

# Harnessing creativity through arts-based research to support teachers' identity development

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## Abstract

Although prevalently focused on research-based outcomes (i.e. better understanding of a particular phenomenon, process or experience), arts-based researchers have widely emphasised the transformational potentialities of arts for individuals. In particular, the arts create space for thinking differently and provide opportunities to explore intuitive and emotionally connected ideas that do not rely on words alone. The arts are powerful instruments to activate individual and collective reflection, creativity and ability to approach life situations from different perspectives. Thus, arts are particularly powerful to promote the creative and transformational processes that are essential for professional identity development, including reflection and reflexivity on self. In this paper we aim at conceptualising the high potential of art-based research, as a creative process, for teachers' identity development. Based on a systematic scientific literature analysis we intend to map the different ways arts can be used to support teachers' professional identity development while clarifying which transformational and learning processes are involved.

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Arts based, reflection, teacher identity, creativity, professional learning

**Introduction***Creativity and teacher identity development: The key role of reflection*

The need for creativity is widely part of the current education discourses, including those related to teacher education. The link between creativity and the teaching profession was introduced in the last century by those authors who adopted the metaphors of the “teacher as an actor” (Harris, 1977) and teaching as “a disciplined improvisation” (Sawyer, 2004). Certainly, creativity is part of an effective teacher’s performance, as teaching is a matter of communication and presence, here intended as a state of alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional, and physical workings (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). However, creativity is also crucial to promote the teacher identity development processes that necessarily require personal, relational and conceptual transformation (Gouthro, 2018; Meijer & Oosterheert, 2018).

In particular, teachers’ identity development implies personal transformation and requires teachers to be able to question their own beliefs and ways to operate in order to reinforce personal agency and self-awareness. Also it requires teachers to be able to think *outside conventional or usual boxes* in order to generate novel solutions to complex dynamics associated with their work. From this perspective, teacher identity development can be conceptualised as a generative, transformational and creative process, where individuals are asked to be open to see and think differently – differently from the mainstream understanding or from how they are used to working – in order to enlarge their possibilities of action and their possible selves.

To this respect while not synonymous, creativity has been related to reflection and reflectivity. For example, Razdorskaya (2015) described a synergetic interaction between reflection and creativity. The author described reflection ‘as the basis of creativity and the mechanism allowing the subject of education to make a creative product, to evaluate its novelty and to define the prospects of the further development’ (p. 434). The generative processes required to be creative, depends on the individuals’ ability to reflect, as well as the ability to reflect critically, on knowledge, actions, ideas and experiences (Howard-Jones & Murray, 2003).

However, the ability to think differently and reflect critically and creatively does not only depends on the individual cognitive and metacognitive skills, it is also a matter of opportunities to ‘experience differently’. Being involved in new experiences (i.e. something unknown, unpredictable or very far from our usual practices), being embodied in a multimodal experiential process (i.e. when various senses are involved) or interacting with people very different from ourselves can all be considered as experiences of boundaries crossing (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). They

provide the opportunity to face alternative ways of feeling, thinking and acting. Those kinds of experiences are the motor of a possible transformation, also in terms of identity transformation, as they provoke cognitive conflicts, experienced contradictions, and multiple insights (see also Engeström, 1987; Piaget, 1977).

Arts can provide such kinds of experience. For example, Liamputtong and Rumbold (2008) draw on Heron and Reason's (1997) extended epistemology to illustrate how arts-based research extends access to ways of knowing beyond conceptual knowledge often privileged in research. The extended epistemology includes four ways of knowing: propositional (conceptual); experiential (felt); presentational (symbolised) and practical (how to). Liamputtong and Rumbold (2008) suggest arts-based research methods provide access to the 'experiential knowing of participants' (p. 3) and favours presentational knowing: a representation of 'experiential knowing in expressive forms' (p. 2) that can be transmuted into practical knowing. Application of practical knowing helps to bridge the theory practice divide and makes visible the product of creative thought. Also, arts facilitate individuals to communicate by using multiple languages (not only based on verbal language or writing) and feel in a multi-sensorial way as well as to reflect by using processes not limited to cognition and written language.

### *Arts-based research and teacher identity development*

Arts-based research is a growing field within teacher education. The purpose of this article is to develop a clear understanding of the different ways arts can be used to support reflective practice for teachers' professional identity growth.

We come to this project as experienced teachers who have worked in multiple settings with children, adolescents and adults. We use arts-based methods in our current teaching and research in teacher education. By arts-based methods we refer to various teaching practices we employ, such as role play, body shaping, collage and drawing, which is also connected to our research. Throughout this paper we use the terms approaches, practices and methods interchangeably, with choice of vocabulary often reflecting that of the research being discussed. In many of the research projects we identify in this paper, the research methods being employed as data collection tools are also teaching practices and therefore overlaps occur.

Moreover, Nichols, Schutz, Rodgers, and Bilica's (2017) notion of identity work provides a foundation upon which our goal is examined. They purport that identity work is the process of figuring out what it means to be a teacher and recognise that within the literature, identity is seen to have three salient features. Identity is fluid. 'It is not about what someone *is*, but rather identity is about what someone is *becoming* that is central' (p. 407). Second, identity is context specific and involves negotiations between the individual, others and context. Third, identity involves human agency where teachers have some input and influence into the practices of their professional lives.

In the current era of scrutiny within education, Lindstrom and Beach (2015, p. 254) claim it is getting harder to ‘assert a strong professional identity’ while Schutz (2014) identified the close relationship between professional identity, personal identity and emotions. This connection is significant at a time when high levels of exhaustion and burnout characterise teaching, and significant attrition rates of disenfranchised teachers are noted (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Vesely, Saklofske, & Nordstokke, 2014). Understanding how art-based practices support professional identity development is important, therefore, as it opens ‘possibilities for the care and the self-knowledge of teachers’ (Nichols et al., 2017, p. 408).

To achieve our goal we conducted a systematic literature review study guided by the research question: How are the arts used to support teachers’ professional identity development? In the following sections of the paper, the methodological considerations of the study are detailed, and the main findings are reported and discussed.

## **Methods**

We conducted a systematic literature review to locate, appraise and synthesise the corpus of existing literature (Hao et al., 2016). Through a metasynthesis of the identified studies our aim was to interpret the existing findings and map the different ways arts can be used to support teachers’ professional identity development.

Five databases were utilised during the systematic search. ProQuest, A+ Informit, Science Direct, Taylor and Francis, and Psych-info databases provided access to a large range of literature globally, across a broad spectrum of educational contexts including preservice teacher education, professional learning for teachers of children and adolescents, teachers in higher education, teachers in post secondary education and alternate schooling settings.

## **Systematic approach**

Similar to the work of Haidet et al. (2016) who conducted a systematic literature review into the use of arts in medical education, we included arts-based research encompassing a range of modes such as drama, poetry, drawing, dance, music, visual arts and images, movie making and metaphors within teacher education. We were looking for studies where the arts were incorporated into data collection and/or analysis. The search included articles that specifically utilised arts-based practices in the research or learning process that aimed to support professional identity development in teachers or teacher candidates regardless of their area of teaching or experience in the field. The search did not focus on the development of pedagogical content knowledge but rather in changes associated with identity and the impact of changing perceptions of self on practices and approaches to teaching.

The searches were conducted between June 2018 and September 2018. The details of the key words used across five databases are documented in Table S1 (Supplemental material). In total 522 articles were located using the

key search terms. Following the review of abstracts 62 articles were selected. Nineteen repeat articles were located and removed. Forty-three articles were read in full and reviewed against the criteria. A further 20 articles were excluded leaving 23 articles that met the stringent criteria for inclusion. Table 1 outlines the details related to the parameters of the search and the criteria used for inclusion and exclusion of particular articles.

Only peer-reviewed articles where full text was available were included. All included papers were required to contain arts-based pedagogy or methodology in adult education that related to professional identity development of preservice or inservice teachers despite their field of teaching or their level of experience. Figure 1 illustrates the process used to move from abstracts to full papers and the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

### *Coding process explained*

An overview of each paper was created. An Excel spreadsheet was used to record information such as country of study, context of study, key words, type of study (review, theoretical, empirical), informing theories, art processes employed and types of learning distinguished in relation to identity development.

Next, a second page of the excel book was created to collate a summary of each paper. This information included the research question or aim; the types of data collection methods that were employed and what types of data were collected; identified themes; summary of findings or key message; recurring links to other literature related to identity development; and further applications to adult education.

A thematic approach was then adopted to analyse data related to learning and identity development that emerged from the papers. As described by Braun and Clarke (2006), a thematic analysis aims to identify, analyse and report themes within data that are related to a specific research question or topic. For this study, the focus of the thematic analysis was the way arts-based methods are described to support identity development and learning processes. Following the procedure we first identified a list of organising concepts related to teachers' identity development and learning processes supported by arts methods, as described in the selected papers. The organising concepts were then analysed in order to identify major themes. Finally a concept map was drawn to illustrate the possible linkages amongst the findings from each paper.

During the coding process we employed a dialogical validation technique. This technique consists of a dialogic reliability check 'where agreement between researchers is reached through discussion and mutual critique of the data and of each researcher's interpretative hypothesis' (Åkerlind, 2005, p. 331). This procedure is typical of the phenomenographic analysis. A record of papers and the analysis process was stored on a shared electronic platform so it could be independently and jointly accessed and processes were transparent. We met regularly via Skype during the analysis process to validate our interpretations.

**Table 1.** Inclusion exclusion criteria.

Parameter	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Arts-based learning	The use of arts-based pedagogies in various educational contexts to promote learning related to professional identity for preservice and inservice teachers. The arts-based pedagogies were used to promote reflection. Teachers include those working in early childhood, primary, secondary, vocational and higher education settings. Preservice teachers are those still completing their basic qualification in any field teacher education	Art-based pedagogies or practices that incorporate various activities to compare professional identities
Teacher professional identity	Teacher professional identity includes the development of understanding of the complexity of teachers' role, enhanced self-efficacy, and strengthening commitment to teaching. It is advanced through arts-based practices that promote self-reflection and /or critical reflection.	Comparison of teacher professional identities to other identities within the arts, such as artist and art teacher; musician and music teacher; actor and drama teacher
Arts-based reflection	Arts-based reflection includes reflection on self, practice, and/or context that is activated, sustained or reported using some form of the arts including drama, painting, drawing, poetry, music, metaphors, collage or other forms of visual arts.	Arts-based reflection instigated by teachers that focuses on the response of the students.
Models/ theoretical frameworks	The use of models/frameworks that include an arts-based approach to data collection and/or analysis. The model/framework is applied in a teacher education context to promote reflection on personal biography, pedagogical practice, teaching context and the role each plays in identity development.	Teacher education related to pedagogical content knowledge. Narrative inquiry when not paired with an arts-based method of data collection
Language	Paper published in English	Paper published in language other than English

## Findings and discussion

### *Descriptive information about selected papers*

In total, 23 articles were included in the final analysis. With the exception of one theoretical article, all other papers were empirical in nature and covered the use of

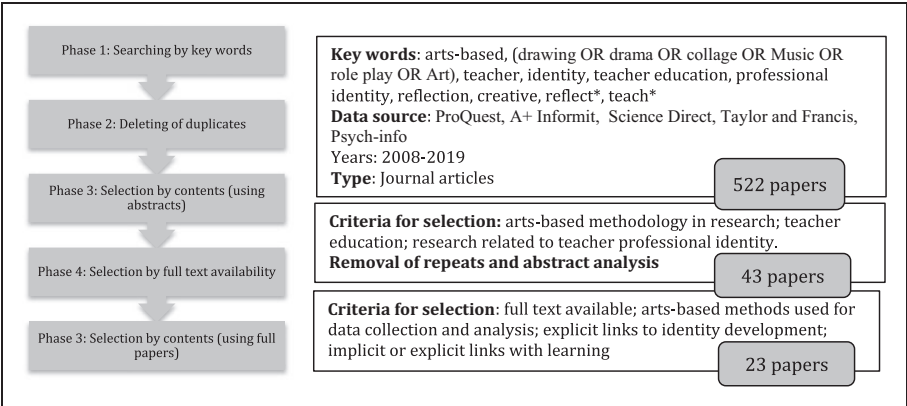


Figure 1. Model of selection process.

arts-based practices in data collection and/or analysis in studies concerned with identity development in adult education and learning. There was a noted predominance of this research in preservice teacher education with half of the papers focusing on this demographic. Other adult education contexts represented were in-service teachers and academic staff within the higher education sphere. All studies were qualitative in nature and included at least one of the following arts-based methods in their research design: a/r/tography, narrative with drawing, graphing, body shaping, photo stories, painting, music production, digital stories, movie making, zines and cartography. Sample sizes ranged from a single case to 187 participants. The larger participant sets usually only had a single data collection point, such as a drawing or used only a smaller sub group for the follow-up interview. Several studies included data collected as course work in teacher education programmes or from short-term professional development sessions. Data collected in two projects, each reporting a single case, were conducted over one year. One study was conducted over five years with one participants’ story the focus of the paper. Table 2 presents a list of the papers included with details of the research context and location.

Organising concepts and major themes

Not surprisingly, reflection, reflexivity and/or critical reflection were identified as an overarching and crucial element of the arts-based process related to identity development. Leitch (2006) and Liamputtong and Rumbold (2008) support the use of arts-based practices for reflection claiming it opens possibilities for thinking differently and expressing ideas. It allows for consideration of new perspectives, and opens up ways to express germinating ideas, that is to be creative. These new forms of thinking and previously unformed ideas can lead to transformational ways of being. McNiff (2008, p. 40) claims more ‘meaningful insights [that] often come by surprise, unexpectedly and even against the will of the creator’

**Table 2.** Details of included papers.

Paper number	Reference	Context and country of study
1	Strangeways (2016)	School/Uni NT, Australia-preservice
4	Power and Bennett (2015)	Service learning project in Australia-preservice
6	Grushka and Goodlad (2013)	Preservice teachers in Australia
8	Glass (2011)	Australia-preservice
11	Botha (2017)	South Africa-preservice
13	Anae (2014)	Australia-preservice secondary
14	Gouzouasis, Irwin, Miles, and Gordon (2013)	Canada-preservice
15	Mantas and Di Rezze (2011)	Canada – inservice
17	Griffin (2015)	Canada – preservice
18	Bhukhanwala et al. (2017)	USA – preservice
19	Bertling (2017)	USA – preservice
22	Pellegrino (2011)	USA – inservice music teachers
23	Lavina et al. (2017)	Australia – inservice
24	Beltman, Glass, Dinham, Chalk, and Nguyen (2013)	Australian-preservice
25	Kenny, Finneran, and Mitchell (2015)	Ireland-preservice
26	Nevgi and Löfström (2014)	Finland-academics
27	Dinham, Chalk, Beltman, Glass, and Nguyen (2017)	Australia-preservice
28	Hökkä et al. (2017)	Finland-teacher educators
29	King et al. (2014)	UK-academics
30	Unrath and Nordlund (2009)	USA-preservice art teachers
31	Regev and Ronen (2012)	Israel-preservice teachers
32	Koc (2011)	Turkey-preservice teachers
35	Brigham (2011)	Canada-participants held qualifications as teachers

result from reflection undertaken through an arts-based approach. Through arts-based practices, reflective skills and experiences draw on creative thinking to move the practical task of making and creating to a process for deeper thinking and meaning making (Nottingham, 2010).

The organising concepts included changing perceptions, challenging beliefs, alternate ways of communicating, becoming, social construction of identity, well-being and vulnerability, trust and safety, and change. Arts-based practices open up spaces for doing things differently by moving beyond propositional or conceptual knowledge and bringing into focus experiential knowledge to express knowing in practical terms (Liamputtong & Rumbold, 2008). To this respect arts are described as providing the teachers with the opportunities to question views and practices taken for granted in order to explore their identity and profession through different lenses. Thus, arts leads teachers to see, think and act differently from the



conventional thought and practice as well as from the way an individual is used to seeing, thinking and acting.

Linked with this notion, four major themes were selected and named to arrange the organising concepts and report on the potential contributions and different ways arts can be used to support teachers' professional identity development. These themes are: *Reflecting differently*, *Becoming differently*, *Being differently* and *Doing differently*.

In the following section each theme is first described, followed by the discussion that illuminates the different ways learning occurs in relation to teachers' professional identity development when supported through arts-based practices.

(a) *Reflecting differently* – (This theme is reflected in the following papers: 1, 6, 8, 11, 15, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 35. See Table 2 for paper details)

*Reflecting differently* encompasses reflection that moves beyond thinking back, thinking within or thinking towards the future. In this paper, *reflecting differently* encompasses the use of arts-based processes to generate deep thinking and feeling linked with the affective nature of being and becoming. It involves processes where people, materials and social interaction interweave to uncover uncertainty. *Reflecting differently* may act as a catalyst for creative thought that is required for new learning in the form of problem solving, making connections or creating innovative solutions to take place. Finally, in this context, we are interested in *reflecting differently* to understand the contribution it makes to new learning related to teacher identity development.

Across the literature was a consensus that arts-based practices promote deeper, richer reflection (6, 8, 11, 15, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 32, 35) and reflexivity (1, 6, 17, 30, 35). Authors recognised the embodied nature of the arts-based reflection experiences and the activation of different neural pathways to include emotional as well as cognitive responses (8) that 'allowed [participants] to explore, reflect, understand, synthesise, and then re-present their teaching philosophies' (Grushka & Goodlad, 2013, p. 78) (6).

Individuals come to teaching with varied backgrounds, but all with an experience of education. Recalling the past reinforces the narrative students have developed over this time and how they see themselves as learners and potentially themselves as teachers. Lavina, Fleet, and Niland (2017) (23) suggest that arts-based practices provide tools for reflection that helps to 'make explicit many textures of teachers' thinking and provided valuable opportunities for teachers to deepen understandings of identities and practice' (p. 159). In addition, they note the 'potential for uncovering rich internal constructions of teacher identity' (p. 159) through arts-informed methodology and the possibilities for transfer into teachers' practices.

Strong feelings and beliefs often accompany teachers into their training. *Reflecting differently* through particular arts-based methods can expose, as myths, the beliefs previously held that have shaped identity. Unchallenged beliefs and unexamined personal histories have the potential to sustain particular practices in education not because of their effectiveness but because of their taken for

granted existence. For example, Grushka and Goodlad (2013) (6) reported the use of perzines as useful tools to facilitate preservice teachers' critical reflection capacities. Preservice teachers in their study were able to challenge the long held narratives they believed about themselves as learners as part of their identity building process. Teachers' beliefs are known to play a significant role in their approach to teaching, and therefore, re-examining strong feelings and beliefs can potentially open ways to engage in creative and critical thinking. This way of thinking is required for transformation or *doing differently*, which is discussed below.

Many articles reviewed noted the potential of arts-based practices to expose deeper levels of reflection through enhanced communication (4, 8, 23, 29, 30, 35). King et al. (2014, p. 262) (2) claim 'the use of visual research ... produced results ... more richly expressive than would have been possible through more traditional approaches'. Power and Bennett (2015) (4) acknowledge the a/r/tography methodology provides a way to communicate experiences that are difficult to express. Providing teachers with an opportunity to 'move beyond the words and into a deeper understanding' Glass (2011, p. 134) (8) helps to expose the challenges and tensions that are currently blurring teachers' sense of who they are in their professional identity. Enhanced expression of ideas and feelings is an important role of the arts in helping teachers' unravels their experiences and contextual influences on identity development (27, 30, 35). Identity construction is a complex mix of personal, professional and contextual factors and 'arts-informed methodology offers potential for uncovering [the] rich internal constructions' (Lavina et al., 2017, p. 159) (3) that develop over time. Authors noted that arts-based methodology provides a means to support reflection during the process of becoming and 'provide an arena for making sense of the world' (Unrath & Nordlund, 2009, p. 102) (30).

(b) *Becoming differently* (4, 8, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 35)

*Becoming differently* includes the ways arts-based practices support the construction and restructuring of identity. It encompasses making sense of the emotional, physical and intellectual selves that need to be understood and balanced as professional and personal identities blend or collide and teacher identity becomes visible (13, 29, 35).

Several authors discussed the ways that art-based practices support the social construction of identity (11, 15, 17, 19, 23, 26, 35) and its fluid nature (25). They referred to the role of personal biographies (8, 15, 35) and context (8, 15, 26, 35) as influencing factors on identity development and how arts-based methods of reflection and reflexivity allowed slippages in memory to be pulled forward to become part of the developing narrative of becoming teacher. Arts-based reflection intensifies the awareness of past experiences that may be unpleasant to recall but can be pivotal to the learning process (Brigham, 2011) (35). McKay and Barton (2018) describe arts-based reflection as the process of supporting or scaffolding oral and written modes of reflection through tangible methods, such as collage or drawing; or through the use of artefacts such as photo elicitation, to explore and represent teachers' thinking.

Arts-based reflection allows participants to uncover and utilise important emotions related to their work. Griffin (2015) (17) adapted body mapping as a narrative practice in a study of 20 preservice music teachers. The process encouraged reflection on past experiences, and helped participants to recognise how the emotions linked with the past experiences were shaping their current perceptions about themselves and their ability to teach. Throughout the process participants reported increased self-confidence and comfort in their future imagined selves. Griffith contends that using body mapping to support reflection where 'heightened awareness, acknowledgment, and deconstruction were all key components of walking through the formative process of ... identity and becoming classroom teacher' (p. 274). The arts is a conduit for meaning making (Unrath & Nordlund, 2009) (30).

Understanding who we become as teachers is important to ensure balance between our emotional, physical and intellectual selves. Balance across these areas is required before we can make sense of ourselves (13, 29). It also supports resilience and wellbeing (17, 22, 23, 27) required for teachers to approach the resolution to feelings of dissonance in a positive manner (4, 17, 24, 25, 35), to activate agency (18, 35) and sustain confidence, strength and efficacy (24, 25). These characteristics are acknowledged by the authors to be important aspects of identity development.

(c) Being differently (1, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 30, 32, 35)

*Being differently* incorporates consideration of the interplay of factors that determine embracing or resisting moments of *becoming differently*. It includes identifying the vulnerabilities and confidences that shape teacher identity through first hand experiential knowing. Providing space for teachers' voices to be recognised, arts-based practices support *being differently* when space is made to foreground teachers' voices and support traits that contribute positively to teacher identity development. These traits include confidence, creativity, autonomy, wellbeing and resilience. For example, in a Canadian study of 24 migrant women who were teachers in their respective homelands, Brigham (2011) (35) illustrated how art-making, using a range of materials supported the exploration of multiple modes of knowledge and the development of personal narratives. These processes supported the participants to be more reflective about their teacher identity and opened the way for transformative learning and consideration of new ideas and possibilities. Personal agency and collective action for social change were outcomes reported from the study where research participants engaged in 'imaginative, experiential, cognitive and affective dimensions of learning' (Brigham, 2011, p. 45) (35).

Teaching is an emotion laden vocation (4, 6, 8) where teachers' wellbeing is linked with a balance between our emotional, physical and intellectual selves (13, 17, 22, 23, 27, 29, 35). The complexity of the teacher role, often considered in quite a naïve way in the early stages of teacher training, needs to be realised (Hong, 2010). Authors discuss the complexity of identity development in relation to the complexity of the role for which teachers are preparing (11, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 30,

32) and the influence of context on identity development (1, 6, 8, 18, 30, 35) including relationships and emotions.

Glass (2011, p. 142) (8) contends that arts-based reflective practices help teachers to understand prior experiences and new learning so

they can be assisted to find not only the image or vision of themselves as the teacher but the way forward to put that vision into practice; to negotiate the “prickly aspects” of the process; to know that teacher identity is informed by and informs the multiple contexts in which it develops. (Glass, 2011, p. 142)

Being able to name and respond to significant influences potentially facilitates processes to support resilience and agency (27). Furthermore, including participants in the planning and decision making around the arts-based projects was also considered to support identity development by providing an environment where participants felt valued and raised engagement. Active participation reinforces their capacity as professionals, strengthening their identity as agents in their own future (18, 29, 30, 32, 35).

(d) Doing differently (1, 4, 6, 8, 15, 17, 18, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 35)

*Doing differently* incorporates how art-based practices expose the power dynamics that support or hinder teachers’ daily work and is associated with their sense of efficacy, agency and wellbeing. Lavina et al. (2017) (23), in a study of early childhood teachers used photos, drawings and written expression to support reflection. They contend that the benefits of using arts-informed approaches to explore teacher identity lies in the ‘potential for uncovering rich internal constructions of teacher identity’ (p. 159). It moves beyond ideological and hegemonic practices and allows teachers to recognise barriers and challenges and to seek slippages and new ways of viewing and responding. It supports spaces of unknown and risk taking where uncertainty is seen as an opportunity to grow creatively rather than as a sign of incompetence. *Doing differently* is reflected in transformative practice. In the current era where control and accountability imposed by systems is having a profound effect on the clarity of professional identity (Lindstrom & Beach, 2015) and the related attrition rates of disenfranchised teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Vesely et al., 2014), *doing differently*, is clearly important to teacher identity.

Transformation required critical reflection and interaction with significant others (Brookfield, 2000) as well as removing oneself for introspective reflection (Cranton, 2006). It involves a level of discomfort associated with the unsettling of previously unexamined beliefs, values and attitudes (Mezirow, 2000). ‘Transformative learning involves imaginative and emotional ways of knowing’ (McKay, 2013, p. 106).

Professional identity determines how teachers perceive their role and the related sense of agency (Zembylas, 2003). Exploring opportunities to enhance teachers’ sense of agency may also contribute to their level of job satisfaction and support

the retention of disenfranchised teachers as risk of exiting the profession (McKay & Barton, 2018).

Agency involves making deliberate choices that result in significant outcomes for self, other individuals or groups. In teaching it is closely related to one's professional identity and 'acting in new and creative ways' (Hökkä, Vähäsantanen, & Mahlakaarto, 2017, p. 37) (28). Resistance, disruption, change (Cranton, 2006) and resilience (Mansfield Beltman, Broadley & Weatherby-Fell, 2016 2016) are related to agency, and therefore agency is linked with emotion. The authors consistently reported links between the arts and the emotional responses connected to internal conflicts teachers experienced within their roles. While specifically linked to body mapping, Griffin (2015, p. 274) (17) echoes the authors' sentiments that arts-based reflection is 'a unique tool that invited teacher candidates to deeply conceptualise places of embodied emotion towards their future practice'.

Despite the diverse range of studies reviewed, there was strong agreement that arts-based practices can enable belief systems to be challenged as our identity is shaped and re-shaped, and that arts practices support different ways of thinking and acting (4, 8, 18, 24, 26, 29, 35). Authors note the value of the arts in challenging the taken for granted assumptions and preconceptions (8, 17, 18, 29, 30, 31, 35). Challenging the preconceptions gives purpose to, and therefore is a necessary requirement for 'doing differently'.

Authors note that arts-based processes of reflection can support teachers during the dissonance that can be experienced through stages of change. When exploring, through creative means and exposing a new or unknown self with others, trust was deemed essential as participants appeared to experience a sense of vulnerability (15, 27, 29, 35).

Arts-based approaches were reported by authors, to open spaces to examine tensions (6, 17, 18, 24, 28, 29, 35) and provide possibilities for being agentic and *doing differently*. Arts-based reflection opened opportunities to shift perceptions involving power dynamics leading to agency through constructive dialogic interactions and negotiated meaning (18, 35). Feelings such as fear and inadequacy, but also hope and self-confidence were uncovered using arts-based reflection during periods of transformation (17, 31, 32, 35). This process is particularly relevant in preservice teacher education and early career teachers when imagined self and real self may be in conflict or not well-aligned. Arts-based reflection is valuable in understanding influences on identity development and how best to respond in the future when conflicts of expectation around teacher identity arise in the workplace (24).

Similarly, studies revealed safe spaces (15, 27, 29, 35) were required for full participation in arts-based practices that were noted as processes with heavy emotional engagement and often pushed participants beyond their comfort level (15, 17, 18, 25, 29). Of particular note was the role of collective agency (28, 35). Explored through the arts, collective agency was revealed to help transform feelings of being marginalised on the fringes towards a shared understanding of belonging, affinity and empowerment. Through the development of trusting

relationships, collective agency supports teachers' professional identities by creating space where their voices may be heard in relation to their day-to-day roles and their areas of expertise (Hökkä et al., 2017) (28).

Bhukhanwala, Dean, and Troyer (2017, p. 627) (18) note,

Sharing critical incidents, taking risks, and being vulnerable provide necessary conditions for deep, intimate and transformative learning. When student teachers experience shifts in their way of thinking and feeling, they experience a sense of empowerment and a new understanding of how to live in that world.

Clearly, a contextual consideration for such transformational learning to occur is a trusting relationship with the researcher and the other participants, and therefore the research environment plays a role in learning. Mantas and Di Rezze (2011) (15) note that co-creative approaches to identity development help teachers to take responsibility for their future pathway and professional learning thereby supporting agency and wellbeing.

## **Conclusion**

The goal in this paper was to develop a clear understanding of the different ways arts can be used to support teachers' professional identity development. We achieved this through a systematic literature review and analysis of the literature that was guided by the following research question:

How are the arts used to support teachers' professional identity development?

The arts were found to support identity development in a number of ways, particularly in their contribution to enhancing the value of reflection and reflexivity. In some instances, the arts provide a structure for previously ill-defined processes for reflection. However, more predominantly the arts were found to enhance reflection because of their capacity to tap into thinking beyond cognitive levels to allow for deeper understanding of emotions and emotional responses.

Many studies revealed the potential of the arts to support teachers to challenge previously held beliefs and to make meaning from the associated dissonance and disequilibrium. Naming and responding to challenges and vulnerabilities which contributed to resilience and wellbeing was also connected with outcomes of art-based research. Increased sense of agency, confidence and efficacy, all linked with identity development were also seen as positive outcomes of arts-based research. Creativity can be enhanced through arts-based research practices because they provide opportunities for thinking about the future and to see, think and act differently in order to find new solutions to solve problems and tasks.

Furthermore, a number of learning processes related to identity development were evoked through arts-based practices. These included developing new knowledge and skills applied to reflection; adopting changes to belief systems; developing self-regulatory behaviours, including emotional regulation, applying creativity,



and transforming practices. Thus the arts can activate creative processes that are essential for learning and identity development.

Multiple aspects of thinking and doing differently were found to be activated and fostered by the arts. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that, arts can combine and activate creative processes that are essential for learning and identity development. Our literature search and synthesis highlighted that multiple possibilities and future thinking can reframe challenges and events that influence identity development through the generative processes made possible through *thinking, becoming, being* and *doing differently*. Outcomes of this process include strengthening reflection and reflexivity that enables agency, resilience and wellbeing to penetrate teachers' professional identities. This message is important for teachers, school leaders and teacher educators because of its potential to enhance the quality of care and support for the teaching workforce.

While an extensive search was conducted, we note some limitations and make no claim that all research informed by arts education in teacher education has been considered. Despite the range of search terms applied it is also possible that relevant studies have been overlooked. By selecting only the articles with full text available and printed in the English language, we acknowledge the over representation from English speaking countries. A more culturally diverse investigation could include studies from Asian and eastern Europe or developing nations.

Longitudinal studies related to teacher professional identity development across career spans were not identified and is suggested for future research. This research may expose the full transformative potential of arts-based approaches on teacher identity and identify those processes that transpose into the practices of educators and the flow on effect that may potentially ensue. At a time in teacher education where knowledge transmission and high stakes testing impact and limit teachers' pedagogies (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) this would be useful research for the future to counter systemic and political influences on teachers' work and therefore on their identity.

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