

An arts based inquiry as a method of reflection

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This paper which is part of my thesis study (still in progress) examines the experience and implementation of arts-based procedures and processes as a method of student reflection. The inquiry into experiencing and the procedures for making sense of things is applicable in so many real life contexts. My aims in introducing this method of inquiry are to facilitate an understanding of these procedures and processes and to show how they can be utilised for student learning within the context of the community engagement and intern practicum established at the Australian Catholic University. I was also searching for a deeper understanding and appreciation of all that such a processes involves, highlighting how the art of intersubjectivity supports collaborative learning. My broader aim was to contribute to the overall quality of university community life. It is also an opportunity for participants to learn more about themselves.

The arts based procedures used to support student learning have been adapted from an epistemology developed at the Melbourne Institute for Experiential and Creative Arts Therapy (MIECAT) that emphasise participatory, experiential, and embodied multi-arts approaches. Through my studies at MIECAT I became aware of a multi-modal form of inquiry or extended epistemology where presentational knowing such as drawing, painting, poetry, sculpture and movement emerge from experiential knowing (Heron 1992; Heron and Reason 1997). This can be an access to a much deeper and broader understanding of what we do, think, act and feel, and that this way of working could be applied quite directly and appropriately to reflection on community engagement.

For the past nine years I've been employed full time within the Department of Student Services, as a Campus Minister at the Australian Catholic University (ACU). Campus Ministry is about bringing the distinctive identity and mission of ACU to life. The position is responsible for developing and implementing initiatives that enhance the lived expression of the University's mission. I am located at St. Patrick's Fitzroy Campus Melbourne. Campus Ministry provides a variety of services and part of my role includes individually oriented pastoral care, group activities such as leadership and liturgical formation, religious services, mission induction workshops for staff and students, reflection and retreats.

Campus Ministry is a diverse yet specialized work, where specialist staff promote and enhance the university's mission, especially the Catholic ethos. The Campus Ministry team tries to encourage a sense of belonging within an inclusive and diverse community. As both a public and Catholic University, we endeavour to foster an appreciation of the sacred within life, with particular focus on the Catholic tradition. Professionally, I operate from a spiritual base incorporating contemplation in my day-to-day work. The contemplative space enhances all of my life which I value and take time to develop.

Within the campus ministry team I had a key role in the organisation of bi-annual national social justice, spirituality and social gatherings for students and from these, opportunities for student involvement in community and Catholic social justice issues. Part of my role now is to encourage and support students in community engagement work at the Atherton Gardens Housing Community in

Fitzroy. Emphasizing reflection, as well as action, has become a significant part of my work.

Several of the ACU courses incorporate volunteer community engagement experience units which link to appropriate course work and personal reflection. The aim is that these activities benefit both the recipient and the provider. Holland and Robinson (2008) maintain that the benefits of service learning for students can be clustered around “personal, social, civic, academic, and career learning outcomes” (p. 20). One particular way I promoted outreach, was to encourage students to become involved in the local community. This involvement can help students to understand their role as community members.

Reflection is a key component of community based learning. Holland and Robinson (2008) argue that “through reflection, adult learners see the value in learning in community based settings” (p. 22). My study addresses the impact of arts-based reflective practice in a tertiary setting. The implementation of this method of inquiry offered the students a significantly different experience of reflection. Lett (2008) highlights that “understanding is created through multimodal representations and inquiry. It contributes to the construction of personal meanings” (p. 12). This inquiry is multi-faceted involving the body, the senses, personal imaginative construction of knowing as well as a co-construction of knowing shared by others.

THE BROADER CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

Within the context of higher education, community engagement can take many different forms. During the 1990's, my own conceptualization of the idea of serving the community in outreach work, shifted from the idea of “service”, as a one-way approach by service providers, to actions that emphasise engagement with others in a collaborative, shared endeavour which is directed towards mutually agreed-to goals (Weerts and Sandmann 2008). Community engagement initiatives aim to increase levels of engagement in communities where there is disadvantage, marginalisation, or social exclusion. Green (2001) found that such experiences offer opportunities for students to experience difference and to encounter diversity in a place in which economic injustices may lead to modified prejudicial attitudes.

In the past the nature of community engagement work within educational institutions has been variously defined. However, Bell, Scott, Jackson and Holland (2007) argue that “across the international literature, there is now a strong consensus” around the definition of university-community engagement (p. 4). The following definition has now been widely adopted:

the collaboration between higher education institutions and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. AUCEA describe university engagement as, ‘a two way-relationship in which the University forms partnerships with the community that yield mutually beneficial outcomes’ (Bell, Scott, Jackson and Holland, 2007, p. 7).

ACU defines community engagement as:

The process through which the University brings the capabilities of its staff and students to work collaboratively with community groups and organisations to

achieve mutually agreed goals that build capacity, improve well-being, and produce just and sustainable outcomes in the interests of people, communities and the University (para. 1).

In effective university-community engagement, the promotion of interpersonal relationships, support and having mutually agreed goals and governance structures between university and external partners from the different community agencies and organizations are crucial. Ongoing evaluation of these partnerships is essential and the understanding and valuing of each organizations mission establishes a sense of ongoing commitment to the engagement.

Many students have taken part in structured experiential learning that has given them opportunities to strengthen their educational development and are often experienced beyond university settings. The 2009 Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) reported that, “beyond-class interactions play a formative role in student learning” (p. 21). Whilst such interactions are important, what is also required is a process for ensuring the integration of life experience, work outside the university and work within the class room. Students need to be provided with opportunities to explore and reflect on all these and the impact they have on their lives. Support is required for students in community engagement work especially in the area of reflective practice.

Many students report that they do not know how to reflect. Power (2010) suggests that repeated exposure to reflection, without some assistance does not guarantee that trainee teachers will develop critical or higher levels of reflective thinking. In addition to this lack of apparent skill in reflective practice, students know and represent their knowing in many different ways. As Eisner (2008) suggests knowing understood as “the provision of warranted assertions, represented through language” is only one way of understanding the world. It has become increasingly clear that knowledge or understanding is not always reducible to words and this opens “the door to multiple forms of knowing” including knowing through the arts as well as the knowing that derives from relational inquiry processes” (p. 5). This suggests the need for an effective learning environment where reflection skills are privileged and multiple ways of knowing be incorporated into reflective procedures.

There is now a new urgency to raising the position and status of the arts in education for many believe they have a significant role in humanizing the world through developing citizenship and social consciousness by fostering tolerance, recognizing difference, developing diverse ways of thinking and creating a supportive social environment for learning (Burridge 2010).

Pavlovich (2007) highlights the lack of reflection within tertiary institutions and she argues that engaging in interactive and dialogical inquiry offers a “focus on self and that one’s learning journey is rarely explored” (p. 281). Gleeson too, also advocates for self-awareness in education and states that:

if we are serious about recognising the diversity of learning styles and the worth of enacting democratic processes, then it behoves us as educators and researchers to attend to the day to day lived experiences of the learners (2004, p.5).

Over my nine years at ACU I have frequently been told by students of the extent of these challenges and the satisfaction they experience in overcoming them.

Arts and Reflection

Eliot Eisner (2006), a longstanding advocate for the arts in education, in presenting his argument on the future of arts-based research, claims “the arts provide access to forms of experience that are either un-securable or much more difficult to secure through other representational forms” (p. 11). The use of the arts provides access to emotions, thereby making vivid what has been hidden by the habits of daily ordinary life (Eisner, 2006). The development of emotional understanding (intelligence) has been taken up by a number of educationalists (Goleman 1995; Cohen 1999; Elias, Tobias et al. 1999; Mayer, Caruso et al. 2000) and as Stern (2010) notes is “dramatically and positively predictive not only of academic achievement, but also of satisfactory and productive experiences in the world of work and marriage, even of better physical health”.

Orange (1995) in her psychotherapy work emphasises the desirability for emotional understanding and also argues that this is achieved through a process of making sense together. She notes that making sense is “an affair of memory, emotion, and anticipation, of past present and future...Making sense stretches the bounds of bivalued logic and forces us to think about experience in more holistic but less neat categories” (p. 6). Further she argues that making sense requires collaborative effort; it is a process of knowing by participation in the emotional lives of human beings.

REFLECTION OPPORTUNITIES

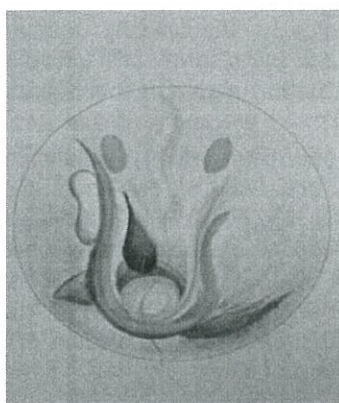
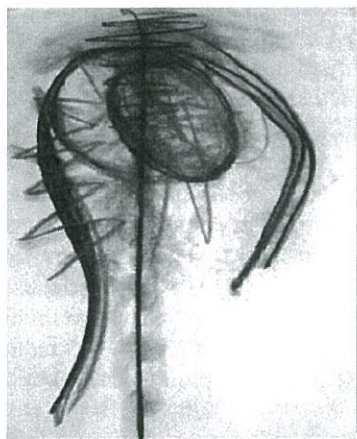
With all these influences and confluences, I became committed to develop a process of reflection where students would work collaboratively and creatively in small groups to make sense of their experiences of community engagement and to understand how these experiences related to their program of study, their values and aspirations. Even though these opportunities were offered to students only a small number took up the prospect.

Bulman and Schutz (2008) wrote that there are no “universal definitions of reflection in literature” (p. 5). However, they do name some specific qualities in relation to it. Reflective practice should be characterized by creativity and open-endedness. This requires courage, open-mindedness and the ability to accommodate differences as one enters into a review of one’s experience and a consequent process of meaning making. As it involves inter-relationship with others in a group setting, it also demands an ability to modify and expand one’s insights, and also, and also to begin to see things differently. Its great value is that the reflector continues to represent and to describe her/his behaviours (a process involving not only thinking but also the ability to feel) in order to come to greater personal and group understanding. Both Smith (1998) and Pager (2001) see this as a positive and useful experience and my own study re-interate this. Reed and Canning (2010) suggest that one can develop into a reflective practioner most effectively within a “learning community where individuals are actively listening and responding to the thoughts and experiences of others” (p. 10). In this context, both the co-constructing of knowledge and the sharing of understanding takes place.

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

My first real experience of any sort of a reflective process took place in the 1980’s in higher education setting. There, I was involved in small groups which were

encouraged to map life experience through labelling of significant moments either by journal writing or through visual art work. This personal work was shared with the group but there the process ended. We were left in the circle of individual and group experience with little possibility of moving forward in terms of greater understanding. As a person who lives with chronic pain and involved in ministry, I would often represent my experiences through art but



I did not attempt to inquire systematically into these representations or to construct specific meanings from these drawings when I initially drew them. As well as my visual representations I created some journaling and at different times, had shared this in small groups. I did not find this completely satisfying either. However through studying at MIECAT, I realised that I had always wanted to have clear procedures to hopefully lead me to deeply understand my patterns of being.

NOTE: PICTURES IN
COLOUR IN ORIGINAL -

The MIECAT processes give a flexible framework for the coming to deeper understanding and meaning – a trusted long term commitment that enhances both relationship and self-knowledge.

THE IDEA FORMS SLOWLY

Creating an appropriate learning environment, one of real quality, is not an easy matter, particularly within the university setting. Formal educational institutions are very good in providing resources for scientific and technical equipment, but, the arts, generally, receive little resourcing and timetables assume that almost any physical space will do for the reflective process (Cross 2009). He also comments that where the learning space between teacher and learners is not so hierarchical, there is a greater chance the learning space can be “genuinely shared more flexibly” (p. 37). This also relates to my own experience where I have had to create a suitable space for reflection opportunities.

During the early years of my role as Campus Minister at ACU, a small number of students described to me some transforming experiences they had had as part of their community engagement experience. Others felt a degree of fear and lack of being supported in their exposure to working with people in marginalised situations. I knew that more should and could be done to help these students make the most out of their experiences of community engagement. I was already committed to giving time in my rather busy life to explore my own experiences through the arts and with another person, and so was eager to assist others in a similar process.

AN OPPORTUNITY AROSE

An opportunity to do so first arose in 2002 with an individual student. This student, with whom I had regular conversations about life and faith issues, shared with me the many challenging situations she encountered during a community engagement placement. She was enrolled in a pastoral counselling course and had been on a placement at a well known telephone crisis agency. She shared with me that in listening to peoples’ experiences of struggle, hurt and aloneness she felt confronted with a sense of helplessness and wanted to offer as much support as possible to the person dealing with these circumstances. As part of her course requirement, she was required to give an oral presentation and submit a written reflection about her experience and learnings. As someone who would frequently draw as a way of self expression, she showed me a work she had created during placement. She was a person whose spirituality was important to her and she valued sharing this art and written work with me. For both of us it was a way into her lived experiences and I felt as though I was companioning her on her spiritual journey.

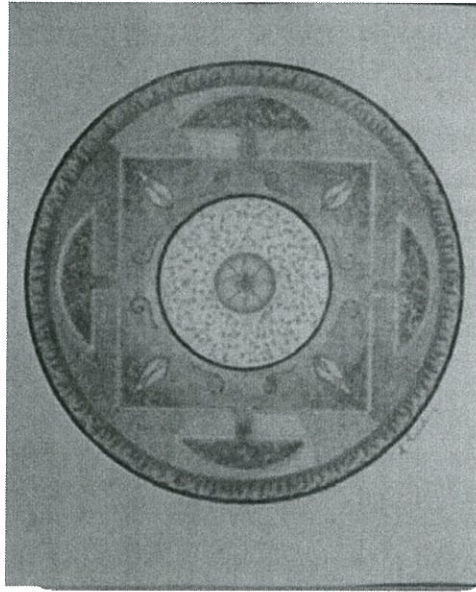


Figure 1 – Ruby - pseudonym, biro on paper, 210mm x 297 mm

I was excited that even without support and direction, she was using art as a way of representing her experiences. Her piece of art work had a profound effect on me. The representation was done in fine colour biros and must have taken hours to complete. It had so much detail. She explained that each colour represented some of her feelings and thoughts as she listened to the people on the telephone. Pain, sadness, anger, hope and frustrations were all expressed in what she described as a mandala. This was a student with many talents. She loved to compose music and play the piano. I suggested she might like to place her art work on the piano and compose and play music about her experience and tape what emerged.

Recognising that this student knew I was studying creative arts therapy and knowing her readiness to represent her own experience visually, I offered her the opportunity to work with me as a companion in an inquiry process. I have used the term 'companion' deliberately and refer to Lett (personal communication, September, 2008) who said:

the relationship between co-inquirers is described as companioning. It is assumed that a deep intersubjective connectedness held with trust, strong resonance and respect for the importance of the content in the process of relating, will greatly enable a true co-construction of meaningfulness...the art of improvisational resonance and compassionate confrontation in the search for meaning is central.

Companioning is a shared encounter and is a support in the process of understanding. I proposed she meet with me on a weekly basis for an hour and then continue her inquiry in her own time. This was the first time that I'd companioned a student using the procedures articulated by staff at MIECAT. There are a series of procedures that begin with a focus on lived experience, which is then further accessed through representational forming. This is followed by a phenomenological description, bracketing out assumptions and judgements about what the person thinks she or he knows, thus horizontalizing (Moustakas 1994)

with the aim of seeing the art work with fresh eyes. Allan (2004) highlights that this procedure intends to enabling the person to be “present to the ‘other-as-art’ as it is experienced in the moment” (p. 12). As Moustakas suggests the horizons that open up to us in this process make us aware of the ongoing possibility for making sense of experience, in ways that fall outside our usual habits and patterns.

The further steps in making sense of what is seen via representational forming emphasises the relational, intersubjective dialogue that occurs between the inquirers and their representations. This dialogue is not always verbal – it can be visual, musical, kinaesthetic and textual. It is an attempt to offer another a response for seeing other possibilities and also offers support within this engagement. Being in this intersubjective field can be intricate as Allan (2004) describes:

It is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional - there are felt temporal and spatial shifts, constantly changing embodied experiences of being with another, different expectations of how the other should be for us, experiences of emotional resonances, dissonance, similarity and difference and varying feelings of autonomy and inclusion (p.58).

Procedures of the inquiry

Representations of Experiencing

An experience is accessed and formed by creating a representation using the creative arts. Through the mediums of drawing, collage, body movement, writing, poetry or prose, vocalising or sculpture, one enters into self/other expression in modes that allow various access points to lived experience.

Bracketing out and phenomenological description

Once a representation has form, there then is the opportunity to find out more about experience. The process then involves creating a description of the representation. This is done through a bracketing out of beliefs and assumptions about the phenomenon to ensure that one can be “open to all possibilities”. The premise for this is that all aspects of a phenomenon (a representation of experiencing) are potentially meaningful; therefore they must be attended to. One describes rather than interprets. Bracketing out is a way to see beyond our ‘natural’ attitude – the ‘network of assumptions that we usually employ to make sense of our everyday world’ (McLeod 2001). Description requires focused, close attention, and openness to the representation. Giorgi describes this as an “open ended presence to the phenomenon that is unfolding”. The description also implies the ‘bracketing of past knowledge about the phenomenon being experienced’ (1992, p. 5). MIECAT’s approach is one that is committed to exploration of experiencing steeped in respect where an open mindedness is of value. However it is difficult to exclude all biases. Description can be done in a number of ways, individually, collaboratively, verbally, written, taped audio or visual.

Selecting Key Words, Images or Phrases- Reduction and Amplification

One then enters into a reduction by identifying, highlighting and selecting key words, images or phrases within the description that hold significant resonances (are access points). These words are key markers to understanding. They are a personal response to what stands out in the description helping to highlight what is important at this stage of the inquiry. Then they can be clustered in groups of similar words. The cluster then may be reduced further and given a title. Sometimes a word or clustered group might be so significant that it leads to another representation which opens up the cluster to amplify something that is significant.

Inter-subjective Responding

As I have already mentioned, central to the MIECAT form of inquiry is being companioned by the other person. The intersubjective dialogue and responses where trust is central offers possibility for further knowing. Intersubjectivity is a shared experience and is non-interpretive and co-created. It is a process of being present, listening attentively and finding understanding together. Heron and Reason (1997) describe an intersubjective encounter as: transactional, interactive: to touch, see, or hear something or someone does not tell us either about our self all on its own or about a being out there all on its own. It tells us about a being in a state of interrelation and co-presence with us (p. 270).

This is respectful and shows willingness to co-create, to co-construct an approximation of meaning. The process requires resonance. An inter-subjective response is need based on what the person has shared through their representation/phrases/keywords. It can be expressed creatively through a painting, movement, poem or any other medium.

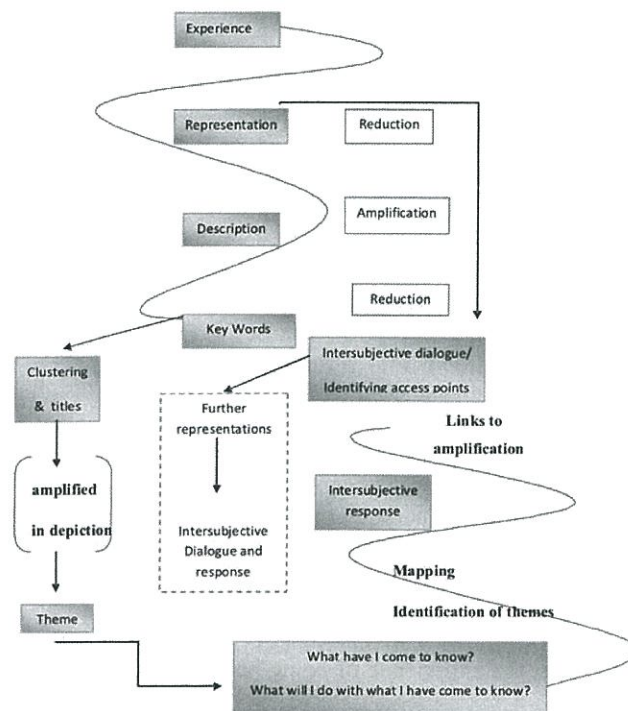
Construction of themes

Life themes might begin to be given form following reduction, amplification and responding. A theme is usually a statement that identifies patterns of experience. Themes are something quite essential to the way we are in our life at the moment and in the past. Themes serve to clarify what we know and what we want to do with what we know.

Approximations to meaning, creative synthesis

An approximation to meaning or an essence statement expresses a person's current and essential understanding of an experience. As Lett (2008) says it "attempts a reduction to the heart of the matter under consideration, in its most succinct possible form" (p. 7). It is not fixed but might continue to change over time; it is a temporary approximation to meaning. A creative synthesis can be represented in any form.

These procedures do not have to be followed in sequence but their usage depends on how the companioning process unfolds, the emerging data and what seems to invite a particular focus. The MIECAT process seeks to "make an inquiry of shared understandings of experience, helps to construct meanings with others, and encourages the others to make life choices from the exploration of other ways of being" (Lett, 2008, p. 4).



Sometimes further representations were made usually time dependent and if participant feels this step is important.

These procedures often done in collaboration with other/s are a means to access deeper experiencing; they are not linear but emergent within the relationship. Some of the procedures are often repeated. It involves a return, a revisiting or re-entering and willingness to be open to the experience with the intention of creating an approximation of meaning. Thus space is created in which to identify bodily felt senses, thoughts, feeling and associations. This is what Lett (2001) means when he says that “all the modes of knowing makes the process epistemological holistic” (p. 13). This requires reflection, a sense of trust, being present to what is emerging and being open to inquire into the unknown. Reflexivity is gained through noticing and naming what is happening in the experience; this is the content in the process.

Student's reflections on these procedures and processes:

It's so special to receive an intersubjective response. It feels like you've been listened to and that what you have shared matters and is worthwhile. It also creates a bond between the giver and the receiver, which is partly an unspoken understanding of each other (Alanna's journal 2006, p. 14).

Sharing your views about their experiencing and giving this back...is like a gift. It was participatory; we all worked together in the inquiry process. I felt that we were sharing all the time. We share through listening; responding, looking, creating, interacting...I have never

done this before. It is great to get a response from others and also to create an intersubjective response...and give them something...this was building on the relationship as well, and this strengthens the bond in the group as well, giving and receiving. It had a great impact on me working together in a group. We were engaging together. (Audio tape – Group conversation 2006).

In the students' comments recorded above I was struck by their appreciation of being taught a process that supported their learning. As well as this, I felt humbled by the quality of the interactions and by the honesty between group members. It seemed that by being together, having a structure and learning to be non-judgemental and resonant to their own and others' experiences, students were able to increase their potential for learning about themselves as a participant in community engagement and about their fellow students. As Finlay (2005) suggests, "through the web that is intersubjectivity, one comes to understand that self-understanding and other-understanding are intimately interwoven" (p. 285). They identified the benefit of committing to the group process and meeting together regularly as well as the experiential nature of the inquiry. There was a sense of reciprocity in the inquiry. The students articulated a loyalty to each other and a strengthening of their bonds. I didn't realise that this would be part of the process.

Helen expresses in her journal how the collaborative process is extremely personal and comments on the experience of being able to give an intersubjective response to another.

One thing I noticed was, although our work was reflecting our experiences it was also an intense reflection of our personal lives and issues we each are facing at that point in time. I was moved to produce an intersubjective response (using music) for Alanna, and also for Kim. In fact, I am very excited about it. I also wrote a few things in response to Alanna's dialogue, trying to link it to the musical composition. I enjoyed this exercise, very much, and once I had finished I felt a sense of completeness within myself (Helen's journal 2006, p.16).

In this last sentence above, Helen shows a beginning understanding of the how "content in process" (Lett, 2008, p. 3) can lead to significant learning.

As a facilitator, I was trying to attune to what was emerging for each participant. At the same time I tried to facilitate the students' learning by teaching them the procedures, as well as the conceptual bases for doing these. I was also wanted, in these initial sessions, to encourage students to be attuned to and more fully aware of the present moment. Stern (2004) describes this moment as a "...holistic happening...a gestalt" (p. 35). Thus a present moment comprises experience of affect, cognitions and a succession of actions and perceptions. It is assumed that by inquiring into what is present in the moment through a non judgmental process of description and intersubjective responding patterns of behaviour become highlighted and this can then lead to the articulation of themes and new possibilities for action. Staying with, being with; noticing what was occurring was encouraged all through this process. In this kind of experiential, intersubjective reflective activity understanding is sought through the senses and multi-modal exchanges. The emergent material requires an attitude of trust. As I listen to the students and try to understand what is happening within and between them, I pay

very careful attention via observation and awareness of my own resonances. Sharing my own responses with them helps in the construction of understandings.

In being present to what is accessed, we practice intersubjective relation, we are reflexive, we collaborate in a participatory way, we reach into emotions and thoughts, we may explore patterns of being and focus on values embedded therein. We may select out a new focus because it demands our attention, so we construct understandings as we stay with the new focus (Lett, 2008, p. 7).

The following journal entries show Helen's ongoing inquiry process in which deeper understandings about herself emerge.

I wanted to work in the community with people who were disadvantaged but I felt worried and afraid that I couldn't handle it and it could be overwhelming. I thought I might become too emotionally involved, and I might not have been able to handle it mentally and emotionally. The reason for this is that I know someone close to me that suffers with a mental illness so I was afraid that it would bring up past emotions especially of helplessness as to how to be with people who struggle.

Our perceptions of others are tainted depending on the colour of the window of which we look at them through. I want to change the way that I look at disadvantaged people e.g. those that are disabled or suffer with mental illnesses and not see that they are so different to me (Helen's journal, 2006, p. 12).

Her sharing is where shared experiences of insecurity, uncertainty, of having to let go past perceptions and negative responses in order to be able to trust and to be open to the future. Walking along side her on this journey, throws fresh light on my own life experience. It offers human solidarity. Helen's final piece of work is a reflection on her experience of her community engagement work.

Procedures:

- Helen created the representations.
- Together a verbal phenomenological description took place. (Not included)
- She identified the access points that held the strongest resonance for her.
- Reduction to a piece of poetry

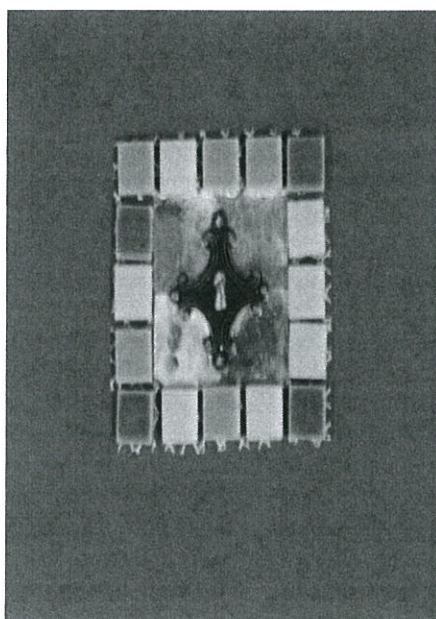


Figure 45 - Helen, 2D, objects on canvas

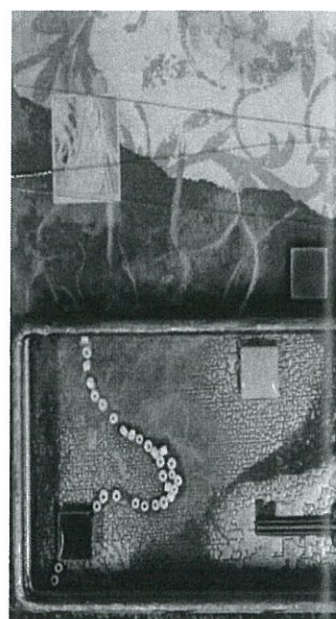


Figure 46 - Helen, 2D objects on canvas & spray paint

Access point: The colour blue

It is calming. It is contentment. It brings me a sense of peace.

Access point: Gold

I have used gold to show the valuable nature of my experience with the Atherton Gardens children, it has become a thread that is tied to my being.

Access point: the image of the heart

The image of the heart signifies my emotion, the centre organ (or muscle): the place where I feel that my love and faith abide, simultaneously. It has played a big role, so I have placed in a small window on the left.

Access point: the white beads

The white beads in the gold rectangle symbolise the trail of my journey, like a map that leads me to the key.

Access point: the canvas

The canvas depicting the keyhole is plain. There is a mirror behind it, which symbolises the reflective process I have used to find meaning in my experience.

The other canvas is filled with stories because it is a symbol for the journey that we take to reach our destination. It is full of happenings and important meetings.

The journey can be just as important

*(in fact more important) than the destination itself.
This is what I have found within my own experience.
Below is a poem I have written to accompany the two small canvases.*

The Key

*Travelling, unknowing,
Feeling my way through uncertainty.
Somewhere, someone turned on a light,
But I still can't be sure of where I'm stepping tonight.
Then a stirring wakes me,
As though from out of a dream,
And I reach for the key
As it floats down life's stream.
Tied to treads of gold
Are glittering smiles,
Teaching me to laugh-
There's my forgotten inner-child.
And it's another page
In the same little book,
I'll tear a piece to give away...
Yes, it's precious to me
That you can see,
But it loses its value,
Up there on the shelf-
Collecting dust all by itself.
We can swap and share tales,
So our books won't stay bare.
A true mirror reflects*

*More than what appears to be there.
You can follow the map,
But don't be scared if you stray-
No two paths can ever
Be travelled in the same way.
And once I hold the key,
I'll open up all the doors,
And set free what was trapped
Beneath the cold stone floors.
You can't sell a blue sky,
And you can't buy it either,
But if you try, what you desire
Can shine out the more clearer.
So take a chance orange girl,
With a heart open wide,
And let yourself be surprised
At what awaits you inside.*

In summary Helen notes:

My experience of working with the children at the Atherton Gardens' Breakfast Program, has allowed me to become more aware of the importance of interacting with others and the way in which this interaction can influence our lives. Through my reflection of the experience and the wonderfully inspiring people I have come to know along the way, I discovered that every encounter we face in life holds a key.

The exploration of what I found within my pieces of "expression" was a state of reflection and created a better understanding of how I interact with others, how I experience things and what my expectations are. In doing this I can form a method of becoming "in tune" to myself and those around me when I engage in community environments. This awareness can help me to grow from my experience, rather than let it go by without a second thought. Each key opens a separate door during certain periods in our life's journey. I found a major key in this past one year, and it has proved to open an awareness that can continue to grow, as long as I nurture it, throughout my life.

My most significant learning: *The journey can be just as important (in fact more important) than the destination itself. This is what I have found within my own experience.*

This experience has done more for me than simply giving me a guided tour through the reflection. It has made me aware... in the sense of what it really means to be part of a community, and the discovery of the communities within our community. I find that many of my ideas have changed in regards to the volunteer community engagement aspect of this internship.

I had approached it with the notion that I was there to help someone else who was in desperate need of me. It turns out I was wrong. I discovered it was I who needed them, and so ultimately we are helping each other. Experiencing the reflective process first-hand by participation was more rewarding than I had imagined it to be. I now have a broader understanding of the objectives behind reflection and how multi-modal experiential inquiry works.

I had imagined that my personal involvement in the arts-based inquiry experience and the community engagement would be two separate entities. Instead I found them to be co-existing. I found it most valuable that I had the opportunity to experience both (Helen's Journal 2006, p. 45).

Robert's reflective journal from his work with Mowanjum Aboriginal community in the Kimberley

This inquiry in short, was collaborative. For Robert it focussed on what he described as the *mind and heart* of his experience in the Kimberley. It seemed to suggest an entirely different level of personal reflection on his part, one which I would define as a "deep learning process" (Laird and Garver 2010). For myself this was a process of developing companioning skills. As we worked together, I experienced extraordinary times of feeling a sense of "we-ness". I felt as if we were both in Robert's story together, even though I was viewing it from a personal stand point. We both developed understandings about ourselves and the other which were profound and respectful of difference.

Tears for the lost ones

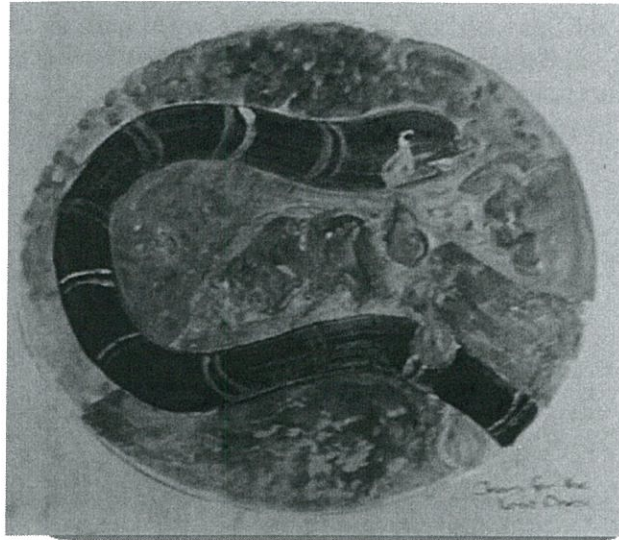


Figure 66 - Robert HOSKINS, Title: "Tears for the lost ones"

acrylic paint on paper, 210mm x 297mm

*My grief deepens
 My tears become real,
 As I cry for those who are gone and those who are here.
 I paint the shape of the Ungud snake
 Who mourns her mate at the break of the day?
 I have so many tears
 So much to grieve
 For I am alone
 At the end of the world
 I miss my loved ones and am lost in my pain.
 My energy fades
 At the end of the day.
 And I grieve these boys
 The lost ones
 The ones who turn from the door of their culture
 And knock at the door of mine
 This door has no key and many locks
 They knock and knock again
 Then give up the search
 Walking at the edge of nowhere
 Stumbling on a path to destruction
 Where alcohol, drugs or sheer boredom
 Will take them to an early death.*

*And where are their Elders
The Lost ones.
Who were boys like these boys
Bright eyed and agile
Now bowed down with endless grief.*

Key Words chosen by Robert and Mary from the prose above.

My grief deepens
My tears
I cry
I paint
So many tears
So much to grieve
I miss my loved ones
I grieve these boys
The lost ones
This door has many locks
Search
At the edge

Mary's visual intersubjective and poetic response

IN COLOUR.



Figure 66 - Mary MCINERNEY, soft pastel on paper, 210mm x 297mm

Haiku
Painted Ungud snake

Destruction and early death
Full of tears and grief

The main issues which emerged from our intersubjective dialogue were around the grief Robert experienced in the Kimberley, his own personal grief in denying his artistic contemplative self, general feelings of melancholia and the recent death of his father-in-law. From our intersubjective dialogue the following images were created by Robert.



Figure 67 - Robert HOSKINS, Title: "Tears"

found cupboard door, bitumen paint & oil paint



Figure 68 - Robert HOSHINS, Title: "Wound",

polystyrene & bitumen paint & oil paint

Access points: The tears: Grief is expressed in both works, in the tears in the first and the flowing 'blood' in the second. It is what I am feeling at the

moment and the grief has many layers: Grief is what I experienced in the Kimberley and grief of my own father-in-law's death. It is grief of my own childhood. Turning away from the contemplative side and the grief of entering the last phase of my life becomes a reality.

Theme

When I reflect on the grief, I realize the importance of having someone whom I can trust to share my experiences with. I need to externalize my feelings within a safe space: the presence of mature people, a warm supportive environment, and the thought that I have time to process the feelings that may emerge.

Mary's visual and written intersubjective response

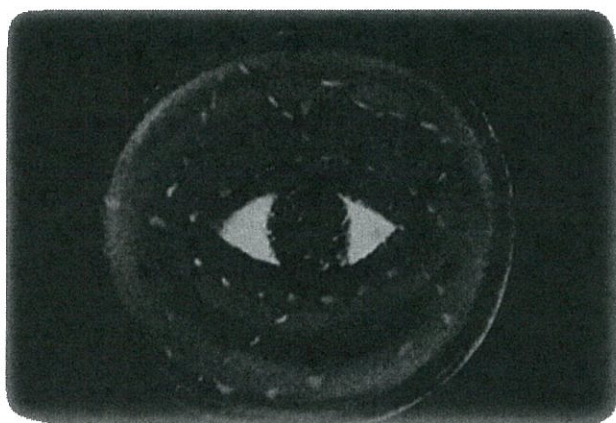


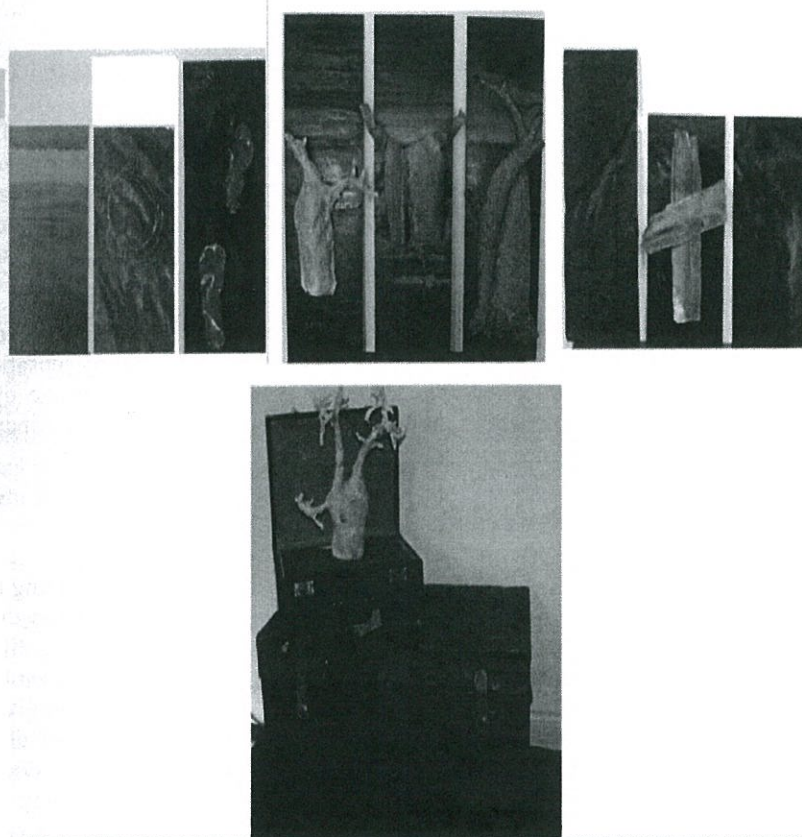
Figure 69 - Mary MCINERNEY, soft pastel on paper, 210mm x 297mm

The tears of your human experiences bring you to these representations "Wound" and "Tears". Your tears for the lost ones in the Kimberley also bring you in touch with your own tears of denying your contemplative artistic self. Yet from this, emerges your story of the many currents and patterns in your life. Your life patterns at times lead you away from your contemplative life, where you feared that there would be a sense of nothing within. I resonate strongly with you in this as it is a strong current and pattern in my life too. You confront your tears of being for others and deny your contemplative self. You felt caught between two worlds. Too busy to feel your own grief, and told that you are not allowed to be melancholic. The many patterns and colours in your currents remind me of a cloak of many colours that hold you and your grief. Melancholia has its place, it can be felt and this is different from being stuck in it and allowing it to overwhelm you. Now new patterns are emerging, a contemplative self.

What emerged from the above work and intersubjective dialogue and response, was an installation of nine panels, exploring my feelings of the

Kimberley and issues of loss and displacement. In the following panels, I deal with the disruption to the land, to the people and the grief that arises from this disruption. I found this chest, discarded on a neighbour's nature strip. The find led me on a complex journey through my memories of the Kimberley and my awareness that the people of Mowanjumb had been moved many times to their present settlement. Having found the chest below, I began to work with the concept of an altarpiece, based on my experience in the Kimberley. The work on the first two panels above began a complex series dealing with grief and loss. The final work called Kimberley Odyssey comprised the chest, nine panels and a "baked" boab tree in a suitcase

IN COLOUR.



Poetic summary statement

Reflection is:
not just gathering
but bringing experience into the light

creatively
multi-modally
moving my knowing from shallow to deep places.

Reflection requires containment:

by the art that can say more
than words
by another
with strength to hold
and respond to me
be with our common
spirit presence.

Reflection is best when we act together:

treading gently around our presence of shared value
yet
allowing surprises
to strengthen knowing
and
our different energies
to find balance.

Students' themes that emerged throughout my research.

- **Multi-modal reflective practice**

Multi-modality allows extended access to experience and enhances the reflector's capacity to re-experience feelings, thoughts, actions and associated body sensations that are the focus of the reflection. The different modes of representation offer multiple perspectives on experiences, and also served to enhance the participants' perceptions of themselves as creative practitioners.

- **Embodied reflective practice**

The whole self is brought into the inquiry where experiencing, understanding and knowing are explored. Emotion, feelings, thoughts, imagery, actions and values, were able to be named and more fully understood and managed and used actively in the process of reflection. Participants were able to confront intense and unexpected emotional material that connected to their university work and were able to do this without becoming overwhelmed. In this way the material of the curriculum of community engagement interfaces with personal issues. Embodied reflective practice is active in its orientation and so can be energising and experienced as empowering in the reflection process.

- **Structured reflective practice**

Rather than reflect in an open ended, undisciplined fashion, the participants (student and staff) both found it useful to have sets of procedures that provided safety. The "safe container" allowed participants to explore freely within the structures established by the procedures. Being able to trust the flow and cyclical nature of the experiential multimodal enhanced both the staff and students'

confidence. The cyclical nature of the inquiry process, that is the ease with which inquirers can repeat steps to gain greater clarity and understanding, was significant.

- **Collaborative reflective practice**

The group process encouraged sharing and relating. Participants learned to value the resonances shared within the group, that included both consonant and dissonant experiences. The atmosphere became one of trust and acceptance with a focus on the "here-and-now". Companioning of one another and the maintenance of an intersubjective connectedness was valued and embodied. This process of reflection created a sense of community of caring within the university. The capacity to hold different perspectives in the group in a non judgmental way helped students commit to their own knowing.

- **Spirituality in reflective practice**

Reflection was not just about gathering information and knowing more. The process connected the students to their deeper life meanings and enhanced their sense of personal spirituality. It also gave emphasis to the individual's faith through its representation in both visual and poetic form. Significant spiritual metaphors emerged as important.

- **Maintaining curiosity in reflective practice**

In an open and trusting environment, the not-familiar aspects of personal experience were given a voice. Surprise and delight experienced by others' intersubjective responses maintained the energy in the group, as well enhancing the possibility that the inquirers remain open to the unexpected, emergent material that might surface.

- **Organisational implications for reflective practice.**

The organisational implications for this type of reflective practice requires the creation of a flexible and sufficiently reflective space, in which students can explore their experience multimodally. The procedures are time consuming and ideally time allocation needs to be factored into the students' timetables. Structural change within the university setting is necessary so that reflective practice is seen as an important aspect of all learning.

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