

Rendering Artful and Empathic Arts-Based Performance as Action

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Abstract

There is a critical need to consider ways to enrich the educational experiences and well-being of adolescents when the lack of empathy in the world is high. This paper presents the concepts of *Artful Empathy* and *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology*. The concepts are exemplified from a multi-site case study within Australian secondary visual art studio classrooms. The article demonstrates how learning and making art in an artfully empathic ecology can support the legitimacy of diverse and marginalized voices. Arts-based performative approaches may facilitate empathic knowing across disciplines with global traction.

Background

Visual art (VA) learning environments have the capacity to embed artful empathic approaches to learning. The article reports on research in the VA classroom, employing performative approaches and demonstrating the qualities of an artful empathic learning ecology. Artful and empathic learning ecologies contain the performative elements identified in arts-based research. It is a learning ecology that accepts and welcomes diversity and has the capacity to support empathic knowing and empathic journeying. Artful performative acts embed the identities of both the art students and their teachers learning together. Artful empathy can be seen as operating in a shifting assemblage of meanings and possibilities. This article presents the idea of an *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* containing learning that sees an intersection between Lifeworld, Artworld, and Making meaning. An ecology with interrelational elements and authentic forums provides opportunities for young people to discuss aspects of their individual and shared lives inside and outside school. The *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology*, a finding of a multi-site case study across three Stage-5 Visual Arts studio classes in regional Australia, will be unpacked through both its theoretical lens and research outputs.

Rendering Artful and Empathic Learning Ecologies

The inquiry is positioned in a qualitative, ethnologically oriented, interpretive multi-site case study. Situated within the VA classroom, it was able to render, or depict, the performative and empathic capacities of arts-based VA studio learning as they emerged in student actions, words, and artmaking. The research sought to inquire as to whether the VA studio learning ecology could facilitate empathy.

As visual art educators, we had examined school environments and VA classrooms seeking evidence of empathic acts that might contribute to making school a safe space and lead to deeper relationships and improved academic outcomes (Fullchange, 2016). As researchers, we sought to explore this possibility

building from understandings that VA classrooms have an historical legacy of transformative practice embedded in the visual artmaking experience (Dewey, 1934). Past research has seen a clear articulation of VA learning and artmaking as sociocultural inquiry (Eisner, 1981, 2002) that fosters citizenship and democratic classroom relationships (Dewey, 1921, 1934). The learning has been described as fostering the conditions that incorporate an empathic understanding of self and world. There has been an assumption that empathy is another dimension of the Visual Arts curricula as it embeds identity or subjectivity work within its educational goals. Thus, it was assumed within the wider debate about student well-being in education that VA learning did indeed build empathic understandings through curriculum without a clear understanding of how. It was seen to provide the context for understanding difference via connections to students' Lifeworld and learning when making art. This inquiry has been built on the research antecedents of Eisner (1981, 2001) and Dewey (1921, 1934), who conceptualized the role of artmaking as socioculturally and sociopolitically situated. These conclusions have more recently been hypothesized as present when a student-centred and choice-based postmodern modern curriculum grounds artists' practice in engagement with materiality. To date, very few research projects (Jeffers, 2008, 2009) have been carried out from the perspective of the naturally occurring conversations within the classroom during and about art making, as student artists explore the liminality of becoming empathic. This research grounded in VA performative and co-constructed learning spaces has sought to extend previous notions of empathic learning in the VA classroom and go where very few studies have ventured. The inquiry moved beyond the aims and rationales of curriculum and the purposeful teacher-directed pedagogical imparting of ideas about what it is to be empathic (Bullough, 2019; Franzese, 2017; Gair, 2011; Warren & Lessner, 2014), to an investigation of how empathy dwells and has resonance within a VA studio learning ecology.

In the context of this inquiry, artful empathy is presented as dwelling within VA making processes and its material knowing. It is presented as emergent from within the performative complex self-assemblage praxis of student artists when they talk about and make art. "Performative" is defined in this study as the receptive/aesthetic, and expressive/embodied, artmaking responses of learners that can be seen as representing events artfully. The artful event is connected to a sense or experience of becoming self (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013). It emerges in the intra and inter affective production of Art (Semetsky, 2010, 2011). Artful knowing can therefore be seen as learning, as a journeying, co-constructed between teacher and student, student to student, emergent within VA studio pedagogies and individual lifeworld learning. An artful learning ecology goes beyond the idea of a biological ecology to embrace the notion of a classroom as an aspect of a wider sociocultural world where living and thriving depends on our abilities to be adaptive (Valera et al., 2017). The concept of ecology is applied to describe the VA studio teaching and learning landscape where interrelated elements within multiple relationships occur in its complex sociocultural and educational terrain.

Articulating the differentiation between the well-known VA classroom and an *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology*, emerged at the core of the inquiry. Therefore, it is important to unpack the interrelated assemblages that transcend the boundaries of the classroom as a teaching space. This lies at the heart of the overarching research project and the focus guiding the inquiry. The inquiry considered data collected as relational elements of VA learning across three different VA classroom contexts.

The Inquiry

The VA studio classrooms used in this research were ethics approved inquiry sites and were purposely selected as examples of good practice (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). Learning sites had similar characteristics, such as having a high profile in the school and a robust Creative and Performing Arts Department. The participants were three consenting VA teachers who allowed the researcher to observe their classrooms and share the Visual Arts studies programs; two VA preservice teachers on placement; and 13 students from Stage 5 (ages 15-16 years). In order to capture the complexity of intersecting conversations within the VA classroom, the consenting student and teacher participants wore small MP4 recorders and lapel microphones during the artmaking classes. This enabled conversations to be gathered across the duration of the learning and between students and teachers who inevitably moved around the VA classroom. In addition, the researcher dwelt in the classroom for one lesson a week for 14, 12, and 10 weeks in the first, second, and third sites respectively, and situated themselves as a legitimate classroom member. When appropriate to do so, the researcher spoke to the students during the learning about their artmaking and joined in conversations. In addition, taking photographs of the learning throughout the lessons was permitted. This allowed candid moments of interactions and movement in the classroom to be captured. Images from Visual Art Diaries (VADs) in progress, student artworks, and classroom environments, were also captured. The rapport built with students guided the photographs taken as well as an understanding of the subtleties of student conversation. When assembled, the multiple ways the students and teachers engaged with the learning, such as being observers; active contributors to conversations; and co-constructors of the learning, were viewed as storied lenses. Teacher reflective voices were also significant for their capacity to relate to, and resonate with, the student voices and actions. This additional teacher voice provided authenticity to the insights into curriculum praxis and relationships between teachers and students in the VA studio classroom. Combined, the weaving together of these data sources informed the assemblages operating within the visual art *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* that emerged and were seen to facilitate empathic knowing.

In a final analysis phase of authentic truthfulness, photographs were selected by students and teachers, as stimulus and elicitation material for recorded reflective conversation interviews. During the interviews, teacher and student responses to selected photographs and reflections on VA learning were probed through an empathic, participatory researcher lens. The interrelational and aesthetic conversations in the classroom that occurred between students during artmaking were viewed as performative and co-constructed acts and as spaces where empathy may be found. In relation to claims of authenticity and truthfulness (Leavy, 2020), this study draws on crystallization as a postmodernist approach, presupposing that no ultimate truth exists “out there.” Instead, it posits that there are only multiple, or partial, truths authentically constructed by researchers (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).

Relationships between and within the data emerged as an *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* construct, which can be seen as assemblages bound by a concentration of affective expression and revealed through conversations and narrative voice. Within the construct, you can observe the interrelational play of the assemblage and the ecology’s key affordances. Thus, student artmaking can be seen as a learning self-assemblage. It is the core of becoming and is artfully and affectively experienced

(Deleuze & Guattari, 2013). These affordances facilitated through curriculum and pedagogy, relationships with peers, self, and world, are seen to value difference and inform the learning assemblages within an artful and empathic learning ecology.

The Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology Unpacked

The key finding of the inquiry was the concept of an *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* (Figure 1, below). It emerged as the researcher sought ways to render the interrelational elements of VA studio learning and how its performative affordances dwell in classrooms. The following section will unpack the concept of the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* through both its theoretical lens and performative perspectives via student learning examples. This conceptual model is one aspect of a wider study that sought evidence of empathy in Visual Arts artmaking classes.

Figure 1 depicts the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* and its interrelational affordances as the key elements of a VA studio learning environment. The *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* emerged from the spaces where student artists' Lifeworld, Artworld, and Making, coalesce in a learning environment that nurtures Artful Empathy. It must be viewed as a dynamic system, one of openness and tolerance, hence its representation as concentric circles with no start or finish within which the components all work together to varying intensities over time.

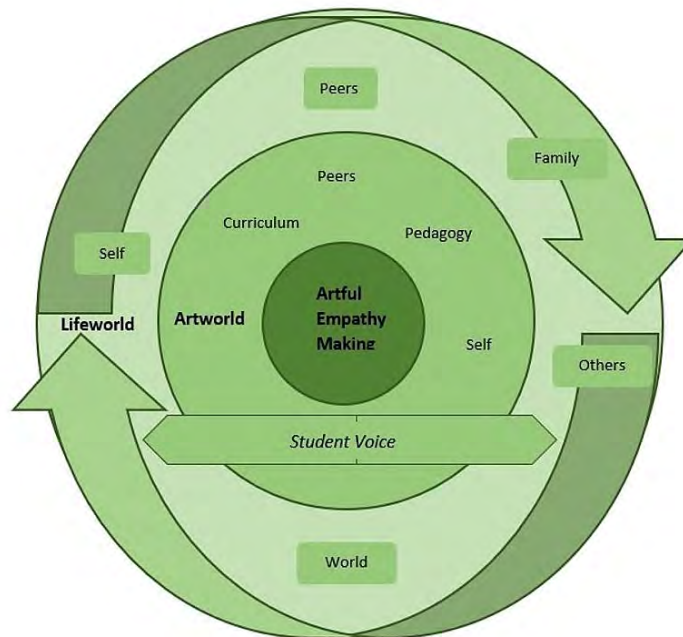


Fig. 1: Artful and empathic learning ecology.

Its key elements are:

Lifeworld (Outer circle). The broader aspects of students' lived experience occurring in their lives inside and outside school. They include: self, peers, family, others, and the world of all experiences, and embed complex diversity.

Artworld (next circle). The function of artists, artworks, the world, and audiences, as agencies within the Artworld which are considered and are connected to students' own artmaking. These agencies contribute to how they can interpret, explain, and perform self through art.

Artful Empathy Making (Inner heart). At its core is Artful Empathy. It reveals itself in the teaching and learning self-assemblage praxis of student artists, in conversation with and between peers and visual art teachers, as a journeying within co-constructed studio pedagogies. The images they make provide alternative modes for interpreting the world (Walton, 2012; Yunkaporta, 2009). They work with symbols and images to convey their own realities through means other than words (Barone & Eisner, 2011). Making performs Artful Empathy.

Empathy. Empathy is not static but is a complex process of becoming. Empathic knowing emerges, grows, and is modified according to the context with which the student artist engages. Empathic knowing in artmaking is a way of embodied knowing performed through each student's personal inquiry. It is emergent from the pedagogical relationships afforded in the VA studio classroom.

The Ecology. The concept of ecology to describe the VA studio teaching and learning landscape clarifies interrelated elements in the multiple relationships that occur in classrooms. It is an "interchange of closely related elements" (Genosko, 2009, p. 102). Guattari (2014) defines these ecological learning domains as environment, social relations, and human subjectivity. Knowledge across these elements is facilitated by relationships between teacher, student, and subject. The significance of this study is in the attention given to defining qualities of learning and making that centre Artful Empathy. These are characterized by two vital aspects of diversity, giving marginalized voices spaces to be heard in the relational conditions that exist for learning (Knutson et al., 2011). A visual art learning ecology is student-centred and appreciates that all learning is different and does not "conform to a standardized notion" (p. 327). Through acts of making, exhibiting, and critical discussion, as well as the use of symbols and metaphors, student artists create meaning in order to make sense of their world (Grushka, 2007a).

Evoking an Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology

Reflections on the data findings will be used to bring to life the elements of the ecology that draw on the theoretical and participant inquiry evidenced. On the outer limits is the Lifeworld, within it lies the Artworld found in the performative acts facilitated by curriculum and its pedagogies. Student artists' Lifeworld includes their relationships with family, friends, and peers, both inside and outside school, and functions as interrelated factors that inform students' worldviews.

VA studio pedagogy and curriculum promote intellectually and practically driven autonomous student practice. Across the three sites of the case study, the freedom for student artists to move around the classroom, undertake artworks of personal interest, and engage in conversations, which are both explicitly and tangentially linked, was central (Grushka, 2009). Empathic journeying dwelt within these conversations. Evoked through the interrelational spaces created by the Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology, tolerance for diversity and marginalized voices emerged as empathic journeying. Empathic journeying is a way of describing the learning within classroom conversations. Empathic journeying is moments of empathy displayed as caring actions, interactions, and conversations facilitated through the curriculum, pedagogy, and VA studio practice.

Artful and Empathic Learning: Lifeworld, Artworld, and Lived Experience in Making

Interrelational conversations in the VA studio classroom draw on and cross over many different aspects of students' Lifeworld. Recollections and references to life outside school covered many different aspects of students' lived experience. Conversations about past events emerged alongside discussions about a student's current mood and health, as well as aesthetic deliberations around the progression or completion of artworks. VA studio conversations saw student artists engage with their Lifeworld and experientially with the Lifeworld of their peers. In the following examples, student artists converse about one another's life outside school, referring to their own experience and experiences of friends and family members. The selection and investigation of subject matter is personally oriented and grounded in their social and political understanding of the world. The following images of student work and associated conversations and reflections; other fragments of captured conversations; and photographs of classroom learning; render moments of empathy in the VA studio learning ecology.

This extract (below) from a spontaneous classroom conversation, shows one student talking about a past experience, with an ambulance. This led to a peer recalling a similar ambulance story which they had also found to be a distressing event, as the person in their story was their father.

S2: So, he almost died, like, three times. It was very bad.

S1: Oh my God! (Classroom conversation, February 20, 2020)

The student (S1) responded to their peer's recollection by engaging with empathy to the distress expressed by her (S2) in the retelling of her story. These students engaged with empathy as they participated experientially in the lives of their peer, evoking memories of lived experiences through the retelling of stories. This included stories about being different and marginalized.

The interplay between Lifeworld, Artworld, and Making, that can articulate this feeling of difference, is demonstrated clearly in the following examples of one student's practice. Occurring during the reflective interview, the student selected their VAD cover illustration with excitement.

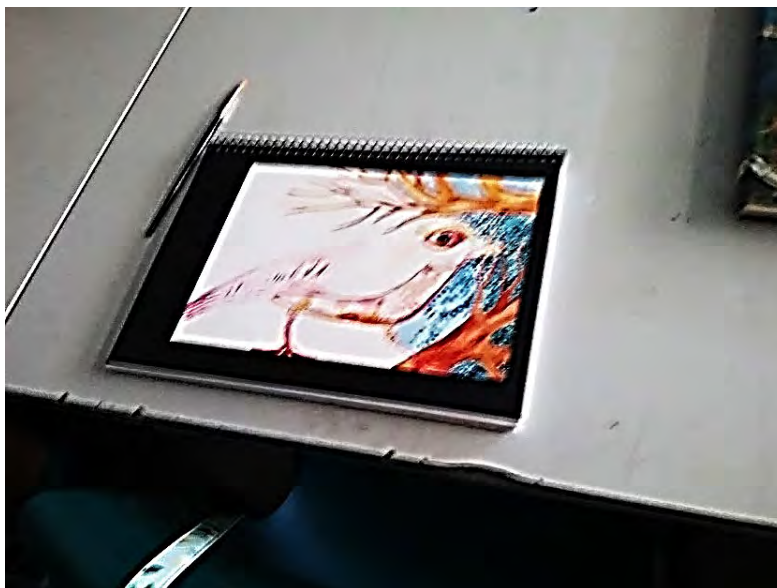


Fig. 2: *Associations with painting birds*. (Photograph of student Visual Art Diary.

Photograph by Shirley Clifton, February 27, 2017)

Shaniya reflected on how it evoked memories of time spent with their sister, and that these memories were further associated with their sexuality. This appeared to affirm Shaniya's identity as an individual and as a sister by engaging in self empathy (Sherman, 2014) and self-affirmation when recollecting painting birds with their sister.

Well, for starters this one, the reason why I did this for my cover is because I'm a part of the LGBTQ community, I am bisexual, so I found this, like, relating to me in some way. I don't know.

Like, this is the only image that I really wanted to make, like, to put onto my cover.

And I don't know why. Maybe because me and my sister, because my older sister is a lesbian, and we were painting birds but in rainbow.

And it just brought back to a lot of memories on that. (Student interview, October 9, 2020)

During the interview, Shaniya also reflected on the way in which they expressed their inner feelings, through making art. These connections were metaphorically shared with the researcher as Shaniya described painting bright flecks of colour on a dark background, juxtaposing their outer brightness with inner feelings of darkness and sorrow and of feeling marginalized.

Like, that's when I was using the darker colours on the canvas because that's how I was feeling. Because I like colours in art, but behind the scenes, I wasn't feeling that. And I put little things in my artworks that represent that, but it doesn't really seem like it. (Student interview, March 19, 2020)



Fig. 3: *Reflecting inner feelings in artmaking.* (Photograph of students in the VA classroom.

Photograph manipulated for the purposes of participant deidentification. Photograph by Shirley Clifton, February 20, 2019)

Shaniya expanded on this reflection referring to another image from their VAD. The image chosen was the head and shoulders of a female figure with a rose in place of the mouth and thorns twisting down around the neck of the figure (Figure 4).

And I always felt like I couldn't say anything, because I thought it was normal. I thought, like, the fighting was normal, the screaming and yelling every night was normal. And then when I came to school, it was all different. I'm, like, well, it seems like I am the only one that suffers this? So, I always felt like my mouth was overgrown with stuff that I couldn't say. That's why there's a rose growing out of her mouth. (Student interview, October 9, 2020)



Fig. 4: *Couldn't speak.* (Photograph of student Visual Art Diary. Photograph by Shirley Clifton, February 20, 2019)

Shaniya’s story, shown in these examples, establishes how Visual Arts learning provides authentic contexts for students to explore and reflect on their identity, relationships with others, and place in the world. Such deeply personal interrogations of subject matter and feelings are afforded by student centred curriculum content and pedagogical decisions. In the research, critical case studies were selected by teachers with sensitivity so that they resonated with the direction of the class’s thinking. Teachers displayed an open tolerance for difference while focusing on a particular artist and technique or, by exploring art movements across time with relevance to the overarching themes emerging in students’ work. These are professional decisions and, as such, they provide opportunities for student artists to not only articulate personal stories, but to also empathize with the stories of historical figures, places, and events, and indeed the ideas of the artist themselves, affirming the importance and depth of the artists’ ideas.

Artful Empathy: Student Artists as Social and Political Commentators

Observations of student VADs illustrate empathic and reflexive engagement with people, social figures, issues, and events, that students selected as their subject matter. One such example is a student who chose Marilyn Monroe as subject matter. In a classroom conversation, Daisy responded to a query as to why Marilyn Monroe had been selected as a case study for portraiture. Daisy described how they viewed the Marilyn Monroe story to be such a sad one because the actress was so famous and regarded as a sex symbol, yet never seemed to have been happy. There is also intrigue and controversy surrounding the famous actress’s death, which is the aspect of Marilyn Monroe that was emphasized in the work. The contradiction between the actress’s public image and her poor mental health in private life, together with unanswered questions surrounding her tragic death, drew Daisy to the story. It was evident to us that Daisy engaged reflexively and empathically with the tragedy in Marilyn’s life that was accentuated by unresolved questions surrounding her death.



Fig. 5: *Marylin conceptual and practical development VA diary entry.*
(Photograph of student Visual Art Diary. Photograph by Shirley Clifton, November 6, 2017)

The image repeats, and the student artist reflects on their interests, lived experience, and ways of interacting with the world.

In the work of another student, political commentary was evident. In a classroom conversation the teacher remarked on and affirmed the validity of the political content in the student's work. The work addressed the plight of refugees on Manus Island.

The Classroom Teacher: Oh I love the division of the mottos. Oh my god that's great.
S1: So, I'm going to do it probably down here. Freedom, no freedom and then up here we're going to do...
The Classroom Teacher: Look at you. I love the concept.
S1: And I'm going to put boats and put Manus.
The Classroom Teacher: Yeah.
S1: And so down the bottom...
The Classroom Teacher: Is it Manus? Manus Island?
S1: Yeah and I'm going to put down the bottom no freedom.
The Classroom Teacher: That's awesome. Good job Manny.
(Classroom conversation, September 11, 2017)

Thus, the focus shifts to artists as social and political commentators, as the student artists engage with broader social and political issues. Such engagement acknowledges the role of student artists as agents of change (Finley, 2005, 2008; Krznaric, 2008) who challenge, question, and (re)represent real world events and issues as artefacts.

Lifeworld and Making: Family as Subject Matter

VA studio practice can also support grounding self in familial connections, which were strongly represented as subject matter. Bobbi's preference for sketching is a deeply embodied practice embedded in their awareness of self and memories of childhood. During interview, Bobbi talked about how they are particularly fond of sketching with pencil. They selected an image from their VAD that was a portrait sketch of Rihanna, a popular singer. The sketch was a preliminary work for an oil painting that was the assessable item. Bobbi stated that while happy with their sketch, they were disappointed in the oil painting, explaining that they preferred working with pencil because it held strong associations with their grandfather. There is a clear link between memory and medium in Bobbi's artmaking practice. The obvious enjoyment in sketching and the association of the practice with their grandfather were important to Bobbi, and through memories taking material form in artmaking, enhanced their well-being by empathically engaging with fond memories.



Fig. 6: *Intersection of memory and medium*. (Photograph of student Visual Art Diary.
Photograph by Shirley Clifton, November 1, 2017)

Researcher: So what made you proud of it?

Bobbi: I just thought it was really good, to be honest, I didn't get a good mark in it, but I thought it was great. I like drawing with lead pencil more than anything else. Well, the reason I got into it, is when I was little, my pop used to draw all the time like all the time, and I liked to draw with him, and my mum was like 'you've got like his talent' and he never did it as his profession, he just did it as a hobby, he was like very good at it, he never traced anything, Nan had this tray with these trees on it and he literally just sat there and like drew it and I was like 'that's cool', and then I tried to do it and then I have kept doing it and doing it. Yeah, I was very close to him because my nan was a cleaner so she would work, and me and him would like go shopping, and I'd always get two chocolates, and I'd always get the same chocolates – and then come home and then he'd like draw, and I'd like watch him. (Student interview, November 6, 2017)

This example clearly demonstrates how embodied VA practice incorporates the Lifeworld of student artists. Similarly, during another artmaking task which was a portraiture assignment, Shaniya chose their sister as the subject matter. Students were tasked with creating a realistic portrait of a family member or someone that they knew personally and well, and was a significant figure in their lives. Shaniya chose to do a portrait of their sister as someone with whom they have a deep connection, and who is a person of significance to them. The VA studio learning environment allows Shaniya to articulate inner musings, and honour and acknowledge significant relationships in a supportive, safe space. Indeed, without the teacher's assistance, Shaniya may not have been able to successfully achieve the project concept in the portraiture task. Shaniya found it challenging to attain the correct shading when sketching the portrait, so the teacher demonstrated how to identify the light source and shadows in the photograph, and apply them to the working sketch.

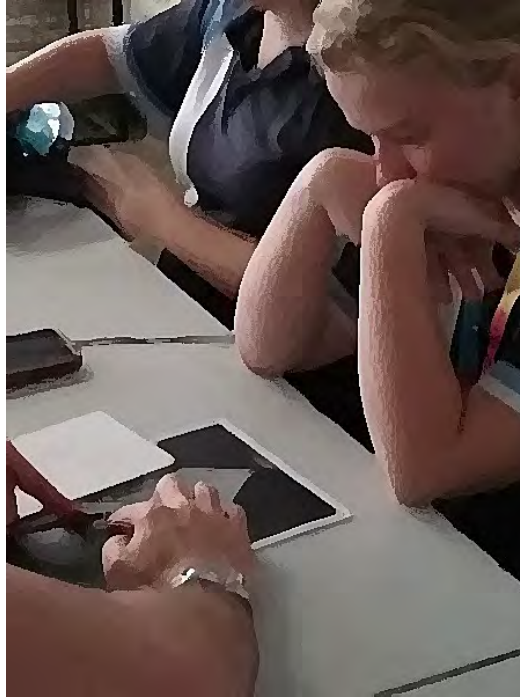


Fig. 7: Finding the shadows. (Photograph of student and teacher in the VA classroom.

Photograph manipulated for the purposes of participant deidentification. Photograph by Shirley Clifton, March 12, 2020)

In the image the despondency of the student is visible, but the teacher honours the lived experience of the student knowing that the artmaking journey is as much about articulating and resolving personal dilemmas as it is about making a resolved artwork. He is explicitly showing the student how to identify the shadows and light source of the source photograph, gently persisting until they understand.

The Classroom Teacher: Well, look where it is. It's under the collar bone, it's here, it's under the chin, down the side of her face. See, that's quite distinct shadow there, so all the shadows are on this side, really. Isn't it?

Shaniya: Mmm.

The Classroom Teacher: So that would say maybe the light came at, not front on but this way.

Shaniya: Mmm. Maybe.

The Classroom Teacher: Well, that's what it looks like to me. It's much, much darker on this side, so this is the side for your predominant shading. So that side is going to be darker. See how that's darker?

Shaniya: Yeah...and here on the face...it comes round. (Classroom conversation, March 12, 2020)

The image below (Figure 8) is from the portraiture project too. Here, Charlie chose to develop a portrait of a close friend nursing their niece.



Fig. 8: *Caring for family*. (Photograph of student Visual Art Diary. Photograph by Shirley Clifton, November 1, 2017)

The photograph selected for the portrait was carefully chosen to show a deep sense of caring. It privileges the importance of family relationships and reflects the student's cultural values.

The selection of subject matter in *Making* is a pivotal intersection of Lifeworld, Artworld, and lived experience in the VA studio practice of student artists where portraiture features significantly (Grushka, 2007b).

The Relational and Aesthetic Conversations: Tolerating Difference and Supporting Each Other

In the conversations between students, the student artists offered advice and support for each other. In the examples selected, the focus has been on being different, being apart. Students and teacher support ranged from their artmaking decisions to empathic perspectives of caring for their peers, acknowledging difference. The empathic co-construction of learning becomes normalized as feelings and relationships are shared while journeying together. Making art sees the students co-construct and enact empathic meanings. Conversations took the form of negotiating ideas between one another and providing aesthetic advice. These conversations in the classroom are demonstrated in the following exchanges. The first is in the context of developing an artwork through aesthetic decision-making.

S1: Should I add like an eyelid? I have to make it look bigger.

S2: Oh yeh...that'd be so good!

S1: I'm not using that idea, but...

S2: You should do that... (Classroom conversation, August 26, 2016)

The second is a conversation where one student artist links the aesthetic quality of mood in their artwork to the mood in the artwork of their peer as relational and complementary.

S1: Oh my God, it's like this was what they looked like when they were alive and then yours is what they looked when they were dead.

S2: Mine are pretty dark too.

S1: Yeah, and mine's like darker so that's like a mirror image of life and death.

S2: Yeah. And mine's, like, lighter. So, that's, like, a mirror image of life and death.

S3: God, that is so cool.

S2: Ours is a mirror image of life and death. (Classroom conversation, December 5, 2019)

This exchange establishes a relationship between the two artworks that is embraced by both students and admired by their peer. These connections facilitate close relationships between student artists, and together they co-construct a shared understanding about the meanings being communicated.

Artful Empathy: Caring as the Heart of Practice

In the very heart of the ecology is caring and tolerance. Artful Empathy emerges in the intra- and inter-subjectivities of student artists, and their shared meaning making. Intra- and inter-affective actions, interactions, conversations, and reflections, authenticate student artists' caring for self, others, and the world. Empathy occurs in the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* as student artists are making and appreciating their own artworks and the artworks of others. The performative possibilities or potentials are evidenced in the art-based learning of students, as artefacts, their conversations of becoming, and their continuous reflections as voice.

The *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* shows the learning assemblages that make up the ecology. There is always movement and flow, where student artists are creating and embody being as becoming empathic. The interrelational affordances draw together students' lived experience of the world; relationships with friends and family embedded in the intra- and inter-affective conversations during artmaking; and relational and aesthetic conversations about artworks; that are intrinsic to VA studio practice.

Student Voice: Self and Others in Making

The VA classroom is an environment which affords opportunities for students to refine their own ideas through ongoing conversations with teachers, peers, family members, and friends (Grushka, 2007a). Critically, it also provides opportunities, through the process of artmaking as embodied practice, to engage personally, culturally, and socially with the worldviews of others. Authentic conversations occurring in this space therefore embody essential truths about students' experience of the world and their relationships with each other, albeit that they remain processual and in constant flux. In line with Dewey's (1934) notion of "assertability," the concept of truth is operationalized, linked "to practices and processes of inquiry, focusing less on what truth is and more on what truth does" (Capps, 2018, p. 39). It allows the students to journey in and through their lived world.

Devised through an artful and empathic inquiry lens, the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* centres the performative act of Making. It is here that Artful Empathy emerges in the intra (VADs) and inter (classroom and interview) reflective voice of student artists. These authentic renderings of empathy are made possible due to the empathic relationships developed between the researcher, as an authentic member of the classroom community, and participants. Through an empathic ethnologically oriented approach to being in the site, the subtle and intimate nuances of actions, interactions, and naturally occurring conversations during artmaking classes, were able to be closely observed and documented. Exploration of self and world are performed through performative acts as artefactual evidence, identified and revealed as artful empathy, enacted through and, dwelling within, visual forms. Being artful is not the exclusive domain of learning in the Visual Arts and has traction beyond the VA classroom, wherever students are afforded the conditions of Artful and Empathic learning.

Artful and Empathic Learning: Resonance Across Disciplines

An artful and empathic lens is presented as attainable for all students when one takes a broader view of the classroom, beyond a VA curriculum learning context. The *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* presented was identified in a VA classroom context, but essentially empathic connections are shaped through aesthetic and embodied practice via performative acts (Deleuze, 2005). All learning can be performative if it centres the student and their authentic learning.

The ecology's interrelational affordances are about an empathic journeying and have the capacity to resonate with teaching and learning in other curriculum areas where the space between individual, society, and the environment, combine in the learning, whether it be Science or History. In the ecology there is a flattening of the teacher-student hierarchy, which nurtures a tolerance for difference facilitated through the pedagogies present in artful and empathic learning. Artful and Empathic learning ecologies facilitate student artists' empathic engagement with each other and provide a context for diverse voices to be heard. The student voices present here articulate inner sadness; give voice to past trauma; engage empathically with famous figures and contemporary political events; work with fond memories; and affirm collective, cultural, and gender identity. Providing authentic forums that give form to this diversity and marginalization require the kinds of pedagogies that are present within the interrelated elements of the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology*. Student-centred and co-constructed teaching and learning practices provoke personal and collective insights that support student well-being and continuing engagement in education.

If the affordances are reflected upon in a sincere way by teachers, it will encourage student agency to create thoughtful informed citizens ready to empathically respond to marginalization and act on the world to make change. The discipline areas and their pedagogies all have a contribution to make towards developing empathic students and nurturing environments for individual and collective well-being. Empathic learning ecologies, which will have unique discipline resonance, can afford all students opportunities to:

- i) link their learning with their lifeworld through everyday actions and interactions (Habermas, 1984) while sharing conversations with teachers and peers;
- ii) support learning by valuing enacted and embodied insight;
- iii) experience inclusive classroom cultures through bodily engagement that responds to lived experience, with aesthetic and expressive openness;
- iv) to articulate personal inquiry as embodied through performative inter-subjectively communicated acts; and
- v) render a self-assemblage praxis at the core of becoming artfully and affectively experienced.

These core affordances stimulate expressive experimentation realized through subjective thought and experience as performative actions for learning.

Conclusion

Authentic VA learning experiences establish meaningful relationships between students and teachers where empathy emerges as a state of artful becoming via interactions and reflections. The capacity for VA education to provide aesthetic learning experiences that embed the conditions to support the well-being of young people in schools is conceptualized as the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology*. It is a learning space where Lifeworld, Artworld, and Making create the conditions where empathic actions and interactions are made possible. In spaces where adolescent vulnerabilities are articulated in conversations and through performative actions, student artworks emerge with communicative potential that can speak poignantly to feeling different or marginalized.

Artful and empathic inquiry has emerged as a conceptual and empathic metaphorical lens for the researcher. Through careful observations and attention to conversations and student voices, empathic journeying was performed through making. The ecology has affordances that emerged through the research process that were seen to support well-being for young people in schools. There are no spaces for teacher hierarchies—simply spaces for sharing and co-constructing meanings together. This research approach recognizes the criticality of student agency to foster deep learning and engaging learning experiences that incorporate student's Lifeworld in curriculum for the development of the whole child. Investigations of applications of the *Artful and Empathic Learning Ecology* to diverse education contexts would be relevant across the full spectrum of education from preschool to primary and secondary, as well as tertiary education endeavours, if learning is seen as holistic and builds empathic relationships in the classroom and with the world.

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