Colouring Outside the Lines

Pedagogical Illuminations from an A/R/Tographic life

Exploring Art Making and Art Pedagogy as Important Sites of Learning for Adults

Alice Bennett
B.A, H. Dip. Further Education, M.Ed.

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Head of Department: Dr Camilla Fitzsimons
Supervisor: Dr David McCormack

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Image 1 Film Still KCAT Courses Studio

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Dedication

To all the courageous artist learners and educators who understand that lines are for colouring over. You live your lives as curious, seeking individuals in relationship with each other; you fill the world with hope and possibility.
And for Rosie and Sadie who do the same - *hear the heart beat whispering truth*.

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IMAGE 2 MEMORY VESSEL 2025

Abstract

Adult learners can find themselves marginalised in formal educational settings due to assumptions about their perceived limitations, as if their capacity for growth is fixed or has already ended. It is, I propose, not the individual that is limited, but the pedagogical space they find themselves in, which offers no room for growth. Adopting an a/r/tographic identity - Artist, Researcher, and Teacher, I position my personal and professional life as a lens through which to examine the pedagogical potential of Art as process. I revisit both formative and recent life experiences through creative acts of making 'artefacts' to illuminate the knowledge we can gain by attending to art practices. I explore processes that help adults challenge limiting beliefs that they may have accepted as truth about themselves. For this exploration, I enter into a journey of methodological discovery, embracing an arts-based heuristic attitude (Moustakas, 1974, 1990; Sultan, 2018). I begin by using painting, drawing, stitch, and poetry as well as evocative autoethnographic writing (Bochner & Ellis, 2016) and life history (Randall, 2013) in relationship with others. This unfolding methodology emerges, develops, and finally establishes itself as a congruent life practice of A/R/Tography.

These Research/Art-making processes offer pathways towards enhancing our capacity to engage with essential ongoing life learning themes. I identify these themes as *resistance*, *resilience*, *recognition*, *resonance*, *reclamation*, and *repair*, and suggest that attention to these will help an adult learner to flourish.

This thesis offers artmaking and art pedagogy as a powerful invitation for adults to recognise that it is always possible to know more, to learn, to become more, and to flourish. It asks that we, as adult educators, researchers, and learners, recognise how important it is to consider ourselves and each other as learners *throughout our lifetime*. Art making and art pedagogy offer possibilities for reimagining pedagogical approaches within the broader field of adult education.

Art Pedagogy. Art Practice as Research. Evocative Autoethnography. A/r/tography. Heuristic Inquiry. Life-Long Learning.

ARTEFACT 1 TO BE HER- POEM-2022

Oh, to be her,

remembering
what she knows,
to comfort this
small animal
with still, strong,
gentle hands, to
be quiet in the
wilderness,
to listen for the growing pulse beneath her.

Oh, to be her,

taking crayon to
paper in worship,
living in line, dot,
squiggle
of chameleon skin, autumn leaf.

Of floating seedhead, Water Walking
insect, Trapdoor spider, and
Rhinoceros beetle.

Oh, to be her,

Scribbling outside
the lines, learning to
dwell in small
places. Where
heartbeat whispers
truth,
where skin, blood, hands outstretched, say….

Come, you know the way.

Introduction

> ‘Habit is a second nature which prevents us from
> knowing the first, of which it has neither the cruelties
> nor the enchantments.’

Marcel Proust

As children, we live in a direct, sensory relationship with the world. Our ‘first nature’ is characterised by spontaneous emotion, sensitivity, and awareness; it is full of wonder, vivid colour, promise and potential, it is defined by curiosity and creativity. But over time, we are taught to conform and imitate: to adopt behaviours which are shaped by outcomes, to fit systems that reward predictability more than presence. These lessons teach us to form habits which eventually become our ‘second nature

We unlearn our ‘first nature’ as we are taught to strive towards productivity and conformity. We forget there was ever another way, and in becoming fluent with this ‘second nature,’ we lose touch with the raw intensity of the first. Our instinctive early relationship with the world fades, dulled by routine, narrowed by safety, numbed by the comfort of control and consumption. We trade the unpredictability of wonder for order. We trade our ‘enchantments’ for the expected; we swap the wild beauty we once knew for a domesticated calm.

And though we are protected from the certain ‘cruelties’ Proust speaks of, we are also distanced from the enchantments that once ensured a resonant and whole relationship with our world.

> ‘Discontented with his own accomplishments and extremely anxious to please others with his art, he tends to give up original creation and personal expression…. Further development of his visualizing powers and even his capacity for original thought and for relating himself through personal feelings to his environment may be blocked at this point. It is a crucial stage beyond which many adults have not advanced.’

Lindstrom, 1957 in Edwards, 1999, p.69

As a young girl, I knew what it was to be in communion with nature, with myself and with the 'others' in my world. As I grew, this knowledge was overtaken by the expectations of others, which I was taught to believe were more important. In my poem, 'To Be Her" (ARTEFACT 1), I yearn to reclaim this relationship. This research emerged when I recognised the same yearning in those I worked with and taught. I set out to 'remember' my 'first nature' and give it a place of recognition and value in my 'self' so that I could share this reclaimed knowledge with others.

Working with others in Art Education, I had long experienced a dissatisfaction with what I felt was an unhealthy emphasis on outcomes within art pedagogical spaces for adults. Rosa (2019) tells us that overemphasis on productivity and consumption fosters an increasingly pathological relationship with the world. In this thesis, I explore the processes of art pedagogy and artistic practices, which I propose can help us reconfigure this relationship. A relationship we once had with the world, but which has been 'taught' out of us. Through a deeply personal and scholarly exploration of intense life experiences (Irwin 2013) as an Artist, Researcher, and Teacher, I demonstrate how a focus on art processes, rather than outcomes, can offer a way for adults to reclaim their 'first nature' and flourish in a reconfigured relationship with their world.

I set out in this research by asking, how can artmaking and art pedagogy, approached through an a/r/tographic lens, support adult learners in challenging limiting beliefs and fostering lifelong learning and growth?

The context of the research is grounded in my experience at the Kilkenny Collective for Arts Talent (KCAT), an art learning centre that embraces a diverse range of learners and fosters an environment of growth, experimentation, and transformation. At KCAT, both the artist-educators and the learners engage in relationally supported process-led art-making, cultivating not only artistic excellence but also challenging limiting beliefs about human potential. Initially, I aimed to demonstrate the effectiveness of this pedagogical approach to policymakers, advocating for a broader, more inclusive understanding of human value in adult education. Through collaboration with neurodiverse adult learners, I wanted my research to highlight the importance of art pedagogy in fostering empowerment, self-expression, and holistic learning. As the research unfolded, I adopted

an a/r/tographic lens, which led me to reflect deeply on my own life history and subjective experiences with art and pedagogy; these included more recent experiences in community education in Ireland. Over time, this study became a living inquiry, demonstrating how artmaking has transformative potential, both in learning spaces in a relational sense and in personal development.

It became a living demonstration of a process-led method, revealing the power of creative practice to resist limiting ideologies and support lifelong learning.

The events curated in this thesis also reveal the development of key learning themes that became central to my identity and professional journey through art making and art pedagogy; learning themes that I have come to believe are important to the adult learners I work with and teach. These themes include, but are not limited to, *resistance, resilience, recognition, resonance, reclamation, and repair.* Each theme, I believe, surfaces and re-surfaces at different points in our lives, often in response to profound life events, challenges, transitions, and relational encounters. These key learning themes significantly contribute to our growth as creative adult individuals who are full of potential, individuals who can reintegrate their 'first nature' with their 'second' and so begin a new relationship with their worlds.

Through sustained engagement with art making and art pedagogy, I approach these themes not as abstract concepts but as living, experiential phenomena. I discovered that, as core ideas, they also show themselves to be important considerations for educators and adult learners who are navigating personal and professional complexity. Within the context of adult education and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991), these themes illuminate how artmaking and art pedagogical processes enable adults to reclaim passion, make meaning, confront personal/social challenges, and ultimately, reimagine their ways of being in the world.

Each of these themes is examined through an a/r/tographic lens that draws on evocative autoethnographic writing, poetry, visual art practices, and dialogic exchange. These methods of inquiry unfolded as I sought to match methods to my life and way of being,

arts-based methods, autoethnographic writing and life history were all called into service for the triadic identity I inhabited as artist, teacher, and researcher on a journey of discovery. These methods became creative paths to integrated ways of knowing, allowing for cognitive, emotional, and embodied learning to complement and enhance each other.

The demonstration of these creative explorations invites a rethinking of how art pedagogy and art making as a process extend our understanding of adult learning as *transformative* adult development. These explorations emphasise learning through reflection and the re-evaluation of established beliefs and 'habits' through the lens of lived experiences. The creative/ aesthetic artefacts of this inquiry offer themselves as non-textual 'data' or evidence of personal experience/testimony, cultural context, and pedagogical insight.

Priming the Canvas-Background and Motivation

KCAT (Kilkenny Collective for Arts Talent) is an inclusive arts centre in Callan, County Kilkenny, Ireland, where people with and without intellectual disabilities make art. It was founded in 1999, initiated by Camphill members who saw a need for a space which fostered and nurtured the artistic talents of some of the people who lived there. Camphill is a charity organisation that adopts a holistic approach, offering 'education, training, work and living opportunities for vulnerable children, young people, adults and older people whilst providing them with help and encouragement to reach their full potential' (https://camphillestates.org.uk/index.php/about/about-camphill/ accessed 13/02/2026)

Since its inception, KCAT has grown into a multidisciplinary art studio incorporating theatre, dance, and the visual arts where people can aspire to be professional working artists. KCAT describes itself as a centre which is 'evolving and changing perceptions and misconceptions around arts, disability and participation' (https://kcat.ie/home/about-us/ accessed 13/02/2026).
I worked at KCAT between 2015 and 2022 as the Education Coordinator. In this role, I supported both learners and educators in reaching their full potential, looking after day-to-day management while also helping to ensure a sustainable income stream to maintain the organisation's financial stability. I reported directly to the Centre Director, who in turn reported to and took direction from the broader Camphill administration board.

While working here, I was struck by how the pedagogical space embraced a wide diversity of learners, always open to change, always in the midst of 'becoming' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014), ' experimenting without destination' (Janssens & Steyaert, 2001, p. 12). The artist-educators and education management at KCAT embraced each learner's personal and unorthodox learning journey with confidence in

their learners' ability to choose paths in process-led art making. This attitude consistently resulted in growing excellence in both practice and (consequently) product for the learner artists.

I knew that this learning space was revealing important knowledge about art pedagogy and epistemology with relevance for broader adult education. In my role there, as Education Coordinator, I began this research intending to demonstrate KCAT's effectiveness to policymakers and funding bodies. I wanted to advocate for a more inclusive definition of value, especially regarding neurodivergence, artists' lives, and the nature of art itself. By listening to the voices of these neurodiverse adult learners, I hoped to surface knowledge that would contribute to discussions around difference and inclusivity in adult education. I invited several KCAT artist learners to collaborate with me in an arts-based heuristic study incorporating evocative autoethnography (Bochner & Ellis, 2016) and life history (Randall, 2013,2014) through an a/r/tographic lens (Irwin, 2013). We shared our stories. KCAT became an illuminating context in which I began to synthesise the conditions necessary for realising individual human potential through artmaking and art pedagogy

My knowledge of and passion for art and learning developed over a lifetime as an artist with a long teaching career in diverse settings. I have experienced -in myself and witnessed- in others, how art pedagogy fosters empowerment, expression, growth, and holistic learning. It has the potential to resist dominant ideologies, recognise individual worth, and repair the damage which can be caused by debilitating pedagogies. I know art pedagogy to be inherently inclusive. It embraces the multiple potentialities within each learner and creates spaces where broader, more diverse populations of learners can not only co-exist but also flourish together. Art pedagogy assumes that we are always evolving, always 'becoming.' As Deleuze and Guattari (1987/1980) argue, a person is an open multiplicity 'a series that is open-ended' (Janssens &Steyaert, 2001, p. 11). By its nature, art making and art pedagogy reject the notion that

we are fixed or limited beings.

While this research began with the intention of foregrounding the voices of neurodiverse learners in a setting that values their ways of knowing and being, it also asked me to turn the research gaze inward. I couldn't ask the KCAT co-subjects to examine their experiences if I was unwilling to do the same. This ethical imperative led me to reflect on formative personal experiences that shaped my pedagogical journey and sense of 'becoming' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Adopting a/r/tography as both methodology and identity (Irwin, 2013; Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005), I examined my personal and professional encounters with art and pedagogy to articulate the values and practices that support transformational learning and human agency (Green, 2024)

Over time, the process of writing and researching this thesis evolved and became an increasingly personal and ongoing inquiry. The practices I set out to explore uncovered complex issues related to power, limitation, the privileging of cognition over creativity, and the dynamics of inclusion and 'othering' (Fanon, 1967; Kendall, 2012; McIntosh, 1988). These issues elicited deep responses from me. I recognised that they were central to my life history. My research increasingly became a pathway for deeper self-actualisation, unfolding through the very artistic processes I was exploring. My 'self' became one of the most revealing subjects for this research. My lived experiences have become a testimony to the role of art as a meaningful site for learning. The research increasingly became a living inquiry, shaped by my reflections, experiences, and findings, which were further informed in side-by-side moments with my fellow artist educators and learners; together then, these methodologies demonstrate the transformative potential of creative practice in both pedagogical and personal development.

The 'Self' at the Centre

At the centre of this research is a concern with how we, as human beings, relate to each other and the world. I consider education to be an important way for us to build a good life. Whether we situate ourselves in the world with healthy relationships or with damaging relationships depends on many factors. Rosa's sociological study, Resonance (2019), inspired me to explore how we might be able to improve our relationships with the world through art-making processes and pedagogy. A wide range of key academic perspectives from various fields has inspired other ideas, which I explore to the same end. These include but are not limited to Paulo Freire's (2000) notions of critical consciousness and dialogical learning to examine how *resistance* and *resilience* might be valid themes within art making/pedagogy; Axel Honneth's (1995) theory of *recognition* to understand identity and relational affirmation as it relates to art making/pedagogy; and Shaun McNiff's (2007) scholarship on art as a healing process, to support reflections on *reclaiming* the self and *repairing* the parts which have been damaged. The philosophical contributions of thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty (1962), hooks (1994), and Buber (1970) further scaffold interpretations of intuition, love, and relationship, offering a rich perspective through which I explore my lived experiences as a learner and artist educator for pedagogical insights. The contributions of other artist educators and learners help me see my 'self as a 'co-subject' situated in a contextual relationship with other 'selves' and the world; they offer a vast range of insights for research.

Rooted in constructivist, psychological/sociological, and humanistic research traditions, theories of the 'self' are key to pedagogical understanding of adult learner development. As such, the 'self' occupies the central role in this research. Placing the 'self' at the centre of this research reflects my conviction that learner-centered models of pedagogy are essential for fostering individual agency and meaning-making and that they are encouraged through art making and art pedagogy. I base my pedagogical understanding of the 'self' on the work of Vygotsky (1978),

Maslow (1943), and Dewey (1961). The self in this research is understood as that which divides itself into two main parts: the 'I' (pure ego) and the 'Me' (empirical self). The 'I' is the subject who thinks and acts in the world.

The 'Me' is what we, as subjects, understand as our 'observable self'- understanding ourselves as Material (body, possessions, physical environment), Social (perceived by others and shaped by social interactions), and Spiritual (inner self, personality, values, and conscience). We are not fixed but are always becoming, in flux, changing- we are shaped by experience and context The premise that asserts we co-construct our 'self' in the world is an essential principle of this research.

Our identities are shaped by our social environment. Learning is an active, interpretive process in which learners make meaning based on their personal experiences and social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). Our concept of the 'self' is co-constructed in our experiences within a particular cultural context. For this research, that context is the learning space, inside and outside of the educational institution, particularly through engagement with art making and pedagogy. 'Education is not an affair of 'telling' and being told, but an active and constructive process' (Dewey 1916, p. 38). The context of art making and the art pedagogical process is both private and relational.

Relationship is key to the educator-learner dynamic. Rogers (1961) emphasises the significance of conditions such as empathy, acceptance, and authenticity in cultivating a learner's self-identity, while Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs identifies self-actualisation as the ultimate goal of human motivation. Along with both Rogers and Maslow, I consider the 'self' to be at the heart of personal growth and becoming, and I emphasise the idea that the learner needs to have a sense of 'self' to truly flourish.

In my pedagogical approach, I place the 'self' of the artist learner and

my ‘self’ as the artist educator as central to experience; the ‘self’ has important implications for my practice. I believe that if pedagogies are healthy, they should encourage and develop agency, promote self-reclamation, and foster positive identity, all leading the ‘self’ to flourish. Art processes contribute to identity formation and reformation, and the learner's sense of ‘self.’

Finding Lines

In my art classes, I use the term ‘finding lines’ to describe the sketchy, loose way we start to draw while familiarising ourselves with the form and contours of an object/subject. It is a tentative and exploratory approach to drawing, often done with a light touch, a soft tracing of graphite, which ensures that no hard and fast decisions are made before we are confident that we understand the object in relation to the space around it, to the composition of which it is a part. In this section of the introduction, I use similar lines to ‘find’ my way to the pedagogical premises that the research is based on.

Pedagogical ‘Finding’ lines

The historical and philosophical foundations shaping the dominant/subjugated understanding of knowledge pervade our Western educational landscape to the point where we no longer question them. This insidiously hegemonic attitude towards education creates polarisation and limiting attitudes towards adult learners. The emphasis for this research is on alternative ways of knowing and learning, particularly from the experientially formed viewpoint of myself as researcher, artist, and art teacher. Through this lens, I consider that learning is inherent in art processes/art pedagogy, both of which celebrate difference and possibility. I explore how artmaking and art pedagogy support adult learners in challenging limiting beliefs and fostering lifelong learning and growth.

Artmaking as a concept in this research lives between a Deweyan experiential learning theory and McNiff’s process-based art practice; in this sense, it becomes a form of embodied inquiry, reflective praxis, and transformational knowing. Rather than production or representation, artmaking is understood as a lived, relational experience through which meaning is generated, experience is reorganised, and art becomes both pedagogy and epistemology—a way of learning, knowing, and becoming.

Dewey's theory helps us understand artmaking as central to education because it supports growth rather than achievement, enabling individuals to form meaning, identity, and a relationship to the world through the integration of intellect, emotion, and action.

McNiff (1998) emphasises non-verbal, imaginal, and bodily intelligence, viewing art as a form of direct knowing that emerges through embodied engagement rather than analysis. Art making of this kind relies on the hands, the materials, and the *act* of making in a dialogical relationship with images and materials. The focus is on the journey of creation itself, the unfolding of thoughts, emotions, and insights as they emerge through the hands, the materials, and the act of making.

Artmaking in this research refers to a process-led, deeply reflective practice that is not driven by economic outcomes, societal expectations, or external validation, but rather by a personal quest for self-understanding, healing, and knowing. Art is not something we make to have, but something we engage in to experience and to learn.

For this inquiry, artmaking is not about creating objects for sale or consumption; it is a dynamic, exploratory process that allows the individual to engage with their inner world in a direct, embodied way. This form of artmaking is inherently *process-oriented*, prioritising the **act** of creation over the finished product. Artmaking in this research is understood as a medium for introspection, enabling the artist to engage with their own feelings, memories, and lived experiences in a way that words or intellectual analysis cannot capture. The tactile, sensory nature of art allows for a deeper connection to the unconscious and provides a language for expressing what might be difficult or inaccessible through more traditional forms of communication. It is through the process of making that one can begin to work through unresolved emotions, trauma, or personal conflicts, creating space for *repair* and *reclamation* of self, healing, and transformational personal growth.

In this context, art becomes a tool for *knowing*, a way of *recognition*, storying the self and the experience of living in a new light, understanding oneself and the world in a more holistic, embodied manner. Rather than seeking to represent an external reality, artmaking as a process of self-understanding invites a more intimate, subjective exploration of one's inner landscape. This type of artmaking fosters a deep dialogue between the self and the material outer world, where the artist, in *resonant* relationship with self and other, learns through interaction with their medium, uncovering new insights, perspectives, and ways of being. This process, rooted in the praxis of reflection and transformation, becomes a space for personal discovery and empowerment.

In summary, the artmaking I refer to in this research is an act of *self-knowledge*, a way of engaging with one's lived experience in action and reflection that goes beyond intellectual understanding, tapping into emotional, sensory, and spiritual realms. It is about making, creating, not for an external audience or for financial gain, but for the internal purpose of understanding, healing, and knowing oneself more deeply. Through this approach, art becomes a vital practice for personal growth, resilience, and transformative learning.

A note on the meaning of art pedagogy in this research

My approach to art pedagogy can be mapped across various educational theories that centre on transformation, agency, relationality, and holistic learning: transformative learning, critical pedagogy, experiential learning, and holistic education.

When referring to *art pedagogy* within the field of educational experience for adults, I am referring to an approach to teaching and learning that goes beyond traditional instructional methods and engages participants in a *process* of deep, personal transformation. In this light,

Art pedagogy is not simply about acquiring technical skills or creating aesthetically pleasing works. It is about using artmaking as a path toward self-exploration, emotional expression, and critical reflection. This form of pedagogy taps into the power of creativity as a means of transformative learning — a process that reshapes the learner's understanding of themselves, their world, and their place within it. This aligns with the idea that transformative learning occurs when adults reflect critically on their life experiences, engage with new perspectives, and integrate these into their understanding of self and the world (Mezirow 1991,1997)

For adults, particularly those who may have had limited exposure to art education, this kind of pedagogy can be radically liberating. It allows learners to reconnect with a creative self that may have been suppressed or overlooked in earlier life experiences. Art pedagogy encourages adults to step outside of the rigid structures of traditional education, where knowledge is often framed in ways that prioritise logic, rationality, and fixed outcomes, and instead fosters an environment where curiosity, imagination, and personal expression are at the forefront. It allows them to 'colour outside the lines.'

At the heart of this transformative experience is the notion that creativity is inherently linked to personal agency and empowerment. Through the act of creating, adults not only engage in a process of self-discovery but also challenge and dismantle long-held beliefs, social conditioning, or limiting narratives that may have constrained their growth. The act of making art becomes a tool for personal resistance against life-limiting ideas, allowing adults to reclaim their voice, their identity, and their capacity for change. It offers a space for healing, reflection, and reconceptualisation of past experiences, helping learners reframe challenges, traumas, or societal expectations in a way that fosters resilience and growth. Art pedagogy is a potential site to empower learners to critically engage with the world and reshape it. Art, as a tool for personal resistance and social change, fits within Freire's notion of education as a practice of freedom, where learners are active agents in

transforming their reality. The focus on reclaiming identity, building resilience, and challenging societal constraints through art can be seen as a way to dialogue with and resist oppressive structures, co-creating knowledge. (Freire 1970, 1993, 2000, hooks 2003, 2006)

This type of art pedagogy is fundamentally *relational* in nature. It emphasises the importance of community, dialogue, and shared learning experiences, creating a space where learners can engage not only with the materials and their own inner worlds but also with the perspectives of others. It is through these shared interactions that transformative learning happens, and participants come to understand their experiences in a broader social, political, and historical context. In this type of art pedagogical space, adults remember and realise the power of their own creative expression to enact change, both within themselves and within their communities.

I understand Art pedagogy as a transformational experience rather than one that is simply a cognitive intellectual engagement of skills and knowledge about traditions, materials, form, etc.; it is one which addresses emotional, spiritual, and embodied dimensions of knowing. It acknowledges that adults bring with them complex life histories, often shaped by trauma, resilience, or personal struggle. Through art, these experiences can be externalised, examined, and processed, offering a path toward personal healing and growth. The art-making process helps learners reinterpret past experiences, fostering resilience and the capacity to overcome adversity. In this sense, the pedagogy becomes a holistic process of transformation that integrates the mind, body, and spirit, allowing learners to engage in a more profound, integrated understanding of themselves and the world around them.

Ultimately, art pedagogy in adult education offers a lifelong learning space for transformation that is grounded in authenticity, reflection, and personal empowerment. I posit that it can create pedagogical spaces of *resistance* where we can develop agency and self-realisation as well as *reclaim* and *repair* our personal histories. It offers adults the opportunity

to *reclaim* their creativity as a tool for personal and social change, providing a way for them to challenge the constraints of their past, build resilience and envision new possibilities for their future. Through this process, art becomes not only a means of artistic expression but a catalyst for deeper *recognition* of self and others and a profound shift in the relational connection through *resonance* with ourselves, others, and the world. broader, deeper, and more meaningful transformation.

Extended ways of knowing, those beyond purely cognitive ways of knowing, can be applied within art-making processes; the mind and body, the head, and the heart- all contribute to integrated and interdependent aspects of being and becoming through learning. Art processes encourage the creative, spiritual, and emotional growth of learners (Moore 2005, Sloane 2005, Miller et al, 2005, Sultan 2019), allowing extrarational senses (that which is outside of the rational) into learning spaces (Robinson, Walker & Walter 2023). These alternate ways of knowing include intuition and tacit knowing (Polanyi 1966), spiritual knowing, and soul logic (Moore 2005; Zohar 2012; Sloane 2005; Romanshyn 2005 and Emmons 2000), aesthetic sensibility and art making as knowing (Dewey 1980, Eisner 2008, Weber 2008, and Finley 2008). Extended Epistemologies, as conceived by Heron and Reason, scaffold these by broadening the notion of what learning is and how different adults engage with learning. (Heron & Reason 2008; Heron 1996; Heron 2017). Freire's (1970/2000) theory of critical pedagogy, hooks' (1994) radical teaching philosophies, and Foucault's (1982) analyses of power and resistance support my reflections on nontraditional ways of learning. I explore my positionality and my learning journey in the light of their theories. Further art teaching insights come from my exploration of Dewey's scholarship on experiencing art (1934), McLaren's (1995) framing of art as a process, and McNiff's (2007) conceptualisation of art as a healing medium. Ideas inherent in these theories support my opinion that art processes/pedagogy can foster transformation.

More radical thinkers and educators, Steiner (1973, 1995, 2007), Stern[1]

(in Grabowska 2013) and Illich (1971) have contributed to my philosophy of how we come to know and flourish in and out of pedagogical spaces. Their revolutionary and somewhat esoteric approaches created a space for me to explore more alternative ways of thinking 'outside the lines' about pedagogy. Both Steiner and Stern are practitioners grounded in their pedagogical practices; they have inspired confidence in me to see my experience and practice as evidence for theory. Through that experience, I have come to believe that the sharing of knowledge and skills may be better served through networks of informal and more casual but resonant relationships - relationships NOT based on traditional student/teacher hierarchical association and NOT embedded in the institution (Illich 1971).

A Deeply Praxis-Based Approach to Adult Education

As an artist-educator/researcher, my praxis is grounded in a holistic pedagogical approach that combines self-expression, emotional engagement, and relational connection. At the core of this approach is the influence of Dewey's (1938) theory of experiential learning, which emphasises learning through doing, reflection, and active engagement with the world. Dewey's reflective practice encourages students to make connections between their lived experiences and wider cultural and societal movements, shaping a pedagogical environment in which learners are not only recipients of knowledge but also active participants in the *processes* of knowledge creation. This pedagogical focus is significantly enhanced by Rosa's (2016) theory of relational resonance, which emphasises the dynamic relationships between individuals, their environments, and objects within the art world and the larger natural world. Rosa's work provides a framework for understanding how artistic practice—as a relational process—can deeply engage the self, others, and the material world. These connections, in turn, further deepen meaningful emotional connections with both the artwork and the community surrounding it.

Further supporting this integrated approach of art praxis is the contribution of Eisner (2002), whose work on concepts of research methodologies informed by art challenges traditional views of art education as merely the transmission of technical skills and knowledge. Eisner argues that the arts have a unique ability to cultivate thinking beyond the practical, enabling students to express complex ideas and engage with the world in ways that go beyond mere technical ability. His emphasis on the open-ended nature of the creative process supports the notion that art is not just a product but an ongoing dialogue between the artist, the medium, and the world. This approach aligns with my belief in the fluidity of learning, where art is seen as a transformative process that offers opportunities for self-discovery, becoming, and personal growth. Understanding Eisner's theory encourages me to create a learning

environment where students are not confined to rigid methodologies and processes but are encouraged to explore, question, and reinterpret their artistic practices in ways that reflect their own personal narratives and interpret the events they have lived through to make new meaning for themselves.

Eisner's contribution to my pedagogical framework also stems from his assertion that art education should foster the development of multiple ways of knowing (Eisner, 2002). In this sense, art provides a unique learning context for students to explore and express knowledge that is not easily conveyed through traditional verbal or written forms. The artistic process invites students to engage in a dialogical relationship with their materials and their inner selves, allowing for intuitive, emotional, and sensory knowledge to come to the fore. This aligns with Dewey's view that experience is multi-dimensional, involving the body, mind, and environment. Dewey (1938) argued that all learning is grounded in direct experience, with reflection serving as the bridge between action and meaning. In the context of art education, this means that students can engage in a creative process that simultaneously cultivates technical skill and emotional insight.

Through the art praxis lens I have developed, the creative process is a site of relational resonance—an idea advanced by Rosa's theories (2016), which speak to the interconnectedness between self, others, and the world. Rosa's concept of relational resonance highlights ways in which the artist's practice is not an isolated and introspective process but is shaped by the interactions that the artist has with others, with their materials, and with the wider social and cultural world. In this sense, the act of creating art becomes a process of connection and dialogue, where the artist resonates with the world and creates work that, in turn, resonates with others. Rosa's theories further scaffold the pedagogical framework I apply by framing the artistic experience as a transformative experience for both the creator and the viewer, facilitating the creation of meaningful social bonds, and fostering empathy across different contexts.

Fromm's (1976) dichotomy between 'having' and 'being' provides a natural intersection between these theories. His work speaks directly to the role of art in promoting a shift from a materialistic worldview (focused on having) to a more authentic existence (centered on being). Art, in this framework, serves as a tool for self-actualisation, allowing students to move beyond the expectations of external validation and develop a deeper connection to their own sense of purpose, agency and identity. Art education, when approached holistically, becomes a practice of being—an ongoing, reflective process that allows individuals to explore personal identity, collective belonging, and societal transformation.

Eisner's (2002) focus on art as a language of perception further aligns with Fromm's emphasis on being. These theories challenge the dominance of a purely functional, outcomes-based approach in modern society. In the learning space, this opens the door for artist students to not only express themselves creatively but also to reframe the world around them, viewing their surroundings through a new lens, creating new and more appropriate narratives for themselves. In this context, the creation of art becomes an act of self-discovery and claiming the world, and the educator's role is to scaffold these experiences by encouraging introspection, relational engagement, and a reflective practice that resonates with the student's evolving sense of self and the world.

Incorporating Dewey's reflective learning, Rosa's relational resonance, Eisner's multiple ways of knowing, and Fromm's philosophy of being, scaffolds a rich, interdisciplinary framework for understanding how the artistic process can be transformative. This pedagogical approach invites artist students to engage with their creativity in a way that develops personal growth, emotional resonance, and social change, while also challenging them to question the ways the world is perceived and experienced. As educators, our role is to create learning spaces where students are encouraged to shift from a mindset of 'having' to 'being,' where they can explore artistic expression as a journey of self-discovery

and transformational learning.

Research also, I have also learned, can be approached in less formal and traditional ways; the heuristic methodology created by Moustakas (1974, 1990) has offered me a way to approach research from a position of emergent knowing. Rendón (2009), Romanshyn (2007), Zohar & Marshall (2012), and Heron & Reason (2008) have forwarded ideas which contribute to my perspective for understanding extrarational ways of knowing and being.

Irwin provides me with a central vein of theoretical guidance as I rely on identity exploration through a/r/tography as a central methodology. Her notion of 'Renderings' (Irwin 2013, p.899) illuminates art processes and informs ways of knowing and becoming through art process, particularly within a transformative learning environment. Accepting transformational learning as an *ongoing* adult experience is further supported by Irwin's theory of examining life's intense experiences as sites for learning (Irwin 2013). These experiences are moments of disruption in a life, also known as 'disorienting dilemmas' (Mezirow, 1997), which lead us to challenge our existing viewpoints/assumptions while opening up transitional spaces where deep personal growth and change can occur. Self-knowledge emerges from critically examining our experiences. Mezirow (1997) argues that 'a defining condition of being human is that we have to understand our experiences' (p. 5). Without critically interrogating our assimilated frames of reference, our 'habits of mind' and 'points of view,' we cannot interpret the meaning of our experiences. Without this examination, transformative learning cannot occur.

1 https://arnostern.com/ accessed 04/07/2025

Methodological Finding lines

In this research, a wide range of methodologies emerged as responses to a living inquiry. I embarked on a genuinely curious exploration of personal, intellectual, emotional, and embodied experiences that resonate deeply with my way of being and living. In doing so, space and time were needed; uncertainty needed to linger, slow dawning enlightenment emerged without hastening toward explanations or conclusions. As a living practice-based inquiry, the methodologies demonstrate the art processes I engage with in my life, as an artist, an artist educator, and a person who thinks and moves through the world in an art-full way. Placing scholarly inquiry side by side with artefacts which incorporate both evocative auto-ethnographical writing and art pieces demonstrates how an artist and teacher moves through her world as a researcher. Both the academic and the artistic voices reflect these different identities.

This research navigates a delicate balance between reflexive, autobiographical writing and a rigorous academic framework that justifies how that reflexivity informs and shapes methodological, ethical, and analytic decisions.

It integrates my personal experience over time with scholarly inquiry, demonstrating how a researcher's lived narrative can become a critical lens through which to interrogate and influence important aspects of methodology and the overall research process. By weaving together self-reflection with academic analysis, the study illuminates the interplay between personal insight and methodological choices, while also grounding ethical considerations in lived experience. This approach not only deepens my personal understanding as a researcher but also contributes to the broader conversation on the role of artmaking and reflexivity in research, particularly within the context of adult education.

My positioning as an artist, researcher, and teacher brings embodied depth to the thesis, a depth amplified through the extensive use of artefacts throughout the work. The artefacts ground the research in praxis, where

the act of making, sensing, and responding to materials in creation is inseparable from reflection, insight, and personal and community/ social transformation. The artefacts demonstrate a lived practice of action and reflection that both substantiates and enacts my central claim: that embodiment, sensory engagement, and artistic practice constitute powerful and potentially transformative ways of knowing.

In making this claim, I set out to challenge dominant epistemological frameworks that prioritise cognition and rationality over embodied and affective ways of knowing. My argument is firmly grounded in my critical analysis of the education system in Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe), my personal life history, and, subsequently, in a carefully curated overview of my experiences in community education in Ireland, which informs my broader examination of adult education. A selection of three-dimensional artefacts created over the course of the research processes supports and is witness to these claims within the thesis itself, where they are necessarily represented in two-dimensional form.

I deliberately foreground my own narrative of experience as a legitimate and rigorous site of learning, a methodological and ethical choice that demands vulnerability, courage, and sustained criticality. This approach offers detailed and reflexive accounts of how critical engagement with my personal experiences enables me to reframe experiences that had previously been constructed as limiting or negative. Through this process, I generate insights that are demonstrably transformative for my own learning and identity, while also holding clear significance for wider adult education practice.

In particular, these insights point to the transformative potential of art education within adult education contexts.

As an ongoing inquiry, the arts-based research methods I employed were inherently emergent and heuristic in nature. The heuristic approach permeates the entire methodological framework. By exploring personal life-learning moments that reveal the process of 'becoming,' I embody

the identity of an a/r/tographer, using evocative auto-ethnographic writing and life history to navigate the unfolding journey of research.

Heuristic Inquiry

> ‘Having made a discovery, I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently. I have crossed a gap, the heuristic gap, which lies between problem and discovery’

(Polanyi1958, p.151).

I ‘felt’ my way into a living arts-based inquiry, knowing instinctively that the contributions I sought through research would be found in my own lived experiences and practice. I approached this research with the attitude of wonder and openness inherent in heuristic inquiry (Sultan, 2018), seeking to engage with the 'self' and uncover what it might reveal. This heuristic attitude goes beyond cognitive knowing; it embraces an emergent, intuitive process that is both ‘diffuse’ and ‘non-sequential’ (Sultan, 2018, p.95).

In Chapter Three, a curated collection of descriptive, poetic, and artistic processes unveils the artist’s way of being, learning, and becoming. In subsequent chapters, four and five, I continue to research with a heuristic attitude, delving into relational exploration through conversation and shared artmaking experiences. These explorations are emergent, rhizomatic, and responsive.

A heuristic attitude towards a living inquiry is both qualitative and phenomenological, exploring human consciousness and experience (Moustakas, 1990, 1994). It honours the unique qualities of the subjects and co-subjects, fostering an open-minded responsiveness to whatever emerges. Through this deeply subjective process, a heuristic attitude may reveal experiences with the potential for social and collective implications for humanity (Sultan, 2018).

Embodying the personal, creative, and emergent nature of an artist's way of being and becoming, a heuristic inquiry approach supports the discovery of an unpredictable nature and the learning that comes from mistakes—elements that are central to art pedagogy (Moustakas, 1974, 1990; Sultan, 2018). Artmaking requires a methodology grounded in personal experience, where the topic emerges as a 'lingering presence' (Rendon, 2023, p.27) or 'a question you are unable to ignore' (Sultan, 2018, p.11). The 'questions' guiding this research 'chose me;' they are deeply embedded in my own experience and personhood (Sultan, 2018, p.10). A heuristic approach

> 'awakens and inspires researchers to connect with and respect their questions and problems, validating imagination, intuition, self-reflection, and the tacit dimension as legitimate means of searching for knowledge'
> (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p.40).

Throughout this research, a diverse range of methodologies arose as responses to a living inquiry. I embarked on an open and curious exploration of personal, intellectual, emotional, and embodied experiences that resonate deeply with my way of being and living. This required space and time; uncertainty was allowed to linger, and insights dawned slowly without hurrying toward conclusions. As a living practice-based inquiry, the methodologies mirror the art processes I engage with as an artist, educator, and someone who artfully moves through the world.

Arts-Based Research

A general arts-based research approach integrates my vocation, practice, and lived experience. The methodological framework of this research places art making both visual and written—at the heart of its ontological and epistemological foundation. The emphasis on emergent heuristic research methods aligns with my belief that evolving art-making processes are essential to healthy adult learning. These methods affirm that extra-rational ways of knowing are necessary to restore balance to

research and education, which have historically been dominated by purely intellectual approaches. Artmaking serves as both the subject and method of inquiry, with artefacts (creative expressions of thought and experience) acting as nuanced carriers of embedded knowledge.

As a reflexive practice, artmaking and creative writing provide embodied, intuitive ways to make meaning. McCormack (2014) describes this as 'immersion in the difficult element,' a process of articulating, in an embodied and emotionally connected way, a deeper form of knowing and learning' (p. 172). This knowledge extends beyond the cerebral, moving into what Rendón (2014) refers to as 'heart knowledge,' a knowledge that fosters individual flourishing rather than pathologising difference.

As an a/r/tographer, I immerse myself biographically and aesthetically in the research process. When employing imaginative writing and artworks (artefacts), they serve as metaphors and symbols to express complex subjectivities (McCormack, 2014). The artefacts illuminate the vulnerable, multifaceted identity I inhabit as an artist, teacher, and learner, validating this identity as essential to the inquiry. This identity is both private and political. The artefacts embody both personal and universal ideas, creating space for dialogical research through visual language and written communication.

These artefacts emerge slowly, as image/word iterations of pivotal learning moments, revealing fluid processes that highlight philosophies, values, and memories once hidden, repressed, or forgotten, in what Irwin (2013) calls 'the intensities' (p. 189). These intensities often emerge as poems for me, spontaneously during reflection or daydreaming. I include them here to illuminate and demonstrate 'other ways of knowing' (Sameshima, 2008). Conscious and unconscious realms (Romanshyn, 2007) are bridged through arts-based research, mining these thoughts and feelings for valuable insights. Artmaking and writing allow me to reflect upon and reframe neglected or forgotten knowledge from my past, enhancing my engagement with artist-learners in a more meaningful way as an artist-educator.

The field notes included in this document resemble the sketches an artist uses to 'find out' about and explore their subject. The quiet spaces of observation and contemplation that I create through these notes provide an opportunity to listen attentively to the internal dialogue between my head and heart. This note-taking and reflective journaling are processes that occur both 'in the moment' and 'after the moment, enabling me to capture subjective reflections throughout the research process (Ellis & Bochner, 2016). As these notes accumulate, they begin to build a comprehensive 'picture,' serving as the 'finding lines' towards a larger, more sustained composition.

In addition to field notes, I rely on a habit of reflective journaling to maintain rigorous research discipline. This journaling process increases my awareness of the 'paradigmatic assumptions and instinctive reasoning that shape how we work' (Brookfield, 1995, p. 30), helping me uncover and challenge my assumptions about power and hegemony (Brookfield, 2008). As an artist-researcher, I found it impossible to separate my subjective 'self' from my researcher 'self;' impartiality was not an option (Jackson, 1989; Ellis & Bochner, 2016). The 'self' as both artist, educator, researcher, and learner is at the centre of this pedagogical research (James 1968; Maslow 1943; Rogers 1961; Dewey 1916). Thus, subjectivity is essential to understanding the learning experiences inherent in various pedagogical settings; full immersion in both my experience and that of others was a deliberate methodological choice (Polanyi 1966; Moustakas 1990; Sultan 2018).

The arts-based research approach I employ is influenced by Eisner (1998), Weber (2008), and a workshop with Sibbett (2004, 2005, 2008) in 2015. These theorists' work challenges dominant paradigms that tie knowledge production to systems of social privilege and power (Finley, 2008). Such paradigms have historically privileged objective, detached, and 'rational' forms of knowing, methods which have excluded or marginalised voices outside the dominant Western culture. In contrast, emergent arts-based research methods emphasise subjective, embodied, and relational ways of

knowing. The use of art in research is inherently subversive, rejecting paternalistic or colonising traditions and resisting the framing of knowledge as a function of social privilege (Finley, 2008). Art methodologies align with feminist and qualitative research traditions that seek to challenge established authorities, value lived experience and validate diverse ways of knowing. This orientation is congruent with my philosophy, which values equity, inclusivity, and the transformative potential of creative practice in knowledge production and adult learning—affirming a grounded, qualitative philosophy of knowledge creation (Finley, 2008; McNiff, 1998; Barone, 1997; Eisner, 1995).

Arts-based research 'makes use of diverse ways of knowing and experiencing the world' (Finley, 2008, p. 79). In this research, the visual and written arts offer creative, non-threatening, cross-cultural ways to depict alternative viewpoints, while challenging assumptions about people and their abilities.

A/r/tography

> 'A/r/tography is a living practice; a life writing, life creating experience into the personal, political, and professional aspects of one's life.
> (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 903)

Valuing learners' distinct ways of knowing and learning has always been a core principle of my teaching philosophy. However, I have often struggled to validate my own intuitive learning methods. As a student, I found it challenging to fit into the traditional educational framework, which was rooted in binary and hierarchical thinking, despite my strong desire to belong. Through the process of writing and creating art for this research, I came to understand that engaging fully in this inquiry meant embracing myself as a heart-driven learner who may not always fit neatly into established categories but is continuously 'becoming' (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Accepting my way of knowing and existing, with all its 'messiness'

and uniqueness, was essential to maintaining the integrity of this work. It has also become an ongoing journey toward self-acceptance and wholeness. Reflecting on my pedagogy, epistemology, and ontology during this research, I began to recognise the same intuitive, creative, and emotional ways of being that I had long admired in my learners within myself. This process of self-recognition and acceptance, as an artist, aligns with Irwin's conceptualisation of a/r/tography as both a methodology and an identity (Irwin, 2013; Springgay, n.d.). Her portrayal of the a/r/tographer identity allowed me to step into my 'self' and articulate the values and practices that I believed could foster a pedagogy of belonging and flourishing for all learners, irrespective of their ways of engaging with the world. I didn't need to define myself within a single profession or align with an 'either/or' mindset. I could embrace all aspects of who I am. This realisation of myself as a multifaceted human led me to adopt a/r/tography as a methodology because it integrates my roles as an artist, researcher, and educator (Irwin, 2013). As I delved deeper into the processes of an a/r/tographic, rhizomatic, and resonant research approach, I came to see it not only as a methodological framework but as a professional identity.

The process of living inquiry—exploring intense personal experiences through evocative auto-ethnographical writing and art-making—is nonlinear. It involves creating a map, not by tracing a clear path, but by wandering, scribbling, and navigating the unknown. "It is about experimentation: altering, reversing, modifying, among individuals and groups, across time and space" (Irwin, 2013, p. 33). In reclaiming the deep, embodied knowledge I have developed over a lifetime as an artist, researcher, and teacher, I needed a methodology that would allow me to "colour outside the lines." I required a framework that would give me the freedom to explore, experiment, and play at my own pace—embracing mistakes, retracing steps, and transitioning between seemingly disconnected experiences and concepts. A/r/tography, as a methodology, allows for "the creative invention of concepts and mapping the intensities experienced in relational, rhizomatic, yet singular events" (Irwin, 2013, p. 1).

Deleuze and Guattari's theory contributes to this research as far as it emphasises the creative, relational, and heuristic pedagogy where extra-rational abilities are honoured. They are important in that they inform the work of Irwin et al as a way of thinking about generative processes in learning. It is in this capacity that some of their concepts of the rhizome and intensities encourage a pedagogical approach which understands learning as a creative adventure in becoming. Their theories offer a radical reconceptualisation of learning as *an event of becoming* rather than the development of cognitive and rational knowledge. In their work, hierarchical, representational models of thought are displaced, and knowledge is presented as emerging from relations, encounters, and intensities. This shift in understanding pedagogy is a foundation for the pedagogy I propose and one which is inherent in the a/r/tographic methods Irwin develops in A/R/Tographical research methodology. Irwin's a/r/tographical processes create a scaffold for creative and generative learning rather than a reproductive one. Her processes in research are congruent with a pedagogical stance which honours relational dynamic and resonant exchanges which take place between people, materials and concepts and a heuristic process in learning oriented toward discovery rather than predetermined outcomes.

A creative pedagogy does not reproduce established truths but enables the production of the new and original. Learning is a process of experimentation, an active engagement with problems that transform the learner. For Deleuze, genuine learning occurs when one is forced to think by an encounter that disrupts the usual. These relate to the intensities inherent in Irwin's methodological explanation of events/moments, which are potentially transformative for the learning they hold. Creativity becomes of deep importance to thinking and enables learners to imagine new possibilities and generate their own original response.

The emergent, heuristic pedagogy advocated for is grounded in discovery, and this resonates with the notion of the rhizome, which is central to Deleuze and Guattari's theory. Learning emerges through multiple entry points, detours, and connections rather than following linear pathways. Intensities of experience, according to Deleuze, are more about multiplicity and the ways connections and interactions are made in unexpected ways (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014, pp 403-406). Learning emerges from the genuine curiosity of the learner and is exploratory; learners are encouraged to trace lines of thought, to map problems, and to experiment with possible solutions. Education, in a Deleuzian sense, becomes more about navigation than mastery and more about creation than representation.

My experience of being in the world as a "messy/rhizomatic thinker/artist" is an integral part of my identity, and this inquiry required a framework that could validate how this identity could contribute to academic research.

> "Understanding others begins within our own lived experience, encompassing (our) personalities and histories as much as academic research"
> (Jackson, 1989, p. 17).

It was crucial that I first embraced my own identity and experience before I could fully appreciate others'. By adopting a/r/tography as both a method and an identity, I reclaimed my artistic self/role—one that values the world through intuition, wonder, emotion, and imagination (see artefact 2)—qualities often overshadowed by academic expectations. I also learned to embrace my role as a researcher, using the formal education skills I've acquired to examine my experiences and integrate both rational and extra-rational ways of knowing.

As an artist/researcher/teacher engaged in embodied practice, I required a methodology that could accommodate art-making as an active, living inquiry (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Irwin, 2013). Because I am continuously

becoming through my interactions with life's events—constantly in flux and beginning anew—a rhizomatic approach to being in relationship with the world resonated with me. We are always between endings and beginnings. “When something occurs, the self that awaited it is already dead, or the one that would await it has not yet arrived” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 198–199).

The rhizome, much like an interconnected subterranean network of roots, is a principle of connection, where everything is linked through a web of relationships. Rather than relying on linear or hierarchical structures, a rhizomatic model is characterised by non-linear pathways, decentralisation, and multiplicity. In this view, connections form organically and unpredictably, enabling diverse elements to converge and create new meanings and possibilities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 403–406). The rhizomatic framework of a/r/tography embraces multiple, intersecting branches of inquiry and aligns with art-making and arts-based methodologies (Causey, 2017; Dewey, 1980; McNiff, 1998; Finley, 2008), as well as evocative autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Multiplicity and fluidity characterise the rhizomatic nature of a/r/tographic research, enabling inquiry to branch off in many directions, beginning, and pausing at various points. The rhizome, a plant structure without a single point of origin and characterised by lateral, multiple, and circular growth, stands in contrast to hierarchical, binary structures of knowledge that impose rigid, standardised paradigms akin to Freire’s (1970) banking model' of education.

Identifying as an a/r/tographer enables me to curate and examine moments of life learning that appear separate but are intrinsically connected—to each other, to myself, and to the broader world (Irwin, 2013, p. 24). hooks (2003) describes the creative process as an ‘entanglement’ of living and making, encompassing planning, preparation, reflection, and anticipation. As an artist-educator and practising artist, this rhizomatic, interconnected nature of being and

doing provides a methodological point of entry for inhabiting the research.

As an a/r/tographer, I can fully embrace the arts and education as intertwined forms of inquiry, living my research through art, writing, and my various roles (Irwin, 2013, p. 25; Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 904). Clarke and Parsons (2013) contrast rhizomatic researchers with traditional ones, noting that rhizomatic researchers acknowledge their embeddedness and follow research wherever it leads, breaking free from binary constraints and opening up new possibilities. Irwin (2018) highlights how this practice allows for the creation of new concepts and the mapping of 'intensities experienced in relational, rhizomatic yet singular events' (p. 198–199).

Rhizomatic philosophy is inherently tied to pedagogical thinking, where sensitivity to the power imbalances in hierarchical traditions allows educators to invite learners to co-create knowledge, becoming active participants rather than passive recipients. Rhizomatic educators resist controlling thought, action, and hegemony, instead fostering creative power, difference, and multiplicity (Freire, 1970). By celebrating difference as a positive force, rather than as a "lack," learners are freed from objectification and become relationally embedded with others (Clark & Parsons, 2013). The rhizomatic approach fosters an education that embraces diverse ways of knowing, enhances empathy, and generates new knowledge.

The a/r/tographer uses both writing and art-making as complementary modes of inquiry—a process Irwin, Springgay, and Kind call "double imaging" (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). In my research, art and words are inseparable and mutually generative, creating layered meanings through their interplay. "Each informs the other in an active moment of lived inquiry" (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 900). A/r/tography exists simultaneously as methodology, creative practice, and performative pedagogy that resides "in Rhizomatic structures of the in-between" (Irwin, 2013, p. 198).

In a/r/tographical research, viewers and readers become co-creators in this interconnected process, engaging in meaning-making themselves. In art pedagogy, learners co-create with their educators, sharing the process and meaning-making. A/r/tography, both as research and a way of being, lingers in the liminal spaces between artist, researcher, and teacher, creating openings for shifts and ruptures where new actions can emerge (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). These gaps between art and words, between viewer and a/r/tographer, artist-learner and artist-educator, are spaces where "presence" arises through "absence," inviting embodied understanding and relational engagement (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005).

The roles of artist, researcher, and teacher are deeply interconnected and contiguous (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). In practice, a/r/tography is described as

> 'a relational aesthetic inquiry approach (that is) envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text and between and among the roles of artist/researcher/teacher and the viewer/reader'
>
> Springgay et al, 2005, p. 900.

A Case for Embracing A/R/Tography in Pedagogy and Scholarship

The concept of the artist/researcher/teacher identity, as articulated by Irwin through a/r/tography, plays a central role in both the methodology and the process of knowledge generation in arts-based research.

This framework interweaves the identities of artist, researcher, and teacher, asserting that these roles are fluid and interconnected. For me, the artist identity is not secondary but integral to the entire process of research, acting as an important conduit for creative expression, personal experience, and intellectual inquiry. Artmaking becomes more than an

aesthetic endeavour in and of itself; it is also a living, evolving practice that bridges personal reflection with scholarly research.

In my own research journey, I engage in a living inquiry through arts-based methods, using life history as a foundational tool. Life history is not simply about recounting events from the past but about reinterpreting those experiences, allowing them to evolve and inform present and future understandings. The process of self-inquiry through artmaking, whether through painting, drawing, or writing, allows me to reflect on moments of learning and growth that have shaped my pedagogical and personal identity. This form of inquiry is iterative and spontaneous, enabling me to navigate the complexities of my lived experience and to capture the fluidity of the research process. Each creative act, whether through visual art or writing, becomes a form of introspection, a way to access insights that may be difficult to articulate through conventional academic methods.

The Role of Art in Re-Scripting Identity

Incorporating life history into my research allows me to revisit and reconsider the past, particularly the experiences of feeling marginalised or "othered," and place them within broader social, political, and cultural contexts. This process of re-imagining myself as an artist and researcher becomes a form of re-scripted identity, one shaped by creative practice and reflective self-inquiry. It is through this process of self-reflection and artmaking that I've found the strength to transform the personal narratives I've carried for years. By reinterpreting these stories, I have created spaces where personal histories can be shared, reimagined, and reframed, allowing both myself and others to reshape identities and narratives that were once fixed.

Art as a Method of Inquiry

At the heart of a/r/tography is the belief that artmaking itself is a method of inquiry. The creative act becomes a way of exploring and understanding the subjective dimensions of human experience. This approach to research rejects traditional objective paradigms and embraces more intuitive, embodied ways of knowing. In arts-based research, art becomes both the subject and method of inquiry, enabling me to use my own creative process as a way to explore, discover, and generate knowledge. As an artist, the act of creating art is a dynamic and ongoing process of learning and becoming. Each piece of art, whether visual or written, emerges from a deeper understanding of lived experiences, offering insights that are embodied and non-rational dimensions of knowing that traditional methods often overlook.

This artistic inquiry (McNiff, 1998) becomes a dialogical process, where both the artist and the viewer are invited to engage in reflective exploration. Through the interaction with creative artefacts, paintings, poems, or journal entries, I invite others to share in the meaning-making process, fostering a co-creative space for knowledge generation. This

interaction between the artist, the artwork, and the viewer extends the possibilities of inquiry and offers multiple interpretations and layers of meaning.

The Interwoven Roles of Artist, Researcher, and Teacher

The artist/researcher/teacher identity is not about transmitting knowledge from educator to student, but about co-creating knowledge through a shared process of artistic and intellectual exploration. In my teaching practice, I emphasise the collaborative nature of learning, where students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in the process of meaning-making. Through dialogue, artmaking, and reflection, learners are encouraged to question and reimagine their own identities, challenging societal norms, and expectations.

The arts-based methodology enables me to engage deeply with learners, inviting them to reflect on their life histories through art. This process of shared vulnerability and storytelling encourages learners to critically examine their identities and empowers them to rewrite their personal narratives. Through artmaking, students can embody abstract ideas and connect theoretical knowledge to their lived experiences, creating tangible representations of complex concepts. In doing so, they gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the world, themselves, and each other.

The framework of a/r/tography is grounded in the philosophy of the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), where knowledge is understood as an interconnected web of relationships, rather than a linear, hierarchical structure. This rhizomatic approach reflects my own teaching practice, which resists traditional authoritative models of education in favour of a more democratic, co-creative process. In a rhizomatic learning space, the teacher and students are in a constant state of becoming, moving through a nonlinear, emergent process of discovery. This pedagogical approach fosters empathy and values difference, allowing each individual to bring

their own unique perspectives and ways of knowing into the learning space.

By embracing the messiness and fluidity of learning, I can create an environment where new perspectives emerge, and multiple ways of knowing can co-exist. This process is collaborative, as learners and educators co-create knowledge through shared exploration, dialogue, and creative expression. In this way, I see myself as a co-learner in the process of artistic inquiry, where both the artist, teacher, and student are constantly rewriting and reframing their identities and narratives.

Art and Words: Double Imaging in a/r/tography

One of the unique aspects of a/r/tography is the concept of double imaging (Irwin, Springgay, & Kind, 2005), where art and writing exist simultaneously as complementary forms of inquiry. In my research, art and words are not separate entities but are deeply intertwined, each informing and enriching the other. The interplay between visual and textual forms allows for a more holistic understanding of the world, blending cognitive and embodied ways of knowing. Through this process, I engage with both mediums to explore complex ideas and to generate new insights that transcend the limitations of any single form of expression.

This double imaging process mirrors the rhizomatic nature of my practice, where meanings are not fixed but constantly in flux, emerging through the interaction between words and images. By integrating art and writing into the research process, I can create a dynamic space for both myself and others to engage in an ongoing dialogue of exploration, reflection, and meaning making.

Embodying the roles of artist, researcher, and teacher in a continuing process of a/r/tography is a deeply relational, evolving practice that allows for constant becoming. By embracing the interconnectedness of these identities, I create a living, dynamic process of inquiry that allows

for the continuous transformation of both educator and learner. The interplay between artmaking, reflection, and pedagogy enables a fluid, emergent approach to knowledge generation, one that values intuitive, embodied, and creative ways of knowing. Through this practice, I invite my students and myself to engage in a process of collaborative discovery, one that embraces the messiness of life and learning, creating space for new possibilities and ways of being. In this ongoing journey, art, research, and teaching are intertwined and co-constructed in the process of living inquiry.

The identities of artist, researcher, and teacher within a framework of a/r/tography contribute to knowledge generation by embracing a holistic, embodied approach that transcends traditional boundaries of academic scholarship. I embody the identities of artist, researcher, and teacher within the a/r/tographic framework within my practice. I have developed my practices in all three to the point where I can now contribute to knowledge generation through a holistic, embodied approach that goes beyond the confines of traditional academic scholarship.

In my role as an artist, I bring creativity, intuition, and emotional depth to my work. This allows me to explore personal and subjective experiences that offer fresh perspectives on human understanding. This identity helps me connect with the human experience in ways that purely intellectual approaches simply cannot.

As a researcher, I integrate critical inquiry, analysis, and reflection into the academic processes, grounding my work in theoretical and methodological frameworks that ensure rigor and scholarly depth. This identity keeps me focused on the importance of analysis and evidence, while pushing the boundaries of traditional research practices.

In my role as a teacher, I create a relational and co-constructive learning environment, where knowledge is developed in collaboration with students. I see this as a shared process of discovery and transformation, where my students and I grow and learn together This research is a

methodological journey of discovery. A shifting, searching sense of understanding methodology as a way of living and learning in research becomes one of the important threads and discoveries of the thesis. Changing courses, trying new approaches became an important part of understanding a living inquiry. In art making, mistake making, changing direction, and following alternative routes are part of the process of creating. Over time, I found that this is also my approach to working with methodology in research. The seed of my methodological approach lies in this intuitive, lived, openness to the new, to curiously experimenting and trying to find the right 'stroke',' colour' and 'shape' for the working composition. Over the course of this research, I move between those methods of inquiry which serve me best at the time. To illuminate this emerging and flexible process, I interject a small methodological section after each chapter. The unfolding of my life history in each chapter has been drawn out by different methods, which are illuminated in these sections. These disruptions and fluxes in methodology are integral to the living inquiry and essential for a full ontological and epistemological understanding of my practice, which becomes clear in the final chapter. In much the same way as a painting finally 'tells' the painter it is finished, I step back from the intricate weave of methodologies I have used and see that the composition has become complete.

Sketching a Path Forward - a map for the reading journey

Below, I sketch out a brief description of the three chapters which make up the main body of this research. Hints of the methodologies used in each of the chapters will be echoed in more detail in each of the methodology sections, which will be found between the chapters.

Chapter One's Composition

In Chapter One of this research, I return to the young emerging artist/learner I was and use her lens to explore selected life events and critical moments that have shaped my understanding of how creative expression can be used to contest oppressive paradigms. This chapter functions as a foundation where values and beliefs are revealed. I show how they have been formed and reformed within me as I become an artist and educator. I curate a collection of stories and artefacts that illuminate the interrelated themes of resistance and resilience: 1) how to resist ways of being that are abhorrent to us, and 2) how to foster the ability to be resilient when faced with challenges. These themes represent embodied ways of knowing and being in the world, and I offer them as theoretical constructs for adult learning and development. As foundations for knowing, they challenge dominant ideologies and the structural limitations of traditional learning environments while offering ways for adults to keep growing, learning, and flourishing. As foundations for being, they offer hope for those who experience injustice and have had to shrink themselves to fit a hegemonic worldview. In this chapter, I consider how creative expression can not only foster a political or reactive stance but also become an ontological orientation, an ongoing way of being in the world. Within the space of art pedagogy, critical engagement with ideas and others leads to awareness, which in turn exposes and subverts hegemonic norms.

Artmaking, in this sense, offers both a method (process) and a genre (outcome) through which an identity can be asserted and a voice reclaimed and expressed. In this chapter, I demonstrate how art making

and the field of art pedagogy can become critical sites of empowerment and meaning-making in the adult learner's life.

The overall theoretical context of the thesis is enriched in Chapter One by engagement with the work of Freire (1970, 2000) for praxis and empowerment; Zalec (2021) to examine ideas of human resilience; Randall (2014), Bochner (1998), and Ellis (2004) for exploration of narrative re-creation. Mezirow (1991) and Blackburn Miller (2000) contribute to the theory on transformative learning for adults. These theoretical concepts provide essential support for my belief that both resistance and resilience are developed and sustained through reflective, creative, and critical engagement with art processes.

Chapter One – Methodology in review

In this section, I look back at Chapter One to understand the methodologies which serve me as an artist and teacher who is researching ways to journey through a living inquiry. I consider how the emerging Arts-Based and Life History/biography methodologies are congruent with the identities I inhabit and have allowed me to excavate the long-ago memories and events I had suppressed.

Chapter Two's Shape

In the second chapter of this thesis, I inhabit my mature adult identity as artist educator and teacher. I shift my focus to the key themes of recognition and resonance, both of which are intimately connected to interpersonal experiences and relationships in my role as teacher and educator. A series of conversations become sites for exploring KCAT (Kilkenny Collective for Arts Talent), a unique context of art pedagogy. Colleagues share their experiences, which show important insights into art making and art pedagogy. The participants were asked to share their views on KCAT, learning, and art making, and each of these participant narratives acts as a standalone contribution to the research and is framed as an Artefcat in and of itself. I also 'listen' to what the KCAT Centre, as a holding space for art pedagogy, can tell me. I invite KCAT to 'speak' to me in an imagined/researched conversation where she shares her

history, ethos, and evolving identity with me. She also features as the main character in a film, which describes her physicality and captures the living sounds she makes. In my role as an artist/teacher, I explore her contributions to better understand how artmaking and pedagogical practice can become important sites of adult learning. The contributions made by KCAT and her inhabitants demonstrate that recognition and resonance are: 1) fostered through art making and art pedagogy, and 2) that they are essential to building inclusive, empathetic, and affirming learning communities.

In Chapter Two, I explore the learning theme of recognition further to show how social validation contributes to personal agency and identity formation (Honneth 1995). Buber's (1970) I-Thou philosophy underlines the ethical imperative of meeting the other with openness and mutual regard, a stance I know to be inherently embodied in the shared practices of collaborative artmaking. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology of embodied existence contributes to my understanding of being-in-the-world as inherently relational and situated, particularly within creative and pedagogical encounters.

The concept of Resonance is equally central to my understanding of the learning inherent in artmaking and art pedagogical practices. Resonance describes the affective and embodied dimension through which recognition often occurs. Rosa's (2019) theory of resonance has been especially illuminating for understanding how we form our relationships with the world around us. Before coming across his work, I struggled to articulate what I had long felt was an important quality in the experience of making and sharing art, a mysterious sense of being deeply connected, not only to others but also to the wider world. In this chapter, resonance becomes the conceptual language of this phenomenon. Resonance is a mode of responsive and reciprocal engagement that links human beings with each other, with other sentient life, and with the material and natural world.

I record careful observations from the safe, co-creative environment of

KCAT. The experiences and contributions of artists and artist educators from this learning space demonstrate conditions that are important for fostering recognition and resonance. They show how artmaking and art pedagogy not only facilitate the development of healthy and affirming relationships but also cultivate responsive, interconnected ways of being in the world. Their contributions here show us how artmaking and learning processes allow recognition and resonance to emerge as lived realities, making visible the transformative power of art in educational and communal life.

Chapter Two – Methodology in Review

Reviewing Chapter Two as another stage in the development of an emergent methodology, I use the lens of an artist educator/teacher in KCAT Arts Centre to explore the research journey with a heuristic approach. In this reflection, I look at how important an attitude of openness is to working with colleagues who make important contributions to the knowledge contained in this thesis.

Chapter Three's Design

In Chapter Three of this thesis, my full identity as A/R/Tographer is revealed as I establish a practice which is based on a/r/tography. I explore and curate more recent group art practice-based experiences within community artmaking and art pedagogical spaces, considering them as critical sites for healing, restoration, and the fostering of hope-filled ways of living into the future. This section curates personal narratives and artworks, as well as selected evocative stories of community, creative collaborations, and shared artistic practice. It explores the question of how artmaking and art pedagogy, approached through an a/r/tographic lens, can support adult learners by challenging fixed narratives and limiting beliefs.

These stories and artworks aim to illuminate how creative communities, when intentionally structured with care, ethical facilitation, and mutual respect, can foster conditions conducive to healing. They explore how art can function not only as a form of expression but also as a site for therapeutic engagement, a place where emotional repair, self-reclamation, personal flourishing, and social connection are made possible.

In this chapter, I write as a witness to the capacity of artmaking to help individuals process pain, navigate trauma, and move toward a renewed sense of self and relational wholeness. As I reflect on these spaces and experiences, I draw connections between past events in my life that required deep resilience and acts of resistance, and how those moments have since become fertile ground for learning and transformation. I consider how those challenging experiences, when accompanied by creative engagement, can lead to growth, insight, and greater emotional depth. I demonstrate, through the act of artmaking and the recording of being in resonant relationships, how: 1) we can reconcile our fragmented selves, reclaim parts of ourselves we have learned to repress, and 2) rebuild our lives with intentionality and hope. The work of Shaun McNiff (2007), who positions art as both a creative and healing process, supports this chapter of my inquiry. McNiff argues that the act of creating art allows individuals to externalise inner realities, transforming them into something tangible and manageable. His perspective affirms my own experiences as an a/r/tographer: that artmaking is inherently therapeutic, not because it aims to 'fix' what is broken, but because it allows us to engage meaningfully with what needs to be witnessed, understood, and integrated. This third chapter of my research underscores the role of artmaking and pedagogy in fostering not only personal healing but also collective well-being. Art practices are not only capable of addressing wounds from the past, but they also serve as vital strategies for imagining and building unprejudiced, compassionate, and flourishing futures in society. Artmaking and art pedagogy create spaces for caring for the self and the broader community.

Chapter Three – Methodology in Review

This section is an important one. It brings together all the identities I have inhabited through this research journey. It shows how a living inquiry becomes an ongoing journey into the future as I establish a confident and whole sense of being an a/r/tographer, an artist, a teacher, and a researcher who lives and experiences her life in her current

community practice, knowing that it will serve her beyond the present and into the future. A/R/Tography is explored as a methodology scaffolded by Irwin (2013) as I consider the practical implications of her theory for methodological practices in my life as an artist educator.

The Afterword

The afterword is a reflective musing and draws the body of work to a close. Here, I reflect on the learning I have made through research and consider the methodological impact of my journey, which has allowed me to use everything I am as an artist, researcher, and teacher in pursuit of understanding and illuminating a life worked in Art pedagogy. I reflect on how our life stories can impact others in the learning relationship. This afterword offers illuminations for considering art pedagogy as a living process to expand our thinking on possibilities for alternative ways of being, and ultimately, for alternative educational path

How to read this thesis

A Koan of unknowing

Knowing is not found in an answer, but in the moment the question loosens its grip.

A girl follows a small brown rabbit through a thickly overgrown and dark forest into a clearing where the ground is scattered with fragments of drawings, half-formed stories, and small clay pots still marked by fingerprints in various stages of completion. The girl asks the rabbit, 'Which of these is the answer?' The rabbit pauses, lifts a small lump of clay, and stands on his hind legs. He lets the clay crumble through his paws, back into the earth. 'If you already knew there was an answer,' the rabbit says, 'why did you follow me?' The girl looks at her ink-stained hands and the clay beneath her fingernails.

She cannot tell whether she has lost the question or become it.

Like a Zen koan, this thesis resists linear logic and solution-oriented interpretation, inviting the reader into a contemplative encounter space where problems don't necessitate solutions but instead invite contemplation for the wider, more nuanced truth they may hold.

Koans encourage us to forget everything we think we know and create again. They show us how to approach research with a beginner's mind, to honour curiosity, and trust that the next right move might appear out of nowhere. Koans encourage us to *rely* on uncertainty as a generative space, to be comfortable with discomfort and find courage in being vulnerable enough to keep searching, and so, keep 'becoming.' Koans demonstrate again and again that our knowing cannot be found in things outside of ourselves; instead, they reveal that, through active

Koans interrupt our usual, habitual ways of thinking; they open spaces for insight to arise through reflection, paradox, and lived experience. Koans have taught me to embrace ambiguity; their narrative tensions provoke awareness within me, rather than explanation. Understanding emerges through my sustained engagement, presence, and willingness to stay with the

journey and sit in spaces of not-knowing.

This thesis is not a Zen koan, but it is an emergent arts-based journey of discovery which invites you, the reader, to engage with the work not as a text that delivers predetermined conclusions but as a dialogical and interpretive arts-based experience. Meaning unfolds through nuance, story, image, and resonance, with any illumination or understanding shaped as much by your responses as by my own intentions. There are elements of this journey which will seem like unknown territory to the reader; in this respect, they are 'koan' like, they ask you to work with them in the way an artist might, loving especially the material which doesn't make sense' (Tarrant, 2008, p. 6). Rather than seeking definitive answers, I encourage you to follow my steps through the methods and processes which emerged as I made a path into what began as an imagined and therefore heuristic journey. I ask you to pick up the small offerings on the forest floor and let them speak to you, allow yourself to dwell with uncertainty, attend to what moves or unsettles you, and discover your own insights in response to the questions this work raises.

In this way, reading will become an active, reflective process, one that mirrors the arts-based inquiry itself, privileging relational knowing, resonance, personal meaning-making, and multiple truths.
Like the brown rabbit, I will not lead you to a predetermined answer, but we will uncover many truths along the way.

> 'For certain kinds of knowledge, you have to undertake a journey. It isn't like pouring water into a bucket- a process by which neither water nor bucket is changed. It seemed that if I took this journey, I would be utterly changed. And before setting out, I couldn't predict what that change would be. That was interesting to me. It encouraged me to set off with only the vaguest directions,'
>
> Tarrant 2008, p.5



Image 3 Detail Collage Revisited 2024

Chapter One Africa

Resistance and Resilience



ARTEFACT 2 Memory Vessel- Alice Bennett-2025

Chapter One: Africa-Resistance and Resilience

Prologue

It's nineteen eighty-eight. I'm in the back seat of a red Opal sedan. Josh is driving and Adam is sitting in the passenger seat, window all the way down, his elbow on the ledge and his hand dipping and rising in waves against the hot air as it rushes by. We are driving fast on the Cape Town motorway, away from the city. To our right, a wide dust-verge ribbons alongside us and beyond that, a deep stretch of corrugated shanty town glints and bursts blindingly under the harsh sun.

I'm making the first of what turns out to be many visits to Gugulethu Township. I've volunteered through the University Students' Union to make art with the children in a community centre.

We turn off the highway abruptly; there's no signpost, but Josh reckons this dirt road will lead us into the centre of the township. We slow right down and make our way, rattling and shaking in the deep, dry furrows of the earthen road. Lines of curious townspeople watch us, and a man steps up to Josh's door, his hand up to stop us

'What do you want?' he asks. We tell him we're here to meet the coordinator of the youth group, Ayabango Bhele. He nods, tells us to follow him. And so, for what seems like an eternity, we drive slowly behind this man who leads the way, ambling ahead of us. He's joined by dozens of small children and adolescents; he’s a dust-covered Pied Piper.

Then, he turns to face us abruptly and points towards a concrete building with a corrugated tin roof. It is in much better repair than the iron sheeted, cardboard, and wooden constructions surrounding it. The front of the building is brightly painted with a mural of children playing football in an incongruous green field with flowers and butterflies. Heavy iron gates stand wide open at the entrance; a thick chain and rusty red

padlock hang from one of the gates. I step from the car and am surrounded by small children, grabbing at my hands, my arms, they are smiling, laughing, and bubbling over with questions and exclamations in Xhosa. I feel so damned white. It's overwhelming, and I don't know whether to laugh or cry. Josh hands me several bags containing paint and brushes, and other art equipment. We are pulled by the children into the room - into the beginning of what becomes, for me, a lifetime conviction of what art is for.

Art. Making art for hope, making art for connection. It was all about

resistance and resilience. It made sense to me then, and it still makes sense to me now

Definition- Resistance[2]

The action of resisting, opposing, or withstanding someone or something; an instance of this. Sometimes with *to*, †*of*.

Psychoanalysis. Opposition (whether conscious or unconscious) to the process of bringing back to consciousness repressed memories, thoughts, feelings, or desires; an instance of this.

Definition- Resilience[3]

The quality or fact of being able to recover quickly or easily from, or resist being affected by, a misfortune, shock, illness, etc.; robustness; adaptability.

[2] Oxford University Press. (n.d.). Resistance, n., 1.a. In Oxford English dictionary. Retrieved October 15, 2025, from https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6014153751

[3] Oxford University Press. (n.d.). Resilience, n., II.5. In Oxford English Dictionary. Retrieved May 27, 2025, from https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3234012380

‘Sometimes there's truth in old cliches. There can be no real peace without justice. And without resistance, there will be no justice.’

Arundhati Roy[4]

‘The violent imposition of “Western” reasoning, which privileges the cognitive over all else, has dulled our awareness of our extrarational senses - the emotional, embodied, imagined, remembered, dreamt, spiritual, and ethereal - disconnecting us from ways of knowing that are critical to our collective survival and well-being. Re-entanglement with the entirety of our senses is essential to identifying and challenging these oppressive ideologies as well as imagining and constructing better ways of being.’

Robinson, J., Walker, J., & Walter, P., 2023, P.497[1]

‘Art provided me with a form of communication that helped me rationalise the context and, in some ways, gain agency’

Johnston 2018, p. vi

Sydney Peace Prize Lecture, sydney.edu.au. November 4, 2004, https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1101172 accessed 17/02/2025

Art, Politics, Belonging: Race and Difference in South Africa

The context of chapter one is firmly set in Africa. From Zimbabwe, where I was born and grew up, moving to South Africa as a young art student and adult, returning to Zimbabwe to teach art, building my career and my family. The context is defined by difference and conflict. During the 1960s, under the Apartheid regime in South Africa, thousands of black citizens were forcibly displaced from urban areas and relocated to designated townships, one of which was Gugulethu. Originally designed to house migrant workers from the Eastern Cape, the area was made up of barracks-style accommodations, where no one owned their homes, and people lived in dire, debilitating poverty. Many of the people who lived in these townships travelled to and from the city to look after white children as domestic workers or 'nannies'[5]while leaving their own children at home with grandparents and relatives.

In March 1986, seven young black men were murdered by South Africa's Apartheid security forces in an event that became known as 'The Gugulethu Seven'. The victims - Zandisile Zenith Mjobo, Zola Alfred Swelani, Mandla Simon Mxinwa, Godfrey Jabulani Miya, Themba Mlifi, Zabonke John Konile, and Christopher 'Rasta' Piet - were members of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the African National Congress[6]An inquest into the men's deaths was held in 1986, a trial was held in 1987, and another inquest was then reopened in 1989. 'The outcome of both inquests, despite opposing eyewitness accounts and conflicting forensic evidence, was a finding by Wynberg magistrate Hoffmann that the youths had died in a legitimate antiterrorist operation'[7] This was a time coloured by extreme violence and inhuman treatment of people fighting for South Africa's freedom.

Against this political and social backdrop, I was living and studying fine art at the University of Cape Town. My experience of learning the history, theory and practice of visual art making was inextricably linked to politics because of the circumstances I found myself in. Having grown up in apartheid Rhodesia I was steeped in a context where 'difference'

coloured every action, reaction, thought, decision, and choice I made. I knew myself as part of a hierarchy; I had been born into the top tier as a white and privileged child. The world was quite literally all about 'black' and 'white.' While this research is not about race, I do acknowledge that the extreme aggression and violence perpetuated on 'other' races and people of difference by white people is part of my inheritance as a white woman from a colonial apartheid background; I have been both informed and formed by it. My view of the world, and therefore this research explores and considers my experiences in this context as an important formative factor in my epistemology and ontology. At this time, while studying for a fine arts degree, I hadn't yet considered Art as a teaching career. I was more interested in painting and artmaking; I wanted to be an Artist and make a name for myself in the Academy.

The experience of making art, however, was deeply infused with my early political experiences; it was woven into my social learning and inextricable from the development of 'my personal self' (Green 2024, p.85). By the time I left Cape Town University, I had already identified art as a vehicle to personal agency. My engagement as a political activist in South Africa added to my early childhood and adolescent life experiences in Zimbabwe. As the country of my birth, Zimbabwe was my home, but it did not feel safe. Ever since I can remember, my world has been coloured by uncertainty, war, and a sense of not belonging. The art that I made in childhood, adolescence, and as a young adult in these contexts gave me a firm belief that art making can help us to resist domination and oppression and bring a sense of connection and belonging, particularly when we are different or on the margins of society.

[5] *Nanny*- a person whose job is to take care of a particular family's children, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/nanny

[6] https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/umkhonto-wesizwe-mk-timeline-1961-1990 accesses 27/01/2025 https://sabctrc.saha.org.za/reports/volume2/chapter3/subsection43.htm accessed 27/01/2025

In Apartheid South Africa, legislation regulating public meetings was a deliberate mechanism of control; it was designed to fracture Black communities and dismantle resistance at its roots. In townships, like Gugulethu, surveillance and police raids were a routine feature of daily life, intensifying particularly when white individuals entered these spaces in acts of solidarity or community development. Harmless cultural or educational gatherings could be disrupted or disbanded by authorities under suspicion of subversion. A litany of legislative instruments underpinned this repression[8]. These laws were not, as they purported to be, reactive tools against violence, but rather part of a systematic strategy to criminalise Black political organisations and disrupt collective identity. The laws effectively rendered everyday acts of solidarity and connection as punishable offences.

Josh, Adam, and I could have been part of a much larger group of willing student volunteers, but we would purposefully go in small groups of threes to minimise police aggression. We knew that we were taking a risk but used our identities as 'artists' as a way to bring the people in Gugulethu information about political support that was growing within the university. We also brought materials, foodstuffs and school equipment that had been donated. We were 'making art' together while building solidarity. Art was a way of resisting the racist agenda of the government.

[8] The Suppression of Communism Act (1950), Riotous Assemblies Act (1956), Public Safety Act (1953), Internal Security Act (1982) **https://sahistory.org.za/article/apartheid-legislation-1850s-1970s**

In the context of difference, we look for recognition. We look to be part of something and to make connections. We look to resonate with the world around us, find meaning, and experience connection (Rosa 2019). From early on I learned that making art was a form of connection (see Artefact 8). Later in this chapter, I engage with art and autobiographical stories about becoming an artist, as a transformative and personal activity that fosters and sustains self-knowledge and promotes critical reflection and reflective learning (Raikou 2016).

> ‘By exploring the meaning of the imagery, we can examine alternative realities, change our belief systems, and write new stories that are affirming and empowering us to take charge of our own lives’
>
> Lawrence, 2012, p. 141.

In making the image ‘The lost child’ (see artefact 10), I reflect on a traumatic time in my life where I ‘see’ myself as part of a larger context, understanding better how I was caught up in a political agenda that was not of my doing. I learn to see myself differently through the image making, which becomes an alternate version of the story I had long been telling myself. One I can put behind me and move on from.

In this way, art pedagogy/making not only creates opportunities for resisting hegemony and oppression, supporting adult learners in challenging limiting beliefs and fostering lifelong learning and growth, but it also leads to self-creation.

Within the context of adult education, exploring how arts-based methods can disrupt fixed assumptions about adult learners' potential and create spaces for lifelong development and transformation. Art is a way of (re) constructing our ‘self’ in a world that insists on constructing us in one-dimensional ways (Green 2023, 2024). We can make art to shift our perspectives on our experiences and ways of knowing, valuing alternate, embodied, intuitive ways of knowing instead (Heron and Reason 2006, Biffi and Zuccoli, 2016

Beyond the Lines: Re-searching the Self

As a/r/tographer, I return to the subjective experiences of my life in my identity as artist/researcher/art teacher. The concept of art as a force for resisting oppressive, limiting agendas is illuminated through several artefacts I write and make. In reflection on these artefacts through both personal and scholarly writing, my relationship with a growing sense of resistance to hegemony and domination through art pedagogy/making is offered as an example of the personal, to illuminate the political. Ethically, I needed to research my 'self' because I was asking my research participants to do the same, but also, I needed to turn the research gaze inwards because my strong passion for the power of art pedagogy arose first in my 'self'' (Sultan 2018). I knew that there was important information in this seed of passion, and in the experience, I had gathered over a lifetime of making and learning/teaching art, which might be useful. I knew I had important knowledge to share about how art pedagogy/making had impacted my life and the lives of others and could potentially benefit others.

Chapter one incorporates collage and evocative autoethnography to re-search my experience as a small child in a confusing and contradictory society. The context is personally and socially significant because it impacts my identity based on my experiential history (Green 2024). When I am faced with certain disorientating dilemmas (Mezirow 1991), I have to choose to step 'beyond the lines' and free myself from conditioning to create a new revised identity



ARTEFACT 3 COLLAGE- ALICE BENNETT- 2022

I have shown you my collage piece first. I want you to see it without words. Words interpret and tell. There will be time for words, that is what a traditional dissertation (and this dissertation) demands, but in an a/r/tographic dissertation we also need to 'read' the image. The artwork shown above holds memories and experiences, feelings and much more. It is an artefact which acts as a container for my childhood. Here, collage becomes a container, a vessel for memory, emotion, and narrative. Through the act of making collage, I explore belonging and not-belonging

Below, I record the collage-making process. I am excavating my values through making a collage which merges with evocative autoethnographic writing. The art process leads me through the landscape of the past, awakening my childhood 'self.' In the retelling of this self, I am searching to understand and know better how art pedagogy/making might reclaim my sense of belonging/not-belonging in a society which I recall as oppressive, dangerous, and hostile. I also hope to illuminate how the process of collage/art making might allow for extended epistemologies for valuing other ways of knowing (Heron and Reason 2008). Extended epistemologies enable us to shift from a cognitive-based response to the world to an embodied experience where we can co-create a space which is safe to participate in with our whole selves and our whole bodies, including our emotions, intuition, and relationships (Meyer,2009). It is my belief that embracing extended epistemologies leads to a deeper connection with others and ourselves.

I start the collage process by finding images which spark memory and context and use these along with paint to re-create something which represents my experience. In this way I can dwell in an embodied intuitive space (Biffi and Zuccoli, 2016). Later, I can confront these thoughts and explore them through both academic and creative writing. Making collage allows me to access the past more easily, writing into the collage experience allows me to interrogate and challenge the past narratives and claim new ones (Randall 2013).

ARTEFACT 4 Tearing up the past- gluing myself back together

I know this won't be easy, and to keep some semblance of control in managing my emotional response to the work ahead of me, I decide to use generic imagery rather than any of my photographs. On the morning that I had set aside to make collage, a friend of mine, who lives in Zimbabwe, has sent me real time footage of burning cars, people running, and police brutality on the streets of Harare. Memories of being in such situations rise in my throat threatening to spill. I am feeling emotional, concerned for my friend in that space, anxious, feeling helpless, powerless. I tell myself to focus on the work I had planned to do, that there is even more reason to lose myself in this action today.

And so, I begin. I google the words 'Zimbabwe, Liberation War.'

At once the familiar line up of soldiers from both sides appear. The scrub bush is the first thing I identify with. I can smell the dry grass and dust dirt in my nose, I inhale deeply. I sense the danger in this image which resonates with memories I have long ago repressed. I am flooded with sensations.

Kicking the dust on the farm road, I see myself walking with my best friend. We wonder whether the 'terrs'[10] are camping in the hills above her home again tonight. We had come across a campfire there in our wanderings a few days before. Bones of a carcass and mealie cobs [11]left near the ashes of a small cooking fire, shells of bullets, discarded. We exchange furtive whispers about our friend Sunny, who has been kidnapped from his farm and has been taken across the Mozambique border. He is eleven years old. We can talk about this now, away from the stricken adults who speak in hushed voices about what will happen to him.

[10] Terrs- slang for terrorists
[11] Mealie cobs- maize cobs

I feel the tightening of the muscles in my throat again. I come back to the room I inhabit as a fifty-four-year-old woman. I look at the photograph in front of me, white men in shorts with tall rifles, as tall as themselves, pose proudly on either side of their kill of zebra and antelope. The zebra is skinned, and the pelt is stretched, Christlike between them.

I press print.

I see a link to Selous Scout, my fingers recoil from the keyboard. The words conjure fear and loathing. I hear the war song in my head, the one we sang as children, ''Cos we're all Rhodesians and we'll fight through thick or thin, we'll keep this land a free land, stop the enemy coming in……''.

The scouts were supposed to be our (white) heroes.' After the war, I learned of their brutality, perversion of torturous practices done in the name of 'self-defence.' I remember my own father's stories, when sick from things he could not un-see, he told us, in drunken slurring words, of the excrement smeared on the walls of the prisoner cells, of bodies in black zippered bags. Bodies piled high one on top of the other, ready to be thrown into mass graves. Soldiers stood around, smoking amiably together, talking of their wives and families back home.

I am shown hundreds of images here on the screen but none of these images are as bad as the ones I have pushed down into my being, from listening to the world around me as a child, and the witnessing of brutality I later saw firsthand, as a young adult.

I google 'freedom fighters. The black counterpart of the white Selous Scouts.

Robert Mugabe as a young leader surrounded by loyal fighters and comrades. His weapon is raised above his head; he roars into the sky. The fear came at us from all sides. I could not sleep at night. My brother, five years younger than me at the time, lay in his toddler-sized fatigues with a wooden plank, cut into the shape of a rifle, under the covers in the room we shared. He promised to protect us while our father was away in the army camp. Richi patrolled the perimeter of our garden during dusk. Before his bath time and in his dreams, he killed all the 'baddies' telling everyone that he was 'an Army.'

I press print.
I came across an image I could never have imagined existed before now. It is a propaganda poster. It shows two young white women with pistols, the text declares, 'These women will kill for Rhodesia.'

I press print.

There is another image with text. A photograph of three young black men reading a placard which warns against forgetting what happened in South Africa, warns against voting for the white men. And finally, an image of a black 'nanny' [12]dressed in a servant's uniform, holding a white child on her hip. Three more white children of various sizes pose next to her, all hold rifles in their arms, all are smiling into the camera, except the woman.

I draw breath, my nanny's touch, a skin

memory, a blood memory. I miss her.

I press print.
I have enough. Enough imagery to represent the darkness of regret, guilt, fear, loathing, confusion, and despair inside me.

And then I think of Rudo, as I so often do when darkness and anger descend on me.

And so, I Google 'African boy in school uniform,' an inept attempt to describe the image I have of him in my head with words.

I realise that I am searching for him again on the internet. I had, in young adult life, tried to find him through social media platforms and sites, without luck. Now I try to represent him through another's image, as I remember him when we were at school together. I find an image which touches me and choose it as his proxy.

I press print.

I take my photocopies from the printer tray. I collect scissors, a board, glue, paint, a brush, and a water jar. I cut away the white edges from the photocopies and tear through the centre of the image of white hunters, glueing it down to the board, the stretched Zebra skin torn, is my central point. It speaks of power and arrogance, domination, and ego of the hunter, the predator. It is an outward expression of raw brutality and

colonialism in its most basic form. The white man's 'god given right' to plunder and control.

This inheritance has been central to my identity as a white girl born into a patriarchal, colonial world. It is where I began, it colours my understanding of my place as a child and young person in the world. The sense of being a child returns to me, I feel the overwhelm of expectations to behave - I must be quiet, pliable, good-natured, and pretty. Demure. I am, after all, daddy's *girl.' I realise that I am holding my breath now. I am barely breathing.*

I feel a little sick and get up to make a cup of tea. The images have more resonance with me than I expected them to. Later, I return to the table and rush through the next part, glueing down the other images around this central one depicting the Zebra Christ.

I realise I am tearing and pasting, tearing, and pasting.

I like the ragged edges; they are random when they are torn. The words, random, torn, ragged, seem to express something about my long-ago experience. I am in an almost frenzied state, a half-conscious process. Cognition is temporarily suspended - one action is leading to the next, it seems, instinctively. I drag myself away from the action and stand still to observe. I need to step away from the table, look at the board. I feel I have been closer to some of these memories in the last few moments than I have in years, not thinking them, but feeling them. I step back into the work, take the paint, and begin to cover over parts of the image. There are parts I rush over and others I am intrigued by, drawn to. Some of these images I want to dwell on, think over, stay longer with. Areas of puzzlement, confusion. I can make more choices with paint than I could with tearing. I can choose colours and apply strokes in different ways. It feels like I am more in control. I can choose what I would like to highlight and what I would like to cover. The process of painting is less violent and immediate than the glueing and pasting. I am stroking the images with a brush and paint, making them become what I want them to be.

The process ebbs slowly to a natural ending. I am exhausted, both

physically and emotionally. I sit to write, reflecting on the artmaking and to try to understand what I have just experienced.



ARTEFACT 5 Collage Revisited- Alice Bennett-2024

It's a messy process; there is always a mess after making collage, cut/snip/glue/scatter. It's chaotic, but within that chaos is the potential for surprise. New information is always nearby when making a collage. In making collage, I enter only with a vague idea, a trigger image. I make one step, and out of nowhere, another will suggest itself; I can only proceed one step at a time. The emerging image and placement are unknown at the outset. The resulting image becomes something that was, a short while ago, unknown to me. It invites discovery; it becomes something despite me and my interference. Collage demands surrender of control, where intuition and accident become co-creators. It is a process that is emergent, without a prescribed outcome. I don't know how the finished image will emerge, and I don't know how I will experience the process of making the collage.

Collage making aligns closely with what I understand of heuristic processes and the emergent nature of a/r/tography. Both art pedagogy and artmaking are inherently emergent practices that embrace the unknown (Sultan, 2018; Moustakas, 1990). The act of creating a collage can explore layered personal and collective experiences by 'providing a novel and metaphoric language with which to give shape to thoughts and ideas' (Biffi & Zuccoli, 2016, p.135).

Much of what I express through collage is not something I have consciously thought about for years. These ideas and memories have been buried, suppressed, and set aside as a way to protect myself from fully feeling or confronting them. Through the messy, intuitive process of collage, hidden layers begin to surface, not as direct memories but as gestures, fragments, and metaphors. The act of making becomes a way of knowing, of discovering what has been unspoken.

Collage making encompasses contradiction. Opposing images can stand starkly juxtaposed, emphasising their differences, or they can be manipulated to reveal unexpected commonalities and shared attributes. In

the process of making, I create space to both love and hate my home country, my place of becoming. This kind of nuance feels more accessible to me through images than through writing.

Art pedagogy and making embrace unknowing and contradiction (Robinson et al. 2023). In the process, I am both drawn to and repulsed by the images I use. Yet, because they both speak to the 'difficult to express,' I allow them to coexist. In this way, the process of collage becomes a space of complexity and emotional honesty.

In making art, we are constantly 'on the edge,' waiting for revelation. I come to know when the composition begins to reflect something new, something illuminating. The 'openings' created by images and artworks 'penetrate deeply and shift the boundaries of perspective,' offering 'the possibility of infinite re-combinations' (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 906). Through these possibilities, alternate understandings, and ways of knowing emerge, unfolding through process, material, and intuition.

I recognise, in retrospect, admit to myself that once the initial process of making the collage was over, I began looking more for aesthetic value in the piece. I wonder whether others who are not artists do this, or does it just come with the territory of my role as artist /teacher? I wonder if my need to create a complete artwork dilutes or confuses my experience of research/understanding of other ways of knowing? Now that the making is over, I want to turn it into an image that more consciously expresses and communicates to others. The value I have for it as a journey it took me on is diminishing. I am glad I did reflective writing immediately after making the collage. I feel that the further away I get from the making process, the less I trust its value and the more I doubt my knowing as a maker. The more I use cognition, the less I believe in the embodied experience of knowing, as having value. How dominant the cognitive is! Even subliminally, it works to dismiss the deep knowledge that I have found in the art-making process.

I engage in collage as research to experience firsthand how it might function as a methodology. I wanted to understand how it might feel for the people I intended to work with in this research. While creating this piece, I worked alongside others in a communal studio and was reminded of the vulnerability involved in making within a shared environment, of exposing what I do not know in front of others. This process required a surrender of ego and a willingness to remain in a space where I felt little control (McNiff, 1998; Robinson et al., 2023).

Through this activity, I learned that I am freer to explore uncomfortable thoughts and emotions when working with physical materials and suspending logical thought processes. I find it easier to 'talk' to the canvas than to the computer screen or to another human being. Art pedagogy and making reveal valuable information (Dewey, 1934). I imagine that the participants I hope to work with in this research will have similar experiences, and this encourages me. Making the collage surfaced difficult feelings, anxiety: would I be able to see this through? Doubt: Did I have the ability to do this at all, and would it be of value? I felt uncertainty not only in myself, but also in my research methods and ideas. I questioned how the serious researchers, the 'clever ones,' might view my experiments with artmaking as research methodology. I thought about how art pedagogy and making are often seen as 'less than' within academia and adult education. I equated this perception with my 'self.'

I struggled with the thought that I, too, might be 'less than.' Not only was my work not aesthetically beautiful, but perhaps it was also 'stupid,' not 'clever enough' for the academy. These feelings are rooted in long-ago learning and internalised self-doubt. I must remind myself, again and again, that my ways of knowing, my artist's ways of knowing, are valid.

The cognition of artists is inseparable from their art production; their thought processes unfold through the act of making, so generating

learning (Dewey, 1934; McLaren, 1992). Artists are necessarily and continually engaged in a form of critical praxis (Freire, as cited in McLaren, 1992, pp. 7- 27). The dialogue that occurs between the canvas and the artist creates a fertile space for learning and knowledge building. This canvas can become a holder for liminal spaces- a site of pure possibility. Green's hypothesis, drawing on Cross 1999 and Kegan 1982 (Green 2023, p. 199), is that adults are continually in a process of development, navigating transformation in similar ways to children. As adults, he tells us, we address states of 'groundlessness' (liminal zones in Irwin 2013, disorientating dilemmas in Mezirow 1997) through 'action thought' (p.199). This process is one where the adult can come to conceptualise their new way of being only through 'direct engagement with concrete reality' (p.198). This 'action thought' is originary in nature, not relying on previous schemas, habits, or mindsets. Transformation involves unpredictable human choices. Those choices are acts of agency producing originary forms' (Green 2023, p.192).

It is my suggestion, based on Green's hypothesis, and my experience, that artists construct meaning for themselves, and potentially for others, by imaging metaphor, imagining possibilities, and constantly problematising and re-imagining their position in the world (De Botton & Armstrong, 2013).' By making the familiar, strange, this method discloses that the 'actual' is just one of many possibilities- it could have happened otherwise' (Green 2023, p.196). The outcomes of artmaking are filled with potentiality, possibility, and promise. Each step in the making process suggests the next, opening limitless directions and ensuring originality. Dewey (1934) refers to this as 'flexible purposing', a mode of spontaneous and responsive creation that cannot be predetermined. In flexible purposing, the artist is engaged in constant assessment and reassessment, allowing for multiple possibilities and directions to emerge. Artmaking, as a creative and epistemological practice, bridges a gap in knowledge production. It makes space for the irrational, illogical, mysterious, and emotional as valid and valuable ways of knowing. Every brushstroke or artistic action is connected to what the

artist has experienced, what she is experiencing, and what she will experience. As Dewey (2005) tells us, ‘What is done and what is undergone constitutes intelligence’ (p. 47).

‘While the artist’s originary ‘action thought’ is made in the first instance from his intra-personal experience of being in the world, it is also, in part, an experience of interpersonal experience. When held by an experienced artist-educator and /or within a supportive group, the transformation can become a community/ relational experience’

Green 2023, p.196.

Many artists and artist learners have been excluded or marginalised within education due to perceived levels of academic ability. Their artistic ways of knowing have been systematically subjugated and deemed ‘less than.’ I remind myself that the artists I hope to work with in this research need to be protected in the making process. They must be reassured that their artmaking is free from expectation or judgment, and that it will not be treated as a product to be aesthetically evaluated.

Surrendering Control: The Courage to Not Know

Constant searching for new ground and dwelling in liminal spaces towards building new ground demands courage and resilience (Green, 2023; McNiff, 1998; Zalec, 2021). The transformational art process demands that we surrender control; artmaking disturbs and unsettles us- yet it is in this space that uncomfortable, and sometimes unwelcome, knowing emerges. A delicate tension between surrender and agency exists in the artmaking process- it is a fragile endeavour, and I believe, it must be protected as a process toward knowing, rather than reduced to a means of producing something of aesthetic or material value. To achieve this, artists must surrender the ego as a necessary step for accessing creative knowing in both artmaking and pedagogy. As McNiff explains:

> 'Training in creativity requires the ability to relax in periods of uncertainty and to trust that creative intelligence will find its way. The education of imagination involves giving up what I call "ego" control. It requires an inclination to step into the unknown as well as the ability to persist when there is no end in sight.'
>
> McNiff, 1998, p. 3.

This surrender of ego enables acceptance of unpredictable outcomes, the embrace of mistakes, and the opening to new possibilities (Green 2023). By relinquishing control and leaning into imagination and play, we allow knowledge to emerge with each step in the artmaking process. By persisting in inhabiting this surrender of ego, even when the path appears endless, we enact resilience and agency. Willingly becoming vulnerable is not an act of weakness, but of strength. Remaining in a state of vulnerability is a bold and courageous stance. It requires a sustained commitment to 'unknowing,' a space in which artists often dwell. To be an artist is to embrace the extrarational and to consciously practice the ongoing surrender of ego (McNiff, 1998; McCormack, 2015; Robinson et al., 2023).

The collage and artmaking experience surfaced remote memories. I was able to access thoughts and feelings from my childhood at the time of the Chimurenga wars. Forgotten or repressed memories emerged, visceral and profound. It felt as though my internal landscape and physical geography had manifested in the visual creation of this collage. In the act of making, both my internal and physical life were exposed. Personal memories and experiences were revealed with what Romanshyn (2007) describes as a 'metaphoric sensibility', bridging the gap between the conscious and the unconscious. Both the artmaking and the writing have become a process of 'excavating memories' (O'Neill, 2006). Through this excavation, I can resurface and reframe knowledge I have long ignored, forgotten, or neglected (Lawrence, 2012). In re-examining these intense life experiences, I reconnect them with the learning I have since done, to deconstruct what I know and understand better how these ways of knowing were formed in me. I can question them, test them for truth.

The act of making art becomes an act of agency (Green, 2023, 2024). I begin to recognise my life and reclaim my experience. I use the art process to consciously resist the co-option of my story into dominant narratives, into the story of white apartheid Africa, the story of my parents, and the society I was born into. Artmaking allows me to reclaim my life as a story that I can 'tell' myself. It belongs to me. It positions me in the world I am reconstructing (Randall, 2013, 2014). As Bruner writes:

> 'Eventually, the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organise memory, to segment and purpose-build the very "events" of a life. In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we "tell about" our lives
>
> Bruner 2004, p. 15.

Embracing Ambiguity: Meaning Making through Art

I acknowledge that my lived experience is filled with ambiguity and uncertainty, relying as it does on memory, recall, and my subjective interpretation of those experiences within their contexts. My life story can only be known 'partially, imperfectly, and second-hand, through my theories, my senses, my memory, and my imagination' (Randall, 2014, p. 49). Embracing the ambiguity of life storytelling in evocative autoethnography helps me find meaning rather than explanation (Pallas, 2001). I hope to 'make meaning' out of my existence through art pedagogy/ making, reclaiming my stories to 'make something' out of our (*my*) lives' (Randall, 2014, p. 8, insert mine).

'Somewhere in me, I have filed them (my stories) away for future reference or that, as we say, I have "learned from them"' (Randall, 2014, p. 50, insert mine). Active engagement with the world through symbols, images, language, and cultural contexts through art making, helps me make meaning of my existence and experience. It builds resilience in me by showing me how, despite difficult circumstances, I have persevered, adapted, and remain here (Zalec, 2021). Through art pedagogy and making, I engage with the world and gather information, assigning it meaning (Bruner, 1994). Recognising that this action is ongoing, that I am always gathering information and assigning meaning, frees me from limitations and allows me to be a person who is always becoming, always capable of change and potential. By retelling my living story in the present, I continually reframe my approaches and discover alternative perspectives and ways forward. I understand then that I am not a fixed being; I am a powerful, dynamic character in my own story.

In bringing the story into the physical realm through word and image, space for meaning-making is created. The metaphor and metonymy of image and word create a tension and space between both landscapes, the internal (within) and the context (without), the physical and the abstract.

Experiences become more vivid, more real, and more meaningful when they encompass tension (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005

Resurfacing Memory: The Embodied Nature of Art

Resurfacing feelings and memories through the collage process was uncomfortable and at times distressing. Art pedagogy/making as research can unsettle us (Blackburn Miller, 2020), creating 'discomfort, frayed edges, and holes' (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 901). It is a site for staying with knowledge that is 'nettlesome' (Sibbett & Thompson, 2008). Art pedagogy/making accesses the extrarational, creating a visceral, embodied reaction to thoughts and feelings which emerge through memory.

In art pedagogy/making, the senses are called on to participate in both the cognitive and emotional experience of remembering past events. Thinking does not have to be an 'inside the head' phenomenon; thinking mind and feeling body are not necessarily in opposition; we can know with the heart, body, and mind, engaging both rational and extrarational senses (Rendón 2023).

After reflecting on the extent to which I have suppressed my memories and emotions about my time in Zimbabwe, I realise that my body has held onto emotions and memories. I also experienced how easily these are accessed when given the right triggers and permission to emerge. Art pedagogy/making provides a key to unlock the suppressed, the subjugated, the vulnerable that lives in me. The act of making art illuminates knowing that has been hidden; it subverts what is controlled and usually kept in check.

This process of 'bringing to light' is not neat, nor is it linear. It is messy and unpredictable, demanding a willingness to sit with discomfort and uncertainty. Yet, within this tension lies the potential for transformation. The body remembers what the mind has tried to forget. Through art, I can give form to the intangible, make visible what was once unseen. In this way, art pedagogy/making becomes an act of reclaiming voice and agency, challenging the learned silence in me. Writing alongside image

making seems to create both the contiguity (side-by-side conditions), which in turn creates a shift or metonymy for a deeper understanding of the experience (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005).

Taking a more systematic approach to try to understand the writing I have done, I begin to pick out words that relate to the body, movement, and physicality of the collage experience. 'I rush through, my fingers recoil, 'dive in,' I step back/I step back in,' all these words and phrases indicate a physical involvement with the collage process. My body is responding, acting alongside the making/thinking process. 'I draw breath.' 'I feel a little sick.' 'My throat muscles tighten.' 'I need to step away.' These phrases indicate that my body is physically affected by engagement with the memories and the images I am working with. Writing into the experience, I notice how my breathing slows and becomes deeper. I realise that my body reacts to the thoughts, and how the two are in a dance of recognition. It feels as though, through this process, I am returning to an equilibrium.

It seems as if both thought and feeling are coming back into balance, my cognitive/rational thinking function aligning with the emotional/embodied/extrarational sense. I was transported to another place and time by engaging with the making process: Kicking the dust on the farm road,' I am walking with my best friend,' I must be quiet, pliable, good-natured, and pretty. Demure. I am "daddy's girl".'

I recognise the little girl who was afraid to step out of line, who needed to behave and yet found something within her that rebelled against what she felt was wrong and unacceptable. I return to thinking about Rudo, I hold him in my heart and head as a reference point of values. I was living in a world of black and white where the boundaries set for us by our racist society were disregarded for an intuitive recognition of the humanity we shared, a simple friendship, resistant to the discrimination that coloured the worlds of our adults.

In this moment of reflection, I realise how the act of making art becomes a powerful dialogue between past and present, body and mind, control,

and surrender. The collage is not only a site of memory but a space where the tensions of identity, belonging, and resistance are felt and worked through, allowing for new stories to emerge from the layers of experience.

ARTEFACT 6 His Name is Rudo Zivai- Alice Bennett -2020

Rudo walked me home from primary school for several weeks before anyone noticed there was a black boy by my side.

Everything about Rudo fascinated me. The moment he slipped in behind the headmaster through the door of the classroom, standing like a shadow, half hidden. His whole being eclipsed my senses. He looked me straight in the eye. He sat near me during the morning lessons. At break time, we found each other on the playing field.

His apple rolled in the dust towards me where I stood alone, apart from the other kids. I picked up the apple and wrapped it in the hem of my uniform, rubbing it clean before taking two steps towards him, holding it out in front of me, as far as I could.

He walked towards me, looking me straight in the eye.

From then on, we were inseparable, and Rudo walked me home every day. The whispers around us only wrapped us more tightly into a new world of our own making. One day, he didn't leave me when we got to the border of the garden gate, we crossed all the way over, up the long driveway, through the front door and then into the living room.

I saw fear grip my mother's body, flash in her eyes. She turned pale. Rudo and I, standing side by side, looked at each other. The air filled with electricity. I tasted the storm, metallic at the back of my throat.

Rudo took my hand.

I knew then what needed to be done.
'Mum, this is Rudo Zivai. He's black' I said.

Resisting Discrimination and Racism through Art

The society I grew up in was always acutely fractured. After independence in 1980, a process of righting wrongs began, which seemed to only create further pain and suffering[13]I had been accidentally privileged by my inherited class and colour. I had learned and assimilated an ethnocentric and narrow worldview or 'habitus,' an 'internalised, embodied, social structure' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 468). During my primary school years, I attended a school for 'Whites Only.' The education system was traditional, colonial, informed by religious indoctrination, and modelled on the British education system. Marxist theory states that the dominant class is a 'class for itself' because it deliberately manipulates education to serve the elite in a politically motivated way (Munck, as cited in O'Sullivan, 2007, p. 304). This was true of the education at that time, but we lived in a rapidly changing context where history was, in the final instance, rewritten overnight. After independence, statues were torn down, and roads and buildings were renamed. The very geography of the physical world I grew up in was turned upside down. The lifeworld we had all come to know as 'normal' was eradicated overnight. The 'social imaginary' Green (2023) speaks of the 'glue' that made up our (dysfunctional) society, was gone, and this led us to a collective disorienting dilemma, which demanded that we transform (p.191)

After the founding of Zimbabwe, education became more accessible to most classes and races, and some of the crippling inequalities of apartheid were addressed. For me, this upheaval was a time of meaning-making, a time to forge my ideas of the world and become part of a new 'social imaginary.' My country was celebrating independence, and I was beginning to glimpse what personal independence might look like, too. Though I didn't know it at the time, I was learning to make sense of my own historical and social perspective in a chaotic society. The day Zimbabwe celebrated its independence from colonial rule; the first Black Zimbabwean boy was admitted to the primary school I attended. His name was Rudo.

I want to understand why my meeting with Rudo is still so vivid to me and always seems to arise when I experience feelings of anger at injustice. Rudo, it seems, has become synonymous with my sense of justice. I read back over the story of Rudo and me. The moment that 'I knew what needed to be done' was a moment of pure instinct. I had an intuition to trust a strong inner feeling of what was right, according to values I had no conscious recognition of. How did I know what was to be done? Everything in my world had told or taught me otherwise. How can we know certain things without ever having been taught them? My intuition was strong and directive, and I followed it with conviction. Why did I give value to what I thought I knew to be true despite everything in my world saying otherwise?

In Rudo, I recognised and connected with a person, a person on the margins. Accessing these feelings again through this small piece of evocative autoethnography showed me how I came to embrace 'others.' In childhood and adolescence, this meant people of different colour; in adulthood, it has been 'others' who are neurodivergent, in both cases, in different contexts, those who feel marginalised and segregated. My family held a hierarchy of acceptability, where Black people were not included. They also considered intellect as imperative to being a person of value and worth. In my family, just as it would have been acceptable to call a Black person a 'kaffir[14]' it would have been equally acceptable to call a person with intellectual disabilities a 'retard [15], I absorbed and learned that the 'worst' kinds of people were 'stupid' people, those 'without brains' or academic ability, and Black people. Consequently, an emphasis, both explicit and implicit, was placed on doing well, being compliant, and being the same as all the other white children in my class. I shrank myself in trying to please my parents and teachers and, as a result, became extremely shy and introverted. I spent much of an already frightening childhood in a routine of reading and studying. My desperate desire for connection arose because I identified myself as 'other,' a misfit who did not understand the freedom my school peers seemed to inhabit in their confident ways of being.

It was only through my acceptance into the art studio/art classroom in adolescence that I was able to create connections and recognise that I might 'belong' somewhere. The learning I did through making art helped me become aware of my assumptions and fostered empathy for the 'other' and for myself (Black & Bernardes, 2012; McDermott et al., 2012, as cited in Blackburn Miller, 2020). It also provided me with a place of acceptance.

The powerful response I feel at the injustice of racism echoes through me, in a similar way, to that which emerges when neurodivergent people are discriminated against and marginalised in education. The value base from which my desire to research, make art, write, and teach deeply informs my ontology and epistemology. The excavation of these past intense moments through both collage and reflective consideration leads me through a continually deepening understanding of how I have 'become' the person I am. The process of artmaking takes me to liminal spaces, spaces of 'groundlessness' where I can reflect on where I was and where I would like to go (Green, 2024).

[13] https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/zimbabwe/ZimLand0302-02.htm

[14] Since the mid-20th century. *Kaffir* has been considered extremely *offensive* and is now widely avoided, esp. in South Africa, where its usage is categorised as *crimen injuria* (**crimen injuria** *n.*) and is thus legally actionable. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/kaffir_n?tab=meaning_and_use accessed 17/07/25

[15] *colloquial* and *slang* (frequently *derogatory* and *offensive*, esp. in recent use). A person (or occasionally a thing) regarded as being mentally or physically slow, stupid, or incompetent. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/retard_n?tab=meaning_and_use#178569305 accessed 17/07/

Deeper into Difference: Childhood in Apartheid Rhodesia

An extreme context of civil war, infused by dichotomies of black/white, privilege/poverty, innocence/brutality, overshadowed my earliest and formative years in Apartheid Rhodesia. We had been at war my whole life. Bomb drills at school, convoys of vehicles to travel in, electric fences, barbed wire, hushed voices, the rifle cabinet, and the smell of gun grease in the living room. My earliest memories are conflicted. Love and war in equal measure colour my early memories. A wide divide, which was created between white and black people in my childhood, was culturally constructed, politically fed, and dictatorially enforced. I was born into a colonialist culture, a mindset of bigotry, intolerance, and hatred for which there was no justifiable logic. Racism in apartheid Rhodesia and South Africa was 'a system of white-over 'other' supremacy, dominance, and oppression' (Nwanze, 2024, p. 48). As Nwanze explains, 'The dominant group's access to "information about the subordinates" is often limited to stereotypical depictions of the "other"' (Tatum, 1999, p. 105, as cited in Nwanze, 2024, p. 18). As a small child, I knew in an embodied/felt way that I was privileged simply because of the colour of my skin (Kendall, 2012; McIntosh, 1988), but it was an uncomfortable and precarious understanding. I had no way of being brought into the lives of members of minoritised races, through storytelling and other forms of narrative interventions, to be able to see from the perspective of the minoritised group (Crenshaw, 2011, as cited in Nwanze, 2024, p. 18). My role and that of the Black people with whom I had contact were strictly defined by my parents and the divided society we were living in.

My life world, at the time, through the seventies and eighties, was that of the middle class and the privileged. I was privileged simply by being born with white skin, and yet I was filled with fear and learned to suppress my voice in a male-dominated colonial society. My country was war-torn, undergoing intense and violent political reform as the white apartheid

regime was overthrown and replaced by a Black Zimbabwean regime. The image I found during my collage making, of the small white child on the hip of the black maid/nanny, functioned as a direct key to open feelings I had not felt for a long time. This one small picture led me to write into the story of my early experiences, where further values and fundamental lessons were initiated for me as a child.

> ‘Why does one write if not to put one’s pieces together. From the moment we enter school or church, education chops us into pieces: it teaches us to divorce soul from body and mind from heart.’
>
> Galeano 1992, p.12

ARTEFACT 7 The Story of a Witch-Alice Bennett-2023

I am sitting on the floor of the veranda with Nanny. Rain falls in sheets from the tin awning, and it's very noisy. It's been raining all day, and it's dark even though it's still daytime.
Mummy is napping, and the house behind us is very quiet. Nanny is helping me write the story of a witch with words. I have drawn all the pictures myself. She has helped me fold the pages- pink sugar paper. She has helped me use the stapler to fix them together. All I have to do now is write the words, but my spelling is not good. Nanny writes the words on another piece of paper, and I copy them down.

ARTEFACT 8 The Cocktail Party- Alice Bennett-2021

I stitch my lips together after I learn to pour my first Gin and Tonic. The liquor cabinet is my height, low crouching, against the brown and orange papered wall. Sleek veneer with thin, tapering legs which disappear into the green shag carpet.

I am proud to pour the drinks. Proud to be allowed to stay for a while at the grown-ups' party. Mum says it is called a Cocktail Party. The Gin must always be poured first. Using two hands, I pour the Cork Gin into the diamond-cut glass. Dad says they come from Russia, from a client of his who is a very important man. I take the lid off the pretend pineapple icebox. I can't manage the silver polished tongs yet, so I pick up the ice with my fisted fingers. I love the crash of the cubes when they hit the glass. Now I need to pour the tonic water in. I hug the huge bottle and balance the bottom of it on my hip. It sloshes and spills a little when I pour it, but Dad says, 'Not to worry!' Then I choose the most perfectly thin lemon slice and drop it into the sparkling, popping liquid. The glass is very, very heavy. I carry it with both hands, slowly stepping with bare feet across the room to where my mother sits smiling at me.

She is lipsticky perfect. The most beautiful woman in the whole room. This is the best night ever; the first time I can pour drinks and the first time I am allowed to stay with the grown-ups before I go to bed. The

excitement bleeds like cordial into water, bubbling up to fizz. I skip to the liquor cabinet, twirling across the room to where Dad is waiting. He's smiling at me, laughing. He is going to help me pour the next drink. I am five years old.

Aunty Janet drinks Brandy and Ginger Ale. Uncle Bill likes a lager. It makes a HSSSSSS noise when the bottle cap comes off. Dad does it, my hands can't work the big metal head on the opener, which has the rough, ridged horn of a Zebra Duiker on it - it is like a bone. I hold the heavy opener in my hands and wonder what happened to the Duiker.

Dad drinks Scotch, neat 'on the rocks,' the 'rocks' are the ice cubes, 'love on the rocks.'

The LP goes around and around as I watch, dizzy with the party, listening to what the grown-ups are saying, but I don't understand. Other Aunties and Uncles arrive, they are noisy, and Dad is busy at the booze cabinet again. When there are lots of people, I am allowed to carry the drinks, one at a time, with two hands, carefully to each guest. When I give them their drink, I get my cheeks pinched, and sometimes I am scooped up like the snacks that are being passed around by my sister. The lounge looks so different from the height of a hip or from over a shoulder, another country. Sometimes Dad lifts me and dances me around the floor to the music, me with my legs dangling. I get dizzy.

My parents have taught me to ask politely, 'May I take your drinks order, Sir?' Or 'Can I refresh your glass, Madam?' You are never to say, 'Would you like another?' That is rude. Praises drop like coins on my freshly washed head. Kaftan silk murmurs and rustles when the aunties walk by me, clouds of perfume and stinky hairspray fill the air. My sister skips from one little group of guests to the next with her snack plates, shimmying in her pretty dress, bare feet pirouetting. I watch an uncle grab at her hips and pin her between his knees; he is whispering roughly in her ear. She is laughing back at him over her shoulder as she breaks away, eyes sparkling. My cheeks burn, and I cross my arms over my chest. I am 'ready for bed' in my nightie. I had my bath with Nanny at 5 pm like I do every day. Nanny and Cookie stay in the kitchen when Mum and Dad have cocktail parties. They don't make any noise or even

speak to each other, washing glasses and plates, frying fancy pink and white shrimp crackers and skewering cheese and real pineapple cubes onto sticks. There are olives in bowls with toothpicks. Mum tells me they are expensive because they are smuggled in over the border from South Africa, like the smelly smoked mussels shining in oily dishes on the low-lying coffee tables. It is getting late now, the music is getting louder, so are the voices and the laughter.

Nanny comes in and gathers me up, where I am pretending not to be, cross-legged, tucked behind the curtain. I am straining to hear what the women sitting on the other side are saying.

'These bastards want all of it; they're going to destroy the entire country. They want us all out of here, kill us or force us to leave, either way, they want to get rid of us…'

Nanny gathers me up firmly like a bag of mealie meal, 'bedtime for little madam,' she whispers in my ear.*

Nanny's skin smells of soap and cooking oil. My head rests on the familiar soothing starched white collar and her warm neck. She carries me quickly to the bathroom to brush my teeth and sits me on the closed toilet lid while inspecting my face, holding it first this way and then that. It is dirty with stolen shrimp cracker crumbs, and she scrubs it with a dampened face cloth and then roughly brushes my hair, tucking the last bit behind my ear. When she is satisfied that I am ready, she lifts me again and carries me, straddled on her wide hip, to the bed, tucks me in and says 'goodnight, Miss Alice.' She leaves me alone in the dark.

Neil Diamond continues to croon from far up the passage, and I strain harder to listen to the voices. A roar of laughter rises from the murmuring, someone shouts, a smashed glass. I hear the veranda sliding doors open. I imagine Dad and the uncles outside, watering the bushes, relieving themselves in the darkness, I imagine their faces lit up by cigarettes dangling from the sides of their mouths. My imagination fills my heart to bursting, and I burn with the frustration of being exiled to my room. It isn't fair. My sister is allowed to stay up. I wish I were twelve years old, too. I hear a loud splash and laughter, and I know the

grown-ups are now skinny dipping in the pool. I remember the last time I saw them, pale skins glowing in the shadowy garden. It's like a Polaroid image bright behind my eyes; the memory makes me blush. Mysteries poke their fingers at the inside of my skull as I turn to thinking about the party. I think about the way Aunty Bee was looking at my dad. Her smiling pink lips curled back from her yellow teeth when he took her coat from her shoulders. What did Uncle Bill mean about 'crippling sanctions'? Who were the 'bloody gooks' and what was a 'coup'? Why did it make the men so angry, and the women look at each other, frightened, tight, and silent?*

I am lying still in my bed, and outside my window, where the crickets sing their night song, I picture Shingai patrolling the garden. He is walking the perimeter with his knobkerrie. I pray to Jesus to keep him safe and to keep the 'fucking Terrs*' away tonight.*

Then everything goes silent in the sitting room; it is as if someone has turned the sound right off. I can't hear anything. Sliding off the edge of my bed, I tiptoe from my carpet to the red polished concrete of the passage. Like Tom in Tom and Jerry, I raise my legs and place pointed toes slowly down on the cool floor to hear whether I make a sound to my own ears, then I sink flat on my tummy and crawl up to the corner wall and peek around the door. The talk is quieter now, and something soft and whispery slow is spinning on the turntable.
Through the open door, I see Aunty Della and Uncle George squashed together dancing on the veranda, Mum is holding her drink high in one hand while pulling hard with tight lips from the end of her cigarette, her ear cocked towards Aunty Belle. Aunty Belle looks as if she has been crying. Dad is lying on the floor; I think he is dead.

I run to the middle of the room and pull at his arm. He lies face down; his head turned to the side. The eye I can see is half open. He can't move, his mouth is gaping open, and spit hangs down, tying him to the carpet. He's so heavy. He's dead. Mum laughs and points at me. I tug at his shirt, his collar. She shouts for Nanny to come and get me. Nanny comes and pulls me away. I am screaming now, straining to get back to

him. Mum is still laughing. I hate her with my whole heart. I hate them all. I am drowning in the terror of my father's stillness.

Nanny tries to soothe me. She tucks me into the bed again and tries to hold my arms down. I lash out at her and scream, beating at her until I have no more strength, kicking my legs against the sheet which hems me in. I thrash my hot, angry head from side to side against the pillow until she scoops me in her arms and holds me close to her. She contains me, her deep, throaty humming consoles me. The flower print of her maid's uniform is wet with my tears. She combs my wet hair back from my forehead with her fingers. She lays me down again on the bed. I watch her black skin glisten, shining with the reflection of a slivery moon which cuts through the window. I hear the engines of the cars start up, and then the gravel of the driveway crunches as the guests slowly leave. Flashes of their headlights merge with the moon slices on my wall.

I don't remember falling asleep or when Nanny left the room. In the morning after waking, I decide to hate cocktail parties. I get up and walk to the kitchen. Dad is alive and laughs at Mum's story of me trying to save his life. I look at them both. Something has changed.
Something has been decided in my head. Something is broken. I promise myself that I will never pour another drink for a grown-up. I use the thread of the night's memory and begin to stitch my lips together. Words don't come out of them unless they have to. This is the beginning of my silences. This is the beginning of my not belonging. When I swallow my words, I am aware that my eyes can still speak, so I learn to evade the eyes of others. When there is a cocktail party, I sit in comfortable wordlessness on the back stoep, with Cookie and Nanny nearby and I listen to the nagapies* chatter in the garden treetops.*

**Mealie meal- a coarse flour made from maize which is known as mielies or mealies in Southern Africa, from the Portuguese milho.*

**Gooks- slang term used by white Rhodesians/Zimbabweans at the time of the Chimurenga war 1964-1979 in then Rhodesia, to denote terrorist*

or individual who uses violence and intimidation to achieve a political result.

**Knobkerrie- a short stick with a knob at the top, traditionally used as a weapon by the indigenous peoples of South Africa.*

**Terrs- slang term used by white Zimbabweans during the second Chimurenga War 1964-1979, in then Rhodesia to denote a terrorist or individual who used violence and intimidation to achieve a political result.*

**Stoep- (South Africa, dialect) a veranda in front or behind a house.*

**Nagapies- (South Africa, dialect) a nocturnal primate of the family Galagidae, native to continental Africa, also called a bushbaby*

The teaching I received from parents, teachers, and my peers, as a young girl, did not match up with my life experience. I was told that Black people were 'barbaric,' 'dangerous,' and 'dirty,' but the Black 'domestic servants' I knew (the only Black people I had contact with) were kind, patient, present, sympathetic, and caring towards me. My parents and their peers acted and reacted to their own chaotic existence in the world by escaping through alcohol. In my reflection of the event told in autoethnographic writing, I am struck by how the small girl finds solace in the company of those who have been subjugated and oppressed. The Black people I knew did not frighten me; they reassured me, and they had the grace to be kind to me. While fraught with issues, these stories reveal how moments of intensity remembered can hold complexity and illicit meaning for us in discovering knowledge; they offer profound transformational learning that can impact the course of a life (Bruner, 1994, 2014; Randall, 2013). Living in apartheid Rhodesia / Zimbabwe taught me that we cannot trust what we are taught, that the people whom we love, who are in a position of power and control, can be wrong, and that we must use our discernment in knowledge acceptance.

Anecdotally, I was considered an 'odd' child by my parents, and teachers worried that I was not developing as I should. In primary school, I was

taken to a psychologist because I refused to speak for long periods. Remembering and writing the stories above was, in part, an attempt for me to understand why I preferred to stay silent and why making art was important to me. In 'The Story of a Witch,' I recall how making art with Constance was a still, small pool of deep pleasure and recognition. Constance shared time and space with me in making and learning. She helped me find a pathway into visual and written storytelling. In the story book we made together, I have recorded her words, this is Constance's diction, she sat down to crying,' not mine, and it is a reminder to me of just how much a part of me she was. How my resonance with her as a human being and caregiver has become a living part of my 'self.' My silence had been an act of resistance as a child, exerting the only form of control and resistance I had at my disposal. As an adult, I speak for the child and reclaim both her story and her voice.

In the story, I see a small child who found her lifeworld frightening and confusing; a child who preferred to spend time alone or with Constance, who represented stability, security, and a calm presence. I remember that the girl child found school to be frightening and lonely, too. It was the silences that made me appear as an 'odd child' to my parents and teachers. Embracing the small, frightened child in her frightening world context, I begin to understand why she felt so alone. In telling the story now, I am giving that child a voice; she can speak of her experience and advocate for herself. Writing the story from the viewpoint of the child allows me to access all the sensations, the extra-rational knowing that lives in me. Through evocative autoethnography and making art, I am accessing feeling, memory, emotion, and embodied memory. I access the extra-rational, employing the senses, embracing unknowing and contradiction. I can re-create the complicated, nuanced feeling of being aware and not aware, as a child navigating a complicated life world.

Exploring Tacit Knowledge: Indwelling and Intuition

Throughout my lived experience, I sensed truths that defied the explicit teachings of my environment, truths that were deeply felt but difficult to articulate. Building on my reflections of intuition and the embodied knowing that guided my actions in childhood, tacit knowledge (Polanyi 2005) helps me better understand how the intuitive, extrarational knowing that lives in us manifests itself in artmaking and why that is important for adult transformation and development.

Where Bruner (1994) emphasises active engagement with the world for meaning making, and Heron and Reason (2008) argue that all knowledge relies on experiential learning, Polanyi suggests that we are not always consciously aware that our experience is the foundation of our knowing. He describes this subliminal cognitive activity as 'the structure of tacit knowing' (Polanyi, 1966, p. 9). Polanyi theorised that we make sense of experience through a two-part awareness: a lower-level or subliminal perception, which he termed the 'proximal term,' and a more focused, outward awareness, the 'distal term.' Together, these form an integrated whole type of knowing. Sometimes this knowing feels like it is just out of reach; it seems as if we might 'know more than we can tell.' Fundamentally distinct from explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge cannot be easily articulated, and those who possess it may struggle to explain how they came to know it or break it into parts. As with Heron and Reason's concept of 'practical knowing,' that is, knowing through skilful doing' (Heron, 1981, 1992, 1996), tacit knowledge manifests itself through skilled activity. These expressions of tacit knowledge are visible in artistic practices.

Since art making can embrace the extrarational and bring it to light in the visible world, it allows for a more nuanced way of knowing to take its rightful place alongside the rational, thereby extending possibilities for growth and transformation. The manifestation (artwork) of this

extrarational knowing is always personal, and the personal involvement of the knower is always valuable (Polanyi, 2005). Intuitive knowing places truth and knowledge at the centre of subjective and personal experience. Polanyi's concept gives value to the intuitive knowing that lives in me, but which I find difficult to express in words, and easier to express in nuanced artworks. 'I shall reconsider human knowledge by starting from the fact that we can know more than we can tell. This fact seems obvious enough, but it is not easy to say exactly what it means' (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4). As a person seeking to make sense of the totality of their experience, subjectivity becomes a tool for understanding. It is this subjectivity that allows us to 'know' deeply and wholly, but it takes time and effort, a sustained engagement - we arrive at knowing through 'indwelling' (Polanyi, 1974). The action of indwelling, that is, dwelling in a process, allows us to know something as a whole, rather than as parts: It brings home to us then that it is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them that we understand their joint meaning' (Polanyi, 1974, p. 18). This process of indwelling, inherent in art making, enables us to arrive at knowing (Polanyi, 1974). Polanyi tells us that some ways of knowing help us make connections with others and with 'dimensions beyond' ourselves, while other ways of knowing help us to learn information, skills, and behaviours for living. Some ways of knowing involve objective/ external ways of knowing, and others are more subjective/internal. Both are essential for navigating our lives. Having access to different ways of knowing ensures that we can navigate both the internal and external worlds of our lives.

As an artist works through the liminal space of a transformative experience with 'thought action'/originary thought (Green 2023), she makes sense of the totality of that experience, and her subjectivity becomes a tool for understanding. It is this subjectivity that allows us to 'know' deeply and wholly. In my experience of painting, I am always searching for the expression of self, and as a result, individual truth emerges. It is the subjectivity of the painter that 'knows what needs to be done in the making process. The unconscious, once reflected from the

canvas, can be enlightening, revealing, or troublesome and disturbing. The back-and-forth dialogue on the canvas of 'possibility' allows for a new voice to emerge, for alternative knowledge, extrarational knowledge to present itself. Making art creates a space for

> 'engaging in embodied reflections, naming, imagining, and critically reflecting (which) provide rich opportunity for constructing new ways of thinking and feeling, which could lead to transformative learning'
>
> Bhukhanwala et al., 2017, p. 611, as cited in Blackburn Miller, 2020.

Extrarational knowledge is often 'hidden away in our subconscious mind' (Blackburn Miller, 2020, p. 341). It is only through what Robinson et al. (2023) call 're-entanglement' with all our senses that we can transform our ways of thinking. It is the intuitive embodied knowledge, living beneath the surface of our awareness, which can be brought to the surface through reflection and art making, illuminating that which is already present within us. The reflective 'action thought' uncovers previously hidden information, enlightening and informing us, and guiding us toward our authentic selves. As Rowland (2013) notes, 'Anything derived merely from rationality risks being profoundly inauthentic unless it also bears witness to the destabilising presence of the unconscious' (p. 23). Creativity and imagination become essential to transformative learning, helping us unlearn perspectives which are unhelpful to us and relearn new, more meaningful ones (Green 2023).

As a small child, I was experiencing much more than what was formally presented to me as knowledge by teachers, parents, or white society. I also felt joy, connection, and meaningful interaction in my relationships with my Black Zimbabwean peers. The positive regard I held for them came from my lived experience. Although I could not articulate this intuitive/tacit knowing at the time, it existed within me as a truth I never questioned. Creativity and imagination through artmaking and storytelling gave me a way to articulate and formulate a new set of values

and a new reality for my life world, and it continues to be the process by which I move through difficult liminal spaces for transformation as an adult. Art making helps me to see beyond the lines drawn.

As a white girl born into a comfortable middle-class family in Africa, I inherited many layers of privilege, but this wasn't always obvious to me. My acknowledgement of this and the power it afforded me was slow to emerge. Yet, having seen it for what it was, and is, it has become one of the defining aspects of my being. Kendall (2012) and McIntosh (1988) both examine white privilege from the perspective of white women interrogating their positions, not only as individuals but also as part of a system that perpetuates inequality based on racism. This process of interrogation of self-demands 'learning to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred systemically' (McIntosh, 1988, p. 2).

My sensitivity to 'the other' has its roots in my upbringing in an extreme context of difference. The ideological construction of 'the other' is understood as an attempt by one group to subjugate another. This dynamic was deeply embedded in the political and cultural context as power shifted from white colonialists to Black freedom fighters (Thomson, 1995). In this same context, the schooling I received as a child was rigid, unambiguous, and dismissive of any notion of soul or spirit. It was an education shaped by traditional, mainstream practices of competition, replication, rote learning, and disconnected curricula - administered with dictatorial authority (Lynch et al 2007).

As an artist, I, like Kendall (2012) and McIntosh (1988), interrogate this complex and difficult identity by making art and telling stories in order to distinguish the privileges and strengths Ito culture; it involves 'writing that is emotional, vulnerable, and political, meant to change the world and the people who write and read it' (p. 11). I have decided to tell this story, not only a personal act, but also as a social and ethical one. It has been told and re-told by others who live with their own versions and

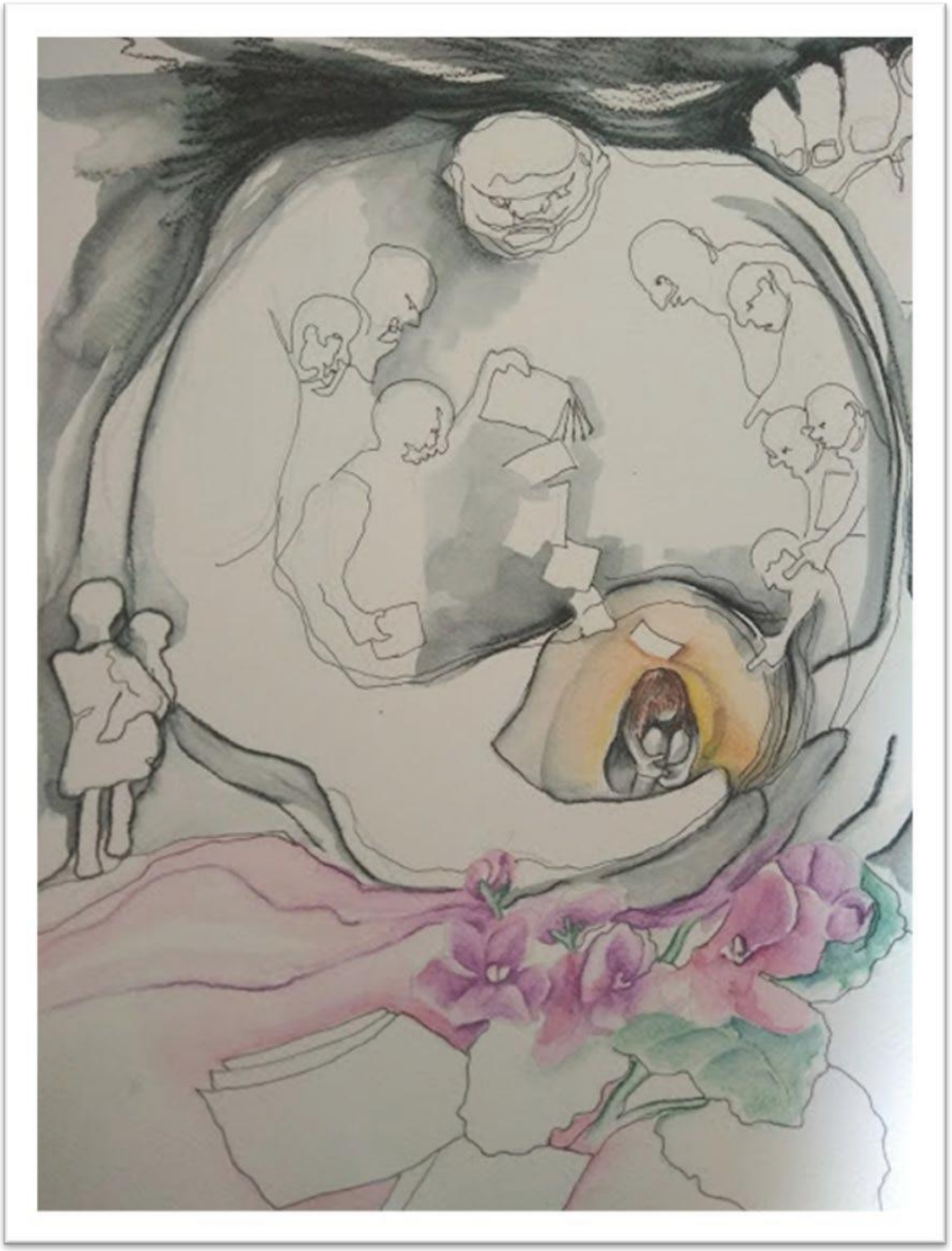
perspectives of this story. By writing it here, where I can re-search it for learning and understanding, I will claim it to be my own. By manifesting it into a living testimony through art making, I will deepen that ownership. Randall interrogates the implications of life story, where the author is

> '.at once, the main character of its own story, the principal reader of that story and the storyteller; striving more or less consciously, to weave a coherent, believable, original, or at least interesting story from the events and experiences, the conditions and contingencies, the flotsam and jetsam which constitutes life'
>
> Randall 2014, p. 9.

In this process, I enter an uncomfortably intense space of experiencing the event again as a character, hearing the story as a reader, and sharing it with others as storyteller. I am not a detached observer. I am stepping into the role of a 'wounded storyteller' (Bochner & Ellis 2016, p. 57), my story emerges from the tension between lived pain and the transformative potential of writing. To write this story, I must surrender aspects of Ego, creating a vulnerability in me that is necessary for creativity and honesty to infuse the telling (McNiff, 1998; Robinson et al., 2023). I can only access the extrarational by relinquishing control. Ellis and Bochner (2000) also suggest that good autoethnographic writing should 'invite compassion, empathy, and a sense of connection', and disrupt traditional notions of academic objectivity (p. 745). My writing, then, is both a method of inquiry and a mode of connection with the reader and with myself, an invitation to witness what has remained hidden, misinterpreted, or unspoken.

The artefacts which follow needs to be placed in the context of the world I was living in at the time. As outlined previously, I had been accidentally privileged by my inherited class and colour. My education was privileged; I was privileged by being part of the dominant class by assignation of skin colour, by being born into the elite group of a society. After independence, a new elite controlled the system of education and

made every effort to right the wrongs which had been done to indigenous black Zimbabweans through colonial rule. My secondary school years were coloured by the new independent political state. As a fifteen-year-old schoolgirl, I fell pregnant. I became a person on the margins of acceptance and subsequently of education. The powers that dominant pedagogies in mainstream education can give and can take away reveal themselves through the events that follow.



ARTEFACT 9 DRAWING THE LOST CHILD-2022 ALICE BENNETT 2022

ARTEFACT 10 THE LOST CHILD-

How will I begin? This story is not just about me; you see. It's about a whole country, a whole history of a country. I was living my way through that history, naive, too young to really understand the enormity of it all ..... and the importance of it for everything that was to follow for me.

It was a chaotic year. 1984.Our nation was making a long-drawn-out transition from the apartheid Rhodesian government to a black Zimbabwean government. Most white families had left or were leaving Zimbabwe at this time, it was referred to as an exodus and became the first major diaspora wave the country was to experience. It was a difficult time; violence and terror were still very much a part of our life experience. My parents had decided to stay on and work towards the new Zimbabwe. My father had a powerful position in a banking institution and was busy forging relationships and investments for the new ministers and emerging tycoons of industry. It was a feverish time for the whole country, and my parents were grappling with change on a massive scale, both personally and professionally.

I didn't tell anyone about my pregnancy until my changing body grew large enough to tell the story itself. My mother discovered my secret when she decided it was time to buy me a new summer dress. I was deeply ashamed by their disappointment, and very frightened. My parents took charge. It was decided that the baby would be given up for adoption. I was expelled from the school I was in and ostracised by my friends and their families. Retreating to my silences again, I lived for the months before the baby was born, in my bedroom. My English teacher came to visit regularly. On one occasion she brought with her, an African violet plant, and a challenge for me. She offered to work with me towards the O level exams which would take place soon after the baby was born. My teacher told my parents that I was a good student, intelligent and capable of doing well. They arranged for several tutors to come to the house and prepare me for the exams.

I understood then that I could redeem myself through doing well academically. I turned my attention to schoolwork the way most expectant mothers turn their attention to nursery decoration.

There were no distractions from studying, except for the kick and turn within me. The pulse, stretch, and beat of the baby growing inside me. When I was alone with him in the night, when all books were closed, he was my comfort and companion, I talked to him all through the night, until in the cold light of day, it was time to pretend that he did not exist again.

You grew in me made me feel
each word forming,

building to burst in birthing
the new, the unexpected, the love lines that would go
on and on
until I held you again.

Tiny miracle.
My lost poem.

It was decided that I should be induced early so that I would have time to recover and write the exams. The obstetrician told me I was a 'stupid girl,' and the epidural was administered. I gave birth to a baby boy whom I never met outside of myself, he was taken away immediately, passed on to a waiting family. I went straight back to the house with my chest tightly bound. I slept a lot in the week leading up to the exams and when they arrived, I sat at the desk in my bedroom. An invigilator from the examination board sat in a corner of my bedroom every day for two weeks as I bled my way through the O level papers. My family never talked about the pregnancy, the birth, or my baby again.

When the exams were finished, I had nothing to occupy me, no one to talk to, nowhere to go. I slept. This sleep became a refuge. In retrospect, I believe I was waiting for the exam results to arrive; they would be my redemption and forgiveness. While I was waiting, the new government

was asserting itself, propaganda was an important part of establishing its power. The freedom fighters were celebrated, land redistributed, new appointments to the government made daily, these, along with international congratulations and economic investment in the new Zimbabwe, were headlines for our national paper. The eyes of the world were on our new nation.

One morning, I walked into the kitchen to find my mother on her knees, clutching the newspaper, all colour had drained from her face. My shameful story had found its way to the headlines. I was an example of the dregs of white privilege remaining in Zimbabwe. The article denounced that privilege - I had been enabled to pursue my education while pregnant, when many of my black Zimbabwean sisters who found themselves in the same situation, could not. My privilege as 'white' and 'resourced by private funding,' made of me an example of what the new nation would not tolerate. My parents found solace in alcohol and argument; they carried my shame in the world for me while I stayed behind closed doors. My parents had done everything they could to minimise my disgrace,' and now it was on the front page of every newspaper across the country. This led to the new Ministry of Education publicly confiscating my exam papers before they landed for marking in the U.K. The intervention by the Government became a triumphant example of the death of apartheid, colonialism, and white privilege.

All my energy and hope had been focused on the outcome of my academic striving, but it was taken away. The full force of loss and emptiness descended on me. I had been ignoring my empty body and my empty heart. Now I was achingly aware that I had nothing. I felt powerless to redeem myself.

The following year, I was accepted into another school and given the opportunity to write my O and A levels in the same year. I was continually anxious about succeeding and the school suggested that I take art as a subject to counteract the heavier subjects and the pressures of the impending exams. I found relief and healing in the art room, hiding from the whispers and sniggers of my new schoolmates there, my

art teacher nurtured and encouraged me. I discovered a haven for myself.

Later, when the results for the exams came back, they were listed as the highest in the country. My photograph in the newspaper, shaking the Minister of Education's hand, the same hand that had ruled my previous results invalid, was a moment of ironic and bizarre recognition; I was now accepted back into the fold of respectable society.

I should have felt redeemed. I should have relaxed a little, but now I believed that only this headwork and academic success could fill the gaping hole left by what had become an intense sense of the loss of my baby.

Reclaiming Agency Through Art and the Reframed Narrative

Our stories are always much bigger than ourselves. Individual stories become part of the larger fabric of society. Historically, not all individual threads/stories that make up that fabric are heard. These subjugated, silent voices impact the tension of history. Each thread/story is impacted by the tension of all others, yet this is not always acknowledged.

My experience as a pregnant adolescent irrevocably changed the course of my life. It exacerbated my identity as an 'outsider' and led me to further disconnection and the feeling of not belonging (Green, 2024). This personal and difficult story serves as an example of how systems and structures - political and social - can influence and affect a learner in a profound way. In my situation, I had no power, no voice, and no agency.

While difficult to do, the time spent writing and reflecting on this story helps me to make sense of my own historical and social perspective in a chaotic society where I had little understanding of the power structures and dynamics of politics and race. It gives me context and a narrative to access meaning. As Bruner (2004) notes, narratives are how we make sense of the world and give shape to experience; they help us 'locate ourselves' in relation to others and to the broader cultural context.

The act of making art and reclaiming my story also helps me to reclaim agency and an identity for myself, it helps me to reclaim my power. The creative process has unlocked memories; it has helped me remember so that I can turn what was known as difficult and traumatic into something that can be used for good. As educators, Randall suggests that

> 'our vocation, then, is to do and to be whatever we can to help each other to both tell and live "our'' story, our whole story and nothing but our story, transforming our "actual existence" into "available experience"'

Randall, 2014, p. 353.

Fanon (1967) speaks of the need to have a voice which can be heard so that we can 'exist.' Without a voice, one is 'the other,' Fanon tells us that we can feel self-division within, as a direct result of colonial subjugation (Fanon, 1967, p. 17). The changing political situation, along with my personal experience, created a vulnerable space where my voice could not be expressed, and in the context of difference and oppression, I felt as an 'other' within (Fanon 1967, Romanshyn 2007).

While academic success was a route to acceptance, it was through an education based on discipline and performativity; it was not a space of transformation. Instead, it was a space of fear and dissociation (Foucault 1977). Academic learning, initially, became a form of coping, a way to suppress emotion, to manage instability. But over time, and with the addition of art and care-based teaching, education became something else entirely: a portal to healing, agency, and hope. Artmaking and its processes became a medium through which I could find a voice and begin to find agency.

The idea that I was able to find power in my voice/expression is found widely in feminist perspectives where the attention to intimate, individual narratives and the realm of emotions becomes a source for agency and strength (Lorde, 2007; hooks, 2003). The power of the white/black male dominant voices, as well as the focus on rationality, permeated my lifeworld at the time of this life event and continues to do so for many in the world. Switching the focus to values which honour individual voices through their personal stories, whether written, spoken, or painted, is a witness to the power of art pedagogy as a place for transformation in people's lives. In healthy pedagogical spaces, shared stories can help us to build relationships and connect across differences (See Chapter Three for more on this).

When I read back through this story, I feel a compassion for the girl I was, one which I haven't felt before now. I wrote the title for this story, 'The

Lost Child,' about the child I had to give up, my baby boy. But now I also see myself in the title; I lost my childhood, too. A deep existential loss happened when my boy was given away; I gave away a part of myself, my sense of self-worth, becoming further alienated from society. The guilt and confusion which accompanied my baby's adoption established itself as a deep sadness within. I have spent years berating myself, living in guilty silence about this life event. Unable to forgive myself and always striving for the redemption I thought I would receive by being a 'good student.' I've been telling myself a story where an irresponsible girl must pay the consequences of her 'bad' behaviour.

By retelling this story in a context of inquiry, I can construct a new reality for myself, reframe my life (Bruner, 1994), I can 'organise and re-organise, how we*(I)* story and re-story, both (myself) and our(my*)* world' (Randall, 2014 p. 8 inserts mine). As an educator/teacher, the ability to pass this capacity on to learners, validating their voices through story and art, creates a purpose for experience, brings meaning to life experiences which have been difficult and painful, while making sense of the world we are living in. This aligns closely with Irwin's (2004) concept of a/r/tography, where all the roles we inhabit as artist, researcher, and teacher are fluid and entangled, personal, and professional, offering a space where meaning-making through art becomes both experience, inquiry, and pedagogy.

> 'The way we story our lives directly affects the way we understand ourselves; the way we understand ourselves, directly affects the way we act; and the way we act, directly affects the way the world is'
>
> Randall, 2014, p. 36.

Without the capacity to tell my story, I would not be able to 'see' myself, understand the context I was living in, and begin to accept the profound feelings which emerge in the telling. Exploring the event now, through both creative storytelling and academic critique, I can interrogate and begin to know more clearly the significance of the learning that comes

from this intense life experience. Self-creation through storytelling is learning, and it is power. 'Learning is synonymous with self-creation' (Randall, 2014, p. 8). Bruner (1994) affirms that storytelling is fundamental not only to how we learn but to how we become.

In the act of drawing and viewing the image I make, I can access and express the intense feelings I had—vulnerability, pain, rejection, and loss. In reading my story, I see a girl desperate to belong and to be forgiven, and one who finds that making art in a space where there was no judgment and I was accepted as I was, set me on a course of commitment to art pedagogy and art making. As Eisner (2002) explains, the 'arts enable us to have experience we would not otherwise have' (p. 5), and so they offer ways of knowing that reach beyond the rational into the emotional and intuitive.

> 'The works we create speak back to us, and we become in their presence, a part of a conversation that enables us to see what we have said'
>
> Eisner, 2002, p. 11.

Making art which I can reflect on, dialogue with, and explore, creates a space for healing which leaves me no longer powerless, informed with new knowledge, able to resist the forces which once oppressed me. In using art in this way, it becomes not only a form of resistance but also a form of reclaiming the self and repairing the parts of me that have been broken or diminished (See Chapter Three for more on this). Art becomes a way of challenging entrenched assumptions about adult learners' capacities and opens pathways for lifelong growth and transformation.

In my drawing for 'The Lost Child,' I didn't set out with a conscious plan for format and composition to illustrate a contrast of the power of the government/society with the small, vulnerable child, yet I instinctively created a visual dynamic where the strength of one is seen to overshadow the other. The knowledge of that power dynamic emerges in the drawing and shows/teaches me something contextual about the story that I didn't fully realise before. I learn that what was hidden from

me before can be revealed in the act of making art.

Through making art, I could reflect and reconsider, choose, and direct my actions and future path. I was able to make my *own* world, my *own* truth, through emancipatory artistic praxis (Cary, 2012, p. 311). I was able to re-create my 'self' through my art and writing.

Risk Taking in Research, Art, and Life

Revealing my 'self' as the character in this story elicited moments of deep distress. It felt profoundly risky to bring such a personal life event into an academic research study. Academically, I could use language to reframe it as a profound subjective auto-ethnographic inquiry, but at its core, it is a deeply emotional story about my life, which has been repressed for years. Stepping away from safe, well-trodden paths of objective research and logical, rational, objective inquiry was a risky and unsettling act. There was a very real possibility that I might expose myself, make myself vulnerable, and that it might all be for nothing - it may even lead to failure. Yet these moments, though 'powerful, scary, and requiring courage, are often where the deepest learning occurs. It is in these uncertain spaces that we discover things we 'didn't know we knew' and even things we 'didn't know we didn't know' (Morrissey, 2013, 2014).

Taking the risk to share my story stems from a belief that personal narratives can be sites of deep learning, can lead to transformation, for ourselves and for others.

What is important to me is that, as Morrissey says, I *decided* to take a risk to tell my story because doing so aligns with my pedagogical belief that if my story can help others, I should tell it. The story becomes an example with which to give all those who have been denied the space to have a voice, to take courage, make decisions and be agents of their own futures. It demonstrates a way to use both academic/creative and

thinking/feeling alongside each other to engage in our life experiences in a richer, more illuminating way.

Morrissey's assertion that we learn in risky, uncertain, emotionally vulnerable spaces is not just a theoretical claim; it is a lived reality for many educators and learners. The risk is not only pedagogical but existential. To show up, to speak, to create, to share personal history - these are not neutral acts; they require the courage to be seen, to fail and to be judged. An important theoretical bridge between lived experience and pedagogical theory is formed when we validate the affective and vulnerable dimensions of education. We take risks in using these dimensions because they are based on valuing practices that do not always produce predictable outcomes.

Art making focused on process allows us to access the affective and vulnerable domains of ourselves, but when art is focused on outcome and accreditation, it leaves no room for unpredictable outcomes. The image I drew for this story accesses a more embodied knowing than conscious thought; it becomes a space for revealing more submerged, little-known/ unknown feelings and thoughts and knowledge. The African violet emerged 'from nowhere' while I was drawing - it was a gift from my English teacher during my seclusion, and in its manifestation on the page, it becomes a symbol of hope and recognition. While I drew it, I began to think more consciously about how important my English teacher's intervention in my life at that time was.

She made a personal effort and commitment to teach me and support me. Her generosity and love have continued to be a model of good practice in my teaching career (Palmer 1998). Her gift of the violet provided me with a symbolic invitation to grow and flourish. This woman cared for me and gave me purpose and direction at a time when I felt hopelessly lost. She opened a gateway through academic learning, which I have assimilated into my ontology and epistemology. Because of this

experience, I regard education as a portal for possibility, hope, and agency. It is this that drives me as a teacher and a researcher.

Education can offer a way through difficult times. I survived my pregnancy by taking refuge in thinking, dissociating from feelings, and focusing on head work. Suppressing my feelings for a time to concentrate on cognitive engagement with facts and logic served a purpose for me and led to my increased ability to learn and adapt, to see beyond the present and look into possible futures. Just as academic work served a purpose, making art after my baby was born provided refuge and solace and gave me a working life path. I found peace in an activity which allowed me to access non-thought, unconsciously accessing 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), calming my racing heart, and developing a skill which was outside of the academic. My learning about these dual aspects of thinking/feeling in education and its power led me to my epistemological belief that learning is hope and can provide flourishing when it is kind and caring, whole, and inclusive, balanced, and incorporating both the head and the heart (Freire 1970, 1993, Horton 1990, hooks 2006). By contrast, education, when dictatorial, used as punishment, withheld, or forced, creates pathology, fear, and dissociation (Foucault 1977). This year of my life was a fundamental cornerstone, shaping the way I understand education. I used academic learning to ask for acceptance, for forgiveness and stability. I used art to escape, create, express, and find comfort.

The two side-by-side became a powerful way of understanding and knowing, compatible and complementary. Rendón 2023 calls this a model of education which 'focuses on the delicate balance between our inner life of intuition, emotion, and sense of meaning and purpose, and the outer world of action and service' (Rendón 2023, p.4).Embracing art pedagogy/making as part of this research allowed me to come to understand that I had tried to divide the extrarational senses I had access to, from the cognitive rational ways of knowing, which I used in school

and in the world. The art-making process reclaims experiences I have had as a child/student/art teacher, living and working in a context of difference. It also shows me how continuing in times of crisis when all odds seemed stacked against one helps us to overcome, grow and learn.

Education is a resilient act, and it fosters hope because it brings

> ‘confidence that things will somehow move forward, that the person still has something ahead of them, that they can and must do something more of themselves, that they can still start something new, that there is still some task ahead of them. This all means that they see the point that life makes sense for them. We call this future-oriented trust hope’
>
> Zalec 2012, p.142.

Education as a place to belong- Resisting Othering

> ‘The experience of belonging invariably takes place in a context of power relations involving exclusion and inclusion that structure people’s lives in different and unequal ways’
>
> Lutz, 2004 in Davis et al, 2018, p.10.

As a young pregnant schoolgirl, I was both physically and emotionally removed from the groups I had belonged to. I was expelled from school, ostracised by my friends, peers, and society at large. By being made into a public example of white privilege, I was further alienated from the new society our country was building for itself. The silence, secrecy and shame that characterised my family made me feel that I did not belong there either. I became the ‘other’ in a multiplicity of ways.

I came to understand that in my childhood and adolescence, I had created an outsider identity, an ‘other within’ (Romanshyn 2007), I had internalised societal and educational oppression and come to believe I was ‘less than’. In my early education I found it difficult to fit into the lines drawn in mainstream education and quashed my creativity in an attempt to be more academically capable. Later, as a teacher of art, I loved my life work, but I had become increasingly exhausted and anxious in that work. Increasing managerialism, record keeping and endless evaluation within the further education system had shifted the focus away from the teacher/student relationship and the subject of art, towards accreditation and evidence-based outcomes. When I started to make art to interrogate my feelings about this exhaustion and overwhelm, I discovered similar feelings within me that had been childhood anxieties. I had come to believe I was ‘different’ as a child because I struggled to adopt a way of being and thinking that I believed was expected of me. I thought my ways of knowing were messy and wrong; I wanted to play, daydream, make art, write stories, but I felt the pressure to conform and fit in to being a good academic student. I struggled to prioritise the demands of the world with my innate creativity. I could not easily define

or express this internal struggle.

Although power had changed hands in Zimbabwe, the historic landscape of racism, intolerance, colonialism, and misogyny continued. Our country had been in turmoil for all my cognisant life. The legacy of our fathers clung to us, and white skin was equated with being evil. The ruling party, ZANU PF, needed to show power, and one way they could visibly do so was to exclude whites from the political and cultural life of Zimbabwe. This was a deeply profound/transformational period for me and had far-reaching consequences for my ontological path, the most profound consequence of which is that I experienced first-hand what it means to be 'the other' (Thomson, 1995). I became sensitised and painfully aware of that state of being for myself and others. I understood that my outsider perspective had emerged from a sense of not fitting into my childhood formative society, where I experienced an ontological and existential 'otherness' (Fanon, 1967). A strong sense of identity and support of sociocultural circles teach us to celebrate our unique individual traits, but if we are socially ostracised because of those traits, we can learn to despise our own selves. We self-oppress, shunning those things that make us different and searching for ways to transform ourselves to become accepted into the 'in-group.'

By 'other' in this research, I refer to the second subject, which is considered outside of, or unequal to, the narrowly defined societal, educational, and cultural norms. Working from a combined psychoanalytic and sociological definition of 'Othering,' I combine the two to refer to marginalised groups/individuals in society as well as to parts within the self which have been repressed and buried in our consciousness (Riggins, 1977; Kristeva, 1991, in Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012; Romanshyn, 2007). The felt experience of being othered by oneself is that of internal struggle for authenticity, agency, and self-esteem. In our inner world and our outer worlds, we have systematically attached moral inferiority to both these 'others,' those outside of us and those within (Pickering, 2001; Schwalbe et al., 2000; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012).

Being othered by a dominant hegemony in sociological constructs creates an experience of oppressive exclusion, feeling judged, rejected and 'less than.' It is a place of real and 'symbolic exile' (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012, pp. 299–309). Othering creates a divide between 'us' and 'them' and is a system where power and its benefits are awarded to one group and disadvantage is bestowed on the other. Otherness is felt by marginalised individuals or different groups through racism, disablism, religious intolerance, and other overt expressions of intolerance. In many cases, it is impossible to redress othering because the learning we have from our socio-cultural environments is so embedded in our development. It requires a complete shift in perspective, both on a societal level and on a personal level. I was hungry for new perspectives and needed to explore possibilities for myself. I enrolled as an art student at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, an academy in Cape Town, South Africa where I studied for my bachelor's degree.

After a time of frustration and disappointment with the egos and pedagogies of the higher education Fine Art space, I rejected what I considered the hierarchical, elitist group of artmakers in the academy in favour of community and grassroots art engagement. My art became a form of activism. South Africa had yet to achieve independence, and fear and hatred were pervasive and intense. My emphasis in art pedagogy and making shifted from the academy's focus on creating fine art to a practice of sharing the process in a spirit of resistance to political power. I believed that making art was a way for people to find their voices and express difficult realities, that art could facilitate communication across differences for people coming from vastly different life worlds and perspectives. As Barndt (2006) states,

> 'Whether the modes are verbal or nonverbal, artmaking ignites people's creativity, recovers repressed histories, builds community and strengthens social movements is in itself a holistic form of action'

Barndt 2006, P. 18

In the Cape Town townships, I continued to work alongside other activists in outreach art-making programmes. The practice became a way through which we sought connection, showed solidarity, and worked toward social change.

Sharing art pedagogy and making spaces, communicating through visual images, showed me then that we can experience the embodied knowledge of another human being and recognise our own experiences in them. Feelings can also be communicated as more ambiguous and nuanced, creating empathy for one another because visual images are more open-ended and evocative than verbal communication. Complicated, multi-layered meanings are conveyed, through art and these contribute to the expansion of human understanding (Weber, 2008).

I found this time of making art with people who had been marginalised and oppressed by the government to be deeply transformative on a personal level. Reflecting on the images we made and engaging in dialogue within the groups helped us to examine intra - and interpersonal phenomena at both personal social and political levels. The visual art allowed us to facilitate conversations in which alternative viewpoints and ideologies could be expressed in a non-threatening, cross-cultural way. It helped us to question our assumptions about each other and the situations we found ourselves in within a divided state (Eisner, 2008; Finley, 2008; Weber, 2008).

The making and sharing we engaged in together became a way to problematise and explore larger concepts of difference and the 'other.' We were using artmaking to experience the world and one another in a way that felt safer and more achievable during a difficult time in South Africa's history. As Finley (2008) observes, 'Arts-based research (and art making) makes use of diverse ways of knowing and experiencing the world' (p. 79).

The act of making art in this particular context was a conscious form of resistance to Apartheid. As young art students, both white and Black, we were voicing our dissent and challenging the oppressive socio-political and cultural conditions of the colonial legacy. We believed that our actions in the townships were part of a critical moment in history. I reflect now on how naïve my political aspirations were for both Zimbabwe and South Africa. It would take a long time for me to accept that the inequalities, injustices, and brutalities we continually heap on each other are, and perhaps always will be, generational and endemic.

The stories that I rewrite and the artwork I create in here below helped me to shift my perspectives, to see life events as complex, nothing is black and white. In the following artefact, I reflect on another intense life event in South Africa. I can reconcile complicated feelings with thoughts, addressing complex, long-suppressed and unacknowledged issues of othering.

ARTEFACT 11 Young Lions-Alice Bennett-11th February 1990

This day had been willed into being it slipped into the week, almost quietly.

We walked together to the town centre at dawn, hand in hand, still doubting. We stood silently, waiting under the scorching sun to witness his release. Finally in the long shadows of dusk, after twenty-seven years, Nelson Mandela stood on the balcony of Cape Town City Hall. He looked incredibly small.

And then he cried out 'Amandla!'- Power. Madiba's first word to us surged through our blood, tens of thousands of us, black and white, replied 'Awethu!'- 'Is Ours!' Mandela repeated the cry once more, Amandla!' The crowd, a seething mass as one, flowed forward, some stretching their hands towards where Mandela stood, his own arms reaching back. We were weeping and grinning, disbelieving, relieved.

As I stood waiting for the father to speak again, enmeshed with the fevered crowd, an uneasy sensation jostled forward, resolutely it pushed inside me, until it had my full attention. It settled lightly but carried the weight of a prophecy in my soul. On this special occasion in all the events of this country's history and in the history of my small lifetime, I had pushed it down, ignoring it as best I could, until this very moment. My skin prickled again as he spoke. I had never been more aware of my whiteness as in that instant.

For years, I had marched, my principles united with the darkest of skins against the injustice that was Apartheid. Into countless early morning hours, we planned and dreamed together, zealously imagining a new future for South Africa, our shared hunger for change, the fuel for our actions. Our skins had both been painted a matching shade of purple by the paint rain of water cannons staining us - damning us to detention, riot police threw us like sacks of maize into the back of windowless vans. Our young, strong bodies and bones were bruised by sjamboks and short truncheons. But we felt that our souls were indestructible. We would run, hands held, our hearts beating wildly in our chests, our spirits singing in harmony with the intensity of our youth and our convictions. Together,

our mouths and lips had shouted the same freedom cry. Our eyes burned acid hot, tears streaming in anticipation when the tear gas canisters rolled to hiss at our feet.

I returned to the words he was saying. Tata spoke directly to us, 'And I pay tribute to the endless heroism of youth, you, the young lions. You, the young lions, have energised our entire struggle,' I surged forward along with the others, to drink in his salutation but a new part inside of me, a part I didn't recognise fully yet, shrank back.

It would take longer, more time and more tears for me to learn that it was my legacy to carry the sins of my fathers. The shame of generations was my inheritance. As I stood there among the people I loved, my skin stung in its whiteness. Awareness was still a long way away; but already I knew, I was too white for this freedom.

Too white to belong, too white for my country.

I could not belong in Africa because of the colour of my skin and my heritage, and yet I felt that Southern Africa, particularly Zimbabwe, was my home, my country. My heart might celebrate independence with its people, but my head knew that my future in a country that didn't want me was limited. Heart knowledge (Rendón, 2014) and head knowledge sometimes appear to be at odds with one another, yet the convergence of the two creates nuance and reflects the complexities of our human existence. Nothing is black and white.

The process of writing and making art gave me, then, and continues to give me now, a still, quiet space to observe the world within me. Making notes and sketches allows me to pause and listen to the words bubbling up inside. The internal conversations between the head and heart create reflective space. Art provides a quiet space to listen to an 'inner knowing.' Creative emerging narratives, such as the sample above, surface to offer clues to knowledge I had forgotten or moments of learning I had repressed. I am digging down, piecing together evidence that would make it clearer to myself and others why human beings treated each other as unfairly as they did' (O'Neill, 2006, p. 6), excavating my

memories to understand the significance of certain events. While I know these stories are entirely subjective, I choose to embrace the lived experiences, beliefs, and values I carry within me to better value the observations and interpretations I make as a researcher. Jackson (1989) insists that the knower cannot be separated from what they claim to know, because

> ‘our understanding of others can only proceed from within our own experience. And this experience includes our personalities and histories as much as our held research.’
>
> Bochner & Ellis, 2016.

Within the political and social context of a country plagued by oppression and violence, there was an inherited dominant and oppressive educational culture. Such a culture, as described by Freire (1970) and Hooks (2003), is the result of centuries of binary hegemonic ideology impacting our ‘societal structures and internalised narratives’ (Brookfield, 2017). The privileging of the cognitive over other ways of learning and knowing ‘has dulled our awareness of our extrarational senses, the emotional, embodied, imagined, remembered, dreamt, spiritual, and ethereal’ (Robinson et al., 2023, p. 497).

As a child, I wanted to immerse myself in imagination, to dwell in aesthetic observation, emotional sensitivity, and creativity. These characteristics were viewed as problematic, seen as needing to be fixed for my assimilation into a ‘healthy’ society and education system. I was regarded as ‘other’ because of my ‘extrarational’ senses, and later as a teenager who acted ‘immorally’ by falling pregnant. Boler (1999) explains how emotion is perceived as pathological by dominant discourses of rationality and religion, which have created a belief ‘that we must “control” our emotions and, if we don’t, our “inappropriate” emotional behaviours may be pathologised and medicated’ (p. 8).

‘The separation and devaluation of feelings have led to a policing and silencing of affective ways of being, particularly of marginalised groups’

(Robinson et al., 2023, p. 500; Boler, 1999) and of individuals. My long periods of silence as a child were partly due to the struggle to express myself, but also because I was made to feel like an outsider, outside of the norm, different. I feared being my authentic self and threw myself into academic work to gain acceptance within a wider hegemony. The suggestion by my school that I take art as a subject during that challenging time was a wise and loving gesture. It was an act of recognition of difference, aligning with a pedagogy of the heart (Rendón, 2014). Engagement in art pedagogy and making gave me an acceptable identity, that of 'artist,' with which to make sense of my emotionality, imagination, and sensitivity. It allowed me to access parts of myself that I had tried to silence and gave them a 'legitimate' outlet.

By welcoming extrarational senses (those outside of the rational) into learning spaces, we can embrace a more holistic way of knowing (Robinson et al., 2023, p. 472). These senses allow us to know in nuanced ways, from emotion and physical sensation to intuition, memory, ancestral knowledge, dreams, imagination, and spiritual insight. These can belong alongside cognitive and conceptual knowing (Robinson et al., 2023, p. 501). Working with the heart and the head creates an 'inclusive concept' that 'does not reject rationality' but recognises its complementarity with other, more holistic ways of knowing (Robinson et al., 2023, p. 472; Rendón, 2014). We use all these ways of knowing to understand our world; by integrating them into educational spaces we honour the full spectrum of learning.

Boler (1999) considers that emotions are an important place for us to dwell 'to explore the revealed 'space' between ideology and internalized feelings' (p. 13). She sees this space as one where we can allow the unresolved and uncertain to emerge, creating new perspectives and understandings. This key concept of the liminal space created by a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow 1997) is found in experiences that are disruptive and uncomfortable, creating liminal space for transformation. 'Liminality' (Latin: limen, threshold) is an anthropological term that

relates to the ' betwixt and between 'limbo state in a transition' (Turner, 1995, p.95; Van Gennep, 1960) in (Sibbett & Thompson 2008). This state of unknowing creates a sense of ambiguity and discomfort, which can, I believe, be held by the art-making process and healthy art pedagogy.

In my retelling of the vignette of Rudo Zivai, a liminal space had opened up for us. Before Zimbabwe's Independence, I had been forbidden to mix with Black people other than those who 'served' us in a role very much dictated by the racist white superiority paradigm of which I was a part. When I met Rudo, a child of my own age and in a shared space of the primary school, in a context of a new, free Zimbabwe, our cultures were thrown together. A liminal space, an in-between space, was created for us. opportunity for us to share our cultures became both a site of resistance and of possibility. It was a space where we could challenge our imposed identities, where we could create new identities for ourselves. By walking together with Rudo across a literal and metaphorical divide, a new space opened up for us, and we created' an intimacy that questions binary divisions.' Bhabha (1994) tells us, a 'Third Space' opens up in Postcolonial Cultures, where people strive to redefine their own identities in places between the private and public

> 'The recesses us, a domestic space' opens sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement the borders between home and the world become confused; and uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision as divided as it is disorientating,'
>
> Bhabha 1994, p.9

As I retrace my intense experiences as a forming human being, I understand better how I was learning to redress my cognitive constructs of a colonial/post-colonial world by making visual representations of the world as I understood it and how I imagined it could be. I expressed difficult ideas which were inaccessible to me cognitively, interrogating the ideology of the world I had been born into and the experiences I had

lived. I did not know it then, but I was using metaphor in art to make sense of what was complicated, chaotic, and frightening. I was searching for ways through a process of metaphorical imagination to reclaim a sense of self, an identity for myself and bridge the gap between unknowing and knowing, a liminal space where 'the transitioning individual has access to possibilities that were foreclosed by their previous meaning perspectives and premises' (Green 2023, p.193). This process enables me to 'traverse the liminal zone and create a new, more inclusive, meaning perspective' (Green 2023, p.192)

After graduating in Cape Town, I returned to Zimbabwe, taking on the role of art teacher and school counsellor in a privileged all-girls school which had a reputation for reaching high grades at every level. As a newly qualified teacher, I fell back on the methods I had learned in my schooling to 'stay within the lines' so that the students and I could achieve the outcomes needed from us. I began to teach secondary school students for accreditation and excellence in everything they produced. Product in artmaking was favoured over the process, and I was focused on achievement by grade. I had become a perpetrator of the oppressive education I had rejected earlier and was later to reject again for other more process-led models of pedagogy (Freire 1970).

Freire explains that 'Banking Education 'transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power' (Freire 1970, p.58). 'Banking education' is used by the 'oppressors' for domination, for creating people who are a 'better "fit" for the world.' (Freire,1970, p.56). In other words, it educates only for people who will remain part of the status quo. The 'banking method' is only one of the oppressive systems in place which marginalise people who do not fit into the profile of a passive and pliable student. Those who cannot enter or sustain the mainstream provision of education are treated as marginal people, on the outside of society. When their differences are regarded as too far from the norm, they are regarded as the pathology of a healthy

society, which must be segregated. As Adult Educators we can create the third spaces Bhabha (1994) speaks of, we can disrupt and subvert spaces and imbue them with critical pedagogy. Hussey and Connolly (2013) write that 'the point of education is to build the capacity of our students to challenge the forces which maintain the status quo' (Connolly & Hussey, 2013, p. 13). By interrogating the world we live in, through critical pedagogy, we can take our place in it with more confidence and agency. But to accept education as a liberating force, we must first discern what kind of education is not liberating. Freire is seminal in this research; his philosophy for education is transformational and humanising.

> 'Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through restless, impatient continuing and hopeful enquiry which people pursue in the world and with each other.'
>
> Freire 1970, p.49.

In the year before I left Zimbabwe with my family to move to Ireland, I was involved with a human rights group, trying to help people in the aftermath of brutal psychological and physical attacks of torture during the Land Reforms of 2000[16], when economic collapse and violence coloured the landscape. I was tasked with listening to and recording the stories of political torture victims. The stories they told me forced me to acknowledge my naivety in the face of political and social terror. I needed to accept that I could do very little in that environment to contribute to creating better spaces and places for people to thrive in. I could only listen to their stories. These stories of extreme suffering led me to further deep/transformative 'self' learning, which has continued to impact my pedagogy to this day.

I struggled to make sense of what appeared to me as 'senseless' in the chaos of terror warfare, and in the process, I was learning about myself as much as I was learning about issues of power and the dark side of human nature. My confusion became a space for learning, perplexity' leads to learning' (Dewey, 1966, p. 150). Transformative learning happens at moments when the learner is exposed to a 'moment of rupture in the

structure of daily life' (Denzin 2014, p.53).'something new is always coming into sight, displacing what was previously certain and seen' (Denzin 2014, p. 1). Experiences that disrupt and disorientate lead to people making changes in their worldview and in their actions (Green 2024).

[16] https://www.alonereaders.com/article/details/2568/mugabes-land-reforms-zimbabwes-economic-collapse-and-violence-in-the-2000s

Art as a Possibility for Becoming

> ‘Have patience about everything that is still unresolved in your heart; try to love the *questions themselves*, like locked rooms, like books written in a truly foreign language. Don't look for the answers; they cannot be given to you yet, because you cannot yet live them, and what matters is to live everything. For now, *live the questions*. If you do, then maybe gradually, without realizing it, some far-off day you will live your way into the answer.’
>
> Rilke 1903/2021, p 22

In the process of creating these artworks and writing the stories about the formative years of my life, I began to feel as though I had remembered or recognised something about myself and my experiences, which hinted at the person I was/am and could be.

A constructivist theory (Vygotsky 1978; Dewey 1929; Bruner 1994) of self and identity allows us to perpetually construct and re-construct ourselves. In and of itself, self-construction is a form of resistance to social and political influences which would have us be and behave a certain way. This reconstruction of self occurs by our acting upon the known experiences of our lives. Randall explains the process of trying to get a life story ‘straight, to tell it in its fullest and truest way’ (Randall 2014, p.5) as an important part of the process of human development. It is important, he says, to explore ‘metaphor as life-story, as an examination of ‘the mystery of learning’ (Randall 2014, p.5). The life experiences which I consider have taught me something, are those that I have interpreted or worked on in some way ‘through my theories, my senses, my memory and my imagination’ (Randall 2014, p50). I have made meaning out of those experiences to know or learn something from them. The process of internalising these experiences becomes an act of self-creation (Randall 2014, Green 2024). ‘Using metaphor, art, and story, we can navigate the direction of our own becoming’ (Randall 2014, p.36), all the while acknowledging that this way is messy and unpredictable.

Blackburn Miller explains that 'the soul dwells in paradox and does not approach life in a linear manner.' (Blackburn Miller 2020, p.7). Rendón reflects on her navigation of living a research question as being 'agonisingly slow, confusing and chaotic' (Rendón 2023, p158). The act of making art is an attempt to make sense of these confusing and difficult states of being, all the while 'living the question now, living our way into the answer' (Rilke 1903/2021.). My stories had been either forgotten, unexamined or pushed to one side until I was able to make space, through research, to find them, to gather them into myself as conscious knowledge and find illumination in them through art and writing. My life work as an artist and art teacher allows me to help others do the same; I take my story to others and invite them to tell their own, with the potential to re-construct their personal narratives and find meaning in their experiences.

Art pedagogy offers us a way of (re) constructing ourselves in a world that insists on constructing us in one-dimensional ways. It offers us the possibility to reclaim, reimagine and reinvent ourselves. This is an act of resistance and opposition. It becomes a way where we can challenge and protest the limitations that are heaped on us.

The process of art making as research into the 'self 'has allowed me to reclaim a sense of who I am as a researcher, but also an artist, educator, and human being. Through art making and evocative autoethnographic writing into life history (Randall 2014), pathways/openings (Springaay et al, 2005) into my experiences have emerged, allowing me to reflect and remember. These processes have enabled me to see myself in context and so reframe my life history. Understanding how the territory of my childhood was rife with contradiction and chaos and entering it again as adult – a/r/tographer has been a deep learning experience where I have been able to make sense of events. I can also understand more clearly how I chose the values which have informed my life choices and how I came to choose a life route which placed art making and art pedagogy at its core.

By making, sitting with, dwelling in, and reflecting on a curated sample of experiences, I embrace both the cognitive and the extra-rational as important ways of knowing. Thought and feeling are not mutually exclusive. Both thinking and feeling 'seemingly opposite concepts, should be viewed as complementary rather than separate and apart, both are important, one is not better than the other, (Rendón, 2023, p.7). By giving attention to both, honouring their place in my learning life, I can discard unhelpful redundant learning and adopt new knowing. I can make new meaning for my life world.

Engaging in art making and art pedagogy as resistance to dominant ideologies and pathologising of differences is a deeply risky, uncomfortable endeavour. We expose ourselves in our efforts to understand and to know more. To effect change, we must grapple with the tensions that arise between the social context we find ourselves in and our internalised 'monsters.' 'Processes of change and resistance can only occur through one's constant and persistent plunging in this auto-antagonistic, self-agitating, active, open-ended pursuit of being' (Kukacka, 2016, as cited in Barndt,2016, p 111). I've experienced this learning process as being evocative, moving. I am surprised by the intensity of my emotion. Without acknowledgement and delving into the meaning of these emotions I might miss a valuable understanding of both my 'self' and of others. The learning process is a difficult one, rife with uncertainty, frustration and sometimes disappointment, but without undergoing this process and searching for self-knowledge, a teacher cannot engage in 'good teaching' (Palmer 2017).

The use of art as both a personal and social tool for change and disruption, challenges and subverts expectations both within us and amongst communities. Importantly, it seems to me, art for transformation, personal and political, needs to be held in spaces where creativity and play are fostered without emphasis on aesthetic or economic value. It cannot be truly transformational without being free

from the constraints of expectations for aesthetic excellence and saleability. Art pedagogy of a type which emphasises individual expression, communication and creativity challenges the dominant and oppressive; it ignores boundaries, it 'colours outside the lines.' Engaging in art of this type, within communities and for ourselves, can lead to empowering self-knowledge, reclaiming our individualities in all their myriad forms, our histories, honouring our differences, but also, art of this type, fosters empathy, induces vulnerability, and opens us up to the 'other.' In art, we find we are different and the same. Our differences are to be celebrated, and our commonalities are too.

Key themes of Resistance and Resilience

The themes of 'resistance' and 'resilience' emerge in Chapter One as key elements in navigating difficult experiences and challenging contexts. I choose to highlight these themes using personal history to map learning to a wider political application for research. *Resistance*, in this case, is not only about opposing external forces but also about reclaiming agency over one's own narrative and the stories we are taught to accept. *Resilience*, as learned over time, reflects the ability to adapt and transform in the face of adversity. When viewed through the lens of adult learning, these themes highlight how learners, particularly adults reflecting on earlier experiences, can reinterpret and find new meaning in past events. The process of revisiting and reinterpreting these events through creativity and artmaking enables the development of resilience as a learned strategy for confronting and overcoming challenges. This dynamic adds to the broader conception of adult learning, where reflection on past experiences, especially difficult ones, becomes a catalyst for growth, empowerment, and transformation.

Chapter One offers my personal perspective on Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe) and its education system during a critical historical and political period, when difference and dissonance impacted education at

all levels. I hope that this lived experience will make a contribution to the scholarship on education in the region during that time. It provides an exploration of personal identity formation through the concept of 'Othering,' both as an internal process of self-perception and as an external, socially constructed process. This concept is applied to my experiences growing up as a white child in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, exploring how these experiences shaped my understanding of identity, power, and belonging within a deeply divided socio-political context.

In addition to this, Chapter One illustrates how immersion in re-membered experiences, revisiting past feelings, ideas, and memories through art processes, can facilitate profound personal transformation (Dewey, 1916, 2005; McNiff, 1998). The chapter demonstrates how the act of re-engaging with these memories through artistic expression not only generated personal insights but also created a space for reflexive dialogue with other educators (further extended in Chapter Two). This process demonstrates artmaking's place in *resistance* pedagogy, the potential of artmaking to challenge dominant narratives and create spaces for critical self-reflection and *resistance* to oppressive educational structures.

The chapter also shows how art-making and creative engagement can be powerful tools in resisting life-limiting beliefs and narratives. By reframing my own past experiences and using them as a platform for critical reflection, I present a model of pedagogy that resists the status quo, challenges traditional teaching practices, and fosters transformative learning. In doing so, this chapter and the subsequent ones emphasise how educators, particularly in adult education, can use their own lived experiences as sites of resistance, promoting more inclusive, critical, and transformative pedagogical practices that empower both themselves and their students.

The key themes of resistance and resilience are inherent in the art making that occurs throughout this thesis. The artefacts are an embodiment of

resilience and resistance, shown in the sustained practice of artistic praxis; the act of making and subsequent reflection. They stand as witness to the experience of the researcher, evidencing how the contribution of art making and art pedagogy in challenging life-limiting beliefs and dominant narratives creates more hopeful, critically engaged, and transformative adult learning processes and pedagogies. In Chapter Two, the research becomes more ethnographic, set in the context of KCAT (Kilkenny Collective for Arts Talent). In KCAT, I found a place where resistance to oppressive and limiting ideologies and insidious discrimination through art pedagogy is modelled. Art here is made for flourishing for the individual and for the community - it's a place where resonance with the world and recognition of the self and other are engendered through art making and healthy art pedagogy.



Image 4 STILL from Film, KCAT Courses Studio

Emerging Methodology for an Artist

As a living inquiry, the arts-based research methods I employed initially were fundamentally emergent and heuristic. When I reflect on the stages of this unfolding methodological journey, I can see how a heuristic approach colours the entire methodological journey, particularly in the 'seed' of inquiry. This heuristic approach grows and develops in the second chapter, where intuition played a large part in resonating through research with others. I will write more about this heuristic approach after Chapter Two (see Developing Methodology as a Teacher). In this particular section, I explore how Life History and Arts-Based research became important in my research methods for me as an artist, reflecting on her life as an emergent creative. Life History and Arts-Based Research naturally align with my identity as an artist and a creative in the process of becoming. Framed through these lenses, I aim to show that these methodologies came to illuminate the personal life-learning moments that inform and sustain this living research journey.

Life history

Self-inquiry through re-telling my life history became a profound transformational journey. I became an evolving 'Alice' who continuously reimagines herself through writing and painting (Randall, 2013, 2014; Bruner, 1994). I started to reassess my experiences in all their intensities. My childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood are explored in Chapter One. I reassessed the events in my life and increasingly became able to place them in time and context, both political and geographical. I learned to become comfortable embracing the ambiguity and complicated nature of my life as an epistemology in its own right, seeking the meaning within it rather than a fixed explanation of what it had all been for (Pallas, 2001). Bruner (2004) notes, the instability of autobiography (life history) allows it to be deeply influenced by culture and intervention, making storytelling a powerful site for transformation. I turned to my life history to re-search my 'self,' seeking answers to

troubling questions about education and marginalisation within context and culture. Witnessing 'othering' in my childhood and feeling that outsider status myself, sensitised me to how others might feel the same; this resonance with others led eventually to the imperative to write this inquiry.

> 'Autobiographies as learners in childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood frame our approach to teaching at the start of our careers and frequently exert an influence that lasts a lifetime'
>
> Barone, 2001, p. 50.

It exerts an influence on our research lives, too - my autobiography in the present continues to exert an influence on my identity as a/r/tographer. Life history research enables me to map moments of intensity from life stories (Irwin, 2014), revealing how past experiences can ripple into our futures (Randall, 2014).

Arts-Based Research

> 'To excel at scribble art, you need to learn to walk between order and chaos. If your drawing is too messy, it doesn't work. If it looks too refined, that won't work either. You need to create a scribble drawing that looks finished and spontaneous simultaneously, and that's a skill that can take a lot of time and practice to master.'
>
> Ian Walsh[17]

It was a comfortable place to start. Arts-based, everything' is how my life is lived. I fall into making art to discover, to learn, to understand. This research is about Art, Art making and the role of Art Pedagogy in education. It was always going to be an arts-based research journey. And so, as I looked at my life history to explore the significant moments of learning and living to become, I make art. Chapter One is the beginning and it is laden with episodes of making and writing creatively. A general arts-based research approach integrates my vocation, practice, and lived experience.

The emerging methodology of this research positions artmaking, both visual and written, at its ontological and epistemological core. An emphasis on emergent heuristic research methods (See chapter two for more on this) aligns with my belief that evolving art-making processes are essential for healthy adult learning. The collection of these methods affirms that extra-rational ways of knowing are necessary to rebalance the fields of research and education, which have historically been dominated by purely intellectual approaches. Artmaking functions as both subject and method of inquiry, with artefacts serving as intuitive, nuanced carriers of embedded knowledge. I choose the word 'Artefact' to express the creative manifestations of thought and experience which emerge on this journey of research. I decided that this word 'Artefact' describes a self-contained creative illumination which manifests the perfect expression of a phenomenon or experience better than the art work or creative story/poem might.

[17] https://improvedrawing.com/scribble-drawing-everything-you-need-to-know/accessed 24/07/2025

As a reflexive practice, artmaking and creative writing offer embodied, intuitive ways to make meaning. McCormack (2014) describes this practice as 'immersion in the difficult element, a process of articulating in an embodied and emotionally and imaginally connected way, a deeper process of knowing and learning' (p. 172). This knowledge extends beyond the cerebral to what Rendón (2014) calls 'heart knowledge', a knowledge she describes as fostering individual flourishing rather than pathologising difference.

As an a/r/tographer, I immerse myself biographically and aesthetically in the research. Where imaginative writing and art works (artefacts) are used, they provide metaphors and symbols to express complex subjectivities (McCormack, 2014). The artefacts highlight the vulnerable, multifaceted identity I inhabit as an artist, teacher, and learner, validating this artist identity as vital to this inquiry; it is an identity I adopt throughout the research and is both private and political. The artefacts embody both a personal and universal set of ideas, creating space for dialogical research through visual language and written communication.

Artefacts slowly emerge as image/word iterations of pivotal learning moments, outlining a fluid process that reveals philosophies, values, and memories previously obscured, repressed or forgotten, in what Irwin (2013) calls 'the intensities' (p. 189). These 'intensities' often arise as poems for me, spontaneously emerging during reflection or while daydreaming. I include them to illuminate and demonstrate 'other ways of knowing' (Sameshima, 2008). Conscious and unconscious realms (Romanshyn, 2007) can be bridged using arts-based research, and these thoughts and feelings can be mined for important knowing. Art making and writing allow me to reflect on and reframe the neglected or forgotten knowledge of my past and engage with artist learners in a more meaningful way as an artist-educator.

The field notes I include in this document are similar to sketches that an artist uses to 'find' out about and explore their subject. The still quiet spaces of observation and contemplation I make about the world through notes provide an opportunity to listen attentively to the internal dialogue between my head and heart. This note-taking and reflective journaling are both an 'in the moment' and an 'after the moment' process. As a method of living inquiry, it enables me to capture subjective reflections throughout the research process (Ellis & Bochner, 2016). By gathering them together, these notes started to build up a whole 'picture;' they became the 'finding lines' (see page 22), towards a larger, more sustained composition.

Alongside field notes, I relied on a reflective journaling habit to maintain a rigorous research discipline. The journaling process heightened my awareness of the 'paradigmatic assumptions and instinctive reasoning that frame how we work' (Brookfield, 2017, p. 30), enabling me to uncover and challenge my assumptions about power and endemic hegemony (Brookfield, 2017). As an artist researcher, I found it impossible to separate my subjective 'self' from my researcher 'self;' impartiality was impossible (Jackson, 1989; Bochner& Ellis, 2016). The 'self' as both an artist, educator, researcher, and learner is essentially the subject of study at the centre of this pedagogical research (Maslow 1943; Rogers 1961; Dewey 1916). Subjectivity, therefore, is key to understanding learning experiences inherent in different pedagogical settings; full immersion in my experience and attention to that of others was an important and deliberate decision for the methodological approach (Polanyi 1966; Moustakas 1990; Sultan 2018) (see page 20 for more on this).

Framed within adult education, I use arts-based methodologies to explore how creative practices can disrupt limiting perceptions of adult learners and cultivate opportunities for ongoing learning and personal transformation. These approaches are informed by Eisner (1998), Weber

(2008), and a workshop I attended with Sibbett (2004, 2005, 2008) in 2015. These theorists' approaches challenge traditional dominant paradigms that view knowledge production as inherently tied to systems of social privilege and power (Finley, 2008). Such paradigms often privilege objective, detached, and traditionally 'rational' forms of knowing, methods which have historically excluded or marginalised voices outside the dominant Western culture. In contrast, emergent and arts-based research methods emphasise subjective, embodied, and relational ways of knowing. The use of art in research is inherently subversive, rejecting paternalistic or colonising traditions and resisting the framing of knowledge as a function of social privilege (Finley, 2008). Art methodologies align with feminist and qualitative research traditions, which seek to question established authorities, value lived experience and validate diverse ways of knowing. This orientation is congruent with my philosophy, which values equity, inclusivity, and the transformative potential of creative practice in knowledge production and adult learning - it affirms a grounded, qualitative philosophy of knowledge creation (Finley, 2008; McNiff, 1998; Barone, 2001; Eisner, 1995).

Arts-based research 'makes use of diverse ways of knowing and experiencing the world' (Finley, 2008, p. 79) and in this research in particular, the visual and written arts offered creative, non-threatening, cross-cultural ways to depict alternative viewpoints while challenging assumptions about people and the world (Eisner, 2008; Weber, 2008; Finley, 2008). In the life work context of KCAT Arts Centre, the research explores rich areas of diversity. I invited neurodivergent artists, those identifying with intellectual/cognitive differences, to talk to me about their experiences of learning and knowing. Arts-based methods of communicating and researching were particularly accessible for us as a group of co-subjects versed in visual language. Visual imagery is our shared language, bypassing verbal barriers and facilitating discovery and deeper communication. Painting, drawing, writing, journaling, and film were employed as a fluid language, adapting to participants' needs rather

than adhering to fixed methods. As an artist educator, I recognise that nuanced knowledge cannot be expressed easily through verbal description but may be more accessible through imagery (Eisner, 2008; Weber, 2008). Colours, textures, symbols, and archetypes evoke primal responses, leading to resonance with the art and artist, a deeper understanding, and connection. Weber (2008) tells us, 'The visual disarms or bypasses the purely intellectual, leading to a more authentic and complete glimpse of what a particular experience is like, or of what people think or feel' (p. 46). Engagement with others through artmaking and conversation enabled me to tune in to their individual embodied knowledges and experiences, invoking empathy through layered meanings. Morrissey tells us that as ‘we perform our evolving identities in our embodied interactions with others, we make sense of our experiences by making and telling our stories’ (Morrissey 2014, p.10). Arts-based research fosters insights and expanded human understanding (Weber, 2008), and combined with reflection and dialogue, these methods effectively helped me to explore intra - and inter-personal phenomena at both subjective and social levels.

Creating art, as artists, researchers, teachers, or learners, is simultaneously a process, an event, and communication. 'The works we create speak back to us, and we become, in their presence, part of a conversation that enables us to see what we have said' (Eisner, 2002, p. 11). ‘Artmaking is powerful for facilitating self-reflexivity, enabling us to discover our own interior landscape' (Eisner, 2008, p. 11). As an artist-educator, I have both witnessed in others and personally experienced how art fosters self-understanding and subjective knowledge, and how, when it is shared publicly, it becomes open to multiple interpretations. The artist/researcher and the viewer/reader share in the interpretations made from the content shared, and their combined interpretations become co-created knowledge. In academic research, art methodologies promote 'humbler and more nuanced knowledge claims' (Weber, 2008, p. 46). Research thus becomes 'more open-ended, closer in function to deep conversation and insightful dialogue than to error-free conclusions'

(Eisner, 2008, p. 7).

Art as inquiry helped me to explore my epistemological and ontological philosophies, enabling me to imagine the unimagined and embrace uncertainty (Greene, 1995). Aesthetic/art education is an intentional process nurturing

> 'appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagement with the arts,' art processes enable learners to notice new connections, form new patterns, and open vistas, allowing them to 'see differently'
>
> Greene, 2001, p. 6.

Engaging with art helps us develop perception, senses, and imagination, inviting transcendence of known realities and encouraging imagination of what 'might be' in research. Experimental engagement with art materials without focus on outcome liberates imagination and fosters transformational learning, increasing agency and unique self-expression; it enables emergent, unpredictable results, sometimes without ending.

This open-ended nature of arts-based research is congruent with the practice of process-led art making, and so my dual practice as a researcher and teacher through artmaking and reflection is supported by using arts-based research (Causey, 2017; Dewey, 1980). McNiff (1998) observes, 'The domain of arts-based research is a more focused application of the larger epistemological process of artistic knowing and inquiry' (p. 29). My life as an artist and my immersion in the arts learning context can best be served by arts-based research because it, like myself, draws on creative expression to access and communicate knowledge.

> 'An artwork ... is not an explanation of anything. It is an exploration of a way of seeing, or of hearing, or of shaping one's living, expressed in the pre-reflective, concrete language of symbols.'
>
> Hughes, 2011, p. 41.

The art-based methodologies I incorporate are creative self-processes of discovery (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9), not intended as explanations, but as contemplative, intuitive expressions which may or may not illuminate certain ideas. The visual artworks and the film included in the research are evocative reflections on life's narratives (Heron & Reason, 2008; Polanyi, 1966, 1974; Zohar & Marshall, 2012; Romanshyn, 2007; Moore, 2005). Goldbard (2013) emphasises that humans exist simultaneously in physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual realms, and are most powerful when engaging all dimensions of knowing (p. 162). Using arts-based research methods side-by-side with scholarly scaffolding, I hope to allow for powerful and personal engagement for the reader and myself within this research.

The experimental nature of art research can be understood as rhizomatic, a way of thinking and being which allows for invention, multiple beginnings and endings, revisiting, and new departures (Irwin, 2013). In my practice and with others, I value the process of artmaking over the finished product. Resisting hierarchical notions of 'good' art as product, we can embrace art as an ongoing searching and experimenting process. An acceptance of art as a process acknowledges multiple possible outcomes and invites continual 'becoming' in our relationship with the art and with the world around us and within us. It is an acceptance which resists finite ends and obvious beginnings. Artworks in research are valuable for the knowledge and learning they represent rather than aesthetics alone; their context in academia gives them a new purpose, and they are both art and knowledge rather than an aesthetic product. The inclusion of artworks in this research without critique allows them to stand as complete expressions of knowing and experience rather than as finished artworks in and of themselves. They complement and extend written communication, serving as thresholds for layered, subjective understanding.

Presenting artworks of different types throughout the thesis invites readers to engage beyond the text, without the interference of

commentary. A film of the contextual space of KCAT further creates opportunity for multiple interpretations of events and experiences and extended possibilities for reader/ viewer engagement with the concepts presented in the research. Polanyi's concept of 'dwelling in the work' suggests that true understanding emerges from inhabiting the artwork, grasping its whole meaning rather than parts (Polanyi, 1966, p. 18). This 'indwelling' is central to this art-infused methodology, paralleling heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990) and is congruent to Rosa's theory of being resonant with the world of material objects and sentient beings (Rosa, 2019). Prolonged dwelling fosters empathy and understanding, facilitating a journey of 'becoming' and allowing for a deep and resonant relationship with the world where we can 'make sense of life' (Rosa, 2019, p. 280).

The Experience of *Living* Arts Practice as Research

> ‘The artist, for Deleuze, is someone who delves into the intensive chaotic presence of the flesh, into the ‘wound’ that defines his or her existence, experimenting with the force of the pure event, participating in it, thereby turning the physical event into a pure intensive becoming through a counter actualisation’
>
> Jagodzinski, 2016, pp. 4–5

Making art for this research made me feel exposed and ‘raw;’ I became vulnerable in this exploration, digging into old wounds, places where I know things of deep significance. This research demanded that I navigate memories and repressed feelings, drawing them to the surface through artmaking. It was a process that took a long time, and sometimes I needed to stay in spaces that were deeply unnerving until I could work my way out of them. I entered the process somewhat naively, unaware of the impact that these acts of rediscovery would have on my being.

I frequently lost myself in the artmaking process. The sense of hereness and nowness required for everyday tasks often slipped away. I was learning not to resist the liminal space the art-making research threw me into. I had to resist the impulse to create boundaries between immersion in research and daily life. When I wasn’t thinking or writing, I was making art; my head and my heart were continually focused on the work.

I knew that I could find meaning from my life experiences in art making and art pedagogy. But before I could write and paint freely to unearth the intuitive and embodied knowledge I had forgotten/buried, I needed to understand my ontology and claim it as a foundational cornerstone for this research. I needed to identify and claim my values as a bedrock for the work ahead. I employed both auto-ethnographical writing and a collage process to surface the core values I knew deeply but had difficulty expressing. Collage, as a multimodal approach, combined artmaking, and writing, allowing me to explore nuanced and complex aspects of my

experiences. The process of collage also allowed me to embrace the heuristic and creative processes inherent in art methodologies (Wallas, 1976; Sultan, 2018), allowing for deviation from fixed stages to preserve the unfolding story's flow and emerging direction. Deep focus, embodied presence, and a willingness to surrender ego were necessary to explore my experiences beyond intellectual and cognitive engagement.

The collage process invites both the maker and the viewer into a profound, embodied experience where understanding resides. Re-experiencing this life story through collage helped me, as an artist, reclaim my voice as a researcher, clarifying my ontology, pedagogy, and epistemology. Collage became both a manifestation and a source of knowledge for illumination. The act of creating a visual artefact through paint, paper, tearing, and glueing unlocked feelings and embodied memories. It was as though the collage process itself surfaced additional memories and tacit knowledge (see Chapter One, 1.8 for more on this).

One pivotal moment in my research journey was captured in a small, evocative autoethnographic piece written years earlier, which identified a transformational experience that was key to my life path and work (see *His Name is Rudo*, Chapter Three). To clarify and own this experience's significance to my self-formation, I combined collage making with journaling and reflection (Mernagh & Bennett, 2020). The resulting composite of painting and collage allowed access to repressed embodied knowing and aspects of my past that I had not fully addressed. This process was an early and essential step towards engaging deeply with my inquiry. Creating collaged memory-based imagery was a tool to unearth core values and concepts informing my inquiry, but it also unearthed the seed of my research motivation: 'Why is it so important to continuously search for the ideal conditions of existence for a human world?' (Fanon, 1967).

I recognised through collage, journaling, and life history reflection, that the initial data was within me (Moustakas, 2004). A process of reclaiming myself and embracing 'the other within' (Romanshyn 2007) was a prerequisite to understanding and resonating with the 'other' in the world (Rosa 2019).

As with all connections through art, an understanding emerges when the reader/viewer is invited to experience alongside the creator a state of indwelling, coming to know the artist through reliving the work (Dilthey, 1914–1936, pp. 213–216; Lipps, 1903). The concept of indwelling aligns with heuristic inquiry's process, which involves deep consciousness and awareness in relation to objects, ideas, or art (Moustakas, 1990). The question I could no longer ignore had always been present within me (Sultan, 2018), and art illuminated it.

Life narratives unfolded during the collage process, unlocked by tearing, glueing, and drawing, mapping my experiences from childhood through to adulthood. While I lacked a space or person with whom to share these stories verbally, I found my dialogic needs met by writing them down and seeing them reflected to me in word. In the art making, no predetermined outcome existed; the act itself was the means to knowing:

> 'the act of motion, touch, and manipulation produces a movement toward acknowledgement of the unexpressed, known in both physical and metaphoric ways'
>
> Sameshima, 2008, p. 49.

This 'unexpressed known' emerged in the artefact, revealing deeper understandings of memory and experience (Sameshima, 2008, p. 48). Not all artwork made during the research was included in the final iteration of this research; I was creating in a state of excess without thinking ahead (Irwin 2005). The end document would demand careful curation, privileging works that best expressed and illuminated study themes, but the process demanded that I didn't put restrictions on what and how I was

engaged in making.

The artwork, rooted in personal experience, required deep thought, and embodied presence, demanding as much time as academic writing. I experienced time as fluid, and open-ended sometimes, and at other times it felt oppressive or restrictive. It is my experience in art making and art pedagogy that art requires 'time.' Time to be made and time to be felt deeply, because self-examination is a slow, immersive process demanding that we dwell within ourselves (Moustakas, 1990; Sardello, 2011; Sultan, 2018). For me, art as research was an act of rediscovery, reclamation, and transformation. 'Becoming,' as Deleuze and Guattari describe it, is not a change between two states from a point of departure to a point of arrival; one is in the middle, experimenting without destination' (Janssens & Steyaert, 2001, p. 12).

The first participant-engaged arts-based research, which involved artmaking with another, occurred in a studio session, painting alongside Andrew (Chapter Two). I asked a few questions, which encouraged conversation about our methods and experiences of making as we worked together. Andrew generously shared insights and teachings important to his learning (see Chapter Two for more on this). This collaborative space was consciously set up for research purposes, so I consciously decided to let my attention to art making take a backstage position and reminded myself throughout that I was in a researcher identity for this time, facilitating and leading conversations, unable to fully immerse myself as an artist.

Conversely, when making art alone for this research, I was most able to immerse myself fully in the process, bringing myself as an artist to centre stage, allowing her to engage fully in the art-making process as it unfolded. Privately, I could become an artist in the process, working with various materials. Most often, my making was a response to thoughts, feelings, memories, or dreams, frequently emerging after reflective

journaling. My painting was spontaneous, moving fluidly from drawing to colour and composition. Visual metaphors surfaced naturally. As research and art making progressed, the auto/self-aspect of the ethnographic process strengthened. Writing my stories reflected the narratives shared by learners, interpersonal spaces, and conversations, significantly shaping my understanding of pedagogical processes and spaces. By working across all a/r/tographic identities, I could tell the story of my own and the 'other's' experience (see Chapter Three for A/R/Tography in more detail). I aimed to capture the essence of the collective phenomenon by paying attention to the resonant relationships we inhabited and responding sensitively (Rosa 2019). Moustakas (1990) validates subjective research by asking,

> 'Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one's own rigorous, exhausting self-searching and the explications of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience?'
>
> Moustakas, 1990 p. 32.

Creative writing, particularly poetry, provided another expressive outlet. Unlike painting, writing requires less physical space and time, allowing immediate and dynamic engagement with research. Poems often arrived in the early morning, spilled out of my dreams/nightmares, and into my phone's 'notes' app. Too bleary-eyed to engage with them then I would return to reflect on them later, contemplating their place, if any, in this research. My growing body of written notes included observations, academic references, book titles, conversations, poetry, and reflective meditations. The multiple ways of writing with so many different motivations, voices, and intentions were useful to this research in many ways, but it was, I believe, the pages of personal writing, journaling, poetry, life history, and evocative autoethnography in an arts-based research framework, that most clearly and accurately informed the direction of this research.

Emerging personal narratives surfaced memories and learning moments I

had repressed/ forgotten about. I recognised I was excavating memory for knowledge accessed through heart and soul engagement (O'Neill, 2006; Zohar & Marshall, 2012; Romanshyn, 2007; Rendón, 2023). These narratives appeared not only in writing but also in painted and three-dimensional forms. Over time, the intertwining of arts-based methodology and auto-ethnographical writing became more contiguous and interconnected.

In art making, we experience the phenomenon of 'flow,' a deep state of focus where time seems to dissolve (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Goldbard describes flow as an 'integral state' that opens us to an expanded reality, a space where suppressed or sublimated knowledge surfaces (Goldbard, 2013). Through writing and painting for this research, I have excavated this buried knowledge, uncovering memories and insights previously forgotten. This process has been an intense awakening, driven by curiosity and metaphor.

Metaphor, as McCormack (2012b) explains, allows us to express what eludes rational discourse. Personal symbols emerged spontaneously during my painting sessions: the Heron, which appears in Chapters Two and Three, for example, while assigned numerous symbolic meanings, became for me a powerful herald of liminal spaces, embodying my experience of 'unbelonging.' The heron as a motif became part of my personal iconography. Susan Walsh's notion of re-symbolising illuminated how symbolic art-making fosters a deeper understanding, not only of concepts but also of self and community through shared witnessing and responsive creativity (Walsh, 2004; Walsh et al., 2014). Understanding the language of shared symbols in image making helped me collaborate with artists who are naturally attuned to visual language. Visual language is nuanced and rich, and the multi-dimensional mediums, such as film, could offer rich possibilities for honouring and communicating collective experiences. Andrew used the symbol of the bluebird as a motif for freedom and brought it into images he made, which communicate his thoughts and feelings towards my situation (see Chapter Two). Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) remind us, self-study

research is ultimately moral, aimed at understanding ourselves and others more fully to educate and transform relational interactions. Our language in images helped us to recognise ourselves and one another and is enriched in an increasingly resonant relationship (Rosa 2019) throughout our living, teaching lives.



Image 5 Detail Community Vessel 2025

Chapter Two Ireland
Recognition and Resonance



ARTEFACT 12 Community Vessel- Alice Bennett-2023

Chapter Two - Ireland - Recognition and Resonance

Prologue

Monday morning. Parking the car in front of KCAT, I realise I've left my keys at home again. I can't get into the building this early unless I use the 'other' way, the one no one's supposed to know about. A wide-open secret for staff and artists alike! I pass through the passageway, across the courtyard, to the door on the right, left slightly ajar. Camphill volunteers for the third-floor residents are in and out on early morning business, but I hardly ever come across one of them in the quiet of these mornings. I climb three flights of stairs to the studio/admin floor and push open the heavy fire door with my shoulder because, as usual, my hands are full, this time with flowers from my garden, a basket of papers and a tin of muffins. The stairwell opens onto the landing, and I breathe in the smell of oil paint, dust, and slightly stale air. It's warm and heavy in here with all the windows closed, the summer heat already wrapping itself around the year-round heated building.

My office door sign makes me smile, as it always does - The Other Office' it declares, a sign cut from a thick chunk of a raw wooden plank painted with thick blobby flowers in yellow, blue and red. There are a lot of 'other' ways and spaces, things, and people in this art centre. My office is 'other' because there are only two offices, and the 'main' office is where the centre coordinator and financial administrator work. The door to my office is always unlocked, and I hoist my baggage onto the smoothly curved wooden desk which I share with D, the Studio Administrator. She'll be in later, smelling of lavender and pine needles. I turn on my computer and then stretch across the deep windowsill to open the windows wide to the outside. The Abbey Ruin sits on a blanket of green glistening meadow below. A wide, blue, cloudless sky above us all. This quiet stillness before the happy busy-ness of the day begins. I sit in my chair and notice a small piece of green card, cut out with zig-zag scissors. On it is written, 'You are not a machine!' I laugh to myself.

Andrew is reminding me to take care of myself again. I breathe in deeply, as I always do, and can't believe how lucky I am.

Definitions - Recognise[18]

2.c. transitive. To acknowledge, consider, or accept (a person or thing) as or to be something.

3.a. transitive. To acknowledge the existence or truth of; to admit knowledge or awareness of; to confess or avow.

3.c. transitive. To perceive clearly; to realise, understand, or apprehend that

5.a. transitive. To perceive to be the same as something or someone previously known or encountered; to identify (something that has been known before).

Definition- Resonance[19]

Corresponding or sympathetic response; an instance of this. In later use also: the power or quality of evoking or suggesting images, memories, and emotions; an allusion, connotation, or overtone.

[18] Oxford University Press. (n.d.). Recognise, v.¹, 2.c. In the Oxford English Dictionary. Retrieved May 27, 2025, from https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2013472976
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ARTEFACT 13 KCAT arts centre-ink on canvas-Alice Bennett 2020

> ‘The claim is that as a necessary condition for acquiring adequate beliefs about our own beliefs and desires, we need the recognition of another person. One has to recognise and be recognised by the other in order to be able to cognise oneself.’
>
> Honneth & Margalit 2001, p.19.

ARTEFACT 14 KCAT on her building, her genesis, her pedagogy

I like the way you’ve painted me, I look quite whimsical, floaty, not at all like the big solid sausage factory I used to be! You wouldn’t have recognised me in those days, gosh it’s been nearly twenty-five years now. Time flies. It was so cold inside back then, and the Kings River used to flood and pour into my ground floor. The artists used to have to stand on layers of cardboard just to keep their feet warm. Can you imagine! There were only twelve of them then, six artists and six mentors. That’s how I started actually, shall I tell you a bit about why I was made?

George McCutcheon inspired me; he had Down syndrome, lived in Ballytobin Camphill. He was completely obsessed with making constructions from boxes in the beginning, then he moved on to painting, mosaics and all sorts of amazing sculptures in wood. Anyway, the shed he used in Ballytobin as an art studio was overflowing with art materials and art books too. That’s when everyone realised he needed a bigger space. Luckily, European funding was flowing back then, and a group of dedicated volunteers rehabilitated me from the old Callan Sausage Factory. I got a whole makeover - my rooms were gutted, a literal face lift! Huge windows and doors were put in to let light flood the building, sinks, studios, under-floor heating even, those were days when money was abundant for community development all over Ireland. Because I could meet needs for arts, community, and disability I got a lot of it. George was happy, I can tell you! He really loved me. You must show them the logo he made for me. I love it, because you know, well apart from the fact that George made it, it really shows how funny and

surprising I am. You could say I've always been colouring outside the lines, it's a drawing of a dog with five legs but everyone just assumes it's a cat.



KCAT logo- George McCutcheon 1997(+-)

When I think of it, if it hadn't been for that funding in 2000 coinciding with a whole bunch of government initiatives I might never have come into existence! During the Celtic Tiger period there was so much money and support for community education[20]. And I got so many great artist educators on board, they were well paid too. I thought at that time that I'd always be able to offer lifelong learning for people ***with*** *and* ***without*** *disabilities.*

So, you know what, maybe I should go a bit further back. How long do you have? You know I can talk for Ireland when I get started on this! But seriously, I think I should tell you about Dr. Karl König, founder of the Camphill movement, a Viennese Jewish man who came to Ireland in exile to escape the nazi occupation. He had developed a brilliantly radical approach to education for children with special needs and the ethos and philosophy is what underpins everything in Camphill. It's a person-centered ethos at its core, just a simple belief that everyone is full of potential - that's what happens inside me - everyone can flourish here.

See the mural that you've depicted on my walls in your painting, well that decoration came later. I always hear visitors exclaim when they arrive here. I'm so pretty - yes, I am a little vain, but then why shouldn't I be? I'm a popular place! Those stones you've painted in the picture were put there to represent the huge stones in the river, the flow of the path outside echoes the flow of water you know. That was before the pandemic though, things were quite different, a lot has changed over the

years, mostly for good but lately, well I don't know - HSE and HIQA put new rules in place, and they got extreme, anyway I'll tell you more about that later. In my first twenty years, I used to resemble a big creative messy home more than anything. There used to be huge comfortable couches and artists used to take a nap on them or read books from the huge library or just sit and chat. The whole place smelled of M's lunches, and everyone's tummies would be rumbling waiting for them. J and S used to tinkle away on the piano during breaks when all the artists and staff would come together round the massive wooden table to eat and drink tea.

Springtime was probably my favorite time of the year, in April and May, the end-of-year artist exhibition, that's when I really shone, two hundred visitors at a time! Theatre performances, artwork flying out the door, people knew they were getting quality work from the artists, then the certificate ceremony in May - ceramicists, painters, actors, and sculptors, roses and certificates, a harp or violin playing them out for the summer. Christmas was wonderful too of course. D the local DJ with his signature classics, everyone dancing and dressed in sparkles. The big fire burning with logs and the lights on the tree flashing, disco lights casting colour on my ceiling and walls. Movie nights, historical lectures, and community meetings filled me year-round. As I said I was really popular! Or read books from the huge library or just sit and chat. The whole place smelled of M's lunches, and everyone's tummies would be rumbling waiting for them. J and S used to tinkle away on the piano during breaks when all the artists and staff would come together round the massive wooden table to eat and drink tea. Springtime was probably my favorite time of the year, in April and May, the end-of-year artist exhibition, that's when I really shone, two hundred visitors at a time! Theatre performances, artwork flying out the door, people knew they were getting quality work from the artists,

[20] *The White Paper of 2000 promised an 'expansion of adult education, for a strengthened focus on access, quality, flexibility, and responsiveness' (O'Dea, 2000) and delivered 'more streamlined, longer term and diverse funding channels to community education groups' (White Paper, 2000, p. 17).*

then the certificate ceremony in May - ceramicists, painters, actors, and sculptors, roses and certificates, a harp or violin playing them out for the summer.

Christmas was wonderful too of course. D the local DJ with his signature classics, everyone dancing and dressed in sparkles. The big fire burning with logs and the lights on the tree flashing, disco lights casting colour on my ceiling and walls. Movie nights, historical lectures, and community meetings filled me year-round. As I said I was really popular!

I think it was this sense of me being a home that most made my artists feel like they belonged here. I'm a reassuring sort of building, artists say it doesn't matter where they come from, they feel at home here. Some of them come from horrible places, institutions really, sterile and medicalised. I just offer a relaxed space where everyone can be themselves, no matter how different. Who am I to judge? Artists need to have space and feel safe to create, they need to do more than just paint and make stuff, they need to think, reflect, talk to each other, keep playing and imagining. I always use to think that J's naps on the couch made her paint much better in the afternoon!

Artists can step away from everyday life and just dive into their imaginary and aesthetic worlds with me. As a researcher you've probably heard of Groys?[21] *Samuel agrees with him, he says I am special because, in me the artists can escape 'the dictatorship of reality' and forget about their 'daily grind'. I like that. Everyone here forgets their problems and whether they are a chair user, identify as autistic or Downs or just a 'bored housewife,' like Andrew says, they come here to make art. That's what I'm all about.*

Or I've always tried to be anyway. You know, there were times when my artists travelled the world, Japan, Australia, Germany, America, they'd go to work with others in the arts, giving

[21] *art school settings are 'meant to isolate (the student), to be a site exclusively of learning and analysis, of experimentation exempted from the urgencies of the outside world' (2009, p. 27).*

workshops and sharing all sorts of skills. I established a solid reputation of being a really progressive and radical pedagogy for diversity. But then, I have to admit there were some pretty rough years too. I was hit with demands from the outside world. If I wanted to keep going the way I was, I needed more money and so I tried to do FETAC[22] courses here. Artists and artist educators absolutely hated all the box ticking, the pretense that art making was all about filling portfolios and painting the same way as old masters. One of my facilitators actually had a breakdown trying to keep up with the admin and no-one was happy here anymore. I tell you, honestly, it made me sick too.

The artists much preferred the learning when it didn't have to be marked and graded. Everyone here just knows that artmaking emerges, it can't be forced and because it was of such a personal nature, the artmaking space was a really special place for people to develop their practices and grow and grow. Anyway, because I couldn't fit into the FETAC structure, I had to let the funding from ETB (Educational Training Board Ireland) and BTEI (Back to Education Ireland) go and accept more and more funding from the medical sector. That was very hard because I don't believe that my artists should be in a place associated with medical pathology. I had to scramble for funding from all sorts of places, which was all very ad hoc and very insecure. The Arts Council and the HSE (Health Service Executive) continued to be a funding support for a few of the professional artists and actors so they could still take part in fantastic cultural and aesthetic projects in Ireland and abroad but artist learners who wanted to attend courses from the private sector paid increasingly high private course fees.

Anyway, the agenda for lifelong learning, which had become the 'cornerstone' of policy on adult and community education in the 2000s, actually ended up coming against us[23]. I needed a sustainable, continuous funding stream to keep the needs-based model everyone had worked so hard to build. It became more and more difficult to keep the courses going and plan from year to year. I couldn't promise staff contracts or even hours from one year to the next.I think, and I have to

come back to this again and again, is what always worked so well was that my community was always about the people; it put the needs of each individual first.

Every artist had their own needs, and each person was considered separately. I always asked, 'What did each need to be genuinely served?' you know? [24] I just did what I could with what I had. And the energy and care of the artist educators were essential to that. The artist learners, too, were fully involved and spoke their minds. And because there were so many minds and so many voices, it meant I could go in any direction, too! It was always fluid, organic - things were always changing. But in a good way, you know? A vibrant, resilient 'eco-system,' like Samuel says (see artefact 17).

Remember that researcher Groys[25] I was talking about, he said that art education can be anything at all because art students in art schools are always looking for the new, the alternative[26]. Art spaces are supposed to be responsive to changes; that is what I believe, anyway.

I think art spaces should be open to all kinds of people and ideas as well. Art spaces couldn't work if there was only one type of person working there! I welcome everyone, as long as they agree to be kind, respectful, and focus on the art-making. If I welcome everyone, then everyone learns so much more about each other and themselves[27]. I don't believe that learning is just for some and not for others, everyone has a right to learn what they want to learn, and that it's my job, along with the artist educators and management, to help them to do that. There are a lot of people who think that people with disabilities shouldn't be going to college or getting degrees. It's sad, but true, that that's a way of thinking in the world.

Education shouldn't be a power thing[28] A lot of society still sees artmaking as an indulgence; they think it's useless for the economy and that artists are a waste of time and a drain on the welfare[29]. It makes me so mad sometimes, if they could actually see how incredible the artists here are, how much they understand about getting along with each other, they celebrate all their differences and have such respect for each other[30]. The

politicians of the world could learn a lot! Anyway, I think that's what makes this learning space so special. Everyone recognises each other[31].

A lot of the world's problems might vanish if we could really recognise each other, that's what I think. When someone sees you, you feel like you have something to contribute, you have an identity, a purpose, and a place to belong to. I want my artists to feel they belong. I want everyone to feel like they are part of a bigger community. It's like we are all in it together, all trying to make the best art we can, artist educators and artist learners. It's like creativity needs others to flourish, any inventor, even a genius, is always a plant growing in a certain time and in a certain environment[32]

I think though, and this is important, that I've always had such amazing artist educators working here. And they make it their business to forge relationships with the artist learners. When the artist learner understands just how open the artist educator is to them, then the magic happens. Every key is a different shape for every artist learner, and the artist educator finds that key unlocking their special skills. They guide each person to make their own path to learning. It's quite wonderful to watch each artist growing in their own way. And the artist educator never acts as if they 'know it all.' They model that they are always learning too.

Theres a sort of shared responsibility for all the teaching and learning that happens here and it really depends on trust. Trust is key, that's why good relationships between the artist educators and artist learners is so important. It's all about relationships, knowledge is always shifting, it's in the sharing of the doing and the conversations afterwards that the learning really happens[33]*. I'm always amazed at the new innovative things that happen here. It's like everyone wants to find new ways of doing things and it doesn't matter if it works or fails, the fun seems to be in the trying.*

I told you I could talk for Ireland, but listen, why don't you just come in and see me? You'd be so welcome, I'll pop the kettle on….

[22] *The 2014–2019 SOLAS Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy adopted an 'outputs-based, economic model that prioritised employability over everything else and that relegated community education to little more than a way to attract so-called 'hard-to-reach' learners into vocational programmes' (Magrath & Fitzsimons, 2019, p. 41)*

[23] *There existed 'a disconnect between community education funders and providers where funders are implementing an 'outcomes-based funding model, which prioritises jobs activation over social inclusion' (Magrath & Fitzsimons, 2019, p. 38).*[24] *(Magrath & Fitzsimons, 2019).*

[25] *Groys (2009)*

[26] *'Art education is an education that functions more as an idea of education'*[26] *(Groys, 2009, p. 27).*

[27] *Freire, 1970; hooks, 2006; Illich, 1971*

[28] *Greenstein, 2016; Foucault, 1977, 1980*

[29] *Freire, 1970; Bennett, 2015*

[30] *Greenstein, 2016*

[31] Rosa 2019

[32] *(Vygotsky, as cited in Runco & Pritzker, 1966).*

[33] Praxis- Freire 1980

ARTEFACT 15 STEP INSIDE KCAT- FILM- 2023



This film will take you inside KCAT (Kilkenny Collective for Arts Talent). Right click anywhere on the film to follow the You Tube link.

Reflecting on KCAT and Her Story

It's the sounds that get me, resonate with me, stir me; they're so evocative, reminding me of all the years I spent inside KCAT's lovely 'self.' It's just as she describes it, warm, homely, welcoming. You feel that there's hope in the world after visiting her. And it's because of the way she treats people, with human dignity and respect. At the heart of meaningful learning in art pedagogy is this attitude of respect and recognition of the creative potential and personal evolution of each individual. For deep connection to occur, between self and other, there must also be an openness to creative flow, and a reverence for lived experience. Within this space, trust, curiosity, and resonance guide their relationship. The artist-educator and the learner engage in a shared, transformative journey.

Her approach to art pedagogy is grounded in non-judgment and an organic unfolding of exploration. In KCAT, learning is not an imposed duty towards a fixed outcome, it's invited - not coerced but gently coaxed into being in a relational experience.

I think about the moments when artworks are nearing their completion, and everyone is there to witness it being 'birthed.' For a long time before that moment, that artwork was hidden from the shared space, it was deeply personal and could not be shared fully. The manifesting power of creating something which started from within the learner into an open shared space is profound. An artwork emerges, slips quietly into existence and there is often joy and surprise for both artist and viewer, at its genesis. In these moments, the artwork can stir something in those who witness it; it resonates with them. This resonance is often accompanied by the 'double surprise' that Samuel speaks of - the learner's realisation of what they've achieved, and the emotional echo it creates when shared with others. In that moment, something intangible comes into being - an understanding, a spark of mutual recognition, a shared humanity.

The role of the artist educator is to see and nurture the unique gifts each artist learner has the potential to build. It is the artist educator's role to create fertile ground for moments of self-realisation for the learner. This is not merely an instruction and information sharing action, but more of a facilitation of encounters for the learner to recognise their own creative capacity, facilitation of moments when the learner feels seen, heard, and deeply valued.

To be acknowledged in this way is to be affirmed as someone who matters, someone with insight, perspective, and a voice worth sharing. It is through this sense of belonging that identity is shaped, purpose discovered, and confidence allowed to grow. In such a space, the relationship between learner and artist-educator is not hierarchical, but mutual; not transactional, but relational.

This shared learning becomes a living dialogue within a relationship, ideas are exchanged, knowledge is co-created, and resonance is nurtured through conversation, collaboration, and trust. By modelling openness and vulnerability, by sharing uncertainties, artist-educators invite artist learners into a partnership of equals, where both are shaped by the learning journey. Critical reflection is essential here. When educator and learner engage in reflective dialogue around the complexities and joys of the creative process, they not only deepen their understanding but also honour the messiness and beauty of becoming. Learning, in this context, is dynamic, unfolding through shared inquiry and lived experience.

At its core, this approach honours individuality, human difference, uniqueness, and the slow unfurling of potential. Compassion is a guiding force, ensuring each learner feels held and protected as they navigate their personal, creative path.

Knowledge in a space like KCAT is fluid, a shifting space shaped by each artist learner's individual rhythm, pace, and voice. Growth emerges not from predefined outcomes, but from the freedom to explore, question, and resonate with their work, with each other and with the artist educator- on their own terms.

ARTEFACT 16 A Visit to Samuel's Studio

It's a chilly December morning, and I wait for the door to open to Samuel's studio. In a few seconds, I hear his footsteps, and he stands there, unchanged after months, with a familiar and welcoming smile on his face. Stepping into this two-storey house given over to his working life is a strange and profound experience. He turns on the light for the passageway.

I am face-to-face with an enormous fan-shaped sculpture, hung in the narrow space. Deeply dark and luminously bright colours, laid side by side in the finest of line work, cascade over the surface, refracting in folds. Mountains and valleys of the meditative landscape, which for me, defines Samuel's work. I am not an art critic, nor am I qualified to comment on this work, but I know how it makes me feel. Each piece hits me viscerally, a squeeze of the heart, a punch to the gut. I have stepped into another world where Samuel. reigns. As he shows me through passageways and into rooms, I find it hard to concentrate on what he is saying to me. I am overwhelmed by the large architectural shapes his paintings have assumed. When I last saw these paintings, they were flattened expanses of visual plane, in two dimensions stretched across the walls. It is as if a tsunami, a wicked wind, has passed through this space and transformed everything - instead of paintings, there are pillars, fans, cabinets, castellations, and balustrades.

Samuel is explaining to me that he has to leave this space in a few days, weeks, months, he is not sure, but he has been forced by a 'logistical nightmare' to fold, bend, and minimise every piece for removal and storage. He is also telling me that the longed-for anonymity he sought not too long ago has come against him as he now looks for curators to take on his work for showing.

I recognise his humility, surely, they will be clamouring to snap up this opportunity.

Climbing the stairs, there are pieces on every wall, suspended monoliths, and more giant fan shapes. We turn into another room, and it is as if I

have stepped into someone else's nightmare. Dark leather angels are suspended on the walls, their impossibly heavy wings now fallen to the floor. Samuel. picks up a stretch of wings, carved in wood, and painted. I have an impression of him as the guardian attendant of this small tribe, able to breathe life into them at his will.

I have no words here and have stopped hearing Samuel, except I register that he wants me to know that the work is supposed to unsettle the viewer. I am both drawn and repulsed by the characters who stand in communion. Angular and soft at the same time, menacing and humorous all at once. They are all wearing tiny, pointed leather slippers, impossibly dainty and impossible to stand on. I am fixated on the only angel who has no shoes. He is telling me that he took a cast of a dancer's feet many years ago, and these are hers, tiny and hobbled with her craft, they are strapped with leather and metal studs to the fragile painted ankles.

By the time we move into his studio, I want to close my eyes, sharp pointy teeth smile at me from strangely shaped heads, and a blood red tissue heart in an exquisite glass vial beats into my brain. I am still processing the paper eyes of Samuel. himself, which have been inserted into a skinned rabbit's face, a self-portrait. I sit down on the chair he pulls up for me at his huge worktable and try to gather myself.

On Being an Artist Educator- Pedagogical Illuminations

It has always been this way for me; this sense of overwhelm in the presence of incredible original art and its makers. All my senses overload. The colours, the shapes, the format/size/scope, the message - a flood of wonder, I want to swallow it all, internalise it. It's a type of hunger and at the same time a sort of surrender. I want to consume and be consumed by it. Art has the power to move me both emotionally and cognitively, to teach me, and illuminate understanding. Like an evangelist who feels they know the only way to truth, I am passionate about telling other people that art has this power, that it can create opportunity for enlightenment and self-transformation, and I want to share it. Art creates a vibration which resonates, a power which touches and moves us (Rosa 2019). In art, we can discover and rediscover, keep on discovering. We can muse and follow our curiosity to revelation and illumination. Samuel opens his door, and a whole new world of imagination and possibility opens up to the viewer. In Samuel's art world, we can rest, float, and suspend our daily routines, escape the grind, let our imaginations reign.

And we can understand each other and ourselves. When I am invited into Samuel's world, he allows me to see him, really see him, recognise him for who he is beneath his day-to-day presentation. Without words, I can share his nightmares, his fears, his deepest inmost thoughts, and emotions. We come into a deeply resonant relationship with him through his art (Rosa 2019). This communion is intense and rare in a world where we have become so busy and focused on economic and other forms of survival that we have little time and presence for others. Art in all its forms allows us to transcend ourselves and make connections (Rosa 2019), recognise ourselves in one another (Biffi & Zuccoli 2016, Eisner 2002, Goopy & Kassan 2019). As art educators and practitioners, the act of being present with fellow creators demands that we are fully engaged, I am fully present as an educator and co-creator. This presence is not a

performance nor is it an act of collegiality or teaching - it is an educational practice involving a pedagogical presence that must give of Self to reach new spaces of possibility with Others' (Johnston, 2018, p. viii).

I address Samuel fondly as Maestro, a term he shrugs off, but smiles at anyway. We have been friends and colleagues for many years, but I hold him in deep reverence as an artist and artist educator. I invited Samuel to contribute to this research because, for staff and learners at KCAT (Kilkenny Collective for Arts Talent), as well as within the broader Kilkenny community where he lives and works, he has become a role model, a kind of legend - a Master of Art, Life, and Education. I find him esoterically brilliant. At times, I struggle to keep pace with his intricate conceptualisations and philosophical reflections on the history and current state of the world. Yet, despite the abstract nature of his thought, Samuel consistently embodies care, love, and kindness. He holds a deep respect and love for humanity.

Samuel. is one of the founding artists and educators at the KCAT Arts Centre, which forms the central context of this thesis. I wanted him to introduce KCAT to the reader because his lifelong commitment to community education and inclusive artmaking has shaped the centre's distinctive pedagogical philosophy. As a sculptor with a background in painting and graphic design, Samuel brings his whole self, his lived experience and artistic skill, into his role as mentor and artist-educator. Through his reflections on the creative process and his understanding of KCAT as a 'safe space for creativity,' he articulates the transformative potential of artmaking and pedagogy in shaping personal identity.

He also possesses a deep knowledge of KCAT's history and its evolving identity as part of the Camphill Communities of Ireland. Samuel's approach to teaching is grounded in principles of community education and demonstrates authentic alignment between his values and his pedagogical practice. This congruence between his ontology and his

method earns him the respect of both staff and learners. He has the ability to engage with individuals while also maintaining an awareness of KCAT's broader role within the wider socio-economic and cultural sphere.

My relationship and ongoing conversations with Samuel provide a rich environment for exploring the pedagogical space we have co-inhabited. We have shared kitchens and studios, travelled in Europe together, walked by rivers, and, through it all, talked, at length and in depth. Our conversations have shaped my understanding of KCAT's approach to art education, which we agree, is a radically inclusive and distinctive form of art pedagogy. These dialogues have also led me to reflect on how KCAT has challenged my understanding of knowledge and fostered personal growth, particularly through its encouragement of intuitive and creative dimensions of the self. Artmaking enables a deeper recognition of others' experiences and, through this, a clearer understanding of oneself. Through my exchanges with Samuel, I came to see more clearly that this dynamic process of mutual recognition is a vital component of meaningful pedagogy. It allows us to reframe personal and particular experiences as shared and universal (Honneth & Margalit, 2001; Rosa, 2019). Several years after what we (Samuel and I) have come to describe as 'the decline of KCAT,' a period marked by funding cuts, increased managerialism, and the commodification of its programmes, I resumed conversations with Samuel. Together, we reflected on the unique pedagogy that had characterised KCAT. We discussed how the recognition of self and other, and the fostering of resonant relationships through teaching, learning, and artmaking, formed the core of this educational philosophy. Samuel. knows this pedagogy intimately. However, he notes that theorising it retrospectively is difficult, as reflection, planning, and formal assessment were never central to KCAT's approach. These processes were embedded in lived, relational, and creative practice, rather than external frameworks.

Below, I show just a small selection of some of the conversations we shared. I show you only Samuel's words (not my own) because I respect these as Samuel's own unique contribution to this thesis. His insightful ruminations are here to illuminate and extend themes of art pedagogy, resonance and recognition within the unique space that is KCAT Arts Centre.

KCAT began not as a specific place but as a series of studio collaborations. There were several of us. In 1999, I got a phone call, I was asked if I would receive a visitor every week in my own studio and send my invoice to Camphill. Well, first of all, the guy I was supposed to work with, and this is ridiculous, could no longer take part because he got a kidney transplant and suddenly the HSE[34] redefined him as not having special needs, quite ridiculous, so that mentorship never took place! Later, I got a phone call from P.B. and N, and they told me they were creating a place called KCAT, and instead of people coming to us in our studios, they asked us (artist mentors) to come to this building and work with people there. It was only maybe five of us, and we were sharing the same space in the old sausage factory. In the beginning, there were the full-timers (artist learners) because there was funding from FETAC, and they were trying to do FETAC Level Five. The selection process for people who worked as staff in KCAT, back then, and even recently, was done more by word of mouth. It really was just a group of people who were known to each other and came to work together. I suppose the recruitment process appeared somewhat disorganised, but when you reflect on it, there was a certain sort of person who was typical of working there. People who were working artists certainly, but also those who had certain qualities. Perhaps it was relational; there was always a certain organic aspect to everything that was done in KCAT.

It was also always a mixed group of artist learners from the beginning. Little by little, neurotypical learners joined the people in KCAT. Some were permanent artists, and the full-time course attracted a lot of young people preparing portfolios for college. The sense of mixing between different types of people was always there. It was interesting, it established itself mysteriously. The Celtic tiger was the basis for it, and you know, sometimes in history you have a group of individuals who come together and create something extraordinary. This is what

happened. In the beginning we didn't have a sense of direction or anything and I always say, you know - leave it like this - its better. We were practice based, certainly. Little obvious planning went into the course 'curriculum.' We organised sessions around the needs of the particular individuals who were in each group, and I think this was in many ways the key to its success. One of the beauties of KCAT in fact was that we were so fixated on the idea of practice, there was very little reflection and in fact, one of the few times there was reflection was this (PhD) because you came and said, well can you actually reflect, because otherwise we were just there, and we simply jumped onto the paper. Just do it, you know? We made very little reflection, we never actually reflected as such, there were very, very, few moments in all my years in KCAT that we engaged in reflection, or even in a philosophical approach to doing anything, because we based it on allowing these people (KCAT artist learners) to move into a different plane. One they chose themselves. It was impossible to plan because of the extreme diversity of the learner group. We adjusted all our approaches, our methods, sharpened them in response to each individual to meet their needs.

In the beginning we were trying to find ways to make life and the art interesting for people and to this end, we practiced a very much hands on approach. There were, of course, technical discussions because you had to respect the primary concept in which people came there, which was to make art. I think, you know, that sometimes things only really worked in a very real way - like the fashion show, it happened simply because of the materials we had to hand, we created a show out of the materials that were available in the stockroom. That's how it happened. In the courses there was of course a 'sense' of curriculum where we taught people basic skills and techniques. This idea, of course, was very much that way, right from the start. For instance, in the early days I decided that we were going to paint light and so we had these little

candles, we turned the lights off and people were painting holding the candle in their hands - that was very basic and probably very stupid because there was paper and…fire, but it took people's imaginations

because suddenly, you know, here they are, painting light in the dark. There are so many examples like this, where, as a facilitator we would simply take everyone outside, stimulate a moment, create a specific situation for inspiration, but again, there was no real reflection on our actions or methods.

There was no need because the environment was so positive - it was working. People felt respected and so they respected themselves and others in turn, and the atmosphere was good. These learners are adults you know, they come with their 'self' already formed, you have to respect that. And that respect was also for diversity. The atmosphere of respect helped towards creating an environment for people to flourish in, that and our authenticity with them. I remember a time when I was explaining something about sculpture to G and she handed me the wood and the tool and said, 'show me then!' As an educator you had to know how to do the thing, be ready to demonstrate, to show it to the student, you had to have a sense of humility too. As educators we were trying to create conditions for people to thrive in. I remember another woman coming to the centre at a time when we had full-timers (Fetac students) and initially, she was very against artist educators, just you know completely against artist educators which was very silly really, but you know, in a few months she was completely transformed and simply because of being in that space, breathing that air with others.

The outside world is the space from which the KCAT participant emerges on arrival and that submerges and reclaims her or him when the working day closes. What happens during the daily engagement is a wonderful exercise in fantasy and a creative form of indulgence with a very faint connection to the daily grind of life. It is, in a real sense, an engagement with a form of abstract behaviour free of the dictatorship of reality and its indignities. People are removed from the normality of the way that they are seen by the state and classified, there is a social and political duty to allow people with special needs to be able to eclipse the way they are defined by the state so that they can transmute their identity into a more humanistic definition based on their artistic achievements.

As an artist, you are transformed. You are a painter, an artist, a sculptor, and you are not defined by the fact that you have Down syndrome. I think that this was always a political thing in KCAT. The idea of KCAT in this sense is revolutionary. When people came there, their medical identity was discarded; it was not ignored, of course, you have to adapt yourself, but the ultimate goal was to allow that person as a human being to, through the practice of creativity to emerge as a transformed person basically. It was a privilege really, seeing extraordinary, amazing things happening in that space.

The basis of everything is to look for sparks of individualism, that primary engagement you have with the student, and the chameleon behaviour of the educator is the nearest thing I can think of to adapt your discourse and pedagogy to the recipient. And sometimes it depends on the person, but they are flexible. So, like the chameleon, as an educator, you change your response, your colour, if you are talking to one person and then another, you are completely different. It is a political act. The only thing you can do is allow people to develop their own ways, create moments of happiness, of surprise of achievement. This is the respect I am talking about, if you try to over influence the outcome of their work you are denying them the respect they deserve.

You have to respect that individual's life baggage and to respect the exact amount of interest that they can have in the work. It is difficult to think about it and to explain how the thing works. We have so many different characters there you know. One who is quite opiniated, quite sure about his influences, and has an extraordinary knowledge about painting and practice, and you have other people who arrive there and have only a very specific interest in drawing, I don't know…. cartoons. So how do you adapt yourself as an educator? I cannot really define how you do it, the only thing you have to have is a lot of empathy and I think this is probably a critical point and you understand they are there, and they want to be there, well at least this is what we assume in most cases. In general, I think you can say that KCAT was an inviting space because people felt themselves to be able to behave properly in that ecosystem, so everybody - everybody, comes from the daily grind of life, not just the

people with special needs, but people like you and me.

KCAT can be defined as a safe space for creativity. It is clearly a space in which the participant works in an atmosphere that is not judgmental, not dictatorial in terms of ideology or concept and absolutely not prescriptive in style. To dictate norms would have been denying the individual differences of people. We didn't need to explain to everyone what was to be done, what was to be made, as that would have predicted the outcome. And so, planning was somewhat unnecessary. We took materials, we showed some skills, and we let people have the freedom to find their way. The position of a mentor or artist educator trying to inform, correct or modify that process is, in that case, extremely precarious and suspect.

Creativity has to be defined, by its nature, as transformative, probably non-conformist, always differentiated from the norm. The ultimate successful outcome in an academic artistic context has to be the undermining of that discipline. How can we engage in a meaningful and positive way with such an ethereal and subtle enterprise?'

We really need to understand creativity as the attempt and sometimes the achievement of the completion of a moment in time or an object that transcends the quotidian. I think that the experience of transcendence is private to the individual. The success or not of the work when confronted by the spectator can be clearly separated from the private joy of completion by the artist. A great work of art, a wonderful poem, is only successful when the exhilaration of the experience in the creation of that work is understood and communicated in full to the viewer, the reader. The empirical demonstration of that affirmation is best observed by analysing the not uncommon phenomena of what I call 'The Double Surprise.' The first one happens when on completion of the work, the participant realises that she or he has achieved something remarkable, an accomplishment probably not conceivable a few days or even hours earlier. The second one is, of course, when, as a result of an exhibition of the work, the family and friends stand in astonishment, having discovered an extra dimension to a friend or family member that

had been hidden from them before. This was what the End of Year Exhibition did, families and friends arrived and saw a whole new and other aspect to their loved one. The End of Year Exhibition really was the 'proof of the pudding' as it were, it proved that our ways in KCAT worked.

That extra-ordinary quality of the daily work that occurs in KCAT, practiced in an ecosystem that is defined by its openness, where different abilities are welcome and, indeed, celebrated is exactly what makes KCAT a fascinating space. You have to understand that the KCAT space works as some imaginary ecosystem, a forest populated by different species that share the same territory, very much aware of each other but engaged in their own pursuits. Some of the participants dominate the relationships at certain times, engaged in a particularly interesting outburst of creativity and it is the duty of the artist educator to bring to the attention of the group that successful outcome and to moderate at the same time that dominance, distributing, as far as possible, a modicum of attentiveness and public exposure to participants that don't enjoy that degree of self-confidence, finding an equilibrium between giving the student freedom and holding the learning space for them is the tricky part . The practice of the visual arts is best understood, like other similar endeavours, as a self-interrogation that has to be undertaken, in general, in the solitude of the private sphere. And what I remember and understand was that there was a contradiction between art, the practice of art or any artistic endeavour and at the same time this has to be done in the context of an institution and then there's tension.

The pandemic was a huge shock, and it collapsed everything. But in fact, the pandemic was a historical moment in which many, many things were changing in Camphill, a very different world was beginning. The idea of those imaginary spaces at that time were being transformed into institutions. You know when I was interested in communism (until I discovered, of course, that the 'practice of' was different to the 'theory of') .... It was the same with the HSE for me; the pandemic came, and the new management transformed these spaces into institutions basically. Do you know they even want to lower the salary of the artist

educators who are in KCAT now? It's incredible, yes, a complete disaster. Artist-educators begin in KCAT as economic refugees working precariously; some stay, some move on……..

This conversation with Samuel in his Studio, along with follow-up meetings where we talked about our experiences within KCAT as a context for learning and being with one another, were particularly important to me. They allowed me to reclaim the rich and enjoyable aspects of working there before its 'decline' and also showed me how it was experienced from another's perspective. Another's story helped me to reframe my own experience through reminiscence. Our shared experiences deepened our understanding for one another and place our own stories in a wider context.

Below, I enter into conversation with another artist - Andrew Pike. His multifaceted practice bridges theatre and visual arts. As both a professional actor and a visual artist working in film, sculpture, and painting, Andrew's work and philosophy significantly influence our understanding of the value of adult learning through art process

34 HSE- The Health Service Executive (HSE) manages all of the public health services in Ireland, including personal social services.
https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/health/health-system/health-service-executive/ accessed 07/07/202

Conversations with an Artist- Andrew Pike

Like Samuel, Andrew was one of the first six artists to join KCAT. He was a contemporary of George McCutcheon and, like George, had been labelled as having an intellectual disability. Joining KCAT in his fifties marked a pivotal moment in Andrew's life. Since then, he has travelled widely across Europe, Australia, and Japan, exhibiting his work, facilitating workshops, and participating in artistic collaborations. Through his artwork, Andrew communicates his values, his humour, and a deep compassion for humanity and the world.

In 2018, one of Andrew's self-portraits was included in the National Self-Portrait Collection of Ireland at the University of Limerick. The following year, he was awarded an honorary fellowship by the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology in recognition of his 'unique contribution to the Irish cultural landscape'[35]. These recognitions were groundbreaking, marking the rare inclusion of an artist with disabilities into mainstream artistic institutions and collections.

Unfortunately, the designation of 'vulnerable person' label assigned to Andrew by the medical and state systems posed ethical complications for our research relationship for this thesis. Initially, I had hoped that Andrew could join me as an equal co-researcher for this research - this was vetoed by the University Ethics Committee and so we chose not to label his role formally. Andrew is a friend, colleague, and an important contributor to this research.

Over the years, I accompanied Andrew to exhibition openings and workshops. We would drive for hours in companionable silence, stay in hotels, attend conferences, share meals in restaurants, and enjoy drinks together with colleagues in pubs. The relationship deepened with time. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we spent many hours talking online, exchanging images we had drawn or painted. Andrew told me how much these conversations meant to him during that difficult period, and how the

journaling he undertook as part of this research project was, in his words, keeping (him) alive.' Our collaborative process drew on conversation, art-making, and reflective commentary through artworks. In this, we assumed roles as collegial a/r/tographers (Irwin & Springgay, 2005).

In those years, we shared a commitment to safeguarding the distinctive pedagogy of KCAT which was being increasingly threatened by managerial pressures and the commodification of learning. We both experienced the profound, transformational effects of learning and working at KCAT. Our hope was that the research would honour and celebrate it as a space where people- and art - could truly flourish. Andrew often used his public speeches and interviews to advocate for continued support of such creative spaces. In his words 'Without places like KCAT the culture of this country would vanish and then we would be sorry. A sorry nation. Art is the way we communicate.' (Pike 2020)

Andrew worked in a studio on the same floor as my office, and he visited me daily. Our conversations flowed easily, ranging from art and work to global issues, our experiences in hot climates, and our shared dislike of Ireland's cold grey skies. Over time, I came to know Andrew well, as he frequently shared stories from his life. Our relationship was relaxed, marked by humour, spirited debate, and a comfortable stillness in each other's presence. Andrew possessed a depth of experience and an intuitive understanding of the creative pedagogy I had long admired. In our conversations, I recognised a form of intelligence that seemed to me to be 'wisdom.' As Rendón (2018) writes, drawing from Thompson and O'Dea (2001).

> 'Wisdom is borne of personal and communal reflection on life as it unfolds; on happiness, suffering and the causes of each. It requires a maturing process which incorporates courage, insight and at times letting go of the need to know and resting in paradox. Unlike knowledge, wisdom is rooted in much deeper spiritual soil. It requires the cultivation of multiple intelligences.
>
> Thompson & O'Dea, 2001, p. 6, as cited in Rendón, 2018, p. xx.

Below, I curate Andrew's side of some of the conversations we shared. These evocative vignettes illuminate themes of pedagogy, resonance, and other things, including a philosophy of life redolent of multiple intelligences.

[35] https://circaartmagazine.net/dominic-thorpe-in-conversation-with-andrew-pike/ Accessed 18/07/2025

When I went to school, it was horrible, and I didn't like it at all.

We had twenty or thirty in the class, and we never had one-to-one. We talk about education, and the teacher should, if they have a kid with dyslexia or any difficulties, they should have one-to-one time, and they should encourage them to learn by saying 'You've got to do this,' but not in a nasty way. In the 1950's schools, kids were terrified of going to school, and the officers would come to the parents and say the kid had to come to school, but they were terrified of school, and so they didn't want to learn. A lot of people didn't think that I learned anything at school, but I learned outside school rather than in school because in my day, they called me 'backward, lazy' and everything else under the sun.

We found our place in life, KCAT gave it to us. I think KCAT has made me assertive. I can speak my mind, and I love doing Art, and I know this is what it (KCAT) does; it's a place where people come, and they learn. Even housewives, bored, looking after their kids and looking after their husbands, come and do a painting course, but at the same time, we (in KCAT) have taught them to be assertive. To learn to say Yes or No, and that's the main thing, it is allowing them to express their own thing, of what they want to say, they do it in painting, sometimes they do it in dance, sometimes in sculpture, whatever, but I think this is the most important thing. Most of the people we have in KCAT have a learning difficulty. This learning difficulty is not a hindrance to them. It encourages them to learn more and when they do, they meet interesting people - they are happy, they can express their feelings and that's the way it should be.

I think education is on the line. We learn, every day, something new, a new trick, even if we cut courses, we still learn something! So, really, it's just that and I think learning is the most important part of education. You never stop learning even now, and you know at 73, I'm still learning new tricks and trying to keep myself healthy but also learning to live life and I've met a lot of people. I've been in Germany, I've been in France;

Northern Italy and I think really, it's time for people in education to just accept that some people with learning difficulties, dyslexia or any learning difficulties should be helped, and not ignored. And not say 'okay they can't learn, they won't be able to.' But you know when they come to KCAT they find it easy, simple, and lovely, it's a family. It's not just 'oh you've got to do this, you've got to do that', which is what I had when I was at school in the 1950's and in the 1960's, in the end they can see that there is nothing wrong with these people, they just get things mixed up, it doesn't matter, we have to sort of accept that is the way they are, and I think KCAT has accepted a lot of things. We are open-minded and if we have to have a course or a set-up, a learning scheme, we have to really be conscious of this, so this consciousness is the way we are. Well, we work together as a team, and education is part of it, and I think we educate the Mentor (artist educators), and the Mentors almost torment us and so we call them Tormentors! (laughing) Mentors learn, and they love coming to KCAT and I think that's important.

ARTEFACT 19 Andrew on Inclusion and Outsider art

As I say, we are just artists. I don't like the term 'outsider art.' I hate it. I would like to dig a hole and bury it. The only thing I say is we don't have disabilities. We are just artists, and inclusion is just what we do. We are not an exclusive club, we don't say sorry you are not good. We just let people come in and do art just for the sake of it. So really to me KCAT is a forum for other things to happen, I'll be glad if similar structures develop in other places. I think that will solve problems. We are an inclusive art studio, and we don't care about disability. We just do art. I notice a lot of mainstream artists come here to meet us and look around and they just are blown away. They say 'What?" Have people with disability done this?' And I say, 'yes they did!' They look at me as if to say you've got two heads! No, we don't, we just do our work ourselves. Earlier on, when KCAT was just starting, Tony O'Malley humbly looked at it and said this is what it is to see people helping each other to do art.

And that to me this is a marvellous thing.

ARTEFACT 20 Andrew on the Empathetic Heart and Resonance

One day when I was a boy, I was looking at a blackbird, just staring at the blackbird, nothing else, just staring at the blackbird, and it was on the green, green grass and finally when it flew away, I found I was still staring at the blackbird on the grass.

My mum was shouting my name over and over, but I had blocked the outside world out.

Now after living on this earth as long as I have, I think we have in the last few years messed it up and I think that in the future if we're not careful, this earth will disappear.

We haven't done enough to stop pollution and erosion, and everything else under the sun. And really, I think it's about time that everyone stopped thinking that it's about money, it's not, it's a home that God created for us. Our home is earth and it's beautiful so why wreck it!

And what for! I say to the businessmen 'Go to hell.'
I think this poor planet - we are destroying it as fast as we can. It's sad, it's really sad.
I hate to say that.

We are going to have a stinking, rotting, dying world. Living on this earth is very fragile, and we are destroying it. The trouble I have seen with my naked eye.

The aftereffect of a nuclear explosion is not an attractive sight. I have seen it myself. It was like a sunset, but different - down below, a line of black, dark brown, going into black and over the top of that pink, then a real orange, and then up above - a light mauve blue, and that was from the explosion, it blocked the sun, and it was a kind of sunset.

Oh my God! It was miles south of where I was, but I could see it with the naked eye. I was about twenty-five, the French were doing the same further north, I didn't see that one, but my mother knew about that, we all knew, and we were all shattered by it. The British did it, the Australian coast and Christmas Island and you know it's never been the same since. Peculiar things happened to the animals and the fish and plants. Strange things happened. I remember Chernobyl, we were working in Duffcarrig and there was thin red dust over everything and that was from Chernobyl, and we planted tomatoes. There were extra tomato plants growing all along the stem, you pinched one out and there was

another, you know, the tomatoes were lovely, but there were odd things going on. You could have a plant growing there, but different things were happening to it. Different shapes and you'd say, I wonder what the hell's going on, that was nature telling us not to interfere.

I was a gardener for a long time. I'd look at the flowers and everything else, and when I did, I was absolutely in heaven, in a trance. One morning I went out to the garden, and I was going to tend to the plants and there was a mist and I'm not kidding, I looked at the plants, and a steam was coming out, and I was like 'what is going on?' But the sun was drawing liquid out of the soil. Seeing the whole place so misty and then, you know, you feel something, something really stronger than you…

It's all connected you know.

When you dig with a spade and you turn the earth, the light gets in the soil, it brings light to mother earth and the soil loves light, but it also loves dark. It's a spiritual thing and when we do it and turn the spade, it doesn't matter what turns up, weeds and manure, this fertilizes the soil and brings rebirth to the plants we put in, so really, we are feeding the earth.

It makes you think how the whole thing works - how things work in nature - the root is the head; the growing part and it develops.

Look at the way nature works.

When you take something away you must put it back into the earth, otherwise it will be a mess, that's when the balance is messed up.

When you make art, you know, we are told that God has given us a blessing, you know, and you do it, properly, and you benefit from it. And I think, you know, that people recognise that this is from him up above, but you know, it's your interpretation. And I tell you, once I tried to paint a sunset and I couldn't get it right and I gave up and I said to somebody, the greatest artist in the world, is not us, it's God.

It is beautiful, the world is a beautiful place to live in and the more we destroy it the less we will have, and some people will look back into the past and say what were we doing? Why?

We have done so much damage; it's time to stop.'

Illuminations on Inclusion and Resonance

The education Andrew experienced in the 1950's is vastly different from the education primary school children with disabilities now experience. As well as a drive to 'include' at primary and secondary school level, there is also an emphasis placed on 'inclusion' in the European model of further education. This drive seeks to address a long-standing inequality, where adults, distinct from one another in their learning abilities, have historically been seen as 'other,' dehumanised and pathologised.

To redress this inequality, adult educational spaces do at times admit individuals from varying educational backgrounds into what is still a deeply entrenched pedagogic culture, intent on standardisation and outcome orientation. This kind of 'inclusion' doesn't, however, allow individuals who learn and understand the world in different ways the right to reach their potential in ways which honour diversity and celebrate difference.

Present-day policies and legislation have a direct impact on current cultural attitudes and the fluctuating perspectives of an able-bodied society on a group considered to be outside of the norm. Developments in government, religious and educational care, and provision for people with disabilities in Ireland follow a cyclic fluctuation directly in accordance with philosophies and attitudes of the time. There is a pendulum between community-based provision and that of institutional care (Linton, 1998). In the Irish context, care and provision were originally founded in religion and in charity.

'Charity,' as a fundamental Catholic Christian concept, describes love for God and, as an extension, love for fellow man made visible through acts of giving and doing good deeds[37]. This charitable attitude is redolent of an 'us and them' dichotomy where people with disabilities are dependent on others. It maintains a separatist view, creating a culture where people with learning difficulties have limited participation in society and are

assumed to have no agency.

Even those learning organisations which now proclaim to be 'inclusive' are based on a construct of what is normal and what is outside of the range of normal. Greenstein describes this as a 'paternalistic discourse of "inclusion" or assimilation to a norm' (Greenstein, 2016, p. 18). The mainstream adult and further educational system serves a homogenous group of typical learners while disregarding the learning potential for those who are different. Adult learners are still marginalised from mainstream education based on the criteria of a perceived lack of ability. The adult learners at KCAT had been marginalised from mainstream education based on perceived ability. Educational and medical systems had historically defined them as limited (Linton, 1998; Davis, 1995; Greenstein, 2016). These artist learners don't always rely on cognitive or rational methods but engage with the world in extrarational ways, where the emotional, embodied, imagined, remembered, dreamt, spiritual, and ethereal are central to knowing and transformation (Robinson et al., 2023; Lawrence, 2012; Blackburn Miller, 2020). I had come to believe that artistic knowing fosters self-awareness, community, social action, and serves as a powerful context for learning (Blackburn Miller, 2020, p. 339).

By listening to the voices of KCAT artists within this pedagogical space, I sought the conditions that enable a liberating pedagogy, one that fosters reinvention, growth, and flourishing. An inclusive model, such as KCAT, where difference is valued and students of all cognitive and physical abilities learn together, enriches the educational experience through diverse perspectives. Research demonstrates that inclusive education not only benefits students with additional needs but also enhances learning for all (Gillies, 2004). However, meaningful inclusion requires intensive, individualised practices and smaller learning groups, resources which are often under-supported within traditional educational funding structures.

[37] Oxford University Press. (n.d.). In charity, in Charity, n., 1.e. In the Oxford English Dictionary. Retrieved July 18, 2025, from https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8157822796 accessed 18/07/2025

As his advocacy work shows, Andrew has strong views on inclusion for artists who are on the margins to be brought into the mainstream art world. He believes that all art and artists should be included together, outside of a dominant discourse, outside of our mainstream habits of thought and being, and outside of any form of discrimination. Learning as an artist, for Andrew, is a way of being in the world. He refuses the limitations that society tries to place on him. Resonance is 'a relational theory of our being in the world' (Zalec, 2021, p. 143), a set of perspectives for countering the

> 'aimless, endless compulsion towards escalation (which) ultimately leads to problematic, even dysfunctional or pathological relationships with the world on the part of both subjects and society as a whole'
>
> Rosa, 2019, p. 2.

The pathology Rosa describes is identified as crisis: an environmental crisis, a crisis of democracy, and a personal, subjective, and psychological crisis of the 'self.' The societal compulsion toward acceleration, and the behaviours that reinforce our drive to work in pursuit of ever-increasing resources, forms a 'reinforcing circular pattern' that alienates us from the world and positions us as 'subject,' with the rest of the world perceived as 'object' (Rosa, 2019). The power of art and its ability to foster 'resonance' reframes the world as subject and transforms the way we relate to it. A way of being that is not solely separate or self-sufficient, one in which we 'exist beyond the boundaries of our skin' (Greenstein, 2016, p. 31), allows us to connect with one another in a rhizomatic manner (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). When we connect to the world in this way, a process of direct and visceral resonance is at work, where 'empathy is quite direct and can touch such depths as to transcend our sense of separateness' Hart, 2014, p. 114.

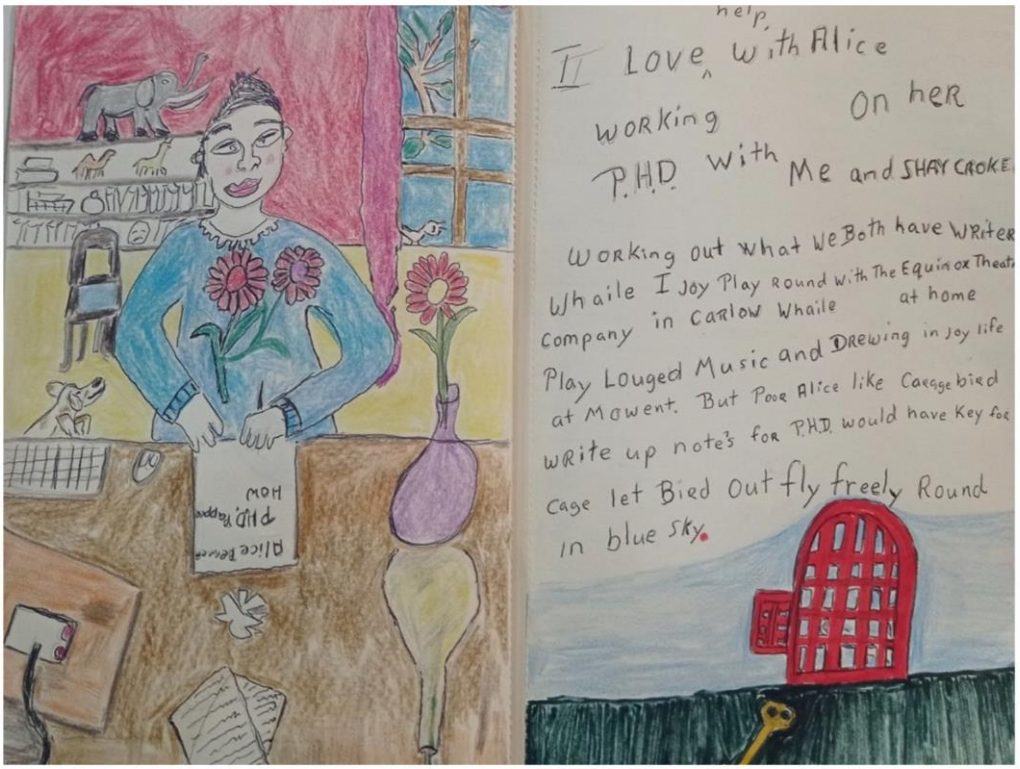
Hart describes the empathic heart as one where we 'simply meet what is before us' (p. 120) with curiosity and without judgment: when someone experiences joy, we respond with a lightness of heart; when we witness

pain, we feel a withdrawal, a shrinking, a type of psychosocial suffering. Empathy is a primal, passive response to another's emotional state, but it is not limited to human interaction. Rosa (2019) explains that there are different spheres of resonance. In these spheres we relate to a world that includes 'people, artefacts, and natural objects, as well as perceived totalities such as nature, the universe, history, God, life and even one's own body and emotions' (p. 195).

In Andrew's stories about the natural world around him, he describes this empathic communion with the earth and sentient creatures where he loses all sense of time, cannot hear his mother calling, the light shifts, and boundaries dissolve as he watches the blackbird or turns the soil. These moments of profound communion are instances of coming to resonate with the 'other,' where we 'see through their eyes, whether a person or a plant, engaging the empathic heart as a legitimate source of knowledge' (Hart, 2014, p. 121). This deep way of knowing, where noticing and 'tuning in' lead to profound connection and understanding, is supported by thinkers such as Heidegger (1927), Thich Nhat Hanh (1988), Rogers (1961), and Buber (1996). Without the capacity to lean into this relationship with the world, the world remains merely a collection of objects (Hart, 2014, p. 119).

In relationships with people, too, Andrew models this way of being in profound communion with the other. Andrew wanted me to flourish and be happy; he cared about me. It was not unusual for me to find small notes and gifts on my desk from students and one day on my desk, I found a small green card on which he had written, 'You are not a machine!' His concern was that I would work late or be 'tied' to the desk. In his journal page (Artefcat 21) he uses the metaphor of a caged bird, telling me to 'fly freely in the blue sky'; on another occasion, he told me that I 'should be a butterfly and fly away from everything'. Our relationship was based on mutual respect and admiration, where we recognised one another as significantly important to each other. We experienced empathy for one

another, a resonance with one another.



ARTEFACT 21 Sketchbook Portrait of Alice-2020

A Pathology of Alienation

In contrast to communion with the world, we experience alienation (Rosa, 2019). When the world is reduced to a collection of mere objects, rather than being a place where we connect and 'resonate' with others, we become 'separated from the world' (Rosa, 2019, p. 110). Hart (2014) refers to our tendency in contemporary Western education to separate, grade, rate, and measure as a 'cognitive repression of the awareness of separation' (p. 119).

As Palmer describes:

> 'It puts us in an adversary relationship with each other and our world… we value knowledge that enables us to coerce the world into meeting our needs - no matter how much violence we must do. Thus, our knowledge of the atom has brought us into opposition to the ecology of the earth, to the welfare of society, and to the survival of the human species itself. Objective knowledge has unwittingly fulfilled its root meaning: it has made us adversaries of ourselves'
>
> Palmer, 1993, as cited in Hart, 2014, pp. 119 - 120.

Andrew finds the adjectives commonly used to describe Outsider Art negative and disparaging. He rejects terms such as 'naïve,' 'childlike,' and 'primitive' when applied to his work. In discussions, we've reflected on how the label 'Outsider Art' may further marginalise individuals already living and working on society's edges. Within KCAT, many artists are aware that the mainstream art world often classifies their creations under this label historically extended beyond those with learning disabilities to include many marginalised creators. Those labelled as creators of 'outsider art' are frequently perceived as inferior - lacking respect, value, or the capacity for meaningful contribution in cultural and economic spheres. Embedded within a culture of ableism, artists with disabilities and their work are often excluded from mainstream art venues, elite cultural institutions, and public art markets. Artists with learning disabilities are typically assigned to categories including

‘Outsider Art,’ art brut,’ or ‘raw’ art (Cardinal, 1972).

Historically linked to mental illness and untrained creators, ‘Outsider Art’ remains a contentious subject. The genre, associated with simplicity, lack of polish, and absence of deliberate conceptual intent, faces challenges in self-definition. Art produced outside mainstream channels was once seen, as Dubuffet 1987 put it, as emerging ‘from solitude and from pure, authentic creative impulses (pp 34 - 36), untainted by competition or recognition, which made such works ‘precious.’ Dubuffet’s portrayal attempts to grant the genre dignity and significance, framing it as a rebellious, anti-cultural, and anti-establishment movement. According to him ‘art brut’ confronts conventional cultural values and stretches the limits of accepted norms. Yet, this identity has a darker aspect, one Andrew strives to distance himself from. The genre’s origins lie in a case study of a psychotic patient who produced prolific artwork within an asylum. The term itself was coined by a doctor, effectively serving as a diagnosis for an art form. The artists had no role in naming it, nor in shaping its inception.

Andrew says, ‘I hate the term Outsider Art, it’s simply not true.’ He refuses to accept that artists with disabilities must be segregated from other artists. The diagnosis of ‘having a disability’ is often applied to people who differ in behavioural or cognitive ways, those who fall out of a narrow range of what is considered ‘normal.’ Medical diagnoses categorise those with a ‘disability’ as deficient in some way, less than others, victims, or dependents. The emphasis is placed on their ‘lack,’ creating an image of ‘inability.’ Yet ‘disability’ is a broad category that includes a wide range of physical, emotional, sensory, and cognitive conditions. The term ‘disabled’ describes a large and diverse group of people who share the experience of marginalisation due to their perceived difference. While there are discourses advocating for equality for people with disabilities, there also remain policies and practices that invisibly control and marginalise them. These practices are often invisible to those who are privileged by their ability, much in the same

way that racial privilege occludes the experiences of discrimination faced by Black people (Linton, 1998).

The wide acceptance of 'Outsider Art' is, I contend, one such invisible practice that those without disabilities need to critically examine. Fair representation of artists with learning disabilities in discussions about 'Outsider Art' is rare. Communication methods among people with diverse learning styles can be subtle and multifaceted, while formal art theory and the language of art critique is often inaccessible to many. Without a voice in this discussion, artists with learning disabilities are frequently 'spoken about,' disregarded, ignored, and relegated to the margins, which limits their agency, opportunities, and their inclusion in society. Andrew takes every opportunity to advocate for artists who cannot advocate for themselves due to their disabilities. That is why Andrew, when included in mainstream art discussions, galleries, and exhibitions, stresses that artists with disabilities are no different from their peers and should be recognised without separation or exception. Andrew's ongoing refusal to accept the label 'Outsider Art' reflects his commitment to challenging the structural biases faced other artists. He emphasises abilities rather than disabilities and dismisses the notion that people with disabilities should be separated and relegated to fringe or specialised forums for learning and working.

Andrew refuses to be confined by labels, genres, or the expectations imposed on him and believes that the term 'Outsider Art' is a label that suppresses and devalues the work of artists with learning disabilities. While Outsider Art claims to include 'untrained' artists, Andrew and the other artists at KCAT have spent years learning and collaborating with experienced peers, honing their artistic skills. Historically, apprenticeship in art has nurtured great talents, like Michelangelo Buonarroti, who was apprenticed to Domenico Ghirlandaio in 1448 and stayed with him for a year, learning and honing his skills (Barolsky, P. 2012). Apprenticeship was considered to be a valid and honourable way for apprentices to

become Masters of Art in their own right. To label Andrew and other artists with learning difficulties as 'untrained' is simply incorrect. Today, it seems that the training deemed necessary to be considered a mainstream artist can only come from institutionally validated accreditation. Most adult art education programmes are based on Western cultural models, and people who lack verbal literacy or who cannot learn conventionally are often denied access to these institutions. Academy art education for adults can be oppressive, based on prejudice, domination, and control. The invisible culture of discrimination against people with learning disabilities creates significant barriers to opportunities, both for working artists and for artist learners in the art education system.

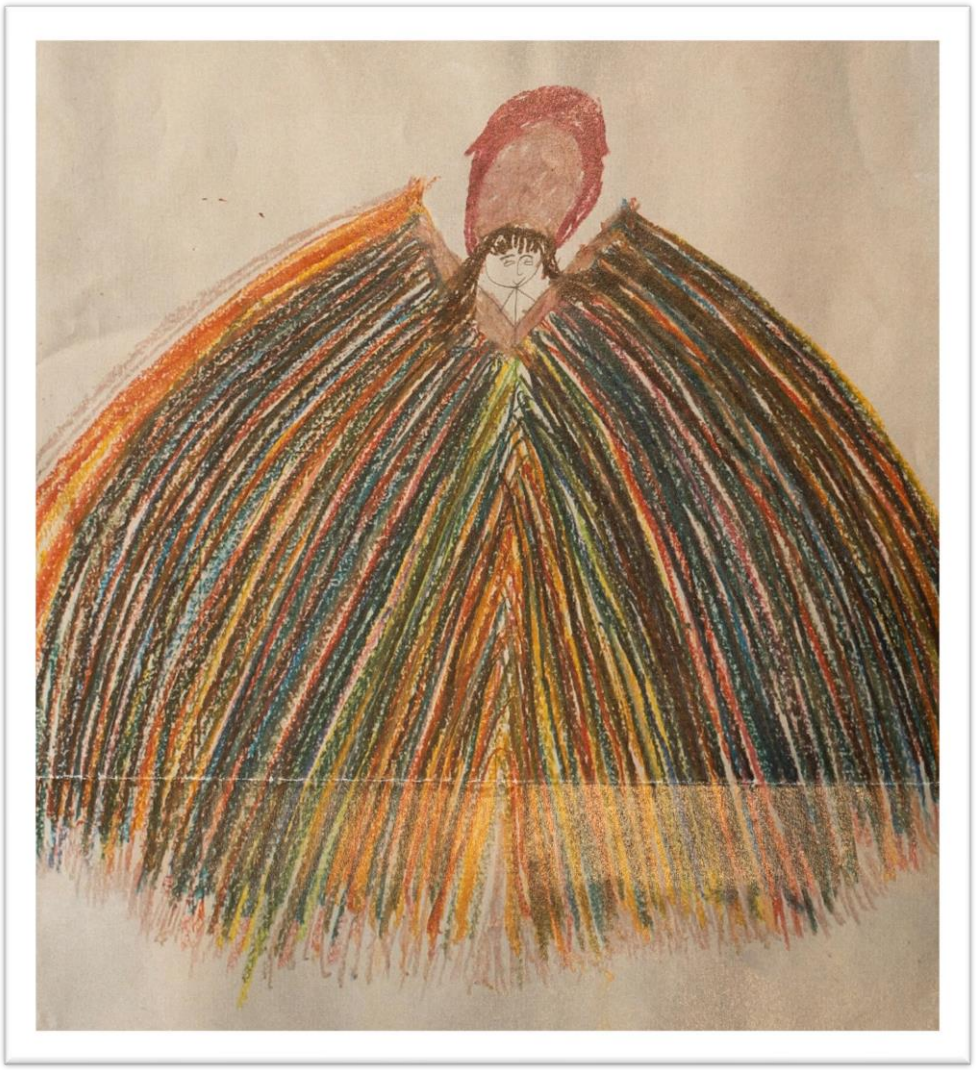
Conversations with Andrew reveal that art pedagogy can offer an approach to education which profoundly values and recognises people who are different, in the case of KCAT, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, by fostering an environment that celebrates individuality and creative potential rather than focusing on perceived disabilities. His experience and reflections consider that the conditions necessary for such a pedagogy include an acknowledgement and celebration of difference. Healthy art pedagogy encourages an understanding of diverse ways of being, learning, and relating to the world, recognising that everyone has something valuable to offer, regardless of their cognitive ability or ways of learning. Learners should be seen, not as 'other' or 'less than' but as equal contributors to the creative and learning process.

Andrew reminds us of the fact that people who are different do not need 'fixing.' Different ways of being are not pathologies. Individuals express themselves in unique ways. Our skills, gifts and abilities contribute different aspects to creative fields of learning. In art pedagogy learning can also be a form of personal and sometimes communal reflection which allows people to confront and integrate different aspects of themselves, including those parts which are difficult or 'nettlesome' (Sibbett 2008). When the learning space is safely held by an experienced artist educator

and empathetic peers, this approach empowers individuals to communicate their thoughts, emotions, and experiences creatively. Healthy pedagogy sees differences as an opportunity for learning, where learners of *all abilities* can learn from one another, challenge themselves, and gain new perspectives. The ethos of a pedagogy which is truly inclusive, rejects the idea of 'normalcy' and embraces diverse forms of intelligence, wisdom, and creative potential. Lifelong learning and self-discovery are, I believe, central to a healthy pedagogical approach. Healthy learning spaces are powerful places to challenge and dismantle notions of the 'other,' and de-pathologise people who are seen as 'less than' or damaged in some way. This respectful and supportive approach to pedagogy rejects conventional, ableist ideas. The relationship between artist-educators and learners and peers is based on collaboration and shared learning.

In a truly inclusive environment, all learners contribute to a dynamic, diverse community where their self-confidence and autonomy can grow. Inclusive art pedagogy holds within it the potential to recognise all people by emphasising what we have in common while celebrating and acknowledging our differences, by nurturing self-expression for personal growth, and by deconstructing ableist perspectives. It supports the idea that all individuals, regardless of their cognitive or learning differences, have the capacity to learn, create, and contribute meaningfully to the broader artistic and cultural landscape of society. The recognition of difference is not about highlighting limitations; it is about celebrating diverse ways of being and learning. Might these art pedagogy principles be useful as pedagogical principles in other contexts of adult education?

In the following section, with the help of Ella, I explore further principles inherent in art pedagogy, the themes of interdependence, connection, and relational learning. Ella shows me that the power of connection and interdependence shapes not only the learning process but also the deeper, transformative relationships between artist educator and artist learner where shared experience becomes a catalyst for mutual growth and understanding.



ARTEFACT 22 ANGEL- PENCIL ON PAPER- ELLA-2021

Conversations with An Artist – Ella

Ella lives in a Camphill Residence, she has attended the Roots course at KCAT for nearly twenty years. We have known each other for several of those years. The following artefacts, poetry and evocative auto ethnographical writing illuminates our nuanced relationship and the subtle knowing which accompanies our resonance, showing how we 'tune in' to one another.

Ella exemplifies the artist who directs her own learning path, she shapes the environment around her in her interactions and through her choices. My collegial and research relationship with Ella has illuminated notions of many aspects of Art Pedagogy including embodied learning, the importance of interpersonal relationships, resonance, and compassion.

ARTEFACT 23 ELLA- ALICE BENNETT-2022

You walk to the front door.
It is closed. But still you stand,
and I open it for you. It is
raining.
And still you stand,
a purple hood, laced with drops,
water on your face like tears.
And yes, you are very sad today, you tell me.
You tell me every Monday.

You are sad because you miss your sister. I am sorry, I say,
as I do every Monday. And I am.
Your sadness is torrential. It engulfs me.
Your lashes hanging rain drops.

Let's sit on the couch together for a little bit, I say, and we do.
The rain was only a shower and as we talk of plane trips, and airports
and holidays

your smile breaks through.
Sun on our shoulders warms us and you are ready to work now.
When I come to see you later, you are drawing an angel with rainbow wings.

Ella sits on her own at the large table. I see her as I'm leaving the studio, I stop and sit down next to her, we smile at each other in greeting.

'I miss Bernadette, it's hard. My mood goes up and down. Quickly. She died last April after a long illness.'

I am aware that I have been taken deeper into Ella's confidence and it at once draws me in and makes me feel that I must take on this sharing as an important step in our relationship. I have known Ella for two years. Every Monday, she attends a day-long art course called Roots in our centre. In all the time I have known her, she has begun every day with a declaration of her sorrow and spent the day drawing angels

It's hard, Ella,' Yes'

'You miss her.' 'Yes'

'Are you drawing an angel there?' 'Yes'

'The angel looks a bit like you, Ella- is she you?' 'I don't know,' she tells me, smiling again.

'She has the same hair'

'Yes, the same dark hair
'

I sit with Ella as we settle into silence and Ella continues to draw. I am recording our words and my thoughts. The companionship feels comfortable. She looks up from her drawing periodically, we see each other, and we smile. We continue. She concentrates hard, careful lines of symmetry are drawn, in bright orange at even spaces in downwards motion. This angel has become an icon. It is all she will draw. Her repeated motif, a mantra. Ella selects purple now; she chooses carefully, slowly. With this she now begins to draw immaculate lines between each orange line. Her head is bent low to the page, in concentrated application. I am so close I can hear her breathing. It is steady and rhythmic, like the lines. This repeated motion is meditative, for us both. I

am guided by her into peace. I feel the peace around her extend and I am part of it. A short distance away the busy-ness of the class goes on, but it does not share the same space as us. The laughter, loud voices and exchanges happen as if at a great distance. I feel as if we were in a safe space, contemplative, timeless.

The time extends and my writing pauses for longer and longer periods. I find it hard to be present with Ella and write at the same time. I want to be at her side without reflecting, to feel the full benefit of the peace which emanates.

I have noticed that every now and then Ella takes her bobbed hair and holds it between her fingers, close to one eye, examining its edge. She sees me looking and gives me the widest smile.

She returns to draw the lines for the second wing. The break has allowed me to notice something I didn't notice before. If the space between the orange lines is slightly wider, she may repeat the purple lines, laying them beside one another, when she does this the direction of the lines change; up and down she draws instead of downwards. It is like the most careful 'colouring-in' process. It is a carefully considered adjustment.

I watch and she looks up at me again smiling. I think to myself; this is how our relationship has grown over the months - slowly through small observations of each other, realisations of each other's needs, shared space and time, absorption of each other's states of being. I ask Ella whether she might teach me to draw an angel one day. She smiles and says that she won't be attending class next week. She is going on her holiday with Kate, the Polish girl, they are going to Cork, for three days. In the early days of our getting to know each other, Ella asked me where I had been on my holidays, which countries I had visited, what each airport was called, she asked me every week, the same questions, enjoying the exchange. I came to understand that Ella has an adventurous soul; she loves travel and sometimes brings in her travel books; Cyprus, South America, Italy.

Now Ella wipes at her eyes with her handkerchief and returns to her

drawing. She selects a green and begins to cover each orange and purple line with it. As an artist educator my aesthetic instinct balks, but as she continues, I am humbled, amazed at her knowledge that this combination would sing - as I see it does now. I breathe into her lines, they are glorious, and when she picks up the lime yellow to cover them again, I have every confidence in her choice. Ella knows what she is doing. I must surrender, as Ella teaches me. This is her expertise not mine. These are her angels. I will never be able to draw them. Every one of them is perfect, unique and an expression of Ella's internal processes, thoughts, heartbeat.

I am still silent as I watch, being calmed, and uplifted all at once. Understanding myself a little better for having sat next to Ella and shared this space with her today. She looks up at me again.

'Is it going to be cold today, Alice?'

'I think it will, Ella, are you going out?' 'Yes, I'm going down to the town at teatime.' 'You will need a jacket, so'

'Yes, I will wear a jacket, yes.'

We have moved on.

ARTEFACT 25 MONDAY 8TH JANUARY 2018-KCAT

Returning to KCAT as the term resumed, the first Monday of the New Year and the start of classes. Ella is the first artist I see as I enter the studio. She is lying on the couch, curled up on her side.

'I miss Bernadette,' she says to me in greeting. I

crouch to talk quietly. 'I'm sorry Ella……. I know

you do.'

'I want to go home," she tells me.

I tell her that I am so glad to see her, that I have missed her over the

break, she smiles, 'Did you miss me?'

'Yes,' I tell her, and I say, 'We can go shopping now for your art materials.' She brightens, 'Now?'

My mistake, 'Well just now' I say, 'I have a bit of work to do and then we can go to the office and look at the different pens on the computer, and we can buy whatever you want.'

'I want to go to Mr. Price in Kilkenny.'

'Well, we can look at them online and choose there because I don't think I can take you to Mr. Price today, we are only just back to work!'

'No, I want to go to Mr. Price, they have pens there.'

I knew that I had fallen into a place where I would need to create a way for Ella to achieve her needs. I had set her and myself up for this; I needed to follow through.

'Can I see my money?'

'Yes, Ella, will you let me welcome the other artists and then we can go to the office together?' Ella sits up.

When we go upstairs later, she is alert and listens carefully to my conversation with her support workers on the phone. She checks with me after the conversation that we can go to Kilkenny ***now****.*

My plans for the day are on hold. This expectation that I have created in her must be fulfilled.

The ensuing morning was one of the most rewarding of my exchanges with any artist. Ella, exploring the parameters of our relationship, tested the limits of what we could do that morning. I practiced saying no gently and firmly, and together we negotiated a morning of shopping for art supplies, me drinking tea and Ella eating a bowl of custard in a café. Ella asked me innumerable questions, from personal to curiously confounding, 'What colour swimsuit do you have?' and 'How is glitter made?'

The administration work I had planned would always be there; this time

with Ella was precious.

'I like you' she told me in the car coming home. I had earned her trust and friendship. 'I like you too, Ella.'

ARTEFACT 26 September 2019- Ella Moves forward

Ella has been drawing the same angels for three years. We wondered, if she had undivided time to give to her process, whether it would deepen or extend her aesthetic. After consideration and discussion with her artist educator and her care team, I asked Ella if she would like to move from the Roots foundation course to the Open Studio. Ella was becoming more resistant to participating in the Roots course and it simply wasn't serving her needs. A move would be the change she needed. It would be a significant change to Ella's weekly routine and was not to be considered lightly.

Ella was keen to make the change; she smiled widely and said that it would be very good to switch courses, and so she began to attend the Wednesday Open Studio.

The Open Studio is a much less directed, much less formal learning space. It is one where artists who have some established practice can concentrate on their own practices. They build a relationship with the artist educator where a shared understanding of their challenges, skills and goals is explored. It is the ultimate in person-centered learning with the addition of peer support and group encouragement from colleagues.

Learning, moving forward, can take a long time. Sometimes movement in learning seems to halt altogether. A resting period from time to time, who am I to say what cognitive changes are happening within Ella's mind when she is not creating?

I do not have the expertise, but I recognise a growing sense of trust and commitment to her practice of art making. I see in her an opening to other ideas and ways of doing things. She has accepted the guidance of a new artist educator, she has decided to explore new

source materials, from imaginative work to primary references. These are definite movements and there is significant learning occurring, in Ella's own time.

Ella still brings her sorrow for the loss of her sister with her, but there is a lightness which attends her also. Ella still wants to sit removed from the group, out of their sight but near their activity.

And then a remarkable change occurred in the first weeks.

Ella no longer draws angels. She now draws flowers. Flowers which she picks and places in a vase in front of her.

From the heavens and back down to earth?

Interdependency and Connection.

> ‘Put yourself away. Let go of yourself. Tune into other people. To the movement in the branches, the sudden coming of rain, to the patterns in the waves. To how those two lie on the grass. To how that one sits on the bench with their hands clasped, looking up. To how those three stand at the crossing, playing with each other's hair. To how that young one shifts the weight of those shopping bags and tries to keep up with their mother's strong legs. This is it. This is the thing. This is the beautiful thing.’
>
> Kae Tempest 2020, p.117

> ‘The essence of work with another person is to be present as a living being.’
>
> Gendlin 1996, p. 297

In KCAT Centre, the development of long-term, mutual, and interdependent relationships was always regarded as one of the most important factors supporting personal growth and social maturity for learners. Time and again at KCAT, it was the side-by-side experiences that revealed new learning and illuminated important ways of knowing and being for both artist learners and artist educators. The ‘Ella’ artefacts describe the engagement between myself and Ella in KCAT and reveal this person-centered art pedagogy, where the unique way of being and knowing that each individual possesses is validated. Being present in relationship with an artist learner, while holding an attitude of empathy and regard for them, opens up possibilities for deeper understanding. The concept of the ‘I-Thou’ encounter, as proposed by Martin Buber (1970) and extended by Carl Rogers (1995), supports this principle. When we are present within the world and with the other, an ‘I-Thou’ encounter is created, fostering shared ways of knowing and being. This attitude of being present leads to intersubjectivity (Rogers,

1995; Sultan, 2018), the foundation for 'the realm of encounter and relationship with the self, the other, and the world' (Sultan, 2018, p. 73). In contrast, an 'I-It' encounter devalues the other, relegating them to the status of an object to be used for some predetermined outcome. This approach leads to inauthentic relationships, inequality, and a lack of inclusivity, where others are dehumanised and pathologised (Buber, 1970, Rosa 2019). An attitude of respect and mutual engagement in relationship, on the other hand, creates an open-ended possibility for new understanding.

With Ella, I also learn the importance of valuing a type of knowing that honours the inner, felt body experience, a 'body-sense of meaning' (Gendlin, 1981, p. 11). This type of knowing arises when we experience a 'gut feeling' or a 'hunch,' a knowing that transcends or subverts cognitive reasoning and instead validates understanding through feeling and sensing the body's response to experience. By taking time and space to 'be' with Ella, I am afforded the opportunity to focus on an inner-searching experience (Gendlin, 1981). My engagement with Ella shows me that by focusing on the body's responses to experiences, I can access a wider understanding of learning and being. Embodied knowledge is 'in the body, not the mind,' (Tanaka 2011, p.149). My relationship with Ella is one in which I am becoming more and more familiar with her ways. 'Merleau-Ponty also refers to it as 'knowledge bred of familiarity (*savoir de familiarité*). This is the original source of embodied knowledge' (Merleau- Ponty as cited in Tanako 2011, p.149). Nearly all the experiences we have as individuals are relational, dependent on the contexts we find ourselves in and the relationships we have with other humans. We are inextricably situated within this world, and our individual perceptions of realities are always open and transforming, in flux with the events around us (Merleau-Ponty, 2013). We encounter our world in a state of submerged embodied experience through all our senses, and when we are in this state, we are able to meet moments of deep insight which can lead to a shift/change/transformation in perspective (Merleau-Ponty 2013).

The role of the senses plays an important part in art making and art pedagogy and encompasses the visual, tactile, and aural experience. In my relationship with Ella, I am at once an artist, researcher, and teacher (artist educator), but I am also a fellow human. I feel her grief and disappointment, and I share in her moments of joy and success. I respond to these in both outward demonstration and inner reaction. I am affected by my interactions with her, and by dwelling in poetry and writing, I can explore those senses to understand what our relationship teaches me. In being in relationship with Ella, I am in a state of learning 'how to be.' Sitting next to Ella, I am aware of her breathing, of her wetness from the rain, of her own experience of the cold and the space around her. In relationship with Ella, I am able—visually, tactilely, and aurally—to enter into her embodied experience, where that experience then becomes shared. This heightened perception becomes a source for meaning-making and knowledge (Sultan, 2018, pp. 73–76). It enables fresh perspectives in a search for understanding through 'curiosity, wonder and empathy' (Sultan, 2018, p. 75).

Ella and I meet each other in a relationship as colleagues; we meet each other in an equal space of knowing. In our engagement, we do not impose predetermined expectations onto the relationship. Each of our own felt experiences is honoured and acknowledged as an opportunity to gain knowledge and make meaning. We are doing *work* in relationship where 'the essence of work with another person is to be present as a living being' (Gendlin, 1996, p. 297). The side-by-side, slow and careful engagement with Ella helps me to consider principles of congruence/authenticity, unconditional positive regard, and empathy for her (Rogers, 1995) but they also help me to understand myself better. The conditions described by Rogers inform careful and effective communication, where difference and multiple perspectives are validated in a relationship -where we are not only colleagues but co-researchers. Comparing and reflecting on our individual journeys through artwork and dialogue opens a pathway to understanding for ourselves and for each other. This understanding or 'knowing' is relationally responsive; it

leads us to ‘relational and dialogic implicit knowing from within, situated in embedded and contextualized understanding’ (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 133).

We want to belong, we want to be seen, we want people to acknowledge our worth, and we want to feel valued. As human beings, we are driven by our need for connection (Tempest, 2020). For a large part, we learn so that we can facilitate relationships and live together. We are driven as social beings to be ‘part of’ (Benson, 2018). To be included is affirmation, it is reassurance that we are needed, that our lives matter. No matter what our intellectual capacity is, we know that we need others to survive. Our families provide context for our lives; our learning spaces do the same. A mutual, respectful relationship is a crucial one for healthy pedagogical environments. In KCAT, there is a bond between learner artists and artist educators where support and encouragement for each other is commonplace and personal successes and achievements are celebrated by everyone.

> ‘In contemporary Western societies where the ‘other’ is categorised as “unusual,” “strange,” “untrustworthy,” “unwanted,” and “abnormal,” friendship could become a powerful means to unsettle the dichotomous and normalised practice of Othering’
>
> Davis, Ghorashi, & Smets, 2018, p. 121.

In KCAT, people of all abilities find common ground through their pursuit of art education. Art pedagogy offers opportunities for friendship and relationship beyond hegemony, where difference is celebrated rather than seen as ‘abnormal.’ In the learning space, narratives can be shared and valued in a way that leads to the creation of commonality, which in turn increases mutual involvement’ (Davis et al., 2018, p. 125).

Narratives shared through the visual, musical, dramatic, and literary arts are nuanced; complicated, multi-layered meanings are communicated, and these contribute to the growth of human understanding (Weber, 2008). In the making space and in the shared

experiences of studio workspace, relationship builds. Empathy for our fellow human beings is aroused through the evocative and open-ended nature of art making.

As Ella and I share the making space, no words are necessary. The absence of judgment, the silence of a shared acknowledgement, is powerful. Together, myself a viewer and Ella as painter, I am locked in a moment of sharing consciousness and the knowing that comes through making art (Dewey, 1980; Eisner, 2008; Weber, 2008; Finley, 2008).

In Reflection- Relational Illuminations

Through our side-by-side art making, Ella shows me that empathy, mutual respect, recognition of embodied experiences, and an openness to non-verbal, emotional, and relational ways of knowing are important aspects of the learning dynamic. Our relationship has been built on a foundation of interdependence, shared space, and a commitment to each other's well-being and growth. A healthy pedagogical relationship has to be one of mutuality, a sharing of experiences and emotions, grief, joy, and creative expression, shared facilitates deeper understanding between us.

Ella has taught me that if I can sit with another, be present and empathic with her, I can understand her emotional state and learning needs better. By recognising the learner's emotional and creative processes, the artist-educator becomes an active listener and is emotionally tuned in to the learner, affirming her individuality and worth as a fellow human being. The time spent side-by-side in silence, while making art and learning, provides a space for non-verbal connection. The shared experience of working together, without the need for words, emphasises the importance of simply being present with the other, a key condition for recognising the humanity of the other person. By taking time, observing, and tuning in to Ella, I learn to respect her process and her agency. The artist-educator must respect the learners' choices, even when they diverge from conventional or expected norms. This conscious act of respecting the

‘other’ and her choices, reinforces the artist- educator’s recognition of learner autonomy.

When I notice Ella’s physical gestures (such as her attention to her hair or the way she draws), I experience a shared sense of calm and peace through embodied moments of noticing and ‘being with.’ This recognition of bodily presence further supports a deeper, non-cognitive way of knowing each other. Ella reminds me that knowledge isn’t just intellectual but also emotional and sensory. She shows me how the emotional and sensory embodied experience informs both the pedagogical relationship and the practice.

Ella shows me that I cannot impose my expectations on the learners emotional or creative expression but must accept whatever the learner brings to the shared space. By recognising her emotional and creative needs without judgement, I help to co-create a safe environment for learning.

In healthy pedagogy, the importance of an I-Thou encounter is recognised; we must treat the other as a valued human being, rather than as the ‘other’ or ‘less than.’ In a whole and healthy pedagogical relationship between artist-educator and learner, both acknowledge and engage in mutual, authentic recognition of each other's humanity, which is fundamental to the learning process and personal growth (Buber, 1970; Rogers, 1961).

ARTEFACT 27 Conversations in the Kitchen

Andrew comes to find me in my office, 'Come on girl, you work too hard, you need a break, come and have a cup of tea.'

We go downstairs and sit at the wooden table, comfortable in each other's presence, blowing steam across the surface of our cups and smiling at one another in easy silence. Andrew has not been well, and he looks tired. He has recently dyed his hair again, an extraordinary shade of iridescent blue. He is telling me that he is winding down,

What do you mean Andrew?

I'm just tired you know; I'm getting old! I have to see the doctor again, he says I have what my mum and dad had, he says I'm winding down. Are you in any pain?

No. Just tired.

He asks me how the research is going, and I say that I am working away on it. Billie[38] comes to join us,
Can I join you? she asks.

She sits down and looks intently at me, I like you, she says,
I like you too.

Andrew asks me what I am working on, I'm still exploring values.
I tell him I am meeting with the CEO of Camphill to discuss what we both think about values.

If you really want to know about the values of Camphill, you have to go right to the beginning, to the work of Koenig[39] and Steiner[40]. They set it all out for us. It's all there.

[38] Billie is a pseudonym
[39] Koenig, K. 2018. The Spirit of Camphill: Birth of a Movement. Edinburgh, Scotland: Floris Books.
[40] Steiner, R., (2007). Truth and Knowledge. Great Barrington MA: Steiner Books.

I thank him, yes, I have read some, you're right, it's all there.'

Will you tell the CEO something for me?' Billie asks, 'Can you tell her that we need families. Since HIQA and the move to staff instead of co-workers it's ……'

Billie is recovering from having to leave her childhood Camphill home after a HIQA inspection and investigation resulted in the old family-based home model being shut down. She has moved to another Camphill house and the change to HSE staff and ever increasing safe-guarding regulations has profoundly affected her.

Have you experienced changes in KCAT do

you think Billie? Well, you are not staff.

How am I different?

There's something spiritual

in it, she tells me. What do

you mean Billie?

You are friends, even though you're staff. I can talk to you.

Andrew and Billie return to their studios, and I stay at the table, my tea is cold and my heart heavy, I feel the familiar tightness in my chest.

Rachel, one of the artist educators, comes into the kitchen and throws her sketch book down noisily on the table. She is angry.

These rules might be making the lives of management easier she says, but they're not helping us! Can't they see that the artists are really struggling? Everyone is really feeling the isolation now, you can see it in their lack of motivation. Tommy's health has completely deteriorated; Janet hasn't spoke for weeks again and she was doing so well just before it all broke. She can't see my face under this mask and even if I stand far away enough from her to speak without it, she doesn't engage. This place is slowly dying, its sick - we may still be in the building, but we're losing our spirit.

I don't want to be here anymore, she tells me, now sitting, sprawling across the expanse of the table, her head on her forearms. I touch her shoulder because I haven't the will to pretend that I think everything will be alright anymore. The artist educators and the learner artists don't hear and see what I do in the office upstairs - the avalanche of new directives, documentation that needs to be filled in, measures put in place, more restrictive policies flood the inbox daily. The changes are rapid, too rapid to keep up with.

I make her a cup of coffee, and we sit for a while, together in silence.

Steiner, R., (1998). Anthroposophical leading thoughts. Rudolf Steiner Press.
Steiner, R. (1995). Intuitive thinking as a spiritual path; translated by Michael Lipson

Reflections on Conversations in the Kitchen

'*Conversations in the Kitchen'* reveals the grief our community was experiencing as we navigated the loss of a way of being and living together. In this disorienting space, the depth of those resonant relationships which defined KCAT as a healthy pedagogical space, show themselves as deep care and heart ache. The shifts in policy had seriously impacted our everyday experiences, our intra- and interpersonal life worlds. The artist learners and educators were feeling these shifts as a disorientating dilemma, a place of threshold, where moving forward into the unknown was inevitable.

Billie began referring to the HSE and HIQA as the 'enemy.' Her language was charged, emotional, and entirely grounded in her lived reality. She had lost her Camphill family, who were now replaced by a rotation of unfamiliar shift workers. 'We need families,' she told me, simple words that carried profound longing. In her search to make sense of the changes, she would come to see me often, and she would talk about the parallels she saw between the regime I had lived under in Zimbabwe and the institutional control creeping into her world. She asked more than once whether, despite new boundaries and titles, I could still be her friend, or if I was now only 'staff.'

Her confusion wasn't just about roles, it was about identity, about love, or about loss. She later confided to me that she had been prescribed anti-anxiety medication to cope with the overwhelm she was experiencing. Her daily life had been altered beyond recognition. It was now a life shaped by institutional logic and medical control rather than familial relationship and resonance.

When KCAT closed in 2020 during the pandemic, the absence of it in people's lives was felt as a rupture. For the learner artists, KCAT wasn't a service - it was a creative home. Artist educators worked tirelessly to maintain a connection with their learners - delivering art supplies, hosting

Zoom classes, and personal phone calls, but these were ineffectual and in actuality, I believe they added to the confusion and keen sense of disorientation everyone was feeling. For learner artists with intellectual disabilities, the loss of routine, of physical space, of relational energy, had profound consequences. I received regular phone calls, some anxious, some grieving, describing episodes of depression, lethargy, and loneliness. The void was personal, collective, and deeply affecting. The pandemic brought with it a profound rupture for KCAT Arts Centre, but I don't believe it is solely responsible for creating the tensions we all felt; the pandemic exposed the shifts that were already being put into motion at a higher management level.

For years, we had been watching a slow but steady shift from a community rooted in creative freedom and mutual support to one that was increasingly shaped by external managerial and medical agendas. The pandemic only accelerated this shift, making visible the quiet co-option that was already happening. What had once been a place of warmth, inclusion, and artistic agency was being turned into a business-oriented model, more comparable to a day service for people with intellectual disabilities.

When we finally returned to work and each other, KCAT was a transformed environment. Already under strain, the learning centre lost the last elements of spontaneity and person-centred learning that had once defined it before the Pandemic. HSE guidelines and HIQA inspections, while intended to safeguard health, brought with them a wave of new protocols that undid the core identity of our community. Learner artists were divided into 'pods,' breaks were staggered, and longstanding shared rhythms were disrupted. The second-floor professional artists had their studio hours halved to accommodate shifts. They now ate alone. The lively kitchen, delicious smells of M's lunches, clatter of pots, warmth of domestic ritual was all gone. It was an eerily silent and sterile environment.

The couches and books were removed because they were now considered infection risks. The extensive library was boarded over, as if it had never existed[41].The piano untouched and silently 'safe.' The large metaphorical King's River stones (See Artefact 13) set into the path outside were dug up after a HIQA inspection deemed them a safety hazard. At the door, learner artists and educators were met with temperature checks, sign-in forms, hand sanitiser and face masks. For many, particularly those artists with intellectual disabilities, the inability to read facial expressions or speak clearly under the masks made communication and connection frustrating and debilitating. Relationships built on nuance, embodied resonance, and intuition, such as the one Ella and I shared, was no longer possible (See Artefacts 22-26). Procedural protocol made the warmth and reassurance of human resonance feel forced and this took its toll on everyone

. Artist educators, many of whom had spent years working alongside learners in mutual learning, were suddenly required to complete a whole catalogue of HSE trainings unrelated to their work[42]. The shift from artist educator to 'carer/health worker' was not only a professional imposition; it signalled a deeper ideological turn. The emphasis was no longer on creative facilitation, but on safeguarding, documentation, and compliance. Within this context, it became more and more difficult to hold space for art making and keep the pathology of the 'disability' paradigm at bay. The frustration was felt deeply by committed artist educators like Rachel (See Artefact 27). Relationships which had once been defined by mutual respect and regard were now reconfigured to be replaced by a top-down management system. Learner artists who had been seen as autonomous and creative, were now redefined as vulnerable and dependent. The studio was no longer a place where learner artists felt they were escaping the 'dictatorship of reality.' They had experienced the world's definition of them as passive recipients of care within their once safe space. I watched as artist educators, many of whom had come to KCAT drawn by its radically inclusive ethos, struggled to reconcile their practice with these new constraints. They were no longer artist educators but carers. Their training, their instincts, their connection to the artists, none of it seemed to matter anymore.

Historically, Camphill communities had been based on a social model of care: people with disabilities and those supporting them living and working together. Now, with the increased internal managerialism of the National Organisation Camphill, intensified HIQA inspections and more stringent applications of the Health Act of 2007 (Health

Act, 2007), that model was systematically undone. Residential houses were closed altogether or medicalised; they resembled hospitals more than they did homes.

The visible signs of COVID did eventually fade, restrictions lifted, masks removed but the ethos and relaxed atmosphere of KCAT did not return altogether. The medical model imposed by the Camphill Organisation and the HSE during the pandemic stayed with us, a residue of mistrust and an increased pathologising of the learner artist lingered. What had made KCAT a unique site of arts pedagogy and inclusive learning was quietly, but decisively, undone.

[41] On a recent visit, I looked through a small crack between the boards and saw that the spiders had set up a gloriously complicated and organic ecosystem across the library shelves of books.

[42] This training (astonishingly) included ’Safe use of Sharps’ and ‘An introduction to Children First’

As Lennon (2020) writes,

> ‘such communities are intentional creations rather than the product of local organic evolution. Consequently, they can last only so long as the members remain committed to the ideals of co-equality, care and a respect for difference that is the bedrock of each community,’ in KCAT, we witnessed how quickly those ideals could be eclipsed by policy.
>
> Lennon 2020

As the people involved on the community ground, we had never imagined KCAT as a Day Service for people with intellectual disabilities, neither had we thought of it as just another educational programme. It was a shared space, an artistic ‘home’ for artist learners and artist educators. But as national policy became more and more focused on compliance, regulation, and professionalisation, the nature of our centre was fundamentally altered. The National Organisation of Camphill began making changes aligned with a business-oriented, medically driven model of care. These changes affected our everyday experiences, significant shifts in our routines, they distorted job roles and relationships between learner artists and artist educators. ‘Conversations in the Kitchen’ only hinted at the full extent of the brokenness that was to come for the community.

Groups of concerned parents, families, Camphill coworkers, and supporters met regularly, trying to preserve the values that were the foundation of KCAT’s ethos. In these meetings we spoke of care, of belonging, of creativity as a form of connection, but our efforts to hold on to what we believed in began to feel like a slow ebbing inevitability. The language in policy had changed and with it the atmosphere of the centre. Our established relationships, based on collaboration and democratic structures between artist learners and educators and regional management staff became more and more strained and we talked more about risk management than we did about art process and the joyful achievements of each individual. The relational aspect, so important to

the work we did, was significantly diminished.

Allegations of financial mismanagement within Camphill further blurred the boundaries between care and control. ‘House mothers and fathers’ were replaced with temporary managers, P.I.C.s (Persons in Charge) who were constantly turned over to avoid attachment. Long-term coworkers left, unable to reconcile their vision of community life with the new corporate framework. Their departures were painful for everyone, but for the learner artist with intellectual disabilities, like Billie[43], they were devastating.

KCAT transitioned from a space rooted in inclusion, creativity, and human connection, where recognition and resonance scaffolded ways of teaching and learning, to an institution defined by medical and business-oriented models focusing on objective and wholly practical and economical concerns.

The art pedagogy we practised in KCAT had enabled individuals of differing abilities to thrive in community. KCAT had offered a radically inclusive educational model (Greenstein, 2016), one that stood as a quiet refusal of the mainstream’s commodification of learning. It celebrated difference not as a pathology but as central to the ontology of life itself (Greenstein, 2016, p.113).

What I (and others) experienced at KCAT was holistic, process-oriented, and profoundly relational. It prioritised heart over mind (Rendón, 2014), seeing each person as capable of becoming, of flourishing, not in spite of their difference, but because of it. In that learning space, difference was not a problem to solve; it was a way of embracing new possibilities. There was no segregation, no hierarchy of ability. The community operated from a belief that learning and creating could only be fully realised in relationship, with each other, with the art, and with the space itself.

For me, KCAT had become a space where my ontological and epistemological values were not only acknowledged but lived. I found resonance with others who, like me, had struggled to fit within dominant and traditional educational structures. KCAT's pedagogy, non-competitive, experiential, collaborative, allowed people to recognise one another and themselves. The boundaries between educator, artist and learner were fluid and interchangeable, we were always humans capable of more, we did not recognise limitations, only possibilities. KCAT recognised extrarational knowledge as valid and equal to cognitive, cerebral knowledge. It created space for ways of knowing that didn't conform to accreditation or economic productivity. KCAT allowed time for creativity and honoured presence, and it nurtured agency in those who had been told they had none.

Holding such a radical pedagogical space comes with very challenges. Anti-conformist spaces like KCAT struggle to secure investment because they nurture artists not labourers for conventional workforce roles. In KCAT, each artist's contribution to the world was valued, not for marketability, but for meaning. As a result, we were always under financial pressure, and sustainability was a constant concern. Staff and artist educators worked in precarious conditions, mostly without security, certainly without fair pay. Still, the centre resisted conforming to the structures of QQI accreditation for funding, having learned through trial and error, that the introduction of such accredited courses, while promising financial relief, introduced stress, competition, and performance pressure that ran counter to its ethos. The joy of process and participation had previously collapsed under the weight of measurable outcomes, and we couldn't allow that to happen to the artist and artist educators again.

By 2022, the weight of external pressures, bureaucratic restructuring, financial austerity, and an expanding managerial approach, had taken its toll. The fragility of this space was increasingly apparent. The values that

had once defined KCAT were being eroded by a focus on efficiency, risk management, and institutional control.

Eventually, I found myself unable to protect what I felt mattered most: a pedagogy built on presence, relationship, and resonance. The emotional toll of resisting the shift towards pathologising people with intellectual disabilities and performativity of art making became unsustainable for me.

My resignation was not just professional, it was personal. I could no longer stay in a space where compassion and relational pedagogy were being steadily replaced by policies that made people invisible.

In KCAT, I had found healing and understanding, digging into difficult past experiences (Sibbett & Thompson, 2008), and allowing myself to confront and integrate the 'other within' (Romanshyn, 2007). In KCAT, I had encountered new ways of being and relating to others, grounded in the recognition of difference and the celebration of creative potential. Before I came to work in KCAT, I had struggled with low confidence in my own agency as a learner artist and educator. I had internalised a belief that my way of being and learning was 'less than that, that my approaches were 'wrong' because they were different. I didn't want to face the 'other within,' that part of me that had been 'unacceptable' in the life world I had found myself in; I had repressed and hidden my true 'self.' As Romanshyn (2007) writes, when the other within is unconscious, when it lives in one's life as a shadow, this emotional challenge is often more than one wishes to hear' (p. 340).

In the safe and supportive space of KCAT, which truly treasured and promoted difference, I began to listen to that challenge and understand myself more deeply; it was the beginning of reclaiming my 'self.' The emotional challenges I faced in reclaiming my past and my story could be held in the processes of artmaking, building relationships, and

engaging in critical reflection for reframing. My experience had been a similar one to that of many of the KCAT artists.

In that community, I met people who had been pathologised and dismissed. And yet, through the slow and patient work of artmaking and connection, they had built resilient, creative identities. KCAT was a site of resistance where marginalised people could reclaim their voices, visibility, and power, not just to mainstream education, but to a culture that too often overlooks creativity, care, and relationship in learning as a whole.

Leaving KCAT was an act of mourning the loss of something I held dear. But it was also an act of integrity to the values that it had stood for and a refusal to return to co-option into a set of values that no longer served me. My leaving was not caused solely by the changes KCAT went through. My own body had begun to fail me.

A cancer diagnosis forced me into confrontation with my own evolving limitations. External pressures and internal realities converged to create a liminal space, a threshold of reflection and reckoning (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1995; Sibbett & Thompson, 2008). It was there, in the quiet collapse of what I had built and believed in, that something else was beginning to grow. My life was changing; the research was changing too. Romanshyn (2007) describes the moment when research, or life, slips from the hands of the researcher and begins to follow its own path. It was no longer a question of what I intended for the research, but what the research (and my life) was asking of me.

> ‘Research also has its moments of falling apart, moments when the work falls out of the hands of the researcher, when the work resists the conscious intentions of the researcher and begins to

> twist and turn in another way. Such moments are crucial to an approach to re-search that would keep soul in mind because they signal a shift from the researcher's ego-intentions for the work to the intentions that the work has for itself.'
>
> Romanyshyn, 2007, pp. 47-48

I resigned from the centre, deferred this research for a year, and entered a space of surrender. I felt lost, but not hopeless. It wasn't reason that led me away to look for myself in art making again, it was my heart's quiet insistence that I honour that calling (Rendón, 2014). Illness and loss gave me clarity, however painful. It asked me to face my vulnerabilities, my mortality, and rediscover a longing I had buried: to live a life shaped by creativity, compassion, and meaning.

In Chapter Three of this research, Reclamation and Repair,' I tell the story of how I came to explore artmaking as a healing and restorative space. Bringing everything I had learned about the power of art pedagogy as a practice for growing and flourishing and using it for the repair of 'self,' I turned my attention to reclaiming and repairing my life.

My body, my work, and my world were all in transition. And from that liminal space, something new in me began to emerge. I decided then to look for my 'lost poem,' the child I had surrendered.

ARTEFACT 28 36 ECCLES ST, DUBLIN

I hold a little yellow card, a year of appointments, in my two hands and stumble my way through the dark corridors before pushing the heavy door open onto Eccles Street.

The sun is high in a blue, blue, sky.

I turn my face to the heat above and I breathe in.

My heart bursts, a confetti shower, in gratefulness at the

blue, the beauty, at life. I have one thought only - find my

child.

That is all I must do now.

Find my child and know that he is well.

Then I can stop and surrender

to anything that comes my way.

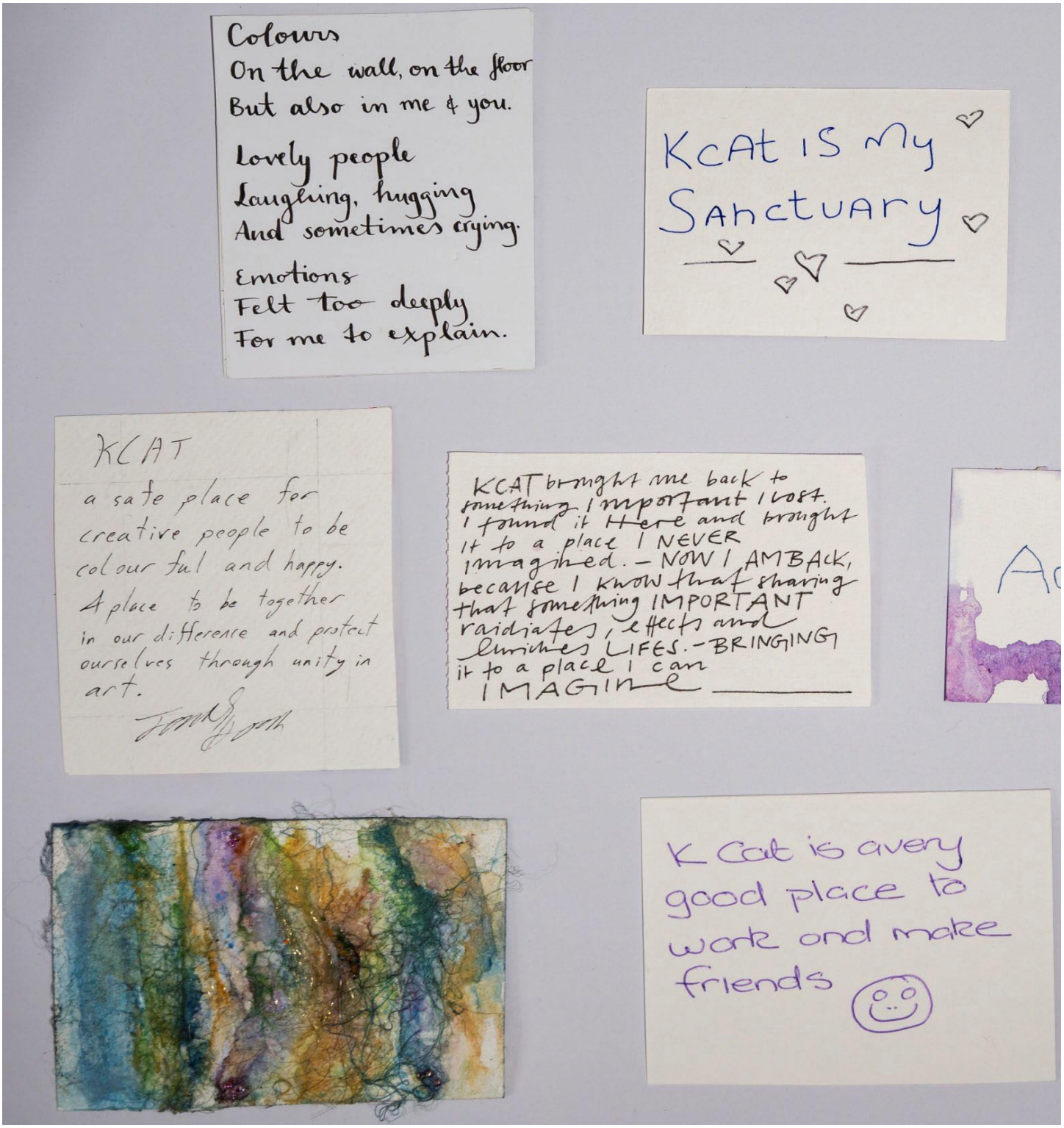


Image 6 Community Artist Contributions to Community Vessel 2022

Developing Methodology as a Teacher

Heuristic Inquiry

> ‘Having made a discovery, I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently. I have crossed a gap, the heuristic gap, which lies between problem and discovery’
>
> Polanyi, 1958, p.151.

As a teacher and an artist, an art teacher, I felt my way into a living inquiry, knowing instinctively that what I wanted to contribute through research would be found in my life experiences and my practice. I surrendered to an attitude of wonder and openness which is inherent in heuristic inquiry (Sultan, 2018) to find my way into the ‘self’ and explore what it might tell me. A heuristic attitude involves more than cognitive knowing; it embraces an emergent, intuitive process which is both ‘diffuse’ and ‘non-sequential’ (Sultan, 2018, p.95). In Chapter One, a curated body of descriptive, poetic, and artistic processes revealed the artist’s way of being, learning, and becoming. In Chapter Two, a heuristic attitude becomes even more pronounced as the relational exploration of conversation and shared experiences of artmaking take on more significance. This research moves away from Life History of the past and becomes more about the people I spend my working life with. The explorations in Chapter Two emerged to demand an intuitive and responsive approach to others.

A heuristic attitude towards a living inquiry is both qualitative and phenomenological in its exploration of human consciousness and experience (Moustakas, 1990, 1994). It respects the unique qualities of the subjects and co-subjects and fosters an open-minded responsiveness to what might emerge. Through this deeply subjective process, a heuristic attitude might reveal experiences that hold potential social and collective

implications for humanity (Sultan, 2018).

Embodying the personal, creative, and emergent nature of an artist's way of being and becoming, a heuristic inquiry approach supports both discovery of an unpredictable nature and learning from mistakes; elements intrinsic to art pedagogy (Moustakas, 1974, 1990; Sultan, 2018). Art making requires a methodology grounded in personal experience, where the topic emerges from within as a 'lingering presence' (Rendón, 2023, p.27) or 'a question you are unable to ignore' (Sultan, 2018, p.11). The 'questions' guiding this research 'chose me,' were questions deeply embedded in my own experience and personhood (Sultan, 2018, p.10). A heuristic approach 'awakens and inspires researchers to make contact with and respect their questions and problems, affirming imagination, intuition, self-reflection, and the tacit dimension as valid ways in the search for knowledge' (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p.40).

KCAT as a Research Context

> 'Knowing beyond cognitive recognition requires participation in a shared culture, art, language, values, and tacit mutual understanding, which forms the foundation for deeper, experiential knowing'
>
> Heron, 1996, p. 280

KCAT (Kilkenny Collective for Arts Talent) is an inclusive arts centre where people with and without intellectual disabilities make art. As Education Coordinator, I experienced its pedagogy as one grounded in participatory knowing (Heron, 1996) and resonance (Rosa, 2019). I sensed that within these relationships, with people, art, and space, there were essential insights into how we might live, learn, and create in more humane and relational ways. The genesis of this inquiry emerged when I recognised the unique ethos of KCAT: a community rooted in inclusivity, creativity, and the belief that learning is a continual process of becoming (Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

The living/working space of KCAT became an onto-epistemological axis, where life history reflection and painting deepened my awareness of personal, cultural, and relational dimensions of learning. The holistic, caring ethos that characterised the learning centre unlocked new perspectives for me, challenging the cognitive, conformity-driven paradigms I had long questioned. Using the 'self' as subject is a statement that knowledge is not simply handed down by external authorities but found within the 'self' (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Critical reflexivity (Brookfield, 2015) and autoethnographic practice enhanced my sensitivity to others' stories, an ethical prerequisite for respectful qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

After I decided to begin this research, I invited artists, facilitators, and colleagues into a collaborative process involving interviews, observations, field notes, dialogue, and artmaking. Together, we explored what was special about this unique educational model, we asked why it worked, and what the challenges of sustaining its inclusive, holistic approach were. I had begun with a conventional research plan: identify the setting, define questions, collect data, etc. While this would have fitted a qualitative paradigm (Holliday, 2007), it quickly became apparent that the relationships within KCAT would reshape the research itself. My role was not, nor could I ever remain, detached. Rather, the inquiry evolved into a relational, reflective, and creative act, one that mirrored the exact nature of the setting.

Ethical Considerations for Research

Ethical Integrity and Research with Potentially Vulnerable Adults: Institutional and Relational Considerations

Ethical integrity was the guiding principle throughout the design and execution of this research, particularly given the involvement of adults deemed vulnerable by the state. This included individuals with cognitive impairments or those in dependent situations. Vulnerable populations face heightened risks in research, so it was crucial to ensure that informed consent, confidentiality, and participant autonomy were thoroughly addressed. As the researcher, I was committed to establishing and maintaining ethical standards that would ensure the safety and dignity of all participants.

The ethical considerations of the research were also critical at an institutional level. I collaborated closely with KCAT to ensure their ethical policies aligned with the study's procedures. This included staff training on supporting participants and ensuring that all contributions shared with the organisation were anonymised. On a relational level, I recognised the potential for power imbalances between participants and researchers, especially given the participants' cognitive impairments and possible dependence on caregivers. To mitigate this, I fostered strong relationships with participants, providing a safe environment for them to express their views. I also made sure to keep caregivers and family members informed throughout the study, maintaining transparency about the progress and outcomes.

Informed Consent as an Ongoing Process

A central concern in this study was obtaining freely given informed consent. Following the guidance from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, 2015), I viewed informed consent as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. Given the changing capacities and circumstances of my participants, they needed to understand the research fully throughout the study. Participants were provided with clear, accessible information about the study's purpose, procedures, duration, and any potential risks and benefits that may be incurred.

In recognition of the challenges some participants faced with reading or processing written material, I created and offered alternative formats for consent, such as verbal explanations and audio-recorded consent. This approach was crucial in ensuring that participants, particularly those with cognitive impairments, could engage with the process in a way that was accessible to them. In line with APA (2018) guidelines, I was acutely aware of making sure that no coercion or undue influence was exerted on any of the artists. Additionally, the artist participants were encouraged to discuss their decision to engage in the research with family members or trusted individuals, allowing them time to reflect on their choice before proceeding. At times I sought out the care givers and gatekeepers myself, and we had a meeting with the potential participants to discuss all aspects of the research engagement.

Reflecting on Participant Selection and Vulnerability

In considering how to select participants, I made a deliberate decision to limit the number of participants. Although many potential research colleagues at KCAT could have been included, I decided against expanding the working group. Vulnerability can arise from many factors, including disability, age, and marginalisation, all of which can impact an individual's capacity to give voluntary consent (ESRC, 2015). By choosing a smaller sample, I was able to give each participant the

personal attention and care needed to ensure that their participation was truly voluntary. This decision was grounded in the principle of researcher reflexivity, which encourages active reflection on the power dynamics that may shape the research process (Shannon, 2018). In limiting the participant pool, I ensured that no participant felt pressured by external factors such as institutional roles or professional relationships, which could compromise their autonomy (Morrow & Richards, 2007).

Ensuring the Integrity of Consent

Throughout the research, I continued to revisit and engage with the informed consent process. Participants needed to understand they could withdraw at any point without facing any consequences, and this was clearly communicated to them. This ongoing dialogue about consent is particularly important when working with vulnerable adults, as the capacity to provide informed consent can evolve (Caldwell, Barnett, & Hemsley, 2016). In cases where participants had cognitive impairments, I ensured that the consent process was supported by family members, caregivers, or trusted professionals, as recommended by the Mental Capacity Act (2005). Consent was not treated as a formality but was an active and reflexive process throughout the study (see Appendix 1).

Confidentiality and Disclosure

Maintaining confidentiality was a fundamental ethical consideration. Given the potentially sensitive nature of the material I was collecting, I took great care to ensure that personal information was protected at all stages. Participants were made aware of the limits of confidentiality, particularly in cases where they disclosed information that could indicate a risk of harm to themselves or others. This was particularly pertinent in a research context where disclosures of abuse or neglect might arise. I was prepared to breach confidentiality if required by law or ethical duty, as researchers have a responsibility to take action in such circumstances (ESRC, 2015).

In any such cases, I would have consulted with relevant professionals, such as safeguarding officers and care coordinators, and informed participants of any actions taken, unless doing so would increase risk (APA, 2018). My approach ensured that I adhered to ethical guidelines that prioritise the duty of care for participants in vulnerable situations.

Dissemination and Impact on Participants

As the research drew to a close, I reflected on how the dissemination of findings would impact participants and their communities. The ESRC (2015) stresses the need for careful consideration of the potential consequences of sharing research findings, not only for the participants themselves but also for their families and broader communities. Since the study involved a small participant group, the risk of identifying individuals through published findings was heightened. To address this, I ensured that all material was anonymised before dissemination. However, I also recognised that some participants may have wanted their experiences shared openly, as they were strong advocates for their community. This required balancing confidentiality with participant voice, respecting those who wished for their stories to be shared.

Furthermore, I was mindful of the broader impact of the research on participants' lives, careers, and relationships. Given that this community had already been subject to scrutiny by state bodies, I wanted to ensure that my research would add value to their lives and well-being. Guided by the beneficence principle (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013), I ensured that the potential benefits of the research—such as improving care practices and informing policy—outweighed any potential risks to participants.

Collection and Assessment; Timing Considerations

The research involved five KCAT participants: Andrew, Samual, Rachel, Ella, and Billie, some of whom were deemed adults with varying degrees of neurodiversity. I conducted semi-structured interviews, which I called conversations, with each participant. I allowed for a flexible needs-based approach to collect material with each contributor. Two to three interview sessions were held with most participants over a three-year period, during which KCAT was undergoing organisational changes that may have influenced the participants' responses. As changes occurred, the participants were more and more focused on the increasingly

managerial culture which was being imposed on the centre.

The timing of the interviews was significant due to the organisational changes occurring within KCAT at the time. The research was conducted in a longitudinal time frame: before, during, and after the changes, which I believe provides a comprehensive view of how these shifts impacted participants' perspectives; their responses and contributions reflect their concerns and life experiences throughout. The length of time taken for the research engagement allowed me to consider the evolution of participants' emotional and cognitive responses as they adapted to the changes, ensuring that their contributions reflected their ongoing experiences rather than a snapshot at one moment in time. A single interview/ conversation would have skewed the view of the artists' views of KCAT. I was always careful to balance participant responses with an overall view moderated by the timing of the context changes. I implemented a 'light-touch' thematic assessment approach, identifying recurrent patterns within the interview contributions. Each interview transcript was transcribed verbatim, and I organised the transcripts into meaningful themes, focusing on participants' perspectives regarding the changes at KCAT. The artefacts were considered alongside the interview material to capture symbolic expressions that complemented the verbal responses, offering a richer interpretation of participants' experiences.

The supplementation of interviews by visual artefacts (e.g., photographs, drawings) allowed participants to express their experiences beyond words. These artefacts were included in my considerations, providing additional depth to the understanding of their lived experiences.

In my KCAT role, I supported learners and staff through teaching, coordination, and care. I was also a participant observer, engaging in ethnographic fieldwork and arts-based research (Atkinson, 1998; Eisner, 2002; Springgay, 2005). These practices involved relational storytelling, telling stories within my environment (Chase, 2011), and required continual ethical reflexivity. Being embedded in the community meant negotiating insider/outsider dynamics (Hayano, 1979). While familiarity gave me access and trust, it also demanded attentiveness to boundaries.

My relationships with neurodiverse adults were based on deep mutual respect. Supporting their learning and well-being, I witnessed each person's unique contributions and the histories that shaped them. Academic inquiry, in this context, had to remain flexible, caring, and responsive to changing needs. Ultimately, this research unfolded as a living, relational process—rooted in art, pedagogy, and the co-construction of meaning within a dynamic community.

The documentation of the domination and dehumanisation of people with intellectual and cognitive differences has left an indelible scar on humankind. Places of learning have been recognised as sites of both oppression and liberation (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2001; McLaren, 1998). In education, people with learning difficulties, power and control remain major ethical concerns. Because the disability field has been plagued by historical and contemporary abuses, this research needed to be grounded in exemplary practice, infused with love' (Freire, 1970, p. 70). An attitude of love and care underpins my ontology and guides this ethical approach. As hooks (2006) asserts, seeking the highest good' requires looking to love (p. 249). As an insider researcher, I was aware of the privilege of trust and remained mindful of this responsibility. In writing ethnographic observations, I was careful to avoid objectifying learners, which included covertly watching them. Observations in everyday settings, attending to culture and meaning-making (Anderson-Levitt, 2012), demand respect, and ethical awareness. My initial concerns were for the individuals, the organisation, and the wider community of learners, teachers, and researchers, potentially impacted by this inquiry. Living and acting in an interactive interpersonal space, I acknowledged my ethical responsibilities and anticipated that nuanced issues might emerge during the research journey. As relational beings engaging daily with our own and others' stories, this inquiry required exceptional care to ensure everyone's well-being.

The chosen collaborative methodologies included dialogical processes,

where several participants and I created spaces for meaning-making through verbal and visual narratives. All participants are artists familiar with visual language, which served as an accessible medium in the research. Since some participants are nonverbal or unable to read, images speak volumes.' I viewed this process as embodied and relational, acknowledging human potential for self-actualisation (Sultan, 2018, p. 22). As a teacher invested in healthy pedagogy, I hoped this research would foster flourishing and growth for all involved. Collaborating long-term through artmaking and reflection offered opportunities for shared learning and transformative experiences (Heron, 1996, p. 2).

Dialogical narrative interviews demanded attentive listening, which Atkinson (1998) highlights as making people feel they truly matter (p. 34). While aware of potential benefits, I also recognised that working closely might evoke difficult memories or feelings. Together with participants and management, we anticipated distress and established procedures to safeguard well-being. Sessions would be suspended, if necessary, with support from key workers and safeguarding officers. Families or guardians would be informed if required, with incidents reported to the Health Service Executive.

Ongoing conversations and reflections on written and visual work were central. Habermas (1990) emphasises dialogue as essential for mutual understanding and morality, and his discourse theory guided our ethical perspectives, ensuring collective consensus on dialogue norms (Heron, 2017). This aligns with Freirean dialogue theory, which positions participants as co-subjects/researchers expressing their views rather than passive listeners (Freire, 1970, p. 62). Ethical planning ensured participants retained control over what material was used in the research. After each transcription, I checked in with participants to confirm their consent and understanding. When the transcripts were lengthy, I highlighted relevant sections for their review. Occasionally, participants requested changes or omissions. Consent forms were provided at entry

and allowed for contributions at any stage of the research. The creative and relational methods were informed by imaginal and intuitive approaches (Sultan, 2018, Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). Issues of ownership and consent for reproducing artwork were addressed through additional agreements (see Appendices 1 and 2). Artists retained sole ownership of their work and decided whether their art would remain anonymous, with preferences recorded in consent forms. Agreements were drafted in plain English, adapted from available resources[44]

The psychological, emotional, and physical health of each participant was informally assessed and reassessed before planning and holding meetings. I became acutely aware of the participants' levels of energy and well-being, particularly for one of the participants whose health fluctuated considerably. I had anticipated that the longest sessions would be those where the participants and I shared a making/painting space. Though these times were long, it was our combined experience that the time 'flew by.' Further sessions where conversation and storytelling/informal interviews took place could be much longer than I anticipated. There were times when I had to ask one of the participants if we could rejoin at a later stage to continue our discussions. The sessions happened throughout the research, sporadically and in line with the participants' availability. One of the two participants came to me to say that he would like to leave the research at a point when he felt overwhelmed by his life circumstances and activities. He was asked whether he still wanted his contributions to be included in the final manuscript, and he said that he did.

As an artist, researcher, and teacher, a/r/tographer (Irwin, 2013), my creative, pedagogical, and scholarly practices were deeply intertwined and contiguous. This identity aligned with KCAT's culture, where learning is seen not as a linear process but as an ongoing transformation (Kolb & Kolb, 2009) within a relational setting. Art practice-as-research offered a space to dwell in threshold, in-between zones, where tacit knowledge and

metaphor are inherent (Polanyi, 1966; Robinson et al., 2023).

Ownership and Presentation of the Research

This research was only possible because I worked with generous and gentle people who believed in the value of what I was doing. For Andrew in particular, it became a vehicle to share his life story and his experiences of education, learning, and knowing. I struggled to reconcile the formal requirement of a finished, bound manuscript with the participants' open and trusting attitude, which called for transparency and acknowledgement. Volume Two of this thesis became a way to manifest the work, include the artist contributions in an aesthetic form. In Volume Two words are kept to a minimum. Emphasis is on the 'felt' visual aspects of and a/r/tographic search for meaning and knowledge.

In much the same way, the film became a way that I could honour and convey the months and years of collegial engagement I had shared with Andrew, Samuel, Rachel, Ella, and so many more artists for this research. I applied for a grant through the Arts Office in Kilkenny to create a short film that would capture the essence of the research. Collaborating with a videographer, we filmed the artefacts and the KCAT space to provide context. The editing process helped me curate a selection that represents the main themes and ideas of this research. While the film is only a small iteration of the work, it holds the voices of the artists, the essence of the research, and the emergent, unfinished nature of the study.

[44]NALA – National Adult Literacy Agency (https://www.nala.ie/publications/plain-english-guidelines-at-a-glance/ accessed 22/07/2025).

Evocative Autoethnography

Dorothy Morrissey (2013, 2014) takes a reflective and embodied approach to research. She embraces autoethnography as a way to explore the 'self as subject' within the sociological, cultural, and political contexts of pedagogy. Her methodologies draw on the interplay of personal memory, emotional truth, and academic inquiry. Positioning the personal as political, weaving narrative, critical reflection, and scholarly engagement, she explores the complexities of identity, teaching, and marginalisation.

In a similar vein, this work leans into the tensions between inner subjectivity and outer systems of control, where my personal story becomes both method and message. The very act of telling a story from a personal and evocative autoethnographic point of view is pedagogical and political, one that makes visible the hidden curriculum of marginalisation and reclaims agency through the arts. Morrissey's practice of autoethnography foregrounds the lived experience as a rich and valid site of academic inquiry. Her work validates the use of introspection as a method and as meaning-making, acknowledging that our lived and often contradictory experiences can yield deep understanding. In this spirit, my engagement with personal narrative becomes a means to both examine and resist the systemic 'othering' that has contributed to shaping my identity. Like Morrissey, Fitzsimons demonstrates how through auto-ethnographic storytelling, embedded in a critical approach to adult education, a more democratic alternative to canonical knowledge is offered to adult learning spaces,

> 'If we accept that 'our own lives' are a route to knowledge, we become less concerned with the ingestion of facts and truths and more interested in listening to each other to find out how we each experience our world'
>
> Fitzsimons 2019, p.91.

The use of autoethnography enables me to speak from within the lived tension between belonging and exclusion, conformity, and creativity, and offers a space in which personal memory and scholarly insight can coexist, inform, and transform.

My reflective journaling and writing practice during teaching (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Brookfield, 2015) deepened my awareness of relational dynamics in the classroom. Journals, sketches, and poetry captured the rhizomatic, outside-the-box' nature of artmaking as resistance to institutional norms (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). By transforming these notes into more evocative autoethnographic pieces, I could embrace flux and transformation, which allowed me to navigate more fluidly between knowing and unknowing (Irwin, 2017).

> 'What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you sicken and die of them, still in silence?'
>
> Audre Lorde, 2007, p.30

Lorde's words powerfully affirm the survival, resilience, and liberation that can be found through feeling and expression, especially by those whose voices have been traditionally marginalised. Evocative autoethnography enables readers to not only understand but feel the research experience fully, merging personal narrative with cultural critique (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). It is a method grounded in emotionality and subjectivity, enhancing reflexive capacity and fostering empathy (McCormack, 2012). By weaving storytelling, memory, and reflection into whole pieces, evocative autoethnography reveals insider perspectives often excluded from dominant knowledge production (Adams, Ellis, & Holman Jones, 2017). It also creates a safe space for personal voice and vulnerability, essential for authentic inquiry. By painting and writing with a sensibility towards the evocative and auto-ethnographic, I can engage in dialogue with my inner 'self,' embracing fragmented, non-

linear memory as a source of truth and transformation (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

In telling my stories again through reflection and symbolic meaning, I transform my experience (Randall, 2013, 2014; Hillman, 1975). The stories we tell each other and ourselves shape our identity, enabling us to reconstruct our 'selves' and reclaim agency. This creative reflective practice invites self-discovery, imagination, and re-imagining possibilities for change. By re-searching my childhood through evocative autoethnography, I allow multiple voices - the child and adult - to converse on the page, acknowledging complexity and contradiction. This method embraces memory's fluidity and the ongoing negotiation of meaning (Bochner, 1984; Bruner, 1994). It transforms chaotic experience into manageable stories, contributing to understanding transformation processes and deep learning as well as healing and restoration of the 'self' (see Chapter Three for more on this).

We speak with different 'voices' all the time. Our voices, the way we express ourselves verbally, reflect our positioning in the world, reveal different parts of ourselves to different audiences. As a resonant, empathic being, we cannot use the same vocabulary, syntax, and phraseology in one setting and move to the next without adaptation.

It would be unthinkable to me to use the informal familial voice I use with my granddaughters while addressing an audience of professional educators, for instance. When we write, our voice changes too. In poetic form, I am freer and more playful with grammar; for instance, I take liberties with sentences, white spaces, and grammar. On the other hand, when I write formal academic transcripts, I carefully check that I am using standard font, spacing, and punctuation.

A necessary adjustment of methodology in this thesis lies in the 'voices' I use. In some parts of the thesis, I speak with poetic sensibility, and the writing resonates with feelings, embodied experience, and empathy, from a place of connection and intra- and interpersonal relationships. In other parts of the thesis, I critique and engage in a cerebral, objective way with theorists whom I meet only on the page in black text. Both of these voices in writing are mine. The integration of both formal/informal, academic, and poetic is an expression of multiple ways of being in the world, which hopes to challenge traditional boundaries between creative and academic writing.

> 'Everything is constructed in language; our experiences are all epistemologically and ontologically composed and understood in words, our words, and others' words'
>
> Leggo, 2013, p. 166

In Volume Two of this thesis, an emphasis is placed on image and Artefcat. It is an alternative a/r/tographic iteration of the journey of research which focuses on understanding by 'reading' communication differently. It is an important iteration for all viewers and 'reader's whether or not textual language is accessible to them or not.

Reflecting on Key Themes of Recognition and Resonance

Themes of *Recognition* and *Resonance* are highlighted in Chapter Two where the research context is situated in an arts centre for people of all abilities called KCAT (Kilkenny Collective for Arts Talent) In the evolution of educational practices, particularly within the context of learners with disabilities, we have seen a transformation from the exclusionary models of the mid-20th century to the contemporary emphasis on inclusion. The educational systems of the 1950s, like those Andrew experienced (see Chapter Two), are a far cry from the current, more inclusive approach to teaching and learning. Today, inclusion extends beyond primary and secondary education to higher education

and further education in Europe, highlighting the need to provide equal opportunities for all learners, regardless of their perceived abilities. This shift represents an important effort to address the long-standing inequalities faced by people with disabilities, who have historically been marginalised and pathologised as 'other.'

However, as the educational landscape becomes more inclusive, a major challenge remains for those committed to fair and just educational policies: traditional educational spaces, steeped in a culture of standardisation and outcome orientation, continue to devalue the diverse ways in which students learn. While these spaces may admit students from varied educational backgrounds, they are often structured around a homogenous vision of what learning should look like, leaving many students with different learning styles and needs unprovided for. This paradox is especially visible in adult education, where students with disabilities are now integrated but often forced to adapt to a system that does not truly celebrate their unique ways of knowing.

In this context, inclusion is not merely about admission; it is about the *recognition* of diverse modes of being and knowing. Inclusion, as framed within contemporary pedagogy, involves creating spaces where difference is not just tolerated but valued. This is particularly critical in art education, where the creative, often non-cognitive processes involved in artistic expression offer a profound pathway for learners to engage with the world in ways that challenge and expand conventional understandings of knowledge.

Resonance, as a pedagogical concept, provides a powerful tool for navigating these complexities. Resonance emphasises connection and empathy, creating a space where individuals can relate to each other, the world, and themselves in a way that transcends boundaries. Resonance, in the educational context, operates not merely as a cognitive or intellectual process, but as an emotional and embodied connection. It enables

individuals to experience deep, meaningful interactions with the world, fostering mutual understanding and shared growth. This idea of resonance challenges the compartmentalised, hierarchical models of knowledge transmission, proposing instead a model where knowledge is co-created through empathy and connection.

The work of Rosa (2019) and Hart (2014) offers valuable insights into the role of resonance in education. Rosa speaks of the societal pursuit of productivity and efficiency, where we become increasingly alienated from one another and the world around us. Art fosters resonance, shifting the subject-object relationship to one where empathy and interconnection are central. In this way, artmaking not only serves as a tool for expression but also as a tool for building and nurturing relational bonds. In my teacher identity, I know the role of art education is one where I can help learners engage with the world in this rhizomatic, interconnected manner, where the learner is seen as part of the world, not separate from it.

In this space where *relationship* is key, resonance operates as a counterforce to the depersonalising effects of traditional education. It invites learners to engage with their own lived experiences, to understand their emotions, and to recognise themselves in relation to the world around them. As learners resonate with their art and with one another, they begin to break down the barriers of separation that often arise from perceived differences in ability.

In chapter two, KCAT stands as an outlier post for pedagogical resistance, where learners with diverse cognitive abilities are engaged in artmaking, and resonance serves as a foundation for the creation of a truly inclusive pedagogy. The act of sharing art becomes a powerful vehicle for learning, allowing learners to see themselves and one another as part of a collective, interconnected human experience. Chapter Two focuses on key themes of recognition of the other and resonance with the other, as it shows how KCAT Arts Centre embraces

an educational experience enriched by the diverse perspectives that each learner brings, not despite their differences but because of them.



Image 7 Detail Healing Vessel 2025

Chapter Three A Place of Hope Reclamation and Repair



ARTEFACT 29 Healing Vessel- Stitch and Paint- Alice Bennett 2025

Chapter Three - A Place of Hope Reclamation and Repair

Prologue

I meet her again at breakfast on the third morning of my stay in Annaghmakerrig, the Tyrone Guthrie centre[45]. I have come here in a desperate effort to 'finish' my thesis. Sarah is an art therapist. We talk about Shaun McNiff, art making and sugar-dusted scones. I learn that Sarah is also, like me, a teacher, a researcher, and a practising artist.

I tell her she is an a/r/tographer.

I learn also that Sarah has an almost identical leg injury to me and that we have shared remarkably similar stories of recovery. We laugh in wonder at our common ground. We hatch a plan to go out sketching, I relish the idea of leaving the laptop behind.

We walk until we are drawn to an enormous tree in the grounds between the swan-studded lake and the big house. We arrange ourselves in the grass and lean back against the tree. I have brought only a fine liner; Sarah shares her colours with me. Our sketch books are on our laps, and Sarah hands me a hard copy of *'The Poetry Pharmacy Forever: New Prescriptions to Soothe, Revive and Inspire'* [46]. She invites me to choose a poem. I open the book to where the blue ribbon lies, to Mary Oliver's 'Wild Geese.'

You do not have to be good……

I read the whole poem, and we are silent for a long time.

The wind is picking up, the long hanging boughs wave wildly, they sound like water falling from a great height into the space around us. I have goosebumps.

We talk then about our lives as teachers, artists, researchers, mothers, and partners. We talk about resonance and resilience - our traumas, our recoveries, our reinventions of 'self.'

We talk about resistance and recognition, instances when we have felt

invisible, alienated - she was called a ‘crazy mixed-up kid,’ and I was ‘away with the fairies.’ We also talk about how we have experienced being truly seen, like now, when we have recognised each other as ‘knowing’ the unknown, as being ‘different,’ and as being happy, finally, that we are different. We talk about how our differences are important.

And as we talk, and as we listen to each other, I begin to understand. This is where the journey of research has led me.

To this place. Under this tree.

In the grass, in communion with Sarah. To a sanctuary for artists.

To an artist retreat.

Where we talk about repair

[45] https://tyroneguthrie.ie/About-The-Tyrone-Guthrie-Centre
‘Providing a quiet environment that esteems, supports, and develops our artists is what we do’- accessed 19/07/2025
[46] Sieghart, W. 2023, Poetry Pharmacy Particular Books

Definition - Reclamation[47]

A reassertion of a relationship or connection with something; a re-evaluation of a term, concept, etc., in a more positive or suitable way.

Definition – Repair[48]

Restoration of a system or other unity to good or proper condition; an instance of this.

[47] Oxford University Press. (n.d.). Reclamation, n., 3.b. In the Oxford English Dictionary. Retrieved June 19, 2025, from https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8999594524

[48] Oxford University Press. (n.d.). Repair, n.², 3. In the Oxford English Dictionary. Retrieved May 30, 2025, from https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3153201013

In Chapter Three, I write about my departure from KCAT to understand how it created a liminal space for contemplation, where I could acquire new perspectives and, in doing so, restore and repair my sense of 'self' and identity as an artist-educator. As I continue, I remain close to my way of living, close to artmaking and art practices with others, and I seek out a space for reclamation and reinvention. This chapter further explores how community-based spaces defined by diverse groups and a concentration on process can become sites of transformation and healing. While searching for confirmation as to whether art pedagogies rooted in collective processes can address the broken and hurt parts of ourselves, I continue to do the same on a more personal level in my quest to find the child I gave up for adoption. This chapter shows how art making and art pedagogy support these searches.

Introduction

As mentioned at the end of Chapter Two, personal life circumstances and worsening physical health had forced me to slow down and confront life-changing decisions that needed to be made. These two converging forces, one external and the other internal, created a 'liminal' space of contemplation (Sibbett & Thompson, 2008; Turner, 1995; Van Gennep, 1960), where the personal and the universal converged. In what Irwin (2013) might call an epiphany, I experienced a desperate clarity, an acute awareness of my mortality and a profound longing for meaning. This clarity became a catalyst for addressing my deepest, long-suppressed desire (see Artefact 28).

I supported myself in that longing by returning to what I knew to be effective for engendering resilience and resistance to hopelessness: artmaking and pedagogy. Art-making processes had been a way for me to way to gain insight for self-growth and healing in the past, and I needed them to do the same again. The loss of familiar ground necessitates us to explore new territories, which can become a path for self-transformation (Green, 2023; Mezirow, 1991). The hiatus in my career, the decline in

my physical capacity, a sense of lost agency and increasing vulnerability led to a personal crisis. In this liminal space, I found myself open to the kind of profound perspective shift that occurs when boundaries dissolve (Springgay et al. 2005).

Emotionally and psychologically, I revisited memories - feelings and thoughts, from my adolescent and formative life crisis - relinquishing my child for adoption. Confronted with this 'disorienting dilemma' (Mezirow 1991), I experienced a profound conflict, torn between the need to stay as I was and a need to venture forth in search of new meaning. I was compelled to create meaning from the intrapersonal chaos I was experiencing, and I did this both by revisiting the past and by reimagining my future identity. As Green (2023) notes, this involves 'first the loss, then the courage and creativity required to develop new premises' (p. 195). Through artmaking, I began to reconsider my life so far and begin to reconstruct a new context for 'being' (Randall, 2013). 'A threshold, a liminal period or a margin, all can be seen as metaphors for space that provides the freedom for a creative response or transformation' (Anderson Sathe, 2020, p.60).

I began to inhabit my artist role fully, without responsibility for others as an educator, without administrative work to distract me, I was able to devote all my time to writing and painting, remembering myself as a creative and imaginative being. At the same time, I reached out to a professional Adoption Reunion Facilitator and began the search for my son by contacting people from that time in my life. Remembering myself as a young teenager, I was thrown into reliving events, some of which I experienced as deeply uncomfortable.

In these months, I was in an extended state of 'limbo,' waiting, both for health results after surgeries and also for any possible news of my son's existence. I had no idea of what to expect on either front. I was afraid of

what might be, but I needed to know the outcomes so that I could move forward.

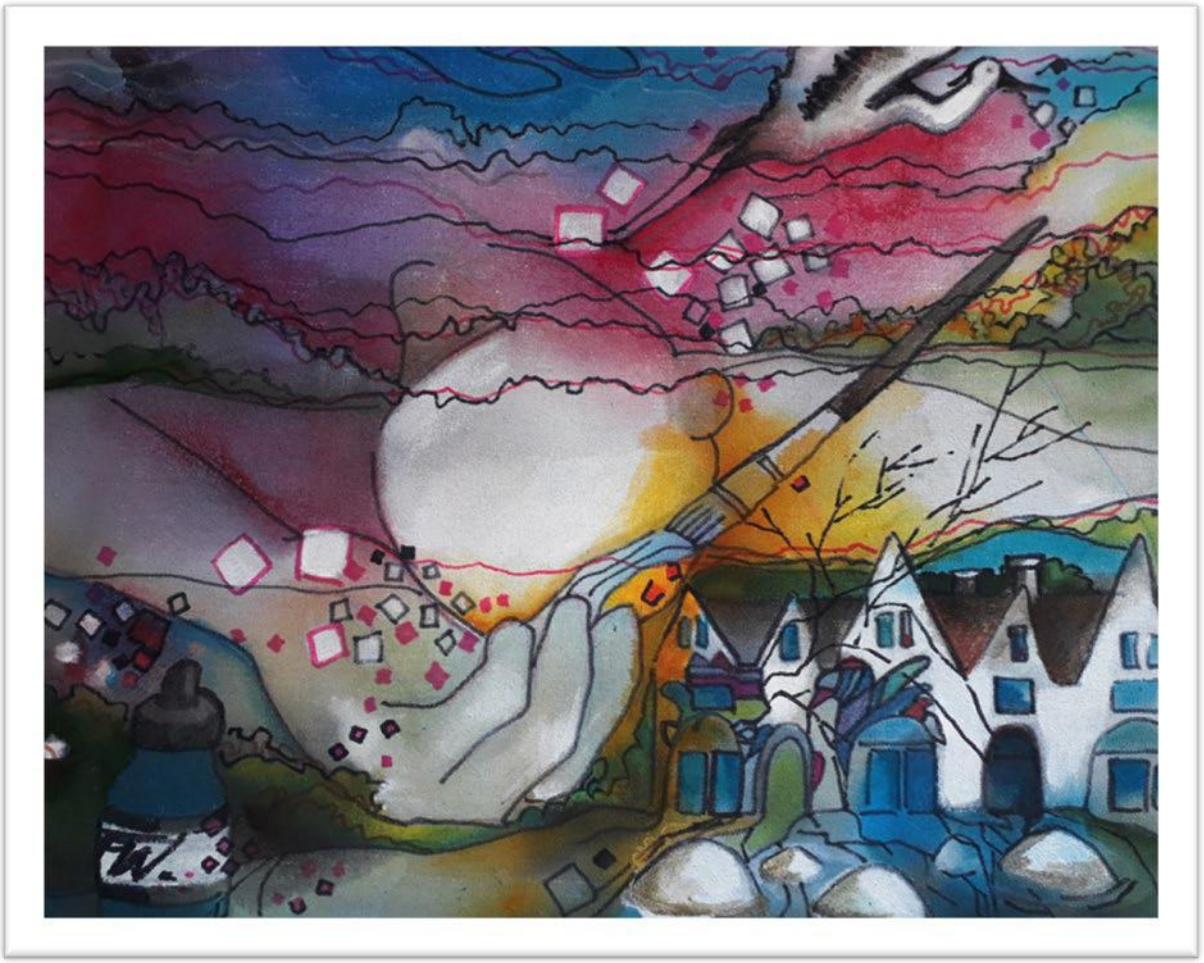
I realised then that I had been inhabiting liminal/marginal spaces (Mezirow, 1991; hooks, 1990), 'a betwixt and between' limbo state in transition' (Turner, 1995, p. 95), many times throughout my life. While often noted in child development, these threshold developments are not always given the same attention when they happen in adult lives (Green, 2023). As both child and adult, art practices have helped me to move through uncertainty and change. I have used the practice of writing and art making as a means to make sense of my feelings and events throughout my life. This adult instance of returning to a vulnerable state of being made me recall times before when I had sought out art making to access restorative learning. As a child, my creative play had been a way to connect with Constance and escape from the chaotic life context of difference and dissonance (see Artefact 8). As an ostracised teenager, the art classroom had given me a place to reclaim a sense of 'self,' art making had given me a new sense of identity and promised a future (see Artefact 11). As a young adult, art making had been a way to connect across racial and societal divides in Apartheid South Africa (See Chapter One, Prologue). The process of art making could bring me solace, understanding and hope in challenging times.

Through art making, I had been able to evoke symbolic expressions of that which had been 'obscured and difficult to face' (Turner, 1995, p. 128). 'Arts-based expression and learning offers the potential for revelatory inclusion of that which otherwise might be excluded as taboo' (Sibbett & Thompson, 2008, p.5). 'Powerlessness/power, symbolic expression, playing, reflexivity, communitas and embodied experience' (Sibbett & Thompson 2008, p2) are all components of liminality, a vulnerable place of being (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1995). In these places, chaos and unknowing exist, but in choosing to dwell in them through artmaking, it is possible to unearth possibilities for moving forward. This is 'the edge' (Zohar & Marshall, 2012) and the 'place

where vital adaptation through expansion takes place' (Dewey, 1980, p.13). These places, while difficult to be in, are also the places where problems, imbalances, frustrations, and the unknown are addressed and potentially solved; they demand that we choose to take the risk to step into the unknown (Morrissey 2013).

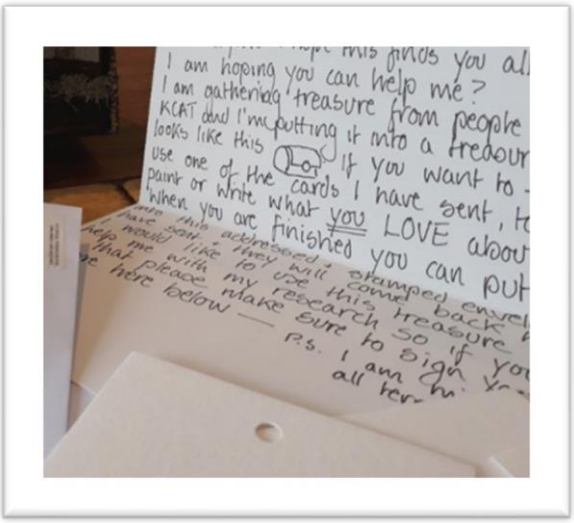
I chose then to embrace the space of liminality as 'pure possibility' (Turner, 1969, p. 97) for finding out what it was that I was seeking to know, always acknowledging that what I might come to know may not be easy, affirming, or positive. This place of risk was unsettling but also strangely intoxicating for its possibility. The tension between staying safe by keeping silent and risking pain by exposing myself to the unknown gave me an increased sense of creative energy (Morrissey, 2013), leading me to an increased creative period of making and writing. In this space, I poured myself into making art without concern for its outcome.

Through the making process (supported by counselling and dwelling in meditation and contemplation), I sought to reclaim agency and restore a coherent, healthy sense of 'self.' As Green (2023) explains, agency is not a thing but a process that gets activated at times of crisis and dissolves once the crisis passes' (p.193). This process demanded a willingness to dwell in uncertainty and discomfort (Sibbett, 2008). I discovered that this process was easier to navigate with others for support.



ARTEFACT 30 LEAVING KCAT-INK ON CANVAS-2021/2022







ARTEFACT 31 Community Vessel Collaborative project 2022

The Liminal Space as a Healing Space

Before I could move forward into the unknown which lay ahead, I needed to disengage myself from KCAT and the role I had as its Education Coordinator. By 2022, the weight of external pressures, bureaucratic restructuring, financial austerity, and a growing emphasis on managerialism had made a profound impact on KCAT as a learning space. The fragility of the space had become painfully visible to me and others. I knew I had to leave KCAT, but the decision was exceedingly difficult. It carried emotional and ethical weight. When I did make the decision, it was after a slow, aching unravelling of a long internal struggle. To remain in my role within management would have meant compromising the values I had formed through years of dialogic, inclusive, and community-embedded arts practices. These ways hadn't only been methods of teaching and learning; they were my way of being in the world. The disruption to that was felt as deeply existential.

Leaving the community, this web of artists, friends, and co-creators, left me with a deep and abiding sense of loss. I had been a part of building something with others: a culture of care, a shared vocabulary of making, a home for difference. Now it was gone.

The first painting I created during this time emerged from that place of rupture and reflection. It shows a solitary figure crisscrossed by the lines of the KCAT landscape, an imprint of the place etched into the body (artefact 30). Bleeding colours speak to the emotional overwhelm I was feeling. Fragmented square motifs represent my confusion. The small blue ink bottle, representing Andrew Pike, rests in the corner; it holds my hesitation in naming my departure. And above and beyond, a heron is in flight: a fragile but persistent symbol of hope and future possibility. In this painting, I see reflected back at me a time of despair and upheaval. My world was changing, and I was powerless to control forces beyond me, the illness in my body, the global pandemic, the organisational systems

which directed the future of the KCAT Community.

My painting spoke to me of the need to take care of myself. I saw that I was drowning in indecision, and I needed to act in some way. I could no longer stay on the 'edge' (Zohar & Marshall, 2012), I needed to move forward. I moved towards connection.

During the pandemic and its isolation, I had reached out, tentatively, and deliberately, through art. I initiated a community outreach project, not only as a means of maintaining contact but also as an attempt to stitch the fraying fabric of our shared community back together. Artist learners and educators had told me that they were desperate for connection. I created a textile 'treasure chest,' a vessel made of fabric, a slow, tactile process of dyeing, stitching, and layering of fabrics that embodied and echoed the kind of care we had long practised at KCAT. Each stitch became a gesture of love, a meditation on how we might hold the fragmented community together. This chest wasn't just an art object; it was an attempt to create a container for collective memory, connection, and affection.

I invited artists and staff to contribute responses to a simple prompt: *What do you love about KCAT?* Each envelope I sent out carried a small piece of watercolour card, intended as a 'message in a bottle,' an invitation to reflect, to create and to connect across distance. These gestures were meant as a reaffirmation of the relational threads that defined KCAT as a living practice of community care.

The messages which came back spoke of the deep bonds we shared. Artists spoke, in image and word, of how friendship and relationships were what they missed the most. They told me that they missed the 'craic[49]' and caring that was inherent in KCAT. They missed lunchtimes and laughter, working together and having a place to go. They were simple and profound statements about why KCAT was so special. Overwhelmingly, the relational and the mutual aspects of sharing and

working alongside one another were the aspects that artist learners and artist educators valued the most. The attention to detail, the time and care that were evident in the making of these pieces, was a manifestation of the deep regard the artists held for KCAT and each other.

Almost a year later, we gathered again, this time for my farewell. The occasion was informal and took place in the large studio downstairs. I brought out the fabric vessel again and shared how, for me, it had become a symbol of our shared community. I once again invited the artists to pick up paintbrushes and crayons to write/draw their thoughts and feelings at this time. In a circle of shared making, we slipped into a familiar and comfortable rhythm together. Artists created new messages for the treasure chest, some making multiple cards as gifts to one another. These simple exchanges were deeply affective acts, expressions of generosity, grief, and continued connection. In the face of its rupture as a familiar and much-loved community space, this gathering in KCAT reminded us that community can be a healing space, a sanctuary made by mutual recognition and shared artmaking. As artists, we did what we knew best to do in a difficult time: we made art with one another and shared it with each other. I had intended to leave the vessel behind as a gift. But the artists insisted I take it with me. In their insistence, they were offering me something profound: an acknowledgement of our journey together thus far and promising that our relationships would be carried into the future. The vessel took on much more significance than a mere art object (Rosa, 2019); it became a vessel of memory, love, and a testament to the transformative power of art as a relational practice. This was an important reminder to me as I left KCAT. I was determined to continue to live a creative life and reminded myself that the heart of a community doesn't live in structures and physical spaces, but in the relational spaces we make together; we make a community in acts of witnessing, creating, and being seen by each other.

When I finally left KCAT, I spent the time in retreat, in recovery, in

making art. I began to do some deep personal therapeutic art work, returning to engage in some of the sorts of objects I would have made as a child; I worked with clay and words mainly. Crafting small portraits and tiny ‘pinch pots,’ I engaged in meditative making. Seeking quiet spaces and solitude, I wrote poetry prolifically, drawing on my resonance with the world around me and with nature. I sought out a more embodied way of being in the world.

[49] Fun, amusement; entertaining company or conversationOxford University Press. (n.d.). Craic, n. In the Oxford English Dictionary. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2883578708

Embodied Illuminations: Art Process as Repair & Reclamation

> *God guard me from those thoughts, men think in the mind alone;*
> *he that sings a lasting song thinks in a marrowbone.*
>
> W.B. Yeats[50]

In recovery, I had to surrender to my *body's* knowing. I was in significant pain and needed to heal. I had to listen to what my 'physical self' demanded of me. I began to realise that I had never been very good at understanding my body's requirements. I lived in my head a lot. I made a lot of my thoughts 'in the mind alone' and these had historically tended to dominate my approach to learning and education. I was a person who tended to use 'their mind without the participation of the body' (Dewey, 1934, p.21). My cognitive faculty and academic achievement were what I had learned to prioritise (see Chapter One for more on this). These were what I had measured my intelligence and self-worth on. I knew increasingly through engaging with this research that the philosophy of mind-body dualism, which characterises our learning institutions, creates a hierarchy of the mind, perpetuating divisions of truth/opinion, subjectivity/objectivity, right/wrong, but I was hopelessly unpractised at trusting the knowing that came from my physical being. The body and mind are inextricably interconnected. In medical research we read how

> 'visual art interventions have stabilizing effects on the individual by reducing distress, increasing self-reflection and self-awareness, altering behaviour, and thinking patterns, and also by normalising heart rate, blood pressure, or even cortisol levels'
>
> Bolwerk et al 2014, p. 1.

[50] A Prayer for Old Age- Yeats, W. B. (1996). *The collected poems of W. B. Yeats* (R. J. Finneran, Ed.). Scribner.

Preliminary findings in this field state that

> ‘visual art production leads to improved interaction, particularly between the frontal and posterior and temporal brain regions and thus may become an important prevention tool in managing the burden of chronic diseases in older adults’
>
> Bolwerk et al. 2014, p.7.

By focusing predominantly on the cognitive, I had limited my potential to heal and be well physically, psychologically, and emotionally. I had devalued a deep and inherent resource I possessed as a human being. I decided that I would allow myself time to pursue more opportunities for listening to my body, exploring its potential as a source for knowing how to flourish by swimming, lying in the grass, playing, walking, and drifting in and through nature.

Embodied knowledge is unique to each person’s experience; it is not a ‘thinking’ experience, but rather it comes from what Merleau-Ponty calls the ‘Body Schema- A self-organising system that realises an action without bodily awareness’ (Tanako 2011, p.156). Embodied knowledge *lives* in each individual and is subjective; it is knowledge which we discern from that which is gained from outside of our bodies. The notion of knowledge which we gain from within fundamentally challenges how we think about knowledge creation. Cultural-linguistic (cognitively driven) approaches to knowledge re-create knowledge of a particular type only; that knowledge, by definition, will always separate people into ethnic, cultural groups, distinct from one another. Embodied knowledge, then, represents a more transferable and universal way of understanding something. I began to think about this in terms of how art making is also a form of transferable knowledge, and just how important embodied knowledge must be to the connection we seek in art making

By listening to the knowledge my body had, I could translate and express that knowledge into artwork that ‘spoke’ to my learning and (I hoped) communicated it more effectively to others. I listened more carefully to

my body and the knowledge that was emanating from 'within,' immersing myself in nature, I started to 'see' things in an almost transcendental way.

The Role of Flow in Art Making

This transcendental state has been widely recognised as a state of 'Flow.' It is a process through which we attempt to make sense of the world by inhabiting embodied and extra-

rational modes of being (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Subjective experiences include a sense of control; a merging of action and awareness; a loss of consciousness of self; a speeding up or slowing down of time; and a sense that one is engaged in an autotelic, (or a self-directed, intrinsic, and rewarding) experience' Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990 as cited in Van Heerden2010, pp141-151

In this state of Flow, I experienced a synthesising of the conscious and the unconscious mind. The act of writing poetry/painting bridges thought (consciousness) and the imaginal (unconscious). This bridging of the gap allowed me access to the unknown, enabling expressions of what Romanshyn (2007) refers to as the 'soul's epiphanies.' As Rowland (2013) suggests, there is always something 'that forever mutates and reaches beyond the ego's inadequate understanding' (p. 59). In this space of unknowing, I allowed the senses to take precedence over rational thought and logical meaning-making.

I thought about how important the spaces which facilitate 'Flow' are. How crucial they are for those engaged in journeys of reclamation and repair, and how they work on both a personal level and in shared community spaces. I thought about how I had witnessed extra-rational ways of engaging with the world in art-making spaces I had been in

before.

In KCAT, I had observed instances where learners seemed to intuitively sense one another's needs. Sometimes, an artist learner would respond directly to another with compassion and kindness when they needed it most; at other times, they would ask staff and educators for help on someone else's behalf, expanding the circle of care. There were moments when artist learners seemed to anticipate events before they occurred, demonstrating a kind of sixth sense or transcendence beyond the ordinary limits of physical reality. At times, a person may exhibit the ability to attract exactly what is needed at just the right moment, a sort of synchronicity, intuitively creating circumstances in which they could flourish. I was not the only one who noticed these serendipitous moments - we would often point them out to one another to the point that sometimes a shared smile after recognising the instance was enough to know we had all witnessed it

These phenomena seemed to stem from a selfless quality inherent in the artist learners, an absence of ego, and an ability to be 'beyond the self.' This quality, I believe, was enhanced by the atmosphere in the KCAT studio of endless time, held supportive spaces, non-judgement/expectation, and the experience of reward which art making can engender. I believe the state of 'Flow' the learners experienced and the inherent selflessness they exhibited combined to evoke an almost spiritual experience for the people who worked together there. As they worked towards aesthetic expression beyond themselves, there seemed to exist a deeper sense of communion and connection than I had witnessed in other learning spaces.

Spiritual intelligence is defined as 'unboundaried' and little researched in the field of adult education (Zohar & Marshall, 2012). Cognitive (IQ) and emotional (EQ) intelligences, by contrast, have been well documented (Gardner, 1999; Goleman, 1996) and rely on boundaried, finite structures of knowing, logic, cause, and effect, and, in the case of emotional

intelligence, experiential learning. Spiritual intelligence is the part of us that seeks deeper meaning, constructs values, and transforms experience into potential. In Andrew's narrative, for example (see Chapter One), we see a form of spiritual transcendence during artmaking: a heightened state of consciousness while appreciating the beauty of a blackbird on green grass. His awareness of a deep entanglement between the human and the material and natural world around us creates space for questioning our privilege and superiority as human beings. His humility in the face of beauty and the unknown hints at a deeper wisdom and knowing. Andrew's entangled experiences with the natural world demonstrate another way of being and knowing.

> '…. understanding ourselves as intrinsically connected to the natural world means acknowledging that the presence of more-than-human others always and already shape our experience, whether that is reading, teaching or research.'
>
> Sidebottom2024, p. 144

Andrew has transcended the everyday experience in this instance and entered a heightened state of awareness, a state of 'Flow,' perhaps. As Emmons (2000) describes, this is the 9). Andrew also demonstrates a capacity to imbue ordinary experiences with a sense of the sacred (Emmons, 2000, p.10). For him, spirituality is a legitimate aspect of his intelligence and his creativity - it is not just a human pursuit, but a divine gift 'When you make art, you know, we are told that God has given us a blessing' (see Artefact 20). His experience points to an important assertion in this research: intelligence is located in subjective experience, where one's truth forms the foundation of knowing.

The tension between educational theories that value subjective, spiritual experiences and those that value objectivity and measurability is inevitable, and the debate surrounding spirituality as a form of

intelligence is complex. In mainstream education, spiritual intelligence is often overlooked. There is a tendency to avoid spiritual discourse for fear of dogma or unprovable claims (Gardner, 1993). Additionally, spiritual experiences are phenomenological states of being that resist standard cognitive analysis (Gardner, 1999). Gardner (1999), who himself writes of ‘existential intelligence as the ability to locate oneself with respect to the cosmos' (p. 60), is also a sceptic of the theory, claiming that the concept of spiritual intelligence is too subjective and unmeasurable.

The soul has long been neglected in education because it resists the empirical frameworks that modern schooling relies on, but holistic educators and theorists are beginning to reintegrate the soul into pedagogy. The benefits of journaling, meditation, dialogue, and reflection are integrated into learning, and scientific research increasingly supports the benefits of mindfulness for brain development (Van Heerden, 2010). Considering spiritual intelligence as a valid way of knowing can contribute a vital dimension to how we learn, know, and relate to the world.

The notion of the soul thrives in spaces of poetry, art, and aesthetics, fields where the mysterious and the indefinable are better tolerated. As we face global challenges, economic instability, and ecological crisis, I find myself continually reconsidering the relevance of these neglected dimensions. ‘Spiritual intelligence is the soul’s intelligence’ (Zohar & Marshall, 2012). The idea of the soul is beyond the scope of this research, being too broad a concept to explore in depth beyond the realms of theology and philosophy, and Moore (2005) warns against defining the soul too rigidly; its complexity lies in its very elusiveness. Mary Oliver reminds us that the soul is not something to be known in a realistic sense but that it is to be experienced through tenderness, presence, and attention. I choose to think of it as part of the indefinable mysterious nature which brings richness to our imaginations.

Poet Mary Oliver (2004) echoes this sentiment in her poem Bone.[51]

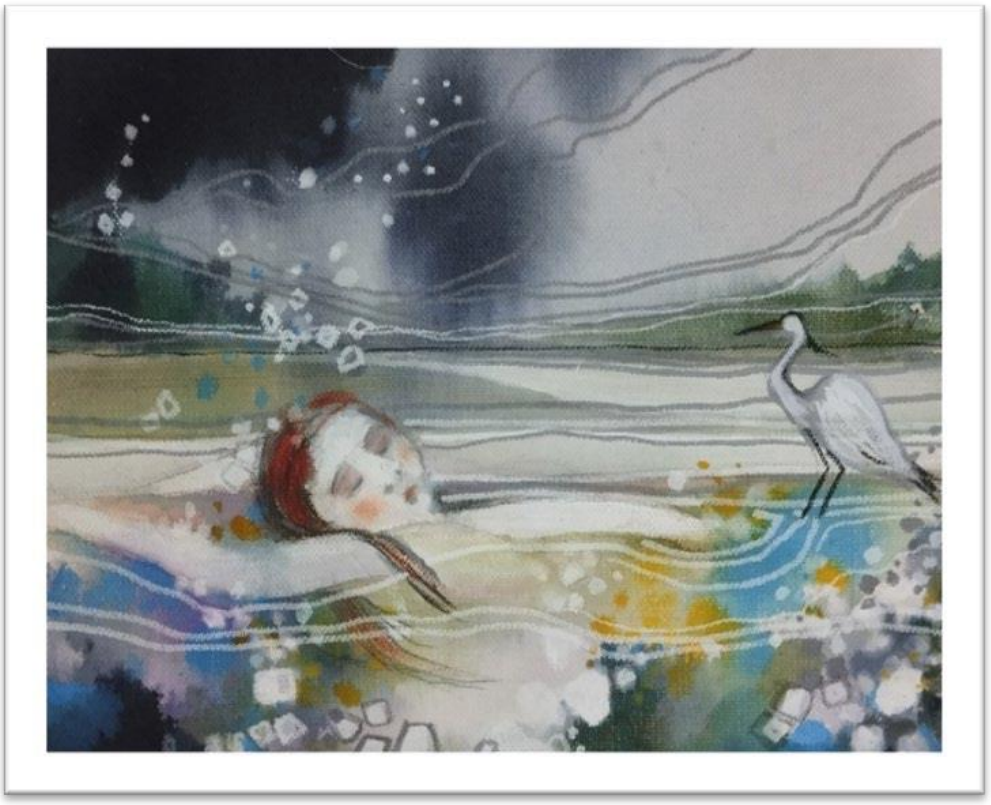
And what the soul is also,
I believe I will never quite know.
Though I play at the edges of knowing, truly I know.
Our part is not knowing,
but looking, and touching, and loving,
which is the way I walked on,
softly,
through the pale-pink morning light.

[51] Why I Wake Early poem - Mary Oliver. https://www.best-poems.net/mary_oliver/why_i_wake_early.html

ARTEFACT 32 HERON

There is no more space between us. I am there with him. Watching for small movements below the surface, alert and alive. A gentle wind ruffles the small crown of feathers on his perfect head, and small gusts of air finger the skin on my face.





ARTEFACT 33 Heron 1 and 2- ink on canvas- Alice Bennett 2023/2024

Immersion: Reparative Art Making Processes Take Time

Faced with the imagery, symbolism, and visual language that emerged from experiences during my self-imposed embodied healing retreat, I came to 'read' my artwork for clues as to what I knew subliminally was the intelligence beyond cognition. 'The land, stars, air and water, all hold a holy place as teacher, if we can let ourselves be receptive to the Eros of every day' (Snowber 2005, p.218). By listening to my body and dwelling in the senses, I began to regard my artwork as a dialogic space where I learn what I needed for my healing. But it took time. As discussed in Chapter Two, time is an important consideration for indwelling, in research, in art and in healing (Polanyi, 1974; Moustakas, 1990; Sardello, 2011; Sultan, 2018). This process would take the time it needed, and no amount of hurrying would change that; there were no shortcuts to the process.

I was expressing my needs and the therapeutic experience of the resonant interaction with water, nature, and my senses slowly. In painting and poetry, I was searching for genuine self-expression, looking for authentic truths to emerge. I had to deliberately and consciously tell myself that this work was 'for me,' no one else, that no one need ever see it. It had to be free from others' judgments, approval, or dismissal. The act of painting and writing freely and unhurriedly helped me uncover what had been hidden and moved me forward to a better place of self-understanding.

In poetry, particularly, my unconscious is always lying just beneath the surface. Through poetry, I seem to arrive more directly at the essence of what I wish to express. During the generative phase of creation, the ego recedes. Only in later stages, such as editing, the intellect and conscious structuring to refine and finish, re-enter the process. Until then, a non-rational intelligence, the unconscious, is free to play. The unconscious

reveals itself through pulse, pattern, and form. The economy of language in poetry allows for sound, rhythm, and soulful embodiment to convey meaning. I notice that I constantly feel a pull back to that originating impulse, whether it arises from within or from something that comes to us unbidden. It is a force or energy that refuses to let go until the work is fully realised. In terms of Wallas' (1976) model of the creative process, it can be understood as cycling through the stages of initial engagement, incubation, and illumination in an ongoing, iterative loop. Again and again, I return to the beginning to move the process forward and gain a deeper understanding of it. 'Creative repetition' involves continually returning to the original moment of inspiration - even at the culmination of the research or artistic process - to fall once more into the rhythm and cadence of the moment when the work took hold of one' (Romanshyn 2007, p. 311). It is a fragile and vulnerable process which needs time as well as supportive and held spaces to thrive. While I was gifting this time to myself and supported by family and friends on my journey to healing through creativity, I recognised more and more that this is what I had been doing for others.

I came to realise that profound and transformative experiences, often occurring at the edges of my life, have shaped my desire to create and hold space for wholeness and healing for others. These experiences have drawn me toward a pedagogy that honours both heart and intellect, and that seeks to integrate the emotional, intuitive way of being with the rational. Artmaking as a therapeutic process is commonly understood to be inherent in the artmaking experience, but it also plays a significant role in art pedagogical spaces. As educators of the art-making process, we bear witness to the therapeutic benefits of creating, expressing, and reflecting on one's thoughts and emotions. Schaverien, an art therapist/theorist, treats images not just as products of therapy but as living elements of the therapeutic process, charged with emotion, capable of insight, and often pivotal in achieving psychological transformation (Schaverien, 1991).

Metaphor as an Art: Making as a Diagnostic Tool for Healing

The ‘embodied image’ is an embodiment of unconscious feelings, thoughts, and psychological processes. It can contain, express, and transform emotional and psychic material (Schaverien, 1991). A piece of art carries a visceral, felt quality; it is infused with emotional intensity and psychic investment. The image holds emotional charge; it can evoke strong feelings for both the maker and the viewer. It becomes a container for difficult and nuanced thoughts and feelings, offering the artist a way to safely externalise and process inner turmoil. It becomes a transformative object that helps us gain psychological insight and healing.

> ‘In its making, it changes something in the psyche of the artist. It articulates states for which there are no words. Therefore, words cannot substitute such an image.’
>
> Schaverien, 1991, p. 79.

The image acts as a psychic extension, almost like an externalised piece of the artist’s inner world. Creating art enables the artist to articulate the symbolic articulation of unspeakable experiences, including trauma. Viewing/hearing the image in art, whether visual or aural, becomes a way to ‘see’ the ‘self,’ sometimes for the first time, and so it becomes a bridge between conscious and unconscious material (Romanshyn, 2007; Schaverien, 1991). This bridging creates a threshold through which the unknown becomes accessible, allowing for insights that feel like what Romanshyn (2007) describes as the 'soul’s epiphanies' (p. 139). Similarly, Rowland (2013) articulates a dynamic in which something within the creative process 'forever mutates and reaches beyond the ego’s inadequate understanding' (p.59). It is important, though, to recognise that the originating metaphor and the image don’t just benefit the maker. Using archetypal symbols, an artist can infuse personal feeling into shared imagery, thereby connecting individual experience to collective human themes. Shared symbols create a common visual language and provide opportunities for deeper resonance, helping others connect with and learn

from the image. Mastery of metaphor, arguably an art in itself, whether in poetry or painting

> ‘eschews fixed meaning, the literal interpretation, the development line or the fantasy of progression out of ambiguity into certainty.'
>
> Rowland,2013, p.318

It is through metaphor that something previously hidden is brought into the world, acting like a kind of magic: a materialisation of thought, emotion, and previously abstract ideas. ‘How does one find words to bridge the gap between soul and its epiphanies?’ Romanshyn asks (2007, p.309). It would seem that artmaking through this metaphorical process can bridge the gap. ‘The picture within the frame is a metaphor for the psyche’s containment of unconscious material’ (Schaverien, 1991, p.62) Imagery evokes multiple pathways of understanding and allows for personal interpretation, an endless possibility. It invites broad engagement because it resists rigid definitions. Even in the most hierarchical and intellectual of artistic contexts, interpretations often diverge, critics debating endlessly over meaning. Ambiguity in artmaking is a generative force, inviting deeper inquiry rather than offering definitive answers.

In Reflection: Embracing the Healing Space of Artmaking

In the liminal spaces of art making for healing, I entered a conscious act of re-searching, staying with the artefacts, contemplating them for their meaning, learning what they had to say to me. The artworks helped me to imagine and re-create my past life narratives, but also to imagine a new life path ahead. The artmaking process became a guide for self-knowledge. The knowledge which I hadn't been able to put into words before became clearer and more defined. After making art, I found I could often enjoy it as an object outside of myself. Something to ponder and meditate on. It pleased me.

> 'When we feel a kinship with an object, it is because the values we sense that it carries are clearer in it than they usually are in our minds'
>
> De Botton & Armstrong, 2013, p.47.

Connecting my younger 'self' to her adult 'self' through art making, contemplation and reflection, as well as by taking time in nature and listening to the needs of my body, I began to know myself better. I reclaimed myself, I could 'be her.' (see artefacts 1 and 42). The young learner who lives in me comes to understand her early experiences and 'self' through the dialogue she now makes as an adult with theorists and their concepts.

> 'It is only when we bring into relation with the preoccupying present experience the cumulative results of similar or at least relevant, if not dissimilar, past experiences of similar potency, that the kind of relational structure we call 'meaning' emerges'
>
> Turner 1986 p.36

In dwelling in my creative works, I piece together a better understanding of my way of being and knowing. 'It is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them that we understand their joint meaning.' (Polanyi,1974, p.18). Indwelling allows me to know my 'self' as a whole, rather than as

parts. In the years which followed my departure from KCAT, I continued to create art prolifically; I continued to research how the process of art making impacted me. I rested in the art, and I embraced it as a 'north star,' a point of reference for knowing.

In this space of awareness of the importance of reclamation and repair, the stars were aligning in my heavens, and another intense life event was about to enter my sphere. The most wonderful event, my lost poem' (see artefact 10, The Lost Child), was returned to me. My son, who was always much closer to me than I had ever imagined, was found.

ARTEFACT 34 Tonight I found my poem

Tonight, I found my poem.
I was stirring garlic into mushrooms reducing white wine with chicken stock stirring, stirring, sipping,
sipping red wine from a glass in one hand swaying in the waves of *'dance me to the end'* through steam and sizzle.
The phone interrupted.
A message on the screen of my phone, slung on the shore of my Friday night.

She had written, 'This is him, Alice.' I typed 'HIM?.'
She said,

'Yes, this is your birth son'

She sent me a photograph

He was looking straight at me. I didn't recognise him.
He was a grown man in a wedding suit, a woman's hand on his chest. She was wearing red nail varnish …….

I will try to sleep tonight, but I don't think I will.

As is the nature of an a/r/tographic life, this story continues to unfold and permeate every aspect of my existence. As is the nature of an a/r/tographic life, the practices inherent in it, the processes of art making, especially poetry, allow me to manage, express, and navigate the emotions which were and still are at times overwhelming.

And after such an intense and joyous event of reuniting with my son, life in all its wonderful ordinariness continued. When I returned to teaching after my illness and reuniting with my 'lost son,' I was in a vulnerable space, physically healing and emotionally navigating a profound personal transformation. I was deeply immersed in the complexities of reconnecting with my biological son, whom I had given up for adoption. The journey was disorienting, as the adoption agent had warned, and it required me to dismantle and renegotiate the story I had carried for decades. As I began to heal and embrace this new reality, I found myself in a dual process of *re-creating* my identity and also learning how to be part of new relationships—first with my son, then with my father, family members, and my husband. I had to absorb truths I had not known before, including discovering that my son's adoptive mother had been my own high school math teacher, living only two streets away from me all those years.

This personal narrative, still unfolding, found a powerful parallel within my pedagogical work. As I shared pieces of my journey, especially with other women in adult education groups, I learned to tell a new version of my story—one that was not just personal but shared. The *art praxis pedagogy* I employ is not about separating 'educator' and 'learner.' It's about how we, together, create and transform meaning through stories and creative expression. The learning spaces I create are ones where vulnerability is modelled as a strength—where stories can be told and where appropriate supported in their transformation. Through artmaking, through writing, and through dialogue, we come to recognise that our stories are not fixed; they are living, breathing

narratives that we can rewrite, revise, and transform throughout our lifetimes.

Because of my deeply transformational experience, I embraced the learning space as a place which could offer new possibilities for a relational and resonant co-creation within pedagogy. More and more, it became a space of co-creation where power is not held by the facilitator/educator, but where vulnerability is shown; it became a way to model resilience and resistance, recognition and resonance, repair, and reclamation. My story was now part of my emerging knowing and being, and it became part of my pedagogical offering in the art-making space.

Sharing parts of my personal story didn't just change the way my students saw me; it also helped them to change the way they saw themselves. It gave them permission to be vulnerable, to open up, and to rewrite their own narratives. I continue to embrace a stance of vulnerability when appropriate in, my art making and creative writing groups

I show, in a very real sense, how my life story does not define me, how my journey is ongoing, and how I can choose a new narrative for myself. It is a powerful realisation—not just for me but for others who need to see that the stories we carry with us are scripts we can rewrite at any time, even late into adulthood.

We discuss how rewriting long-held beliefs through critically challenging our established ways of thinking can open new possibilities. By hearing different perspectives, all of us, as learners, question our own views and develop a more nuanced understanding of complex issues. Our dialogical processes around the creative tables of

art making encourage intellectual and personal growth. The diversity of stories shared in our groups helps us to challenge dominant narratives and promote more inclusive thinking.

In safe and supported groups, we, as women, bring a wealth of prior knowledge and lived experience to the learning space. Personal stories help us build bridges that connect theoretical knowledge with real-life applications. By sharing personal stories, the women and I contextualise difficult abstract, ethical, and philosophical concepts in ways that make them more meaningful and relevant to us all. By being vulnerable and taking the risk to tell my own story, I create a safe space for authentic dialogue. In being vulnerable, I reduce the fear of judgment, allowing the women to express themselves creatively and freely without worrying about being criticised.

I try to show in my teaching that this ability to rewrite our stories doesn't just apply to big moments as it did when I learned to reclaim myself as mother to my 'lost son;' it also applies to the small stories. For instance, I tell the students I work with about doubts I have in my own ability to learn new technology or when I think I'm not creative enough to bring new innovations to the learning space. I show the learners that I have to constantly remind myself that I am not locked into a single story, and neither are they. The process of engaging in art-making and creative writing within the pedagogical context is not merely about transmitting knowledge or skills; it is about co-creating a space where both learners and educators can transform their personal stories and experiences into a shared narrative of possibility. In my own teaching practice, I have embraced a model of pedagogy that is rooted in *art praxis*, authenticity and a continuous process of self-reflection, creation, and re-imagination. This approach is as much about the act of making as it is about the ongoing process of becoming, both for myself and for those I work with.

My own journey has shown me that when we share our personal stories, whether in the learning space as educators/ learners or in life with others as resonant and empathic individuals we can find our voices, re-search and re-write our narratives. We all carry stories of struggle, but those stories don't define us; they can become the foundation for a new and stronger story where possibility, resilience, and hope live. And when we share these stories, we not only strengthen ourselves, but we also create a ripple effect that encourages others to reflect, learn, and grow too.

Returning to the teaching space

Returning to the teaching space after a long period of absence, I found myself disoriented.

I questioned my identity as a teacher, facilitator, and artist-educator. Did I still have anything of value to offer? This moment of uncertainty was more than professional self-doubt; it reflected a deeper existential discomfort. I found myself clinging to the foundational values of my pedagogy: the belief that everyone has something of worth to share, and that learning is fundamentally relational. Yet, I remained unsure of how my embodied knowledge, shaped by both my personal challenges and my creative practice, could serve others in this new phase of my career.

ARTEFACT 35 BIRDS ON A WIRE

I'm sitting waiting for the group to arrive. I've come early. I want to be prepared. The table is carefully laid. A feast of settings, journals and pens, watercolour boxes and water jars, paint brushes for everyone. And me.

I'm nervous. I'm wired. I'm quietening the voices in my head which tell me I will make a fool of myself.

They begin to arrive, and a new shyness enters the room with them.

I am standing now, extending my hand. I need to make contact. I take note of who reaches for me and of those who are reluctant - for next time.

They settle at the table, birds on a wire. They are chatting among themselves, and I am on the outside, trying not to look as if I am.

The community project worker introduces me, and I flinch internally under curious eyes. I am weighed up, assessed, measured for fitting into the space which is theirs. Then it is my turn to introduce myself and I add the details which have not been spoken. I acknowledge my foreignness, my awkwardness, my own nervous anticipation.

I feel them breathe out. I feel

the room relax. 'Fuck me! I

know you! 'We know you!'

Nodding and prodding, the eight women around the table begin to laugh, I breathe in and my eyes open.

Dawning on all of us, the years fall away. Nail polish, tattoos, ombre dyed hair and threaded brow fall away.

I remember.

I see eight small girls in uniform.

I remember the years I spent with them in the school corridor, in the hall, and playground.

I recognise Shona, who came to resource sessions every week, climbing difficult words, math puzzles, social skills - each of us learning in our own way.

We can't quite believe it.

More than twenty years have passed, and here we are. These women and I, linked by a shared past and present. We are all excited now. They want to reminisce and recall characters, the good and the bad. They tell me of their own children attending the same school. Some of the teachers are still there! These women have stayed together through years, neighbours, family, friends, in school, hospital, church and community centre. They ask,

'Where have you been?'

And I am surprised at the response I feel, of pure internal clarity, of recognition of where I have been and where I am at,

'I spent some years away from teaching, but I realised I wanted to come back.

I think to myself, 'I have been so far, so much has happened and I have come full circle.'

And they nod. We are the same. We love this. We want to be here, to

learn with and from each other, maybe even for each other.

We begin the work.

The experience of re-entering the classroom became a site of epiphany. As I sat with others in a shared space of inquiry and making, I realised that the years I had spent navigating illness, loss, and transformation had formed within me a complex matrix of understanding, what I now identify as a coming together of *head knowledge* and *heart knowledge*. These distinct yet interconnected ways of knowing, intellectual/emotional, cognitive/embodied, created a stronger capacity within me to hold space for others in ways that are dialogic, safe, and spacious.

This moment of clarity affirmed my deepest pedagogical purpose: to enter a space of shared curiosity where educators and learners are both invited to bring their lived experience into conversations for learning. It revealed the transformative potential of education not as the transmission of knowledge, but rather as a relational and co-constructed process of becoming. In this space, vulnerability was not a liability or pathology of being, but an integral way for me to be present and model the mutual trust needed to create an authentic learning space.

Drawing on autobiographical reflection, Caryl Sibbett (2004) describes how art-making functions as a therapeutic process, enabling individuals to confront and integrate painful/ fragmented (nettlesome) experiences through both creative writing/storytelling and visual artworks. In her research she tells us that carefully facilitated arts-based learning can open up liminal spaces through playfulness, metaphor, and multisensory exploration. In such conditions, she says, troubling life experiences can be 'processed and reimagined' (Sibbett & Thompson, 2008, p. 11).

My experience echoes what McCormack (2015) describes as an *epiphany* - a moment of insight often born from a troubling or disruptive life event.

Such revelations, he argues, can become catalysts for transformation when they are explored through writing or dialogue. For McCormack, inquiry into embodied, felt experience offers a path through which educators can make sense of their vulnerability and re-engage with their professional identities. In the light of his research, my return to teaching was a 'putting back together' of the self.

The role of art in this process is pivotal. The liminal spaces art process and spaces provide are a threshold state - an in-between space where normative roles and identities are suspended, allowing for new forms of meaning-making to emerge (Turner 1969 as cited in Green, 2023). It is in such spaces that we may *reimagine ourselves* and generate a 'realm of pure possibility' (Green 2023, p. 193). Artistic engagement becomes a form of resistance to hegemonic narratives, a refusal to be defined by limitation or loss. Creative expression opens access to alternative ways of knowing, enabling shifts in how we see ourselves and our lives. This kind of transformation is not merely emotional or symbolic; it is ontological. It marks a reformation and a restoration of identity and agency.

The implications of such a transformation are long-lasting. In a search for meaning, we are never finished learning; learning is a lifelong, recursive process of making and remaking meaning. Likewise, Green (2024) reminds us that 'agency is exercised living forward' (p. 85). Profound life events marked by personal rupture, loss, and illness do not simply pass us by, but they live in us, shape how we continue to live, teach, and relate to one another and the world around us. When I sat with my 'birds on a wire,' these insights became profoundly clear to me as pedagogical pillars for my practice. Teaching is an act of ethical commitment, where we can choose to witness and honour each other's pain and co-create the conditions for the transformation of self and community.

Writing poetry, telling stories, and making artworks require that one be always listening, resonating, being present, bearing witness, observing personal experiences in context and the experience of others in context. This allows us to continually reshape and reassess our understanding of community, pedagogy, and the potential of the arts to heal.

Early lessons from the intense experiences of my life as a/r/tographer live in me, each one deepens over time, takes on more illuminating meaning. They live in me and inform how I can return to the learning space, not just today but into the future. They ensure that as an artist-educator and learner always becoming, I make sure to co-create spaces of learning focused on relationality, humility, and shared meaning-making.

Recognising the transformative pedagogical power of artmaking and spaces of art pedagogy remind us to honour both the head and the heart, embrace vulnerability not as failure but as fertile ground for growth, and understand learning as a lifelong, co-creative act of becoming.

Learning is never complete, not for the educator, not for the learner, and not for the community. We are in a 'perpetual state of becoming,' Maxine (Greene 1995) guided not by predetermined outcomes, but by the imaginative engagement with what might yet be possible. The arts invite us into this space of becoming by helping us reimagine the world and our place within it. Learning is not only cumulative but transformational and imaginative, continually expanding the boundaries of the self. And education is not a finite task, nor is it simply a preparation for future life; it *is* life. Growth and learning are ongoing, experiential, and embedded in the social fabric of daily existence (Dewey, 1938). Learning is an evolving process, shaped by each new experience, insight, and social encounter. In this sense, the classroom, studio, or community space is never static, but always alive with potential.

I had learned to challenge linear conceptions of development, advocating instead for what Bruner calls a 'spiral curriculum,' a process in which

ideas are revisited, reinterpreted, and deepened over time (Bruner, 1996). Understanding is continuous and layered and the act and it is never concluded but always under revision. The lessons we think we have learned return to us again and again in new forms, asking to be understood again in light of new information and our present circumstances. Education is a practice of inquiry rather than certainty, and of presence in any given moment rather than arrival at a destination. What I learned is rather simple, but profound: that as an artist-educator, I must remain attentive to what emerges in each moment of teaching, I must be present,

> ‘The closer we focus on our experience, the greater the awareness of the experience will be, the greater the immersion, the greater the possibility for connection.’
>
> Kae Tempest 2022, p.115

I must hold space not only for others’ transformation but for my own. I must view every encounter as an invitation to listen again, to create again, to imagine again. Learning, in this sense, is not something I give to others, but something I ‘live’ alongside them. I understand my part better as artist, teacher, and researcher and that we must navigate the complex terrain of becoming, together. I was more and more convinced of this research’s value for others who may also be navigating complex life paths. I began to reclaim my role as an artist educator with more confidence and took on work in new communities of art practice and art pedagogy. I began working with the ETB, the Arts Council and Creative Ireland. In the following passages, I explore through the creation of artefacts, how working as a practising community artist, researcher, and teacher illuminated important information about the power of artmaking to reclaim who we are as beings in the world and repair those parts of us that have been broken or damaged.

Weaving Healing Art Pedagogies into Learning Spaces

In my current role as artist, educator, and researcher with Creative Ireland[52]I work with people who are identified as vulnerable groups in the community. The project aims are described as such

'Living Artfully is a community-led creative health initiative that brings together participants from Traveller Support Services, Cancer Support Services, Youth Organisations, Community groups, Dementia-Friendly Initiatives, Mental Health Services, HSE Carlow/Kilkenny, and Disability Services. Through music, movement, painting, and storytelling, the programme fosters wellbeing, connection, and self-expression. Built on principles of inclusion and collaboration, Living Artfully integrates creativity into everyday life—supporting emotional health, building confidence, and celebrating identity. It offers accessible, responsive programming designed to meet diverse needs and promote shared joy through artistic engagement.'[53]

Majella Keating- Creative Communities Engagement Officer

As part of my role as documenter, I was asked to respond to the collective consciousness of the groups that are part of this project with pieces of evocative autoethnographic writing. I created seven artefacts, hoping to catch the unique spirit of each participating group. These poetic reflections offered a way to record the emotional, felt journey of each group. As an artist researcher, I was tasked with using the extra rational knowing that lives in me and my affective and embodied responsiveness, to tap into what the artist learners were 'saying' to me through artmaking and writing engagement. I needed to surrender my ego and draw on certain elements inherent in the art pedagogical process, as well as everything I had learned through my research journey. Themes already explored in this research: resonance and recognition grounded in empathy, resilience and resistance and especially reclamation and repair, were all inherent learning themes in the art-making groups.

I draw on my experience as an artist, teacher, and researcher to inhabit the spaces I share with them, ethnographically, but I mostly I depend on my experience as a resonant human being in relation to others. I sat amongst them, listened, recorded, and scribbled notes. I asked the participants to speak to me, to tell me of their experience of what it was like to be in an art-making space with others. Sometimes their words sounded like a poem, sometimes a song, sometimes a story, in the first case below - a manifesto. Sometimes I felt what they had to say, not with words but in my bones, in my organs, in my throat, behind my eyes, in my fingertips. I allowed these feelings to direct the words and lead me to the centre of what I thought or felt the group was saying.

The following evocative ethnographic artefacts are offered as creative illuminations written in response to my embodied experience of being in the shared pedagogical art space with art-making adults. The artefacts are presented one after the other, a continuous flow of intense experience which may feel overwhelming if read in sequence without a break. I want you to experience these intensities and suggest that the experience of reading will be better if pause and contemplation are allowed to happen between each. An image[54] relating to each group has been inserted so that you may dwell in the visual representation of each experience alongside the written text.

[52] https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/event/living-artfully/

[53] Unpublished evaluation document 2025

[54] Permission to reproduce these images was kindly given by Creative Ireland and Freddie Greenall



Image 8 St Canice's Neighbourhood Hall Group Work Creative Ireland Project 2025

ARTEFACT 36 A MANIFESTO-ONE VOICE AND GO LEOR DÓCHAIS[55]

We chose to come here, step into this space, to find our strength again-together. In this place, each of us decides what we will become, who we will be.

We will find them, the girls we once were. We want to know and see ourselves fierce and strong, as we were, reflected in one another.

The ones who lay belly down in the long grass, watching life with wide open eyes. The girls who made whole worlds out of circles of mud, stick, stem, and petal, who stitched whole nests out of broken shells and threads of sióda[56].

We will pick up the threads of our lives and remember how to spin truth from fable. We will make our own stories, tell our truths in a space without judgement, with others who recognise the lies which have held us back, made us black.

We see glimpses of the girls we were in the hours we share. We speak and laugh, and the stones in our throats rise. Years fall away, lines and shadows of grief, of fear, of loneliness fall away. We will step from the tangle of our lives into a space without limits. Where blue sky sparkles and the weight of sin has no place.

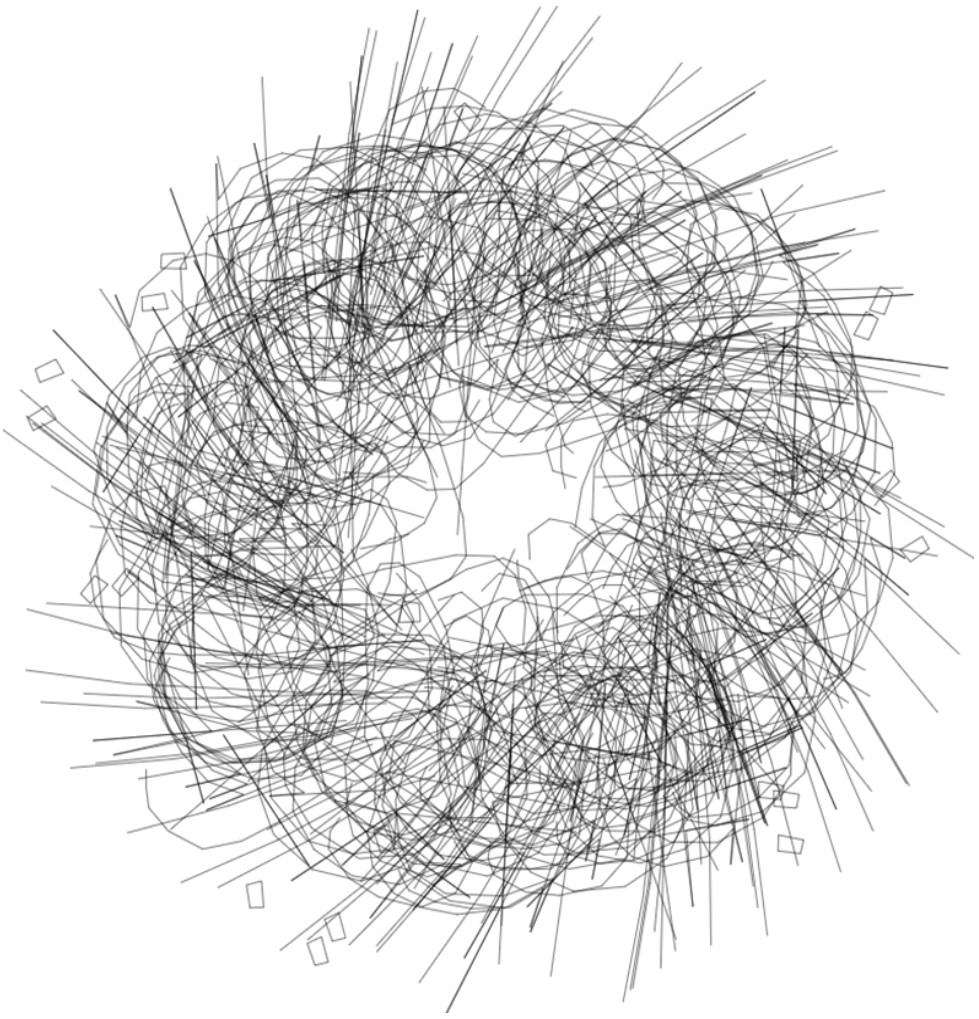
We won't be turned away from this place of together, it is magnetic. We will hold the hands of those who need us and have our hands held in return. We will choose to lean on one another when our strength is fading, when courage feels far away, because we know that we are stronger when we are together.

We will teach our sisters, our mothers, our daughters what we have learned here We will choose to go leor dóchais and speak with one voice[57].

55 Irish to English Translation - go leor dóchais -have plenty of hope 56Irish to English Translation - Sioda- Silk https://www.irishionary.com/dictionary/6890/sioda/
57 St Canice's Neighbourhood Hall, Kilkenny Lead Artist- Alice Bennett



Image 9 The Delta Centre- Book Making Creative Ireland Project



Translation

On a wire/watching/trembling/ she brings us
dried heather from drummin Bog////^^///found feathers from the field
/sharpened twigs //to a point///////^^/ She brings us
///elderberry///beetroot///calendula///onion skins///red dahlia/////alder cone ////soot and ash from the stove//////gum Arabic, salt, cloves///////birch twigs, and dried bracken stems/////^^/// the hedgerow/////^^/////dried yarrow seedheads from the field/// multitudes of tiny dots //
sweeping scratchinglines////////twigsflattenedwithahammer//////// scratchymarks//
///////secateurs to trim^^ twig lengths and taped seed heads to stems///^^/////the super sharp scalpel and the feather // slippy//// boilingupwithrustynails// mordant/////
it takes a while for dyes to colour the water/////
^/it takes a while/^ settling//^ /singing now
sievingthem/////squeezingthemthroughmuslin////^^///poundingtheashinapestleandadding water, straining them into jars/////the book protects the drawing/////// inks are fugitive//////fade out//////left in
daylight/////makethemarks/////'placing'theinksnotdrawingwiththem////
/a different technique//^^///a different sensory experience///^^/// names find us
puffin/////chaffinch//////Greatspottedwoodpecker//////stonechat//////kingfisher/////
greenfinch/////drewthebirds//^^//neverdrawnbirdsbefore//////abstract
//keep it abstract// building birds

taking flight[58]

[58] The Delta Centre, Carlow Lead Artist- Jules Michael



Image 10 Kilkenny Leader Partnership, Kilkenny Creative Ireland Project 2025

ARTEFACT 38 LITTLE WREN

You know,

success looks different to different people, like……sometimes just going along to a new group, stepping away from the house like……venturing out and trying something new, well it can be enough to break a cycle…. Of despondency Of despair Of loneliness Of fear.

Tiny steps, bit by bit. Even if you do it only once. Maybe twice. Those steps into a new space with strangers who don't judge, don't ask questions, don't need to know…those steps can make all the difference like.

The room is cosy, not too bright. Probably not the greatest for art making, but it makes me feel warm and safe and …. calm. I'm hidden away in there. The doors close quietly behind me when I step into the room, and I can breathe. I like the smell of glue and paste and paint. The furniture is old, scuffed wooden - solid like the table I remember from my Granny's kitchen. The walls are white, so white and clean, and there is a kettle, always boiling - mugs, sugar and tea bags, coffee if you want it.

Sheila knew I was a maker when she met me, my hands were always clever. My Da told me that a long time ago. Hands that can 'do good things, make fine things' he used to say. I made my Da proud then.

The first time I went to that art space I just watched. Sheila was making a bird, she had a wire skeleton, wires screwed up into tiny feet, bones, beak, and wings. I saw her pad it full of paper, stuff the spaces between the wire with balls of crunched up pages, torn from old books, newspapers too. And man! Was I itching to get at that bird myself! But I sat with the mug in my hands and pretended not to be too interested. I just watched, watched Sheila and the others. There wasn't a lot of talking, I liked that. It was quiet in the room. Peaceful like. No one rabbiting on about themselves. The next time I went, I made a cup of tea and sat down at a table, near to where Sheila and a few were making

their birds. I could see how they were coming on, how the form was starting to take hold. How the bird was now looking like it took up space on the table there. Becoming something real, a wren I think, it wanted to be a wren anyway.

Sheila, she's the facilitator, she looked over and cocked her head, didn't look at me but I knew she was talking to me,

'Do you want to come and see what we're doing?' she asked me.

No one else looked up, no one looked at me. They were all busy making their bird skeletons, stuffing them with paper. I waited a moment, not sure what to do. I really wanted to make my own bird. But I just didn't know how to step into the group, you know?

I stood up, moved a bit closer, just a little apart from the others. Next to Sheila, just behind her like.

She turned with the bird in her hands and said 'here, just hold that for me, will you?'

And before I knew it, the little wren, it was definitely a wren, was sitting in my cupped hands. Sheila handed me more paper and turned her back again. She was busy with the others.
My hands just knew what to do. And I didn't think, not about anything else for the next hour. It was just me and that bird. The paste, the paper and me doing what needed to be done. I forgot about all the things that had been wrecking my head. All those things that I couldn't shake, solve, escape from, they just seemed to fade away, and I swear it was the closest thing to happiness I'd felt in a long time.

I'm going to go back next week. I need to finish the bird. The paste will be dry by now and I'm going to paint it, varnish it then. I've got a little stand for it, carved it, whittled it myself. It's going to sit so proud on the stand, feathers brown and red. A little white dot of paint in its black eye just so it looks alive like.

My Da would like that little wren.[595]

Cathedral Group, Kilkenny Lead Artist - Sheila Jordan

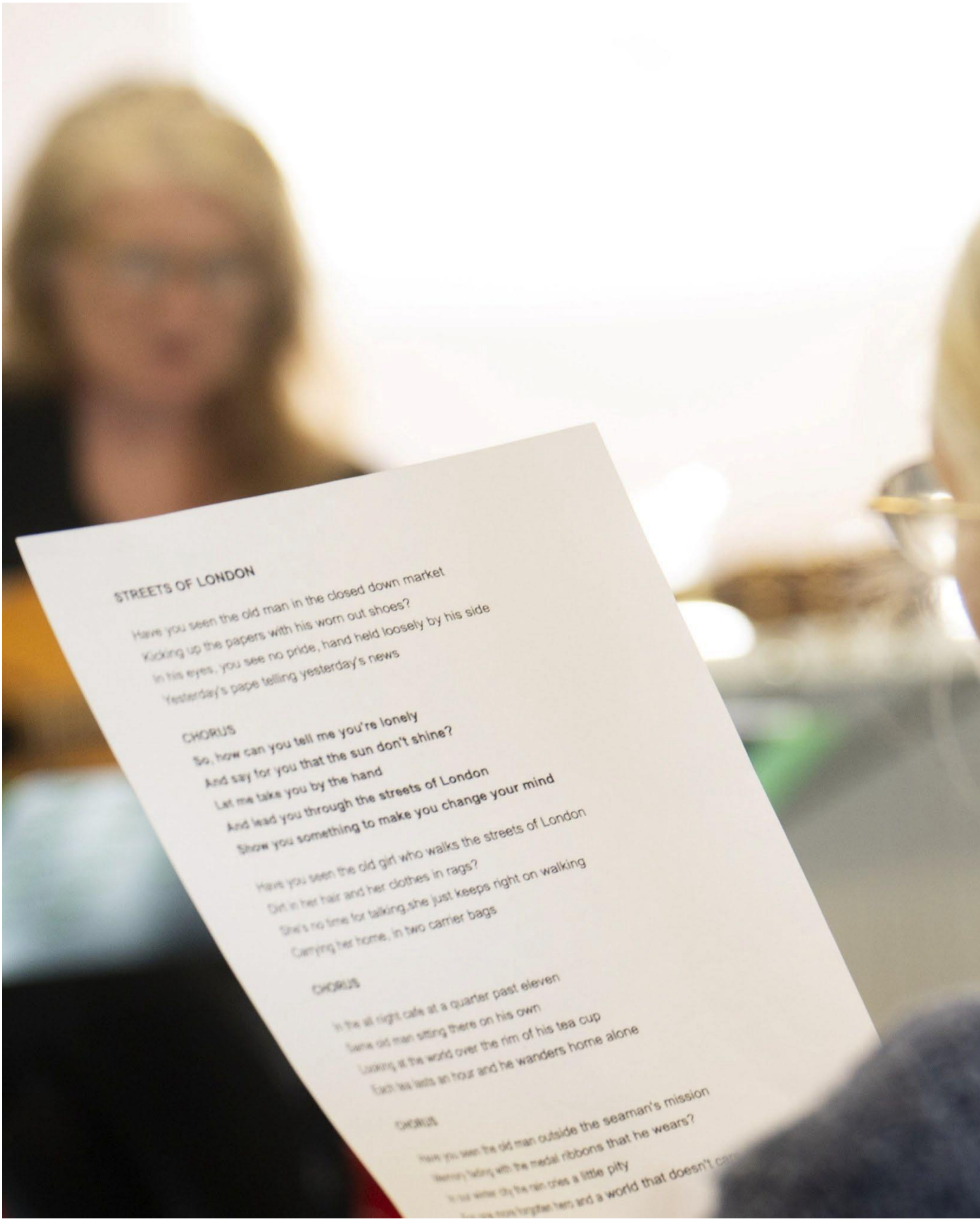


Image 11 Singing for Memory, Kilkenny Creative Ireland Project 2025

ARTEFACT 39 Waiting in the Music

I hear her say…….

My name is Peggy. I came here today with a friend. No. I didn't want to come. I prefer to sleep. I don't sleep well, but it feels safe there, in my bed, in my house, with all the things I mostly recognise. I prefer to hide, day in, day out, since everything started to fade, I prefer to be alone.

But Ann, she's my neighbour, made me come here today, she said, 'Now come on Peg, just give it a try,' and here I am.

There's so many people here. There's a lot going on, sounds and talking and singing and the guitar and these shakers and all. But I met someone I hadn't seen for a long time; we were girls at school together!

There are strangers too, lots of them, but they're kind and friendly and we are making a circle of sound and song.

I feel her say…….

The songs slip into my body, rise from my throat, the forgotten ones, they're still alive.

In this space, words and melodies grow again, find me, nudge me awake. They come back to me, come home to me - the beat and song of long ago here in this room, in my hands, in my lungs, on the air, on our tongues.

That same excitement I had as a girl, a glimmer, a promise, an urge to run and claim the summer wet grass for my dancing feet. All of this, the past, the future, this day, was only waiting quietly in the music.

Until I came here, I imagined that my future was small, that it would hold only silence, only loneliness. Only the inevitable.

But now I am joining a gathering, a circle of grace. Filling up my senses….
…like a night in the forest, like the mountains in springtime,

like a walk in the rain, like a storm in the desert, like a sleepy

blue ocean.

The words spill and fill the space around us. My voice, one of

the many in this place[60], You fill up my senses,

Come fill me again…….

[60] *Singing for Memory The Hub, Kilkenny Lead Artist- Kairen Waloch*



Image 12 Singing for Memory, Carlow Creative IRELAND PROJECT 2025

ARTEFACT 40 THE PINK SHIRT

He wore a pink shirt

Circle work

Five in a circle, when I say HIGH, you say LOW…. turn to the right and walk, walk, walk in a circle…. and out, 2…3…4…4…6…7….8

and in, 2…3…4…5…6…7…8…find a partner, now play a duet, around the circle and off we go….

and switch….and play a duet…. do da do da da da

He stands to attention, he leans in, he follows, he is watching for patterns. His voice finds a way out. He leans in further; his hands hang by his side.

Five in a circle, soft, soft, soft. twinkling whisper of sound, soft wash of sound, fluttering, trembling I am.

Leaning in leaning in leaning in

We lean in.

Shaking beans. Singing bowls.

Rattlesnakes settling into the air between us.

Leaning in leaning in

Breath work

The mind and the body have a breath, a bridge, a breath bridge. Connect your thoughts along the bridge. To the breath.

SOUND sinks into the space between us. Leaning in.

Find our breath, find our rhythm, plant feet firmly in the earth. Palm on belly button. Expand against the hand.

Expand against the hand. Breathe through the nose. Expand against the hand.

The singing bowl sighs

♬…… ♪……. ♫…… ♫♬…… ♪……. ♫…… singing bowl sighs ♫♬……

♪…..♫♬♫♬

♫……♫♬♫♬……. sigh……. ♪……. ♫……♫♬♫♬…♪……..……♫♬♫♬
sig
h…… Breathing in. Breathing out.
Calm, ease, calm, ease,

Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaasssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssseeeeeeee

Flying.

Arms rise- We fly.

Arms rise, breathe in.

Arms lower, breathing out…… He flies his own path, somewhere alone

Feet planted to the earth

Deep sigh Embracing.
Arms out to the side and back in.

Arms out, breathe in, arms in, sigh out.

He embraces his own thoughts, somewhere within

Praising.

Arms up and hands together, breathe in. Arms down.
Groan out.

He groans his own prayer, wordless

Sing a single 𝄞 𝄞 𝄞 𝄞 AUMMMMMMM- lets hum. Activate the release, oscillate.
Calming in a single 𝄞 𝄞 𝄞 𝄞 massage the vagus nerve

Sing AUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

And he sings his own note, his own song with the voice he found earlier
Leaning in

EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOIIIIIIIIIMMM

Rhythm work

1 and 2 and 1,2,3.

Do do do and dee dee dee. 1 and 2 and 1,2,3.

Rock around the clock tonight!!!!! Do do do and dee dee dee.

We're gonna rock around the clock tonight!!!!! 1 and 2 and 1.2.3.

Up now to your shoulder- lovely movement.

And he jives and he rocks around his own clock.

Ticking back, the hour hand spinning back vortex. A *whispersmile* a *memorysound* in his ear. the dance floor spins in his smile.

Hey Jude, don't be afraid, sing a sad song and make it better I'll fly away O glory I'll fly away when I die

By and by, I'll fly away.

Please don't take my sunshine away.

What separate us, the years, the songs, the ones which remain with us from our teens and come with us into old age?

Feeling fluid flowing spin, spin, spin the big double base. Let's sing your song, can you sing your song now?

It takes a worried man to sing a worried song, I'm worried now, but I won't be worried long……. Words spill he leans in he leans in

A sound locked into the drum but reverberating outwards from the drum. Brush the drum, scritchy scratch, scritchy scratch, steely softened bristle, brush the drum.

Somewhere over the rainbow, the clouds are far behind me, way up high. There is a land I heard of once in a lullaby.

The lemon drops melt, and we are found-please find me

why then why can't I? blue bird why?

♫♬♫♬…….♪……. ♫……♫♬♫♬…….

……. ♪……. ♫……♫♬♫♬…♪…….……♫♬♫♬…… Interlude

♬…… ♪……. ♫…… ♫♬…… ♪……. ♫…… ♫♬…… ♪…..♫♬♫♬

Larry's song. Larry leads. Grace in Kilmainham. I walked around there you know, and I sang, and everyone looked, and they stopped, and I sang Grace.

As we gather at the chapel….my thoughts.

Yearn for liberty……with all my love…. the wind upon. We will say goodbye.
I know it's not for you my love….to ever understand…. to his side. Let this moment linger……I place this wedding ring on your finger,
T
here won't be time to share our love, for I must say goodbye.
Reminiscence therapy and improvisation.

Organic, it grows. it grows out of nothing. Stimulated by poetry. Using one phrases I am
I am wind upon the sea

I am wave upon the ocean I am murmur of….
I am ray of golden sun.

We take up our instruments.

Anna brought her happy drum. Ann Marie with the chimes. Larry with his brush and drum.

He takes an Indian shaker

And I stop my pen. I stop writing. Listen. Only listen. I am stopped.

Ray of golden sun Ray of golden sun Ray of golden sun. Fluttering in the breeze…
Fluttering in the breeze…
Fluttering in the breeze dancing fluttering dancing… Ray of golden breeze, fluttering…
Golden breeze ray of golden sun.

Fluttering ray of golden sun dancing in the breeze.

Affirmation Circle

One word, we count to seven, beat the drum softly, count to seven and stop.
One word only.

Glad. Relaxed. Happy. Appreciative. Happy.

Reflection Time

it's so beautiful, so beautiful, a flow where we can just get lost. time evaporates.
we are released --- from fear, from trauma, from everything that holds us back. we become one, connected by sound, connected as one organic flowing group. bit of fun, bit of craic.
it's the freedom I love to express myself emotionally and musically. the group has grown.

it’s good to be part of something.

there are so many aspects to this, music poetry, spontaneity but there’s so much planning behind what Marian does.

‘I was little you know just playing in the kitchen. My dad was in a Ceili band and

my poor mother, you know she was tired of making tea and sandwiches for everyone! But that’s how I learned to play music We lost an awful lot in how we let that all go but now we realise how much we need it as community to connect and to heal and for so many other reasons. It’s brave to make music, as our forefathers did, pushing the boat out, looking for possibilities. The beauty is all in the process’

I sit alone afterwards and try to recall the sounds, feel the way they sank into my belly, my throat my legs. Try to remember how I felt, the response which called my whole self to lean in, lean in.

Writing cannot express this yearning to drown in sound. This connection, the ancient call to be consumed into group and other and be a part of something bigger and more ethereal and meaningful. I am trapped to this page by words in ink. I close my eyes and think. Pink shirt is still a sunburn-afterburn snapshot

behind my eyelids

A picture of Marian in the circle grows then; you are the sun and around you a constellation of flowers facing you, your warmth, your gift….

I am

Learning in leaning in. [61]

61 Singing for Memory An Gardin Beo, Carlow-a space where people can connect more with nature, with the growing and making of food and with one another. https://www.angairdinbeo.org/p/home.html Lead Artist- Marian Gaynor



Image 13 Detail, Walking Photography Group Creative Ireland Project 2025

ARTEFACT 41 The Whole of the Moon

I arrive early to chat with Mary, who works at the Involvement Centre five mornings a week. She makes me a cup of tea, and we sit together at the kitchen table. Mary tells me about the photography course, led by Freddie Greenall, which has become a popular activity among the centre's members. The class has fluctuated in size; some days there are six participants, while on others, only two or three show up. Regardless, everyone who's joined in has enjoyed the course.

Mary explains how Freddie has guided the group to explore Kilkenny City through the lens of a camera. The participants, armed with nothing more than their cell phones, have been learning how to capture images and view their surroundings with a new perspective.
Freddie's gentle encouragement has helped them see the familiar in a fresh light, offering opportunities for them to appreciate the unusual, the striking and the beautiful around them.

Freddie arrives and makes his cup of tea. He tells me how the group has wandered the Abbey Quarter, the Riverwalk, and other scenic paths throughout the city. On rainy, winter days, when stepping outside wasn't an option, the group transformed the Involvement Centre's workroom into a makeshift photography studio. Black sheets and lighting equipment were set up, and the participants practised the skills Freddie taught them. I'm shown some of the impressive images the group has captured: atmospheric photographs of intricately designed Sugar Skulls, abstract shots of statues, and views looking out into the Involvement Centre courtyard.

It's a strange experience to see the same courtyard now, reflected in the black and white photographs, each image somehow capturing a different essence of the place.

The weather today is beautiful; the sun is splitting the stones. It's early spring, and the light seems to infuse everything with warmth and life. I turn to Freddie and ask how it feels now that the course is nearing its end. He smiles while he reflects: It's been wonderful. Really rewarding.

Those walks, sharing what I know with them - it's nice to take a moment and just reflect. To slow down and look at things you've passed by a thousand times, but never really seen. It's about taking a little more time, a few more seconds, to admire the details, to understand them.'

One of the women in the group agrees, 'It's much more than just photography. It's opened up my world. I've started appreciating my own hometown, seeing things around me in a way I never did before.'

Freddie invites us to walk together. We meander through Kilkenny's back streets, slowly making our way out onto High Street. Along the way, Freddie encourages us to stop and take photographs whenever something catches our attention, whenever we're drawn to an image or a scene. We move like a small school of fish, each of us navigating the streets at our own pace, some moving in closer to capture a shot, others lingering behind, drawn to something different. We stoop low, bend at odd angles, and arch our cameras towards the sky. It's a quiet dance of exploration, a group of individuals, each capturing the world in their own way. Freddie moves from person to person, offering gentle suggestions. He never instructs or imposes; instead, his approach is one of curiosity and respect for each individual's process. He's affable, self-deprecating, and at ease with everyone. I notice the way he checks in with each participant, asking things like, "How have you been since the last time I saw you?" or "What did you do for St. Patrick's Day? How are things going with you?"

At one point, a woman turns to Freddie, grappling with a visual challenge in front of her. "How would you even take this?" she asks, unsure how to frame her shot. Freddie comes alongside her, chuckling softly, and the two share a smile as he shows her how to break down the frame into a grid, teaching her how to think about each section of the picture as part of a larger whole. It's in this moment that I realise how much the group embodies the idea of community. We are all, in a way, pieces of a larger puzzle, coming together to form something greater than the sum of our parts.

Some of the conversations we have during our walk are light-hearted,

but others reveal deeper reflections and the underlying importance of this community. One woman tells me about her childhood, about the anxiety she still carries with her into adulthood, and how this photography class has given her the space to pause and reflect.

Under a brilliant blue sky, we continue our walk through the sun-drenched streets of Kilkenny. Our shadows stretch long in the early spring light as we make our way toward St. Canice's Cathedral, where a massive sculpture of the moon, created by artist Luke Jerram, has been installed. We've all heard about it and seen photographs on social media, but none of us have seen it in 'person,' and we're eager for the experience.

As we approach the cathedral, we pause beneath an archway, gazing up in awe at the tall, round tower, its silhouette cut sharp against the clear sky. We angle our cameras to capture the words etched into a gravestone nearby: 'The truth will set you free.'

We step into the darkened interior of the cathedral, our eyes taking a moment to adjust to the cool, shadowy space. The deep brown wood and grey marble lend the space a timeless quality. Elizabeth and I stop just inside the door, drawn to a long marble statue laid beneath the stained-glass window. Light from the windows falls in colourful streaks across the statue, casting emerald, and ruby highlights over the figure's serene face. Her cold, marble hands are forever folded in rest upon her chest. We linger, taking our time. Then Elizabeth gently guides me in setting up my phone camera. She shows me how to position it at the statue's feet, capturing the full length of the marble body in the frame. It's as though the statue stretches out into eternity.

I feel a rush of excitement as I look at the shot, and Elizabeth laughs at my enthusiasm, sharing in that moment of learning and discovery. 'It's moments like these that make it all worth it,' she says.

We walk together down the long stretch on ancient ironwork towards an overhanging moon strung up high before the altar. It is a surreal experience. We stop to take it all in. It's immense, elemental, otherworldly. Then Elizabeth shows me another trick, another viewpoint

for my camera. I see the already marvellous moon in a whole new way.

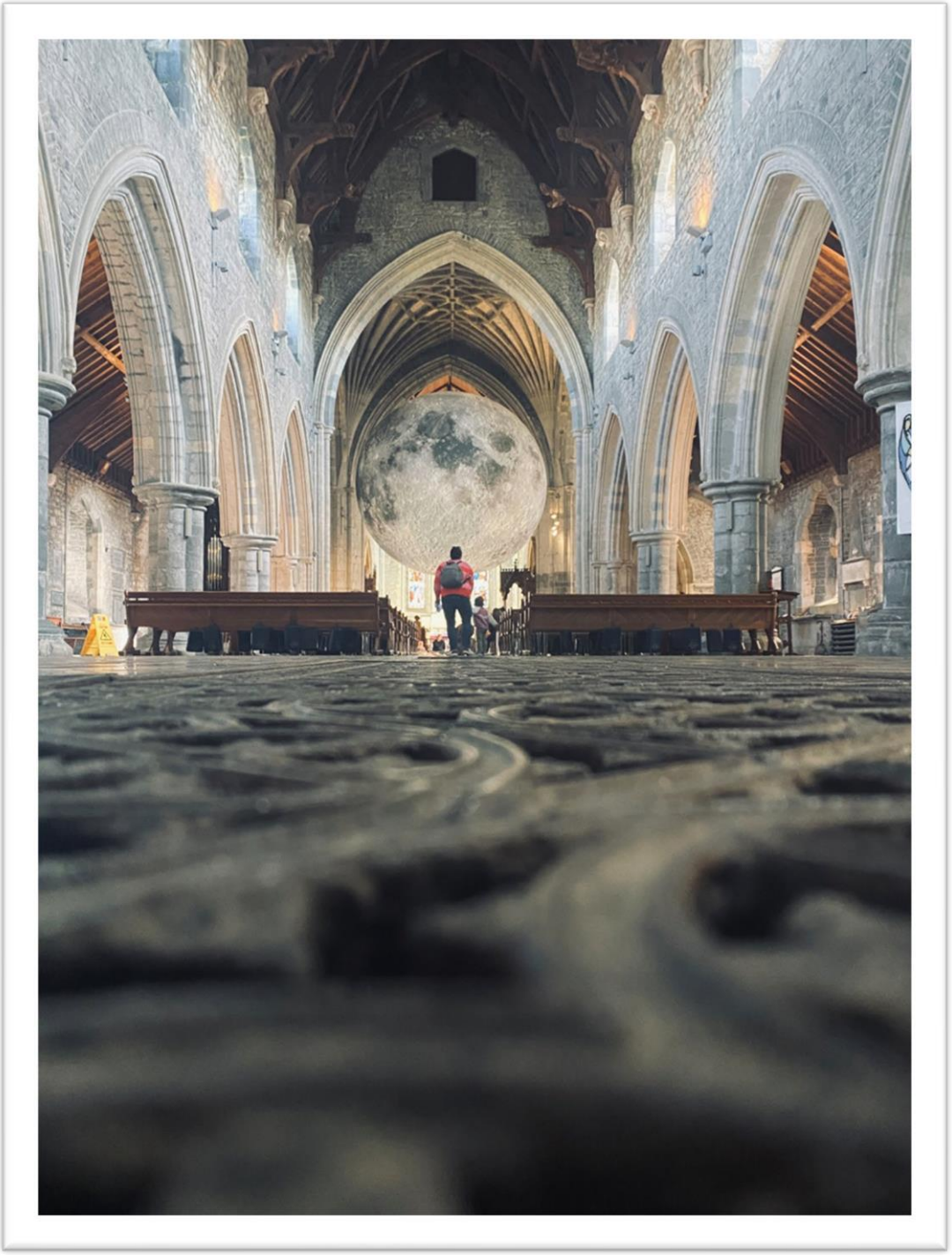
I find myself wishing I could swallow all this new knowledge, the whole of the moon, all this beauty of learning and sharing and being together in discovery.

She tells then how important the course has been for her: It's been such a non-judgmental space. There's no wrong way to do it, and it's been so much fun. Everyone sees the same thing, but in a completely different light. It's fascinating how one person can take a picture of something, and someone else can take the same subject and capture it completely differently. It's also helped with my confidence. I can ask Freddie for advice, and he's always so gentle with me. I never thought I could take photos like this on my own, but now I feel different. I don't know what I'll do when the course ends, but I've loved every minute of it.'

Freddie smiles, his eyes twinkling with encouragement. 'It doesn't have to end just because the course is over,' he says. 'You can keep doing it. Go for a walk, take some photos. You've learned everything you need to keep going. 'Elizabeth smiles, I'm going to get my hands on a Nikon. It's an old one, but it's a great one!' she says with excitement, and the two chat about different camera models. Freddie suggests she might want to check out the Kilkenny Photography Group, a community where she can continue her photography journey. 'Send me your photos,' Freddie adds, as many as you like. If you'd like, we can include them in an exhibition. As the group starts to break up, one more participant comes over to thank Freddie. 'This has been so good,' she says, 'Every time we've done this, it's helped me relax. I've learned to see things differently, and I've really enjoyed it. Thank you for everything.'

The little school of fish slowly disbands, each person taking their own path through the streets of Kilkenny. But the bond they've formed, the shared experience, will remain with them. They will come back together again on Monday, and their journey will take them in new directions. They leave richer for having spent this time together - each of them seeing the world just a little bit differently now.

62 Photography Walking Group, Kilkenny Lead artist- Freddie Greenall



ARTEFACT 42 Photograph by Elizabeth[63]

[63] Elizabeth chose to use her first name only



Image 14 Tullow Travellers' Women's GROUP CREATIVE Ireland Project 2025

ARTEFACT 43 MOLLY POCKETS

The baba's asleep on the couch. Tiny little frown on him. Just like his daddy.

It's raining wet and steady. Like it always is. Mam is telling her stories, her fingers flying across the fabric of her beady pocket. She stitches a hem, in and out, fast as the words, she's stitching tales with. Aint Nora is at the sewing machine at the other end of the table but stops it to hear Mam's punchline. The laughter and the machine's whirring start up again at the same time.

We come back down, and there is silence for a while.

I sip my tea. Breathe. Nothing I have to do. Not even a stitch if I don't want to.

Look at Baba, he's snuffling, wrapped tight in his blanket there. Can't believe he's mine.

I run my fingers through the little plastic boxes of beads, then dip into the buttons. I pick one which has flowers printed on it, bring it across to a wide pink ribbon I'm holding on to for my own pocket. 'Molly pockets' my mother and her mother and her mother before that, that's what they call them. No woman was properly dressed without them, Granny says. She'd wear hers over her big skirt, just to the side, tied at the back. I remember when I was a little one, she embroidered my name on her pocket, Bridie, it was her name too. She'd dig in it and pull out a shell, a stone, something special just for me.

I want to embroider 'Patrick' on mine today, that little Patrick, there on the couch. I might ask Granny to do it, though. She's got skills I can't even imagine yet.

But I will learn. It's important. One day, please God, I'll have a girl of my own, I'll call her Bridie and embroider her name just under his.

I see just what I need for my little Paddy in amongst the buttons - a holy medal of St. Patrick. My little man was born on St Patrick's feast day - that's why I named him that. Patrick's the most important Saint in Ireland and well, our little Paddy is the most important soul in our life, so it makes sense.

Sometimes the other little ones come here too, there's some toys in the corner, tiny little chairs stacked up one on top of the other. It's bedlam then, but we all take a turn to keep them occupied. They don't come often. We love this space for ourselves. When the kids are at school and we leave the jobs at home, all the worries, all the work - we leave it behind and come here and tell stories, listen to stories, and help each other just to remember who we are, where we come from. The time flies.

Mam takes my pocket and starts to pin the pink ribbon to the edge at lightning speed, Will ya Bug mi'dil a gusach a weed?'[64]

I get up to go to the kitchen,

'anyone else want a cup?' It's

raining outside, wet, and steady.

Inside it's shining, laughter and craic. Women holding women. Like it's always been[65].

[64] Taken from https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/GRTHM-Language-cards-2.pdf
Translates to 'Will you make me a cup of tea?'
Tullow Traveller Women's Group

[65] Forward Steps, Carlow- providing a safe, warm, comfortable, and inclusive environment for those who are most vulnerable and at risk in our local community.
https://www.forwardstepsfrc.com/about

Collaborative Spaces for Reclamation and Repair

My experience has shown me, unequivocally, that collaborative spaces for learning together are not only spaces for learning information but are also healing spaces for the 'self' and the collective community. The artefacts made for the Creative Ireland Project- Living Artfully, explore group art pedagogy and the benefits these might have on individuals and communities. I explore how personal and collective transformation for healing happens in these spaces of art making. This concept relies on the underlying conviction that the 'self' is formed, always *in relation to* the world and others (Rosa, 2019), that the 'self' can be restored and transformed through collaborative practice (Green, 2023; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Greene, 1995; Palmer,2009; Noddings, 2003; Dewey, 1916; Irwin, Springgay and Kind, 2005).

Community learning environments, when grounded in creativity and dialogue and attended to with presence and care by both the individual group members and the educators, can become vital sites for personal and social repair. If the 'self' is not an isolated entity, but rather one that is formed and transformed in connection with others, then group work becomes not only a way of working in pedagogical spaces but also a site of affective transformation, where the damaged or alienated 'self' may begin to heal through the practice of dialogue, mutual recognition, and creative collaboration. When held by an experienced artist-educator and /or within a supportive group,

> 'the transformational process can become a community/ relational experience, the fixedness of beliefs is loosened, preparing a space for a possibility to be actualised'
>
> Green 2023, p.196.

Spaces like these help learners feel recognised, heard, and seen. As a result, their self-esteem and confidence both socially and practically grow and develop. For both educators and learners within art pedagogy and

other fields, engaging in dialogic and caring group environments can help create reparative spaces. These spaces allow learners and educators to reimagine themselves through alternate perspectives and the sharing of narratives; they can help members build and identify what makes them unique.

When individuals collaborate with others in mutual action and reflection through praxis, as Freire (1970) suggests, they can reclaim their agency, dignity, and identity. Jackson defines mutuality as a reciprocal, respectful, and relational approach to learning, telling us that it is crucial for authentic community-building and healthy learning spaces. Mutuality requires deep, ongoing engagement, democracy, and genuine connection. Through mutual friendship and life-sharing, values like dignity and respect form the foundation for meaningful relationships and resilient communities where effective learning can happen (Jackson, 2011). Collaborative learning and the sharing of knowledge are inherently social and democratic, encouraging learners to situate themselves within a wider community, where belonging, a shared sense of purpose, and responsibility can lead to healing (Freire, 1970; Dewey, 1916).

Dialogue is central to learning for reclamation and repair; of the 'self' and relationships, it happens in care-filled spaces where 'circles of trust'- intentional learning communities, exist (Palmer, 2009). Educators invite group participants to bring their whole selves into the learning space, to be present in an attitude of deep listening presence. These are not spaces of performance, but of deep listening, silence, and attendance. The act of being witnessed by others who share a commitment to mutual vulnerability, Palmer suggests, is a healing experience that is essential to personal and pedagogical integrity.

When I asked the artist learners in my own Living Artfully Group (See

Artefact 35) what they valued most about our time together making art, they listed the following: Connection and Contact. Trust. Mutual Respect. Acceptance. Sisterhood. Non-judgement. Support. Compassion. Caring and Empathy. Sharing. Safe Space.

Some expanded on their experience in the group, saying how they loved the inner learning/ self-discovery and learning, the safe and welcoming space where they felt encouraged to be themselves, the time for themselves and building relationships. One lady said the group was 'like a warm hug.' We had been on a long break over the Christmas period, and they said that they had missed the group and that it seemed such a long time since we had had it. What was most noticeable was that the women said that the project was impacting their lives beyond the weekly sessions; they reported feeling better able to create boundaries with those who depended on them - to give themselves time to think and create '*I had lost myself and these workshops are helping me find myself again, the person I used to be.'*

Some of the women told me that they found themselves planning and thinking ahead for the group sessions, making conscious efforts to prepare for their engagement in the group.

Younger mothers and some grandmothers said they had been sharing what they learned in the sessions with their young children/grandchildren. Some felt a growing sense of pride and esteem as their family members praised them for their work and were impressed by their skills. A large proportion of the people said they were continuing the work at home, and one woman said she realised that she was not limited but 'was more' than she thought she was *'I discovered that I am more than I thought I was.'* Others agreed that life was so hectic that they were often just busy surviving and that the project had helped them to be more mindful of giving themselves a break, time, and practising 'being in the moment.' They mentioned understanding that they needed to 'fill themselves' up and not allow themselves to get depleted. *'Last year,*

it was like a lightbulb came on.'

Mary came to speak to me after the class and said that she used to write but had stopped many years ago. She said she was constantly inspired now and the '*words wouldn't stop coming*' she felt that she was '*reclaiming herself, the person she used to be'*

Many told me that these weekly sessions provided a social outlet and human connection in an otherwise quite lonely week.[66]

Being able to be vulnerable within shared learning spaces is supported by authentic, caring relationships, where individuals feel loved, respected, seen, safe, and affirmed. Group learning, when infused with genuine care, becomes a space where learners can regain a sense of worth and belonging (Noddings, 2003; hooks, 1994).

The artefacts in this chapter are witness to how, when art, research, and teaching are merged in collaborative art-making spaces, focused on the process and the relational aspects of learning, they can become spaces for healing. Through shared aesthetic engagement, individuals are invited into liminal spaces of becoming, where identity is continuously negotiated, held, and reimagined with others. Art making is a lifelong learning process to make sense of the world. In art making, the learning process of skills and techniques is never-ending, ever-present. An artist may solve a particular problem in the making process, only to understand that the next time they encounter this problem, a new set of options may present themselves, so it is with life problems. The skills an artist learns become tools to access their voice, and these manifest in original, authentic works. The skills we learn in life are also unique to our circumstances, our experiences and can be used to create a world of our own. These skills, like the ones we learn in the act of making art, can be shared with others. It is this fluctuating, shifting, metonymical movement which defines art as being, in its essence, an act of becoming.

Artistic, aesthetic, and imaginative processes inherent in artmaking and art pedagogical spaces provide the potential for self-understanding and repair for individuals and communities alike. Recognition and resonance are central to the kind of healing that occurs in communal art spaces, where being seen, heard, and responded to with empathy allows for a deeper sense of belonging and affirmation. This relational quality inherent in artmaking enhances its restorative potential, enabling us to make sense of our experiences in embodied, visual, and symbolic ways.

[66] Reflective Journal entry- January session 1 2025- Living Artfully, Creative Ireland Project 2024-2025

Working in groups can become a liminal, transformative space, one where the 'self' is not only educated but also reclaimed, repaired, re-membered, and reimagined. Whether through dialogue, aesthetic inquiry, or caring relationships, the group becomes a container for becoming. It is a place where wounds are witnessed and held, creativity and imagination are kindled, and the possibility of a more integrated 'self' is made visible. The development of identity and personal transformation and the path to healing is not a solitary process but one which is fostered in well-facilitated groups where relationships are formed and nurtured. The processes of group work, including dialogue, empathy, and presence, foster self-awareness and help us recognise others and resonate with them (Rosa, 2019; Freire 1970; hooks, 2003; Palmer, 2009). A caring, resonant relationship, one of mutual respect and being present for the other, can lead to emotional healing and an improved sense of identity (Noddings, 2003, hooks 2003, Palmer, 2009).

I wrote the piece for my group in an almost transcendental state, allowing 'flow' to take over, writing before 'thinking,' echoing the resonance I had felt with these women. Over time, when I finished the piece, I read it to the group of eighteen women. Overwhelmingly, they were astounded at how it felt to them as if it were their own words; they wanted to know how I could have *'read their hearts and minds.'* My response to the women was not as an artist, researcher, or teacher, but as a fellow human being travelling alongside them. I needed to honour the individual voices within the group, and to do that, I had to stay mindful of my ego, keeping its voice small so that the others could be heard. Romanshyn suggests that if a researcher is intent on keeping soul in mind during their research (art), they must ask the question of 'whose voice needs to be heard in the work.' (Romanshyn 2007, p.328). As lead artist, I hold the space for the women's voices and bring my own home to my reflective journal. During a particularly difficult time, when women were sharing their stories with me, I wrote,

‘*Death and disease have been at the forefront of my consciousness over the past few weeks, especially because of Davey dying. Hearing the women’s challenges with their health, while getting to know them better, makes me more grateful for the time we spend together and for the project as a whole. It lets us focus on beautiful and good things, distracts us from worries and grief and gives us space and time to be kind, tender and connected to each other. The fragility and ephemerality of our lives are heightened, but it brings out the best in us all.’*[67]

I had drawn on the intimate conversations we had shared, both the challenging and grief-filled as well as the laughter, the playmaking, and the response of the senses to our shared space.

Artmaking is a reflective and transformative process that connects the artist's past, present, and imagined future; each moment of time gives itself as a witness to all the others’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, p. 71). It is an epistemological practice, allowing new insights to surface, often revealing what was previously unconscious or hidden (Dewey, 2005). The process involves what Dewey (1934) terms ‘flexible purposing’, where each step in creation is influenced by what has come before, inviting spontaneity and open-ended exploration. At its core, art invites ambiguity, encourages the unknown, and opens space for multiple interpretations. The individual becomes part of something greater than themselves, their journeys become shared, and they see possibilities for self-transformation and potential repair of past hurts and traumas.

As our world becomes increasingly accelerated, consumerist, and objectifying, our relationships with one another, our environment, and the ‘self’ become more dysfunctional (Rosa 2019). There is, I believe, more urgency to preserve and cultivate educational spaces that centre around relationship, creativity, and care. Reclaiming and repairing the ‘self’ is a collective effort where we share the responsibility for each other in art

studios, art-making community circles, and public art engagement.

Reflecting on Key Themes of Repair and Reclamation

In Chapter Three, the focus turns to emphasise the key themes of *repair* and *reclamation*, both of which are central in the narrative of resilience. Chapter three reflects on the transformative potential of practices of art making and reflection as paths for self-repair and the reclamation of agency, both during and after periods of crisis. Artmaking, as a creative and introspective process, is shown to be a tool for navigating the liminal spaces of personal loss, disorientation, and uncertainty. This chapter explores how these themes of repair and reclamation are integral to artistic practice, self-identity, and pedagogical transformation. The stories that are shared emphasise how in group work, we can co- create reparative ways forward from situations of despair and hopelessness.

The theme of *repair* resonates profoundly in the context of my personal crises, physical decline, vulnerability, and a sense of lost agency. In times of crisis, when familiar structures dissolve and the self feels fractured, there emerges a crucial need for processes that can facilitate the restoration of coherence. Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning provides a valuable lens through which to view these moments of breakdown. In Chapter three I navigate my 'disorienting dilemma,' through the processes of artmaking which become a method for reorienting myself, seeking new meaning from the chaos that surrounds me. Green (2023) tells us that in the aftermath of loss, individuals must undergo a period of reclamation, involving courage and creativity to develop new premises and perspectives on life. Artmaking, in this chapter, is shown not merely to be a process of aesthetic creation but as an important active process of *reparation*—a way to *reclaim* the fragmented self and reconstitute a coherent and more whole identity.

The idea of reclamation within this context is closely tied to identity

transformation. As I reflects on memories from my past, including my experience of relinquishing a child for adoption, the act of revisiting these painful moments in creative ways, whether through painting or writing, becomes a form of self-reclamation. The creative act allows me to not only process but reframe these experiences, transforming them from sources of pain into sites of growth and potential. As Randall (2013) tells us, artmaking facilitates the construction of a new context for being, offering a way to make sense of past trauma while envisioning new possibilities for the future. This transformative space is described as liminal (Turner, 1995), where an individual can exist in a space of uncertainty, yet find creative potential for their future.

In Chapter three, Turner's (1969) exploration of liminality as a space of 'pure possibility' speaks to the essential role of uncertainty and discomfort in facilitating creative growth. Through artmaking, individuals (and groups) can engage in a practice of radical self-exploration, revealing hidden depths of experience, emotion, and identity. In the context of pedagogy, this liminal process mirrors the journey of self-discovery that students might undergo when given the freedom to express their unique voices. As Sibbett and Thompson (2008) note, arts-based practices allow for the inclusion of the taboo, creating a space of revelation where previously excluded emotions or experiences can be confronted and reclaimed.

This process of reclaiming agency and selfhood through art is not solitary but relational. The group artefacts and stories in Chapter three show how creative practices can serve as a source of connection, both to the self and to others. The role of support in these moments of personal crisis is crucial, as it offers a sense of shared resilience. Sibbett (2008) argues that the presence of others, whether through professional counselling or community support, enhances the process of navigating uncertainty and reclaiming a sense of self. In this way, the pedagogy of artmaking is more than a solitary act, it is deeply embedded in the interpersonal and

relational dimensions of learning.

The themes of *repair* and r*eclamation* emphasised in Chapter three offer art making and art pedagogy as profound, restorative practise, and process. By engaging in creative practices, individuals have the opportunity to repair fractured identities, reclaim lost agency, and transform crises into opportunities for self-discovery and growth. These processes provide a framework for educators and learners alike to approach personal and collective challenges with resilience and creativity to foster an environment where healing, transformation, and empowerment are possible.

[67] April 2 session 7 2025 Journal Entry Creative Ireland – Living Artfully Project



Image 15 Detail Research Journal 2020-2025

Establishing Methodology as a Researcher

A/r/tography: Embracing a Multifaceted Identity

A/r/tography is a dynamic, evolving practice that integrates personal, political, and professional dimensions of one's life. It's built on the idea that diverse ways of knowing and learning are valuable, a principle that has always shaped my teaching. However, as a student, I struggled to fit into traditional educational structures. The rigid, binary thinking of these systems left me feeling like I didn't belong, even though I desperately wanted to. Through the process of writing and creating art for this research, I discovered that true engagement required me to accept my identity as a heart-driven learner—one who may not fit neatly into prescribed categories but is always in the process of becoming. By embracing my unique ways of knowing and being, I maintained the integrity of this work and set out on a path toward self-acceptance.

Reflecting on my teaching philosophy, epistemology, and ontology, I began to recognise in myself the same intuitive and creative ways of being that I admired in my learners. This self-recognition aligned with the concept of a/r/tography as both a methodology and an identity. A/r/tography helped me articulate a vision for pedagogy that nurtures a sense of belonging and growth for all learners, regardless of their ways of engaging with the world. I realised that I didn't need to identify with just one profession. Instead, I could embrace my multiple roles as artist, researcher, and educator. This understanding led me to adopt a/r/tography as a methodology that reflects my complex identity and professional practice.

The research process in a/r/tography is not linear but experimental and evolving, much like the creative act itself. It involves creating a map not by following a direct route, but by wandering, exploring, and sometimes retracing steps. This approach allows for mistakes, deviations, and new connections to emerge. A/r/tography provides a methodology that encourages creative invention, offering a framework

for mapping lived experiences, particularly those that are relational, rhizomatic, and intense.

As an artist, researcher, and educator, I needed a methodology that would allow me to embrace artmaking as a living inquiry. A rhizomatic approach, where everything is interconnected and constantly evolving, resonated deeply with me. The rhizome, an interconnected network with no singular point of origin, contrasts with traditional hierarchical structures of knowledge (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, pp. 403-406). It allows for the creation of multiple, unpredictable connections, enabling a broader understanding of experiences. This rhizomatic framework aligns with a/r/tography's focus on multiple, intersecting branches of inquiry, encouraging fluid, decentralised exploration rather than rigid, standardised approaches to knowledge.

The rhizomatic nature of a/r/tography allows inquiry to branch in many directions, reflecting the fluidity of experience. It enables me to connect seemingly unrelated moments of learning, recognising how they are all intrinsically linked to each other, to myself, and to the larger world. By adopting this approach, I was able to live my research through a continuous interplay between artmaking, writing, and teaching. Rhizomatic inquiry invites the researcher to follow the process wherever it leads, opening new possibilities and breaking free from binary thinking. It encourages creative, collective meaning-making where all participants—educators, learners, and researchers—become co-creators in the process.

A/r/tography integrates art, research, and education into a unified form of inquiry. It allows for the blending of creative practice and academic research, where artmaking and writing are seen as complementary methods of exploration (Causey, 2017; Dewey, 1980; McNiff, 1998; Finley, 2008), This dual engagement creates a space for layered meanings to emerge, a process described as "double imaging." The roles of artist, researcher, and teacher are interwoven, creating a relational aesthetic where knowledge is co-constructed through art and text. This

allows for shifts and ruptures in thinking, where new actions and understandings can emerge.

In this approach, a/r/tography lingers in the in-between spaces between the roles of artist, researcher, and educator, creating opportunities for creative transformation. It invites embodied understanding and relational engagement by acknowledging the power of difference and the potential for new possibilities. By embracing multiple perspectives and celebrating diversity, a/r/tography fosters an educational practice that values the co-creation of knowledge, where learners and educators engage together in a shared, fluid inquiry process.

Renderings within A/r/tography

The 'Renderings' described in a/r/tography became an essential navigational tools as I engaged with the complexity and fluidity of an inquiry rooted in artistic practice, lived experience, and pedagogy. These renderings helped me to better understand how my multiple roles (artist, teacher, and researcher) have continually shaped and reshaped my identity over time. Reflecting retrospectively on my life history allowed me to identify key experiences that led to moments of transformative learning. This reflective mapping process was guided and supported by the integration of the renderings into my practice as an a/r/tographer.

These renderings are an intrinsic part of the art process, and they offer pathways within living inquiry, encouraging engagement with ‘research that is attentive to the sensual, tactile, and unsaid aspects of artist/researcher/teachers’ lives’ (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 899).

Works of art

> ‘are not simply static images or words captured on a page; they are visual, aesthetic, and textual performances that dance and play alongside each other, reverberating in excess and as openings’
>
> Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 908.

The renderings as described by Irwin are *contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor, openings, reverberations,* and *excess*.

I will mention each one below, showing how I incorporated them into the methodology of my living inquiry. Renderings are elements embedded in art processes, and as such, they provide a conceptual rationale for integrating multiple methodologies (arts-based, evocative autoethnographic, life history, and heuristic) through a living a/r/tographical inquiry. They provide a rhizomatic matrix of pathways, an intersection between 'being' and researching, which are explained both as modes of existence and as modes of inquiry. I spend time mapping each one to my experience because I believe these are important 'findings' for any artist teacher and researcher who is looking to deepen and understand her practice.

Rendering One -Living Inquiry

> 'But it is much easier to surrender responsibility to gods or circumstances than take matters into our own hands and say, *'Perhaps I am not who I consider myself to be. Perhaps in truth, I have never really considered myself at all.'*
>
> Kae Tempest 2020, p.14

A/r/tography is a fluid, ever-changing process because it is lived and embodied, always in flux. Living inquiry means engaging in research as a form of becoming. We are always situated in a particular context, responsive to experience and life as it unfolds.

Living a/r/tographic inquiry involves situating and accepting oneself as a continuously burgeoning being (Sameshima, 2008, p. 49), acknowledging all the time that we are flawed, contradictory, and humanly imperfect. The experience of being, in all our identities, is a fluid and shifting experience; we are constantly searching for and creating meaning. Irwin (2013) emphasises that we are embedded within ourselves, others, and events

> ‘Each line of becoming is situated within the intensity of an event in constant movement; movement toward possibilities, toward an unfolding of that which is yet to be known, toward the potential of potential... these lines of becoming are always connected, always affected by the other, and always entangled in lines of multiplicities’
>
> Irwin, 2013, p. 24.

As a researcher engaged in living inquiry, I embraced my teaching ‘self’/ role by recognising and drawing on over thirty-five years of experience as an academic and community art educator, shaped by numerous encounters and learning epiphanies. At the same time, I explored my day-to-day experiences with art making and pedagogy, recognising myself as simultaneously artist, researcher, and teacher, and embracing my capacity and qualifications to enact these ‘selves’/roles in an ongoing act of living and being. The ‘self,’ in all its multifaceted roles and temporalities, became, to a large degree, the subject of study in an ongoing journey of discovery. It is essentially an inquiry into what it means to live a life

> ‘It is at once a journey over time and a journey in time, synchronous and asynchronous, imagining the past and future in the present sense of becoming.’
>
> Irwin, 2013, p. 23.

Rendering Two – Contiguity

Springgay, Irwin, and Kind (2005) use the term *contiguity* to challenge binary divisions between roles. They highlight the artist, teacher, and researcher as interrelated and shifting

> ‘The intent of drawing attention to these roles is to also speak of their interrelatedness, their shifting, transitory nature, and to make visible the spaces in between the roles and the activity inherent in practising these roles’
>
> Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 900.

Of all the renderings I have come to practice in my work, this one has had the most profound effect on me. Before I began this research, I had been living in a sort of minor state of panic regarding my professional identity, a continual nervousness and low-level anxiety, a state of 'discomfort, frayed edges, and holes' that left me feeling fragile and worn (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 901). From this place of discomfort, I came across a/r/tography's concept of a contiguous life, one where I could inhabit more than one role at a time, where I could move between roles when necessary. This concept spoke to my living experience, validating the way I 'was' in the world. I had been admonishing myself, telling myself that I should be more linear, that I could follow the research in an organised, sequential way. I had come to believe that I was 'messy' and unprofessional because I brought my extra-rational ways of knowing and my artistic sensibility into the everyday workplace. I had imagined that other teachers, researchers, and artists were far more 'together,' 'organised' on 'top of their games.'

With the concept of contiguity, I began to accept my way of being, learning and moving through the world, more and more, learning to lean into the fluidity of my roles. In this research, I began looking at each of the roles I had inhabited by mapping my life's trajectory of learning, hoping to illuminate my lived experience. Contiguity became a lens through which I could integrate these roles simultaneously and peacefully, embracing their merging as productive rather than problematic. Accepting the notion of contiguity was key to this research being congruent with my ontology and my identity; I had imagined I could validate ways of being in others that I had not yet validated within myself. It took practice and time to fully embrace and accept the validation of shifting and interrelated ways of being, allowing them *all* to exist both separately and together.

But contiguity is not simply an internal way of being. It also illuminates relationships and interconnectedness between people, spaces, concepts, and experiences in a/r/tographic work. It describes how each affects the other through proximity and interaction. In my teaching practice, I work

with haiga poetry, a form where text and image emerge simultaneously, neither dominating the other. The poem adds depth to the image, the image enriches the poem, creating something ‘more,’ a meditative space, inviting multiple interpretations. This exemplifies the liminal space essential to a/r/tography, fostering learner agency and engagement through the interplay of art and word. As such, Haiga acts as a metaphor for this peaceful acceptance, one for the other of seemingly disparate disciplines, ways of being, identities. It represents a side-by-side enlightenment, a complementary and augmenting experience in the world.



ARTEFACT 44 Haiga- Contemplating Roots and Shoots

Rendering Three- Excess

Excess is said to be essential in a/r/tographical inquiry, particularly in relation to writing and painting. It is described as a necessary experience for the a/r/tographer ‘To write from within and through the body is a writing of excess’ (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 907). As a concept, 'excess' acknowledges that not all meanings can be captured or explained. Excess values the surplus of meaning, the indefinable, and the overwhelming aspects of art and research practices. There is always more than can be told, and not everything can be explained.

Throughout my research, I engaged deeply with reflective journaling, drawing, painting, and poetry-making, *in excess*. This process was intimate, private, and uncensored; it refused critique, even self-critique at first. When I began, I wrote as though the research might never be read by another human being. The creative outpourings of writing and painting were unruly and unfit for neat containment, embodying what Springgay et al. (2005) describe as ‘an activity of the sublime, the horrible, and the magnificent intertwined and moving’ (p. 909). This ‘messy’ making process was a natural extension of my thinking and living as an artist, inseparable (I know now) from my ongoing life as an a/r/tographer. It is something I have always encouraged the learners to do in my classroom. In this process, I was engaged in a search for meaning, echoing the re-imagining of ‘self’: ‘Re-imaging ourselves into being re-assembling the mundane of our experiences’ (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 907). In all this making, I knew that only part of it would be used within the research, only part of it might be decipherable and have meaning for this work, but I made it anyway.

Material and temporal abundance is, of course, a privilege; it can be liberating, offering freedom to create without fear of failure. This alleviates anxiety about deadlines or perfection. Yet, at times, I felt overwhelmed by the sheer volume of artefacts which were surrounding

me. I questioned whether I had 'lost the point' of the research. My inquiry felt boundaryless, swinging wildly between ideas, with inspiration for both image and verse flooding in simultaneously.

The time and energy devoted to manifesting ideas through the process of excess were vast, and despite moments of fatigue, I could not cease. In retrospect, this excess was necessary, an extension of myself and an essential condition for attending to the inquiry in its fullness. I was encountering my unconscious through art making to find meaning and direction in it for the research, and the unconscious is a vast place. I experienced what Jung in his Red Book describes as a 'numinous,' a seed where potential meaning, wisdom, and transformation might lie. I was confronted with everything, in all its complexity, and at times it was overwhelming (Jung 1961).

Ending this phase required a conscious decision to stop creating and work with what had already been discovered. It also necessitated curation on an enormous scale. Curation of artefacts but also of thoughts and ideas, narrowing the possibilities which had emerged to become a sliver of their original potential. While excess offered boundless possibilities, selection and curation were important to distilling the meaning of the journey I wanted to communicate to others.

Rendering Four -Metaphor and Metonymy

The linguistic and poetic devices of both *metonymy* and *metaphor* reflect how meaning is constructed as ambiguous and fluid in a/r/tographic practice.

> 'Both metonymy and metaphor allow for layered and indirect understandings that embrace nuance and move beyond literal explanations. Metaphor and metonymy permeate boundaries, disturbing system, and order.'
>
> Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 905.

Within and between the practices of writing and painting as an artist/researcher/teacher, I have learned to make metonymical shifts. The contiguous and open nature of this methodological approach facilitates movement between the metaphorical and metonymical transference of ideas/words, becoming a useful way of resisting binary boundaries. I began to use the slash symbol (/), as employed by Springgay, Irwin, and Kind, early on in my research writing. I tried it out hesitantly at first, but then it began to feel intuitive and 'right.' The symbol would then appear in my writing more spontaneously as I attuned to its function, denoting shifts, and relationships, giving words heightened meaning and purpose. The shift symbol allowed for wider and more nuanced thought and understanding of terms and concepts, which were relational and active, engaging 'with, in, and through each other' (2005, p. 905). The slashes also create tension between word/image and practice/thought, opening space for interpretation and further meaning-making. Metaphor, meanwhile, has long been a vital tool in my personal artistic, writing, and teaching practices. It enables me to create sensory, accessible connections which communicate on a complex level with others (see sections 1.4 and 3.5 for more on the workings of metaphor).

Rendering Five- Openings

Openings describe the spaces of possibility, ambiguity, and potential that emerge in the artmaking and research processes. They invite multiple interpretations, shifts in understanding, and new ways of seeing.

> 'Openings are located in space and time, allowing artists/researchers/teachers to move within the research text, penetrate deeply, and shift the boundaries of perspective. It is a discourse characterised by fluidity, the open interplay of elements, and the possibility of infinite re-combinations.'
>
> Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 906.

In my own experience, transformative learning moments have been marked by stepping into open spaces, relationships, and opportunities. By

intuitively recognising and engaging these moments with curiosity and a desire to 'know,' I remain open to discovery and the potential for deepening my understanding. In art pedagogy, I often find myself inviting artist learners to 'step' into their mistakes, allowing something which they may at first deem 'wrong' or 'ugly' to offer a space, an opening for exploration and direction change.

For Springgay, Irwin, and Kind, openings are metaphorically linked to fabric, its permeability, and when it is well worn it is imbued with 'discomfort, frayed edges, and holes' (2005, p. 901). Moments of serendipity and coincidence present creative possibilities- openings, for meaning-making and learning in art making, in teaching and in research. The concept of openings to the artist-educator and artist is, I believe, as natural as slipping on a well-worn glove. While holes or tears in the fabric of research or life may seem threatening, as an a/r/tographer, I poke through and expand these ruptures, embracing damage as an opportunity to create newness.

Rendering Six -Reverberations

Reverberations describe the ongoing impact of a/r/tographic work as well as the idea that a/r/tography 'resonates,' ripples out, beyond its immediate impact. The effects of a/r/tographic research and art making extend beyond the initial creation or inquiry, influencing individuals, communities, the artist, and researcher over time.

> 'Reverberations within a/r/tography call attention to the movement, the quaking, shaking, measure, and rhythm that shifts other meanings to the surface'
>
> Aoki, 1996 as cited in Springgay et al, 2005, p. 907.

Echoing, resonating, vibrating; these terms describe the rhythm and unsettling shifts inherent in a/r/tographical research. An echo is a mysterious sound, thrown out from us, an echo returns as a sound changed, altered, and 'other worldly.' Echoes of things evoke a desire to

respond to the ‘disappearance and appearance of signs, the impulse between what is known and what cannot be expressed’ (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 907). They are destabilising by nature, quite different from rigid, binary definitions.

Present in metaphor, metonymy, and openings, reverberations/echoes remind us that the ground beneath our feet, that which we assume is solid, is unstable, always shifting in ‘unknowing.’ Reverberations in methodology invite space for ongoing change and transformation. I experience reverberations as both anxiety-inducing and exciting. They signal that there is always more beneath the surface, more to learn and become. This experience has been constant throughout my research and will continue into its ‘after space,’ echoing in my ongoing practice as artist, researcher, and teacher.

Adopting and internalising the renderings of a/r/tography was essential to working within arts-based heuristic methodology. I was constantly and fluidly asked to move between roles, identities, and practices, all of which were demanding and intense ways of being. The concepts of renderings support and identify experiences that might be uncomfortable. By literally naming these emerging experiences and mapping them to a rendering, I had a sense of being held by a set of perspectives.

The Value of A/R/Tographic Work

What compels me to embrace this particular methodology as a way of living into inquiry, beyond the boundaries of this thesis? How can I know, with confidence, that this methodology is congruent with my values and practice, as an artist educator who is always searching?

Over the course of this research journey, I have come to appreciate the value of A/R/Tographic research as being one which makes a unique contribution to the field of academic inquiry. Because it is embedded in arts-based inquiry, still considered by some as less than rigorous and less serious than other, more traditional forms of inquiry, it is important that we can defend its place in the academy. We must be able to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' a/r/tographic research. It must be evaluated as rigorously as other forms of research.

However, the evaluation of a/r/tographic work is different in that it requires that we move away from traditional and binary forms of assessment. Instead, we are asked to embrace a type of inquiry that is multifarious, emergent, fluid, and relational. Because it is rooted in the connected identities of artist, researcher, and teacher, a/r/tography blurs boundaries between knowing, making, teaching and discovery. A/r/tography is not a linear endeavour journeying towards fixed outcomes, but a living, breathing practice of exploration and relational engagement. Evaluating a/r/tographic work involves a holistic and nuanced approach, one that takes into account the relationship between inquiry, identity, context, and process. A/r/tographic inquiry can only be assessed using criteria that honour its artistic integrity, research depth, pedagogical purpose, and commitment to process.

From an artistic and aesthetic perspective**,** a/r/tographic work cannot be evaluated on the formal qualities and traditional measures of artistic technical skill. Instead, we must consider whether it has the capacity to evoke a deep and resonant response from us, whether that be through the

senses or on an emotional, intellectual level. The aesthetic value of the work is only judged by whether the a/r/tographer has imbued it with thought, deep contemplation, and consideration for the impact it will make on its viewer or reader. If the work is *intentionally* undertaken with this in mind, it will inevitably show evidence of consideration being given to the selection of materials, composition, and form, but the unexpected and intuitive playmaking of process should also be evident. A/r/tography is, by its nature, grounded in process, reflexivity, and lived experience. The artistic elements inherent in a/r/tographic work are more than illustrative; they are sites of inquiry themselves, creating meaning through metaphor, abstraction, or embodied expression. A successful a/r/tographic work will draw the viewer into an interpretive space that is layered, open-ended, and charged with possibility. It will invite the viewer to *add* to the research. It is also important that the artefacts/artworks not be evaluated in isolation, but rather, considered for how they engage with the broader research questions of the inquiry.

The depth and integrity of the research inquiry should be evident within the artworks/artefacts. Effective a/r/tographic work demonstrates critical engagement with academic theory, practice, and, importantly, personal /community narratives. The questions an a/r/tographer asks are generative, not conclusive; her purpose is always to open pathways for further exploration (Deleuze and Guattari,1987, 2014; Irwin, 2013; Clarke and Parsons, 2013). The work she makes *is* about process; it is a place for ongoing reflection and engagement, and she is always willing to dwell in uncertainty and is comfortable with multiple ways of knowing. Dialogue and reference to existing literature create rhizomatic pathways to new thought for the a/r/tographer, contributing to new insights through the creative process itself. Research is done through the art-making process, and both are equally important.

A/r/tography is always situated in specific contexts- places, histories, communities, and identities (Irwin 2013). Evaluating whether or not the work/inquiry is responsive to those contexts and has a relational integrity

towards the people, communities, and participants it engages with is an important consideration in evaluating its success. The a/r/tographer must be aware of the socio-cultural and political situation in which she is making the work. The work positions the artist/researcher/teacher in relation to her context and relationships, and because of this ethical considerations concerning these positions are imperative, particularly when others are implicated in or affected by the work. A capable and successful a/r/tographer respects and values these relationships through processes of collaboration, mutual benefit, and care.

Critically, the evaluation of whether a/r/tographic inquiry has been successful or not must consider whether the work has shown a merging between the artist, researcher, and teacher identities. Successful a/r/tographic work should show that these identities are enacted simultaneously and that they dynamically inform one another. The teaching/learning moment can spark artistic insight; the artistic process can reveal new research questions; the research can inform developing pedagogical choices. A successful a/r/tographer will embrace this triple identity and show how the roles impact one another in her practice. In this inquiry, I have tried to make this triple identity explicit through accompanying reflective texts though at times I hope that this identity is evident in more nuanced ways within the work.

While the artefact does matter, the making, unmaking, and remaking that defines a/r/tographic practice is an important journey which defines the a/r/tographic practice. Process is ultimately more important than product. Documentation of the process, which can be shown through field notes, journalling and photographs and any number of other ways, is an important artefact in and of itself, in that it reveals the evolution of the research journey. The willingness to take creative and intellectual risks, to remain open to emergence, and to engage in self-critique is evidence of how deep the process of inquiry has been. The messiness of practice is not judged as a flaw as it might be in other research traditions; instead, it is a feature which makes this methodology unique, vibrant, and

interesting.

Unlike other research traditions, a/r/tography is a form of inquiry that is considered successful if the work functions as an *open-ended* work in progress. Rather than coming to a definite conclusion, a/r/tographic work should invite multiple interpretations, challenge, provoke thought, encourage dialogue, and leave space for its viewers, participants, or readers to bring their own perspectives into the conversation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). I will consider my inquiry most successful if it can linger and stay with my reader/viewer, resonating and living with them after the final sentence.

A/R/Tography is a way of living inquiry. It will continue to serve me as I navigate the contiguous identities I inhabit in the classroom, the studio, the faculty, and I believe, maybe more importantly, in the spaces in between them.



Image 16 Detail Community Vessel Painting 2023

Afterword- Possibility - a Continent of our Own Making

This research was grounded in a deeply informed engagement with its research participants, and as such, it makes a profound contribution to the field of adult education, particularly in relation to methodology, the ethics of care, and a pedagogy of resistance. As a methodological blueprint, it offers a transferable heuristic research methodology, which can be adapted and applied to similar research contexts where emergence is honoured and nuance, sensitivity, and care are of utmost importance.

Ethics of Care

As a comprehensive framework for an ethics of care, this research is specifically designed for working with and conducting research involving vulnerable adults. This framework not only guides ethical practices but also provides a thoughtful, relational approach to engaging with sensitive populations in research settings. At its core, the framework acknowledges the central importance of *relationships* in ethical research, where the act of engaging with participants is not merely transactional but deeply relational, rooted in mutual respect, trust, and understanding.

An attitude of care and respect is shown to be the essence of ethical research, not just as a set of guidelines, but as a practice that fosters a deep, human connection between researcher and participant. This relational approach is influenced by Buber's concept of the *I-Thou* relationship, which emphasises the importance of seeing others as fully human, rather than as objects to be studied or manipulated. In this framework, the researcher is called to engage with participants in ways that honour their subjectivity, unique potential, dignity, and lived experience, creating a space where both parties can experience genuine dialogue and mutual learning.

The ethical framework shows that true ethical engagement occurs when there is a reciprocal connection or resonance between the researcher and the participants, one in which a shared space is created and where both

researcher and participant are deeply affected by and attuned to one another. This mutual responsiveness deepens the understanding of the research process and affirms the humanity of both the researcher and the researched.

The ethics of care in this research is not limited to formal guidelines of consent and confidentiality, though these are still rigorously attended to, but it extends further, to a more profound, embodied understanding of how we relate to one another. It calls for a research practice that is *responsive*, *relational*, and *respectful*, ensuring that all adults are not just subjects of study but active, respected participants in the creation of knowledge

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In this sense, ethical research becomes a form of co-creation, where both the researcher and the participant contribute to a process of mutual growth and transformation, reinforcing the idea that care, respect, and relationality are central to any genuine inquiry. This research demonstrates how inquiry can prioritise ethical care, sensitivity, and nuance by focusing on a care-full relational engagement process and reflection. Understanding for similar types of research will emerge through active participation and interpretation, rather than concentrating on fixed and clear outcomes. I suggest this research may offer a model that can be applied in trauma-informed, participatory, or cross-cultural research where attentiveness to lived experience and the complexity of the human experience is essential.

A/r/tography is a deeply ethical methodology that integrates research, teaching, and artistic practices in a way that respects the complexities of lived experience, diverse ways of knowing, and the inherent subjectivity of the human condition. Because it is rooted in relationality and empathy, a/r/tography fosters an environment where collaboration, vulnerability, and dialogue are central to the process of knowledge generation. By embracing the identities of the artist, researcher, and teacher, it imbues practices of all three with a holistic approach that values personal

experience alongside academic inquiry, creativity alongside intellectual rigor, and embodiment alongside cognition. A/r/tography is ethical because it honours the autonomy of both the researcher/teacher and participants/learners, inviting them into co-creative spaces where their voices and experiences are not just heard but actually shape the research process and outcomes. Because of its emphasis on non-hierarchical, inclusive, and transformative practices, a/r/tography empowers individuals to explore, express, and communicate knowledge in ways that are deeply respectful of diversity, radically inclusive, and socially responsible. A/r/tographic research and the practices it fosters offer an ethical framework for advancing research, pedagogy, and artistic practices. It is inherently resistant to dominant pedagogies, which are dehumanising and devalue the human experience.

Pedagogical Resistance

As a thesis that offers pedagogical resistance, it challenges traditional epistemological frameworks that prioritise cognition and rationality, advocating instead for a more embodied, nuanced understanding of knowing. This research emphasises forms of knowledge that extend beyond the cognitive and rational, highlighting the significance of experiential, sensory, and emotional ways of knowing. (Tanaka 2011, Rendón 2014) It explores how *embodied knowing* — the wisdom rooted in the body's experiences — plays a central role in learning, particularly in contexts where traditional, intellectual modes of knowing may be limiting.

The thesis also emphasises the importance of *extra-rational* and *spiritual* dimensions of knowledge (Moore 2005; Zohar 2012; Sloane 2005; Romanshyn 2005 and Emmons 2000) suggesting that learning is not solely confined to intellectual processes but is deeply informed by intuition, feeling, and spiritual insight. These forms of knowing are relational, emerging in interaction with others, and cannot be separated from the lived experiences and histories that shape them (Freire 1970). Through this lens, the research highlights how knowledge is not only constructed in the mind but is also enacted through the body, the emotions, and the social world.
By challenging dominant epistemologies that put logic and reason at the centre of knowing, this thesis calls for a pedagogical approach that embraces diverse ways of knowing, creating space for students, particularly in adult education, to engage with the world in ways that are more holistic, relational, and transformative.

It posits that such an approach is essential for fostering deeper, more meaningful learning, one that acknowledges and nurtures the complexity of the human experience.

The research highlights the transformative power of embodied and affective ways of knowing. Through a grounded analysis of the education system in Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe), personal life history, and a carefully curated overview of community education experiences in Ireland, this study offers a fresh, critical perspective on adult education. Its impact extends beyond the academic, providing practical insights for individuals, teachers, students, and artists alike. It advocates for a pedagogy that fosters critical reflection, empowers learners to resist dominant narratives, and encourages a more ethical, inclusive, and creative approach to teaching and learning. For artists and educators, in particular, it offers a means to challenge conventional teaching methods and engage in transformative practices that honour lived experience and promote social change (Freire 1970, 1973, 1993).

In my research, I actively explored what were once perceived as negative personal experiences, recontextualising them within the broader political landscape. This process allowed me to gain insights that were not only personally transformative but also had the potential to be transformative for others, particularly educators working in the field of art education within adult education. By situating these experiences within their political and historical context, I was able to challenge limiting beliefs and narratives, offering a model for how educators can use their own lived experiences as sites of critical reflection and transformative learning. This approach has far-reaching implications for those in adult education who seek to foster more inclusive, reflective, and empowering pedagogical practices.

Methodological Blueprint for Researchers

This research offers a methodological blueprint for other researchers, particularly those using arts-based, heuristic, and emergent processes. It demonstrates how inquiry can move fluidly between art-making,

research, and teaching, following the principles of A/r/tography (Springgay & Irwin) and how the researcher embedded in experience and identity can bring new knowledge to the research field. It also shows how researchers can engage in artistic practice as a form of valid inquiry, how they can document and reflect on their experiences, and experiment iteratively with materials, methods, and questions, allowing the process itself to shape meaning. Attentiveness to relational and ethical dimensions of this methodology will help the researcher ensure sensitivity to participants, context, and the emergent knowledge; openness to ambiguity, nuance, and multiple perspectives acknowledges that understanding develops through engagement rather than being imposed.

In this way, the study provides a flexible, process-led framework for creating responsive, reflective, and embodied research that integrates creative and artistic content with thoughtful reflection on the experience of pedagogy.

Illuminations of an A/R/Tographer

> 'When the artist is alive in any person, whatever kind of work it may be, he becomes an inventive, searching, daring, self-expressive creature. He becomes interesting to other people. He disturbs, upsets, enlightens, and opens ways for a better understanding. Where those who are not artists try to close the book, he opens it and shows there are still more pages possible.'
>
> Henri, 1923, as cited in Edwards, 1999, p.8

This thesis will not end; it will be an ongoing 'oeuvre,' a searching journey always with me. It has been a living inquiry into the life of an a/r/tographer to locate the moments where significant transformative learning for identity and agency took place. It has examined those moments to see what learning themes emerged. It has been an act of witnessing adult development through the lens of each of those three identities- artist, educator, and researcher-which demonstrates that, as adults, we are continually learning and we *can* flourish. This thesis will be a continuing story of an a/r/tographic life.

Across time and space, through art and word, I have revisited a selection of the profound/ intense learning experiences of my life, and I understand my place in the world/ art/ education better. I understand and accept that we are always in interaction with our lived experiences through heart and head knowing. We can know, learn, and become through each significant moment in which we live.

I have also come to appreciate that the intuitive, aesthetic, and embodied experience of learning is made richer, more intense, and meaningful when it is paired with cognitive and theoretical illumination. Valuing *both* extra-rational and cognitive ways of knowing and learning opens up to infinite possibilities for understanding. The methodologies I used for this research gave me a way to explore the profound/transformational experiences and deeply felt knowledge I had inside me. The intellectual engagement made it possible for me to place these in context and see their significance on a wider plane. I learned that *equal* importance must be assigned to the learning and knowledge which our inner worlds generate through the

heart, that we cannot solely rely on the intellect and cognitive machinations to be whole and self-actualised (Rendón 2009). I had lived a life struggling to gain academic acceptance, coming to realise that it was only a small part of my struggle for agency. I came to validate my way of being because the research explored vulnerability, wisdom, authenticity, and experience; they were given value and attended to in a way that intellect/performance are usually attended to. Through a deeply transformative process of paying attention to a more embodied way of learning, I came to value these same things in myself. Writing, reading, and thinking enabled me to 'make sense of my experience and my heart knowledge' (Rendón 2014, p.153). This research resulted in a personal acknowledgement that my pedagogy is valid, I have tested it within a space of rationality, in academia and find that it has an important place. I have reclaimed my life journey thus far, finding the life/learning lines run alongside one another, across one another and through each other, they trace a rhizomatically shaped map of knowing.

Creative art-based epistemologies generate ways to expand our thinking on possibilities for new and alternative ways of being, and ultimately, for new and alternative educational paths. Through arts-based practices of writing narratives and poetry, painting and making artefacts, I came to realise that acceptance of 'the other within the self' was a key to unlock creative reimagining of the values for transformative education. Acknowledging heart knowledge and balancing its wisdom with the intellect, we can 'colour outside of the lines.' As educators and students, we can accept and value the parts of ourselves that are difficult, broken, and discordant, so that we can create healthy, creative, and holistic educational spaces. We bring all of ourselves to the teaching and learning space, whether we are aware of it or not (Palmer, 1998).

Art making engenders knowledge creation, which is grounded in qualities such as intuition, love, compassion, and respect - important qualities which run alongside intellect and cognition but are often considered to be less valuable in our ego-driven working worlds. Extrarational knowing can enrich and extend conceptual knowledge. Both are equally valuable, and both can work together to support and engender human flourishing on an individual and collective level. Communities flourish alongside individuals when both are present.

The ideals of a pedagogy I search for - an inclusive, holistic, caring, and radical pedagogy -

live in the hearts and minds of people. Possible pedagogies for human flourishing live in the hearts and minds of the practitioners, teachers, and students. Pedagogies are not embodied by buildings and institutions but can be found in any place where resonant connection takes place, where time, respect and consideration for individualities and differences of ways of learning happen. These conditions are vital if we are to imagine a new pedagogy where all learners are valued as being capable of flourishing. Adults are all vitally and essentially unique and full of potential. Knowledge that is subjective, experiential, and shared is necessary for human flourishing. In a space where knowledge like this is found, where difference is celebrated and accommodated, all learners can find agency and direction. Education could and should model a deep respect for fellow humans and create an atmosphere of positive regard, devoid of bias.

I offer my learning to serve as a contribution to a wider understanding of knowledge; it stands as a space for contemplation and possibility for others who may be searching for acceptance and wholeness in their ontologies and their belief in more inclusive and holistic pedagogies. I hope that these reclaimed pieces of knowing will support and encourage other educators and learners to come to accept and celebrate their differences, tell their stories and find strength and agency in their unique ways of being and thinking. A healthy, whole pedagogy which acknowledges the heart and experience can help support other practitioners in keeping us grounded in what is important in teaching and education.

I've explored artefacts, both personal and collegial, to highlight the learning themes I believe to be important for helping adults navigate the complex and challenging life situations that arise for every one of us, to hold hope for transformation and for us to *keep on* flourishing. I have traced themes of resistance and resilience, recognition, and resonance, as well as repair and reclamation, but of course, there is so much more. There are so many things to learn from engaging in an art-full life.

Reflecting on the journey, I am struck again by how this research was initiated in the Kilkenny Collective for Arts Talent (KCAT), a space grounded in and thriving on embracing diversity and fostering continuous growth through process-led art making.
Through my work with neurodiverse adult learners and my own history, I came to see how art pedagogy not only supports artistic excellence but also challenges ingrained assumptions and beliefs about human potential.

Guided by an a/r/tographic methodology, my inquiry shifted from a focus on demonstrating the centre's effectiveness to a broader exploration of the transformative possibilities art holds for adult learners. What began as an exploration to advocate for a more inclusive pedagogical approach based on my experience of the centre, quickly unfolded into a deeper personal journey through an ethical imperative to examine the 'self.' Reflecting on my own experiences as an artist, educator, and learner, I discovered how artmaking can be a powerful tool for resistance, self-expression, and personal growth.

This research ultimately reveals the capacity of creative practice to reshape pedagogical spaces, offering a pathway for learners to flourish, for educators to engage with lifelong learning as an ever-evolving journey and for researchers to imagine more questions than answers for inquiry.

I know KCAT to be (still) at its core, an outlier post for a pedagogy of hope and resistance, a place of deep human resonance where people come before power, and everyone is seen and heard, known and respected as individuals of vast potential. The management and staff of KCAT continue to strive for the recognition of every KCAT member as artists, full of potential.

The changes I have witnessed in KCAT reflect how the insidious bureaucratic and corporate co-option of such movements renders its members more vulnerable to a hegemonic and narrow-minded classification. When individuals are defined in institutional terms, they come to be regarded as 'less than,' as pathologised.

As discussed in this research, historical, societal attitudes, and policies toward people with disabilities have fluctuated, swinging between community-based provision and institutional care. This cyclical nature reflects not only shifts in philosophical and cultural views but also the underlying economic imperatives that influence such decisions. In times of economic strain or political conservatism, societies revert to past models of institutionalisation as a more cost-effective solution, despite their dehumanising effects. The drive to standardise and produce measurable outcomes and cost effectiveness leads to the pathologising of individuals who do not fit neatly within those models, neglecting the value of diversity in learning and life experiences. This return to institutionalisation is not only a reflection of economic prioritising over human resonance and respect but also an unwillingness to challenge deeply embedded structures of power and control that have historically marginalised those considered as

‘other.’ The tension between community-based care and institutionalisation reminds us how fragile human progress can be, particularly when economic conditions or political ideologies fail to prioritise the dignity and humanity of all people.

I end this research in hope, inspired by and grounded in the light of Andrew, Billie, Ella, Samuel, Rachel, and so many other brilliant souls who radiate creative potential. It is our responsibility as adult educators to bring our whole selves into shared spaces with them and attend carefully to their narratives so that we may continue to learn, reassess and adapt accordingly to the needs of each.

My relationship with, and the contributions made by, other artists and educators in the art pedagogical community have illuminated several fundamental beliefs about what is needed to build a healthy pedagogy for adults in general. I list these beliefs here as a reference, and you will find them also in Volume Two, where they dialogue with images to provide a ‘third space’ (Bhabha 2012) where concept and artefact come together side-by -side for another iteration of my learning. Volume Two is an alternative manifestation of the thesis, which asks for more from the viewer’s *heart* response.

An A/R/Tographer's Guide to Thriving through Art Making and Art Pedagogy

We are full of potential

The creative, imaginative, endless possibilities which art processes provide us with teach us that we are not limited, we are not 'less than'. Art processes offer myriad possibilities for self-growth and learning.

We need both the head and the heart

Both *thinking* and *feeling*, 'seemingly opposite concepts' (Rendón, 2007, p.7), play an important part in pedagogical spaces. A whole 'self' and *all* of the life experiences of the educator are rich compost for creating a healthy learning space for others and themselves to flourish.

Connection and belonging are key

Being able to resonate with others, seeking genuine connection with others and the 'self' in the learning space is an important aspect of pedagogy. Our experience of witnessing others learning alongside us builds a sense of belonging with others.

Difference is an asset

Art processes emphasise possibility, enable us to value, and embrace a profound acceptance of 'other.' Difference and diversity are qualities to be celebrated and welcomed.

Hope is found in possibility

Art making and art pedagogical spaces for adults can bring possibility and hope to those navigating challenges and difficult life circumstances. The art space creates a bridge to 'cross over' the gap, which presents itself as a chasm in chaos.

We can create anew

We can reimagine ourselves in the world. We can build on the knowledge we have. But we can also create new knowledge. Art making, as a creative practice, bridges a gap in knowledge making, where it allows us to consider the irrational, illogical, mysterious, and emotional as acceptable ways of knowing and exploring knowledge creation.

We build our *own* agency

As adult learners engaged in learning, we continue to develop our identity and capacity for agency. We are supported, heard and seen in this learning through resonant relationships in the art learning space.

It's all about the journey

We become more resilient with practice; we can repair the 'self' as we unlearn negative and unhelpful values and narratives which have framed our lives. When we come against challenging times, we are better able to face them and move through them. We understand that the gap is a place where we learn and become. It is not the end, not the whole, but only a stage in the journey, a part; our work, our relationships, our lives *are processes*.

While we live and work in spaces where there is still an unhealthy emphasis on outcomes and many of us as Educators are co-opted into this system, which allows little room for manoeuvre, we do have the means and the skills to make our own learning spaces healthier for everyone we connect with. In a predominantly hegemonic Western educational system intent on providing adults with economy-driven training, exploring art-making processes and the potential and possibilities art pedagogy offers, we can re-imagine our understanding of what constitutes valuable learning and healthy pedagogy. We can turn our pathological relationship with the world (Rosa, 2019) around by valuing relationships, differences, and each other's stories.

Art processes create useful and profound opportunities for adult learning. Art making and engagement with art pedagogy allow us to recognise the 'self' as a deeply fertile ground for learning, a place where adult learners can co-create transformational learning spaces and where flourishing means that adults can learn to live a life 'worth living and worth celebrating, rather than pointless, regrettable or tragic' (Moore, 2023, p. 61). They contribute personal and social value to our existence as learning, developing human beings.

As a subjective living inquiry, this research journey was, in part, a path to reclaim the self, tracing an extra-rationally informed life history where profound and transformational learning moments led to self-acceptance and an understanding of the researcher, identifying her place in the world. The stories I reclaimed from my past became a way for me to embrace the future. I can move forward, using research as re-search, 'a searching again for what was once known and is making a claim upon us' (Romanyshyn, 2007, p.7).

This research has given me hope, hope that by scribbling through the lines which we have come to believe define us and separate us, we might create

new ways to widen our understanding and increase our capacity to embrace differences in our ways of being and knowing. Our stories are not just about the past; our past stories encompass 'projections and speculations about the future ' (Randall, 2013, p. 53).

'Colouring outside the lines' envisages types of knowledge which, at every expression, are a unique symbol of what is possible, depending on the person who has created them. They are an embodiment of individual capacity, an identifier of human potential as unique as a fingerprint. When we colour outside the lines, we reject the hard and fast structure of predetermined right and wrong; we allow heart knowledge (Rendón, 2009) and conceptual theory to bleed into one another. Alternate approaches for learning can allow for hues that are more subtle and complicated, myriad possibilities, an infinite colour wheel, undefined by charts, divisions, and easily identifiable labels.

When we consider one another with the knowledge of the heart, learners who have been identified as deficient or flawed are redefined as understood and recognised as whole. I have learned that art pedagogy is a space for all *resistance*, *resilience*, *recognition*, *resonance*, *repair,* and *reclamation*. But it also creates space for reinvention. It can liberate hearts and minds, creating possibilities, particularly for people who don't fit into a narrow band of pedagogy. *Becoming* is a valid way to be, to learn, and to engage with the world. We can lean into change and accept it as a part of evolving; we are in flux. The mind is expansive, capable of depth and breadth and encompasses a whole range of possibilities. We can use art processes and art pedagogy to move beyond the limitations that others and the 'other within' place on us. Learning through art about the knowledge our life has to offer can be challenging, but it is ultimately rewarding and enriching.

The hope that is issued from this inquiry, then, is that a holistic, healthy

pedagogy can exist in any place where there are whole, actualised, and agentic people.

It is always possible to know more. It is always possible to become more. Remembering this, I find my way forward and understand now that - *I am her*.

ARTEFACT 45 I AM HER

I remember now that I am her,

that I know

how to comfort this small animal with still, strong, gentle hands,

I know how to be quiet in the wilderness, to listen for the growing pulse beneath me.

I know

how to take crayon to paper in worship, how to live in line, dot, squiggle

of chameleon skin, autumn leaf.

of floating seedhead, water walking insect, Trapdoor spider, and Rhinoceros beetle.

I remember

how to scribble outside the lines, dwell in small places.

Hear the heartbeat whispering truth, I know the way….

Come, let me show you

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IMAGE 17 DETAIL MEMORY VESSEL 2025

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Appendices 1 KCAT Forms: Information and Consent

Information Sheet for a study called: [68]Colouring outside of the lines

Who am I? [69]

I am Alice Bennett. I am a student at Maynooth University. My supervisor is Dr David McCormack

You also know me as the course coordinator in KCAT Arts Centre.

What am I looking for?

I want to find out what it feels like for you to make art in KCAT Arts Centre.

What will I ask you to do?

I will ask you to meet me for an hour to talk/paint or draw our feelings about making art in KCAT.

Who has told me I can make this study?

Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee has agreed that I can do this study. You can have a copy of this agreement if you would like it. Anja Terpstra, who is the Centre Coordinator of KCAT Arts Centre, has also agreed.

Why have I asked you to do this?

I have asked you to work with me because you have been learning in this Arts Centre for a long time and have knowledge which can help with the research.

Do you have to take part?

No, you do not have to take part. It is your decision.

If you decide to take part, I will give you a fact sheet to read. We can read it together. If you decide you want to work with me, I will ask you to sign a form. I

[68] Initial title, which changed over time to become '*Colouring Outside the Lines Pedagogical Illuminations from an A/R/Tographic life Exploring Art Making and Art Pedagogy as Important Sites of Learning for Adults.'*
[69] Open Sans type was used to facilitate the best reading experience for participants.

will give you a copy of this form to keep. I will also ask you to sign or state your agreement to continue with the study along the way.

If you sign the form and then change your mind, that is okay. You can stop any time without giving a reason and you can tell me to destroy anything you have given me, right up to the date. I am going to make a book of the research in 2022.

If you decide to stop this will not affect your relationship with me.

What information will I ask you for?

I will ask you for your name, age and where

you come from. I will also ask you how long

you have been making art for.

You can decide what else you want to tell me.

Will what you say and do with me, be kept private?

Yes, all information that is collected about you during the research will be kept private. No names will appear in the research unless you tell me that you want me to use your own name.

All our work will be kept in a locked cupboard in my office. All the work I collect on my laptop will be kept safe with a secret password. The work will also be kept safe in Maynooth University storage and only Alice Bennett and David McCormack will be able to see them.

None of the other co-subjects will see what you have said to me until after the research is completed. If you share your paintings with me, you can decide whether other co-subjects can see the paintings or not before the research is completed. If you decide not to show them, I will keep the work locked in a private cupboard in my office.

I will not give any of your information to anyone else

If you want to see the information that I collect about you, you can ask me, and I will show it to you.

Important

Sometimes the law may decide that it is important for me to share information you have given me with the courts.

If this happens the University has promised to make sure that what you have shared with me stays as private as it can.

What will I do with the information which you share with me?

All the information you give me will be kept in my locked cupboard in my office and at Maynooth University. No one will be able to identify you unless you want to use your own name.

No one will be able to know that it was you that gave me the information if we use a different name.

When the study is finished, all the information will be kept in Maynooth for ten years. After ten years, all the information will be destroyed. Anything I have on paper will be shredded, and the computer files will be destroyed also.

If you make paintings or drawings while we are working together, they will belong to you.

A copy of the art- work will be kept but no one will be able to re-use or print it. There will be a form I will ask you to sign which will say that you are the owner of the work you make. If we make work together then we will both own that piece of artwork. There will be an exhibition of the artwork we make, and it will be seen by many people. If you do not want your name on this work that is fine. If you do want your name on this work, that is fine also. If you do not want to exhibit the artwork that is also fine.

If you agree, I will print some of the artwork we make for my study. If you do not agree, I will not print it. The artwork which belongs to you will be given back to you when the research and the exhibitions are over.

What will happen to the writing which I make about our work together?

When I have finished writing everything, it will be shown to other people who are interested in art and education. They will read it and talk about it. It will also be shared at meetings in Ireland and outside of Ireland. Parts of it may also be put into other books or magazines. It will be kept in a safe place called the Irish Qualitative Data Archive. Students and teachers who want to read it will have to apply to the people in charge there.

If you would like to have a copy of the research, I will give it to you.

Is there anything to worry about?

I will make sure nothing bad happens but sometimes when we share

our feelings and our experiences, we can feel sad or upset.

What if there is a problem?

When we are talking or painting, I will check in with you to make sure you are feeling okay about everything you are saying and doing. If you don't like what we are doing, you can stop any time. After the time working together, I will ask you again if you have any bad feelings about our work together. If you say yes, I will ask Marek Zychla or Anja Terpstra, the safeguarding officers in KCAT Arts Centre to talk more about it with you.

You can also call my supervisor David McCormack at David.McCormack@mu.ie if you feel the research has not been done the way I have said it would.

Any Other questions?

If you want to ask me anything you can contact me: Alice Bennett on 0567706863 *(KCAT Office)* *alice.bennett2014@mumail.ie*.

Thank you for taking the time to think about helping me do this research.

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form. I will give you a copy of the consent form and the information sheet to keep.

Initial Consent Form

I .....agree to work with Alice Bennett in a research study titled

Coloring Outside of the Lines.
An Arts Based Heuristic Inquiry using Extended Epistemologies through Making and Communicating to explore the potential for inclusive models of Further Education

Please tick each box if you agree with these points below.

If you do not agree with them, do not tick them.

I understand what this study is about. I've been able to ask questions, and I understood the answers.

I want to take part in this study, and no-one is forcing me to take part.

I will allow Alice Bennett to record our time together with a tape recorder/phone, a video recorder or by writing down my words.

I understand that I can stop being part of this research whenever I want to.

I understand that I can tell Alice Bennett that I don't want what I have shared with her to be in the study. Even right up until it is made into a book in 2022.

It has been explained to me what will happen to the information and the artwork I have shared and that I can see it on request.

I understand that if the law decided that the information I have shared needed to be seen, I will have to agree.

I agree for the information I share to be kept in the Irish Qualitative Data Archive. This is a place where all studies about people in Ireland are kept. Students and teachers who want to read it will have to apply to the people in charge there.

Please choose one answer you agree with

I want to use my own name for this work

I do not want to use my own name for this work

I agree to my words or images being reproduced

I do not agree to any of my images or words being reproduced

I want to show my artwork to others before the study is finished.

I do not want to show my artwork to others before the study is finished.

I agree for the artwork I make to be part of an exhibition

I do not agree for the artwork I make to be part of an exhibition

I agree that Alice Bennett can share my work for more research projects

I do not agree that Alice Bennett can share my work for more research projects

Name……. Date…….

Name in block capitals ……...

For the researcher, I have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed……. Date…….

Researcher Name in block capitals ……...

Please know

If, at any time during your participation in this study you feel that the information that you were given has not been correct, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee atresearch.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please know that your concerns will be listened to and taken care of.

For your information, the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeon@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.

Two copies to be made: 1 for participant, 1 for PI

Ongoing Consent Form

I .....continue to agree to work with Alice Bennett in a research study titled[70]

Colouring Outside of the Lines.
An Arts-Based Heuristic Inquiry using Extended Epistemologies through Making and Communicating to explore the potential for inclusive models of Further Education

Signed……

Date……

[70] Initial title which changed over time to become '*Colouring Outside the Lines Pedagogical Illuminations from an A/R/Tographic life Exploring Art Making and Art Pedagogy as Important Sites of Learning for Adults'*

Appendices 2 Creative Ireland Requesting Permission and Consent

Dear Lead Artist,

As you know, I am currently engaged in a doctoral research project called

Colouring Outside the Lines
Pedagogical Illuminations from an A/R/Tographic life
Exploring Art Making and Art Pedagogy as Important Sites of Learning for Adults.

I would like to include the artefact that was written for your group as part of the documentation for 'Living Artfully,' the Creative Ireland Project we are currently working on together.

Please indicate whether you would

A. Like me to use your full name as an identifier in the thesis **YES NO**

B. Like me to use a pseudonym for you in the thesis **YES NO**

If you would like me to use a pseudonym of your choice, please write that pseudonym here

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Otherwise

Do you give me permission to choose a name for you **YES NO**

Please send this completed form back to me by email and thank you so much for your time and consideration,

Yours
Alice Bennett

Appendices 3 Creative Ireland Permission to Reproduce Images

Dear Freddie and Majella,

As you know, I am currently engaged in a doctoral research project called

Colouring Outside the Lines
Pedagogical Illuminations from an A/R/Tographic life
Exploring Art Making and Art Pedagogy as Important Sites of Learning for Adults.

I would like to include several of the images that were taken in tandem with my written work as part of the documentation project for the 'Living Artfully' Project undertaken by Creative Ireland in 2024/2025.

Please indicate whether you will permit me to reproduce the images

Freddie Greenall (Photographer) **YES NO**

Signed and dated

Majella Keating (Creative Communities Engagement Officer) **YES NO**

Signed and dated

Please send this completed form back to me by email, and thank you so much for your time and consideration,

Yours
Alice Bennett



IMAGE 19DETAIL HEALING VESSEL 2025