

Surviving the cacophony of educational worlds: The transformative potential of aesthetic inquiry

Alison. L. Black

CQUniversity Australia

a.black@cqu.edu.au

Abstract

If unprepared for them, the realities of teaching can challenge, confront and paralyse the valued ideals and philosophies of teachers. An orientation to teacher education that embraces the ambiguous, dilemma ridden nature of teaching and encourages teachers to contextualise personal knowledge and ways of knowing within an understanding of story, time and place is crucial if teachers are to stay the course, manage surprise, and maintain their hope and vision.

As the nature and complexity of teachers' work has continued to intensify so has the realisation that different approaches to understanding educational dilemmas are needed. A desire to create knowledge based on resonance and understanding has encouraged educational researchers to look beyond traditional research approaches to new methodological genres capable of exploring educational questions in personal, social, engaging and connected ways. There is a growing awareness that narrative forms of knowledge and arts-based inquiry (research inquiry which embraces aesthetic ways of knowing and the language, practices and forms commonly employed in the arts) offer unique representational resources for understanding experience and for illuminating the particular educational dilemmas and situations we care about.

This paper reveals something of the incredible meaning-making and pedagogical capabilities of arts-based research methods, where metaphor, drawing, and story serve as research methods and representational resources central to inquiry and reflection. A metaphor of teaching as 'a composing of a music' frames a sonata-formatted narrative which tracks the journey of an early childhood teacher as she engages in a personal and collaborative inquiry into what it means to teach. It follows her experimentation with narrative and arts-based resources as she (re) lives and (re) tells her story about the challenges of working and teaching in a privately owned childcare centre, and demonstrates how these resources acted as catalysts for discourse, awareness, insight and clarity.

Prepared for uncertain educational worlds?

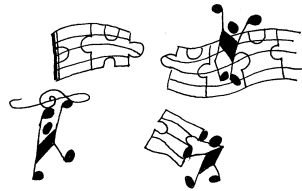
There is agreement and acceptance that teaching is a complex endeavour which is becoming progressively more ambiguous and demanding as constant social change and external and political forces influence what and how to teach (Markauskaite, 2011; Rowan, 1994). Universities recognise future teachers will need to be constantly available to respond to changing demands and expectations. They will need to re-invent themselves, be flexible, be innovators, and skilled curriculum developers in order to manage their world of work (Hamberger & Moore, 1997; Rethinking Schools, 2004).

This paper asserts that an understanding of self-as-teacher, and an awareness of possible realities, challenges and characteristics of work contexts are essential to teacher preparedness, intentional action and coping (Clandinin, 2010; Craig, 2010; Denscombe, 1980). A developed sense of self, an ability to articulate the images that guide practice, and an understanding of real world conditions and day to day realities that influence teaching are critical (Black, 2000; Kelchtermans, 2009). When images and realities are not examined teachers can feel overwhelmed by circumstances and responsibilities (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009; Sumsion, 2002). They can begin to feel drained, cynical and ineffective, questioning themselves and their work.

The conscious examination of teaching images and contextual realities are necessary if teachers are to effectively adapt to and respond to shape the contexts in which they work (Bullock, 2009). Viewing teaching as a lifelong and evolving journey of reinvention, and ongoing opportunities to examine work contexts, cultures and conflicts can enhance teachers' chances of survival (Black, 2000; Leitch, 2010). In order to assist a process where teachers can take charge of their own growth "supported opportunities to reflect upon their own funds of knowledge, explore their attitudes and beliefs, and extend the repertoire of skills and strategies that form the underpinnings of their work" are required (Rust, 1999, p.370).

Turning to metaphor

Because the terrain of the teaching landscape is uncertain, ever changing and unique to each setting and sector, understanding what it means to teach or how to make sense of teaching is not straightforward (Black, 2002). In situations such as this when it is challenging to define an experience - like "teaching"- turning to metaphor can be useful. Metaphorical descriptions can provide a richness, a means of enhancing understanding, of accessing complex dimensionalities of knowing and acting, and of capturing the intuition, artistry and emotionality in meaning-making (Mahlis, Massengill-Shaw, & Barry, 2010).



This paper turns to a metaphor of 'teaching as a composing of a music' as a way of framing and supporting thinking about the nature of teaching. Adapted from the work of Beattie, this metaphor evokes awareness and provides a backdrop for understanding the deeply personal nature of teaching and professional knowledge, and the many problematic situations teachers encounter in their daily work (Beattie, 1995). A metaphor of teaching as 'a composing of a music' supports the characterisation of teaching as the way in which a teacher responds aesthetically to make meaning that is personally and professionally significant; meaning that is invested with great emotion (Eisner, 1998; White, 2007). It acknowledges the tensions, the negotiations and creative energies that are involved in the daily sense-making of teaching. It reminds of the dynamism, interaction and interplay involved as teachers engage in ongoing processes of defining ideals as well as problems. It offers insight into the constant action involved as teachers make sense of and reconcile dilemmas, call upon and examine practical knowledge, renegotiate relationships, and become more deliberative and intentional, responsive and reciprocal within relationships and situations (Beattie, 1995).

In terms of the framing metaphor, this paper pays attention to a teacher's efforts to hear her own voice within the context of her life and work. It documents her journey as she considers herself within her professional context and the complexity and cacophony of her particular educational world.

The language of arts in narrative inquiry: A methodology

Researchers interested in the human experience have been attracted to inquiry approaches that possess aesthetic and artistic qualities and characteristics – naturalistic, interpretive, personal, literary, and artistic features (Barone, 2006; Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1997; Greene, 1980). More recently this has led educational researchers to recognise the relevance and power of autobiographical, narrative, literary, and arts-based modes of inquiry.

Desiring a more holistic understanding of educational situations and experiences, and in particular the unique experience of teachers working in childcare settings, this study valued personal,

aesthetic and creative ways of knowing. It looked to creative arts education, and to the language, practices, structures and forms of the arts as valuable methods and resources (Barone, 2009; Leavy, 2009; Markauskaite, 2011).

Narrative inquiry is closely connected with arts-based research and has been identified as perhaps the most familiar type of arts-based research (Leavy, 2009). Narrative inquiry is inquiry in the midst of (re) living and (re) telling the stories that make up people's lives (Clandinin, 2007). The arts too are considered a way of living and telling, enabling us to "see more in our experiences, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routine have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed" (Greene, 2000, p.123).

For this paper, narrative and arts-based methods of story, drawing and metaphor are used as a means to (re) live and (re) tell what it means to teach, and as a way of expressing meaning about educational experiences. These arts-based and literary forms are applied in a narrative inquiry of what it means to teach and are the basis of the whole research process (Mello, 2007). They create a space for reflection, are part of the data-gathering process, they narrate experiences, and are representational forms that support reflection, awareness and analysis.

Story

The principal attraction of story is its capacity to communicate understandings and life experiences, both personal and social, in significant and meaningful ways (Bullough Jr, 2010; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010). Telling and writing stories of experience can support self-directed growth by bringing to consciousness forces and events shaping knowledge, and alerting teachers to ways to take command of personal growth and development (Clandinin, 2010).

As well as being recognised as a methodology and way of explaining learning, story and narrative are recognised as essential life aptitudes integral to human understanding and experience (Pink, 2006). Narratives help us to understand and relate to people's lives and their particular social, cultural and organisational contexts (Leitch, 2006; Savidou, 2010).

Storytelling was one of the major features of the larger study from which this paper is drawn - the aim being to bring to the profession an understanding of the realities of teaching in a childcare setting, grounded in teachers' accounts of everyday teaching situations. For a period of four months, seven early childhood teachers engaged in cycles of personal and collaborative inquiry where conversations, journal writing, drawing and metaphor creation supported meaning-making and storytelling efforts. Teachers met fortnightly to share stories of experience with the researcher and each other and to discuss the outcomes of reflection. This paper focuses on one of these teacher stories - Corinne's story. Corinne's story serves as a source of insight and understanding about what it means to be a teacher in a childcare centre and how she as a teacher/director of a childcare setting was experiencing teaching.

Drawing

Drawings were valued because they provide an excellent forum for self-reflection, bringing to light nuances and subtleties that can otherwise remain hidden (Weber, 2008). The power of drawing also lies with its ability to concretise tacit knowledge, capture layers of meaning, and offer 'a glimpse of the whole at a glance' (Bagnoli, 2009; Cole & Knowles, 2011; Weber, 2008). Drawing as a form is immediately evocative, stimulating reflective processes and presenting a catalyst for thinking (Haney, Russell, & Bebell, 2004).

Metaphor

During the inquiry, metaphor was combined with drawing and storytelling to assist teachers' efforts 'to put together the pieces' as they accessed various dimensions of their knowledge (Black, 2000). Metaphors can facilitate discoveries of relationships and capture the affective and moral dimensions of knowing (Black & Halliwell, 2000; Bullough, 1994; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Pink,

2006). In terms of understanding teaching, metaphors can make relationships between self and context visible, and capture the interplay between personal meanings and work demands (Bullough, 1994; Mahlios et al., 2010).

A sonata-formatted narrative

The narrative account of what it means to teach is communicated using a sonata-format (Dibble & Rosiek, 2002). In music, a central feature of a sonata is tonality, with tonality characterised by the relationships and interrelationships of note, consonance and dissonance (Cope, 1997; Schenker, 1979). Similarly, this narrative seeks to explore the tonality of Corinne's experiences in her particular professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Here, tonality includes those things that underpin daily experiences - such things as unformed and formed impressions of work situations, central guiding ideals for children, the real and everyday difficulties and dilemmas faced, the aspects that sustain and reward, particular job imperatives, personal concerns and dilemmas, and challenging situations (Dibble & Rosiek, 2002).

The sonata-format also offers a structure for an aesthetic plotline composed of phases or melodic movements where tensions are revealed, complicated, temporarily resolved and revealed again. The emphasis on a melodic aesthetic structure supports the sense that teaching is a complex and ongoing journey of continuous meaning making, linked to relationships both stable and unstable and to a range of feelings including dissonance. Teaching is a life-long sonata. It is an evolving journey of reinvention as teachers reflect on their knowledge and experiences and the interplay between these, and use new understandings to more intentionally shape what they do. The narrative presented here is only a glimpse within a small section of a journey. It is the contextualising of personal knowledge within an understanding of particular experiences during a particular time and place.

In this paper the use of dual vertical columns in the sonata-format is an experimental technique for representing and responding to the primary source narrative data to create 'counterpoint'. In music, counterpoint involves the writing of musical lines (or the relationship between two or more voices) that sound different and move independently from each other, but which sound harmonious when played simultaneously, thereby contributing to a more complete and holistic musical dialogue (Rahn & Boretz, 2001). Counterpoint seeks to encourage listeners to listen more intently to the complexities found within the texture of a composition and to be attentive to the interactions inherent in the musical dialogue. When heard alone, a melodic fragment might evoke a particular reaction. But, when heard alongside other melodic ideas, or combined in unexpected ways with itself (such as is the case with Corinne's multiple forms of representation) greater depths of meaning are uncovered.

This experimental structure seeks to present and develop the central story which is illuminated via a communication pattern that allows secondary conversations or dialogue alongside and across the primary story (Chang & Rosiek, 2003; Sconiers & Rosiek, 2000). In this instance, the primary story is told in first person by early childhood teacher Corinne. The primary source data includes her spoken and written words and arts-based representations. The use of Corinne's own words is deliberate and grounded in the belief that hearing the richness, the actual words and explanations of teachers provide greater insight into their worlds of teaching and their conceptions about what it means to teach (Black, 2000).

The researcher follows the aesthetic plotline and offers one of what could be many available responses or melodic ideas to ground the text. The researcher response considers what is immediately audible in the primary story. It also considers the movement between crucial underlying chords of meaning, identifying recurring themes as well as transient chords and events. Interested in teacher knowledge and experience, the focus of the researcher response is to connect methods and meaning-making, and to respond to the activity, interactions and relationships occurring across the arts-based forms. The response seeks to explore Corinne's

experience of teaching and attend to the ways story, drawing and metaphor support examination of particular experiences and her ways of knowing about her work. It is also interested in how these arts-based representations work together to provide a different and perhaps better view of the contradictions and complexities inherent in Corinne's world of teaching, thereby offering new understandings and possibilities for (re) living and (re) telling what it means to teach.

As in a musical sonata this format is a way of accommodating complementary stories into an integrated whole. The teacher story and the researcher response share the melodic line of exploring what it means to teach, and each voice is interested in the melodic interactions and relationships of experience and knowledge. Together there is an exploration and interplay between different layers of the composition of experience. This format also welcomes and is open to organic, evolving, and ongoing meaning-making – for Corinne, for the researcher, and for the reader.

A sonata of meaning-making

<p>Corinne's story</p> <p><i>I love working with children. I love seeing the progress that they make and the development that we can enhance. There is so much satisfaction in seeing the impact we make on children's lives.</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>I feel I am professional in what I do and I make sure my program reflects everything that I believe in.</i></p> <hr/>	<p>Following the aesthetic plotline: Researcher reflections</p> <p>Corinne, 28 years, was a contact director (teacher/director) at a privately owned 60 place childcare centre on the outskirts of Brisbane, Australia. She had four years teaching experience and was the only staff member with a teaching qualification at her centre. She felt professionally isolated. She wanted to be involved in this inquiry because she saw it as a professional development opportunity to further her knowledge and to talk to others teachers working in the same field (Dinham & Scott, 1997).</p> <p>Corinne held a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood) and a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood). She had also completed a business administration course prior to her teaching degree. She chose teaching as a career because she loved working with children and wanted to positively influence children's early development and learning (Manuel, 2003).</p> <p>At the time of her graduation there was little work available in other early childhood or educational settings.</p> <p>The role of contact director meant that each day she worked as teacher with her group of children till 1pm. She then spent three hours completing administration tasks, returning to the children for an hour in the afternoon.</p>
--	---

I am a contact director. I've got the best of both worlds. I have got teaching and directing - which I wanted. The owners are there but they let me make the decisions. The financial decisions are theirs but I make the rest. They respect that I am a qualified teacher and have that knowledge base.

I do feel frustrated about the perception of childcare. There are really different perceptions of the early childhood teacher who works at a kindergarten or school setting compared to the teacher who works in a childcare setting. People think that anything related to a childcare centre is just babysitting.

Even my boyfriend's mum used to say things like 'how did the playing in the sandpit go today?'

People perceive that all you do is play in the sandpit, push the swing, read a book. They don't see what the children learn or the curriculum decisions teachers are making.

Corinne said being responsible for the management of the centre and the educational program suited her professional aspirations.

At first, Corinne described her work only positively. She described enjoying the challenges associated with her dual roles as director and teacher.

Corinne held a strong image of herself as a professional and found it frustrating that society, including people close to her, undervalued her work as a teacher in a childcare centre. Concerns about the perception others held about her work, and about childcare generally, were recurrent in reflections.

Figure 1: Corinne's first drawing



I seem to be in the middle of everything and everything seems to revolve around me as the director and the teacher. I guess having the two positions leaves me feeling like I have things around my legs pulling me all directions.

The children are always the important part - they are the most important.

I've got staff pulling me one way. Always in my mind I've got my professionalism, being a teacher in childcare. And then I always have management issues in the back of my mind as well.

Corinne's first drawing highlighted the complexities of these two significant roles (see Figure 1) and how various responsibilities converged and competed for her time, focus and energy.

Her centre was undergoing changes in ownership and Corinne was finding she was increasingly called upon to fulfil 'management' roles at the expense of her 'teaching' roles. In her writing she recognised the tension but assured herself that the children would always be her first priority.

When describing her work Corinne articulated some of the difficulties associated with being responsible for staff and their professional development, for all the managerial tasks, and for the needs of children. Talking about the scope of her roles highlighted the difficult and multifaceted responsibilities she managed everyday. Yet she glossed over this to some extent. She was adamant that the children were always at the forefront of her thinking and the most important part of her work.

After representing her experiences in drawing and writing and telling stories of experience she reflected further. Corinne began to acknowledge that these other responsibilities were in fact distracting her from her work with children.

Representing her work through drawing and story helped Corinne see more in her experience. Drawing and written reflection unmistakably highlighted how aspects of her job were in tension with each other.

Some days I think ‘what did I do today? ‘What did I do with those children today? I’ve had sixty phone calls, I’ve had to deal with staff issues and other managerial things and I wonder what those children got out of today as I wasn’t concentrating fully on the program. There were so many other things on my mind.

Management is taking a forefront in my daily roles. However, the children will always come first, regardless.

My first drawing had everyone pulling at me in all directions. But I didn’t let this happen in the last two weeks.

I ordered my priorities and put myself and the children first. It was time to put them first and put everything else second. The children appreciated it and I got more out of my time with them.

I actually got to see what the children were doing rather than being dragged out of the room all the time. I found myself going ‘Oh wow, they can do that!’ I saw them learning. I didn’t have to ask somebody else what the children were doing.

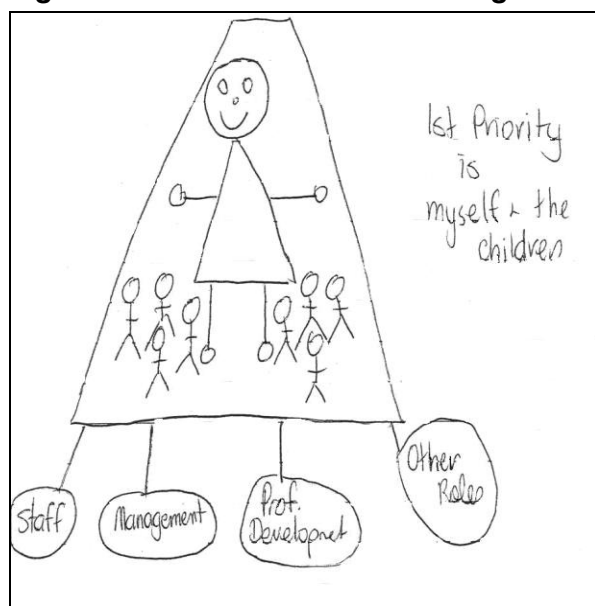
Self-directed probing of priorities and actions revealed how demands and responsibilities affected the enactment, or not, of valued ideals and vision of teaching.

Corinne was feeling torn and guilty and believed ‘children were suffering’ due to her distraction with management concerns. Corinne risked being overwhelmed by her responsibilities.

In an attempt to redress priorities and alleviate these feelings Corinne initiated a deliberate intervention. She changed the timetabling to enable focus and attention on her educational program.

Returning to the framing metaphor of teaching as ‘a composing of a music’, it was important for Corinne to pay attention to the feelings of dissonance inherent in her everyday experiences. Paying attention led her to re-examine her decisions and actions and be more intentional in her approaches to her work.

Figure 2: Corinne's second drawing



The ideal would be that the children were the most important part of my work in this early childhood setting.

Unfortunately there are so many other demands and responsibilities that I have to take care of. So this is not always possible.

When the clash between reality and ideals occurs, you have to take stock of your beliefs and try hard to work towards a compromise between these two areas.

Corinne changed her program to spend more time with the children. Listening to another teacher in our inquiry group describe her success with creating a more responsive program had motivated Corinne to do something similar.

Corinne relayed how wonderful it had been to finally be fully present with the children and to be able to respond to their interests and engagement with dramatic play. She could finally give full attention to the interactions children were having and be part of their learning.

Observing the outcomes of her new and focused involvement with children highlighted for Corinne the value of making time to share their life experiences and learning. She documented in her journal that it was this quality time with children that made her feel like her job was worthwhile. In a musical sense these were her moments of melody and harmony.

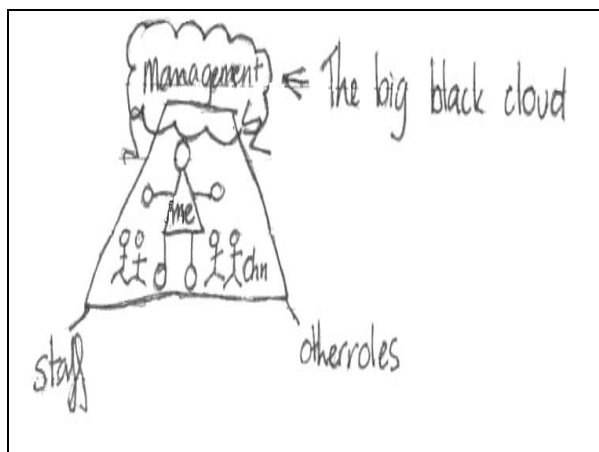
It was interesting to see how Corinne represented these prioritising efforts and shifts in experience in her second drawing (see Figure 2).

Changing the emphasis of her work to focus on the children and their learning meant that Corinne had more time to interact with them, observe their play and build relationships. She was able to capitalise on spontaneous learning opportunities because she was aware of children's interests and understandings. She felt better about being in touch with all aspects of the educational program.

However, this resolution was only temporary. Despite her best attempts management concerns continued to impact on teaching decisions and her time with children. The tension between these roles was ongoing. Perpetual and concerted efforts would be needed to make sense of these competing factors in her work.

My image of myself as a teacher has an ego deflation at times. I sit back and think about what my work really means. Am I really the best teacher I can be in this setting?

Figure 3: Corinne's third drawing



I have found the drawings helpful and a tool that can be used on a regular basis.

My perception or image of myself as a teacher is being challenged as new dilemmas and roles occur.

Drawing and reflection is helping me clarify things.

Reflecting on all these things has given me the opportunity to truly look inside myself and see what I really want and how I really feel.

A sense of discord and dissonance remained with Corinne as she engaged in active meaning making about what teaching meant for her at her particular workplace. Making multiple representations helped Corinne make connections with the teacher she was and the teacher she wanted to be. Reflection helped her examine surface behaviours and practices, and underlying inner feelings.

Corinne acknowledged that her ideal 'to put children first' would perhaps always remain in tension with her other responsibilities. It was difficult to keep the children the foremost priority in her work. The expectations of the new owners and the immediacy of her other responsibilities challenged her ideal image of responsive engaged teacher.

As would be expected, the owners' focus was on the financial viability of the centre and managerial and administrative aspects. To them, Corinne's attention to her director role was paramount. Their surveillance of the running of the centre was acute. Corinne felt a great chasm existed between the teacher she wanted to be and the teacher she had to be to keep on top of these work demands and expectations.

Corinne then drew a third picture (see Figure 3). She combined metaphor and drawing to illustrate the weight that management roles and concerns carried. These were her 'big black cloud' that continually stalked her, filtering into and distracting her daily interactions with staff and children.

The arts-based resources supported Corinne's repeated examination of situations, interactions and feelings. As a result of her reflections, Corinne was gaining a more informed view of the contradictions and complexities inherent in her work and the impact these had on her practice and identity as teacher.

What these arts-based representations also accentuate is the ongoing activity required to make sense of teaching. Demands, pressures and dilemmas persist. To teach is to engage in continual learning, adapting and problem solving.

The reflection process has helped in illuminating so many things about my work.

Metaphor 1:

I described my centre using the metaphor of spinning a web. There are a lot of intermingling relationships between staff and parents, children and parents, staff and children.

Constantly changing relationships can put pressure on the web. Our centre has new owners. This has led to many staff changes and room changes. A lot of pressure has been put on the whole centre and on all the relationships.

The web is very fine and has to be delicately handled because if it isn't, it breaks. You have to handle it carefully and have exactly the right combination to ensure sturdy relationships. If you don't, the web flies away.

Currently our web is unfortunately swinging in the breeze. The web is broken in several places.

Before engaging with arts-based tools and reflection Corinne hadn't found a way to pay attention to her feelings of disquiet about competing work roles. She was not aware of resources which could help her examine the complex kaleidoscope of experiences and meanings that were shaping her teaching or that were part of her ways of knowing about her work. Prior to this inquiry, feelings of discouragement and disillusionment had been bubbling away but had not been addressed.

Metaphor provided Corinne with a supportive and constructive way of acknowledging how she felt about the various interactions and relationships at her centre and the challenges associated with these. She could see and feel the intricate, delicate, complicated and interrelated characteristics and relationships that were part of her world of work.

It was good to go back and read what I said and what I wrote. It has given me perspective about what I do and what I don't do, and how I really feel. It has clarified all those things that flick through your mind - like knowing that you are not happy.

It is important to actually see all the components of what you do. You don't realise the reasoning behind why you are feeling that way until you actually see it in front of you. Seeing a drawing just makes it more tangible. I have a much better understanding of myself now.

The outcome of this inquiry has been increased understanding. I have a better understanding of myself and of my practices. I feel more confident.

It has helped clarify my beliefs about what I value. I can see that I do so much in my daily work. I do more than just teach. I am a professional who is responsible for so many things and I have to pay attention to my role as a manager of a business. This requires ongoing commitment and prioritising.

Metaphor, story and drawing supported recognition and articulation of the emotional investment teaching required. They brought about awakenings (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010) .

Arts-based representations became resources Corinne used and valued. They supported ongoing personally inquiry into the dynamic activity that was her work.

They helped her picture more clearly the challenges of her work and offered a way to critique situations and practices. She was able to be honest about the uneasy fit between teaching and directing roles, and the very real difficulties of her professional context. She could see that she had a really challenging job.

But she could also see she made positive and enormous contributions each day across a range of roles and responsibilities. Seeing the complexity of her work represented in drawing and metaphor helped her understand that she had a great deal of knowledge and many professional skills. This boosted her confidence.

Corinne also got back in touch with her ideals and visions for children. However she understood that ongoing commitment and attention was required to see these realised.

<p><i>Perhaps for the first time I understand that my work is not and won't ever be straight forward.</i></p> <hr/>	
---	--

Epilogue

In terms of the transformative potential of aesthetic inquiry for Corinne, what occurred was renewed awareness and appreciation of the complexity of her work, together with increased self-knowledge. Inner tensions and dilemmas did not disappear. Harmonious work environments were not permanently created. Corinne was not miraculously transformed into an all-knowing, self-assured empowered being. Teaching continued to be a complex activity with many expectations, roles and responsibilities. Making sense of teaching involved a constant grappling with dilemmas, images and issues.

Corinne was however able to see the landscape of her work more clearly. She could identify those things in her educational world that jarred and challenged and why that was. Improved self-knowledge and understanding of work demands assisted Corinne's confidence to see herself as a co-creator of the structural landscapes in which she worked. She could identify the range of contextual and personal factors that influenced and impacted on her experience (Huber & Whelan, 1999). She could also imagine possibilities, and consider how goals and teaching practice and realities might coexist. With renewed sight she began a more intentional composing of self with work demands. Knowledge of self and context facilitated intentional approaches and strategies for dealing with feelings of negativity in ways that also improved her teaching practice (Woods, 1999). She also made peace with the reality of her work situation – there were no easy answers – her work required ongoing commitment, prioritising, and juggling of responsibilities. Corinne was more mindful of the dynamism and cacophony inherent in her work and the knowledge she held and used. Struggles became opportunities for self-exploration and she looked to herself for answers about how to manage the job of teacher and director.

Whilst her situation is unique to her, Corinne's account communicates something of the dynamism, dissonance and cacophony of teachers' work and how the tensions and vibrations of everyday teaching worlds might challenge teachers' abilities to hear their own voices. Teaching is an action world. It is a changing and ambiguous world of local conditions, of dissonant relationships and multiple roles. Without supportive dialogue, sense-making opportunities or reflective tools, discord can overwhelm and teachers can spend their time just surviving. If teachers are to do more than survive, and be agents of improved practice and positive change, it is essential there are ongoing opportunities to investigate personal and professional knowledge and to examine the constraints, realities, dynamism and intensity of their contemporary workplaces.

This narrative account highlights the benefits Corinne experienced as she used representational resources and engaged in reflection. Story, drawing and metaphor enabled personally relevant creative aesthetic inquiry into what it meant to teach. Commonly used in everyday worlds to convey ideas and meanings, story, drawing and metaphor had and have a natural ability to make visible and bring to awareness the emotional, sensory and complex dimensions of experience. For Corinne, they functioned as visible products of reflection and acted as catalysts for awareness,

insight and knowledge construction. Used together, they supported dialogue, reciprocity and interconnectedness and deepened understanding.

Corinne's representations and reflections were significant for *her*. They connected her with personal conceptions, ideals and values about what it means to teach. They highlighted shifting images of teaching linked to shifting concerns and responsibilities. They gave Corinne space to attend to the dynamics and complexity of experiences and encouraged additional reflection, engagement and action.

Corinne's story is also significant for *us*. A reader can relate and connect to similar experiences and other aesthetic plotlines composed of phases or melodic movements where tensions are revealed, complicated, temporarily resolved and revealed again. Or, where experiences are dissimilar, be prompted to (re) consider personal meanings and values or to question taken for granted attitudes or practices (Barone, 2006). A reader can also consider the challenges associated with 'composing a meaningful music' in one's work and recognise the usefulness of the strategies that support active sense-making and are articulated in this paper using Corinne's story - such as attending to the interplay of self and context, and the potential of arts-based methods for making visible the way knowledge is (re) constructed over time.

This type of creative inquiry process is important. It enables personally relevant professional development and offers resources which can be used to make sense of everyday experiences, problems of practice and personal meanings. Educational questions can be explored in personally significant and connected ways, and the qualities of experiences can be seen, heard, felt and better understood.

References

- Bagnoli, A. (2009). Beyond the standard interview: The use of graphic elicitation and arts-based methods. *Qualitative Research*, 9(5), 547-570.
- Barone, T. (2006). Arts-based education research: Then, now and later. *Studies in Art Education*, 48(1), 9-18.
- Barone, T. (2009). Commonalities and variegations: Notes on the maturation of the field of narrative research. *Journal of Educational Research*, 103(2), 149-153.
- Beattie, M. (1995). The making of a music: The construction and reconstruction of a teacher's personal practical knowledge during inquiry. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 25(2), 133-150.
- Black, A. L. (2000). *Who am I as teacher? Promoting the active positioning of self within teaching realities*. Unpublished Ph.D, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.
- Black, A. L. (2002). Making sense of what it means to teach: Artful representations as meaning-making tools. *Teacher development: An International journal of teachers' professional development*, 6(1), 75-88.
- Black, A. L., & Halliwell, G. (2000). Accessing practical knowledge: How? Why? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16(1), 103-115.
- Bullock, S. M. (2009). Learning to think like a teacher educator: Making the substantive and syntactic structures of teaching explicit through self-study. *Teachers & Teaching*, 15(2), 291-304.
- Bullough Jr, R. V. (2010). Parables, storytelling, and teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1/2), 153-160.
- Bullough, R. V. (1994). Personal history and teaching metaphors: A self study of teaching as conversation. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 21(1), 107-120.
- Chang, P. J., & Rosiek, J. (2003). Anti-colonialist antinomies in a biology lesson: A sonata-form case study of cultural conflict in a science classroom. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 33(3), 251-290.
- Clandinin, D. J. (2007). *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. Canada: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Clandinin, D. J. (2010). Sustaining teachers in teaching. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 16(3), 281 - 283.

- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1996). Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes: Teacher stories - stories of teachers - school stories - stories of schools. *Educational Researcher*, 25(3), 24-30.
- Clandinin, D. J., Murphy, M. S., Huber, J., & Orr, A. M. (2009). Negotiating narrative inquiries: Living in a tension-filled midst. *Journal of Educational Research*, 103(2), 81-90.
- Cole, A. L., & Knowles, J. G. (2011). Drawing on the arts, transforming research: Possibilities of arts-informed perspectives. In L. Markauskaite (Ed.), *Methodological choices and research designs for educational and social research* (pp. 119 -132). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Cope, D. (1997). *Techniques of the contemporary composer*. New York: Schirmer Books.
- Craig, C. (2010). Change, changing, and being changed: A study of self in the throes of multiple accountability demands. *Studying Teacher Education*, 6(1), 63-73.
- Denscombe, M. (1980). The work context of teaching: An analytic framework for the study of teachers in classrooms. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 1(3), 279-292.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience*. New York: Capricorn Books.
- Dibble, N., & Rosiek, J. (2002). White out: A case study introducing a new citational format for teacher practical knowledge research. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 3(5).
- Dinham, S., & Scott, C. (1997). *The teacher 2000 project: A study of teacher satisfaction, motivation and health*. Nepean: University of Western Sydney, Faculty of Education.
- Eisner, E. W. (1997). The new frontier in qualitative research methodology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3), 259-273.
- Eisner, E. W. (1998). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Elbaz-Luwisch, F. (2010). Narrative inquiry: Wakeful engagement with educational experience. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 40(2), 263-280.
- Greene, M. (1980). Breaking through the ordinary: The arts and future possibility. *Journal of Education*, 162(3), 18.
- Greene, M. (2000). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hamberger, N. M., & Moore, R. L. (1997). From personal to professional values: Conversations about conflicts. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 48(4), 301-310.
- Haney, W., Russell, M., & Bebell, D. (2004). Drawing on education: Using drawings to document schooling and support change. *Harvard Educational Review* (Fall), 241-272.
- Huber, J., & Whelan, K. (1999). A marginal story as a place of possibility: Negotiating self on the professional knowledge landscape. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 15(4), 381-396.
- Kelchtermans, G. (2009). Who I am in how I teach is the message: Self-understanding, vulnerability and reflection. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 15(2), 257 - 272.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *The metaphors we live by*. Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press.
- Leavy, P. (2009). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- Leitch, R. (2006). Limitations of language: Developing arts-based creative narrative in stories of teachers' identities. *Teachers & Teaching*, 12(5), 549-569.
- Leitch, R. (2010). Masks as self-study. Challenging and sustaining teachers' personal and professional personae in early-mid career life phases. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 16(3), 329 - 352.
- Mahlis, M., Massengill-Shaw, D., & Barry, A. (2010). Making sense of teaching through metaphors: A review across three studies. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 16(1), 49 - 71.
- Manuel, J. (2003). 'Such are the ambitions of youth': Exploring issues of retention and attrition of early career teachers in New South Wales. *Asia Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 31(2), 139-151.
- Markauskaite, L. (2011). *Methodological choices and research designs for educational and social change: Linking scholarship, policy and practice*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Mello, D. M. (2007). The language of arts in a narrative inquiry landscape. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. London: SAGE Publications.

- Pink, D. H. (2006). *A whole new mind: Why right-brainers will rule the future*. New York: The Penguin Group.
- Rahn, J., & Boretz, B. (2001). *Music inside out: Going too far in musical essays*. Amsterdam: Routledge.
- Rethinking Schools. (2004). *The new teacher book: Finding purpose, balance, and hope during your first years in the classroom*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools.
- Rowan, B. (1994). Comparing teachers' work with work in other occupations: Notes on the professional status of teaching. *Educational Researcher*, 23(6), 4-17, 21.
- Rust, F. O. (1999). Professional conversations: New teachers explore teaching through conversation, story, and narrative. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 15(4), 367-380.
- Savvidou, C. (2010). Storytelling as dialogue: How teachers construct professional knowledge. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 16(6), 649 - 664.
- Schenker, H. (1979). *Free composition = (Der freie Satz): Volume III of new musical theories and fantasies*. New York: Longman.
- Sconiers, Z. D., & Rosiek, J. L. (2000). Historical perspective as an important element of teachers' knowledge: A sonata-form case study of equity issues in a chemistry classroom. *Voices inside schools. Harvard Educational Review*, 70(3), 370-404.
- Sumsion, J. (2002). Becoming, being and unbecoming an early childhood educator: A phenomenological case study of teacher attrition. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(7), 869-885.
- Weber, S. (2008). Visual images in research. In J. G. Knowles & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples and issues* (pp. 41-53). London: Sage.
- White, B. (2007). Aesthetic encounters: Contributions to generalist teacher education. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 8(17), 1-28.
- Woods, P. (1999). Intensification and stress in teaching. In R. Vandenberghe & A. M. Huberman (Eds.), *Understanding and preventing teacher burnout: A sourcebook of international research and practice* (pp. 115-138). New York: Cambridge University Press.