

An abstract painting featuring broad, expressive brushstrokes in shades of blue and orange. The composition is dominated by a vertical orange stroke that runs down the center, with other orange strokes extending horizontally and diagonally across the frame. The background is a mix of light and dark blue tones, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall style is gestural and textured, typical of modernist or expressionist art.

*Chapter 7:*

FINDINGS AND  
DIALOGUING WITH  
RELEVANT LITERATURE

# Introduction

In this chapter I draw together themes that emerged through the three strands of this research, and discuss these findings in the light of the experiences of other researchers. These themes were constructed from the data created collaboratively in the work with Helen, Alanna and Kim (Chapter 3), Renee, Peter and Mischa (Chapter 4) and Robert (Chapter 5). To establish the meta-themes, I clustered the themes previously stated in each chapter and named each cluster of themes based on its main focus. The complete lists of the themes contributing to each meta-theme are included as Appendix X.

*The clusters are as follows:*

- Multimodal arts and embodied reflection on practice
- Flexible, structured reflection on practice
- Collaborative arts-based reflection on practice
- Spirituality in reflection on practice
- Organisational implications for reflection on practice

## Meta THEMES

These clusters were then expressed as the meta-themes recorded below.

- Using multi-modal arts in reflection on practice created representations to contain emotion, gave multiple perspectives on issues, and empowered and energised practitioners.
- Flexible structures for reflection on practice assisted deep listening and maintained curiosity.
- Collaboration provided a vital element in this arts-based reflection on practice.
- Spirituality in arts-based reflection on practice led to a deeper sense of personal meaning.
- In practice arts-based reflection requires organisations to provide sufficient space and time.

# *Theme 1:* MULTI-MODAL ARTS IN REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

## *Meta-theme 1:*

- Using multi-modal arts in reflection on practice gives extended access to experience, creates representations to contain emotion, gives multiple perspectives on issues, and empowers and energises practitioners.

This was expanded.

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 offered multiple perspectives on experiences, and also served to enhance the participants' perceptions of themselves as creative practitioners. 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, 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. Embodied reflective practice is active in its orientation and so can be energising and experienced as empowering.

Human beings construct knowledge through multiple means. A goal of this research was to make changes to ways students can learn in tertiary institutions. I have shown the value of arts-based ways of knowing, and explored embodied and action-oriented reflective practice in the context of students undertaking community engagement as a part of their study at ACU. In this section I reflect on my findings in the light of literature that explores the integration of multi-modal and embodied knowing within reflective practices in education. I am interested particularly in how an embodied mode of reflection (Kinsella, 2007) can enhance self-awareness and professional and personal learning.

This section will be divided into the following areas:

- extended epistemology
- emotions in learning and reflection
- importance of physicality/ felt sense
- the importance of the different art forms

### **Extended epistemology.**

Action research such as this, in common with contemporary qualitative research (N. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), seems to go beyond orthodox empirical and rational Western views of knowing, and asserts a multiplicity of ways of knowing (Seeley & Reason 2008, p. 28). Such research accepts that we come to know and make sense of the world in many different ways (Denzin, 1984). We seek expression of our human experiences to bring them “to life so that they can be understood between and amongst us” (Todres & Galvin, 2008, p.571). A multi-modal approach to inquiry offers a chance for students to access their creative abilities, and through the use of the arts, we enlarge not only our understandings, but we more fully develop our identity in the context of the dialogue in which we participate.

This study’s finding that multiple modes of inquiry enriches the reflective process is explained by Heron’s (1992) extended epistemology that describes experiential, presentational, propositional and practical ways of knowing. As discussed earlier in the Methodology Chapter, Heron (1992), Heron and Reason (1997) and Seeley and Reason (2008) all describe these four ways of knowing, “in which each successive way of knowing builds on previous interactions of all different ways of knowing” (Heron, 1992, p. 174). Attention to the idea that, as humans, we engage in an extended epistemology, combined with the understanding that students bring different learning preferences to their study, can provide an approach that will enhance students’ university learning experience. The neglect of these other ways of knowing can result in a major obstacle to learning.

The methods used in this study were derived from the idea that the multi-modal arts would allow access to pre-reflective experience. Lett (2008) argues that:

the view of the modes or ways of knowing available to humans go well beyond cognitive thinking and verbal dialogue, though of course these are accepted ... it is an assumption that much experiencing is pre-verbal and pre-reflective. It is also assumed that learning takes place visually, kinaesthetically, through embodied containment, through emotion, through vocalisation and dramatic enactment, because these modes are parts of the patterns of experiencing and lead to coherent patterned knowing. This assumption is that knowing is therefore multi-modal. (p. 2)

This theme of the study is consistent with the fact that we are increasingly recognising that there are many different forms of intelligence. Howard Gardner as early as 1983 discussed different learning styles and his research in developmental and neuropsychology led to his theory of “multiple intelligences”. Gardner viewed intelligence as “the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural setting” (p. 5). Gardner later (1993) argued for “a pluralistic view of mind, recognizing many different and discrete facets of cognition, acknowledging that people have different cognitive strengths and contrasting cognitive styles” (p. 6). He argued that although our traditional approach to education is shaped by linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences, we all possess a set of intelligences rarely operate independently from each other, each having its own strengths and limitations. Gardner (1999) more recently postulated eight intelligences which individuals have to varying degrees:

- Verbal-linguistic intelligence involves the mastery of language.
- Logical-mathematical intelligence encompasses the capacity to work well with numbers.
- Visual-spatial intelligence deals with spatial judgment and the ability to visualise the world accurately.
- Musical intelligence is implemented when a person composes, or performs using sound.
- Bodily- kinaesthetic intelligence involves using physical actions, including drama or athletics.
- Naturalist intelligence entails appreciation of, and sensitivity to, the natural world.

- Intrapersonal intelligence involves self-understanding, to appreciate one's feelings and the desires of other people. It entails the capacity for making decisions and problem-solving in order to plan effectively to achieve personal goals.
- Interpersonal intelligence is concerned with emotional life and social skills and is used when a person attempts to understand and respond to others. It allows people to work effectively with one another .

Approaches derived from this theory have also opened up the learning process in much recent educational practice, particularly in primary schools. This theory offers a broader vision of education that can accommodate different learning styles, as well as encourage students to become more skilled in 'styles' or approaches that are less preferred. Teaching can be more person-centred when teachers attend to all the intelligences and help students to foster an understanding of the different ways of learning. A person-centred approach involves learning from self, from dialogue and shared experiences. It also involves learning from being more creative, flexible and feeling-oriented, and drawing on the principles of multiple intelligences. Students need to be able to choose which modality is appropriate and important for a particular time and to "explore the eight intelligences ensconced in a myriad of disciplines" (Schirduan & Case, 2004, p. 94).

More recently an integrated view of styles of learning has been espoused (Damasio, 1999). Often in tertiary learning the emphasis is on rational, cognitive and conceptual ways of knowing. However, as Damasio (1999) has suggested, emotions play a critical role in high level cognition and their biological underpinnings are involved, both positively and negatively, in decision-making. Emotional intelligence refers to the capacity to identify the meaning of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on these bases (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000).

When we invite "the whole person" into the learning environment, as Yorks and Kasl (2006) suggest, it involves a person in the "fullness of being: as an affective, intuitive, thinking, physical, spiritual self" (p. 45). Tolliver and Tisdall (2006) likewise argue that engaging learning in multiple dimensions, including the "rational, affective, somatic, spiritual, and sociocultural, will increase the chances that new knowledge is actually constructed and embodied, thus having the potential to be transformative" (p. 39). From the perspective of transformative learning, individuals embody through their actions particular assumed meaning perspectives, or understandings about the nature of reality in given interactions and experiences. The method for accessing understanding

in this thesis is based on the procedures developed by MIECAT where the “whole person” is brought into the inquiry. We know that human knowledge is developed through our auditory, conceptual, visual, concrete and kinetic functions, and so it seems obvious that different modes of expression best allow for the incorporation of these functions in the process of knowing (Kolb, 1984).

### **Emotions in learning and reflection.**

Education needs to deal with meaningfulness that involves the learner in a challenging learning process that concurrently engages the emotions, intellect, creativity, physiology and spirituality. Many contemporary theorists stress the importance of emotions in learning, and point to research that shows emotions play a significant role in the brain's processing of information (Caine & Caine, 1991). The brain processes information all the time and has the capacity to make connections. The first stage of processing information in the sensory memory is prioritising information according to its relevance to survival, emotions and past experiences (Caine & Caine, 1991). Survival needs and emotions continue to control data as they move from sensory memory to working memory and finally into long-term storage. Data in long-term storage contribute to one's self image and cognitive system of beliefs. Renate and Geoffrey Caine (1991) acknowledge the intricate relationships between emotions and cognition in that they interact, energise, and shape each other. They argue that “this sense of interconnectedness, which occurs when emotions and cognition come together, is key to the appreciation of life and learning and to overcoming the downshifting that so often precludes us from functioning compassionately and effectively” (p. 92). Jeremy Gray, Todd Braver and Marcus Raichle (2002) have, in their studies, determined that our emotional state influences cognitive activity in the prefrontal cortex. Their research indicates that “emotion and higher cognition can be truly integrated, i.e., at some point of processing, functional specialization is lost, and emotion and cognition conjointly and equally contribute to the control of thought and behavior” (p. 416). It is obvious that both our emotions and cognition play a vital role in reflective practice and learning. Jensen (1998) stresses that:

Our emotions are a distillation of learned wisdom; the critical survival lessons of life are emotionally hardwired into our DNA. We must cease the long-standing habit of thinking of emotions as always irrational or having nothing to do with the ways we think. Emotions are a critical source of information for learning. (p. 78)

Students were encouraged to explore their emotional responses to different situations. Robert became more aware of the interior landscape of his grief as he got in touch with his loss and expressed it through his art. Robert notes in his journal: *One of the significant gains of this work has been the opportunity to integrate a variety of life experiences dealing with grief* (p. 2). Robert's experiences of grief are felt bodily and he creates a space to give expression to this through the arts. The process seems to be both painful and a relief; his art work titled "Tears for the lost ones", and his own loss allowed him to feel his pain. Embodied awareness is a key dimension of learning experiences. Learning through the arts was real and meaningful for Robert; it encouraged his creativity and facilitated deep learning and growth.

Other students also took risks to explore personal emotional issues; the nature of MIECAT procedures provides a safe environment for exploration and allows participants not to feel overwhelmed. Helen highlights something of this experience.

*Having this experience opened up possibilities ... when you are dealing with emotions it is not always easy to write about or talk about them, you can create art ... The experiencing was important, what I was feeling, my emotions and thoughts were all expressed. (Helen's Journal, 2006, p. 64)*

### **Importance of physicality/ felt sense.**

Much of our experiencing is never fully attended to in our everyday living. Attention to an embodied mode of reflection requires attention to how we reveal knowledge in the midst of experience. Eisner (1997) comments that, "traditionally, emotion was regarded as a contaminant to understanding" (p. 4), but he now considers it a necessary ingredient in the process of reflection. Ekebergh (2007) convincingly argues that reflection is "not to be understood as merely cognitive or intellectual activities, but instead as phenomena in relation to the lived subjective body" (p. 332). The experience of knowing is a multi-faceted. Memory, emotions, feeling, intuitions, the development of experiential structures, felt understanding are all included. The embodied self is brought into the inquiry and knowing is explored and emerges through reflection. Van Manen (2007) argues, we all share in the lifeworld domains of the lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), lived space (spatiality) and lived human relations (relationality or communality). A multi-modal embodied epistemology requires that we listen to our own tacit responses to situations. Polanyi (1976) uses the term tacit



knowledge and states that “we know more than we can tell” (p. 4) and similarly Kinsella (2007) views tacit knowledge as a “mode of embodied reflection” (p. 396). Hayes and Yorks (2007) suggest that “the arts help what has been tacit become explicit to us” (p. 95). This arts-based inquiry does appear to demonstrate tacit knowledge can help in the development of students in a myriad of ways that can have intellectual, emotional, physical, social and spiritual implications.

It is not only the rational but the body, the emotions, as well as the spirit that is significant in everyday learning. Taylor and Lamoreaux (2008) point out that in order for the brain to make meaningful connections, learning needs to be tied to physical, embodied experience. They argue that “the physical responses to the sensory data are recorded - literally, embodied - as experience, hence accessible to reconstruction as memory; without such physical responses, there is no basis for constructing meaning” (p. 53). Human understanding is sought through the senses, body, reflection and imaginative construction and co-construction of knowing developed between people.

As described in Chapter 4, I encouraged students to use Gendlin’s (1981) focusing approach, paying attention to a felt sense as a way of entry and awareness into their feelings:

Focusing is not an invitation to drop thinking and just feel. That would leave feelings unchanged. Focusing begins with that odd and little known “felt sense,” and then we think verbally, logically or with image. (p. 191)

Focusing helps one to listen to one’s body without assuming that the feeling that comes up is negative or to be banished. Helen expresses a body felt freedom to not plan her art but to express what she is feeling. She writes:

*... the different pieces of music put me in touch with my emotions, and my body just reacted accordingly (Helen’s Journal, 2006, p. 38). ... I know this I want to explore the gut issue and trust. I want to find out more about what’s in my gut, and learn more about what it means to trust ... When I trust my gut feeling, I have a sense of clarity and relief... when I follow my intuition, I find it easier to make a decision/choice ... when I listen to my body (its signals), I feel healthy, at peace and content. (p. 42)*

## **The importance of the different art forms - presentational knowing.**

Lett (2001), the founding Director of MIECAT, argues that “every time feeling energy is given [re]presentational form, experiencing becomes more coherent and is available for mental activity” (p. 11). This form of inquiry utilises the different art forms to ensure that feeling energies are expressed as comprehensively as possible, and from as many angles or perspectives as possible. Apostolos-Cappadona and De Staebler (1998) suggested that:

at the core of all artistic efforts is the concern to express and experience what it means to be human. To be human means more than to be able to think: It encompasses the integration of the senses and facilities we associate with the human person. (p. 24)

On the basis of this study, I would argue that the reflective aspects of art making and inquiry provide deeper and more authentic insights into a student’s identity and purpose, and that this search for meaning should be an integral part of the education curriculum. Teachers can inspire learners with arts-based practices that encourage creativity and originality. An arts-based approach to learning can deepen understanding. Reflection can be enhanced through the engagement in different forms of art making and can be a vehicle for individual and collective inquiry on lived experience. Langer (1942) highlights the view that:

There are presentational/aesthetic forms of representation and discursive/propositional forms, which are fundamentally different. For example, presentational forms represent wholes, while discursive forms represent parts; presentational forms represent tacit knowledge, while discursive forms represent explicit knowledge” (as cited in Taylor 2004, p. 73).

Eisner (2008) argues that “the arts are among the many ways in which we come to understand the world” (p. 11). The different modes and forms of representation can be considered as access into experience. In his advocacy for the place of the arts in research, he argues that “these forms of representation give us access to expressive possibilities that would not be possible without their presence” (p. 5). The arts create the possibility for bringing into consciousness tacit, prelinguistic, preconscious knowing and making reflection come to life. Multi-modal representation (Lett, 2008) of our lived

experience can be seen as fundamental to the opportunity of coming to understanding. Liz, a fourth year education student whom I also accompanied in her community engagement inquiry, noted:

*I found it much easier to reflect using the arts than purely 'chatting' about the experience as it provided guidance on how to reflect. I found that by working through the procedures and process I gained a much deeper reflection than if I had just spoken about the experience. It was interesting working with different ways of reflecting such as the sand trays versus taking photos. Some definitely suited my style more but it was good to have a go at several modes. (L. Murray personal communication, 10 March, 2010)*

Eisner claims that arts-based research has a future and that “the arts capitalize on the emotions and use them to make vivid what has been obscured by the habits of ordinary life” (2005, p. 11). Using the non-verbal arts in reflection allowed the students opportunities to examine their assumptions and beliefs but in a way that endorsed an openness to the other and allowed meanings and perspectives to be held within metaphoric representations. Lett (1993) suggests that “experience and reflection which involve only talking would be a vast under-representation of experiencing” (p. 15), hence, incorporating a variety of art modes enhances understanding. The arts give access points for representing what some find difficult to express linguistically, as Antoinette describes below. Antoinette, a third year Bachelor of Counselling student, had asked me to facilitate an arts-based inquiry workshop for four students. She writes: Arts-based inquiry seems to provide one with the means to access one’s unspoken emotion by providing a person with another form of support. Images can transport a person to the core of their being (Antoinette’s Journal 2008, p. 1).

In my own research, the students verified that the different modes of representation offer multiple perspectives on their experiences. Their enthusiastic response to the experiences of multi-modal procedures is evident in Robert’s quote previously included:

*I had no idea what this process of arts-based inquiry would generate. Your work with me has generated a book of images from my journal. But it has also lead to many other images. I have been moved to transform my original work/ images and make paintings and now an installation. This chest and the nine panels will hopefully describe my pilgrimage (Robert’s Journal 2007, p. 57).*

Through adopting a multi-modal arts-based form of inquiry, students engaged in a process of representing, describing and exploring, making sense of their experiences with the companionship of others. These procedures and processes enabled them to come to clearer understandings. The inquiry process had an impact on Robert. It is clear that the arts may spark an ongoing inquiry. Robert's comments below highlight several modes of creative endeavours:

*The cockatoo series began with an oil painting ... This led to a series of cockatoos in which I allowed them to speak to me. With Mary's help the cockie in the new series began to impact on me as a bird with a voice. However, he refused to be left in 2D and wanted to be expressed in sculptural form ... I photographed him with children, (in the Kimberley) who were made up for the dance. These are a series of stunning photographs of the children playing with the cockie and treating him as real. I then produced a film called "Cockie's Holiday". (R. Hoskins, personal communication January, 2010)*



Figure 117 - Robert, 2007, The Meeting: Acrylic on Canvas 120 cm by 120 cm.



Figure 118 - Robert, 2007, Cockie, paper mache and pearls

Robert's inquiry was multi-modal involving speaking, hearing and touching using various modalities such as drawing, sculpture, music, photographs, and dancing. All modes of inquiry inspired him to attend to his personal experience. The multi-modal form of exploring experience evolved in the process and procedure of inquiry "because the content in process becomes the foreground of a dialogue that must be allowed. It is there that the feeling of things will occur and it is this that needs to be followed into what is meaningful" (Lett, 2008, p. 7). Not only did Robert attest to the fact that the different modes of representation offer multiple perspectives on his experiences, but other students participating in this study also commented on this aspect of the inquiry.

*I also wrote a few things in response to Y'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. 10)*

Students also expressed themselves through the use of their body and movement which showed an appreciation of coming to understanding through a different modality in the inquiry. This pre-reflective experience enabled the students to "engage with an emotion, a feeling, an embodied sensing, a sound, a movement or gesture, all of which already carry and convey a sense of meaningfulness" (Lett, 2008, p. 10). Kim and Helen describe some of their experiences through the use of movement.

*I began to really let the music guide me through. I let go of all thought, and tried not to be conscious of my movements or where I was going. The solemn (slower) music was more mellow and I felt myself drawn into my emotions. I experienced feelings of joy, sadness, what it was to be alive – all mixed into one – not really thoughts, just 'feelings'. The different music put me in different moods, and my body just reacted accordingly. The upbeat lively music made me become more aware of the others in the room and I went from being solemn to feeling excited in a matter of moments. (Helen's Journal, 2006, p. 38)*

*The exercise we participated in was a movement-based approach, and we used it as a tool in the reflective process, which allowed us to get in touch with our feelings. We swept through a room full of shredded paper to five different music pieces, after which we would then do a representation and the end of the songs. (Kim's Journal, 2006, p. 34)*

The photograph below shows Helen and Kim moving to the music.



**Figure 119 - Mary McINERNEY, 2007, photograph**

This photograph shows also Kim's visual representation depicting the energy that was evoked in her body.



**Figure 120 - Kim, 2007, chalk on black paper, 210mm x 297 mm**

*Upon doing the exercise (movement to music - with broom sweeping) I became aware of my moods and how they changed in accordance with the different types of music, as well as the movements themselves. I wanted to let go of the broom at one point to embrace just moving to the music. Becoming aware of emotions and what each music piece was bringing up - how it was making me feel. For instance, in this particular response there was a lot of movement and energy with that experience - content, carefree, living in the moment. The image is about looking at the notion of what it means to be human. (Kim's Journal, 2006, p. 34)*

The importance of movement has also been emphasised by Cancienne and Bagley (2008) who explored the use of body and movement as a means for community building. Cancienne's aim in working with teachers was to develop a sense of "common purpose through exercises designed to break down spatial and physical boundaries and bring them together in a stronger, more bonded and unbounded tactile and sensuous way" (p. 172).

In the present research, which incorporated multi-modal approaches to learning and teaching, students came to understandings through a range of modalities during their inquiry. These included movement, poetry, short filmmaking, visual representations, music and song, and the collaborative interactions with one another and their inter-subjective responding. Throughout my study I encouraged the students to imagine using the arts as a method of inquiry in their classrooms and thus providing alternative ways for children they will teach to learn more effectively.



## *Theme 2:* FLEXIBLE, STRUCTURED REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

The meta-theme that emerged from the findings was:

- Flexible structures for reflection on practice assist deep listening and maintain curiosity.

The theme is expanded below, and the contributing themes from chapters four to six are found in Appendix.

Rather than reflect in an open-ended, undisciplined fashion, the participants found it useful to have structured and flexible procedures that provided direction. Being able to trust both the flow and cyclical nature of the experiential multimodal procedures and the process of reflective practice gave direction, as well as enhancing students' confidence. In an open and trusting environment, the unfamiliar aspects of personal experience were given a voice. A sense of curiosity and deep listening allowed understandings to surface over time. The emerging material at times surprised us all and led us even further into our reflective inquiry. Listening for different perspectives helped students make sense of their experience and co-construct meaning.

Assisting students to find personal relevance in their lives through their community engagement and internship work was promoted through the implementation of structured procedures. The clear procedures allowed students to increase their powers of reflection and of understanding. There is a balance of structure, flexibility, deep listening and spontaneity as part of this reflective practice. I saw the use of the MIECAT procedures as helping to create a space offering alternative possibilities where students felt safe to trust each other and explore their emergent material. By retrieving and making sense of experience, students could then attempt to make choices about how they wanted to be in the world. Helen noted in her journal: Life is a journey, and that means that we can't stay in the one spot all the time, we are constantly moving around and through our experiences: that's how we learn (Helen's Journal, 2006, p. 51). The following section draws attention to the way structured flexible reflection on practice helped nurture, maintain curiosity and encourage deep listening within the reflective process.

## **Structured reflective practice.**

Recent literature highlights the intrinsic drive to discover deeper meaning in our lives (Hunt, 2001; Palmer, 1998; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). We desire to make sense and meaning of our lives. Offering such opportunities in education can provide an emotional as well as a cognitive challenge for personal belief systems which can then lead to change. How we offer these is of great importance. There needs to be a balance between structure, flexibility, learning, motivation, emotional risk taking and fun so that education, as Montuori (2008) describes, can be a “creative process” (p. 10).

We frequently take for granted the things we do, and we do not consciously reflect on all that we are experiencing. Various writers (Ekebergh, 2007; Ellis & Berger, 2003) draw attention to the lack of reflection permeating most of our existence. Ekebergh argues that “a person’s natural attitude is basically unreflective” (p. 333). Similarly, Ellis & Berger (2003) point out that “adult learning theorists state that individuals find reflection the most difficult aspect of learning from experience, particularly if they are not encouraged to develop the skill” (p. 228). It is clear that reflection on practice needs to be acknowledged as important, and as a skill that can be taught. Structured reflective practices promise to enable educators to develop a greater level of self-awareness about their actions and the nature and impact of their performance.

Reflective thinking is an important tool in education and there are approaches to reflection described in the literature (Pavlovich, 2007) which offer students different challenges and possibilities. Two of the earliest advocates of reflective practice were Dewey (1933) and Schon (1987). Their views have been influential in shaping a whole generation of academics, researchers, teachers and students and thus have had an enormous impact in education (Erlandson, 2006).

Dewey pointed out that knowledge and experience are different. Dewey argued that: “We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience” (p. 28). While experience is the basis for learning, learning then takes place through reflection. His belief that education must engage with and broaden experience has continued to be a significant strand in educational practice. He also believed that sharing ideas and reflecting on experience was an essential component of making sense of and learning from experience (Dewey 1933). Dewey described reflection as:

... turning a topic over in various aspects and in various lights so that nothing significant about it shall be overlooked – almost as one might turn a stone over to see what its hidden side is like or what is covered by it. (Dewey, p. 57)

Dewey acknowledged the place for the affective domain and encouraged open-mindedness, whole-heartedness and responsibility to be present during reflection.

Schon (1987), like Dewey, regarded reflection as a rational process, one requiring the person to apply prior knowledge and new understandings to new or uncertain situations. Dewey and Schon recognised the role of experience and the context of the individual in reflective practice as crucial. This reflection is a conscious effort by the person to explore and resolve complex issues, and develop a new construction of knowledge about a particular situation or problem, which will lead to change in action. We can also be reflective by thinking about doing something while doing it; this is reflection-in-action that is “on the spot” (Schon, 1987).

The concept of reflection is challenging (Van Manen, 2007) and students’ ability to reflect cannot be assumed (Risko, Vukelich, & Roskos, 2002). A great number of students have reported to me that they do not know how to reflect and this was borne out throughout my study. In many service-learning experiences reflection gets rather “short shrift” (Eyler, 2002, p. 518) and that the reflection that does occur is often superficial and factual.

Reflective journals are one way of promoting reflective practice (Bolton, 2001; Moon, 1999). However, there seems to be a lack of understanding of how to write in reflective journals. Some writers (Risko, Roskos & Vukelich, 2002; Hume 2009) state that students believe that practically anything they write counts as reflection. Francis (1995) believes, that the “attitudes and skills of reflective writing can and must be consciously developed” (p. 240). Some educators (Canning, 1991; Francis, 1995; Schoffner, 2009) employ reflective learning journals to enhance deeper learning among students, which involves creative and critical thinking. Students are encouraged to write honestly about their personal thoughts, feelings and experiences and to show a deeper involvement in the reflection process.

Sable (2007) notes that many university students report “their personal lives have little relationship to their learning process” (p. 288), therefore making the task of meaningful reflection even more problematic. Such comments motivated me to articulate the clear procedures inherent in the MIECAT inquiry method that would allow students to increase their skills in reflection and develop a capacity to make links between their university community engagement and their personal lives. My reading of past student journals had verified the problematic nature of journal writing. Helen’s journal highlights something of this process:

*The traditional “diary entry” method versus the reflective process: I began my volunteer experience with the instruction that I needed to keep a diary / written journal on the events that occurred during my particular placement. So I did the usual “today I went to ... X and Y, and did ...”. I like to write so it wasn’t a real problem for me. But the problem as I later realised, was that I was going in and out of my volunteer experience without stopping to reflect about what had just happened. How did it make me feel? What did I experience in the interaction with X or Y? These are questions I should have been attending to at the deeper level of community engagement, what I bring to it, and what it gives to me. These are “reflective” questions, and not something you can just call to mind and write in a diary entry of your day’s events. This is when I discovered the arts-based reflective process with Mary. In doing this I can form a method of becoming “tuned in” with myself and those around me when I engage in community environments, and this awareness can help me to grow from my experience, rather than let it go by without a second thought. (Helen’s Journal, 2006, p. 60)*

Students want to be taught how to reflect (Russell, 2005) and as the previous Dean of Student Services at ACU said:

It can too easily happen that university courses become aggregated segments of atomized knowledge, with little reflection on the totality of the learning. Students can benefit from reflective practice; practices that are learned properly might stay with them long after they leave the formal university courses. (O’Hearn, 2004, p. 5)

All too often, education focuses on the accumulation of facts, and for me it is an encouraging thought that Russell (2005) proposes that the skill of reflection can be learned with appropriate support from educators (Brockbank & McGill, 1998; John, 2004). Davys and Beddoe (2009) likewise believe that, “students benefit from clear, structured facilitation of their experiences as reflection may not always come easily” (p. 919). My intention in this study was to provide multiple opportunities for reflection before, during and after students’ community engagement placements or internships. I offered students a series of steps or procedures that can be implemented in a structured fashion, or in a more procedurally emergent way, during their work in community engagement and also subsequent to it. And in this research I inquired into their experience of using these reflective processes.

There is a need to recognise the variety of approaches for structured reflection which support the development of the reflective practitioner not only within an educational setting but as a life skill. Schoffner (2008) also believes that the goal of reflection is to “create authentic experiences with reflection ... that will translate beyond the university setting into personal reflective practice” (p. 123).

The literature on reflective practice indicates that there are numerous models of reflection (Johns, 2004; Moon 1999) that provide learners with a framework for facilitating structured reflection. Below is a table of the different models of reflection described by Dewey (1933), Schon (1983, 1987), Kolb (1984), Gibbs (1988), Smyth (1989), Moon (1999), Lett (1997), Taylor (1998) and Fook (1999). These models are not described in detail however illustrate the strategies that can be used when engaging in reflection.

MODEL	PROCESSES OF REFLECTION	MODALITIES
<b>Dewey (1933)</b> Reflective thinking Reflection-on-action	Reflecting on an experience or situation after the event with the intention of drawing insight which leads to change and informs future practice.	Storytelling Narrative description Journal writing
<b>Schon (1983, 1987)</b> Experiential learning Reflection-in-action Reflection-on-action	Knowing-in-action Surprise Experimentation Reflection-on-action	Storytelling Narrative description Journal writing
<b>Kolb 1984</b> The experiential learning cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concrete Experience – actions past/ present</li> <li>• Reflection Observation about the experience - What did you notice? Observation – documenting what happened</li> <li>• Abstract Conceptualisation –What does it mean? Generalization and theories about the experience. Making sense, learning from the experience</li> <li>• Active Experimentation – Try out what you have learned Planning- making plans in order to take (further) action</li> </ul>	Journal writing Group sharing
<b>Smyth (1989)</b> Critical reflection – on and for action A framework for personal and professional empowerment – links with the social, economic and political environment especially within professional teaching practice.	Four stage process requiring a response to each stage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe: ‘What did I do?’ A detailed description of the issue or problem.</li> <li>• Inform: ‘What does this mean?’ An examination of the issue or problem from multiple perspectives.</li> <li>• Confront: ‘How did I come to be this way?’ An examination of assumptions related to the issue/problem in terms of contextual/political factors.</li> <li>• Reconstruct: ‘How might I do things differently?’ Consideration of alternative views and future actions in relation to the issue or problem.</li> </ul>	Individual and collaborative written reflection for student teachers related to classroom experiences Journal writing
<b>Fook 1999</b> Critical theory and practice Reflective approach to social work Critical reflection – on and for action	Focuses on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific instances of practice (critical incidents)</li> <li>• To unsettle (dominant) implicit assumptions (stage 1)</li> <li>• In order to discover and change relevant thinking and practices and reformulate a framework for practice (stage 2)</li> <li>• Uses critical reflective questions derived from theories (self-reflection)</li> <li>• In an ethical learning climate</li> </ul>	May be used in a number of ways Self -reflection Small groups

MODEL	PROCESSES OF REFLECTION	MODALITIES
<p><b>Gibbs (1988)</b> A six stage reflective cycle</p>	<p>Write vivid and spontaneous descriptions of what happened? Feelings: What were you thinking and feeling? Evaluation: What was good and bad about the experience? Analysis: What sense can you make of the situation? Conclusion: What else could you have done? Action Plan: If it arose again what could you do?</p>	<p>Individual and collaborative reflection for student teachers related to classroom experiences Journal writing</p>
<p><b>Moon (1999)</b> Reflection is embedded in the learning process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noticing</li> <li>• Making sense</li> <li>• Making meaning</li> <li>• Working with meaning</li> <li>• Transformative learning</li> </ul>	<p>learner /supervisor dialogue throughout the experience Reflective professional journals</p>
<p><b>Taylor (1998)</b> Systematic flow approach – uses a mnemonic device using the word REFLECT The process is represented as flow rather than as steps. Repeats stages of reflection to encourage iteration, movement, spontaneity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readiness</li> <li>• Exercising thought</li> <li>• Following systematic processes</li> <li>• Leaving oneself open to answers</li> <li>• Enfolding insights</li> <li>• Changing awareness with a diagrammatical representation model</li> <li>• Tenacity in maintaining reflection</li> </ul>	<p>Multiple methods of expression, such as writing, drawing, photography, Painting, montage, poetry, videotaping, dancing. Includes intuition and guided meditation. Role of the critical friend as a trusted colleague to assist in reaching deeper levels of reflection</p>
<p><b>Lett, (MIECAT) (1997)</b> The use of multi-modality.  Learning is multimodal</p>	<p>The procedures of the MIECAT form of inquiry may be summarised as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindful attention to experience.</li> <li>• Multi-modal representation of each experience.</li> <li>• Description and bracketing out of preconceptions</li> <li>• Attention to inner, intersubjective experiencing and each resonance.</li> <li>• Amplification (via access point.)</li> <li>• Intersubjective responding in a variety of art-forms.</li> <li>• Identification of themes, patterns, and valued ways of being.</li> <li>• Enaction of a possibility.</li> </ul>	<p>Use of all art forms Music Voice Dance and movement Visual image Journal writing Companioning and group work Emphasising intersubjective dialogue Responses are given both verbal and in art forms</p>

Some of these models suggest that reflection can be a step-by-step process. The MIECAT method for inquiry outlined by Lett (1997), along with Fook (1999) and Moon (1999) includes a number of identifiable procedures, processes and steps which provide specific guidelines with which to inquire. The process of inquiring can follow these clear pre-designated steps but they also have the potential to be engaged in a cyclic, flexible way, so that inquirers can enter into any phase at different times, and phases can be re-iterative. In the students' initial inquiries, the set procedures allowed students to experience and understand the inquiry process, in its most structured form.

### **Flexible cyclical procedures.**

There also appears to be benefits and value in engagement of structured procedures that also allow for flexibility, and honouring of an individual's or group's intuition as to where to proceed next in making meaning. As McNiff (1998) notes, "the discipline of creation is a mix of surrender and initiative. We let go of inhibitions, which breed rigidity, and cultivate responsiveness to what is taking shape in the immediate situation" (p. 2).

The MIECAT reflective procedures engaged in by the students in this thesis at times did not follow a rigid step-by-step mode of inquiry, but allowed choices about which steps to engage in, stay with and move to next, depending on the presenting material. Choices might consist of which representational modes would be used and how this would be shared within the group, what was most significant to attend to as the next step and the impact of time and space on the inquiry. Some procedures might be repeated or omitted depending on the context of the inquiry and in response to the emergent material.

Jeynes (2006) noted in his arts-based research on 'The Possibilities of the Moment', that the form of his group movement and art sessions was without a fixed template and that the content and form emerged on the day. He described how 'emergence' was a key. "We would identify what arose, and discern and make choices on the go. This was in essence our improvising - following whims, images, concepts, feelings and thoughts to wherever they might lead, and then continuing with what might next unfold" (p. 21).

In this study Helen describes something of her experience and acknowledges the cyclical procedures: *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 and the cyclical procedures involved in reflection and how it works (Helen's Journal, 2006, p. 45).*



At the end of some sessions, when time permitted, we would take time to reflect individually on what we were learning about the MIECAT procedures. This was important as it helped to clarify our understandings and to discover what procedures might be utilised for further reflection.

### **Maintaining curiosity.**

Even though the MIECAT procedures are structured, they also allow for flexibility, and in this way they encourage students to trust the process and to remain curious. Students need a willingness to be open to the uncertainty of not knowing what might present while staying in the moment. For me and for the students, this research has involved an understanding of the importance of curiosity in the creative process. In reflective thinking, Schon (1987) also encourages a person to be open to “surprise, puzzlement, or confusion” (p. 68). Montuori (2008) suggests exploration means “welcoming the mystery of life, not in order to control it but to more fully participate in it” (p. 17). Engaging in reflective practice appeared to give the students confidence to allow them to articulate their felt-sense and emerging ideas. This can encourage them to explore levels of their knowing that they do not always acknowledge in their learning (Hunt, 2001).

In dialogue with companions, the focus is on an exploration of the not quite yet known. There are challenges in this way of being, as it requires bracketing out what we think we know and asks for resilience in being with the not quite yet known and an openness to other possibilities emerging. As DeFehr (2009) suggests, not-knowing can be seen as a liberating readiness to engage with others in each present moment, but in this we are challenged because as the process unfolds the unexpected can occur. To engage in this way of inquiring, I find, requires being enthralled by the process itself, and believing that understanding will make a difference in the life of the self and the other.

Eisner (2008) points out that the arts contribute to knowledge by helping us to seek “new ways with which to perceive and interpret the world, ways that make vivid realities that would otherwise go unknown” (p. 10). Even though this might find us in a place full of mixed emotions, it can lead to new possibilities. Anderson (1996) describes the way that not-knowing allows, “room for the familiar view, confusing ambiguities and vigorous attitudes to exist side by side” (p. 34). This allows for an element of surprise noted by students as they understood this process of reflection.

Peter stated that:

*Entering into the MIECAT procedures we enter into the unknown and there is a starting point that leads to other possibilities and exchanges (Peter's Journal 2007, p. 40).*

Robert shared something of the experience of surprise that emerged in his visual art work:

*Description allows for an element of surprise- you can see things differently ... I hadn't planned it that way; it has taken me by surprise ... The death of the last parent member in the family brings me into confrontation with my own experience of life and death. I could be next! It is also about facing the grief and not running from it and that it is OK to be melancholic. It is OK to express it and to my surprise it is not coming out in morbid images. (Robert's Journal, 2007, p. 58)*

My own response to companioning Robert (transcribed from the interview with my supervisor and Robert), was also something Robert wrote into his own journal.

Mary said:

*Over my time working with you I have been really surprised. I came to our time together not knowing what might happen or emerge. For me I wanted to be really present, and to companion you in all that was emerging for you. I was surprised at the trust that developed and I didn't expect that in the beginning. It was a privilege. (Robert's Journal, 2007, p. 89)*

Perhaps it was that the experience of such surprises that helped us to stay curious.

### **Deep listening.**

Deep listening is more likely to occur when participants engage in deeper reflection, and where there is support and care. It also requires the development of trust in the relationship. The MIECAT procedures and processes of inquiry rely heavily on risk taking within the context of trusting relationships, in which multiple perspectives

are made explicit and acknowledged. Deep listening does not occur automatically. Relating deeply is, as Pearmain (2001) describes, a “profound ontological level of commitment to hearing the other’s meaning” (p. 90).

Really listening requires an attitude which respects the other’s experiences and stories. They need to sense that what they have to say is important. Anderson (1997) defined listening as “interrelated, active, mutual processes ... attending to, interacting with, responding to, and trying to learn about a (client’s) story and its perceived importance” (p. 152). Zull (2002) suggests, “even if we experience something that has happened to us before, it is hard to make meaning of it unless it engages our emotions” (p. 166). He also said that we have to seriously consider the “role of emotion if we want to foster deep learning” (p. 169). Deep listening is a way of being attentive and present in the moment, and requires an attitude of being attuned to and aware of the other.

For me, a major learning in this inquiry was to trust the process and to listen deeply to the other and to myself as we searched for understanding and meaning. Dialogue invites and involves its participants in a sense of mutuality, belonging and ownership. Anderson (2003) suggests that, “newness in meaning and understanding emerges, and thus, possibilities are generated for thought, feeling, emotion, action, and so forth. In other words, transformation is inherent in dialogue. True dialogue cannot be other than generative” (p. 1).

Robert described his experience as follows: *It was easier to reflect with someone else. The other has allowed a movement from the shallows to the deep* (R. Hoskins, personal communication, June 8, 2009). In this sense, working collaboratively is relational, and we sense and feel our way forward together, to a place where understanding is created within each “present interactive moment” (DeFehr, 2009, p. 5). Deep listening occurs when these qualities are present. They are essential in learning and in developing understanding of the self and the other. For example, there is a richness in learning from the wisdom of the Indigenous ways of knowing in which historically, they have created space for dialogue by creating talking circles. In Yorta Yorta language, “Gulpa Ngawal” means deep listening (Brearley, 2010, p. 13). Part of this short poem by James Henry (2010) in Brearley’s book describes something of this:

## **Gulpa Ngawal**

What ya doing?

Gula Ngawal

Deep listening ...

Feeling my ancestors breath on my cheeks

Hearing their whispers in my ears

Reading the land

The country

Listening for birds

What ya doing?

Gula Ngawal

Deep listening ... (Brearley, 2010, p. 13)

This poem touches me deeply because it invites us to that sort of listening in which the everyday is experienced against the backdrop of the land, of nature, time, and history. In this sacred time it is possible to even feel one's "ancestors' breath on one's cheek."

In my experience, deep listening is listening from the heart and understanding what the other person is sharing and saying. Pearmain (2001) says:

When I live more from my heart as a centre of awareness, I find that I am naturally in tune with others and have far more inner space in which to receive and welcome them. I do not have any way of accounting for this, but I rely on it to assist me in every human encounter. (p. 125)

Deep listening generates affective reflective inquiry. Enhancing students' reflective practice involves providing a flexible structure for students to reflect, and an emotionally supportive environment. Developing the skills and habits that come from reflection, challenges students to integrate new learning into previous understandings.

## *Theme 3:* **COLLABORATIVE ARTS-BASED REFLECTION ON PRACTICE**

The meta-theme that emerged from the findings was:

- Collaboration provided a vital element in this arts-based reflection on practice.

This theme was then expanded:

The group process encouraged sharing and relating. The atmosphere became one of trust, where there was a focus on the here-and-now. Companionship of one another and intersubjective connectedness was valued. This process of reflection created a sense of community and of care for these students within the university, and enhanced their community engagement and internship experiences.

Reflecting on experience collaboratively means a commitment to social construction of knowledge. In this inquiry, those involved had a commitment to sharing authority within the group. Intersubjective responding and companionship of each other was valued. Collaborative inquiry in this research provided entry to an empathic field for learning-within-relationship. The journal entries showed that students experienced a sense of belonging where they participated together and discovered how to act together to create change.

### **Commitment to participatory inquiry.**

The findings from this study suggest that offering collaborative reflective practice enhanced students' capacity to reflect, as it utilised the group processes as a way of exploring and making meaning. These opportunities also helped to counter student isolation. Sumara (2002) reminds us that a human being "identifies her or himself and is identified by others through involvement in intricate webs of relations" (p. 112). He also believes that we not only focus on ourselves through self-reflection, but that "the dedicated and focused attention given to someone else's life can create possibilities where one's own situation is understood with greater clarity" (p. 155). This reinforces the idea that the learning process is not only an individualistic one, but can be viewed as a social phenomenon. Those students who choose to work collaboratively report very positively on how their experiences of collaborative arts-based reflection enhanced their understanding of their experience:

*When we work collaboratively as a group, we were not alone and the group decides what is emerging and then comes to some understanding together (Peter's Journal 2007, 40).*

The approach to collaborative learning in the inquiry became a profoundly valuable social experience offering respect for individual and group construction of knowledge. Understanding human life comes from our life experiences, our connections, and interactions with others and the world. Gergen and Gergen (2005) points out that learning concerns the processes by which people come to common forms of understanding which involve “active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship” (p. 15). Knowledge is created and influenced by a number of different factors such as our social and historical contexts and interactions. We can all participate in the creation of knowledge, “thereby influencing what it is we know” (Fook & Gardner, 2007, p. 7).

I see the learning that occurred in this inquiry to be an interactive collaborative process, which offered varied opportunities for intersubjective exchanges between students. The intersubjective approach also allows students to have an equal exchange with staff so within the context of the group we all explore experiences together and shape and re-shape group values. This is what Fook and Gardner call the creation of knowledge that shapes what it is we know.

Even though it took students time to understand the concept of intersubjectivity, I consider its understanding to be a key element in collaborative reflective practice. Allen (2004) highlights the complexity and significance of this intersubjective field, when she states:

it is multi-dimensional – there are felt temporal and spatial shifts, constantly changing embodied experiences of being with one another, different expectations of how the other should be for us, experiences of emotional resonance, dissonance, similarity and difference and varying feelings of autonomy and inclusion. We come to know ourselves in relationship to others and these moments can also lead to a deepening of one's spirituality. (p. 58)

Incorporating this understanding into reflection enhances the value and process of reflection where we learn from each other and come to choose how we act. Harlene Anderson (1995) likewise considers that, “the events and experiences in our lives, including self-identity, are intersubjective phenomena generated by persons in conversation and action with one another and with themselves, and the experiences are always open to a variety of explications” (p. 31). This awareness that the context of all our learning is intersubjective, supports the attention paid in this research to collaborative processes of reflection.

Helen described her experience of intersubjective dialogue in her journal entries:

*I felt I was eager to create and give an intersubjective response, I felt like I had gained something from it as well, this was building on the relationship as well, and this strengthens the bond in the group, giving and receiving (Helen's Journal, 2006, p. 48).*

*It was an opportunity to be open to the other in the shared inquiry and to respond to the other in what was emerging for them (Helen's Journal, 2006, p. 63).*

Peter also explained the importance of the collaboration for him:

*In the group we all bounced back and forth ideas, no one person holds the truth, we worked collaboratively and that was the best part of the experience (Peter's Journal, 2007, p. 68).*

Any inquiry is necessarily conducted in a web of relationships, of connections with others and the world. Montuori (2008) suggests that “inquiry is a way of travelling along this web of connections, to explore the myriad relationships that connect us to the world and ultimately make up who we are” (p. 18). Lett (2008) argues that this type of collaborative inquiry requires, “a deep intersubjective connectedness held with trust and strong resonance, and respect of the importance of the content in the process of their relating” (p. 3). Such connections were described by participants in this inquiry.

*The relationships that developed were important. It was not just coming to something that was one off, but developing relationships and getting to know and trust each other at another level (Helen's Journal, 2006, p. 63).*

*Connecting was a consistent theme that came up for me throughout the experience and one of the symbols that seemed to embody this is the hand. Establishing relationships as well as creating the art representations themselves were all experiences of connecting (Kim's Journal, 2006, p. 42). It is learning that extends beyond academia to include the building of relationships and skills to equip an individual for life (Kim's Journal, 2006, p. 57).*

It seems we have a brain-based drive to belong to a group and to communicate and relate to others (Blumen & Stern, 2011; Caine & Caine, 1991). Educators therefore need to support a sense of community and emphasise the value of co-construction. Cognitive neuroscience researchers (Blumen & Stern, 2011; Caine & Caine 1991) have explained individual brains in terms of cognitive growth. They describe the process of interaction when two or more brains are interacting. Our brains have evolved and developed physical mechanisms that allow us to learn by this social interaction. These physical mechanisms have evolved to enable us to obtain the knowledge we need to keep us emotionally and physically safe, and enable us to engage in affective attunement or empathic interactions and language and consider the intentions of the other (Stern, 2004).

### **Power versus collaboration.**

Creating a learning environment where collaboration is present requires a sense of trust, parity and shared decision making. It is a process which involves valuing the contribution of all participants and finding ways that lead to deeper individual and shared understanding. Jacobson (2010) points out:

Two practices that fundamentally resonate with me as an educator are: pressing the pause button on learning and, empowering students as teachers. Ultimately these two important facets of learning are about metacognition: for the student as teacher it is an opportunity to process what they know and reach deeper understandings, for the student as a collaborative learner it is an opportunity for someone other than a teacher to affirm prior knowledge and extend it in new directions. I believe we do not create enough opportunities in our schools for empowering students to be leaders and co-constructors of learning for understanding. (p. 1)



As educators I believe we are required to be attentive constantly to the power differentials between ourselves and those with whom we work. Praise and Casher (2003) acknowledge that there is a learning and knowledge exchange in collaborations. In order to affect this exchange the teacher or facilitator must, I believe, see themselves as both teacher/facilitator and student. It is important to orient to others with humility and value the contributions of every person's experiences as they interact. Pereira (1999), in her understanding of reflective practice, also notes that, "teachers/tutors are not owners of knowledge and students are not empty receptacles" (p. 8).

I know that within the ACU context I am a person who is perceived as non-threatening. I created an environment in which students could chose freely to commit to this way of being together. I encouraged them also to assume responsibility for their collaborations and to develop trust, openness and acceptance with each other. I believe I modelled this in a way that allowed all to participate, contributing together to create meaningful inquiries. It is important that students' personal experiences are respected, valued, shared and that there is a climate of mutuality, where there is room for all voices (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). I have come to know that in my relationship with students trust is central in creating the conditions that support collaborative learning. Lett (2008) suggested a facilitator of the MIECAT procedures, needs "to be fully present as an attentive companion, to allow the other to be the specialist in her own life, by helping her to inquire into those experiences she wishes to understand and make sense of" (p. 4).

When people are listened to, respected, trusted, and heard, Cranton and Wright (2008) suggest that it is not so much the event itself but "rather the relationship they develop with the educator who creates the potential for transformation" (p. 44). This was particularly evident in my work with Robert.

*I am very grateful that Mary McInerney was willing and able to collaborate with me on this journey. We trusted each other and I have benefited by her wisdom, hospitality and continued care during this year (Robert's evaluation 2008, p. 4).*

Like Southern (2007), my experience in this inquiry suggests that when students and facilitators are more willing to trust each other they are more able to take risks. Svinicki (2007) argues that such risk taking is in fact essential to learning and creative acts, claiming that:

learning, like all other creative acts, will flourish in an atmosphere in which the learner is willing to take risks, and it is the task of the instructor to create such an atmosphere for learning. If we accept this view of learning as risk-taking, we can begin to confront the factors that discourage students from taking risks and build a class environment where learning becomes less of a risk, or where the risk-taking in learning becomes valued instead of dreaded. Both of these directions require that instructors develop a trusting relationship with students. (p. 1)

Southern (2007) suggests, “students are more willing to take risks and be vulnerable as they question their own assumptions and ways of being and doing” (p. 330). Students only feel free to take these sorts of risks and to feel vulnerable if they know that their process is being held and contained in an atmosphere of mutual support and trust. This was particularly so in the case of Helen, Peter and Robert as they pursued their inner exploration in some depth. *It is helpful to know that someone understands and resonates with you. There is a sense of gratitude that someone entered into my space and has given me a response and someone has accompanied me through this experience (Peter’s Journal, 2007, p. 71).*

### **Openness to others’ perspectives.**

My experience of working collaboratively with students is that it was important to encourage openness to others’ perspectives as an important value in learning. Through sharing different perspectives, as well as their own experiences, students developed relationships with one another at a much deeper level than previously experienced at university. Helen expressed something of this experience:

*The bonds formed between all of us were a big surprise. I never expected to feel such respect, admiration, gratitude and understanding between all of us in such a short amount of time. For me personally I feel I’ve created a friendship and a bond with each member that will continue on and last for a very long time. There were many group situations where some very personal issues came up for me and each member gave me just a little something of themselves and so this acted as a stepping stone to help me get through this year. I’m very grateful. (Helen’s Journal, 2006, p. 64)*

These opportunities often illuminated multiple worldviews where the students experienced some resonance with worldviews different from their own.

*My own experiences help me to resonate and connect with others (Kim's Journal, 2006, p. 19).*

By engaging in a respectful dialogical reflection we were able to prevent meanings from being distorted and could therefore engage the person at the edge of their understanding.

Sometimes a sense of dissonance is experienced. In these moments, students are more able to explore the discomfort when there is established trust. Helen highlights her experience of dissonance:

*During X's intersubjective dialogue I had felt a little awkward at one point as she was coming from a different point of view, which made me feel a bit strange about the memories that had come up for me during my intersubjective dialogue (Kim's Journal, 2006, p. 14).*

### **Capacity for empathy and beyond – to intersubjectivity.**

The development of and capacity for empathy is crucial for all those working with other people. Collaborative learning requires mutual respect, and a willingness to listen to others' perspectives and appreciate that others may have different sets of values. Manigaulte, Yorks and Kasl (2006) suggest that "the empathic field is an important dimension of the learning environment" (p. 31).

Yorks and Kasl, (2006) suggest that:

Developing empathic connection is especially difficult when the other's life experience is very different from one's own but is critical when emotions are aroused. The empathic field provides a supportive context within which difficult issues can be pursued without rupturing the relationship (p. 52).

The students in this inquiry shared meaningful experiences and related empathetically, often providing verbal and multi-modal intersubjective responses to each other through the procedure of intersubjective responding. Lett (2001) suggests that an arts-based intersubjective response has:

a component of empathy, but it goes beyond that: it contains our own felt understanding of what we saw and experienced. It is neither merely projection, nor merely empathy, but as close an approximation to uncontaminated variemodal communication as we could engender. (p. 230)

Expressing our intersubjective response in multi-modal art forms allowed us to enter and share our strengths and vulnerabilities in ways that enhanced our collaborative reflection. As Helen, Alanna and Kim explained, it was:

*Great to share honestly and to share what I was really thinking and feeling and receive empathy from others (transcript from audio tape - Helen, Alanna and Kim).*

### **Connection and communities of care.**

According to Green (2005), the thread holding both people and spaces together is the ability to care and to reflect. Seeley and Reason (2008) reinforce and amplify Green's understanding, asserting that community "starts from a relationship between self and other, through participation and intuition" (p. 28).

Effective engagement within the learning environment can help in the development of a sense of belonging within a community. This requires staff members to be approachable and respond appropriately and consistently to students; and to be open to their own learning as well as offering support, empathy and understanding. In the context of this research, students had confidence that they would be listened to and responded to respectfully. This is imperative. I like to consider creating a community as a process of coming to understand who we are in relationships. As Southern (2007) suggests, learning is "the discovery of self through meaningful relationships, mutual understanding, and collaborative action" (p. 335). The benefit of working within a group where there was this community of care was acknowledged by the students participating in this study.

*We also tried to engage with each other and develop a sense of community too. It's about people relating to each other. We got to know each other personally and felt supported (Kim's Journal, 2006, p, 38).*

*I found it extremely beneficial having the opportunity and support to reflect on my community engagement with others and this was why my experience was so rich. If I had not had the opportunity to reflect I would have felt quite overwhelmed at some of the things I saw. I wouldn't have been able to learn as much as I did. It was great also reflecting in a group (L. Murray personal communication 2010).*

A high degree of collaborative engagement obviously took place. A common theme was that there was a sense of support within the group, an experience of both receiving and giving.

How do we build learning communities that promote socially-constructed reflective practices where we can learn from one another? Risko and Vulelich (2002) suggest that we need to provide multiple opportunities to use newly-formed reflective strategies. Heron and Reason (1997) note that “collaboration roots the individual within a community of peers, offering basic support and the creative and corrective feedback of other views and possibilities” (p. 11). I draw comfort from this, and students have shared with me that they have felt more at home at university due to the sharing that has taken place within the reflective groups. They felt they were known by others and knew others within the university community, more than they had before.

In creating such opportunities I have taken a risk, as often I felt I had to go against the conventional ways of providing reflective opportunities for students. I really struggled with taking action in the face of possible disapproval from my peers and supervisors. I also recognise that these collaborative reflective groups are not necessarily suited to all students, and that it is important that students are invited to be part of a collaborative inquiry group and are able to choose not to take part. The significance of invitation cannot be underestimated (Southern, 2007). Southern suggests that learning communities are developed by “inviting others to participate” (p. 332) not by telling them. Once students accept the invitation to involve themselves in new ways of learning, they are better able to become engaged in the process and take responsibility for creating the essential conditions to foster a learning community.

We co-create our lives through the relationships we have with others as Bateson (2001) wrote:

more and more it has seemed to me that the idea of an individual, the idea that there is someone to be known, separate from the relationships, is simply an error ... we create each other, bring each other into being by being part of the matrix in which the other exists. (p. 4)

It seems plausible that openness to new understandings and ways of being do inevitably lead to change. The comments of ACU students on placement at the Atherton Gardens Homework Club describe their new perspectives:

*The Homework Support Programme has been one of the most challenging and rewarding learning experiences of our course so far. It has taught us to build relationships, think on our feet, and alter our approaches according to the individuals.*

*It has taught me to look at each child as an individual learner, each with a different learning style and pace.*

*Open-mindedness and acceptance allows for us to gain a sense of inclusiveness, trust and diversity which then leads to understanding and flexibility to create a welcoming environment.*

*([http://www.acu.edu.au/about\\_acu/community\\_engagement/iace/beyond\\_today/beyond\\_disadvantage/fairer\\_future\\_for\\_fitzroy/ce\\_opportunities/yarral\\_atherton\\_gardens/hsp/](http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/community_engagement/iace/beyond_today/beyond_disadvantage/fairer_future_for_fitzroy/ce_opportunities/yarral_atherton_gardens/hsp/)).*

Kathryn Pavlovich (2007), in a study of reflective practice through the use of student journals, argued that encouraging students to be reflective develops both the student's "inner leadership and self-awareness and also that the practice of reflection has the potential to empower socially purposeful and just organisational contexts" (p. 294). Similarly, Finlay (2005) recognised the power of action-based inquiry that can transform local communities and argued that different skills are required in this new paradigm which are focussed on the "interpersonal, political, emotional, moral and ethical competence; intellectual openness and creativity; and spiritual qualities related

to empathy and understanding” (p. 683). The acquisition of these skills involves choices and a way of being where commitment to change, community engagement and social justice are vital principles.

Higher education has the potential to help students to understand and gain insight and produce significant changes in the learner and in the community. Belenky and Stanton (2000) emphasised that “not only would participation and reflective dialogue support [students’] development as individuals, it could also support the development of a more inclusive, just, and democratic society” (p. 74). While I have espoused these values long before my involvement in arts therapy and multi-modal reflection, I now find that the methods learned through this discipline offer the opportunity to more fully appreciate and to understand them.

Helen, Alanna and Robert’s experiences provide further examples of how collaborative reflective practice interacts and informs the community. Increased engagement led to these students being involved in other aspects of the university life and community life. Helen and Alanna were sponsored to attend a community engagement forum in Brisbane in 2006 where they spoke about their reflexive arts-based inquiry experience. Robert produced a book on his Uncle Ted’s life and an exhibition of memorabilia at the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance in 2009, which was a powerful tribute to those who died on the HMAS Sydney.

## *Theme F*: SPIRITUALITY IN ARTS-BASED REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

Meta-theme 4: Spirituality in arts-based reflection on practice leads to a deeper sense of life meaning.

This theme is expanded below in the box and the contributing themes are found in Appendix X.

Theme: 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.

This section will describe the context of the Australian Catholic University and how this educational setting has influenced the findings expressed in the theme. I will then articulate the meanings of spirituality in light of the theme developed from student data. I will consider how spirituality can be cultivated through this arts-based reflective practice, describe the value of embedding a spiritual dimension in higher education and finally comment on the broader issues for university teaching and learning.

### **ACU: the context for the findings.**

ACU is a contemporary Catholic university, with a staff and student body representing the full diversity of religious traditions and cultural backgrounds. It is a university where “faith and intellect meet in the growth of human potential. The spiritual and intellectual development of the human person should be its prime goal and the Catholic ethos must be oriented to that growth in every way” (Sheehan, 2007, p. 3). Catholic thought and teachings are demonstrated by the university's curriculum and liturgical services. At ACU there is a sense of the spiritual dimension to the university, and staff try to create a campus culture that confirms and maintains the religious elements in the lives of students. This is lived out in many aspects of the university where students are given opportunities to explore the faith and spirituality. Chapel liturgical and faith sharing services are held regularly and special events such as graduations are celebrated liturgically.



The importance of the spiritual is made concrete by having a chapel and multi-faith prayer room where Christian and non-Christian rituals are celebrated. This is a strong statement of a mission to be open to all religious and faith traditions and to engage in interfaith dialogue. There is also provision for other forms of “expressing the spiritual dimension in learning” (DESC, 2006, p. 4), such as the development of meditation techniques and the Epiphany exhibition. There are national retreats off-campus for students and staff, and bi-annual faith and justice workshops organised by Campus Ministry staff with students. World Youth Day and the Australian Catholic Youth Ministry Convention in 2010 were held at ACU. In this research, an arts-based reflective process became another possible and important process through which students could express their spirituality as engaging in reflection on one’s lived experience enabled spiritual issues to surface.

The vision for ACU is that a sense of spirituality and sacredness needs to be widely understood by staff and students and permeate the educational process and the environment. Amongst the university community, we recognise the cultural and religious diversity of the staff and student body in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding. There are numerous examples of staff and students seeking understanding through dialogue, practising compassion, and upholding the dignity of all. It is a responsibility that all members of staff share in the task of preparing graduates to work in the wider community, respecting the religious and spiritual dimension of all.

In its mission statement, ACU makes no apology for its strongly held spiritual values and its emphasis on the Catholic faith. As the only publically-funded Catholic University, with this specific orientation, it regards the promotion of Catholic Social justice teachings and values as its right and responsibility. It is not surprising then, that aspects of faith and spirituality become key components in student reflection.

### **The meaning of spirituality.**

My concept of spirituality is similar to that of Rumbold (2003) who describes spirituality as:

the web of relationships that gives coherence to our lives. Religious belief may or may not be part of that web. Often we only become aware of strands in the web when they are stretched or broken, as happens with a life-changing event like a diagnosis of serious illness in ourselves or in someone we love. (p. 12)

This spiritual awareness involves a sense belonging, of each person's uniqueness as a human being, of their personal purpose, and their interconnectedness and the need to live collaboratively. Fisher (1999) pointed out that recent research has drawn attention to the importance of spirituality in human health and well-being. "Increasingly, when we talk about 'learner well-being' in education circles the dimension of spiritual well-being is included along with the physical, cognitive, emotional and social dimension" (DECS, 2005, p. 2).

Hunt (2009) emphasised the relational aspects of spirituality by suggesting it involves a search for "an implicit recognition of the interconnectedness of all things" (p. 86). This approach to spirituality requires each of us to be responsible for all relationships, not only those we have with other human beings but with all aspects of earthly life. Similarly de Souza (2004) suggests that one's spirituality is defined by the level of connectedness that a person feels towards themselves, their communities and the world around them. In my mind spirituality is more about a mindful process than something one has or does not have. For me spirituality is about an intentional journey towards wholeness, and like Staude (2005) I believe this process is deeply connected to our inherent capacity for creativity and play, as well as to our developing ability to forgive, and to have compassion and trust in ourselves and others. It is a process of developing an authentic identity in relationship with others. This is the ongoing search for life meaning that requires a deep attention to life (hooks, 2003; Hunt, 2001; Palmer, 1998; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006; Wuthnow, 2001; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Staude (2005) also suggests that "spirituality is a transformational process through which the different aspects of life are integrated (physical, emotional, occupational, intellectual and rational). It involves a connectedness to oneself, others, nature and to a larger meaning or presence" (p. 256).

Ranson (2002) emphasises the process mentioned above and how attentiveness to one's life and intentionality is evoked in the spiritual journey.

... an attentiveness (to life) which contains within itself a certain desire, certain hopefulness, a certain anticipation. Attention animated by desire, attention becomes intention, awakens within us the awareness of a deepened relationship with ourselves and with others, with the world and with some greater sense of meaning. (p. 17)

Thus spirituality can be conceived of as a process of being deliberately attentive to, and mindful of, our everyday lived experiences. One obvious advantage of this approach to understanding spirituality is that it breaks down any mystique and suspicion related to the language of spirituality by using ordinary experiences with which most people can identify. As Mary Frohlich, says:

I have become convinced that 'lived spirituality' is, and must remain, the key point of engagement for any study of spirituality. In this context, 'spiritual living' does not necessarily mean adherence to a defined religious or spiritual tradition. It does mean, however, that one attends with as much authenticity as one can muster to the truth of one's own experience. (Frohlich, 2001, p. 68)

### **Spirituality as attentiveness to process.**

If spirituality is described as attentiveness to lived experience then it follows that it may involve not only positive and constructive understandings but also struggle and confrontation with the more shadowy parts of human existence. "The acceptance of human struggle with death ... misfortune and evil are important aspects of life to be embraced, not avoided" (Fenwick, 2001, p. 11). Nietzsche wrote in *The Birth of Tragedy* that "when we are faced with the most dreadful circumstances, art approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live" (cited in McNiff, 2004, p. 4). This I particularly experienced when working with Robert, as through his art work and our intersubjective conversations, there dawned an awareness of his internal struggle and grief. As he said:

*One of the major themes to emerge from this intensive reflection is that of grief and loss. (Robert's Journal, 2007, p. 2).*

*It is a rich place that holds so many memories. Swirls of meanings emerge through this contemplative space. It is a place of grief where tears can also have a place and flow freely (Robert's journal, 2007, p. 49).*

In the tradition of Nietzsche, Robert was aware of the part art plays in the process of healing. In creating his own art work he had a space in which to express the experiences which

triggered a sense of loss and grief. In his confrontation with the sense of loss experienced by the Aboriginal people in the Kimberley, he was able to enter his own grief and loss and to transform these seemingly negative experiences through his creative work.

*Grief is what I hit in the Kimberley and grief of my own father-in-law's death. Grief of my own childhood, turning away from my contemplative side, and the grief of entering the last phase of my life becomes a reality. (Robert's Journal, 2007, p. 51)*

*Healing is the grief  
What happens in this space  
It is about the spoken word and a shared experience (Robert's Journal, 2007, p. 61).*



**Figure 121 - Robert HOSKINS, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 900mm x 600mm**

*The sadness is not an impediment to my art; on the contrary it gives my art life and vitality. Indeed, I could learn to express it more and be confident that as I deal with and express the grief, so my art will be released further. (Robert's Journal, 2008, p. 94)*

Roberts' grief became the impetus for an entire creative process. This motivation to contact and explore his grief through these inquiry methods became beneficial for his personal journaling and internship placement. In creating other pieces of art and written texts he used MIECAT's inquiry in order to deepen his understanding of his experience. He and I both value the arts as a means of expressing our spirituality and as a way of constructing and articulating knowledge. He demonstrated that art making can begin from a reflective practice and become a spiritual and healing process.

Fortunately, from my perspective, spirituality has begun to be widely recognised as a construct and an experience that can be, and often is distinct from religion (Ingersoll, 1998). Since the 1970s there has developed a new curiosity regarding spirituality from outside traditional church institutions (Tacey, 2003). Religion, for me, has to do with a framework for beliefs, traditions, doctrine, conduct and rituals, whereas spirituality is much broader. As Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) argue, spirituality is more about an individual's journey toward completeness, whereas religions are organised communities of faith. These however, do "often provide meaningful community rituals that serve as a gateway to the sacred" (p. 38). Because there is a spiritual dimension to all religions, spirituality and religion are of course, interconnected for many people. As mentioned earlier, ACU aims to integrate a spiritual dimension into the students' learning experiences through core curriculum subjects and forums about spiritual and faith issues. It also has places/spaces that are clearly indicative and evocative of church rituals, which also serve to emphasise the particular spiritual and faith tradition of this university.

### **Spirituality and arts-based reflection.**

The findings from this inquiry suggest that through attentiveness to experience, the students increased their connectedness to themselves and others. Helen, for instance, noted:

*The first stage in which I describe my work allowed me to see my image with a different perspective. It was difficult because I had already attached my own understanding to the image almost instantly once I had drawn it. But something else came up for me that I didn't expect ... it takes time and attention. It's about seeing (Helen's Journal, 2006, p. 6).*

If, as posited earlier, spirituality is a process of attentiveness to all aspects of lived experience, any process that offers the opportunity to reflect mindfully on what has been learned in our lives and how this learning can be integrated into our way of being, is likely to support and in fact encourage spiritual development. As Tisdell and Tolliver (2006) suggested:

just as in any experience that leads to learning, a spiritual experience takes place at a particular moment in time. But making sense of it or learning from the experience happens over time ... as they are integrated into one's overall life, clearly can lead to further development of identity. (p. 34)

In the reflective process developed with these students, their attentiveness to their experiencing and to that of others around them, was a critical factor in their inquiry. Attentiveness is an embedded value and is practised in the description of the representations and in the facilitation and emphasis of relational ways of being in the reflective process.

In phenomenological description we are encouraged to remain:

focused on our immediate and concrete impressions ... rather than step back from our immediate experience so that we may instantly explain it, question it or deny it on the basis of preconceived theories or hypotheses which stand separate from our experience ... the rule of description allows us to carry out a concretely based descriptive examination of the subjective variables which make up our experience. (Spinelli, 1985, p. 18)

Reflective practice also requires an inner attentiveness, an embodied awareness which means noticing and paying close attention to the self, by being so totally in the present moment that one is able to recognise inner reactions, feelings and thoughts. This quality of presence seems to allow a person to be present to unfolding moments and to be curious in the consideration of new possibilities. Van Manen (2007) describes individual attentiveness as 'pathic', referring to the full use of our senses to take in what is around us, in order to be more fully aware of what is within us. He says, "our bodies are responsive to the things of our world and to the situations and relations in which we find ourselves" (p. 12). Through this embodied awareness a person is able to enter a process of such attentiveness as to develop a resonance to keywords and thus to discover access points to personal experience. This enables them to be open to uncertainty, pain and discomfort without feeling the need to push the situation and associated emotions away.

## **The intersubjective response.**

Attentiveness is also a vital ‘ingredient’ in the process of intersubjective responding that occurs between the participants and the facilitator in this arts-based reflective process. In the intersubjective processes, emphasis is placed on attentiveness as it applies to the receptive presence of another person. Moustakas (1995) describes this aspect of attentiveness as attunement. He says: “I am attuned to the entire space between us, and all that surrounds us, all that is with this other person ... to the other person’s moods, situation, condition, and ways” (p. 80). This is highlighted in Helen’s experiences. She wrote:

*Mary gave an intersubjective response to Kim’s, in response to her representation and work during the previous meeting we had. This surprised me. I thought an intersubjective response was a general comment or advice. However Mary had actually gone away and written a few things in response to all that Kim had said. She also gave to Kim a concrete visual response - placing a few small stones on cardboard and coloured paper. This was a direct link to what Kim had focused on during her dialogue, and it showed that Mary had really been paying attention to what she was saying - even taking the time to put together something on which Kim can now reflect ... This seems very important to me also, because Mary gave Kim another point of view, another way of seeing her experience. This led to the process of intersubjective sharing.*

*Observing this interchange encouraged me to be self-aware in my own thoughts, feelings and associations. I discovered that the interaction of the intersubjective response enables both parties to take something away with them. The act of giving and receiving makes for something so personal and intimate and establishes an atmosphere of trust, support and encouragement. (Helen’s Journal, 2006, p. 10)*

## **Multimodality and the manifestation of spiritual metaphors.**

Metaphors allow us to describe one thing using the analogy of another (Cade, 1982). In doing this we are able to depart from established mental sets to explore experience in new and varied ways. In this inquiry, students began to give expression to their lived experience in multi-modal forms, and from these depictions, spiritual metaphors were developed.

What we have difficulty speaking about we can sometimes express through metaphor. Through metaphor, we can explicitly shape the story, the poem, or the song that has been there tacitly all along. Metaphor, as we envision it, may help us to understand better who we are and what we do. Metaphor, then, deserves some discussion and exploration in this study.

Robert Wuthnow, (2001), interested in the conceptions and experiences of spirituality in adults and how this influences their further development, emphasised the power of metaphor, symbol, art and imagination in relation to spirituality. He suggested that spirituality seems more authentic to artists because “they had to create their own ways of expressing it” (2001, p. 7). As I understand it, metaphor is the creation of an image which gives shape and definition to experience. Again and again during this study, I saw students use the medium of art and the language of symbol to come to an interactional relationship between themselves, the art materials, time and space. During the epiphany exhibition, Peter produced a video about the biblical exodus in order to highlight the theme of journey. Robert saw the Kimberley metaphor - the boab tree - as a container for nourishment of the human spirit.

James Fowler (1981) a faith development theorist, highlights the importance of image, music, symbol, metaphor, or kinesthetic sensory experience that is beyond the cognitive or rational realm as fundamental to those meaning-making processes that people frequently connect to as the spiritual. Through their use of art, Peter and Robert certainly moved beyond the cognitive and rational to metaphorical and spiritual realms, reiterating Fowlers sense that spirituality is closely tied to how people build knowledge.

Crisp (2008) suggested that multi-modal metaphor is essential to our experiences and conceptualisation of spirituality. She said: “if spirituality is about wholeness, and because the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts, then spirituality itself is always greater than that which can be described in language. (p. 28). The sense of symbol can take learning to what the core of spirituality is about.

Towards the end of the first group inquiry, Kim wanted to respond to her experience of being with the others by offering a visual response to them. She created the heart image, shown over the page.





Figure 122 - Kim, 2006, 3D plasticine and coloured match sticks

Her choice of this image is evocative of the words of Tolliver and Tisdell:

The metaphor of finding the heart of any body, or any philosophical matter, immediately suggests that there is something *alive* to look for. It also implies that there is something that can sustain the whole through the important discovery that it has a reason for being which far surpasses a mechanical functionality. In this quest for what I call a *spiritual ecology*, or an organizational pattern that leads us back to an imaginal and embodied spirituality in art education, the heart plays incredible role in what we yet may find. (2006, p. 43)

Kim intuitively seemed to understand the truth of these words and go right to ‘the heart of the matter’ in her presentation of this illustration to the group.

### **The spiritual dimension in higher education.**

I see a need to explore how spirituality can be more fully embraced in higher education as part of all students’ educational experiences. One contributor, in a discussion paper on spiritual well-being and education noted that “the connections between spirituality and education are often not made, at least in public education” (DECS 2006, p. 11). Noddings (1992) argued that “possibly the greatest lack in modern public schooling is spirituality” (p. 81). We are coming into a new period when spirituality and education need not be seen as opponents, but as partners in a dialogue about what comprises a more holistic picture of the education process. Kazanijan (1998) proposed that spirituality

in education is that which “animates the mind and body, giving meaning, purpose and context to thought, word and action – or, more simply, the meaning-making aspect of learning” (p. 1). Many young people in universities do claim a personal interest in spirituality that could give meaning and purpose to their lives (Tacey, 2000). Some profess that it is part of their being (Groome, 1998; O’Murchu, 1997). Many students have told me that “I’m spiritual but not religious”. Educationalists such as Hyde (2008) recognise the innate capacity for spirituality and argue that spirituality, “is a natural human predisposition, something that all people are born with, and something which continually seeks expression through life” (p. 33).

As de Souza (2010) an educationalist from ACU, has said:

the philosophical thought that has dominated social and educational concerns in the secular society of Australia has been triadic in nature where little has been done to seek the connections between mind, body and soul, the mental, physical and spiritual world, or between rational, emotional and inner reflective learning. (p. 272)

Given the understanding of these educationalists it could be argued that spirituality should have a central place in education, where the meaningfulness of spirituality can enhance students’ lives and wellbeing. There has been a developing body of educational research, which explores and acknowledges the significance of education and spirituality (de Souza & Rimes, 2010; Hay & Nye, 1998; Tacey, 2003; Tisdell, 2008; Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

While spirituality is able to give sense and purpose to how one’s life is to be lived, Webster (2010) suggests that “spirituality is primarily a searching activity and characterises it as a process rather than as a collection of content to be transmitted by the teacher and ‘learned’ by the students” (p. 63). I agree with Webster’s view that spirituality ought to be embedded in educational curriculum and “understood as a form of inquiry and the experiences offered ... are given meaning through the students who participate in them” (p. 63). However, I disagree with Webster’s idea that “spiritual education requires problems, dilemmas, uncertainties or even angst” (p. 63). Spiritual inquiry does not have to necessarily be problem based, although it may be. We can appreciate the spiritual dimension of our lives by encouraging curiosity and exploration.

With the introduction of Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligences and Goleman's (1996) subsequent theories of emotional intelligence, and inclusion of the physicist Zohar and psychologist Marshall's (2000) spiritual quotient (SQ), de Souza (2010) argues that all these views of intelligence:

recognise the human person as a rational, emotional and spiritual being, one who has the ability to think, feel and also intuit, imagine and create. Arguably, then if learning programs aim to be balanced and transformative, they need to address these essentially human traits that compose the whole person. (p. 32)

Zohar and Marshall (2000) are familiar with the significance of appreciating and understanding the interrelatedness of intellectual, emotional and spiritual intelligence. They believe that our spiritual intelligence is the intelligence by which we access our "deepest meaning, values, purpose and higher motivation" (p. 3). It is how we use these to enrich the deeper aspects of life that can generate goodness, compassion, creativity, meaning and a commitment to making the world different. Education has a pivotal role in developing the spiritual intelligence of both students and staff.

The arts may have a crucial role to play in such developments, though de Souza (2010) argues that there is little time "devoted to the subjects like the arts which involve contemplation, imagination and creativity, all of which require a prolonged learning process" (p. 36). de Souza is a strong advocate that the arts and effective learning programs and strategies must be designed to attend to the "holistic and address the rational, emotional and spiritual dimensions" (p. 41), to enhance student learning.

It is important to identify particular processes that promote spiritual nourishment and inquiry. Robert described his process of painting as ... *a dialogue with one's soul. It is soul talk* (Roberts's *Journal* p. 45). More discussion about the importance of spiritual dimension in higher education is required. Laurence (1998) suggests that spirituality in education has to do with "going beyond the acquisition of knowledge and entering realms of meaning and purpose" (p. 5). The findings of this research indicate that the implementation of an arts-based inquiry, such as MIECAT processes and procedures, does offer a means to unfold and explore spirituality. Using such procedures does honour the full range of beliefs inherent in one's religion and/or spirituality without giving preference to either one.

In conclusion, I would argue that spirituality needs to be intrinsic to the very practice of education (Webster, 2010). In order to engage in spirituality meaningfully, we need to offer participatory inquiry approaches. This involves offering opportunities for learners to explore together their own meaning-making capacities. Spirituality needs to be embedded in the sort of education in which diversity, ambiguity and paradox can be embraced. Opportunities for spiritual inquiry need to be creative and engaging so that students can become aware of their spirituality and of the web of relations in which learning emerges.

## *Theme 5*: ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR ARTS-BASED REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

Theme: In practice arts-based reflection requires organisations to commit sufficient space and time.

The implications of arts-based reflection on practice for organisations include the need to create a flexible and sufficiently reflective space, in which students can explore their experience multimodally. Some structural changes within university settings may be necessary, in order to provide for the process and procedures.

Creating a learning environment conducive to the promotion of deep reflective engagement requires a flexible and adequate learning space. This section discusses the findings of this study concerning the impact of the physical space on students' learning. It also considers how the culture of pedagogical action must change in order to include such reflection, as well as the structural implications related to the delivery of this type of curricula in places of higher education.

### **The impact of the physical environment on students' learning.**

This study found that the creation of space for arts-based inquiry which supported and promoted creativity required time and effort. The physical environment that is the room and materials, required preparation. Finding appropriate time and space were issues faced in working with students. It seems plausible that students will be affected either positively or negatively by the spaces in which they learn. Stokols (1990) suggested that there are different approaches to understanding the effect of the physical environment on the people who inhabit it – in particular on their behaviour, and health and wellbeing. Scott (1993), who studied the attributes of 300 American university students preferred in interiors, found a preference for partially enclosed zones, more rather than less complexity in visual field, and a preference for natural features, plants, natural light and soft forms including curved surfaces over angles. In another study Pearson and Richards (1994), noted that pathways, corridor arrangements and the location of different activities within a building, “weight” the

space in a way that reflects the levels of relative importance to the organisation. Current ideas suggest that the design features which alleviate stress for people occupying these spaces include a reduction of noise, the presence of windows with views to nature, and sunny aspects to rooms (Ulrich, 2000). Other studies have verified findings related to the positive impact of views to nature and accompanying nature sounds in hospital, prison and dormitory settings, again supporting claims of reduced experiences of stress and improved wellbeing (Ulrich, Simons, Losito, & Fiorito, 1991).

Stokols (1990) outlined three main approaches to the consideration of the impact of the physical environment on those who inhabit it. The first, a minimalist view, assumes that the built environment has little influence on people's experiencing. The second approach, an instrumental view, suggests that the physical environment is a means to an end, with facilities oriented towards performance and productivity as well as the comfort and wellbeing of occupants. Within this framework the storage and availability of art materials, the space allowed for movement expression and the placement of tables, lighting, and space for people in relationship would all facilitate better learning. A more recent perspective is one that orients to a spiritual attitude which "holds that the constructed environment is not a tool, but rather a possibility for enriching the flourishing of the human spirit through the concomitant construction of meaning" (Fenner, 2010, p. 51). This study clearly supports both the second and third of these approaches.

At ACU the chapel is an excellent example of how architecture can embody and reflect the spiritual attitude of a place. The chapel's distinctive features are its intimate nature and the way in which its coloured glass art works offer sensory stimuli. For example, the abstract glass panels of the stations of the cross draw a person in, allowing them to look more deeply at the depiction of Christ's hands which alone tell the story of his passion and death. The seating can be moved to create space for meditation and the lighting can be dimmed to create a prayerful, reflective atmosphere. All these aspects offer possibilities for imaginative spiritual journeys.



Figure - 123, Mary MCINERNEY, 2010, Photograph of St. Patrick's Campus Chapel

This chapel is also a place in which one can connect with others in communal liturgical celebrations. I regard it as important that the physical features of this space be repeated in other sections of the building through the introduction of quiet places for reflection, places in which music could be listened to, or art works contemplated and that allow places for connection. Thus, design is never separated from the lived experience of its inhabitants and can encourage healthy responses such as “esteem, autonomy, insight, competence, coherence, tranquillity, restoration, social acceptance and belongingness” (Stokols, 1990, p. 7). The present study supports the idea that the incorporation of contemplative practices and the spiritual, plus the insights that can emerge from multiple ways of knowing and expression, can support transformative learning in adult education (Tolliver & Tisdell 2006).

While it is important to establish a learning environment that enhances student satisfaction and academic achievement, it is also necessary to create learning environments where learning is collaborative and supportive. In this type of environment individual talents are recognised and, as this inquiry shows, knowledge is constructed and created, not just delivered by the teacher.

As Gale (2009) argued “student equity agendas for higher education must centre on the student learning environment and experience if it is to challenge the exclusion of certain bodies and what they embody” (p. 2). He suggested that student learning environments and experiences should be designed in such a way that students are seen to be appreciated for who they are and what they stand for, and that these places and spaces nourish genuine opportunity for students to shape how learning takes place.

## **Pedagogical practice: learning and structural change.**

This inquiry found pedagogical activities involving collaborative arts-based inquiry required particular spatial qualities in order to be effective. The physical space, in itself, is not the crucial determinant of quality engagement and interaction. The space created also needs to reflect the following qualities: open dialogue, concern and respect for students, exploration, trust, and deep learning. This is illuminated by Sumara (2002) who introduced another perspective on the desirability of an optimal space for learning that was focussed less on the objects and architecture of our environment and more on the psychological and intersubjective, relational space that is required for deep learning. He suggested that a teacher's most important work is to create an atmosphere whereby students are able to enter into a "world of inquiry that is new and interesting" (p. 119).

One of the oldest descriptions of learning space that can be found is the Japanese concept of "Ba," described by Nonaka and Konno (1998) as a "shared space for emerging relationships ... [that] provides a platform for advancing individual and/or collective knowledge" (p. 40). They describe good Ba as "superior relational situations where everyone brings energy to the others, enhancing creativity and supporting dynamic positive exchanges" (p. 41).

Yorks and Kasl (2006) highlighted the intersubjective nature of learning spaces with their notion of "learning-within-relationship". This occurs when learners strive to become engaged with both their own whole-person knowing and the whole-person knowing of their fellow students. Much of collaborative inquiry theory and practice also foregrounds the learning space and the relational learning it fosters. A humanised environment that stimulates learning is one in which there is a sense of place, presence, and community. It also needs to be aesthetically pleasing and sufficiently flexible. This inquiry relied on creating a collaborative environment, whether at the art gallery or in an alternative room on campus. I created an atmosphere where students could gather in learning groups and communicate readily with each other. I found that this interaction led to greater student engagement. It felt like an engaging space which enabled students to hear and speak and see each other's face. However it was a challenge at the same time as I needed to bring most of the art supplies to the gallery.



There are certain influential forces in this gradual awakening to new and more student focused ways of engaging in educative practice in places of higher education. One of these is the way that the students themselves, coming as they do from a world of accelerated change and multiple methods of learning, constantly challenge the universities that recruit them. This has radically altered the relationship between teacher and student, driving the need for new approaches to learning design (Flynn, 2008). Thus the old convention of student receiving knowledge from the teacher in a lecture-style environment seems totally out-moded in a time in which communication between teacher and student needs to be two-way. However, many institutions construe teaching almost entirely in terms of lecturing rather than interaction between the participants. Thus the traditional instructional paradigm of the institution needs to give way to a 'shared-learning' one. Students want a learning space that fosters true learning - a space where they engage in dialogue, work on projects independently or in groups, get and provide feedback, collaborate and socialise (Flynn, 2008, p. 8). Flynn (2008) described such places as "environments where learning, creativity and discovery will occur" (p. 9). Guldbæk (2010), a Danish architect who recently visited Australia, believes that we need to get out of the traditional classroom model, and that teaching and learning works best in teams. He argued that "bodies are particularly kinaesthetic; that is, [students] need to be engaged in a way that the body as well as the brain is used ... you need to be active to learn" (The Age, February 28, 2010, p. 16). Seen in this context, the findings of this study support learning experiences that facilitate experiential, multimodal collaborative endeavours which are inter-relational and where meanings become evident at any time in the process of the inquiry. It is through the use of the senses, as well as the whole body that a range of expressive arts may be utilised for personal reflection.

The pedagogical implementation of an approach such as that used in this research implies both organisation and an engagement with students in a different way, bringing into action a new understanding of how learning takes place and calling upon educators to create learning spaces where "creativity and discovery will occur" (Flynn, 2008, p. 8). The provision of such spaces allows for mutual exchange, not only the richness of student to student exchange, but also student to staff and staff to staff exchange. Allen (2004) wrote that "openness is spacious, future oriented, and involves us in reaching out, and being touched by the other" (p. 50). My own findings complement these descriptions of a learning space, centred as they do on its social, relational and intersubjective dimensions. We certainly engaged in learning with the sense of equality and mutuality which this implies, gradually coming to learn from and appreciate individual differences.

I believe the findings of this inquiry give the sense of a flexible process, a learning environment where the opportunity to share the personal, as well as the presence of affirmation and encouragement all allow for deep learning, and the maximisation of individual and group potential. For me, this meant an attitude of openness so that I respected each person's knowledge and experience. I encouraged students to have a voice, emphasising that their agenda for inquiry had a space in which they were free to explore and to engage in an intersubjective way of being. Dalzo (1986) claimed that "calling the student's voice to emerge is of central importance, for clearly we do not learn to speak unless encouraged to do so, or to think without practice" (p. 225).

I cared about students and their experiences and I encouraged them to trust what was emerging. Dialogue and affective attunement between students and companions created the holding environment. This is particularly vital in an arts-based reflective practice if the 'creative springs' of feeling and understanding are to be tapped, and if it is to become a learning environment in which personal material can be revealed. Confidentiality and mutual respect must be ensured and promoted.

Currently St. Patrick's Campus is extending its buildings. A new chapel is to be built by 2012, and in this a gathering space will be provided at the entrance to the chapel. It is my hope that both meditation and reflection using the arts might take place here. The real issue is how to promote arts-based reflection in institutions and utilise institutional support to further arts-based reflective practice. Students are unlikely to be engaged in reflection "unless intentional efforts are undertaken to make it so" (Eyler, 2002, p. 522). I agree with Eyler, believing that more is required than adding community engagement or service learning as a course requirement. Policies and practices need to better reflect the diverse ways in which students learn.

Staff also need to be more responsible in supporting students who are engaged in reflection on practice. In the School of Education at St. Patrick's Campus of the ACU we were able to introduce students to multi-modal reflection on practice and to timetable this into their coursework only because staff came together for conversation about community engagement and about the importance of such practices. A successful outcome was that community engagement continues to be timetabled, and as noted already said now 120 third year education students attend the Atherton Gardens homework club and sessions were also set aside for arts-based reflection.

This chapter attempted to draw on the literature and the experiences of students and staff in this study. There are many approaches which incorporate a range of techniques for reflection on practice. This study has found that using the MIECAT methodology, which supports multimodality, and collaboration within the inquiry can allow embodied knowledge to be integrated. For participants in this study life was given deeper meaning. Providing students with the opportunity of exploring different media as a form of self-expression enabled them to learn multi-modally. I found that incorporating and embodying creative arts-based practice is a challenge in educational settings as it does need to be structured into students' course work, so that time can be dedicated for inquiry. The examples outlined in this study illustrate how the reflective inquiry process was both experiential and participatory; it is a creative form of human engagement, which can be implemented in a variety of ways in diverse contexts.

The findings highlight the fact that structured and flexible multimodal learning can strengthen and enhance the quality of education, and show that this type of inquiry requires learning to be seen in a different light. Learning must become more personalised and collaborative to allow the learner to bring personal ways of constructing meaning into the inquiry. This type of multimodal inquiry as a way of learning can expand beyond the classroom, and students can employ these processes and procedures throughout their life-long learning experiences.

In this study there seemed to be a strong connection between an arts-based inquiry and spirituality, where there was a focus on oneself and one's interconnectedness to others and the world. The underlying thread that runs through the research connects the emerging form of inquiry to reflection and intersubjective exchanges. Creating an atmosphere of trust is essential in this type of inquiry.

In the next chapter, I reflect on the fulfilling nature of the learning experience for me in providing students with the opportunity to reflect on their experience multi-modally, and the ways in which we learned from each other. I review what I have come to understand through my increased engagement with the MIECAT procedures and process, which gave me confidence to continue to promote multimodal reflective practice for groups of students. I also make recommendations for practice and further research.