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BOUNDARY BREAKING: INTERCULTURAL 'HANDS-ON' CREATIVE ARTS WORKSHOPS

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Abstract

This arts-based research inquiry applies innovative approaches to fostering 'creativity' in pre-service primary art teachers during their tertiary training. The main research question investigates how to foster 'creativity' in pre-service primary art teachers so they can better mentor the children they teach. I argue that pre-service primary art teachers can learn to imagine and generate creative solutions by thinking 'outside the box' and by breaking boundaries beyond their normal practice.

This paper is presented in the current Australian reductionist context where educational policy is centered on measuring student learning and neglects issues of context and social outcomes (Lingard, 2001; 2012). In contrast to this reductionist attitude, this research investigates how pre-service teacher's attitudes in the visual arts change as they are influenced by diversity in studio-practical intercultural 'hands-on' workshops.

The study is divided into three sections:

- The first section discusses the literature review and overviews of the research approach used in this study.

- The second section investigates the theoretical framework and introduces the studio-practice approach used in the study.

- Finally, the paper presents the Chinese art and cultural case study demonstrating how the new 'Mo-ku-chi' (*ink-splash and energy*) model consisting of four practical phases can be applied in the project.

Literature review

Cultivating 'creativity' and imagination in pre-service teachers seems to have been largely ignored in most of the Western world (Robinson, 2006; Sullivan, 2004; Wu, 2011). According to Sternberg and Lubart (1999) even the word 'creativity' was not included in the index of the *Psychological Abstracts* prior to 1950 and only 0.2% of published articles referred to it. It was not until J.P. Guilford drew people's attention to 'creativity' that it surfaced as an area of importance (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999; Torrance, 1981; Wu, 2011). Sternberg believes that 'creativity' is as much about a decision about life as ability and this study strives to unpack some of these issues relating to 'creativity' in visual arts education. However, surprisingly, in many of the Eastern countries there are growing importance being placed on bringing 'creativity' and imagination into people's lives. Contemporary Chinese artists are embracing new and old technologies (Wang, 2008; Wang, 2010) and learning about 'creativity' is becoming systemic in the school systems of Taiwan (Wu, 2011), Singapore, Hong Kong and Mainland China (Kam, 2009; Wade-Leeuwen, 2012). The main reason for this is the impact of new technologies "new technology creates many new industries, which require creativity to navigate" (Wu, 2011) and there has been a shift in the importance of creative economy, cultural and creative industries as a response to the global crisis. This is significant as sixty percent of jobs in the future have not even been created yet (Collard, 2011).

The other area of interest addressed in this paper is the impact of educational research on pre-service primary education. Lingard (2001) perceives pre-service teacher education as a complex, multifaceted, multidirectional phenomenon and, in visual arts education, factors such as pre-service teachers' prior knowledge, confidence to learn and teach in visual arts education and the balance

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between theory and practice within the tertiary and schools systems are all significant areas to be explored. Addressing some of these areas was a study conducted by (Hudson & Hudson, 2007) who examined Australian final-fourth year pre-service teachers in an Australian regional university and found that many of the pre-service teachers did not feel confident about teaching the primary visual arts syllabus and indicated difficulty meeting the often unrealistic expectations of the visual arts curriculum. Hudson and Hudson (2007) found that "Many believed they were less well prepared to discuss artists and their works" (p. 1). Their study found that many of the pre-service primary art teachers felt inhibited in inviting artists into the classroom and suggested that this area of inquiry needs further research.

Overview of research approach

This arts-based research inquiry builds on the works of prominent researchers Elliot W. Eisner, Manuel Barkan, Ralph Smith and Harry Broudy who promoted the values of 'hands-on' art education in the 1960s (Eisner, 1990). Eisner in 1962 looked at creativity as a form of enquiry and focused on the inter-relationship between the individual, the visual arts and the socio-cultural context. The arts aim at different outcomes compared to the social sciences, for instance, they are less concerned with critique or policy and more concerned with generating deeper understandings and making meaning from lived experiences (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Wedekind, 2004). Empirical and interpretative methodologies were used to gain insights into the experiential nature of this inquiry. This Arts-Based Research inquiry (Eisner, 2006) applies a mixed method approach to collecting data through a questionnaire, participant observations, semi-structured interviews and critical friends groups. The preliminary results from the initial quantitative questionnaire indicated these pre-service primary art teachers in third and fourth year generally do not feel competent to teach visual arts. Eighty percent of the two hundred and thirty-three participants' responses to the questionnaire indicated they had limited background knowledge and experience in visual arts. Another finding from the qualitative semi-structured interviews suggests that by applying strategies from the Reggio Emilia philosophy during the workshops, participants discovered visual arts could be both meaningful and valuable as both collaborative and individual processes (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). These findings contribute significantly towards better understanding of a range of diverse and alternative learning and teaching practices that could be applied in a variety of settings.

Theoretical framework

Multiple case studies (Stake, 2006; 2010; Yin, 2009) were used including case study one: 'Linear Motion', an investigation of Chinese art and culture with final-fourth year pre-service teachers, and case study two: 'Bwo-me' (Life's Breath) (Wade-Leeuwen, 2013) which is an investigation of Aboriginal art and culture with third year pre-service teachers. The research question is how to foster 'creativity' in pre-service primary art teachers. The study takes place within the settings of practical studio-based workshops designed using a new 'Mo-ku-chi' model of 'creativity' (Wade-Leeuwen, 2010) that optimised environmental settings by working with artists in a cultural community of practice. Drawing on (Wenger, 1998; 2000) cultural community of practice model the project explores how 'creativity' can intersect between pre-service-teacher training, visual arts and the socio-cultural context. Wenger argues for a new kind of organizational design, one that involves informal gatherings of people who are passionate about an issue. The model of cultural communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; 2000) was seen as an ideal instrumental way of supporting pre-service visual arts teachers through the examples of diverse practicing artists who could discuss and demonstrate artworks from their own practice. Applying a cultural community of practice framework to the Linear Motion case study assisted teachers' achievements with meeting the Creative Arts and Visual Arts (Board of Studies, 2000; 2003) curriculums. As found in the research of Hudson and Hudson, (2007) pre-service teachers need to be exposed to artists discussing their works so that they

can gain more confidence in dialoguing with artists and inviting them into the learning and teaching environment. Working with artists also offered the pre-service primary art teachers the opportunity to unpack meaningful cultural elements that they can then apply to their own learning and teaching.

The studio-practice

Elliott Eisner (1972) said 'some say, "Creativity cannot be defined". The difficulty seems to come from the elasticity of this abstract noun and its multiple definitions. Therefore, this study adopts a working definition from (Sternberg, 1999) that 'creativity' is the production of new ideas, approaches and actions. This case study is based on Chinese art and culture and uses the 'Mo-ku-chi' model (2010) designed to elicit different levels of 'creativity' (Taylor, 1959) in intercultural 'hands-on' workshops. This research paper builds on earlier work conducted within this Doctorial study (Wade-Leeuwen, 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013). This paper will now discuss the new four phases model and provide some examples of how the model can be applied.

The first phase in the 'Mo-ku-chi' model of 'creativity' was about exposing pre-service teachers to the works of different artists from the critical friends group within an established cultural community of practice. Before taking part in practice in the intercultural 'hands-on' workshops, pre-service teachers were exposed to several different contemporary Chinese artists from Australia (Lo, 2010), Mainland China (Wang, 2010), Taiwan (Liu, 2009) and Singapore (Tan, 2011) who made up the critical friends group in this cultural community of practice. This paper will examine one of the artist's comments from the critical friends group. Assistive technology was used to virtually display the artist and his works during the workshops in an effort to connect the pre-service teachers to the broader artists world within a community of practice. During an interview conducted in 2011 with the contemporary Singapore researcher-artist, Tan Kian Por, he reflects on how he would use 'creativity' in relation to his own learning and teaching of visual arts.

Tan Kian Por was one of the artists that inspired the intercultural 'hands-on' workshops in this research. Tan Kian Por was born in 1949 in Chaozhou, China, and moved to Singapore in 1962. Tan along with his wife, Poh Bee Chu, and the author are all graduates of Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, and are foundation members of the Siaw Tao Seal-Carving, Calligraphy and Painting Society formed in the 1970s. Tan has been a practicing artist for over four decades and works in Chinese calligraphy, poetry, painting and digital media as well as runs his own gallery and lectures at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. He creatively blends traditional and contemporary elements, enjoying the innovative and interactive nature of new technologies. In 2001, Tan received the Cultural Medallion and Artist Award (2001-2010) for visual arts and his works are represented throughout the Asian-Pacific region. During 2011, the author conducted the following interview with Tan Kian Por in Singapore as part of her critical friends fieldwork research (Tan, 2011).
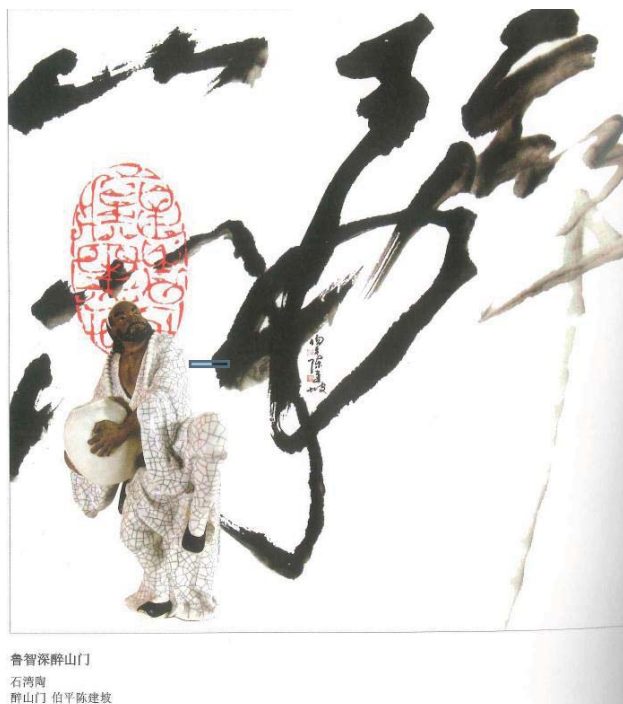
鲁智深醉山门
石湾陶
醉山门 伯平陈建坡

Figure. 1. Chinese calligraphy, artefact and seal carving by Tan Kian Por.

Workshop phase one: Interactions with artists

Below are five questions taken from the interview conducted between the researcher-artist and Tan Kian Por in Singapore (2011). The conversation was conducted in Putonghua (*Pǔtōnghuà or Mandarin Chinese*) with translations made into English by his wife, Po Bee Chu.

Question 1. Researcher: Do you think that creativity can be taught?

认为创作的能力能被教出来吗？

Tan (Translation):

> *Creativity is hard to be taught because creativity is your thought. We only can inspire because everyone's thinking is different. We can give the student some suggestion when they are doing the painting according to our experience to inspire their creativity.*

其实创作是很难教的，创作是你的想法。只能说是去启发他，因为每个人的想法都不一样。所以说以我们的经验来讲，当他作出一点东西的时候，我们可以告诉他你可以从哪个方面来进行。

Question 2. Researcher: What kinds of skills do you need to be good at visual art?

请问绘画这门艺术对于你来说，是需要何种训练，知识和技术才能画好？

Tan (Translation):

> *I think the tradition training is important. However, I also encourage the students to bring new ideas. Nowadays, people always emphasize creating new things, highlighting individuality. I think that students should have a good base of tradition painting skill and then add some new value to their works. But how do we find this new value? The answer is the artist need to be rich in history, feeling*

and individuality.

我很重视传统。可是我会要求学生有创新。现在的人动不动就要讲创新，动不动就要把自己个性的东西拿出了。我的想法是在传统的基础上有基础，然后又要有新颖。那么怎么创新呢？这需要画家富有有时代感和个性。

Question 3. Researcher: What knowledge or training is needed? 知识和技术才能画好？

Tan (Translation):

> *The academy should help the student to open their minds when training in the basic skill. For example, previously, people always said not to go and be creative when your basic skills are not good enough. Actually it should be like this, when they are doing the training they will consider the creating. So it is best to encourage them to open their mind of imagination.*

就是在训练他的基础上，又时常去帮助他打开想象的空间。比如，以前常常讲你的基础还没好，你不要创作。其实不是这样，其实在打基础的时候也会想到创作的问题，所以鼓励他们打开想象的空间。

Question 4. Researcher: What are some new ways to inspire creativity in yourself or in other people?

有什么新的方式去启发小孩子或者自己去创作？

Tan (Translation):

> *The way is actually a process of growing. Many things are like a process from complication to simplification. At the beginning, we would like to paint realistically, but when we experience more and getting old, you will know what you need to abandon and what you should treasure. I think that my way will become more and more simple in the future. My mind will just follow my heart.*

其实新的路是一个过程。很多东西都是从繁到简，开始的时候画的很真实，但当有了这个过程之后，你才懂得弃掉什么东西，保存什么东西。以前强调完美真实，随着时间多了，你的人生经验多了之后，你懂得放掉什么东西，保留什么东西。我想以后的路越来越简单。自己的想法成了主要的了，不会被其他东西牵着走。

Question 5. Researcher: What are three elements that surprise you when you are creating artworks?

在创作的时候，您对哪3样元素感到惊讶呢？

Tan (Translation):

> *In fact the artwork needs incentive. It needs some incentive to make you excited and encourage you to do it. I am a kind of person that always lives with passion. When I do the painting or the photoshop, there are a variety of different unknown things that give me incentive, make me feel excited. Those things help me to create the artwork.*

作画艺术，其实需要激情的，它需要有些东西让你兴奋，鼓动你去做。我这个人一路都生活在激情里面，我作这个创作也好，做这个电脑也好，因为有很多不同的，我不知道的，所以常常带给我激情，让我很兴奋，所以我的作品就这样创出来。

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Workshop phase two: Visual thought and meaning-making

Engaging in discussion with the artist was a valuable way of starting the intercultural workshops in this case study. The case study then moves into its second phase in the 'Mo-ku-chi' model of 'creativity' where the participants are exposed to an imaginary narrative. The purpose of this narrative is to stimulate participants' imagination. This research segment is influenced by the Vygotskian framework and the works of Brooks (2002). Vygotsky (1962) proposed that it is in "word meaning" (p.5) that thought and speech join together to become verbal thought. It is through the practice of imagining and drawing that we can learn to understand children's thinking processes (Brooks, 2002; Narey, 2009). Vygotsky saw that there were two forms of meaning, 'meaning as abstractions' and 'meaning as personal contextualized sense' (Wertsch, 2000) and if teachers understood the difference between these two ways of thinking then they would be able to encourage children in their 'creativity'. Based on Brook's theory (Brooks, 2002; 2003) that drawing assists the movement from invisible to visible thought became the basis of phase two.

Figure 2. Title: 'Lonely Tune' artwork by the researcher-artist

This is a stimulus picture of a Chinese landscape where participants listen to music and wander through the mountains using their imagination. The teacher adds a few words to the picture, saying that in the landscape they can hear faint wind and running water.

In the second phases of the 'Mo-ku-chi' intercultural 'hands-on' workshop the participants focus on drawing out their own ideas and imaginings. An example of one of the participants' comments was:

> *One thing I've been doing so far is trying not to rely on my logic brain too much. Also painting and calligraphy are things that are all helping me to use my other physical senses, energy sense and spiritual sense. I had no clue where to start when I was first asked by you to do some spontaneous, some imagery paintings but then at the end of the session, I can see I have a passion to express my feelings, my inspirations at that time (NV4).*

Another participant commented on the value of interacting and reacting to other students' works:

> *I also think the opportunity to not just listen but to interact and react with the other students during a creative process and hear their ideas and things they have brought to that particular moment is quite*

valuable to one's teaching practice (NV5).

Workshop phase three: Let the materials lead you…

In phase three of the 'Mo-ku-chi' model the pre-service teachers are introduced to the Classical four treasures of Chinese painting including learning new skills such as how to hold the brush, breath while making strokes and how to mix Chinese ink in the traditional way with water, ink stick and stone (Jiang, 2001; Van Leeuwen, 2000). In this phase the participants focus on the power of drawing and mark-making as a vehicle for transforming thoughts into greater mental abilities, the joining of thought, language and drawing to make meaning (Brooks, 2002; 2003; Narey, 2009; Wink & Putney, 2002). Chinese ink washes on rice or mulberry paper and long sheets of drawing paper were the main medium used. The only instruction given at this phase was how to develop the skill of holding the Chinese brush. This phase started with the narrative told by the studio-leader and then the participants interpreted their own thoughts into visible images. Several works were created and then there was time allocated to discuss and compare the outcomes of their artworks with others. These interactions with others within a cultural community of practice provided a safe place for exchange of ideas and valuing others works.

One of the participants who had limited experience in visual arts commented:

> *I can say from my experience being a Sri Lankan person, you're taught that art is not important. And it's just an eye-opener like people need to be aware that art is just not drawing. It means so many different things, and how it can be integrated. It's so important you have to think about your different learners if you're a teacher, engaging your children with different abilities and, how you can use so many different forms, it's not just the four strands of creative arts that help the kids with everyday life (NV10).*

Figure. 3. Mo-ku ink-splash method allows the materials to lead you…
Pre-service students in the intercultural workshop using Chinese black ink, Chinese brushes on long bamboo sticks.

This third phase demonstrated how skills, imagination, aesthetic and emotive responses can be

valued and supported within a visual arts environment. The power of Mo-ku drawing and ink-splash painting for pre-service teachers and the children they teach is that it represents their thought processes in a schematic way and allows for these previously hidden images to become the centre for dialogue. Pre-service teachers shared the different interpretations and responses they saw during the workshops.

This third phase relates to the NSW Board of Studies (2000) Creative Arts (*Kindergarten to grade six*) syllabus which encourages teachers to model 'creativity' to the children they teach and integrate it into their teaching,

> *By modelling creativity and using as many opportunities to show and display visual arts and relating it to other subjects, so integrating it into all kinds of teaching experiences (Board of Studies, 2000, p. 9).*

One participant said in one of the semi-structured interviews after the workshop:

> *At first I thought how is everyone going to go round and doing the same things because it's all going to be like a black dotted line or whatever but at the end I realised two groups had totally different artwork and you can get a lot out of it and also extend that work. Because at first I thought everyone's using black so how is it going to be different, it's just probably going around black lines, but yeah, I was amazed at that. And the using of the brush, like holding of the brush. I wasn't aware of that. Oh, with the energy 'chi', definitely. Like I didn't think about it, like with the energy. I didn't think the more energy you have, the darker the line would go. I though you just drew a line sort of thing (NV11).*

Workshop phase four: art appreciation of the student –made artefacts

Torrance and Wu (1962) conducted research into the measurement instruments used to measure intelligence. They found that 70% of the most gifted children have been overlooked using standard IQ intelligence test scores as the sole criterion of selection ((Torrance, 1981) (Torrance and Wu, 1962, p.1). In order to develop a way of evaluating artworks in workshops, Torrance (1974) suggested that we should evaluate them in terms of the definition of the phenomena, in this case 'creativity', and that a tool should be designed in terms of this definition to assess the results:

> *Creativity is the process of becoming sensitive to problems, deficiencies, gaps in knowledge, missing elements, disharmonies, and so on; identifying the difficulty; searching for solutions, making guesses, or formulating hypotheses about the deficiencies (1974, p.8).*

In this fourth phase of the intercultural 'hands-on' workshops, the pre-service teachers displayed all the works that they had produced. (Board of Studies, 1997). This is in keeping with the Creative Arts curriculum where children are expected to discuss and display their artworks for art appreciation sessions (Board of Studies, 2000). The participants set up their 2-D & 3-D art works for peer viewing and we adapted elements from Torrance (1974) theory of identifying creative tendencies. The tendencies the participants were asked to identify in the student-made artefacts were fluency, originality, elaboration, flexibility, and works that showed humour or avoidance of premature closure.   These, according to Torrance (1974), are the different 'creativity' capabilities. Once we are aware of them then we know what to look for in our own works or others in order to create something new. In the following paragraph, some interviewees discuss elements that surprised them during the intercultural 'hands-on' workshops. For example, one of the participants commented on the meaning she had gained from attending the workshops:

> *I would like to say that I enjoyed the workshop today and the two hours were quite precious to me and I think it would be a really wonderful opportunity if the pre-service teachers that are practicing the creative arts in the schools are able to have more of those sorts of 'hands-on' sessions to align and connect strategies and other content that we have to pursue.*

Another participant reflected on the purpose and meaning of the workshops:

Breaking boundaries: Intercultural 'hands-on' workshops
Author Name: Bronwen Wade-Leeuwen
Contact Email: Bronwen.wadeleeuwen@mq.edu.au

I learnt how teachers in particular need to engage their students and by engaging their students they need to be energetic in themselves with the subjects that they're teaching. They need to carry out that information in a very enthusiastic way, therefore they are 'performing'. The workshop really made me think about how I could make engaging lessons and I'm sad that I did this lesson towards the end of my prac because had I done it earlier I probably would have used a few more of that type of methodology.

These examples of comments from pre-service teachers that participated in the study demonstrate that the intercultural workshops were of value to most teachers. It also links into what (Wright, 2010) says that it is the actual act of drawing (either manually or digitally) that can extend children's (or adults) senses, imagination, emotions and aesthetic capabilities. The 'Mo-ku-chi' model of 'creativity' used visual thought, drawing and ink-splash painting as a way of illustrating how "creativity requires that the school of knowing finds connections with the school of expressing, opening the doors to the hundred languages of children" (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 71).

Conclusion

In the context of a rapidly changing world under consistent global pressures to be critical and creative, I have argued that pre-service primary art teachers can learn to imagine and generate creative solutions by thinking 'outside the box' and by breaking boundaries beyond their normal practice. One way of achieving this is by working with diverse visual artists and by using old and new technologies within intercultural 'hands-on' creative arts workshops. This paper demonstrates how pre-service teachers can mindfully develop their own confidence and creative capacities through a 'spirit of play' and a risk-taking attitude towards studio-practice. These findings may contribute significantly towards a better understanding of a range of alternative teaching practices that could be applied to traditional classrooms or museums and art galleries.

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