

(Re)envisioning Online Arts Education Content Delivery in Initial Teacher Preparation Through Collective A/r/tographic Inquiry

Katie Burke

University of Southern Queensland, Australia

Sian Chapman

Murdoch University, Australia

Susan Chapman

Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Peter J. Cook

University of Southern Queensland, Australia

Katie Hotko

Southern Cross University, Australia

Michelle Ludecke

Monash University, Australia

Amy Mortimer

University of Sunshine Coast, Australia

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Abstract

The rise of online arts education content delivery has created challenges for arts educators in Initial Teacher Preparation (ITP). Consequently, educators in various

arts disciplines across Australia have been regularly meeting online to share, explore and experiment with ITP arts learning practices with the aim of establishing authentic learning and assessment. However, as Eisner reminds us, one must first be an artist if we wish to develop aesthetic dispositions, creativity, and artistry within our teachers and their students. We thus considered our arts ITP teaching from an a/r/tographic perspective, interconnecting the work of each of us as artist, teacher, and researcher and their intersections. This paper shares the processes and theorizations of our two-year a/r/tographic inquiry. It reveals the potential for collective a/r/tographic inquiry as not only a valuable means of engaging in educational research for initial teacher preparation, but as bespoke online pedagogical practice for meaningful arts praxis.

Introduction

This paper presents our journey as a national collective of arts educators in Initial Teacher Preparation (ITP, also known as Initial Teacher Education in some countries) through a collective self-study, and the new understandings for collective a/r/tographic online pedagogical practice that have arisen through this shared aesthetic inquiry. Our twofold aims are to (i) explore the possibilities of (re)considering our ITP teaching practice through a/r/tographic principles (Irwin, 2013), and (ii) develop a richer understanding of arts-based approaches from a practice perspective that might enrich online arts learning. This process has resulted in new insights and realized potential for developing collective a/r/tographic approaches in our teacher education practice. Additionally, this paper presents a methodological contribution regarding the value and process of what constitutes collective a/r/tographic inquiry and collaborative a/r/tographic pedagogic practice through co-construction of process and arising understandings.

The project initially emerged from our shared need for support as arts educators across a range of disciplines (dance, drama, media arts, music, and visual art) as we transferred our on-campus pedagogy to online. Many universities in Australia began to offer teacher education programs online well before Covid-19. However, even without the urgency of rapidly pivoting to online learning during the pandemic, the expansion into online teacher education was typically conducted without adequate pedagogical support (Baker et al., 2016), with many arts educators identifying a desire for guidance (Burke, 2020). Our group had coalesced into a monthly Australia-wide online Community of Practice in 2019, focused on sharing our respective challenges in teaching the arts online, and engaging in ‘wanderings and wonderings’ about creative solutions and new opportunities. At the forefront of our inquiries were innovative ways to engage online learners in effective arts praxis — the cycle of action and reflection that might lead to transformative practice. This ‘hands-on’ learning has been

identified as one of the most significant challenges for online arts educators in ITP, based upon the highly embodied, interactive, and resource-intensive nature of arts practices (Burke, 2020; Burke et al., 2023; Cain et al., 2023).

Our shared emphasis on engaging ITP students in practice-based arts experiences across the art disciplines was founded on our conviction that, as Eisner (2005) contends, first one must be an artist. That is, future arts educators are best prepared for arts classroom teaching through experiencing the aesthetic, creative, and artistic practices as an artist (Cutcher & Cook, 2016). Ostensibly, the intent of our national community of practice was to share inspiration and critical insight into the practicalities of teaching highly embodied and collaborative art forms online. However, the recognition soon emerged of richer potential. As a group, we were exploring ways to engage our ITP students in arts experiences as a foundation for their effective teaching practice without focusing on the elephant in the room which was our own engagement in artistic experiences, or for some, lack thereof.

We collectively recognized the potential (moreover, the need) to explore the possibilities of (re)considering our ITP practice through a/r/tographic principles (Irwin et al., 2018), and to develop a rich, experiential understanding of arts-based approaches that might benefit students — particularly online — from a practice perspective and reignite our artistic pursuits.

As a national online collective, we thus engaged in a collaborative self-study to identify the impact of our artistic and scholarly inquiries in forming better understandings of our ITP students as we/they are becoming a/r/tographers. Our inquiry was framed by the following research question: *How can we (re-)examine (or re-see/re-think) our practice as Initial Teacher Program Educators through a/r/tographic enactments? What are the implications of working a/r/tographically for online teaching and learning?*

This paper presents our process as an online collective with both synchronous and asynchronous participation. We present our shared process of artmaking across a range of arts disciplines that could inform our artistic/scholarly/pedagogical practice, and shared explorations through the lens of the a/r/tographic renderings regarding the inter-connectivity and interwoven impacts of this inquiry.

Understanding and Enacting A/r/tography in Teacher Preparation

A/r/tography is described as an “arts and education practice-based research methodology that emphasizes living inquiry and an examination of the spaces between arts-making/researching/teaching (a/r/t)” (Carter et al., 2011, p. 17). Through art making in a range of art forms, a/r/tographers inquire into the world to bridge the gap of theory, practice, and creation through *theoria* (knowing and researching); *praxis* (doing, learning,

and teaching); and *poesis* (making) (Irwin et al., 2018), which can generate “transformative events... provoking alternate possibilities for understanding” (LaBlanc & Irwin, 2019, para 1). This “places the creative, teacher-learner in a position of trying and applying the inquiry process in both old and new contexts, then beginning the process of questioning one’s practice, inquiry and actions anew” (Gouzouasis et al., 2013, p. x). We felt as a group this was an ideal way to guide our collective explorations into our own arts praxis, given that a/r/tography, from its inception, is a relational process (Irwin, et al., 2006) and provides a way of working that privileges collaborative inquiry.

The exploration of a/r/tographic research and inquiry for generalist ITP students is limited, but it has a growing presence as researchers and educators recognize its value. This approach places the teacher-learner at the center of a practice-oriented research methodology, fostering richer connections between theory and practice. Heaton et al. (2020) explore approaches and possibilities for a/r/tography as creative pedagogy in the postdoctoral space. By reconfiguring and reimagining a/r/tography as a “creative pedagogy that utilizes art education practices where the contribution of affects and acts emerge through engagement” (p. 53), they show that a/r/tographic engagement can enable the connection of theory, practice, and research—something that our own community of practice was particularly interested in for our own development, and moreover, for our students. A slowly growing body of research has reported on engaging ITP students in a/r/tographic inquiry, identifying benefits for the methodology, including encouraging students to inquire creatively and respect self and others (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008), access and reframe understandings of teaching and learning (Kampouroupoulou, 2015), and enrich dialogue between theory and practice (Mohammed, 2018). Liu and Wang (2020) employed a/r/tography to explore the quality of teaching at a Chinese university and found that students who used a/r/tography to create artistic works welcomed it as a “breath of fresh air in contrast to traditional graduate-level courses” (p. 108). Similarly, Gouzouasis (2013) noted that arts-based inquiry contributed positively to the growth of student identity as artists/researcher and teachers. Some researchers are now beginning to expand upon a/r/tography as method beyond arts education, proposing that it represents a valuable research methodology for any practice-oriented research in teaching that uses “practices integral to art making, teaching and inquiry to make meaning from stories” (MacDonald & McMahon, 2017, p. 373). Mohammed (2018) similarly notes, “the lens of creativity, if nurtured and reinforced throughout teacher education programmes, allows for enriched dialogue between theory and practice, and the continuing construction of being and becoming teacher/artist/ researcher.” (p. 20). What was not revealed in the literature, however, were a/r/tographic engagements specific to online learners, which was something our group was interested in exploring.

Teaching A/r/tographically Online

Teaching arts-based curriculums online is demanding and requires additional pedagogical skills (Burke, 2020), especially given that ITP students come with varying experiences in arts practice (Cook, 2018b). ITP tends to favor an understanding of the curriculum over engaging with the discipline experience. However, a/r/tography offers the opportunity to do both contiguously. Scholars leading in this domain offer ITP educators arts making tasks that lead to learning through experiential activities and provocations (see Brooke et al., 2024; Coleman & Cook, 2024). Research that explores this for online generalist ITP students, however, is lacking. Nonetheless, an expansion of a/r/tographic processes has led to delivery online, which was certainly prompted by the pandemic but also with the engagement of digital technologies (see Burke & Coleman, 2024).

Typically, this approach involves grounding ITP students in arts-based experiences, followed by a focus on connecting these experiences to the curriculum. This is intended to present a deeper understanding of the arts, their benefits, and capacity for trans-disciplinary teaching and learning. A/r/tographic approaches have also proven useful in teaching aspects of the arts curriculum through speculative offerings (Coleman & Cook., 2024; Cook 2018a). In these situations, engagement with imaginary activities sees ITP educators expand their resources, understanding of the curriculum, and how to navigate varying pedagogical approaches (Coleman & Cook, 2024; Cook, 2018a). Utilizing digital technologies online extends the educator's pedagogical toolbox, increasing student access and agency, and encouraging creative thinking for both the teacher and learner (Lorenza & Carter, 2021; Cutcher & Cook, 2016).

As a/r/tography continues to evolve, and pedagogical needs continue to emerge, innovation and creativity are heightened when arts-based educational research paradigms are enacted in practice through the teaching and learning of the arts. Thus, as arts educators intent upon enhancing our teaching practice — particularly for our growing cohorts of online learners — our online group of researchers co-constructively developed knowledge in, around and through our own artmaking to better understand a/r/tography and possible implications for enhancing ITP practices and applications for online learners.

The A/r/tographic Renderings

A/r/tography adopts the term 'renderings' to describe the generative concepts that it enables (Irwin & De Cosson, 2004). There are six renderings described by Irwin et al. (2006), namely "contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor/metonymy, openings, reverberations, and excess" (p. 897). Renderings provide theoretical spaces in which to explore different ways of knowing and being through the arts. Each of the renderings will be briefly described here, while noting

that these are not presented in a linear or hierarchical manner, but rather they are interstitial in the way they bleed into one another.

- Contiguity is the exploration of liminal spaces. It activates the interplay in between the identities of artist, researcher, and teacher; between art and writing (graphy); and between poiesis, theoria, and praxis (Irwin et al., 2018). Contiguity is also seen in the very name of a/r/tography itself with the oblique (forward slash) between the a/r/t symbolizing the identities of the artist, researcher, and teacher. The forward slash gestures to a generative forward momentum of being and becoming together (Lasczik & Rousell, 2024).
- Living inquiry is often considered the overarching rendering that acknowledges that arts-based methods of inquiry are not just undertaken by a researcher, but they are an integral part of their lived experience. A/r/tography is relational and reflexive and in constant movement (Irwin et al., 2018; Lasczik et al., 2022).
- Metaphor/metonym are symbolic devices used by artists to make sense of the world. These allow for the “creation and un/creation of meaning through troubling relationships between concepts, creating opportunities for new understandings to appear or open” (Lasczik et al., 2022, p. 1064).
- Openings is the rendering that considers ruptures, seepages, and things that break through (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). This creates opportunities for experiences in and in-between the identities of the a/r/t, the text, the art, and an experience between the reader/audience (Lasczik et al., 2022). A/r/tographic openings create opportunities for curiosities to be followed and creative inquiries to take root and grow in the direction that they determine (Smith, 2024).
- Reverberations reflect the resonances, the relationality between contiguous relationships. This might consider the reverberations between researchers, and the aftershocks that could rupture through a/r/tographic processes. Finally, the rendering of excess considers the overflow, the generative nature of a/r/tography, “Excess is that which is created when control and regulation disappear and we grapple with what lies outside the acceptable” (Springgay, 2008, p. 41).

Our ongoing living inquiry explored the contiguous nature of being and becoming an artist, researcher, and teacher, and the intersections of these identities within our community of practice. We reflected on the implications this had for our respective ITP programs. This paper unpacks and further explores our living inquiry and the excesses that continue to reverberate throughout our professional and personal lives.

Methods

Our engagement in this research inquiry emerged from an already established group that met monthly via Zoom. Members of the group were arts educators from six different Australian universities who represented several disciplines, including visual arts (2), dance (3), drama (2), and one cross-disciplinary arts educator. Importantly, we had all been required at various times to teach across the range of art subjects represented in the Australian curriculum (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, and Visual Art), which was one of the key reasons we valued our cross-disciplinary group for the mutual support and expertise it yielded.

Arguably there is a juxtaposition of academic research and artistic and creative processes. There is a perceived challenge presented by traditional expectations for academic research processes versus creative processes that encourage ‘living inquiry’. We wrestled with the notion of: How do a/r/tographers articulate their way of knowing and seeing (perhaps differently, given from an experiential lens), within the integrity of the artistic process? van Manen’s (2014) explanation of phenomenology provided a helpful reflection. Phenomenology does not focus on creating theories to control or explain the world but provides meaningful insights that help us connect more closely with our experiences of the world. In a similar way, a/r/tography offers opportunities to explore plausible insights rather than confining the researcher to position their experiences into pre-determined theories. Carter (2014) likewise advocates for non-traditional approaches, suggesting that a/r/tographical research concerns itself with being “in community” and rejects standardization in favor of “dynamic and fluid enterprise of living inquiry” instead (p. 23). van Manen reminds us that in our questioning lies the “possibilities and potentials for experiencing openings, understandings and insights” (p. 29).

As a group, we therefore developed a shared direction for our inquiry, as compared to a fixed methodological process (Le Blanc & Irwin, 2019), to engage in a collective self-study through which we would consider our practice, praxis, theory, and identities as arts ITP educators from an a/r/tographic perspective. Our planned process was to both locate and create a/r/tefacts (artworks through which we expressed our artist, researcher and teacher selves) from our arts education practice to both stimulate and deepen our a/r/tographic identities. The process then involved an iterative cycling between creation, discussion, writing, and consideration of our d(art)a (DeFreitas, 2012) through the a/r/tographic renderings. Specifically, we began by each identifying and undertaking an applied arts task that we required our own students to complete in our respective courses. After engaging in this artistic process, each member then shared their completed a/r/tefact with the group, along with reflective discussion of the impacts of the process on our identities as artists, researchers and teachers (Figure 1 and the video link below provide examples of our shared process).

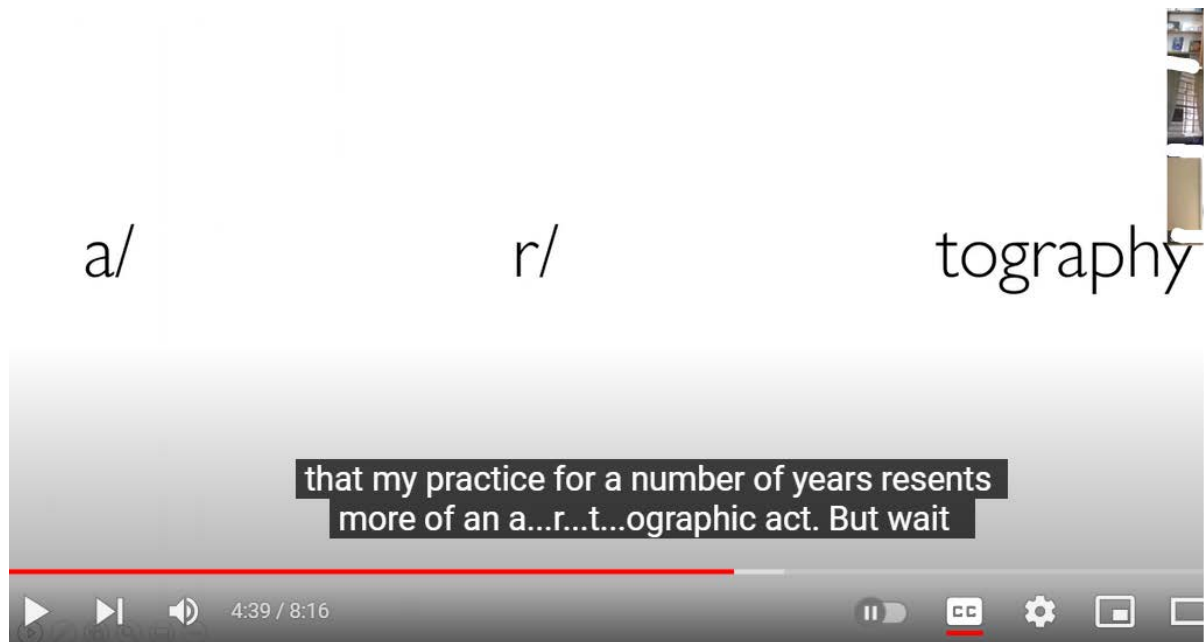


Figure 1. A/r/tography Community of Practice: <https://youtu.be/6SF1JkqGyP4>

Instructions for the arts tasks and our corresponding completed a/r/tefacts were made available to the group in Padlet, a multimedia sharing platform. Each member then selected and completed another group member's applied arts task and once again progressed through the process of engaging in their selected arts task, response, and reflection (See below for an overview of our Padlet instructions).

A/r/tographic Provocation – Music

Develop and record a soundscape: Choose an artwork as a stimulus for this experience - something that is quite evocative is good. Consider emotions that come to mind. Create a one-sentence poetic response that captures the essence of the artwork. Consider sounds that would help to create an atmospheric soundscape that enhances the essence of the artwork. Consider: how would you purposefully employ musical elements to enhance this? Create a recorded soundscape in Soundtrap, GarageBand or other recording app.

A/r/tographic Provocation – Visual Art

Take your drawing for a walk: Listen to the guided audio walk and draw a series of observational drawings. These start small (30 seconds) building to a 15-minute observational drawing. The drawings use simple materials, a pen and paper with optional watercolors. Most of the drawings use continuous contour lines.

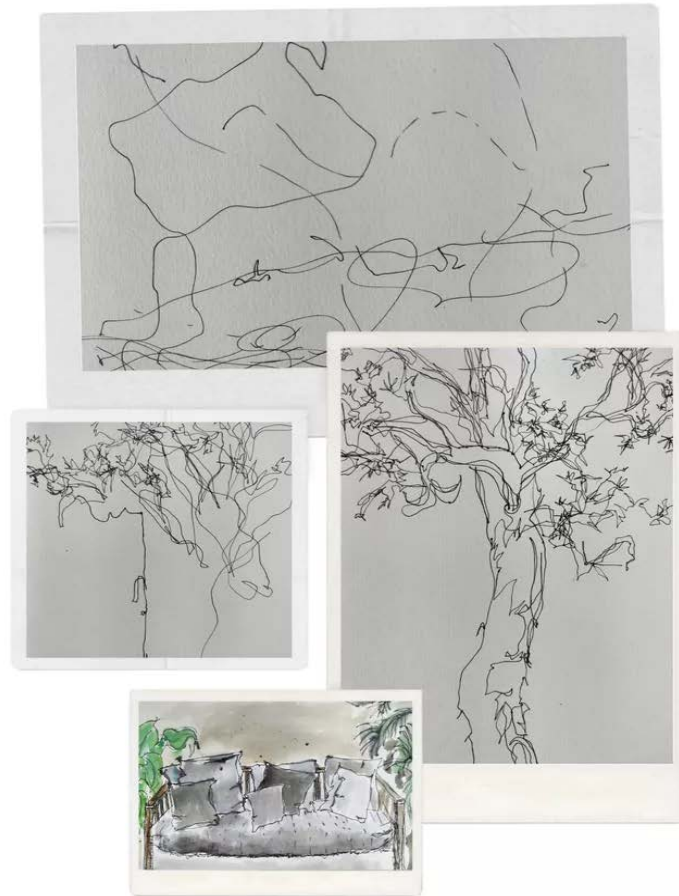


Figure 2. Example Observational Drawings [pen and ink on paper] by Katie Burke.

A/r/tographic Provocation – Visual Art

Create an A3 collage about you and your concept of PLACE. The artwork needs to include something of:

- Who you are, what things you like, and like to do
- Your home life, where you live, what you have around you
- Your environment more broadly, think culture / society that influence you

The collage will contain collected images from a variety of sources (printed photos, magazine or newspaper), dry medium (drawn components exploring line techniques such as hatching, cross hatching, scumbling, stippling, shading), and wet medium (painted components such as watercolor wet on wet, color gradation, salt and lemon applications).

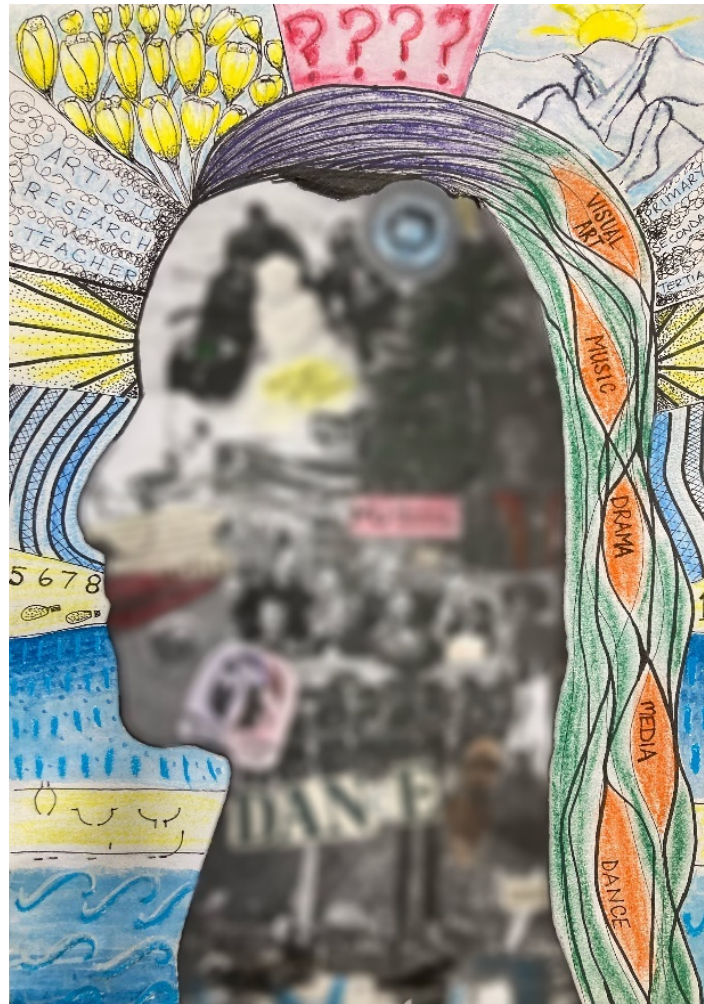


Figure 3. Example Self-Portrait about Place [mixed media] by Sian Chapman.

A/r/tographic Provocation – Dance

Body parts on film: Using a smartphone, record a chosen body part moving in different locations. You may choose to edit these recordings creatively and potentially add sound to the recording. Make sure the overall work is under 2 minutes.

- Provide a two-sentence description of the Action (shape, locomotion etc.)
- Consider the following elements of dance and document how they might be demonstrated within your work.
- Share your work only with someone else and analyze their work in terms of these same elements of dance.

Space – where the movement occurs. e.g. location, areas within the space, levels, planes

Time – when the movement occurs e.g. beat, rhythm, tempo etc.

Dynamics – how the action occurs e.g., Percussive, swinging, sustained etc.

Relationships – with what does the movement occur e.g., Props, location, environment, other performers, other objects etc.



Figure 4. Screenshot from Body Part Dance Video [digital image] by Peter J Cook.

A/r/tographic Provocation – Dance

Choreograph, film and edit a movement based response: Choose a mode of transportation (the video here is 'swimming'). It can be quite pedestrian, or could involve a machine such as a car, bus or ambulance! Manipulate a sequence of everyday movements through the expressive (abstract/exaggerated) use of time, so that it expresses your intention.

Expressive use of Time:

- Speed – fast to slow, acceleration and deceleration
- Rhythm – pattern of sounds/movements
- Duration – the time it takes to complete a movement – long to short

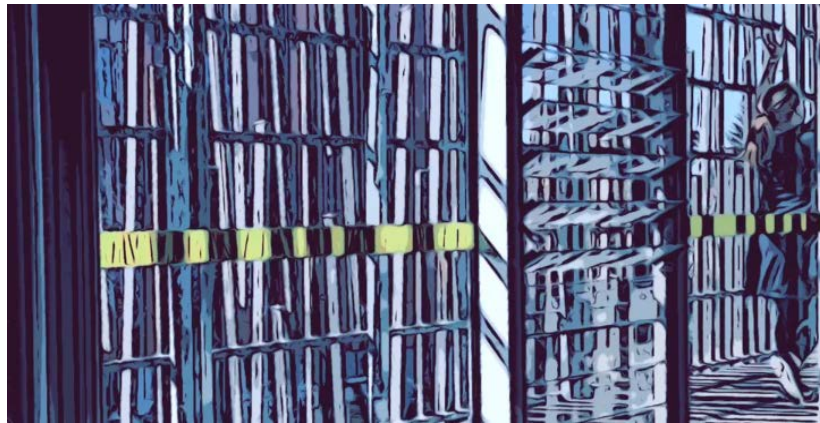


Figure 5. Screenshot from Movement Video [digital image] by Michelle Ludecke.

A/r/tographic Provocation – Drama

Reflect on your experience through student and teacher voice: Write a series of reflections from a session in your arts course that uses student & teacher voice. Think reader's theatre, script writing and/or poetry. The written response should highlight the importance of reflection post pre-during- post performance (or at least one of them).

A/r/tographic Provocation – Drama/Media

Create and film a quirky character: Create a possible backstory for a character which includes physical characteristics, personality, personal history, occupation, dilemma, motivation, vocal characteristics, and potential relationships. Then choose a phone app that changes your voice and appearance in some way and record a 20-30 second video clip with you in role as that character.



Figure 6. Screenshot from Quirky Character Video [digital image] by Susan Chapman.

The group then progressed through online meetups during which we engaged in iterative sessions of quiet reflective writing, interspersed with contemplative discussion. Our first reflective sessions focused on the initial a/r/tefact creation from our own courses, followed in future meet ups with the same process focusing on the second a/r/tefact creation. As we continued to journey together into a deeper shared understanding through the a/r/tographic inquiry, we reconsidered our practice through the lens of the renderings by working back into our written reflections with additional notes. This occurred first on our own reflections, then extended into reflections of our colleagues. We questioned what further insights could be teased out regarding how our role as teachers and artists inform one another and how we could use this understanding to inform our future practice with our students for rich arts learning.

D(art)a Analysis

This process yielded a considerable volume of d(art)a while simultaneously engaging the

group in rich, ongoing analysis that encouraged a plurality of voices and multiple perspectives (Defreitas, 2012). Beyond this d(art)a were the conversations and self-reflections 'in-between' the data collection that also yielded rich understandings while simultaneously representing analysis in action. Importantly, our meetups and the d(art)a collection and analysis did not progress in a neat, linear fashion but were full of 'wanderings and wonderings' as we collectively sat in the messy space between the known and unknown. Through the process, members were learning/unlearning/relearning at the nexus of our artist, teacher, and researcher selves. As opposed to traditional and linear approaches to analysis yielding 'clean' and uncomplicated data, we were engaged in a rhizomatic analysis (Defreitas, 2012; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), which represents an approach that is "partial and tentative, that transgresses generic boundaries, and allows the inclusion of the researchers' voice" (Honan & Sellers, 2006, p.1).

Rhizomatic analysis is linked to the philosophical underpinnings of French theorists Deleuze and Guattari (1988) who borrowed the botanical term, rhizome, metaphorically to explore multiplicities in meaning and provide linkages to seemingly disconnected points. Rhizomatic analysis is best understood through the principles that represent the qualities of the complex root system, often depicted through the image of a piece of ginger. The rhizome has no real beginning or end and can be entered from many points. The connections are ceaseless and offer connectivity between other seemingly unrelated points. As such, the meanings and understandings explored through rhizomatic analysis can be considered similar to that of a map, with no starting or finishing point. Meaning itself can be multi-layered within the rhizomatic analysis with endless possibilities offered. This form of analysis is well suited to research that has varied data sets and events that may be represented from a variety of perspectives. Employing rhizomatic analysis for this project permitted the analysis of data and connections between concepts that may have initially appeared separate or disparate, allowing us to construct a pathway and the 'in-between' stepping stones to give it direction.

By way of example of the methodological process, Figure 7 was created by a group member while listening to a meeting recording, as a visual representation of what she was hearing. It was an attempt to summarize a non-linear interpretation of the key messages she understood from the group members discussing the process and the role of a/r/tography. Amy stated:

It made more sense for me to draw what I was hearing rather than taking notes. It felt like a breaking down of silos, pushing boundaries and smashing cracks into them to champion the process of messiness and chaos that can bring unexpected surprises. This is where the gold (rather than the coal) can be found (hence the grain/coal silo container idea).

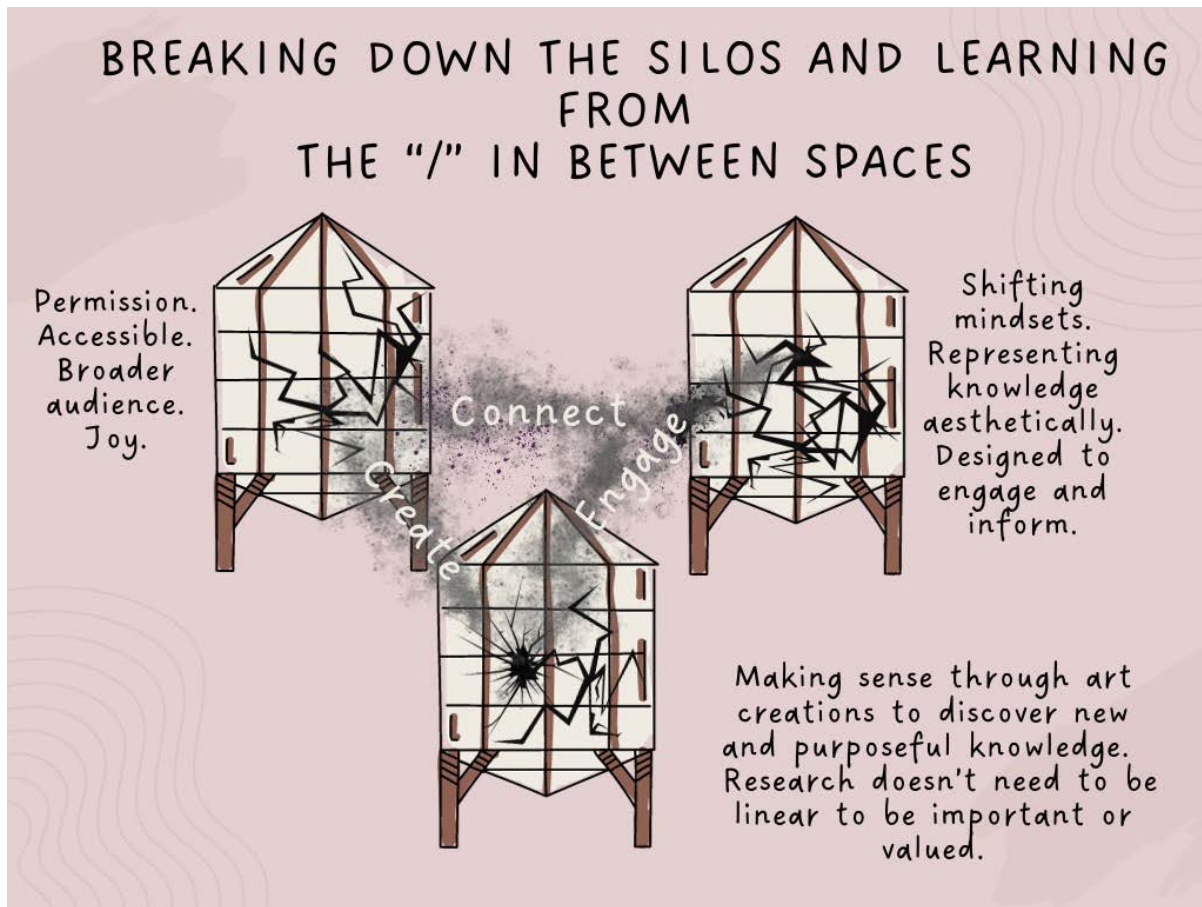


Figure 7. Our Process: Breaking Down the Silos and Learning from the In-Between Spaces.

In the next section, we will share how our process culminated in the synthesis of important and useful insights for us as a/r/tographers, which has further useful implications for our roles as educators of ITP students online.

Understandings

In attempting to draw meaning from our a/r/tographic process that may help to answer our research question while not reducing the complexity of our lived inquiry to simplifications, four rhizomes emerged. These were related to *identity*, *permission*, *synergy*, and *collaboration*. Importantly, although each surfaced as emergent and distinct lines of flight — generated from our a/r/tographic living inquiry in reflecting on each and their value in our process — we recognized the entangled nature of each. The process of non-hierarchical rhizomatic analysis allowed for the generation of multiple relational concepts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Lasczik et al., 2022).

Identity

The concept of *identity* explored how our group of arts education academics perceived the triality of our roles as artist, researcher, and teacher within the constraints of the higher education landscape, along with a recognition of how a/r/tographic inquiry might equally encourage our students to engage in similar identity work underscoring effective classroom arts learning. In this conceptualization, our individual responses indicated a shared understanding and degree of comfort around the notion of our roles as teacher and researcher. What was less clear was our role, and therefore identity, as artists in this space. This seemed familiar to our reflections on our students.

As teachers, there were clear links to our roles in our institutions as arts educators and a recognition of validity in this facet of our work and in our advocacy of space for the arts. Susan stated, “part of my role as an arts educator is to reduce pre-service teachers’ anxiety in arts education spaces and to assure them that every person has a right to be in that space”. As researchers, there were similar levels of comfort in our roles and the expectations of our institutions around research outputs. The work of the group however offered openings for us to consider research from a different perspective, or as stated by Amy, “permission to tap into creative processes that often gets stifled in traditional research”.

As artist, the most thought-provoking comments came in response to the artworks produced from our shared provocations. The joy in the freedom to create was a recurrent theme and an emerging realization that our inner artists are still present, and valuable to our work. Katie B stated:

This project has helped to recognize that my own creative practice, which I felt sat distinct and aside from my academic work, can not only be a valuable dimension of my academic work, but IS a form of research through which my own understanding is growing, through which I then become a more effective teacher of the arts.

The notion of being present and intentionally creating or prioritizing opportunities for integrating the artist in each of us was key to developing our identity and the label of a/r/tographer, which might then ‘spill over’ into our a/r/tographic work as academics within the creative arts. The possibility for similar processes to engage our students in identity recognition that might underscore recognition of their artist/teacher/researcher selves appeared more real.

Permission

Our a/r/tographic journey highlighted that it can be a challenge to gain permission to engage more deeply and intentionally with our artist identities. The notion of gaining permission for this endeavor can be made even more complex because this is not a formalized process, but a kind of unspoken agreement about what is regarded as acceptable academic practice in tertiary contexts. Whether this is a subconscious response to a type of collective artistic guilt on the part of arts educators, or a vague perception held by those in university leadership positions, meaningful involvement in artistic practice can be bypassed when pedagogical concerns dominate decision making. The traditional structure of academic workloads that generally falls into teaching, research, and service leaves little room for consideration of creative artistic practice. It is not clear where artistic practice should sit in this scheme, or how universities might support the artist component of academics working within education disciplines. For arts educators, initiating internal justification for engaging in creative artistic practice may require a symbolic giving of individual and group permission to engage as an artist.

Members of our group acknowledged that through this a/r/tographic project our artist selves were revitalized and foregrounded. Katie H highlighted the need to “rediscover engaging in deep creative practice... without the burden of pedagogical considerations”, to allow the opportunity to be an artist first. Permission to move forward with this intention was regarded as a key catalyst, as Shell noted, in “recognizing that our own creative practice is often neglected through the demands of academic work”, with Susan noting that “my artist self can be neglected as it feels like an indulgence when so many other deadlines loom”. The unanimous permission generated by the group to re-explore our individual and collaborative artist identities led to positive outcomes, including: “seeing all of our participants re-engaging with our artist selves (through) creative flow, genuine engagement, (and) enjoyment” (shared by Peter); the “thinking and doing of artistic practice” (as noted by Sian); and the fundamental need for our artist selves to be part of the “holistic experience of the arts” (shared by Susan). Ultimately, working in this manner had potential flow-on effects for our students. Katie B stated, “Now that I have worked through this in this safe space with my arts colleagues, I consider ways to work through this with my students, who hopefully, will be able to work through this same process with their own students in their future classrooms”. We ultimately recognized that permission to practice artistic language and to attain interpretative and expressive fluency as an artist is therefore a necessity not an indulgence.

Synergy

‘Synergy’ is the dynamic, harmonious interaction and integration of the roles of artist, researcher, and teacher within the context of a/r/tography. The process of sensemaking when re-engaging with our d(art)a released what we knew in theory; these identities are not separate

but instead work in unison to enhance and inform each other. We saw that the combined effect of these roles is greater than the sum of their individual contributions, leading to a more holistic understanding and practice within the field of arts education.

In grappling with the synergy represented in the \ of a/r/tography, we shared a willingness to embrace uncertainty and discomfort that was facilitated by both the permission we felt the process yielded and the collaborative community we worked within. Engaging in messy, ill-defined problems and trusting the creative process was a shared experience. This willingness to sit in the ‘not knowing’ was powerful. Katie B asked, “How can I ask my students to sit with the ‘not knowing’ more comfortably if I have not yet first embraced this way of coming to understanding?” Amy likewise stressed the importance of experiencing the role of a learner: “Engaging with one another’s work was a helpful reminder of what it’s like to be a student”; and Katie H noted, “Our project has encouraged me to take on the identity of students/learner again in a way that informs all the other identities”. Participating in colleagues’ artistic experiences as learners unlocked awareness of challenges and joys of new learning, which enhanced our ability to empathize with our students and encourage them to take risks in their learning.

Through our participation in the project, we were able to “linger in a liminal space wherein multiple moving forces affected each other” (Garcia-Lazo, 2022) and come closer to an understanding of the synergy between the three facets of artist, researcher, and teacher in a/r/tography as the project fostered a sense of belonging and affiliation. The project was seen as transformative, leading to shifts in perception and practice: we held a stronger recognition of ourselves as a/r/tographers, highlighting how our various identities inform and complement each other, and saw the potential for practice if we could engage our students in the same process. Our collective acknowledgment of creative practice as a form of research reinforces the idea that the interrelationship between these roles leads to more effective teaching and research.

Collaboration

The environment in which we worked generated a community of practice where exploration into understanding was welcomed and facilitated. We employed a transparent approach that encouraged and supported critical reflection and action underpinned by trust, honesty, and respect. White et al. (2020) explains the benefits of “critical friends” in this collaborative approach, allowing us to “see our practices through the lens of others”, whilst also providing honest feedback to promote growth (p. 96). As artists and educators our shared responsibility afforded the opportunity for everyone to voice narratives of their own experiences, understandings and interpretations through a variety of arts-based methods. This resulted in enhancing the development of participants as both individuals and as a collective, bringing new perspectives on a/r/tography to light (Rayment et al, 2020).

Individual and collective analysis of our findings harvested words such as collaboration, collegiality, cooperation, connection and camaraderie across all participants' responses. For example, Sian shared how the group allowed her as an artist to add to the “collective breadth of arts knowledge” and as a researcher of how it “opened the door to new ways of working”. Peter spoke of the power of “collective strength and energy of the group” that paved the way for “openness to risk taking in an iterative/unfolding process of new ways of doing and thinking”, and noted the process created new understandings of a/r/tography by generating “an additional dimension to the a/r/tographic lens as we are co-participants and at times the identities of being an artist/researcher/ teacher might be extended to incorporate collaborator”. Shell explained that the “collective strength” of the project left her with a “sense of collegiality that sustains me professionally, nurtures me as a practitioner, and allows me to be myself.”

The collaborative learning and collective sharing shed light on the value and transformative power of sitting in liminal spaces between ‘unlearning’ and ‘re-learning’, not only for us as academics, but also as teachers. The benefit of shared storying and understanding among us was echoed in anecdotal comments we heard from our ITP students who struggled with their own ‘unknowns’ and ‘uncertainties’ about artmaking. Our collaborative approach thus not only taught us about the transformative power of a/r/tography on artistic processes but also reminded us how to ‘play’ again in unknown spaces. Or in Shell’s words:

We have learnt to sit with the messiness, discovering support in our colleagues and the collegial environment we foster. This sense of camaraderie allows us to indulge in the joy of play, further enhancing our growth as teacher educators.

Concluding Thoughts: Arriving at the Destination via the Scenic Route

Our group coalesced around an inquiry into potentially innovative ways to engage online learners in arts praxis. Recognizing the centrality of arts praxis led to a planned (re)examination of our practice as ITP educators as an a/r/tographic act, with the hopes that this would reveal new learning and useful implications for practice using a/r/tography as creative pedagogy (Barney, 2019; Heaton et al., 2020). Our a/r/tographic journey took us through unmapped and unexpected terrain that led to something more expansive than originally expected, while still proving beneficial in understanding potential for pedagogical shift in response to our original research question: *‘How can we (re-)examine (or re-see/re-think) our practice as Initial Teacher Program Educators through a/r/tographic enactments? What are the implications of working a/r/tographically for online teaching and learning?’*

Four concepts were “unlocked” (Bourgault et al., 2022) through our rhizomatic analysis: identity, permission, synergy, and collaboration (see Figure 8). These proved powerful both in

revealing the generative potential of collective a/r/tographic inquiry, while simultaneously revealing aspects of a/r/tography as a creative pedagogy well suited to teaching the creative arts in ITP, particularly for those teaching online where the need for innovative pedagogy for arts praxis represents a more intentional focus (Cain et al., 2023). While previous research has explored approaches and possibilities for a/r/tography as creative pedagogy in discipline-based ITP (MacDonald & McMahon, 2017; Mohammad, 2018) and postdoctoral space (Heaton et al., 2020), a/r/tography in generalist undergraduate pedagogy represents a newer domain of exploration — one we now recognize as ripe with potential.

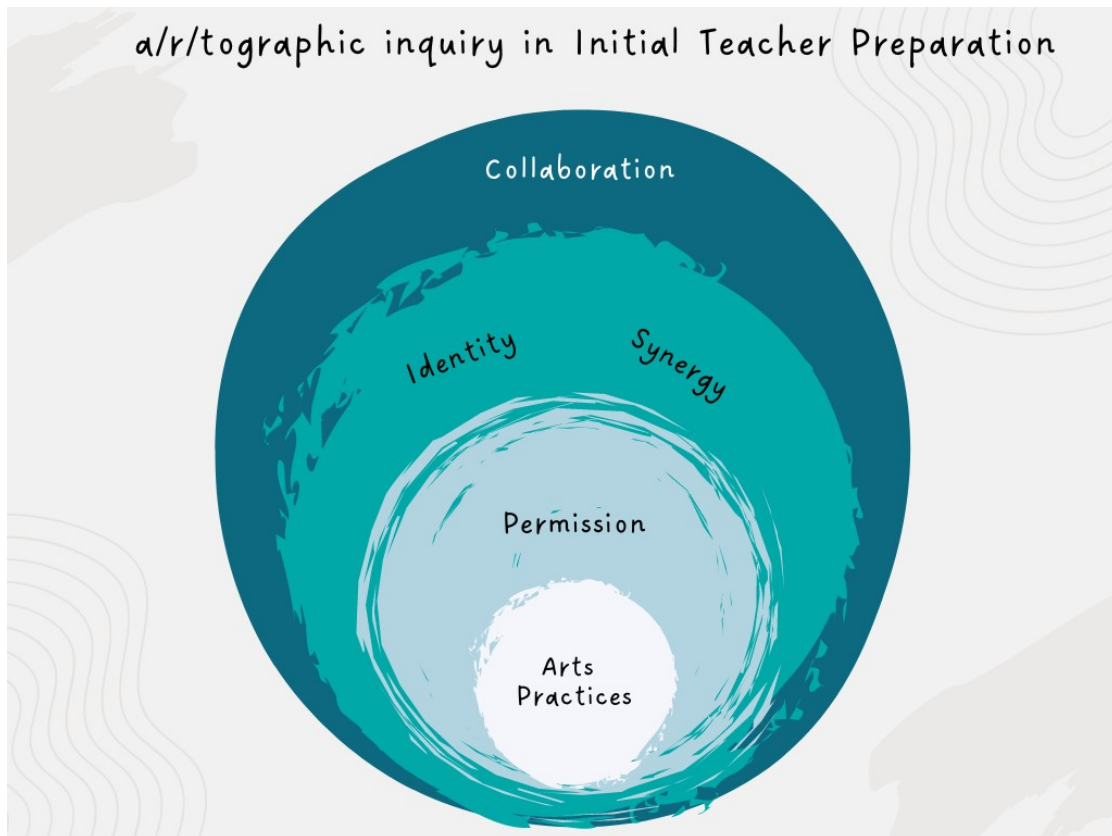


Figure 8. Collective A/r/tographic Inquiry in Initial Teacher Preparation.

As a result of our inquiry, we offer an invitation to other arts educators in ITP to make intentional spaces through a/r/tographic encounters that incorporate opportunities to participate in pedagogic-driven a/r/tographic tasks. Amongst the making of artworks, reflection on processes, and products considering our experiences, we develop an embodied understanding of self, of praxis, and of a/r/tography. More importantly, we believe employing a/r/tographic inquiry with students has the power to shape their own identities as artists,

teachers, and researchers through creative teaching, teaching for creativity, and creative learning (Lin, 2011).

Our process of working entirely online highlighted how the use of provocations for arts practices in a/r/tographic inquiry can readily create opportunities that affords students permission to spend time immersing themselves in creative acts through which new and deeper understandings are established. Given evidence of student reticence to engage in the making experiences in arts courses in ITP if not positioned as a central requirement of learning and course assessment (Burke et al., 2023), a/r/tographic inquiry as a pedagogical approach offers the teacher educator an opportunity to meaningfully embed creative engagement at the center of student learning, which has potentially profound implications for enhancing student enjoyment (Liu & Wang, 2020) and a positive reframing of understanding of teaching and learning as creative practice (Kampouropoulou, 2015). This is particularly valuable for online learners for whom arts praxis has been identified as more challenging (Burke, 2020).

We further experienced and saw the potential for our students to interrogate their identity as artists, researchers, and teachers, “the experience which is essential to the continuum process of *becoming* in any profession” (Mohammed, 2018, p. 20). A/r/tographic pedagogy has been found to encourage educators to both recognize and “embrace their artistic selves not only in ongoing coursework, but also in the ways that they approached their classroom inquiries” (Gouzouasis, 2013, p. xiii); something we can attest to through this inquiry. Through this work, there is then the recognized potential for ITP students to experience a synergy at the intersection of these identities when intentional reflection is woven into the inquiry (Cook, 2018b).

Importantly, and possibly most foundational, is the notion that collaboration among peers in an a/r/tographic community is a key experience that can facilitate creativity (Cremin & Chappell, 2019). When effectively woven into learning experiences, this facilitates opportunities to establish identity, permission, and synergy.

Our engagement in this research has led to new insights for us as educators that may inspire other educators to engage in similar processes, both for themselves, and ultimately, for their students. Importantly, we feel it vital to highlight that our process was not linear. At times, many of us experienced moments of uncertainty regarding how the various “affects and acts” related to a larger picture (Heaton et al., 2020, p. 56). However, in that messiness of sitting in the unknown and allowing ourselves to sit with the murkiness of our reflection and arts-based experiences, we agreed there was something profound and transformative about working this way. In the act of being in the messiness, we were able to break free of siloed thinking; to see

the various threads of our explorations as weaving a new and much more interesting fabric of experience. And this held a deeper and more profound learning and reflection on the non-linear nature of problem solving and creativity that "take[s] roots outside control and apparent logic resonating through multiple planes (Bourgault et al., 2022, p. 167). We further reflected on our desire for our own online ITP students to be able to problem solve, think creatively, and pose difficult problems. We asked, how is it that we can ask them to sit in this messy space if we ourselves are not familiar and willing or able to sit with the knowledge that "transformative research raises more questions than it answers" (Bourgault et al, 2022, p.168).

Finally, we revisit Eisner's (2005) call to action that first we (and our students) must be artists. We are beginning to feel better equipped for such a challenge by recognizing that our a/r/tographic processes are iterative. We invite others who examine their *living inquiry* as initial arts educators to work contiguously with us, to extend on the reverberations suggested through this project — to engage in the messiness of creative identities and to (re)ignite the joy of making as a/r/tographers. Our collective call to all educators is to consider engaging in and (inter)thinking through collective a/r/tography and the generative openings and professional learning that arises from doing research enquiries together, while also offering wide-ranging applications for creative online Initial Teacher Preparation practice and theory-building within/through arts teaching and learning.

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About the Authors

Dr Katie Burke is a Senior Lecturer in Arts Curriculum and Pedagogy in Initial Teacher Education at the University of Southern Queensland. Katie is known for her research and practice into enhancing online learning for creative and authentic engagement, including her innovative online pedagogy of care, developed to meet the challenges of facilitating online learning, particularly in the creative arts. Her research, scholarship and practice has resulted in the receipt of a national teaching award, alongside Faculty and University-level teaching and research awards.

Dr Sian Chapman is a Senior Lecturer Arts (Primary) at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia, teaching arts education and curriculum integration practices in initial teacher education programs. Her research interests lie in arts praxis, curriculum theory, and education policy practices with a focus on how different stakeholder groups react to change

Dr Susan Chapman is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Creative Industries, Education and Social Justice at the Queensland University of Technology. She has worked professionally as an actor and musician and has experience in teaching the Arts in primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. Her publications focus on integrated interdisciplinary learning using an Arts Immersion approach. Susan has completed a Research Fellowship in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) at Griffith University, and conducts workshops on developing engaging academic presentation strategies.

Associate Professor Peter J Cook is the Head of School and Dean, Education at University of Southern Queensland, and holds a substantive role as Associate Professor Arts Education. With an extensive career in dance and arts education, Peter has worked as a teacher, choreographer and director. He identifies as an a/r/tographer, and his research explores learning with and through choreographic practice. Peter's research also spans creative education, initial teacher education, and the intersection of creativity and leadership.

Dr Katie Hotko is an Associate Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Southern Cross University. Katie's PhD titled *We make art and it makes us: An A/r/tographic exploration of generalist primary teachers' creative self-beliefs used Whiteheadian process philosophy and a/r/tography as a lens to inquiry into creative action and belief through art making*. Katie is a

self-taught artist who is passionate about making the Visual Arts accessible to all people. Katie she is also an active member of the SEAE (Sustainability, Environmental, and Arts Education) Research Cluster.

Dr Michelle Ludecke is a Senior Lecturer in Education and the Arts at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. She employs arts-based methods to explore key issues concerning transitions in teaching, such as the impact of employment conditions on the teaching profession, retention of beginning teachers upon entering the profession, mentoring in the teaching profession, the formation and transformation of teachers' professional identity, and the embodiment of teaching practices.

Dr Amy Mortimer has worked across primary and tertiary education in Australia for over 20 years. Her doctorate employed arts-informed inquiry to explore the role of creative writing workshops in fostering creativity in primary school classrooms. Amy's tertiary work has encompassed contemporary pedagogical approaches and Arts curriculum as well as teaching across multiple discipline areas. When not teaching at university, Amy is working as a primary school educator specializing in curriculum knowledge and delivery or making time to engage in quality academic research (preferably arts-based), to benefit teachers and students alike.

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