After all, in writing autoethnography, it is a common practice for "interviewers [to] include their views on and experience with the topic and how their views develop and change as they observe and interact with participants" (Ellis, 2004, p.73).

Through our writing process, we purposely moved away from strictly reporting data of a particular situation and specific individual to embrace and revel in interpretive story telling. We did so for two reasons. First, we were interested in protecting the anonymity of our 'subject' in the creation of a composite student who embodied the characteristics of many students whom we have taught (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Second, in arts-based, interpretive forms of research, a story that is the artistically crafted is more important than the presentation of precise facts and figures. That is because we believe a *truthful* account is more important than a *factual* account

of a situation or experience (Tullis Owen, McCrae, Adams, & Vitale, 2009; Gouzouasis & Lee, 2002, Gouzouasis, 2008a, 2008b). As Leggo hypothesises, "What I know of truth I know from the process of shaping and making meaning in words, through the process of storying and sharing stories of others. I am my words; I am my fictions" (1995, p.8).

In consideration of those perspectives, autoethnography becomes a polydimensional form of research inquiry. It has primarily been conceptualised to be about the *self* (in Greek auto, αυτό, means *self;* technically, ο εαυτώς, *my self)* [iii]. However, from our frame of reference, it is also about the *that* (in Greek, we refer to *that* as αυτό), him *and her (*αυτόν*, auton and* αυτί*, auti), them (*εαυτών*, eauton), those (*αυτά*, auta), and they (*αυτοί*, auti).* Thus, we storied Mr. Phillips and Andy as a composite of ourselves and of students we have known – embued with our own life experiences, with and, as adolescents – in relation to many similar teaching and learning experiences in a variety of cultural contexts. Through this process, the interpretive nature of the tale of a teacher and student and our impression of the truth emerged. From this broader point of view autoethnography is both relational and about complex, multifacted aspects of relationships. It enables us to connect the 'auto' with 'ethno' and 'ethos' (iv)- the world in which we live and the people with whom we interact - and places our selves into the stories and the songs we compose[v]. These notions are supported by Gallardo, Furman, & Kulkarni (2009) in their stance:

> Autoethnographies are written accounts about life experiences providing rich, full, detailed narrative and insight into the perspective of the person who is living and experiencing the researched phenomena. (2009, p.288)

That polydimensional perspective of autoethnography enables us to 'voice' our issues based on many experiences, and not merely a single experience or frame of reference (Gallardo et.al., p. 289) as teachers of songwriting and guitar. In that way we are able to summarise the many conversations Andy and Mr. Phillips shared throughout their time together. This approach to writing reflects the research cited

above. That we chose to write this autoethnography as a creative non-fiction, or faction, is not new in arts-based educational research literature (see Gouzouasis & Lee, 2002; Lee, 2005a, 2005b. 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2009, 2010; Gouzouasis, 2008a, 2008b). In essence, it provides researchers the opportunity to (in)form composite characters who live experiences that resonate with many readers. That way, the story we present herein has coherence, plausibility, empathy (Pelias, 1999), durability, tensility (Gouzouasis, 2008a), and verisimilitude (Eisner, 1991) – qualitative forms of 'validity' [vi] where many teachers who have had similar experiences as expressed in a story come to strongly believe the story in terms of their own, deeply held experiences and beliefs about teaching and learning. As Ellis explains:

> They appear in a variety of forms ... they showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality and self-consciousness ... social scientists often use the term now to refer to stories that feature the self or that include the researcher as a character. (Ellis, 2004, p.37)

Autoethnographers are neither detached nor objective in their research stance, as was claimed in the early days of ethnography (see Geertz, 1973). We are wholly engaged with the 'self' and 'other' in telling our tale. Autoethnographers frequently use various forms of *voice* to tell a story – first person, second person, third person, or all three within the same text (Foster, 2008; Gouzouasis, 2013; Gouzouasis & Ryu, 2015; Leggo, 1995, 2003; Pelias, 2004) – to illustrate and elaborate multiple points of view and creatively draw the reader into the story. And the inquiry can be written as a dialogue not unlike those found in creative short stories, prose, and various forms of performative texts (e.g., ethnodrama, poetic representation, and hybrid arts-based research forms).

Autoethnographers frequently write about an epiphany (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) which for us (in the story that follows) was our experience with Andy and how it changed our ideas about what really matters when teaching songwriting and guitar to adolescents. As a form of enlightened realisation, an epiphany (in

Greek, ἐπιφάνεια, 'epiphania') is often spurred by an object or event that enables the individual to make an inference or develop a new, deeper understanding of a phenomenon. Andy's epiphanies, such as the discovery of his 'voice' as a writer, singer, and guitarist is such an example. Sharing epiphanies is a feature that was discovered early in the development of autoethnography (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Banks & Banks, 2000; Couser, 1997; Gouzouasis & Lee, 2002; Sparkes, 2002). Because the suffix, 'phony' (in Greek, φωνή) means 'sound,' and for musicians important discoveries about the self and others (e.g., music students) are often based upon acoustic experiences, Gouzouasis (2013) coined the term 'epiphony.' He uses it to refer to a realisation that is evoked through sound, specifically, music. Mr. Phillips and Andy share the song through acoustic experiences that require both sound production and listening, to the self and to others.

In our case, epiphanies were also the result of a *process,* the reflexive process (Etherington, 2004) of working with many adolescents not unlike Andy. This reflexive process supported our quest to develop a deeper understanding of how adolescents are currently taught to write and perform songs, and a more meaningful pedagogy for working with adolescents in classroom and studio settings. Perhaps most important, we recognise the highly subjective nature of teacher-learner relationships in music – the ways that they are developed, sustained, change, and suddenly end – and we believe that the nuances of these human relationships defy systematic categorisation. It is a complex undertaking to understand what an adolescent truly thinks about their own learning, and about the relationships they form, requiring a great deal of patience, sincerity, and understanding from all parties engaged in the learning process.

A songwriters' circle provides students with a space and place, that is, a (s)p(l)ace (de Cosson, 2004) to explore feelings that can occupy the attention of a student for days on end. According to Spry, "It is [this] space that presents an opportunity for intimate self-revelation and evolution about how learned injustices effect behavior" (2010, p. 274). In Andy's case specifically, the songwriters' circle class and his personal, one on one, interactions with Mr. Phillips provided him

the opportunity to share the themes of his songs in a safe space that would hopefully one day lead to a self-revelation about why he felt trapped in a habit that did not allow for intimacy to blossom.

Pulling heartstrings and guitar strings

It's the last period of the day, and it happens to be my only empty block. It's the time of day when the atmosphere shifts from dreary fatigue to jovial anticipation for the 3:55 school bell. The school is buzzing with screams, laughter, stomping, and the indecipherable white noise of students talking in modern cultural slangs. I walk around the room reorganising the desecrated desks that have been used by my students since the dawn of time. The profanity and vulgar depictions of reproductive organs deeply engraved onto the wooden tabletops is enough to make me feel sick. Our school has been sidelined for adequate funding, especially for the arts, so we have to continue to work with what we've got. Wearing brown khakis that match my long-sleeved navy blue shirt and grey sweater, I mindfully pace around the room in preparation for my private tutorial with Andy. Andy is liked by many students, but he doesn't have many close friends. He was soft spoken and shy when I first met him. Now after having taken Theatre 11, he seems to be more willing to open up with me. That did not come easy. Over the last two years, I've had to carefully nurture the honest relationship Andy and I have with one another.

I return to my desk and turn up the volume to the music softly playing the background. Janis Ian is singing *At Seventeen*. I call this CD my "vulnerable" collection because the songs were specifically selected to elicit deeply held emotions from me and my students. When I am scheduled to teach the songwriters' circle class, I believe my students need to see me somewhat vulnerable and hear many different kinds of music by some of the great singer songwriters. If I have any hope for them to express their real selves to me and their peers, we all need to be on the same wavelength. If I'm scheduled to teach a keyboard class, I usually play my Laura Nyro, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon, Carole King collection to put

us in a different mental state and mood. If it's guitar, Gordon Lightfoot, Don McLean, Paul Simon, and James Taylor activate my guitarist singer-songwriter flow state.

Meet Andy – An encounter with an adolescent songwriter

A YouTube recording of Laurence Juber's arrangement of *In My Life* plays in the background. I sit and ponder what songs Andy is going to share with me from his 3 inch thick, spiral bound songbook. Andy was the best, a local award winning poet for two of the last three years he entered the contest, a feat unheard of for a competition that receives thousands of entries every year. As I glance at the door with high anticipation for our one on one conversation, Andy vehemently opens the door and storms inside, marching at a pace indicative of rage. He slams the door behind him tossing his book bag toward the floor but intentionally hitting the front of my wooden desk with a loud thud.

"Young man, turn yourself around and don't come back until you have calmed down," I tell him, calmly, but assertively.

Andy takes one look at the seriousness written all over my face and shamefully walks outside the music classroom. I've been called out a few times by my colleagues for my tough-love demeanour toward some of my students. To the untrained eye, it may appear that my style is uncaring, but I only use tough-love on students who seem to need it. Andy's father was not around when he was growing up, so he never learned boundaries. He was accustomed to doing what he wanted, when he wanted. Teenagers subconsciously desire and need boundaries, and I've learned over the past few months that Andy not only can handle it, but appreciates it.

A moment later, Andy returns. His eyes are no longer crazed and the rhythm of his walk is much more relaxed than before. He flops down on the chair opposite my desk and places his songbook between us, freshly marked with multicoloured sticky labels that partition the book into sections. I assume each bookmark will

direct the nature of our conversation.

"Sorry about that Mr. Phillips," Andy says in a calm tone.

"Something on your mind, Andy?"

"You know that feeling when you have a series of opinions about how everyone around you should run their life, yet you can't seem to figure out your own shit?"

Even after a fit of rage, this kid always seems to be wise beyond his years.

"Generally speaking, I try to limit my opinions about others. Have you got a new song for me?"

"Yep!" Andy enthusiastically opens the binder to the first song titled "Break Me." I read the highlighted section aloud.

It's already been decided
Unbreakable, unshakeable belief
Is true courage to challenge, or to walk?
The reoccurrence of relief

"What is the reoccurrence of relief?"

Andy's eyes fix on mine. He answers in a sincere tone, with a calm voice.

"This is a song about how people are convinced that fighting to keep a bad relationship together is better than being alone and meeting other people. Or they believe that their reasons for leaving their partner will offer them relief from their unhappiness. Both groups of people are set in their ways. Their decisions are governed by the same patterns of love and fear."

I'll admit, Andy and I are usually pretty honest with one another,

but even this amount of honesty, this early into the conversation, is a little suspicious. I wonder if this has been bottled up for some time and he was just waiting for an opportunity to share this with someone. Our eyes magnetically lock in a moment of silence.

"Does this relate to you at all?"

"Yeah, I think I'm in the second group. I worry that there is a pattern in my relationships that I can't see. I fear that my mind finds reasons for me to fall out of love, and those 'faults' about my girlfriend become the basis for me wanting to leave her. I suppose this song is about whether we have a choice or not. Can we change our beliefs, or are we destined by fate?"

Andy and I sit silently for a moment, pondering the thoughtful depths of his song. I could have been easily seduced into a philosophical argument about destiny, however, I had to remind myself that the focus of our conversation was about whether the songwriters' circle was successful in being a gateway into personal insights.

"Andy, when did you write this?"

"Last semester."

"Where were you when you wrote this?"

"The thoughts had been on my mind since Jenny and I broke up last year. I think it started as a journal entry during Ms. Coombs biology class. Later it became a song."

"Why were you working on this song during your biology class?"

"I dunno, 'cause I couldn't focus on anything else. I mean, you've taught us to empty our minds before coming to class. I have 'Bio' right before music on Wednesdays. The words were dancing in my mind and I had to get them down on paper. I dunno, I guess I wanted to come to your class with an empty mind." [vii]

"How often do you and your friends swap songs?"

"I swap songs and ideas with Kraig from time to time."

"Why just Kraig?"

"He's the only friend I have that I kinda trust."

"If you didn't have Kraig, what would you do?"

"Probably just use the opportunity I have every year in the poetry writing competition to talk about my songs."

"But that's only once a year. Where do you think those feelings would go the other 364 days of the year if you couldn't express them?"

Andy is silent on this question. I honestly don't expect him to offer some ultimate truth into the multiple realms of his psyche. However, I decide to patiently wait until he gives me a fuller answer. He's capable. Andy's the type of person that would prefer to make a claim now and be proven wrong later, the rarer type of adolescent that doesn't take the safe route by shrugging and saying, 'I don't know.' I have cautioned him about this little characteristic of his by citing Abraham Lincoln on a number of occasions. 'Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.' Lincoln seems to have had very little effect on Andy, but I later realised this little quirk of his makes him stand out from his lackadaisical peers. Andy straightens up in his chair.

"I think those feelings would express themselves in other ways. I think if someone feels sad, it would show just by the absence of enthusiasm in their voice."

"Good answer. Does this song make you feel sad?"

"And helpless. Trapped. Stuck. Depressed."

"How often is love and relationships on your mind?"

"I think it doesn't matter if you're single like me, or practically married like Annie and Josh in grade 11. Honestly, the question should be when is love and relationships *not* on my mind?"

Andy and I each let out a big belly laugh that seems to last for about 10 seconds. Once we eventually settle down, I pick up where we left off in the conversation.

"So in comparison to your biology homework for example, how often do you talk about your songs with Kraig?"

"Honestly, we talk more about 'Bio' because Ms. Coombs gives us a lot of homework, but it's not by choice. My breakup with Jenny has occupied my thoughts more than cellular respiration and photosynthesis."

"I see. Hmm," is all I could say as I nodded.

I am thankful for Andy's honesty, even though a wave of despair had overrun my whole body. How can contemplative discussions about love and relationships ever hope to compete against Biology 11 in the public education system? I pause to think about my next question. As tempted as I am to follow-up on my latter personal concern, I worry that it would sidetrack us from the real issue. Andy is both smart and very wise for his age, but I don't believe he could possibly offer any valuable insights into reforming a system that has "governments around the world [implementing] technical – rational approaches to education that they hop[e] [will] produce workers to meet the needs of global capitalism" (Poole, 2008, p. 23). I lean forward, adjust my glasses, and look him straight in the eye.

"What's your general opinion about how others see my class?"

"I think it's different for other students. Some students don't talk about their songs at all because they think they suck."

"Do you think that makes love and relationships any less real to them as it is for you?"

"Not at all. Mr. Phillips. I just think there are people like me who get what you're doing, and there are those who don't."

Andy excuses himself to go use the washroom, leaving me there to ponder the new insights, successes, and challenges of the songwriters' circle class.

I sit in my classroom alone, reminded of a moment in an autoethnographic inquiry I read about a music educator who describes a "moment of joy [she] felt . . . [that was] quickly replaced by disappointment in [her] ability to satisfy the needs of all [her] students" (Gouzouasis & Nobbs-Theissen, 2013, in review). I seemingly had satisfied Andy's needs for self-expression through the magic of the songwriters' circle class, but I was reminded of how naive I can be at times to think that the class has the same impact on everyone. I stand with the intention to pour myself a cup of tea, but then the doors to my music room open and Andy comes strolling back inside, directing his intention to sit back in his chair. Rather than proceeding to get that cup of tea, I politely end the conversation.

"Hey Andy, I have a class coming in a few minutes, but come back tomorrow and let's take a look at that song with guitar."

Getting down to music

I sit in my office listening to a recording of Livingston Taylor, the less famous brother of James Taylor, singing *Lost in the love of you*, mindlessly engaged in trashing portions of junk email. I hear a

quiet tap on my doorsill, quite a contrast from the bold entry the day before.

"Hey, Mr. Phillips, can I play my new song for you?"

Andy's eyes are clear and his demeanour is much different today.

"Sure, pull up a chair. Play me the one you shared the lyrics of yesterday."

As he pulls his guitar out of its case, the strings look as if they'd been recently changed, untrimmed and springing all about like an unruly Jack in the Box. He strums the first chord, and I notice that the guitar is way out of tune.

"Here Andy, use this."

I pull out my smart phone and turn on the guitar tuning app. It takes him a few minutes, but he gets it in tune. Without breaking his concentration, and likely having mustered his courage at the door, he begins playing. As Andy sings, I listen intently to his voice, but I'm drawn to watching the way he's strumming and chording the guitar. Because he is holding the pick loosely between his thumb and index finger, his guitar pick is floppy and he isn't pulling a great tone out of his instrument. His fingers are relatively flat on the fingerboard as he notes the chords. His left hand thumb is clamped onto the neck in a stranglehold. It causes his chords to have a choked, muffled sound.

He has a beautiful tone in his middle range, but his voice crackles as he sings. Because he isn't using a capo, the key he's chosen is too high for his voice. I know he is nervous. Most boys his age don't sing and play guitar. They play lead and noodle monotonous licks and power chords that eventually lead them to their personal rendition of *Stairway to Heaven* or repetitious streams of minor pentatonic scales. As if they'll impress the girls who may be listening. Others who attempt to sing have a narrow vocal range

and resort to speaking the lyrics like Richard Harris did in the movie musical version of *Camelot* too many years ago.

But Andy is going for it, and his voice is sincere and clear. He looks up at me every few moments for reassurance. I think he knows the key is too high for his vocal range. Each time he glances, I smile as I nod to the steady beat of his strumming. My nodding, and the intent study of his performance, provides him the reassurance that I am honestly into his singing and playing, but he abruptly stops.

"That really sucked, Mr. Phillips. Let me play it again. I know I can do a better job."

"No, wait, Andy. I liked it a lot. I liked the way that you consistently sang the song. That's a complicated melodic line. I love the melody ... it has a haunting quality to it. I like your passion, the ways that you emphasised *reoccurrence of relief* in the chorus and played that little recurrent riff as a metaphor with the lyrics to lead you back to the verse. You had a few trouble spots, but you played right through them. You *really* went for it."

Andy beams. All kids want the reassurance of their teachers, and performing something as personal as a love song they've composed can be difficult for anyone at any age.

"Can I offer a few suggestions to help you get a better tone from your guitar and find a range that may be better suited to your voice?"

Andy has heard me play many times over the past two years. Early on, he thought the tone I had was strictly due to my guitar, but I'd played his guitar a month ago and pulled the same, rich, resonant sound out of his guitar that I drew from mine.

"Yeah, that sounds great!"

I quickly describe and demonstrate a simple approach to holding his guitar pick, using the fleshly part of the thumb to cover 80% of the area of the pick, holding the forearm parallel to the top soundboard of the guitar, pushing the strum from the elbow, and keeping relaxed.

"Andy, check out Jackson Browne on YouTube. John Lennon and George Harrison too. Watch how their strum is mainly from the elbow, and the wrist is relaxed and moves like an afterthought. Think about a relaxed motion for snapping a whip," I demonstrate in the air, "or a drummer playing a jazz rhythm pattern on the ride cymbal."

"Watch me. I'll play a pattern, you play it back."

We try a few straightforward, four beat, rhythm patterns in duple meter.

"Now, play the intro to your song."

Immediately, the sound of his guitar opens up. Andy beams.

"Wow, Mr. Phillips, it really makes a difference!"

He keeps repeating the four bar intro to his song.

"OK, take out your smart phone and make a short movie of me doing it. Just zoom in on my right forearm, wrist, and hand."

Andy turns on his phone and when I hear the beep tone, I commence playing a few 4 beat strumming patterns."

As I demonstrate, I keep talking.

"And when you want to check on whether your forearm and wrist are relaxed and parallel to the soundboard, just flip your guitar over like this," as I flip the guitar so the back is facing him, "and

play some nice, relaxed air guitar strums. Now you try."

I take his smart phone, turn it off, and place it in his guitar case. He tries my suggestion and the look on his face tells me he feels the difference.

"Strumming is a flow, Andy. Get into the relaxed flow of strumming the rhythm pattern."

He flips his guitar over, grabs his favourite G chord, and starts strumming.

"Now, stop a minute. Drop your left hand from the fingerboard."

Andy looks at me quizzically. After a moment, he slowly removes his left hand from the neck.

"Place it back on that G chord again. Now, drop your hand as if it's a dead weight and you have no control over it, like a rag doll."

"Slowly, bring your hand to the fingerboard and form a 'letter C' with your left hand fingers and thumb," I demonstrate with my hand in the air, "and make pretend that your fingers are like spider legs walking on the frets. Grab your G chord like this," I show him a version with no 3rd of the chord, "and try to only press your fingers as much as you need to make the chord sound."

Andy does just as I say and begins strumming the intro to his song. I recognise now that the rhythm pattern sounds like a tune from Oasis, but that's no matter. Plenty of artists have stolen riffs from great tunes over the years.

"Wait, we need a capo at around the 5th fret. I think that will work to help you sing the song with a stronger voice in a better register of your vocal range."

I grab a pink, spring capo hanging from a pushpin on my corkboard

and squeeze it into place. Andy smirks at the pink capo. All the kids think I'm whacky to own a piece of pink guitar hardware, but I bought it as a donation for breast cancer awareness.

"OK, go ahead."

Andy starts playing the intro of the tune. His tone sounds more open, more resonant. I wonder if he'll recognise the new resting tone and begin singing the song in the new key. He's there and he's got it. His voice sounds amazing and he looks at me with a knowing gaze. I reach across my desk for my trusty Guild F50R my father bought me as a gift for high school graduation and start playing to the second verse of lyrics. My finger picking the C chord in first position while Andy plays the C further up the fingerboard (i.e., his G chord with the capo at the 5th fret sounds like C) makes us sound like a rich, open, piano voicing. I play a tasty lick after each phrase he sings, our jamming sounds very good, and Andy's voice becomes stronger as his confidence grows. As he plays his final chord, I rest on my axe[viii] and smile.

"Well, what did you think?"

"I think I need to come back in a few days after I rework the chorus part. I'm having a hard time changing chords and being really relaxed. But I can already hear the difference in my playing and singing, Mr. Phillips."

"It's not going to happen in one session, Andy. It's a process. Trust yourself, trust the process."

I always feel like a wise sage when I invoke Shaun McNiff's book (1998). But I also remember the revelation I had when I started recognising these nuances in guitarists' technical styles in my mid-teens.

"Meanwhile, check out Jackson Browne and Bonnie Raitt on YouTube and watch carefully how fluidly they strum and move

with the guitar as they play. I think you might also think about leaving a space for a solo over the verse section for someone like Kraig to jam on, and maybe even think about adding a bridge like The Beatles' *No Reply* and Oasis' *Wonderwall*."

"A bridge?"

"Yeah, Andy, for the new lyrics I see you've added to your notebook."

Conscience now a victim of dopamine
Refilling my broken mug again and again
No empathy for the shame I cannot feel
Frozen on the low road where it all began

The bell rings and its time for Andy to get on to his next class. I know he'll be back at lunch tomorrow. Andy excitedly rams his guitar back into its case.

"Wait Andy, don't forget, your cell phone's in there," and with one swoop he snatches the phone out of the case and jams it into his hoodie pocket.

"Yeah, we'll listen to some bridges tomorrow. Meanwhile, check out *No Reply* on YouTube. I'll have a lead sheet prepared for you, but listen to it and look at the lyrics to help you identify the bridge."

"Very cool."

And with those words, I know a different kind of bridge has already been built. Tomorrow's task of composing a bridge will only enhance our teacher-student relationship and Andy's music songwriting skills.

Making the connections: A reflective-reflexive analysis

Although our first meeting together ended on an uninspiring note, Andy's story offered some valuable insight into the troubles of adolescents in love, and also into the value of the songwriters' circle class. Songwriting is an art form, but we have used it as a pedagogical strategy to enable and support students' reflective insights into their personal concerns that we believe regularly consume the majority of their attention. If it is in fact true that "you are what you do with your attention" (Kurnarsky, 2007), and Andy's attention is seduced by psychological and emotional bewilderment, then how can we as educators realistically expect our students to retain anything from the lessons? The intention of this insight is not to merely address the pedagogical and content specialist requirements of a job that consumes the majority of our time, but to address the expectations placed on teachers to also be proficient psychologists and social counsellors (see The Hawn Foundation, 2011-2013).

In consideration of this perspective, we infer from the opening meeting with Andy that our students are mentally distracted by real issues that are not related to the academic material we are obligated to teach them. Although a philosophical debate about the nature of love and connectedness is warranted, it is not the focus of this essay. Rather, it is our hope that the reader will consider the benefits that Andy received in participating in the songwriters' circle class, through informal-unstructured learning and one-to-one interactions with his teacher, and Andy's insights into the nature of an adolescent's attention span during school in classes that seemingly generate very little interest. After all, the questions we should now be asking ourselves are threefold:

(1) When are love and relationships *not* on the minds of our students?

(2) Other than the songwriters' circle class and individual songwriting tutoring sessions, how else can we address both the real and personal issues our students rarely attend to in the classroom?

(3) How can we rethink the ways that we engage adolescents in classroom music making?

We have very clear memoires of the concerns that occupied the majority of our attention in high school. They were not the discussions and facts imbedded into the Mathematics, English, Science, French, Social Studies, Music and Theatre Studies curricula. They were the discussions we were having with ourselves about the complicated emotions and insecurities we were dealing with as we were force fed music facts and technique in teacher directed, rote learning environments. As educators, we believe that what we teach should optimistically add real value to the lived human experiences of adolescent students. Call us rebels if you will, but we wholeheartedly object to the idea of teaching to textbooks and methods, monopolising the chalk, conducting the music ensemble with a sole focus on ensemble performances, and adhering to policy decided by bureaucrats that purposefully disconnects itself from the moral purposes of education. As long as students are working to improve their English reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, and learning music through learning to play guitar, it is within a teacher's right to "teach who I am" (Palmer, 1999).

Through the inquiry process, we intend our dialogue to create a space where teachers can talk openly with their hearts and minds about the pain and joy their own students' experience (Gouzouasis & Lee, 2009; Pilcher, 2001), as well as how it interferes with their students' focus on academics. In Andy's case, he categorises himself as someone who feels trapped in some kind of pattern that pushes him away from intimacy. He believes he feels depressed to have realised and articulated this epiphany in a song. We interpret his use of the term 'depression' not as a mental health condition warranted for therapy, but more generally, as "a condition that all people experience at one time or another in their lives" (Gallardo et al., 2009, p. 288). We believe that these types of feelings occupy the thoughts of many adolescent students, and as a result, interfere with pro-social school behaviour, motivation, and academic performance. They form a large part of negative energy that adolescents experience in their school life. Over

the years, we have learned that making music, through songwriting and playing guitar, is one place in school and studio settings where positive, meaningful, pro-social energy may freely flow.

As we implied in our discussion of autoethnography, the topic of relationships addressed in this tale (see Sparkes, 2002; Gouzouasis, 2008a, 2008b) was chosen based on our experiences with students and our own personal struggles in high school. Both of us were always good listeners and mentors for friends who were in committed relationships, yet we always seemed to be the odd man out when it came to actually being in a relationship. It was torturous to see many of our friends unlock the secrets to getting a girlfriend while we sat in awe and jealousy, often questioning our own self-worth. So most Saturday nights we wound up playing guitar and singing songs as the music entertainment at social gatherings and house parties, singing *about* love and life, as we watched our friends *live* love and life.

Hey Mister that's me up on that juke box.
I'm the one that's singing this sad song.
Well, I'll cry every time that you slip in one more dime,
And let the boy sing the sad song one more time (James Taylor, 1971).

Thus, through the autoethnographic process, Andy evolved as a combination of both ourselves from high school and some of the personal revelations and experiences that a number of students have shared with us. Mr. Phillips was also a composite of our personalities and experiences. We have been songwriters since an early age, and by the time we finished high school, we had binders full of songs that made us quite proud. However, we were never given the opportunity to discuss the love, joy, sorrow, and melancholy we experienced in writing our songs, mainly because we were too scared of 'being found out' that we were not happy kids all the time. Acceptable poetry was only the stuff we read in textbooks, mostly (de)composed by dead poets. Moreover, teacher-learner ,classroom based, discussions of spiritual, soulful aspects of life are not a part of mainstream education in North America. Years later, we realised that this fear of others knowing

about personal sorrows and confusion *should* be addressed in the classroom, but teachers need to demonstrate to their students that they are genuinely not afraid to listen to them and talk about real issues. Taking these perspectives into account, we learned from ourselves and from our students, that autoethnography – as a reflective, reflexive, interpretive research process – is pedagogical in nature.

Emerging thoughts

> The pedagogical act is not simply a form of transmission of knowledge. It is a complex act that is imbued with feeling, intentionality, and environmental/cultural expectations. Pedagogical acts are laden with elements of difference (consider the different viewpoints, feelings and senses of the teacher and student) and counternarrative. With this in mind the practice of autoethnography becomes a powerful pedagogical mode of research that holds great potential to inform a community of teachers and learners in a specific field. (Lines, in review, p. 5)

The journey of composing this autoethnography has enabled us to address our concerns about providing students opportunities to express highly personal and heartful, yet universal, issues that revolve around inevitable psychological and emotional confusion adolescents' deal with everyday. The medium of songwriting is one form of expression that has served us well throughout our own lives, however, the opportunity to comfortably share personal experiences as part of the academic experience should be considered in the ongoing debate pertaining to the purpose of school, in general, and of school based music making. Our experiences in teaching middle school and high school taught us that students are willing to share their thoughts about love and relationships, as long as the teacher is willing to have these discussions in a professional, open, respectful, and contemplative manner. In that context, we believe that through the autoethnographic process we are able to create and develop a music pedagogy that is musical, mindful, heartful, and spiritual – a pedagogy that goes beyond music theory, note reading,

and instrumental technique and brings us to a deeper understanding of the affective value of music and music making through the craft of composing music and lyrics in songwriting. Furthermore, because autoethnography can be considered as pedagogy (Banks & Banks, 2000; Gouzouasis, 2013; Gouzouasis & Leggo, in press) it "has an important place in the recovery and reconstruction of pedagogical knowledge that breaches ethical and relational trust in what would otherwise remain unacknowledged in music education" (Lines, in review).

Autoethnography has been a relatively unexplored and undiscovered part of the music education literature for over a decade (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009; Bartleet, 2010; de Vries, 2012; Gouzouasis, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2011, 2013; Gouzouasis, Irwin, Gordon, & Miles, 2013; Lee, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; 2007, 2009, 2010; Gouzouasis & Lee, 2002; 2007, 2009; Lee & Gouzouasis, 2010), and arts-based educational research in music teaching and learning contexts has also been unheralded (de Vries, 2007, 2011; Gouzouasis, Henrey, & Belliveau, 2008; Prendergast, Gouzouasis, Leggo, & Irwin, 2009; Gouzouasis & LaMonde, 2007). That is because the majority of these works have been published outside of traditional music education journals and books. Moreover, they are rarely referenced or considered in the music education literature, but widely welcomed in arts research journals and texts.

Traditionally speaking, autoethnographers (e.g., Carolyn Ellis, Laurel Richardson, Andrew Sparkes, Art Bochner, and many others) primarily write about adult learners, adult learner interactions, adult situations, and adult relationships. Thus, since its inception, autoethnography has focused on the development of adult oriented, adult themed pedagogies (Banks & Banks, 2000). What differentiates the present inquiry from existing literature, and a number of other recently minted research stories, is that it is told from the perspective of teachers and young learners engaged in classroom and studio music making. Also, our focus moved from the self, to include the other and the (s)p(l)aces in which we live, and we did so in a relational manner. Our story examined, elaborated, and (de/re)constructed

music making through the eyes, ears, heart, and mind of the young learner. As such, we are concerned with developing a new way of conceptualising and writing about music pedagogy for the pre-K through Grade 12 learner[ix]. A departure from what's been written in this genre, as well as from other qualitative work that has been written in music education, makes this work distinctive, informative, and evocative. In light of how progressive, artful, qualitative research forms have proliferated across the arts in the past decade, this cannot happen too soon in music education research.

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Endnotes

i We use this name as an homage to singer songwriter, John Phillips, who wrote many angst filled songs in the 1960s for the vocal group The Mamas and the Papas. Listen to "I saw her again (last night)" and "Words of love" for classic examples of pop love songs by Phillips.

ii The terms 'fact, fiction, and faction' have been discussed and elaborated by Gouzouasis (2008a, 2008b) & Sparkes (2002). 'Faction' was coined by Alex Haley (2007) in writing the saga, *Roots*. In many contemporary, arts-based qualitative research forms, characteristics of creative non-fiction and fiction writing – imbued with aesthetic and evocative features that blend fact with fiction (to create 'faction') and draw the reader into the text like a short story – are often more important than exact, factual accounts found in realist qualitative research forms that use computer software to strictly analyze data where writers place a premium on the precise regurgitation of textual data chunks as 'evidence.'

iii Please note that in Greek, 'au' is a diphthong that is pronounced 'af' (as in the word *after*).

iv In Greek, the term ethno (έθνω) refers to nation, country, people, race, tribe, group of people living together, as well as community and family. Generally speaking, ethos (ἔθος, ἦθος) is a place, a state of mind, a sense of being—an essential characteristic that may shape an individual (see Gouzouasis, in press).

v In Greek, the word 'grapho' (γράφω) means 'write' (other tenses include 'graphys,' as in 'writing'). With these meanings in mind, 'auto-ethno-graphy' takes on a much broader meaning than has been traditionally theorized.

vi In his *Toccatta on assessment, validity, and interpretation*, Gouzouasis (2008a) abandons the modernist term 'validity' for numerous others that have been developed over the past three decades.

vii Part of the course requirement is to put every troubling thought and emotion on paper before entering the class. The philosophy behind this practice is that it is difficult for a student to focus if they are mindlessly occupied by interpersonal drama. That's what is meant by "an empty mind."

viii The term 'axe' is slang for sax, but guitarists and other instrumentalists have used the word to describe their instruments.

ix We can also elaborate the argument that in makes great sense to use story as way to discuss guitar and song writing pedagogies because the are aural-oral art forms in and of themselves that require different ways of sharing knowledge.

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DOCUMENTING A COLLECTIVE ARTS-BASED METHODOLOGY: AN APPROACH TO WORKING WITH AND THROUGH COMPLEXITY.

ABSTRACT

Gray's Anatomy houses a series of diagrams of the body. Veins, muscles, organs, tendons, and bones all rendered accurately; the body turned into an object that is broken down into sections and mapped. This paper outlines a 'collective arts-based methodology' that responds to the provocation: If Gray were to try to produce *Gray's Education*, with education turned into an object that is broken down into sections and mapped, would he or could he? Three lecturers from a school of teacher education came together to explore their shared interest in combining academic and arts-based skills and also to document a methodology. We were also interested to hand over to a process and see what emerged as a result. On completion of the project, we have found a strong connection to the field in the work of Samaras, who writes about self-study arts-based methodologies. Having designed and implemented this methodology we imagine that it will be useful to others in situations where curiosity is accompanied with confusion and the desire is to move towards an interim resting point. This paper will appeal to those interested in techniques that support the navigation of tense complex spaces.

KEY TERMS: Arts-based, self-study research method, collective arts-based research method, reflective practice

Introduction

In 2013 three academics came together. We all shared an interest in the arts, and were arts/education practitioners (painters, musicians, writers, educators) and academics. We also shared an interest in education and various strands of social theory. We came together to explore what the intersections of all these shared interests might reveal. Specifically, we were interested to explore the possibilities that combining arts practice and what we might call traditional academic practice could generate. In order to actualise this set of aims, we decided to elaborate what we have called a 'collective arts-based methodology' (CABM). This article describes and applies this methodology.

Arts-based methods

At the outset of this article it is important to note that while we are attracted to arts-based methodologies and are acquainted with writers such as Barone (1995), Eisner (1997; 2002), Dewey (1997) and Greene (2001) and the emphasis that each of these writers places on aesthetics and the arts, our project did not set out from an extensive engagement with literature. Rather, it has been an emergent (Sellers, 2013) process. This means that we embarked on a project, drawing on existing ideas and connections to various forms of literature, and arts practice, and then worked back to some specific arts literature to support the outcomes of the project. Consequently on completion of the project we feel that we have found a strong connection to the work of Samaras (2010). Samaras explores self-study arts-based methodologies and identifies a number of the characteristics of such methodologies.

First, linking to the work of LaBoskey, Samaras identifies that self-study methodologies involve collaboration with others and are intended to support engagement with practice. She writes:

> In self-study research, researchers initiate personal inquiries situated in their practice ... They openly, reflectively, and

> systematically examine their practice with critique from others to gain alternative points of view... As self-study scholars question the status quo of their practice, they attempt to make that practice explicit to themselves and to others. Subsequently, they generate knowledge and make that knowledge public for peer critique (LaBoskey, 2004). (Samaras, 2010, p. 720)

As Samaras identifies, working with others involves engaging in dialogue and through that process, constructing narratives around that practice (see also LaBoskey, 2007). Narratives that not only represent a form of knowledge but that enable such knowledge to be communicated to a wider audience. We have incorporated such notions into this project.

Secondly, drawing on the work of Barone and Eisner, Samaras reflects on the opportunities that the arts offer for shaping understandings. The arts might be thought of as a fertile territory where ideas can emerge, be worked through, complicated, refined and discussed with others.

> While traditional research forms create an understanding of the research situation through the processes of experimentation, observation, and control, the arts allow students to sketch and create an understanding of a situation through a descriptive analysis and encourages outside interpretation (Barone, 1995; Barone & Eisner, 1997; Eisner 1993; 1995). (Samaras, 2010, p. 722)

For each of us, working through ideas in our academic work usually involved deploying written forms of text. As painters, however, each of us was aware that the process of working through an idea via the deployment of images is a very different experience. We were aware that 'working out' from that image was a very different way of generating meaning, sense and knowledge.

Thirdly, Samaras suggests that arts-based practice can encourage dialogue and critical reflection around the cultural dimensions of individual practice (see Butler, 1997, p. 80). She writes:

> ... Weber and Mitchell (2004) explore arts-based self-study methods and explain how "they hold up another mirror to facilitate self-reflection, and force critical consideration of the social and cultural dimensions of personal experience" ... (Samaras, 2010, p. 722)

Each of us holds to the view that cultural context mediates experience. Each of us sought to further understand, via the production of images, the cultural dimensions of our understandings.

And finally, Samaras' insistence on the uses and place of symbol in working through complexity is where the greatest points of connection with our project emerged (see also Ferguson, Dixon, Hay, White & Moss, 2004). Consider the following extract where Samaras muses about the uses to which symbols might be put in her teaching.

> I wondered, "What would happen if doctoral students were given opportunities to articulate their research interests through the arts?"; "Could artifacts serve as symbols and representations to help students articulate their research passions?"; "What role would/could peers play in that process?"; and "Could students clarify their thinking about their research proposals using visuals and by reflecting aloud to their peers for critique?" (Samaras, 2010, p. 723)

Samaras argues that symbols can be used to work through complex ideas and we agree with her. We connect very strongly in this project to Samaras' proposition (see also Ferguson et al., 2004).

On completion of this project we aim to connect tightly to the work of this single author rather than claim to make broad connections to the field. With this in mind, what is it that we can claim to add to the area of 'arts-based self-study' generally (Samaras, 2010, p. 734)? 'Addition' is perhaps too linear a way of thinking and does not capture the type of contribution that we seek to make in this article. We see our contribution to the field as a more aesthetic desire to thicken (Barone, 1995, p. 177; Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 35;

Eisner, 1997, 2002; Greene, 2001). And we aim to do this thickening by developing and documenting our own version of a 'collective arts-based methodology' and then by outlining how such a methodology might be deployed to support teacher self-study/reflective practice (Eisner, 1997).

Working with/through complexity

Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler (2008, pp. 75-89) draw a distinction between complex and complicated spaces. Complicated spaces are defined as those that can be broken down and analysed and then reassembled. Complicated spaces can be frozen in time and edges constructed around them. Davis et al. use the example of the mechanism of a watch to illustrate this. Their key argument woven through this discussion is that complicated spaces are manageable and this manageability is an effect of their know-ability.

Complex spaces, on the other hand, are fluid, relational, and encompass temporal dimensions, and consequently they are open-ended and take shape as the actors within them engage in social practices that in turn shape those spaces. A lake is the example that the authors introduce to ground this concept. When new animals are introduced to a lake, for instance, though the lake remains a lake, it is none the less changed over time because it comes to be comprised of different elements. Complex spaces are difficult to manage and difficult to know. Davis et al. (2008) argue that educative spaces are complex rather than complicated.

As educators we can take up a series of positions in relation to complex spaces. On the one hand, we might position complexity as something that we can revel in and sit with. Aporia is an Aristotelian term used by Kinsella and Pittman to refer to the experience of sitting with complexity (Kinsella & Pittman, 2012; Eisner, 1997, pp. 259+). While on the other hand we might position complexity as something that we aim to settle (Barone, 1995, p. 172; Eisner, 2002) or that demands that decisions be made. Phronesis is an Aristotelian term used by Kinsella et al. to refer to the capacity to make decisions

in complex contexts (see Kinsella & Pittman, 2012; Eisner, 2002).

To briefly segue for a moment, in a discussion on narrative methodologies Eisner (1997) discusses the place, the uses and the dangers of ambiguity, and what he has to say is relevant to what we will go on to suggest here. Narrative methodologies allow for an open-ended use of story and a refusal of certainty and closure. When narratives are used as data, the intention is often to open up an area. Elements of contradiction and ambiguity are often an important part of that opening up and an important aspect of the stories that people weave about their lives. Ambiguity and contradiction are often part of what makes a compelling narrative.

For Eisner, however, this key advantage of narrative methodologies – its capacity to sit with ambiguity – might also be one of its key disadvantages – its reluctance to signpost (1997). In discussing this tension he writes: "I feel a tension in these two pulls: the pull toward precision and the pull toward the productive consequences of ambiguity" (Eisner, 1997, p. 259).

As we have moved through this project we too have felt such a tension. Many of the questions that we work with in education are exceedingly complex. What does it mean to learn? How do we understand the relationship between teaching and learning? What are the purposes of schooling? What is dialogue? Each of these questions is an example of complex territory and each extends an invitation to sit with or to resolve that complexity.

We contend that CABM is a process that can be used to support educators to work through complex situations and complex ideas. This project, as we will demonstrate, has helped to clarify that one stance we might take in relation to the problem of educative complexity involves resisting the desire to maintain an absolute separation between the complex and the complicated. We will now apply the methodology.

Background and context

Having worked together over a number of years, we know each other reasonably well and have a successful track record of co-operating on various projects. The capacity to work together as an effective community of practice is an important aspect of this methodology.

More recently we discovered a shared interest in the visual arts. We all noticed that we were using our arts practice to inform our teaching and thinking in various ways, and we decided to reflect on this in a more systematic way. We met to discuss the place of the visual arts in our work and the following project and methodology emerged.

Overview – collective arts-based methodology (CABM)

CABM is embedded in a number of broad aims and assumptions outlined below:

- CABM is based on feminist, poststructural and critical epistemological assumptions where knowledge is understood to be constructed and value laden (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2009, pp. 53-132)
- CABM is based on the belief that practitioner researchers are producers of knowledge (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2009, pp. 111-132)
- CABM is based on beliefs around the benefits of collaborative modes of research (Samaras, 2010; LaBoskey, 2007)
- CABM is based on beliefs around the uses of symbols and the arts to explore, work through, clarify and communicate complex ideas and spaces (Samaras, 2010, p. 720)
- CABM is based on beliefs around the importance of research attending to issues in ways that result in positive impacts in the world (Fraser, 1997, pp. 218-9)

As well as exploring a shared interest, we also wanted to publish what we produced in an academic journal and as a first step, we decided to design, document and implement a methodology. The steps that we moved through in order to implement this *methodology* included:

- Establishing a community of practice
- Responding to a provocation
- Engaging in dialogue to identify a shared focus
- Clarifying this shared focus by constructing a sentence, key phrase or key question/theme
- Working on art products independently for two months
- Not discussing the project with each other for this two-month period
- Reflecting on the focus theme over this two-month period
- Keeping a journal, which included written and visual text, over this two-month period
- Producing three pieces of visual art that responded to the key theme during this two-month period
- Committing to producing a small written piece that explained the work and that linked to the project focus theme
- Meeting to show and discuss our art work
- Writing responses to the work produced
- Meeting after writing these responses to identify a key issue, learning or insight
- Producing a written piece that we aimed to publish

Collective arts-based methodology aspect 1 – dialogue and arriving at a key focus question

We began by discussing the place of the visual arts in our work. We aimed to arrive at a point of focus. During this initial meeting we engaged in a wide-ranging discussion, and at one point we focused on two books *Anatomy* (Gray, 1989) and *Eucalypts* (Kelly, Chippendale & Johnston, 1989).

Anatomy (Gray, 1989) houses a series of diagrams or etchings of the body. Veins, muscles, organs, tendons and bones are all rendered accurately. The body is broken down into parts that are then mapped and labelled. *Eucalypts* (Kelly et al., 1989) is similar, with plants rendered in ink and watercolour, and parts then labelled and named. A key purpose of the images in both books is to represent *complex* subject matter, in *complicated* ways, in order that the area under investigation might be known.

After a few hours of informal discussion, we arrived at a point of focus. We did this by moving through the following series of stages:

- We brainstormed in an informal way
- We classified areas of concern or interest
- We returned to a general brainstorm
- We arrived at a shared concern that we aimed to respond to through the project

Importantly we also realised that we had turned our key concern into a question and, drawing on ideas from Deleuze and Guattari, we positioned this as an 'assemblage'.

'Assemblage' is a theoretical notion developed by Deleuze and Guattari and used by Youdell (2011) to great effect in *School Trouble*. Youdell defines 'assemblage' in the extract below:

> Deleuze and Guattari write that apparently 'whole' entities, be these societies, institutions or something else, might be understood as assemblages of heterogeneous components that cross-cut state, social, representational, discursive, subjective and affective orders. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that it is the particularities of the ways that these component parts come together that we need to map in order to understand a particular assemblage. (Youdell, 2011, pp. 14-5)

In other words, ideas, concepts and sites are not understood to be discrete arenas, but rather are understood as comprising *and* being held in place by an assemblage of ideas, social structures, discourses, affectivities, and so forth (see Crowhurst & Emslie, 2014).

The question "Could Gray produce an *Anatomy* (1989) that focused on Education?" became a single point of focus that we positioned as an assemblage – as a complex collection of relational components. Once this was done, we could explore this terrain artistically, through dialogue, through journalling and through the production of this text.

Collective arts-based methodology aspect 2 – producing the work

For the next two months we painted, reflected, produced our journals and thought. We did this work independently and we did not discuss the project with each other at all during this period. Each of us continued to focus on our shared key concern over this period. Each of us kept a journal that included written and visual text. (Although we have not analysed these journals in any systematic way in this paper, the work done in each of these journals contributed to the final art works). And finally, over the two months, each of us produced three pieces of visual art that responded to the key concern in some way.

Collective arts based methodology aspect 3 – sharing the work produced

Once we had completed our paintings we shared and discussed our work. We met at an agreed space, re-stated and connected with our assemblage focus statement, put our art works around the room and engaged in an informal discussion. We discussed what we had made, identifying similarities and differences. We discussed what we noticed was happening in our work.

At this point, after completion and discussion of the works, we also started to become more focused on the production of a paper. We photographed the works; wrote individual narratives, linking the pieces back to our key concern; and circulated the narratives via email.

Individual narratives and art products

Barbara Chancellor

I began this task by journalling around the questions: Can education be represented in a series of visual images? and Should these images stand alone or be assembled as a triptych? I am influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'rhizome', and inspired by the work of Warren Sellers (Sellers, 2008) who investigates curriculum in this way. My previous work on this way of seeing education, 'streaming currere' (Chancellor, 2010), describes curriculum as an organic, all embracing, lived and lifelong experience.

I chose to use the same palette for the three paintings to purposely connect them. For the same reason, each canvas was of the same dimensions and, therefore, could be assembled as a triptych.

Painting 1

Infant
Oil on canvas
12cm x 14cm
2013

This painting shows an infant experiencing their world. This includes an adult looking down, intentionally teaching – giving direction, offering comfort, advice, guidance. Around both human representations is the swirling, organic, experience of education. Curriculum positioned as everything experienced, as everything connected organically.

Painting 2

Rhizome
Oil on canvas
12cm x 14cm
2013

This painting illustrates the rhizomatic structure of the iris plant. It reminds me of the book on botanical art that Michael brought to our first meeting. Rhizomes are interconnected. For me they represent how I experience learning in interconnected ways: re-interrogating my histories and re-imagining them in creative ways to produce visual images.

Painting 3

Complexity reduction
Oil on canvas
12cm x 14cm
2013

This painting is about the nature of formal education today, preschools, schools and universities. It represents the concern I feel about rigid curriculum documents that force an interesting, organic process – learning – to 'go down the drain'. This complexity reduction has been described by Noel Gough (Gough, 2008).

Michael Crowhurst

Davis et al. (2008) argue that education is often represented with Euclidean forms. They argue that linear representations are not appropriate to use in relation to educative processes because learning, teaching and education are not linear events. They argue that education happens in what they call a nested fashion or, after Deleuze and Guattari, rhizomatically. To depict education visually

we might move instead towards other less regular forms. Davis et al. (2008) use a honeycomb-style image at the start of each chapter to illustrate how the concepts to be considered might be connected in myriad ways.

The images I have produced respond to our key concern. Specifically I am interested to focus on one aspect of the assemblage, that is 'education' and to visually represent some ideas concerned with 'thinking'.

Teachers are engaged in a type of work that is difficult to pin down. If you asked a room full of people engaged in that work what they believed education should be aiming to do, you would most probably hear a room full of different responses. However, despite this complexity, most in that room might still agree with the proposition that a key aim of any educative system is to support and strengthen the learner's capacity to 'think'. The following three images are about 'thinking'. I will use these ideas in my teaching.

Painting 1

Thinking 1 – a brainstorm
Acrylic on plywood
90cm x 60cm
2013

What does it look like when I think?
This image is an attempt to represent this …
A variety of ideas, different ideas – a spray of shapes …
Random associations … Day dreaming
All accessed and enacted … often unconsciously
from elsewhere … All originating elsewhere

Teachers frequently ask students to brainstorm and often ask students to report back to the whole class after a brainstorm. While clarifying a point of view will involve brainstorming, pushing thinking needs to do more than this. Pushing thinking involves the imposition of a structure of sorts.

Painting 2

Thinking 2 – cohere
Acrylic on linen
32cm x 24cm
2013

What does it mean and what might it look like to push a brainstorm? Perhaps what 'push a brainstorm' means is to encourage students to group random associations – to push them to produce order. What does it mean to claim to have learnt something? Perhaps it is to claim that 'x' coheres.

Learning is also often explained as a process involving acquisition, as in, when I learn I come to possess a greater quantity of 'knowledge' — where this knowledge is stored 'in' my brain, which functions like a warehouse.

Davis et al. (2008) suggest another way of thinking about the relationship that exists between 'learning' and the brain. They argue that a powerful way of thinking about learning is to reflect on the degree to which it depends on or assumes coherence. Learning, they contend, can happen when the learner engages with new ideas in such a way that they can be incorporated into an existing way of knowing – a way of knowing that already coheres.

Conversely, learning can happen when what already coheres is reconfigured or 'troubled' (Butler, 1990; Kumashiro, 2004) on account of a new experience. Learning it would seem involves not only complex but also sometimes contradictory moves.

We often feel comfortable when things cohere and uncomfortable when they do not. Learning is sometimes explained as involving movement between equilibrium and disequilibrium.

Painting 3

Thinking 3 – affirm and challenge
Acrylic on linen
32cm x 24cm
2013

What might my relationship be to the things that cohere for my students? What might my relationship be to the things that they have learnt? Sometimes my role is to affirm these things and sometimes it is to challenge them. Sometimes I pitch, sometimes I stretch – and often I wonder on what basis I decide.

As discussed above, Davis et al. (2008) suggest that one way of thinking about learning is to reflect on the degree to which it depends on or interrupts coherence. This painting is about the extent to which teaching and learning are dependent both on affirming and/or challenging/'troubling' coherence (Butler, 1990; Dewey, 1997, p. 77; Freire, 1999; Gewirtz & Cribb, 2009, p. 148; Kumashiro, 2004).

Narelle Lemon

Painting 1

I began thinking about these pieces, which were based on the concept of assemblages, most specifically by looking at what we put together in education as representational rites and rituals that constitute this space and set of experiences. By thinking about this via the visual arts meaning of assemblage – making three-dimensional or two-dimensional artistic compositions by putting together found objects – I began to brainstorm my experiences in a journal before moving into the studio to explore using familiar and unfamiliar mediums.

Education eye chart
Watercolour on paper
29.7cm x 21cm
2013

This work was constructed by thinking about assemblages of education and scientific ways of seeing the world. A key driving question was: What is it that education is known for in the twenty-first century? The symbols represent a snapshot of education in 2013 and highlight key trends that are emerging and being integrated into education. I connected my thinking to the notions of an eye chart. The chart is hierarchal as a visual symbol but is not interpreted this way in relation to meaning making. This art work implies a vision tester, when we look at something, do we see the same thing? What do we see? What is our attention drawn to? Seeing new things in new ways is also played out with this art work with the reference to a familiar looking scientific eye chart combined with notions of craft and tea towel art that are hung in our kitchens. The viewer is invited to see these parallel endings and consider what we are immersed in within education in different ways.

Painting 2

Lines of play
Watercolor on paper
29.7cm x 21cm
2013

Lines of play looks at the prevalence and ideological effects of lines in education – we line up to enter a room, tables are often in lines, school classrooms are lined up either side of a corridor, we learn to write between dotted lines, we write lines if we are naughty, we sit in lines on the floor, and so on. There are lines everywhere in education, and often very linear ways of behaving and thinking. This linear prevalence is juxtaposed with the image of multiple blue lines, which represent the co-existence of all of these lines and education as a space where lines occur at the same time, sometimes overlapping and sometimes coexisting without intersecting.

Painting 3

Microcosm and Macrocosms of consideration
Watercolour on paper
29.7cm x 42cm
2013

Microcosm and Macrocosms of consideration invites the viewer to consider the various communities of practice that exist in education – the moving in, out, shifting across, the strong and the weak. There are conscious verses unconscious interconnections that are microcosms in themselves influenced by ideology and indoctrinations, some that are told, some that are imposed in an authoritarian manner, and some that are found experiences. The misshaping of circles refers to the flexible movement of communities of practice where there are layers of experiences that can be labelled, linked, some that are solid or some that are just beginning to be formed. The colouring represents the colours often seen within school settings that allude to calm and that support ideal learning to be enacted.

Collective arts based methodology aspect 4 – writing back to the work

The next stage of the methodology involved 'writing back to the work'. At this stage in the project each participant had viewed all of the other participants' work and had read the narratives that were produced to accompany each piece. Each participant now wrote a short narrative that encapsulated or made some sense of the entire collection of work and the entire process so far. A set method for engaging with the work in its entirety was not prescribed. The following extracts are what resulted.

Barbara Chancellor

Interestingly, I found myself keeping a diary during this project, something I only do when I travel, and then not always. I have written in it and drawn in it after each of our meetings and especially before I began painting, finding that I think better when I write and draw about a process. There is something connected about the visual and written texts that I find useful. I am reminded of Noel Gough's comment on Derrida's belief that nothing is outside the text (Gough, 2008, p. 211) as a way of understanding that the visual text is equally valid and complementary with the written word. For academics, the written word is valued as it is in many education forums. In early childhood education children express their learning through a range of mediums, rarely written text. For example, young children demonstrate understanding through movement, creating two- and three-dimensional images, storytelling and role play. With the start of primary school, the value of texts other than the written word declines and diminishes to the point of vanishing in most instances and, it can be argued, this continues into secondary and tertiary education institutions.

Here I connect with Lemon's second image, *Lines of Play*, which shows the striations that are present in school-based education. Controlling lines appear to try to avoid interconnectedness and learners are submerged in the 'blue' co-existence – a mandatory coexistence.

Crowhurst's first image, *Thinking 1*, shows the brainstorming process he uses, and his willingness to accept the randomness of the process, a welcoming in of ideas. In *Thinking 2*, groupings begin and understandings of learning gather together. Lemon's first image, *Eye Chart*, is also a type of brainstorming but with a structure that connects with traditional notions of hierarchy. In a similar way my first image, *Infant*, connects all the ideas surrounding the infant into an organic, swirling background or brainstorm where no idea stands alone.

In *Thinking 3*, the idea that some learnings will be affirmed and others challenged reminds me of *Microcosm and Macrocosms of consideration* in that particular knowledge systems can group us. In my third image, *Complexity reduction*, I consider the notion that as we group into gatherings around shared knowledges, complexity diminishes. Lemon points out the strength and weakness of some groupings and I think she suggests power groupings that can dominate the shape education takes.

Michael Crowhurst

In order to respond to the paintings I printed off the nine images and grouped them according to the painter and the order that each painter had nominated. Next I read and re-read the artists' statements. Finally I tried to record what I connected with – the paragraph below represents this act of capture.

Scanning nine paintings looking for points of connection looking for moments of departure … when I look in 2 ways I sometimes see in 2 ways too … current reading ***continuous*** *with thinking …* ***Movement****, flux, blue, circles, spirals … The artists' statements touch on the paradox that is the relationship between freedom and structure in education …* ***organic****, lines,* ~~*coherence*~~*, rhizome, charts … is imposition a prerequisite for growth or change? … question mark … fluidity, from or of nature, adults, children, small coloured dots … does imposition constrain or enable? … throwing ideas out there carving them back … education is freedom/ imposition … coherence/fragmentation …*

After this was done I went for a walk and had a coffee. I found myself thinking about Dewey. His ideas about 'worthwhile experiences' seemed to connect in some way or another with the themes that each painter had outlined in relation to their work.

In *Experience and Education* Dewey positions himself as a progressive rather than a traditionalist. He argues that a progressive education should be based on experience and should be about more than simply negating tradition. Dewey suggests it is 'worthwhile' experiences that we should be free and encouraged to pursue. A worthwhile experience is defined as one that supports growth, as one that is expansive, and as one that is consistent with the 'continuity' principle – meaning that it might be useful in some way at some point in the future (Dewey, 1997, pp. 37-8).

Each painting addresses similar terrain. Collectively the painters express concerns around systems and imposition and around the way that systemic requirements might get in the way of the provision of quality educative experiences. Chancellor's emphasis on organic growth, Lemon's interrogation of the imposition of educative lines and my own reflections on coherence are all driven by shared desires to pursue what is considered to be 'worthwhile' in educative practice.

As well as providing a set of principles with which an educator can evaluate whether an educative experience is 'worthwhile' or not, Dewey provides a few clues as to what an educator's relationship to such experiences might be in practice (Dewey, 1997, pp. 37-40). He argues that:

- Teachers might aim to ensure that experiences are heading in a worthwhile direction
- Teachers might aim to provide contexts within which such experiences might happen.

I am provoked by this project and by Dewey to reflect on what constitutes a worthwhile experience and to clarify the basis on which I make decisions in this regard.

Narelle Lemon

I've always been drawn to looking at things differently while simultaneously trying to negotiate meaning making and ways of seeing. Working with this collaboration was no different and stimulated my thinking around how to think across, within and with both areas. Our guiding question was thought provoking – can education be represented in images as is done with the plant world and the body in science? Journalling was my immediate reaction and that naturally led me into exploring with mediums (watercolours) I was not so familiar with. I notice that I connect with both Chancellor and Crowhurst's work on reflection, especially with the use of blue and the circular shapings. What is it about blue and education? I am not sure if it is school uniforms or the paint on the wall but the colour and shade utilised in each of our art works connected with the shade of pale blue.

The organic nature and shaping of Chancellor's Painting 1 *Infant* and all of Crowhurst's paintings are fascinating to me. The impact of curves and circles is enticing and obviously resonates with all of us as artists in our representation of education. The non-representation of straight lines, perceived ends and corners to block, guide or stop are not in evidence. Rather shapes are seemingly forever developing, growing, emerging and all with no necessary or perceived end, much like the pedagogical approaches we each enact in our teaching to engage learners and to inspire life-long learning. There is an intention present in all these works namely to draw attention to what it is that we as artists are all immersed in. We have lived, told, retold, and relived our educative stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998) through our art works and we have shared visual symbolic language in order to do so. A new and renewed telling has emerged that highlights intriguing intersections of observations collectively and independently.

Collective arts based methodology stage 5 – return to a key theme/learning/observation

We began this project by attempting to respond in images to a key question. We designed and moved through a collective arts-based methodology outlined above. The final stage of the methodology involves using all that we have done to redraw boundaries, to move inwards, to generate focus, to create a new assemblage territory.

The following key learning was settled on

How did we achieve an *interim* end-point collective key learning? Each artist/academic/researcher thought about all that was produced in the project, over the course of a week. During that week each researcher identified five key learnings. Collectively we moved through these to arrive at a *common interim resting point*. After a series of email discussions, a key theme was settled on. We want to note here that this theme was not the only significant theme to emerge – rather it was the one that we decided we wanted to focus on at this juncture and that is why we used the word 'interim'.

Our key theme involved the distinction between representing fluidity and stasis. At a late point in the process of working through this project, two of the artist/researchers were involved in a discussion about this project with a third colleague who was not directly involved. After listening to our description of the project and looking at some of the art works produced, the colleague posed an interesting question. She asked: Do you know the difference between anatomy and physiology?

Anatomy is the study of parts of the body, and physiology is the study of the moving procedural body. Anatomical texts break the body down, map it, fix it and capture it. Physiological texts also contain images but the emphasis in these texts is on movement and relationship. Images in physiological texts pulsate, surge and move – the body is alive and the component parts are relational.

As we drew to the end of this project the realisation that we had collectively painted a physiology rather than an anatomy is our agreed key learning. We thought about this and realised that rather than represent education in complicated ways that we had all opted for complex representations. All of the art works produced by the writers seemed to veer towards process, expansion and movement, rather than a more static mode of representation. What might some of the implications of this realisation be?

Each of us is also a tertiary teacher working with pre-service teacher education students. When students enter the programs of study that we offer they often want us to talk about 'nuts and bolts' and specific contexts – they often want something from us that is akin to a complicated rendering of education. They want an anatomy. Lecturers, on the other hand, want to talk about process and broader contexts. We offer something that is closer in nature to a physiology.

To generalise, the task for students – who are novice teachers – is to move beyond specificities into considerations of process, metaphor and context. The task for lecturers – who are more experienced teachers – is to elaborate some of the 'nuts and bolts' as well as the more subtle nuances or broader contextual factors that play out in the work of teaching and learning. The task for lecturers is to remember what they have forgotten they have learnt and to try to uncover and communicate some of this. Lecturers and students might also think about their willingness to inhabit such different spaces and about the uses of arts-based methods to support such inhabitations.

Is it problematic that students and teachers come to programs of study occupying different places? (Is this possible to avoid?) No, because the play that this difference enables can be generative for students and for lecturers (Gee, 2003; Crowhurst, 2009). What this illuminates is the importance of avoiding the temptation to think only in complicated *or* only in complex ways – we need to think in both ways – we need to pin things down *and* retain fluidity. We need to deconstruct the binary that separates the complex and the

complicated and speak about and represent education drawing on both sides of the equation (see Davis et al., 2008, pp. 75-89; Fraser, 1997, pp. 118-9). We contend that aspects of the 'collective arts-based methodology' we have outlined here might be deployed to operationalise this aim.

If Gray were to create *Gray's Education* would he or could he? The answer is yes, he could sketch moments, and could freeze and capture these. He could work in complicated ways. Gray might draw classroom furniture, students working on tasks, and so forth. If he were only to do this, however, he would miss movement and relationship, he would miss complexity.

If Gray were to try to represent an educative space he would also need to work with ideas from physiology. He would need to include images that were metaphorical and fluid in nature, images that conveyed a sense of movement. He would need to attempt to represent complexity.

The challenge Gray throws out to the authors is to draw the detail, to freeze, to simplify and to pin down. The challenge we throw back at him is to paint the wash, to muddy the waters, to release. The challenge to both is simultaneously an opportunity – an opportunity to do both – an opportunity to work in ways that deconstruct the binary that separates stillness and movement.

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