

Conceptual Questing: A doctoral methodological journey to music artography (a/r/tography)

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Thesis title: Polyphonic voices in the storied rhizome: An opera of 'becoming' music educators

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Abstract

Music teachers are pivotal to the future of music education and the value of the arts in society. Centrally important is the professional identity of music teachers, expressed through enacted pedagogical and curricular content.

This inquiry investigated professional identity development in ten early career music teachers through an exploration of their beliefs, knowledges and experiences in and about music and music education. Using an a/r/tographic conceptual approach informed by Deleuzoguattarian rhizomic philosophies, the participants' individual journeys of 'becoming music teacher' were storied and re-storied, curated into seven research plateaus. As researcher, the work evolved to be partially autobiographical. The thesis is presented as opera (opus, plural), mapped to guide the reader through the work. Musical and gardening metaphors are pervasive throughout the work. Arts works, both visual and musical, are embedded, not 'as' research, but to explain the research.

What emerged was multifaceted. Unanimously, the participants felt their identity as a musician was important to their sense of self and that being a practising musician/composer was central to becoming an authentic music educator. Early epistemic beliefs are central to teacher practices and in-school experiences either reinforced or challenged the development of professional identity and impacted longevity in the profession.

I have recently completed a PhD that examined professional identity formation in ten early career music teachers (those in the first five years of their teaching practice). Conceptual Questing, my methodological/conceptual section, or opus, of the thesis was literally an exploratory journey into and through various methodological, philosophical and conceptual spaces that eventually led me into a/r/tography.

Engagement with a/r/tography in arts-based research is increasing in popularity as researchers see the possibilities and flexibility that this conceptual approach offers. However, as a musician, a/r/tography is difficult to approach. I am one of only

a handful of PhD music-teacher-researchers who, at the current time, have employed artography (a/r/tography) in their research. Here, I briefly outline artography (a/r/tography) and explain why I express them differently.

A/r/tography, artography

As a more recent arts-based research concept, a/r/tography (artist/researcher/teacher-ography) is not as easily known or understood as other conceptual frameworks. A/r/tography enables the merging of art-works, including music, with text: "knowing, doing and making" (Irwin & Springgag, 2008). Working through six iterative and affective

'renderings' (openings, living inquiry, contiguity, metaphor/metonymy, reverberance and excess) affords the researcher time to explore their own place within the research. As Gouzouasis (2007) explains, "renderings are the ways that *artistresearcherteachers* look at research data to make sense of the world" (p. 34). Prendergast, Gouzouasis, Leggo and Irwin (2009) further explain that practicing while rendering "through artistic processes that are holistically experienced – [researchers] relish in the untold stories of the messiness of the research process that often parallels creative processes" (p. 312).

Although generally expressed as a/r/tography, Gouzouasis (2013), as a musician "removed the slants from the term artography as a symbolic gesture" (p. 4) of living as *musicianresearcherteacher*. In my research I also adopted his approach as it resonated with me as a musician-artographer, so for the rest of this article I will remove the slants when discussing music artography.

The following sections outline the background to the study, explain my conceptual quest to find a methodological home for the inquiry and discuss artography as a conceptual space for the study. Finally, I will discuss future possibilities for music researchers in artography.

Background to the study

At the beginning of the research journey I intended to conduct ethnographic case studies, which positioned me 'outside' the inquiry as the observer-researcher. However, while collecting data through interviews I found that I was enmeshed into the research, not only as researcher but also as musician and teacher. So began a journey through several methodological and conceptual ideas to find a space that worked for my PhD project.

With music teachers being centrally important to the practice of music education, I wanted to uncover how the beliefs, knowledges and experiences of early career music teachers contributed to the development of their professional identities. I had initially embarked on this line of inquiry to inform

my work at the time, in initial teacher education with secondary music specialists. Working in this space I had found that many pre-service teachers had only experienced a limited range of musics and musical ideas. I also found that their perceptions about music and what was important in music education appeared to have been formed early in their lives, and these beliefs impacted their curricular and pedagogical choices.

The current trend in music teacher education in Australia is for prospective music teachers to study a tertiary undergraduate specialist music degree and then move on to a post-graduate teaching degree. With the influence of tertiary musician training as either musician or composer dominant, I found that identity 'as musician' was a significant influence on professional identity as a teacher. This also appeared to impact choices as to why trained musicians were choosing to become music teachers, and what kind of teachers they saw themselves as becoming.

At this early point in the research the methodological plan was to conduct ethnographic case studies (Stake, 1995) to find how early career music teachers enacted their classroom practice. I thought this would be straightforward and would elicit the kind of data that I was aiming to collect. I had already decided to work in a purely qualitative space, conducting interviews and observing classroom teaching practice. However, I felt a constant dissonance about the direction of the project. The more I discussed this with my supervisors, the more I realised that rather than look at what music teachers 'do' in the classroom, I wanted to uncover what 'makes' a music teacher. I knew anecdotally from my own experiences directing music departments, teaching music in schools and from talking with music education peers that the music programs are deeply connected to the core educational and musical values of the people designing and directing them. It was at this point that the direction of my research shifted.

In looking for information about professional identity development in early career music teachers I explored a range of literature concerning pre-service

teachers (including Richards & Killen, 2013; Mills & Ballantyne, 2010; Uptis, 2012; Schmidt, 2013), early career teachers (Conway, 2015) and teacher identity (Ballantyne & Zhukov, 2017; Carrillo, Baguley & Vilar, 2015). However, I could not find specific research into how enculturation, experiences or knowledges contributed to early career music teacher identity development. Out of this exploration of literature my main research question was developed: *How do the beliefs, knowledges and experiences of early career music teachers contribute to their emerging professional identities as music educators?*

I invited ten early career music teachers as participants. All were graduates of the teacher-education program that I was then lecturing in. They had come into the course with various musical backgrounds and, since graduating, were working in diverse education settings. I conducted a series of interviews with each participant, at different stages of their early years of teaching. The data I collected was rich, and as I listened to their responses to my questions and heard the data as stories, also recognising my own stories 'as music educator' reflected in their words.

So began the process of me stepping 'inside' the research. This meant that my original methodological choice was not going to give me the scope that I needed to conduct the research. And so I embarked on a journey that took me to many methodological/conceptual places. As I explored the different ideas I developed my concept of the *storied rhizome* that became a framework for the written thesis. My conceptual quest lasted for almost the whole research journey, eventually 'landing' in artography as a musician.

The quest for a methodological 'home'

Recognising how one 'fits' into the academic world is not always straightforward. As researcher, I initially tried to follow more traditional methodological frameworks, however it was like wearing odd shoes, uncomfortable and dissonant. However, the quest always moved in the direction in which the study flowed, a process I found enlightening, problematic

and slippery. Here, I outline the various philosophical, methodological and conceptual ideas that I engaged with on my way to music artography.

After abandoning ethnographic case study as a methodology I looked into narrative inquiry and design (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2006; Leggo, 2008), but I felt that I needed to show the diversity and complexity of the participants' stories so changed direction towards the Deleuzeoguattarian (1987) rhizome. I investigated botanical ideas of survival and avoidance, growth and opportunity, exploration and creativity but later set them aside. I drew pictures, made artworks and took photographs to explain the rhizomic nature of the inquiry to myself. At times, I 'sang' the research.

I discovered writing about storying and re-storying, which resonated because I was collecting stories from my participants and bringing their stories "into being" (Flood, 2014, p. 14) through the process of re-telling (Clandinin, 2006; Coleman, 2017; Flood, 2014). I also found myself embedded into the research through my own stories, experiences, beliefs and knowledges, examining myself alongside the participants, re/tracing both my past and current life/lives as a musician/teacher.

As the project progressed I became ever more deeply positioned within the research as storyteller and re-teller. This combined conceptual approach of rhizome entangled with narrative became the 'storied rhizome', an assemblage of collected and curated stories (Coleman, 2017) reflecting the developing professional identities of my ten participants in their "lines of becoming" (Johansson, 2016, p. 446). As the work developed, it also emerged as being partially autobiographical.

The storied rhizome

The storied rhizome, as a methodological concept, evolved through the research process. I had encountered the philosophical rhizome in the writing of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) several years earlier. As a gardener, I understood the complexities and multiplicities of the concept, having spent many years battling the botanical rhizomic weed, *rumex*

acetosella or sheep sorrel. I knew its habit, growth and underground world of interconnected roots and runners. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe the rhizome as being multiplicitous and non-hierarchical, having “neither beginning nor end but always a middle.... with multiple entryways” (p. 21). In this, the rhizome is quite different to more traditional dominant ontological models (Garlter, 2018), with Jorgensen and Yob (2013) describing it as “organic... amorphous, promiscuous, even chaotic” (p. 38).

“The rhizomatic journey is not the urban trudging along a concrete pavement but, rather, a trail that may connect to other trails, diverge around blockages or disappear completely” (Honan, 2007, p. 535). As a philosophical concept the rhizome with its lines of flight allowed me to explore and map the participants’ stories in a multiplicitous, non-linear way showing individualistic directions within the data. This enabled flexibility, showing congruence and multiplicity in the participants’ identity development journey. I could see that the data/stories I was collecting in the interviews were creating a more fluid model of thinking, resonating with my own stories. There was congruence and diversity in the storied data that reflected the Deleuzoguattarian (1987) idea of *lines of flight*, a connected aspect of rhizomic movement.

Lines of flight and entanglement

Botanically, rhizomic plants produce roots and runners that enable reproduction or new manifestation. These can be disconnected from the main root system and continue to flourish. Borrowing from the botanical model, Deleuze and Guattari (1987), as translated from the original French, described this as ‘flight’ or ‘escape,’ “the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking and disappearing into the distance” (Massumi, in Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. xvi). These *lines of flight*, having unpredictable rhizomic allowances for moving and multiplying in diverse directions (Semetsky, 2008) opened possibilities for me in conceptual thinking for the thesis. The participants’ stories showed diversity, similarity and individual movement. While

the multiplicitous diversity of the rhizome offered practical possibilities in the writing, I was not yet able to see how this could be applied into my conceptual thinking for the study.

Later I found the writings of Ingold (2007) on lines and entanglement, which included links to storytelling and music. Similarly to *lines of flight*, Ingold (2007) described entanglement as a “meshwork of interwoven lines – there are no insides or outsides, only openings and ways through” (p. 103). This further explained my storied data, leading me to explore narrative and storying.

Narrative, storying, re-storying, recursive re-storying

Leggo (2012) says, “We are awash with stories” (p. xiii), while Wolcott (1994) suggests that the distinguishing feature of a qualitative researcher is to be a storyteller, with a plot and characters. While I briefly explored narrative inquiry as a methodology, I abandoned this and instead followed narrative as method, in the form of storying. In the transcription and distilling of my storied data I uncovered the power of the participants’ stories. I was drawn to the purpose and context of these (Trahar, 2009) and how they gave understanding and meaning to both my life and the participants’ lives (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008). As musicians and music teachers we story and re-story, narratively and musically, with no fixed starting or finishing points (Andrews et al., 2008). My own relationship to the world has always been centrally connected to stories and as a teacher, my musical and life stories became resonant (Bolden, 2017), guiding my practices (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999).

Flood’s (2014) writing on life stories in narrative research included the idea of threads and how stories collected through narrative research are re-told, with the researcher holding the responsibility of re-telling or re-storying as authentically as possible (Coleman, 2017; Stipl, 2014; Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In following this path I developed a method that I called *recursive re-storying*: the cycle of re-visiting, re-telling and

re-fining the participants' data as stories. In the re-telling I found myself propelled into the study as the participants' stories resonated with my own stories as child, student, musician and teacher.

In exploring related conceptual ideas I found the post qualitative writings of St. Pierre (2011), Lather (2013), Lather and St. Pierre (2013) and the idea that the post qualitative researcher could "imagine and accomplish an inquiry that might produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently" (Lather, 2013, p. 653). While this particularly engaged me I found that I did not belong in that conceptual space either and so I continued the search for my conceptual 'home'.

A/r/tography

I had known about a/r/tography for some time, and I continued to revisit a/r/tographic writing. Within this the rhizome constantly appeared entangled with ideas of mapping, cartography (Irwin, 2013; Masny, 2013) and 'becoming' (Honan, 2007; Masny, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Masny's (2013) suggestion that stories and literature are connected, disconnected, threaded together, a cartography of and for becoming linked to a/r/tographic ideas of 'becoming a/r/tography' and a/r/tographic practice-based research and its relationship with the rhizome as explored by a collaborative of a/r/tographers (Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong & Bickel, 2006). I also explored the wonderfully creative digital thesis of Coleman (2016) that used the metaphor of Alice in Wonderland and the rabbit hole, reflective of rhizomic movement.

Music a/r/tographers were difficult to locate. However, most influential on my thinking was the work of musician-artographer Peter Gouzouasis (2006, 2013). He outlined musical perspectives of artographic renderings (Gouzouasis, 2006) and identified that music is largely missing from the academic discussion of 'performance' (Gouzouasis, 2007). In identifying that music research "is perhaps one of the oldest forms of research in the fields of psychology and education" (2007, p. 55) Gouzouasis

also highlighted that "it seems to be mired in traditional forms of academic discourse" (p. 55). With a/r/tographic colleagues, he discussed "the politics of music education research, and the suffocating orthodoxy on what constitutes research in our profession" (Gouzouasis et al., 2014, pp. 2-3) and this resonated with me.

Researcher as artographer

After reading, Gouzouasis (2013) approach to music as research, as musician-creator, re-creator and interpreter and applying musical tonality as a research metaphor, and the work of Bakan (2013, 2014) and his use of song to explore a/r/tography, I felt the affect of the *musicianresearcherteacher*. I discovered theses that explored arts-based research in the music education space: Yanko's (2021) artographic thesis in which he posits "that available research epistemologies in music education are neither progressive nor avant-garde" (p. 22); Lee's (2004) storied investigation of musician to teacher identities; Bakan's (2014) exploration of songs and stories as ways of theorising music education research; and Ryu's (2017) inquiry into piano teaching in which she discusses "never-ending stories" (p. 28) and the constant process of becoming. With/in these sites of practice I found a research community with whom I resonated and I finally stepped inside, becoming musician-researcher-teacher within the artographic space.

Renderings of a/r/tography

As mentioned earlier, there are six renderings of a/r/tography: openings, living inquiry, metaphor/metonymy, contiguity, reverberations and excess (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005). As an arts-based methodology "situated outside traditional research structures" (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019, n.p.) these renderings opened a new way for me of seeing myself as re-searcher.

Openings: On the conceptual quest there were many openings. I had explored qualitative ethnographic case study methodology and methods

and found comfort in Greener's book *Designing social research: A guide for the bewildered* (2011) consequently changing my research focus. I was seduced by the rhizome and drawn into ideas of entanglement (Ingold, 2007). I was intrigued by narrative inquiry methodology and methods, drawn into storying and enlightened through re-storying. I uncovered concepts of post-qualitative inquiry and onto-epistemology, but they did not 'fit' the research.

For a long time I skirted around a/r/tography but as a musician I was troubled by that space. At first I thought it was exclusively for visual artist-researcher-teachers. Anecdotally I had known they are good at creating cultural spaces for themselves. Despite having a strong performing background and self-concept as a musician, I still felt an outsider in the a/r/tographic space and so stayed 'outside'. Unless recorded, as musicians our art and practice as artists exists only in the moment that it occurs. Music has intangibility and temporal meaning. It exists in the memory and emotional recollections for both performer and listener. Although 'invited in' to the a/r/tographic space I felt that I was an imposter, and it took a long time for me to recognize myself as an artographer. I believe this is common for musicians because our artist sensibilities are different to those of other arts forms.

In my thesis artographic openings are seen in the lines of flight, plateaus, artworks and mappings of my research. Rhizomic movements, polyphonic stories and musical and garden metaphors act as entryways, pathways, convergent collection points and divergent explorations and storied openings that created places of collection, connection, slipperiness and understanding.

Excess: Rather than the more traditional interpretation of excess, a/r/tographers use it to propel change. "Excess provides opportunities for complexity and deeper understanding; it is open, pliable, and in constant change. Excess, thus, questions not simply material substances but also how things come into being, the philosophical nature of existence and meaning making" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 908). Excess was the basis

of movement in my research. This was particularly relevant to my quest, as researcher, to music artography as a conceptual 'home'. Part of the work of a/r/tography is in the doing, the rendering of data. In this research the writing became the analysis, a reflective and reflexive process where stories met in combination with image art-making, music writing and mapping. Storying as method was not only used to tell and re-tell storied data but also to analyse the data. The reflective, reiterative, analytic process of telling and re-telling, which I called recursive restorying, was centrally important as analysis, becoming the fabric of the thesis.

Contiguity: The connections of contiguity are reflected in the concurrent existence of artist, teacher and researcher as a/r/tographer.

Gouzouasis (2007) works in music as research, performing and creating music, emphasising the need for music to inform and be informed by research. He describes his research community as "Storying the story, living poetically and performing research" (p. 7). In one example he explains the process of his first performative research ensemble with Rita Irwin, Carl Leggo and Kit Grauer. I found this liberating and explored it further (Gouzouasis, 2007; Gouzouasis, Irwin, Miles & Gordon, 2013; Gouzouasis & Bakan, 2018). Looking through this lens I could see the performative contiguity of music and storying in my research.

Living inquiry: "A/r/tography is an inquiring process that lingers in the liminal spaces between *a(artist)* and *r(researcher)* and *t(teacher)*... to make sense and create meaning out of difficult and complex questions that cannot be answered in straightforward or linear tellings" (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005, p. 902). In this, teaching becomes artistic practice. The teacher 'becomes' performer, both in and outside the classroom.

As musician, music teacher, teacher educator, researcher and storyteller my own stories and identity were entwined into the questioning and writing. As a result I found myself the 'I' in the rhizome. Although I have been engaged in music practice and teaching for many years longer than

the participants, we were all connected as musicians and educators, our experiences and stories entwined together (Aliyu, Singry, Adamu & Abubakar, 2015). Clarke and Parsons (2013) postulate that in conducting research the researcher is changed, learning about themselves and often changing in “inexplicable ways” (p. 36) and this was true for me. As researcher/participant I was wound into the polyphony of rhizomic stories through my own experiences, beliefs and knowledges. Therefore, my position in relation to the inquiry was not objective, but rather, embedded into my beliefs, values and ethics (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017). While this did not affect the research questions, I remained cognisant of my bias when interpreting and re-storying the participants’ stories to ensure their voices were represented authentically.

Reverberance: *A/r/tographically*, reverberance indicates perpetual motion between the known and the new (Irwin, 2013). This is implied in the ever-changing world of the *a/r/tographer*, where the Slant (/) creates the dialogue between artist, teacher and researcher. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain this as the line that “breaks free of the point as origin...of the vertical and horizontal as coordinates” (p. 297).

However, as an aural art form, music implies that resonance and reverberation are reflected in everything we do as musicians and music educators. In the plateaus, stories of music, musician and teacher reverberate together to create storied understandings of identity development in becoming music teachers. Therefore the removal of the slants creates wholeness for the researcher as *musicianresearcherteacher* (Gouzouasis, 2013).

Metaphor: In *a/r/tography*, Springgay, Irwin and Wilson Kind (2005) suggest that through metaphor “we make things sensible – that is, accessible to the senses” (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2014, p.904). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest that conceptually humans understand the world through metaphor expressed in language. Gouzouasis (2013) writes of his relationship with music as metaphor, highlighting that music researchers generally describe and explain “life experiences in music without the music

itself” (p. 6). As musician, I am aware of music as a central, largely intangible ‘thing’ in my life. It is a metaphor of feeling and being, if such a thing can be described. Music is feeling, storying, explanation, existence, growth, expression. Across the span of my life I have lived a multiplicity of external and internal stories, starting from early life, enabling understanding and also escape from the world. In my thesis I used the metaphor of a garden as a way of understanding the conceptual rhizome and the entangled nature of the stories as data.

‘Being in’ artography

Working within the artographic space with music is multifaceted. As a musicianresearcherteacher, one is a practitioner, an artist and as music teachers, we engage in the practice of our art form in our work. The artographic music researcher can also create music ‘as’ research. Peter Gouzouasis who specifically works in music *as* research. Gouzouasis (2013) performs and creates music in his research, or rather ‘as’ his research, emphasising the need for music to inform and be informed by the research. He describes his research community as “Storying the story, living poetically, and performing research” (p. 7). I found this inspiring and liberating and I explored his work further (Gouzouasis, 2007; Gouzouasis, 2008; Gouzouasis, Irwin, Miles & Gordon, 2013; Gouzouasis & Bakan, 2018). Up until that point I had been drawn to composing music within the research, but I was not been sure that this was ‘academically allowable’. In the final thesis I included art works and photographs and a musical composition, not ‘as’ research, but to explain and clarify the research.

Reflections for future researchers

Arts-based research is an obvious choice for music-teacher-researchers, however, it seems that we, as musicians, often feel reticent to take the risks involved in working in those conceptual spaces. Bolden (2017), who had worked with ‘musically enhanced narrative inquiry’, identified that music is the least explored medium in arts-based music

research, possibly because of perceptions of the musical skill levels needed to “work meaningfully with music in a research context” (Leavy, 2015, p. 132). Gouzouasis (2013) has suggested this might be related to the strict classical regimes that music research students undergo in conservatory settings.

Aside from research regimes it is true that a life in music demands a degree of rigidity in practice regimes that is exacerbated by expectations of perfection in performance across musical styles and genres. However, I believe that if we enable our creative musical selves to cross the threshold into artographic spaces as researchers there is so much scope for rich research exploration.

My belief is that the conceptual spaces of artography offer enormous potential for music education research. However, as identified earlier, as musician-researchers we need to re-configure our self-perception of what it means to be an ‘artist’ to enable participation in this conceptual space.

I learned so much in my quest for a methodological ‘home’ in artography. The process was rewarding and enriching, leading me to a wholly different way of thinking about myself as a researcher, teacher and musician. Having stepped inside artography I know that I will not go back. I find the space nurturing, expressive and enabling, giving scope for my researcher self to flow concurrently with my teacher self and, most importantly, my musician/artist self.

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