

## Finding new landscapes of a creative identity

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### ABSTRACT

This paper engages with principles and practices of narrative methodology and hermeneutic practice to make sense of the world in the educational encounter. It reveals ways in which ten textile artists have constructed their life stories and created their artistic identities. It reports on the methodology and findings of the research study, *Common Threads* (Flood, 2003) through which I witnessed a variety of self-held beliefs formed through the experiences of childhood and family, and the decisions that changed the research subjects' creative and artistic journeys.

The aspects of these recorded stories reflect a complex set of relations in which each of the artists operated. The stories reflect how each research participant works and lives within a busy life while negotiating and maintaining a complex self-identity encompassing notions of 'being' creative. The ten artist interviewees provided through their stories an opportunity for others to engage at a close level with what it means to enact an artistic life. The research affirms the importance of providing opportunities for others involved and not involved in art making to become self-reflective in questioning their own lives while at the same time finding a better understanding of the ways they may enact a creative life. Implications for educational practice emerge through questioning how to encourage and enhance creativity in learning subjects.

### Introduction

In this research I sought to understand specifically the ways critical incidents, life histories and educational experiences impact upon an individual's ability to enact his or her desire to become an artist. In his work on the activation of biography and narrative, Michael Erben (1998: 4) states:

The *specific* purpose of the research will be the analysis of a particular life or lives for some designated reason for example in examining the world of work it may be appropriate to look at the biographical routes by which given individuals become teachers, nurses, prostitutes, librarians, actors, etc.

In his writings, Michael Erben deliberates on the methodological issues that confront biographical researchers and provides insight into the ways in which we can glean further knowledge on the nature and meaning of 'self' by investigating individuals' lives. My research adds to that body of knowledge and builds on Erben's ideas (1996, 1998) to explore notions of identity through biographical research.

In his reconsiderations of the grand narratives of history and culture, Jean-François Lyotard showed it is the people ("le commun") who actualise the narrative. He wrote, "a self does not amount

to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before" (Lyotard, 1984: 15). The narrative project from which this article is drawn, *Common Threads* (Flood, 2003), set out to activate narratives and work with relational networks by combining and merging the participants' stories with my own recollections and memories, as well as the words and ideas of educators and philosophers. Further, Lyotard posits that within narratives we determine and illustrate how criteria of competence are applied and thus "define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question" (1984: 23). In this context, my research contends that these stories are part of the cultures of difference, the cultures of artists' lives, and by hearing such situated stories we can gain further understanding into the ways of being creative, the ways of being an artist.

When I began the study I had many questions and, based on my own experiences, had some ideas or possibilities of what I might be seeking as a researcher in this field. I was like the great adventurer Alice who travels in Wonderland and then to other worlds through a looking glass. The looking glass provides an appropriate metaphor. Alice travels between realms through an object that reveals much about the externalised self and in doing so she discovers and reveals much about the internalised self.

On her travels, Alice encounters many creatures and characters, who confront her and ask questions requiring her to re-evaluate her ideas and prior conceptions. One such character is the Red Queen who asks Alice two questions that at some time or other we are likely to confront through the journeys of life: "Where do you come from?" said the Red Queen, "And where are you going?" (Carroll, 1946: 169). When discussing ideas of memory and narrative, these two questions posed by the Red Queen prove pivotal to the way we come to construct stories of self. Gaston Bachelard's (1969) reveries give us the opportunity to reflect upon the place memory and the (re)telling of remembered stories might hold in the construction of identity. Bachelard writes (1969: 99):

When all alone and dreaming on rather at length, we go far from the present to relive the times of the first life, several child faces come to meet us. Only through the accounts of others have we come to know our unity. On the thread of our history as told by others year by year, we end up resembling ourselves.

The work of the French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur extends our understandings of narrative in the constructions and understanding of selfhood. He explains (1983: 74):

without leaving everyday experience, are we not inclined to see in a given sequence of the episodes of our lives (as yet) untold stories, stories that demand to be told stories that offer the anchorage points for narrative?

Ricoeur questions how there can be such a thing as a potential story and asks, "are not stories told by definition?" (1983: 74). His examples of potential stories describe situations where small parts of a story are told and the interpreter (the listener as Lyotard would suggest) then pieces together the information to create the potential story. In the construction of this narrative, the text *Common Threads* (Flood, 2003) revealed the potential story waiting to be told. It evolved from the participants' life stories, and my own story as an artist/educator/ researcher, interspersed with a constant dialogue of theoretical discussions throughout the created text. What are life stories? Life's events and the way we undertake our life journeys along pathways can be planned or altered through encounters and choices or by the serendipity of life, the unexpected and interwoven occurrences. These journeys involve travelling alone or with others. However undertaken we carry ideas and beliefs adopted from our cultural histories or from the communities in which we live.

## **The purpose of the research**

The research was designed to further an understanding of what it means to enact a creative and artistic life. In such a scenario, and through the use of my own narrative voice, it was possible to reflect upon the stories and add considerably to the understanding and displacement of previously

held assumptions and constructions of the metanarrative idea of artist. The research does not claim a universalised position re artistic experiences, rather it is an interrogation of particular stories to reveal what characteristics or feelings might be identifiable in one's quest to be an artist.

From the study, implications for educational practice emerged; particularly in terms of how to develop and encourage creativity. The research confirmed there was need for appropriate art education to be available and accessible throughout one's whole life. Through his seminal writings on art education, Elliot Eisner (2002: 240) notes that new attitudes and dispositions are important outcomes of schooling, stating that "the disposition to continue to learn throughout life is perhaps one of the most important contributions that schools can make to an individual's development. growth is always possible and only terminates with the termination of life itself."

The twenty-first century world appears in urgent need of individuals who are able to find new ways of thinking to respond to the complexities of this world in ways that are meaningful to them. Eisner tells us that, "the arts are among the resources through which individuals recreate themselves" (2002: 240); and Herbert Read (1990: 266), "The real function of art is to express *feeling* and transmit *understanding*", and the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger (2000a: 145), "The artwork is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than what the mere thing itself is, *allo agoreuei*. The work makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory". While this study was not engaged in discussing the content of the artists' works, Heidegger's thesis is highly relevant to the substance of this research. The artworks or outputs—the constructions of the artists—are allegorical revelations of the experiences within their recorded stories. In *Common Threads* (Flood, 2003) new understandings emerged of the significant place art making held in each of the research subject's life story. The research reveals the clear presence of art practice as an anchoring mechanism and process of "unconcealment", as Heidegger put it, in each of the artist's lives.

## Section 1

### The Research Process

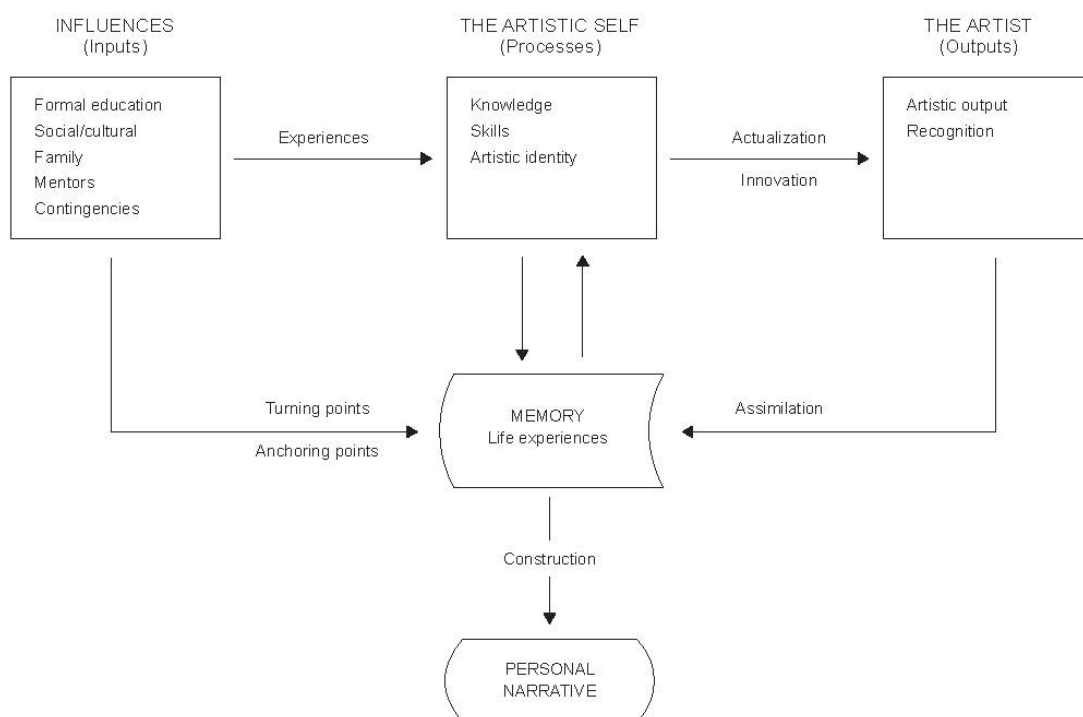
Through the research process new ways of interrogating data gained from personal narratives were constructed to help understand the needs of artists' creative lives. For the interview participants, by living and telling their narratives in a heightened way, a revelatory process was occurring. This is the actualisation, as suggested by Lyotard, in which the stories come into being, and in turn, this actualisation process provides the telling and continuation of the untold stories of which Ricoeur (1983) speaks.

#### *Step 1. The Model: Constructing Personal Narratives*

The model, *Constructing Personal Narratives* (see Figure 1) takes the form of an input/output diagram sourced from the social sciences. With the further input of theoretical readings on learning, art education identity and narrative, the model provides a new structure for relating the subjective (interiority) with the exterior world of the individual research subject. The model reflects a hermeneutical construction of knowledge and learning (Madison, 1990; Rickman, 1979) as well as enabling the crucial elements of creativity that are found in artistic identity and artistic output.

*Deconstructing the Model.* The model reveals the circularity of knowledge acquisition as reflected in the directional arrows that describe movements of action and reaction. These influences or inputs are the sequences of events or fragments that constitute the life story. They are enacted both through the individual's choices of action or they can be the result of serendipitous occurrences.

## Constructing Personal Narratives



**Figure 1.** Model: *Constructing Personal Narratives*. (Flood, 2003: 133)

The elements of the model are as follows:

- The Inputs: Formal education, social cultural, family, mentors and contingencies are identifiable influences or factors that impact upon a person as they go about their life.
- The Artistic Self: The skills and application sit within the realm of the artist and are the practice that the artist undertakes.
- The Outputs: The works created and the identity that is formed as a result of all those factors working together.
- The Links: Elements referred to as “turning points” and “anchoring points”.

*Turning points* are those events that cause or generate a change in the direction of the life story. They usually involve significant people, places or times when a re-evaluation of the life journey occurs. *Anchoring points* are those elements that anchor the individual’s life story and give it meaning that is significant. Such anchoring points, for example, might be choice of home location or the relationships that enable an individual to continue to undertake the life journey. Many of the artists in this study identified significant others who are or have been important anchoring points in their lives.

### *Step 2. The Interviews.*

The interview questions from this model were based upon each of the inputs, outputs and acquired artistic skills.

### *Step 3. Analysis of the transcripts.*

The subsequent transcripts were analysed on a thematic basis to identify common threads: the characteristics or features that the artists and myself, as artist, have in common in terms of family history, schooling and creative experiences. Each theme was colour coded on the actual transcript and then collated electronically. A significant step in the analysis was to identify two realms of response. Firstly there were the comments that sat within the realm of the interior or feelinged voice and secondly, comments that sat within an exterior realm: that is the related facts such as places of schooling and historical data.

An important feature of the model is its explicit revelation that learning is a lifelong experience. It reflects a broad conception of learning and takes learning from the confines of a formal education sector and places it as a central element of personal adaptation and self identity. Through the methodology of identifying and collating both the interior and exterior voices within the transcripts, new and innovative landscapes of texts were created. These I called *Textscapes* and *Threadscapes* (Flood, 2003).

### **Textscapes – what are they and how constructed?**

A Textscape is an innovative device of representation. I created this methodological device to insert into processes of narrative methodology enabling me to represent each life as a landscape with all the elements linked together, as may exist within a painted landscape, rather than as represented more conventionally within a linear story. To construct Textscapes I looked firstly for the emotive content of the transcripts, highlighting these statements and removing them from the complete text to place them together to form the Interior Textscape. I then highlighted the descriptive content that outlined the more factual elements of the life stories, collecting them together to form the Exterior Textscape. The comments were recorded in the order they appeared in the transcripts making clear the recognised assertions that memory is not linear (Lyotard, 1984; Ricoeur, 1983; Barthes, 1973; Giddens, 1991; Schacter, 1996; Usher, 2002). By doing this the Textscapes do not explore the linearity of life but rather, they make explicit how the elements of a life are linked by events and subsequent reflections on beliefs, by diverse accounts and networks.

Textscapes are thus a series of landscapes of life recorded visually through the text: the text emanating from the verbal language that was used by the artists and which I recorded as the researcher during the taped interviews. These Textscapes offered a means to extract and observe the subtext of emotional responses to events and ideas of self, and to the place of creativity within the constitution and negotiations of self.

Included in Figure 2 and Figure 3 are examples of the participant named Holly. In the constructed Interior Textscape are the words that reveal the important place creativity holds in her life and in her memories. This is followed by the Exterior Textscape in which the words of Holly make explicit the physical reality of her life, reflecting a very different and much more constrained way of being in the world. When reading the two Textscapes it becomes evident that in Holly's interior voice there resides recognition of the importance of her creativity and her ability to engage in creative acts regardless of her surroundings. In her exterior situation there appears a real conflict of space and her sense of belonging. However, in her Interior Textscape she reveals her art "takes her away" from the pressing confines of the large working class family in which she grew up.

### **What is a Threadscape?**

*Step 4: The constructions I called Threadscapes.* Threadscapes offer a wider view of how a group of people working within a broadly similar field share and express similar emotional responses to

events and ideas of self. I classified themes or common threads that were identified as significant from the Textscapes of all the artists. The emerging themes:

- family of origin;
- significant others;
- childhood memories;
- significant events;
- formal learning;
- current life situations;
- acts of will;
- self perception;
- response to the medium of art making: textiles.

Each of the above threads formed its own Threadscape in which the collective thoughts and words of the participants were brought together, revealing common ideas and vocabulary. Figure 4 gives an example of a Threadscape focusing on childhood memories. Common threads within the theme can be established. This research contends that while certain similarities can be found by making these themes explicit, approaches in learning and teaching can either enhance or counter these influences to enable creativity to flourish.

### **Findings: What the Textscapes and Threadsapes revealed**

The artists' stories all contained examples of how their lives have been shaped to a great extent by their family of origin and the events that occurred at particular times during their life stories. They reveal many of the challenging and confronting issues they have had to face as they have chosen to exist within other figured worlds while trying to meet a culturally constructed identity of 'artist'. The period of childhood they experienced for the most part was post World War Two, when access to manufactured goods was limited and classrooms were not overflowing with art materials. It was a time when clothes and home furnishings were handmade or created in the home. From the artists' stories, it became clear that informal learning experiences had a stronger and more lasting effect than the experiences found in their formal schooling.

Within the Interior Textscapes, the attachment to these experiences is made evident by the choice of words used when the artists talk about experiences with their parents or grandparents: one describes being with his mother on mending day and in other stories there are obvious tones of affection and a sense of nostalgia. In stark contrast, there is little or no passion attached to the schooling memories that are recounted. Only one artist spoke with any intensity of emotion and that was attached to a particular teacher and the way that teacher made her feel. Most participants were non-committal, some dismissive, while others could not remember much at all. Given that most of them had attended school from five to seventeen years of age, it seems a sad indictment that they could not give a more positive picture of their formal art education especially when they were in what Doug Boughton (1980: 203) identified as the new, creative and studio-focused period of Australian art education.

This must lead one to ask why the art practice they claim is crucial to their personal well-being and now sustains them does not feature very strongly in memories of formal learning. If we compare this with the strength of memories regarding the experiences outside school, it indicates that the art education was either very poor, ineffectual or absent.



Most of the artists expressed a lack of self-confidence in their creative abilities at a young age. This was in spite of any support given by parents. The emotional responses were of feeling inadequate expressed in terms of not meeting expectations of what 'art' is. Most said they lacked drawing skills and could not create in the ways that were expected of them. However, they were all very confident of their skills in the textiles medium. They suggested that textiles as a medium was not seen as mainstream, which somehow further diminished their sense of artistic identity. Coupled with this uneasy sense of being on the fringe was a counterbalancing belief in the medium. This they were able to express in ideas of creating in spite of attitudes around them. They took great heart in the company of fellow artists and found the dialogues in which they engaged to be essential to their artistic identity.

The nine out of ten individual research participants who returned to study at a mature age found the study to be rejuvenating and affirming for their artistic identity. The return to study seems to have been a crucial turning point in their lives and one that led in some cases to them experiencing something illuminating. Their experiences in the higher education sector appear to have had a much greater impact upon the individuals than earlier leaning in the arts and many of them suggest they would not have been ready for this at an earlier stage in their lives. This leads one to question whether the current practice of entering tertiary education following high school, without any intervening period of experience, can have a deleterious effect upon the educational involvement of some individuals. From these artists' stories it becomes evident that as individuals they required support and access to education, but the times when this was appropriate differed for each individual. In the case of people who wish to become artists, it seems a level of maturity and further life experiences are important. The ability to make decisions and articulate that decision regarding the desire to practise as an artist often comes later in life. The research supports the observation that this is even more likely in the case of women who can be caught up in child rearing and family life for many of their early adult years. Eight of the women interviewed have had responsibilities of being mothers and caregivers and for the period of time when their families were young their art making was either on hold or had not begun to develop at any conscious level.

All these artists worked in regular forms of employment as well, so their art making, while being central to their lives, had to be allocated limited time due to the pressures of making a living. In the interior voices of all the participants they use similar, if not the same words to express how they felt about themselves, about their art making and about textiles in particular. The common Threadsapes reflect this commonality clearly and raise important questions regarding from where these feelings emanate, and why the words adopted by each person are so consistent with those of others. The suggestion that these feelings are innate would be considered a contentious statement at best but one to be considered. The artists all expressed a need to create in terms of an imperative that could not be denied; while also expressing it as a means of providing a way to find self-fulfilment and self-expression. As Taylor (2000) in his discussions about ideas of identity and self contends:

a sense of self is defined by the powers of disengaged reason as well as of the creative imagination, in the characteristically modern understandings of freedom and dignity and rights in the ideals of self-fulfilment and expression (Taylor, 2000: 503).

All the research subjects reflect in their stories strong feelings of an imperative that compels them to go on making art. One, who did not self identify as an artist also expressed this compulsion to make, linking it to emotional and physical wellbeing. The research contends that art making itself is a vital anchoring point in the lives of the participants. Their words indicate that the desire to create is intrinsic and exists despite whatever is going on in the exterior world. The desire to create appears to be resilient, and in spite of various times when the individual cannot practice their art making, the creative urge returns to their lives at times when they are able to re-engage with it.

Consideration was given to issues of agency and acts of will. The decisions to take a chance and make the journey appear to be direct acts of agency that change the contours of the landscape and

allow the forging of new pathways. The stories the artists told display strong evidence of will, making evident how an individual creates narrative through the selection and choice of action. The stories the artists told have made clear the need for a determined spirit and an ability to continue creating in the face of imagined or real criticism. Such criticism begins at an early age and one of the issues of formal schooling that makes it so unrewarding for the individual is the ever-present critical voice of authority imposing itself upon the individual. The artists' stories and in particular their interior voices reveal that the criticism goes to the very core of what artistic individuals hold to be essential in their lives and is often transferred directly to their sense of self. The traditional view of the rebellious artist becomes understandable when one can see explicitly how important this creative spirit is to the individual.

Through their stories this group of artists have yielded some clear pictures of how they are unwilling to bow to societal or community pressure. They have reached a position in their life stories where they are confident enough to be able to reject ideas and behaviour they find unacceptable while at the same time embracing artistic pursuits with vigour.

### **The first level of findings**

The following common threads of experience were realised from the listening and recounting of the artists' narratives. As I constructed this list of common elements from within the stories I become strongly aware of the ones I share with the artists and how I have addressed these issues within my own artistic identity. The identified common threads are:

- All the artists related experiences of making within their families. These familial experiences were attached to memories of being with significant adults.
- Parental support was evident in terms of providing encouragement and materials; however most parents did not actively encourage the pursuit of art as a career option.
- Formal schooling made little impact upon the artists' desire to practice and when remembered as a positive experience it was attached to the individual teacher and personal feelings rather than any particular learning experience.
- For those who undertook further study, returning to study and the completion of art qualifications was life changing and a turning point for the artists.
- All artists when remembering their early life expressed a lack of confidence in the self that was directly related to their perceptions of their own art making abilities.
- The sense of isolation the artists felt during their childhood and youth was no longer evident in adult life and their contact with other artists contributed greatly to the disappearance of feelings of isolation.
- All expressed the belief that the creative urge was intrinsic and a force within their lives.
- Their desire to create was not confined by societal expectations any longer. With maturity the artists all identified their determination to go on practising without needing approval from any quarter.
- All the artists discussed and described the way they felt about the textile medium in terms of a sensuous response to both the tactile and aesthetic elements of the medium.
- None of the artists considered that making money from their art determined whether they continued to create art works.
- All the artists expressed their interest in using organic or natural forms within their art works and this was reflected in heightened response to their environment.



- All the artists referred to their art making as anchoring places within their lives.

(Flood, 2003: 289)

## Section 2: Artistic identity

The next level of discovery engages with issues pertinent to the development of artistic identity and the implications for art teaching and learning. Eisner (2002) posits that art experiences are about discovering the contours of the self. In the study the artists revealed significant ideas about self and identity that can be found within the interior Textscapes. All the artists recounted important experiences with significant people, a phenomenon with which I could attest to, from my own formative experiences. For some it happened early, for others it came later, but each needed and found others who were interested in us as learners and in our artwork—interested enough to make a difference. While the responses were individual and reflected the experiences that were particular to their own life stories, there were distinct feelings of similarity in the tone and content of the stories. Throughout the study it was important to remember that when investigating narratives it is not the story itself, but what the story tells us that is relevant.

The common threads as identified go some way to explaining that feeling of similarity, but I felt there was more to it than that. I wanted to get beneath the surface stories, to go beyond the sentences and find the expressive content of the dialogues to find what illuminated their artistic voice and what these feelings and experiences were that sprang from their being; feelings and lived experiences referred to by the German philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) when writing about history in his work, *The Great Poetry of the Imagination* (see Rickman, 1979: 33). Dilthey's reflections on history and hermeneutics brought differing threads of imagination and lived experience together as formulations of the ways poets and creativity can affect us.

By highlighting the expressed feelings I was able to remove the particulars of story and expose the nature of emotional responses. These responses were primarily concerned with the medium and to art making and certain formal elements such as colour and texture. It became apparent that these expressions were spread throughout the transcripts and were an underlying text through which each artist continuously asserted their belief in their practice. The language used was consistently positive, constructive, confident and self affirming.

By exposing these inner beliefs and responses it has made clearer what is felt by these particular individuals who work and identify themselves as artists. This supports ideas from Dilthey as discussed by Rickman (1979: 153) in which he suggested that if we are to begin to know what a social group is like we must learn about the individuals who make up that group. By revealing such internal commentary, we can come to understand how essential the feelings associated with art practice are to this group of artists. Such feelings, as expressed by these individuals, cut across their physical, mental and psychological states. The interior Textscapes make evident introspective expressions of artists talking about art making. Rickman (1979: 161) reminds us that, "Understanding ourselves teaches us how we should live".

## Some final questions

Out of this research some important questions arise: How do we reproduce within the formal learning sector the positive experiences that are found more readily within the informal learning sector? And what are the essential messages that we must take away from these stories to inform our practice so that students' needs are not missed and their creative voices are not lost, or worse, feared and denied?

From the findings of the research I contend the following twelve points are crucial if we are to provide best practice in art education:

1. We should listen carefully to the narratives of those we teach in order for us to understand and determine the needs of learners when they are engaged in arts practice.
2. We should provide rich and rewarding art experiences in our classrooms, no matter what the age of the learner or the perceived level of talent. To do this we must engage with that learner in meaningful ways. This includes listening to and allowing the telling and retelling of personal narratives through which the individual becomes grounded and aware of their place within their family, their immediate community and ultimately the wider world.
3. We need to provide arts programmes that include rich experiences of art making delivered in meaningful and challenging ways. Young children need to work alongside their elders to come to know the skills and those elders must be the role models whom the young can easily access.
4. Art experiences need to provide dialogues in which feelings and self expression are developed. As educators, we must reflect upon our practice and question how we can ensure that students' stories are not absent within the art programme.
5. Teachers as a matter of course should invite their learners to consider and respond to situations as they arise. These responses need to be in visual and oral forms. The learner's opinions need to be sought and heard otherwise the individual will not be able to develop with confidence a sense of artistic self.
6. The students must be equipped to enter into discussions by being given experience within an appropriate discourse.
7. Essential is the need for art making to be reinstated as a core element of art programmes. From the interviews it was revealed that the artists recorded their responses to the medium in terms of physical and emotional wellbeing.
8. Art making has therapeutic qualities and should be provided as a matter of course so that art therapy is not needed at a later point in an individual's life. Too often the arts are seen as vehicles of repair for people who have foundered along the way.
9. We must provide those students who express interest or the desire to work within the arts with the means to do so. This entails enabling the students to progress confidently by providing them with validation of their inner voices and their artistic expression. It became clear from the transcripts that once approval had been given to the individual, there were marked changes to the positive in their self-perception.
10. It is imperative that young people in their formative stages of learning are given that approval and acceptance. Such approval of their work is invariably translated into approval or disapproval of the self. This again makes clear how interwoven an individual's sense of self is with their perceived artistic (or any other scholastic) ability.
11. All children or learners should be given every opportunity to receive art education that enhances their sense of self and encourages the individual to understand their own responses in a meaningful way. This is not to say we must consider that we are educating all children to be artists however, if an individual does wish to consider a career as an artist, then that decision will come from a position of confidence and understanding of self.
12. Tasks oriented towards defined products do nothing to enhance connections between personal input and construction. They call for repetitive, teacher dominated art products that ensure art making is reactive rather than self initiated and individually conceived. These are the art activities that either get lost in the memory, as they have no significance within the memory of the child or adult, or they are the rote methods that can have a permanent dominating effect on an individual's creativity. It takes many years of unlearning to repair

such teaching. By removing decision-making processes from the individual's learning, the inner voice is silenced.

In concluding I return to the Red Queen's second question: "Where do we go?" I ask this to reinforce that as educators we must continuously ask the question of ourselves and ask it on behalf of those we work with in the name of education. Dilthey, when he wrote of the importance of the consolidation and enrichment of human nature, meant for us to continue seeking ways of knowing and learning (see Rickman, 1979: 71). Taylor, when writing about lives, talked of our life journeys in the form of a quest, in which we have to "determine our place in relation to the good, therefore we cannot be without an orientation to it, and hence must see our life in story" (Taylor, 2000: 52). As educators, if we are to orient ourselves to the good, we must turn our attention to the types of learning and teaching we engender.

Heidegger (2000b) reflects on the learning/teaching way when he writes, "Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. Indeed the proper teacher lets nothing else be learned than learning" (2000b: 251). And extending from the art education context, Eisner (2002) says that a teacher's task is to design environments that promote the educational development of the young, and that "these environments include creating curricula, as well as engaging in the artistic use of one's self as teacher" (2002: 235).

Allowing young people to find and explore their inner voice will develop the individual's abilities to make decisions. By employing hermeneutic practices in which the student builds upon known knowledge to find solutions to problems both real and imagined, the art making becomes meaningful. For this to be achieved it would mean a radical rethinking for many educators; they would no longer see themselves as the centre of the learning experience. It would mean an understanding that we are all learners and teachers and that learning is a communicative act between people who are in essence making sense of the world and the manner in which they might take part in that world.

In ending, it was only appropriate that the artists' words concluded the study. Their words speak eloquently and forcefully of the place creativity and art making holds in their lives. They voice the feelings that we must encourage all our students to feel, whatever field of endeavour might engage them.

**Holly:** *It's a steadying influence and I just love all the sensuousness of colour and space and design. It just adds a richer world to you. I made a decision a couple of years back that I'll keep on forever. If I fail I don't care, it's something I'll do forever and you know That's Me!*

**Kathryn:** *It's so much the freedom to do what I want to do that is important I don't need to justify that. It's part of my identity. It doesn't have to be visible, but it's part of the self.*

**Annie:** *With my compulsion or my urge to create, I just find it something that enables me never to feel lonely. I really do believe that it saved me. It has been a saviour through much emotional turmoil whether it was self inflicted or otherwise.*

**Marianne:** *I think often creative people have enormous highs and lows, so they get enormous intensity out of life but also really hit rock bottom. I think it's an ability to give an enormous commitment to things. I think there's a motivation there that compels – it is not like a choice factor, that's how I know I operate, if I'm working on something, I'll sit up all night to get it right.*

**Sian:** *Making in textiles fits into a space. There will always be stitching in my life. Stitching is my life. I don't ever not have work that I am doing. I don't ever not have pieces that I'm working on. It's intrinsic to my life that there's pieces I am working on.*

**Hannah:** *I just love doing it, I don't know why. It's a love, all these interesting things I wish I had done years ago. Time's running out.*

**Fiona:** *Making the decision to go and do my art course. I felt my kids were grown up and what was I going to do with my life. It took me a while to get to the point where I am now that I'm ready to start on my own work.*

**Hilda:** *What is Art? It's something that has to be done. It's a driving force that compels me. It is something that controls me because I have to select, perceive, and the other things they talk about. I can't live without it.*

**Adam:** *Colour has a lot to do with the way I work and form. Colour and Form. Everything to me is very visual. I dream in full colour and stereo sound and I have total recall of what I think about.* **Susan:** *I think it's a journey of learning how to create and also a journey of skills and it's a never ending one, thank goodness. I couldn't bear the thought of getting to the end and thinking I have done that, what else could I do? I've got a lifetime to learn about.*

(Flood, 2003: 299)

### Interior Textscape: Holly

I loved my childhood I was independent from an early age, I would try and find my own space and do little things. I would draw and paint and I loved it all that sort of stuff by myself and in my own space. Art was the thing that took me away. I suppose I just had time to myself and found a release in art. I was a bit of a naughty girl in my teenage years. I wanted to be acknowledged in my own right. I was the first person in my family to get an education. I did it by myself (making) makes you that bit different from everyone else. I just went my own way and my mother used to say I wish you weren't so independent. I really could relate to art. Art opened up to me through a whole range of painters, colours and people. I loved all the colourists like Klee and Kandinsky. I was voracious with my interest in Art. I just really wanted to do something I loved and this was something I was alright at. I was living independently because I didn't get on with my parents. I wasn't the girl they expected. I suppose I felt so different and I wasn't like my mother. I suppose I've got a sense of aesthetics and I'm highly critical of my own work.

I am at the crossroads because I've taken on painting again You've got to have that sense of isolation, you have to be comfortable with your own space. It does take a lot of isolation and I find that hard. Often it's a meditative thing. I tend to love getting into more humorous things you know a slap at society. If I fail I don't care it's something I'll do forever and you know that's me, little reminders but I feel I've got such a backlog because life gets in the way. I don't get enough time to do a lot of things and I really need that space of my own because I never had it when I was young...

I don't know what it is inside me, maybe it is from when I was young. I hadn't reached a good enough point for myself. I suppose the worst critic is me. I think who cares I can do what I like because I'm valid to myself I feel like I don't have to prove myself as much as I used to. I'm going to fulfil my dreams because you only get one chance at it. So I was really determined and I wanted to be an artist. I mean I just love art. I suppose all my life I've gone onto different things thinking this thing called art is really hard but it has anchored me a lot.

**Figure 2.** *Interior Textscape*

### Exterior Textscape: Holly

I was born in Surry Hills I am the youngest of eight children, the seven eldest being boys, I am the only girl. I didn't relate to my mum very well, she expected me to be all cute and little and girly and I wasn't. I suppose after seven boys she wanted a girl and I wasn't a girly girl. It was probably hard on her. Being the only girl in a big family maybe I was isolated. We didn't have much room so I had to sleep in the lounge room. They were quite working class we didn't have much money and all the boys had become apprentices. Everyone had to do something practical to contribute to the home. I hated my secondary school years. I went to a fairly middle class school and our family was poor so I always had crappy clothes. I was very nervous with exams, I was all right academically but I hated exams so I couldn't do a lot of the other stuff. The teacher taught you how to use Lakeland pencils, they would do the horizon in the top third and you always had a 45 degree angle shadow – very limited. There was a woman who said she loved having me in her class. Mum wanted me to be a chemist's assistant so I could bring her home cheap make up. I left home after Matric and worked for one year. I went to P Tech, then to work and then moved to G and did an art course.

I got my degree in Education. I travelled to Europe and Russia. When I was in G it was the Whitlam era and we wouldn't have been able to go to art college if Whitlam didn't pay, let people go for free. (Mum) had no sort of idea of anything I was doing, never came to any of the houses I was living in or never followed what I was doing. For the first time I have a decent studio. Sometimes I have been so frustrated with not doing it because of family pressures because of all sorts of traumas that have happened in my life ... What we were, were too many kids and a crappy house. I hate those sort of families, heaps of animals and they've got wrecks, old car wrecks in their backyards but that's what we were too many kids and a crappy house. On his death bed he (dad) said he hadn't fulfilled his dreams so on one hand that made me think I am going to fulfil my dreams.

**Figure 3.** *Exterior Textscape*



I didn't feel overly confident art was painting or drawing whereas I wanted to make things. Maybe now I realise I didn't know enough. I don't know and I actually didn't feel overly artistic. I was the eldest, that makes a difference. I didn't feel confident with pencils, pens and paints. My mum always had craft materials for us so on weekends or after school we used to do that. She was very strong about children and creativity and being free to make things and create (SUSAN). *I truly believe that my childhood was filled with inventiveness and creativity we had to improvise and invent for our own amusement. My mother was the most predominant person. She was always very creative herself and watching her painting when I was really little always intrigued me. I was so much in awe of her and there was no other artistic model for me. My mother practised as an artist but not as a professional artist. She was the one who took me to exhibitions when I was young* (ANNIE). *I was an only child, I never had much confidence, I have always alternated between highs and lows. I can vividly remember working on the blackboard with coloured chalks. I can remember the paints were like magic. I always thought when I grew up that I would be a teacher I think it was at an early age I wanted to be an art teacher* (HILDA). **I was given a Christmas present, it was a paint box and the first thing I wanted to do was go out and sit on the path and paint the violets. My dad gave me a love of insects and bugs in the garden. And I have a fascination with all of nature As a little girl my sister and I used to play wonderfully we both had very creative imaginations. I loved my mother very much but I think she found me hard and different maybe. It was Dad who would put his arm around you and cuddle you and encourage you** (HANNAH). I loved my childhood I was independent from an early age. I would try to find my own space and do little things. I would draw and paint and I love it all that sort of stuff by myself and in my own space. I wasn't the girl they expected. I suppose I felt so different and I wasn't like my mother. I suppose I felt so different and I wasn't like my mother and I couldn't relate to a lot of people I think I was a bit lost and lonely at that stage, I didn't have any real friends (HOLLY). *It was very secure and solid. It was solid working class, really strongly community based upbringing. I thought of it as secure. I don't have very many memories of my childhood at all. I always had paints and pencils and stuff. I always remember drawing and we were given all those things that I suppose girls were given then. I always had access to craft related things. So yes they were supportive in terms of craft based creative practice. I liked to do things with my hands so they always made things available. I didn't feel any extra praise but then my family were not like that anyway I just did it so I certainly never felt it was anything special* (SIAN). *I loved ballet and dance even then – we'd go and see a ballet and I would be so excited by seeing the costumes. I was totally accepted for what I was doing it was the only time I could absolutely be myself. We always had access to art materials we were allowed to paint our rooms and decorate and do things like that. I was a very argumentative child I was allowed to play with these treasures from all around the world. They inspired me because they were real. My sewing with my grandmother was fairly functional yet there were largely decorative elements to it as well* (MARIANNE). **It was just after the war, and we had gone back to school and my father had given me a box of coloured pencils. All through the classes I was touching it, I wanted to touch the colour. We were supposed to go out to play and when I came back it was stolen. I was devastated. I have always been drawn to drawing. I had always wanted to learn but there was no opportunity for me to do anything because all the mess of the war. I felt very different when I came to Australia. I could never fit in** (FIONA). I spent most of my time doing all sorts of things that other kids didn't do. I was very headstrong, very quiet and completely self-entertaining. I used to spend lots of time by myself configuring all sorts of things. I can remember discovering plaiting before knitting. I plaited everything including grass. I was the creative black sheep of the family. I'm of very strong character, which was very fortunate because I come from a very lean economic background. I was creating things for myself to do and I just never felt alone as a child (ADAM). *I'd had an unhappy time being in a whole mixture of schools. I kept mainly to myself. I had always had in my mind from the age of eight or nine that I would be an artist. I started life drawing classes when I was in year 10 after school. I think my first source of inspiration other than family was when I went to Art School. I was overwhelmed with the challenge of a lot of my peers and lecturers in those days* (KATHRYN).

Figure 4. Childhood Memories Threadscape



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