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Weaving Forgotten Pieces of Place and the Personal: Using Collaborative Auto-ethnography and Aesthetic Modes of Reflection to Explore Teacher Identity Development

Leanne Lavina
Macquarie University, Australia

Fiona Lawson
Gumnut Cottage Macquarie University, Australia

Abstract

How do we develop understanding of our teacher identities and what can aesthetic modes offer to assist reflection and learning about shifting images of identity? These questions provoked our auto-ethnographic project. As two experienced early childhood teachers, we found ourselves transitioning into new professional terrain as teacher-researcher and teacher-director. This progression represented a significant shift in how we conceptualised, enacted, and located our respective identities. Using a new aesthetic framework, we explored what was known about our professional lives at key moments of "self and the other in practice" (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 12). We

discovered that our histories matter, place matters, as do relationships made within these social spaces. This work opens opportunity for collaborative dialogue and critical reflection on self-as-teacher. Situating self-understandings within social systems of learning recognises forces influencing identity development (Hickey & Austin, 2007) and expands pedagogical frameworks for navigating sociopolitical complexities of educational realities.

Introduction: Picturing Teacher Identity

Teaching and developing concepts of self-as-teacher involves interactions that are inherently relational. As our professional understandings of teacher self develop, we are guided and shaped in social contexts of learning that influence both our thinking and practice (Flores & Day, 2006). Sachs (2005, p. 15) describes teacher identity through developing expectations of "'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society." Accessing and sharing teachers' insights from these socialised processes of becoming 'teacher' opens multiple sites of ambiguity as we struggle to identify the meaning of socio-political discourses that underpin lenses of viewing, negotiating and adopting images and experiences shaping our teaching lives (Marsh, 2002).

As part of a larger project, this article presents the identity journeys of Leanne and Fiona; two Australian-based early childhood teachers. Adopting aesthetic processes of thinking, drawing, speaking and writing identity, we seek to untangle and unify borders of meaning across intersections of past and present images of teacher self-in-place (Marsh, 2002). Using a newly developed aesthetic framework (see Lavina, Fleet, & Niland, 2017), seven linked components provided us with multi-modal forms of representation to reflect on our teacher identity development. These included: early memories of teacher (photo), professional image of teacher self (photo), place of personal significance (photo), early image of teacher self (drawing), present image of teacher self (drawing), expression of self-as-teacher/teaching experience (narrative), and an artifact with identity meaning. Inquiring through these artistic forms of expression, we explore contexts and experiences influencing constructions of our teacher selves (Jenkins, 2008) and negotiate the duality of identities felt whilst transitioning to new roles of teacher-researcher (Leanne) and teacher-director (Fiona). Engaging arts-informed approaches, we critically reflect on personal understandings of teacher self by using "systematic artistic process" (McNiff, 2008, p. 29) to explore identity development. This methodology was chosen as "arts-informed research…enhances [emphasis added] understanding of the human condition through alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry" (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 59). In the process, we seek to engage meanings beyond "a splash of colour or an illustrative image" (Knowles & Cole,

2008, p. 27), to open more critical readings of situations and experiences influencing our evolving identities (McNiff, 2008). As "art-based tools and ways of knowing" provoke reconsideration of "habitual responses" (McNiff, 2008, p. 37), additional insights are revealed and the unexpected valued through "creative process" (McNiff, 2008, p. 40). Resisting linearity and "standardised procedure" (McNiff, 2008, p. 39), arts-informed approaches embrace "the unfolding of thought" as meanings are examined and interpreted (McNiff, 2008, p. 35). Adopting this same mindfulness in our project, multi-layered images of self-as-teacher were created to revisit assumptions about self and experience (Gillis & Johnson, 2002); thereby expanding upon ways of connecting identity understandings (Cole & Knowles, 2008).

Documenting significant personal experiences of identity through past and present aesthetic frames of 'knowing' teacher-self (see Lavina et al., 2017) illustrates the value of multi-layered approaches into understanding teacher identity development beyond simplistic conceptualisations. This framework-as-resource provides a dynamic method for examining the discourses of self and teaching that influence practice (Marsh, 2002).

Adopting auto-ethnography as a "multivoiced form" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 435) of visual and textual description presents accounts of identity development beyond a singular reading. Compilations challenge intersections of the personal and social as meanings of experience are interrogated to forge new understandings of self and practice (Denshire, 2014). Opening opportunity for conversation, collection, creation and reflection across these modes assists teachers to develop strong and resilient identities and offers a platform for sharing questions, provoking inquiry and establishing collaborative support systems to sustain images of teacher self in early childhood contexts (see Lavina et al., 2017). In this article, we consciously strive to situate our teacher identity development through a sociological place-based framework wherein we go beyond "the writing of selves" (Denshire, 2014, p. 833) to explore spaces or silences "in both ourselves and others" that influence identity development (Dauphinee, 2010, p. 818). Engaging diverse forms of image creation, we search the relationship "between visual images and words" to critique the "kinds of stories…images tell" of our teaching experiences (Weber, 2008, p. 50). These often overlooked fragments strip back self-protective layers to reveal the person-in-the professional (Denzin, 2003). In this way, we attempt to look within ourselves to make meaning of our lived experience (see van Manen, 1997) and enhance understandings of our teaching and learning selves. While we see this process as deepening our self-understanding, presenting 'data' through different aesthetic and textual forms allows for different readings of teaching experience, invites a wider audience (for example, Barone, 2000; Sparkes, 2002) and contributes to knowledge exploring the complexities of educational contexts.

The adoption of an auto-ethnographic approach using aesthetic modes of creation and reflection provokes teachers to consider and re-consider forgotten pieces of place and the

personal influencing their identity formation. Using the aesthetic framework as a springboard, our sharing of stories visualised through aesthetic frames invites teachers to make connection with our experiences and enlarge 'seeing' of an evolving teacher self "that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations" of 'teacher' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Multi-modal compositions exploring our developing teacher identities offer renderings that are deeply personal and located within social interactions of knowledge and practice (Ellis, 2009). These vivid pictures ask teachers to reflect on and create their own storied images, in the process, retracing "experiences buried under…conscious reasoning" to more deeply understand the social construction of identity (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008, p. 131).

Early Childhood and Teacher Identity: Positioning Context

Early childhood teacher identity is recognised as an evolving construct shaped by the interaction of personal and contextual frameworks of influence (e.g., Beltman, Glass, Dinham, Chalk, & Nguyen, 2015). As identity is continually reshaped in relationship with others, there are multiple, often hard to define nuances shaping identity: "teacher identity is hard to articulate, easily misunderstood and open to interpretation" (Olsen, 2008, p. 4). Whilst there have been several studies looking at pre-service and early career teacher identity development through visual methodologies (Beltman et al., 2015; Sumsion, 2002; Weber & Mitchell, 1996), these focus on early childhood teachers working in school contexts. Apart from Black's (2011) case study of 'Andrea', an early childhood teacher working in a privately-owned child care centre with 4-year-olds, there is a noticeable absence of Australian-based studies examining identity journeys of early childhood teachers working in prior-to-school contexts. Identifying potential reasons for this research gap means taking a closer look at the ideological and socio-political forces influencing early childhood education in Australia.

A draft report from the Productivity Commission (2014) does little to assert the importance of early years learning for children under 36 months; with recommendations suggesting minimal qualifications are needed to work with infants (Productivity Commission, 2014). Accepting the Productivity Commission suggestion of nannies and au pairs as favourable over highly-qualified educators heralds the return to historical images of children as fragile beings needing of maternal care and protection (Brennan, 1998). Arguably, this deficit image of young children speaks of the "economics and convenience of the system to meet family work pressures" and strongly contradicts the strong and capable image of young children presented in the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009) a teaching and learning framework for early years educators working with children aged birth-five years (Cheeseman & Sumsion, 2015, p. 41). If we accept these sociopolitical ideologies of 'care,' 'education' and 'image of the child,' what are the implications for early childhood teachers' identity development? Are we largely perceived as caretakers of children before they enter school to begin 'real' learning? How do we resist such ideologies to continue advocacy efforts and

maintain a strong sense of professional identity?

In Australia, many studies have considered challenges associated with attracting and retaining highly qualified early years educators. Reasons for workforce shortfalls, specifically in long day care prior-to-school settings are numerous and relate to low professional status: wages which are disproportionate to work responsibilities, qualifications and expertise; a lack of opportunities for professional advancement; workplace pressures and burnout (Noble & Macfarlane, 2005; Sumsion, 2005; Warrilow et al., 2002). As a result, teacher identities have become unstable constructs, with pictures of self-as-teacher influencing approaches to practice as well as decisions to leave the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector (Schepens, Aelterman & Vlerick, 2009). Given that a strong professional identity potentially mediates attrition rates for early career teachers (Cattley, 2007), it makes sense to identify notions of childhood and teaching motivating teachers' entry to the ECEC sector. In this way, teachers are provided means to critique potentially romanticised images of working in early childhood contexts.

Sumsion's (2003) case study of early childhood teacher attrition illustrates powerfully the diverse perspectives needed for navigating complex teaching realities. As habitual ways of organising thinking about experiences, Phelan (2001) also identifies prevailing discourses of "…teaching, schooling and society" (p. 584) transmitted through teacher education that limit recognition of alternate discourses for understanding and conceptualising teaching practice. Such argument provides a substantive platform for exploring early childhood teachers' identity development in prior-to-school contexts. Addressing this research gap also brings into view understandings of sociopolitical discourses, which allow teachers greater insight into narratives shaping their identity. Creating opportunities for teachers to identify and potentially disrupt current pictures of pedagogy and practice gives additional tools for reflecting on identity development and resituating understandings of what it means to be an early childhood teacher (Ortlipp, Arthur, & Woodrow, 2011).

Aesthetic Journeying with Auto-ethnography: Collaborative Looking at Teacher Selves

There has been much interest in auto-ethnography as a means of better understanding and transforming understandings of self and situated experience (e.g., Denshire, 2014; Denzin, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2006). For teachers, the power of such an approach rests in creating new dialogical spaces of subjectivity and collaboration where meaning is centred on the inclusion of voices and representations that embody "biography with social structure" (Denzin, 2006, p. 421). In this way, we open memories of our teaching-learning selves and reconsider beliefs of 'teacher' and 'teaching' that have influenced our identity development (Vasconcelos, 2011). Positioning our pedagogical and identity reflections through this lens acknowledges the subjectivity of "writing and our talk" (Denzin, 2006, p. 422); that is, "we

enact the worlds we study" (Denzin, 2006, p. 422) by looking back and interpreting experience alongside evolving worlds of teaching. Acknowledging the cyclical nature of teaching and learning enlarges personal understandings of "people and experiences" that have shaped the formation of our teacher selves (Vasconcelos, 2011, p. 416). Likewise, auto-ethnography is characterised by self-awareness and introspection as the unfolding fabric of stories is told (Ellis, 2004). As a useful approach to the study of teacher education and identity, Hickey and Austin's (2007) Australian based auto-ethnographic exploration of teacher identity construction illustrates the benefits of using this approach as a means of "exposing the mediating role that social structures play in the construction of identities" (p. 21). Working with a large number of undergraduate teachers alongside a smaller group of graduate teachers, students were prompted to re-examine assumptive understandings of self and experience. Processes of inquiry focused on making "explicit that which had been submerged into the implicit, experienced as the everyday and judged as the ordinary" (Hickey & Austin, 2007, p. 25), the surfacing of these renewed self-understandings prompting re-examination of social forces impacting the development of teachers' identities.

In their concluding remarks, Hickey and Austin (2007, p. 27) contend that auto-ethnography offers a valuable means of supporting self-understandings through examination of relational dynamics and "social practices", this approach also supporting critical re-examination of pedagogical approaches informing practice. Seeing great value in the interrogation of identity conceptualisations "through memory-based lived experiences" (Vasconcelos, 2011, p. 436), we took inspiration from Hickey and Austin's (2007) study and consciously focused on multiple ways of exploring the meanings of experiences as they related to our identity formation. Adopting auto-ethnography to explore our teacher identities provides us with a powerful research space for thinking/creating/reflecting on the aesthetic nature and form of our teacher identity journeys. The collaborative (and visual) nature of this approach invites new ways of publicising our knowledge, pedagogy, and practice through aesthetic forms. In this way, the details of our identity representations and interpretations are understood as residing within interlinked social systems, where orientations of teacher identity occur inside and outside early childhood learning contexts (Moore, 2004). Along the way, the audience is invited to walk with us as we uncover links between what is known and unknown about our teacher identities to enable a closer examination of past and present experiences influencing our ongoing development as learners and teachers. The narrative evolutions of auto-ethnography expressed through aesthetic modes of reflection offer teachers across stages of professional learning a valuable means for re-examining identity representations over time.

The Project: Facing and Placing our Teacher Identities

Our experiences of identity reflect our ongoing work with children, families, and educators in

community based Long Day Care services in Sydney, Australia. With a focus on auto-ethnographic artistic forms of storying, we share individual and collaborative reflections on journeys of self-as-teacher and our practice. We learn about questioning normalised images of teacher that impose tensions on who we ought to be as professionals (Weber & Mitchell, 1995) and seek to untangle what was "consciously and unconsciously" felt about key events shaping our identities (Slattery, 2001, as cited in Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008, p. 135). Whilst we resist presenting absolute answers about the educational worlds of teachers (see Eisner, 2008), our visual and textual stories of identity serve as provocations to broaden conversations into teachers' lives. Adopting this approach invites emotionality and personalises "life and work" connections (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008, p.136). In so doing, we hope to make visual forms of auto-ethnography accessible to audiences within and outside of educational research (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008). The integration of "words and pictures" serves as a deliberate attempt on our part to "let go of …categories and open up possibilities" (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008, p. 136); the meeting of arts-informed and auto-ethnographic approaches (see Mullen, 2003) seeks to reframe the uncertainties and challenges of teaching lives within and outside the classroom (Tierney & Lincoln, 1997).

With emphasis on visual forms of symbolism, we examine personal and professional sense of place as socialising constructs that influence how our identities develop and with whom (Alsup, 2006). Using auto-ethnography and a recently-developed aesthetic framework for representing our teacher identities (see Table 1), we reveal deeply-held personal understandings and memories of identity, the aesthetic framework providing a clear structure to guide us through past and present images of teacher, allowing for greater objectivity and expansion of aspects influencing our identity development. This does not mean, however, that evolving conceptions of our teacher selves are in any way neatly understood. Visualising self in relation with others involves collaging "images, faces, colours, and textures, creating a representation of the experience" (Scott-Hoy, 2000, p. 325). In this way we recognise our subjective "interpretation of the world" as ever-present within our representations of identity (Scott-Hoy, 2000, p. 326). Given our earlier outline of complex social and political forces shaping the Australian early childhood sector, we explore the messiness of our lived experiences in these contexts. As such, there is shared understanding that the aesthetic framework developed and used elsewhere in a larger identity project (Lavina et al., 2017) is approached here with the same sense of adaptability, so whatever is discovered/created/enacted can come together in ways that move beyond the safety of surface self-truths (Griffiths, Malcolm, & Williamson, 2009), to explore the interrelated nature of place-based histories and their influence on our learning and teacher selves (Samaras et al., 2007).

As a means of inviting complexity, challenging normative knowing (e.g., van Manen, 1997), and embracing uncertainty, the aesthetic framework used for our auto-ethnographic project

assists to uncover deeper truths about our professional selves beyond written texts that arguably produce 'removed' reproductions of self from "our immediate lived involvements" (van Manen, 1997, pp. 126-127). Producing images of symbolic meaning invites "transformed consciousness", "without being confined by the use of language" whereby new insight is generated through image creation and later viewing (Scott-Hoy, 2000, pp. 335-336). Using seven different representations of our teacher identities as process and product (see Table 1), we are provided a place of return to retrace and transform our thinking about pedagogy and practice. As connecting fragments, past and present images alongside reflective writing and conversation vignettes "become an extension of the picture," becoming a "companion tool" for organising perspectives of identity influencing our continuing identity journeys (see Lavina et al., 2017; Scott-Hoy, 2000, p. 335). Apart from encountering new depths of knowing our teacher selves, we highlight the value of insights generated and the potential benefits of future projects with early childhood teachers to enlarge personal understandings of self and enhance their repertoire of tools for coping with uncertainties. Closing thoughts emphasise the importance of collaborative professional spaces that support reflection through visual representations, alongside the familiarity of words (e.g., Scott-Hoy, 2000; Griffiths et al., 2009), with artistic storying through auto-ethnography viewed as an evocative approach to research and professional development that makes vivid the voices of teachers (Scott-Hoy, 2000). Engaging aesthetic forms of identity work is highlighted as a means of developing diverse discourses for understanding self-in-practice and reinforcing early childhood teachers' resilience and strong sense of professional identity.

Framing Identity: An Arts-informed Approach

As primary researcher in a larger project exploring early childhood teachers' identity journeys, Leanne collaboratively developed an aesthetic framework with multiple visual tools for accessing and representing past and present teacher identities (Lavina et al., 2017). A biographical approach (e.g., Furlong, 2013) integrated with an artist's methods (Creates, 1991) was used to support recognition of self and society as impacting past images and present representations of self-as-teacher (Gee, 2000). Artifacts as socialised symbols of self and journey were also included as touchstones of place to connect personal and professional contexts of identity development (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Looking specifically at the development of diverse identities, this framework was used to explore our formative identities as teacher-researcher and teacher-director. The seven aesthetic frames indicated in Table 1 represent different forms of identity information collected during our investigation.

Table 1

A Framework for Representing Teacher Identities: The Seven Aesthetic Frames

Frame 1	Frame 2	Frame 3	Frame 4	Frame 5	Frame 6	Frame 7
Image	**Photo**	**Photo**	**Drawing**	**Drawing**	**Narrative**	**Artifact**
early memories of 'teacher'	*identifies professional image of self*	*significant place of meaning*	*representing personal understandings of early teacher self*	*representing personal understandings of present teacher self*	*written expression of self-as-teacher and teaching experience*	*physical object that reflects teacher identity*

Note: Adapted from the creative works of Marlene Creates as cited in Knowles and Thomas (2002, p. 121-132).

Note: An expanded version of this table appears in Lavina et al. (2017, p. 147).

Analysing Identity Journeys: A Meeting of Thoughts and Processes

Over a three-month period, we came together to discuss our reflections and representations of identity. This experiential approach connects formative memories with collaboration as a means of integrating personal and professional identity knowledge and learning (Dewey, 1938/1963). The idea of considering linked experiences of identity across time and place recognises the socialised nature of expressing identities in lived situations of teaching and learning, where "identity construction not only affects experience, it also depends on experience" (Alsup, 2006, p. 78). In our final discussion, we each examined critically all seven aesthetic frames with particular focus on aspects of socialisation and power relationships influencing our identities. This important step recognised the illusive visibility of teachers' thought as hidden within discourses assumed in particular contexts (see Marsh, 2002, 2003). The use of sourced images alongside drawings of self-as-teacher served to disrupt comfortable discourses and beliefs about teaching philosophies and developing identities. Situating teacher narratives (frame 6) toward the end of our project meant that pre-determined scripts of 'teacher' were interrogated prior to writing our responses, the previous sourcing and creation of images (see frames 1-5) helping us to recognise and connect the different textures of our experiences. Images also supported our objective distancing as we looked to understand our self-knowledge predominantly through a visual perspective, thereby distinguishing subtle events of influence previously unseen (Weber, 2008). Through this lens,

aesthetic frames were examined for content, where symbol systems used to represent experiences of teacher and developing teacher-self were identified and analysed.

Discussions were primarily used to describe representations and confirm symbolic meanings, thereby placing clear emphasis on the unique visual characteristics of images (Beltman et al., 2015; Rose, 2012). As each frame had a specific focus tracing our identity development over time, we looked for key elements in each frame that were found to influence our personal and professional selves and the ways in which these multiplicities overlapped. We also sought to interrogate visual absences and situate their potential identity meanings in relation to those symbols represented at particular points in our teacher journeys. For instance, in Fiona's aesthetic frame 5, an absence of children communicates initial distancing felt when assuming her new role as non-teaching director. In the same way, our chosen artifact(s) were examined through multiple lenses of identity. Following a series of informal chats and emails, initial categorisation of themes was done independently before we came together to discuss and further clarify potential combinations. Any variances or evolutions of themes were re-examined until there was shared agreement of categories (Beltman et al., 2015).

Revealing Identity Journeys: Unexpected Images Surface

Themes were identified through the analysis of each of the frames as shown in Table 2. Leanne and Fiona's aesthetic frames 1, 3, 4 and 5 will be included to illustrate elements of evolving identities present across visual representations.

Table 2

Analytic Framework for Identifying and Describing Themes

Aesthetic frame	Theme	Description
Frame 1: **Image** *early memories of 'teacher'*	Seesawing stereotypes	*Chosen image(s) depicts a socialised conception of teacher*
Frame 2: Photo *identifies professional image of self*	Symbolic seeing(s) of self	*Chosen image(s) uses visual and/or textual metaphors to represent self-as-teacher*
Frame 3: Photo *significant place of meaning*	Greening time	*Chosen image recognises the importance of unhurried time to experience green spaces as places of connection and reflection*
Frame 4: Drawing *representing personal understandings of early teacher self*	The eagerness of 'us'	*Drawing reflects relationships of learning with children and/or collegial partnerships*
Frame 5: Drawing *representing personal understandings of present teacher self*	Stepping back, moving forward	*Drawing includes reflections and aspects of re-defining self as a means of navigating collaborative relationships*
Frame 6: Narrative *written expression of self-as-teacher and teaching experience*	Poetic presence	*Narrative written in a poetic style to capture the emotionality of teacher identity journeys*
Frame 7: Artifact *physical object that reflects teacher identity*	Placing the pieces	*Artifact captures a sense of personal and professional identity story*

Figure 1. Leanne's Early Memories of Teacher. (Sources: 'Paintbrushes photo'. Some rights reserved by LexnGer – Brushes; 'Glasses photo'- cropped version'. Some rights reserved by Louis du Mont – Glasses; 'Nun photo- cropped version.' Some rights reserved by [CO]2 – Nuns). All sizes of photos are available for download under a Creative Commons license.

Seesawing Stereotypes

Aesthetic frame 1 - Our first images of teacher were markedly different. Whilst we both used conventional symbols of 'teaching' and 'teachers' to represent early memories of teacher (Leanne: glasses, open smile; Fiona: books, apple) (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 310), the meanings of these objects and qualities were transformed in contrasting ways in response to our experiences of 'teacher.' For instance, Leanne's photo-collage captured early memories of her 'preschool nun'. Discussions with Leanne affirmed teacher qualities experienced were warm, happy, welcoming and supportive; an engaging, rosy-cheeked bespectacled mature figure that had nurtured her interests in drawing and painting (see Figure 1). As Leanne comments- "Days were largely spent at the easel, hence the positioning of paintbrushes in the foreground; desks were for drawing!" Fiona's collage of photos however, appeared to depart from relational and creative arts experiences. Her depiction of books stacked and shelved capturing her experience of teacher as "holder of knowledge" (see Figure 2). As a formalised seeing and experience of 'teacher,' Fiona's inclusion of a desk symbolised the teacher's station of authority where information was transmitted (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, 1996); this physical space and beyond to the blackboard remained the teacher's territory. As Fiona recalls, "…the stack and the pile of books…it's got all the different areas that teachers should be an expert or have complete knowledge on and then they instruct or share their knowledge with children." Fiona's decision to include a red apple in frame 1 stemmed from her memory of apples being gifted to the teacher. As Fiona comments, "I don't know what child gave the

teacher an apple, but I just remember seeing one…it just reinforced that image." As a symbol of teacher presence and power, this object was prominently positioned on the teacher's desk (Weber & Mitchell, 1995).

Such symbolism illustrates sociocultural representations of 'teacher' and highlights the need to contest popularised readings and search for images outside homogenised manufactured stereotypes (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). What struck us the most when analysing our first images of 'teacher' were the contrasting symbolic tools used to represent teachers' work and the polarising learning dynamics we experienced as a result of either open or more traditional approaches to schooling.

Casting ourselves back to early experiences of 'teacher' also meant we were able to examine and unpack the power these images hold in constructing or re-constructing our own images of self-as-teacher. For Fiona in particular, rather than seeking to push aside or bury potentially negative memories of teacher, she chose instead to recognise associated stereotypes as situated images of a particular time and place (Weber & Mitchell, 1996). For both of us, this meant examining shifting social landscapes of teacher thinking and learning to better evaluate evolving symbols of self-as-teacher as socialised expressions of knowledge and thought (Elbaz, 1991). Returning to our chosen images meant consciously separating "teacher identity…with teacher role and function" (Sutcliffe, 1997, p.89) with discourses of learning in educational contexts shaping formation of teacher identities (Weber & Mitchell, 1996).

Figure 2. Fiona's Early Memories of Teacher. (Sources: School books and apple-https://solutions00.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/school_books_and_apple.jpg; Bookshelf-http://www.drscavanaugh.org/ebooks/libraries/).

Greening Time

Aesthetic frame 3 – Images selected for this frame of significant places embodied the sights and smells of our surrounding green landscapes (see Figure 3). Qualities of escapism, a sense of freedom and endless hours for exploring imaginary green worlds pervade our memories and discussions of these photos. For Leanne, her personal place as a young child was perched high in the branches of a black wattle tree in her front yard. As Leanne comments, "I remember this as a place of peace and solitude where I would explore tiny worlds of insects and wattle blossoms, my own little haven of miniature wonders." Likewise, Fiona identified the bushland at the back of her house as "A space for playing, creating and imagining" with her siblings; a place "without imposed adult-bound rules and time restrictions" where she was "free to relax and just 'be.'"

Whilst there were differences in terms of how we experienced green spaces i.e. solitary (Leanne) and social (Fiona), what we found compelling was the shared importance placed on felt aspects of experience, of "deepening the person-place relationship" (Cameron, 2003, p. 100); these natural worlds nourished our imaginations and sense of connection with the environment. There was also a sense of flow, of pausing to look at the little things of flora and fauna through each of our senses. As adults (and teachers) reflecting on the significant green spaces of our childhoods, we see how place-based relationships have assisted us in situating our sense of self and instilled within us a care for preserving and nurturing understandings of our local natural environments (Cameron, 2003). These motivations have been brought forward to our work with children and families, where we seek to emphasise relationships 'in' and 'of' place, so children have ongoing opportunities to experience nature in ways that invite wonder and respect for "the outside and all it entails" (Robertson, 2011, p.12), so they too can see the possibilities afforded by extended discovery of the fragile living details that make a "natural play space" (p. 11) within and beyond the playground.

Figure 3. Leanne's photo - Significant Place (left) and Fiona's photo - Significant Place (right). (Source: https://financialpostcom.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/green-forest.jpg?w=620)

The Eagerness of Stepping Back, Moving Forward

Aesthetic Frames 4 and 5 proved to be the most conceptually challenging for both of us. How to capture the duality of roles and identities experienced over time? Beginning with Frame 4, our early career drawings captured a shared sense of enthusiasm upon entering the teaching profession (see Figure 4). For Leanne, her use of colour and symbolism reflected sense-of-self enacted with others in a teaching team (3 interlinked green 'canopy' figures); "I always saw my role in relationship with colleagues and children, we worked as a team…and I think we all learned 'something more' about ourselves and each other as a result." This unified metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) served to make-sense of interdependent ways of developing pedagogy and practice. Influenced by her childhood experiences with nature, she chose to represent a sense of growth and nurturance between teachers and children (child 'seedling' outstretched). At the same time, Leanne was clear in her image of the child as strong and resilient (Rinaldi, 1998), with teachers viewed as an equally strong presence in a "fertile space" (Jovanovic & Roder, 2012, p. 124) of discovering, learning and growing with children (Rinaldi, 1998).

Figure 4. Leanne's drawing: Representing Personal Understandings of Early Teacher Self

Likewise, Fiona's early career drawing communicated 'togetherness' and a sense of enthusiasm. Her use of two scaled smiling figures holding hands conveyed her focus on collaborative adult-child relationships of learning. Embracing the concept of journeying with children, Fiona comments "I wanted to make a difference in their lives, to continue developing my knowledge and support of children's growth and learning." Adopting 'enabler' as an organising schema assisted Fiona's seeing and understanding of her teacher self at this point in time (Bullough & Knowles, 1991). More comfortable with written forms of reflection, Fiona acknowledged challenges associated with symbolically representing her identities. As she comments, "I find myself questioning; what am I trying to say through my pictures?" Initially, she spoke of the need to include key words that had particular resonance. Following further unpacking of intended symbolism, she felt that further engagement with

visual forms of reflection would necessitate 're-capturing' of early and present images of teacher self to more effectively express her sense-making of visual meanings of identity (Weber & Mitchell, 1996). As such, we include Fiona's Frame 5 here to illustrate her process of recognising and resituating understandings of looking and creating images that convey the multi-layered qualities of her identity journey (see Figure 5). For instance, she noted that engaging with visual forms of expression brought renewed clarity to picturing her shifting identities over time (see Weber, 2008). As Fiona comments, "In viewing my pictures I saw myself in a different light, clearly saw myself with my eyes open." Indeed, she described this process as searching her current (Frame 5) image as teacher/director for intended meanings that needed to be communicated (Weade & Ernst, 1990)—such as the shift from 'enabler' with children (Frame 4) to 'driving force' in a distributed leadership model; where a sense of vision, inquiry and collaboration is sought with children, the teaching team, families and community (Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley, & Shepherd, 2012). Recognising the absence of time spent learning and being with children (now that she is in the role of a 'non-teaching' Director), she expressed a sense of mourning the loss of her teacher identity, "In revisiting this process, I mourn my teacher identity; the connections, and being more 'carefree' with time…" It was clear that after creating and viewing her image, Fiona's understanding of potential metaphors captured within images was heightened. In our discussions, this was further emphasised in her recognition that perhaps only "a part, but not the whole" of her meaning was reflected, that her images, just like the 'chapters' of her identities reflected across frames are "continually under construction" (Weade & Ernst, 1990, p. 139-140) and that these threads assist us in weaving together new identity possibilities. As Fiona reflected, "I began to understand my challenges/limitations/misconceptions that clung to me and I had carried unconsciously over time…I was able to freely swim to the surface and explore possibilities that lay ahead- forming a new identity."
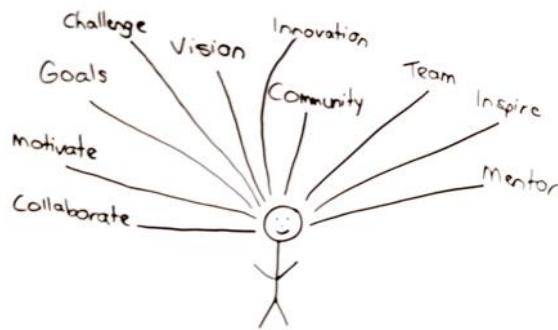

Figure 5. Fiona's Drawing Self-as-Teacher/Director, Representing Personal Understandings of Present Teacher Self

In her Frame 5, Leanne also experienced a 'stepping back.' Originally, she had conceptualised a single image, but upon meeting the aesthetic challenges of representing her teacher-researcher self, she chose to create a triptych to illustrate the back-and-forth of experiencing different identities in place. As she explains, "Initially I struggled to capture the fluidity of 'becoming' an early career researcher. Inevitably, there is a process of continual exchange between identities as I negotiate teacher-researcher worlds in search of my own space." Her initial image of 4 different coloured figures (green, purple, blue, red) both connected and extended her early image of teacher self. In explaining her use of colour and symbolism, Leanne continued to include a green figure to reflect teacher self (as in Frame 4), however, she identified complexities in defining a 'singular self' as her role was inextricably linked to internal and external relational forces. She described these forces as contextual lenses called upon for seeing and situating understandings of teacher self and practice (Marsh, 2003). As Leanne comments- "figures represent connections to community and support services (purple), ongoing professional development and learning (blue) and relationships sought and strengthened with colleagues, families, and other early childhood professionals (red)." As in her Frame 4 image, Leanne's primary focus remained on supporting children's learning. However, just as Frame 5 included a many-sided view of seeing the influences shaping teacher self, this understanding was also reflected in her image of children, with 4 outstretched figures featured in the centre. In explaining this perceptual change, Leanne cited her encounters with the learning philosophy of Reggio Emilia and 'the hundred languages of children' (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, 2012), where children are seen as having a vibrant sense of agency, powerful voice and diverse ways of thinking. As Leanne commented:

> I wanted to recognise the multiple languages children engage to ask questions and communicate their understandings and interests. Mirroring outstretched arms of children and adult figures also conveys shared 'willingness' to engage in respectful relationships of learning where listening with intent is valued.

As context also informs pedagogy and practice, creating a sense of receptiveness in the spaces between child and adult figures featured was intended to reflect possibilities enacted as we "respond to the gifts of children" (Gandini, 2011, p. 11). This positioning reflected Leanne's sense of livingness shared with children and families in early childhood contexts.

Leanne chose to represent identity transitions in the form of a light globe, where thinking (globe) and knowledge/creativity (pencil) became essential "tools of thought" (Root-Bernstein 1987, p. 17) needed to begin a new research journey in her doctoral program. What was unanticipated was the singularity and potential sense of isolation associated with doctoral research journeys (Ali & Kohun, 2007), this realisation necessitating a conceptual shift from more collegial forms of situating teacher-self understandings and identity. As a result, she chose to emphasise an absence of the personal when initially representing her researcher self,

with no figures depicted. As Leanne reflects, "I wasn't totally prepared for the solitary nature of research. Coming from a space of collegiality and relatedness within a group, seeing self in a more isolated role was quite a departure from previous ways of thinking and 'being.'" This absence speaks of Leanne's sense-making of new scholarly territories and social dynamics encountered whilst pursuing doctoral research (Pyhältö, Toom, Stubb, & Lonka, 2012). Whilst this period of transition created discomfort and uncertainty at times, she also indicated that the multi-layered glow and outward shine of the bulb reflected the warmth and supportive presence of her supervisory team who assisted her developing sense of membership in academia (Pyhältö, Vekkaila, & Keskinen, 2015). As Leanne comments, "I am so thankful to have a dynamic team who complement each other's interests, strengths and personalities… their combined 'glow' has enabled me to shine."

In her final image of self-as-teacher/researcher (Figure 6), Leanne spoke of the globe's perceptual shift in meaning, highlighting a more enlightened self-interior (Hogan & Pink, 2012) to bridge her creative being and thinking across educational and academic contexts. As Leanne reflects:

> Repositioning child-adult relationships within the globe is personally significant as this symbolism re-affirms my purpose alongside teachers and children. The 'glow' of the globe which may have flickered with uncertainty at times, now shines brightly as I increasingly adopt a sense of 'comfortable presence' within research spaces.

This renewed sense of identity-in-place signalled her return to early childhood symbolism, shown through the reappearance of figures, to once again reflect her continuing journey of learning, researching and writing with teachers to improve the lives of children.
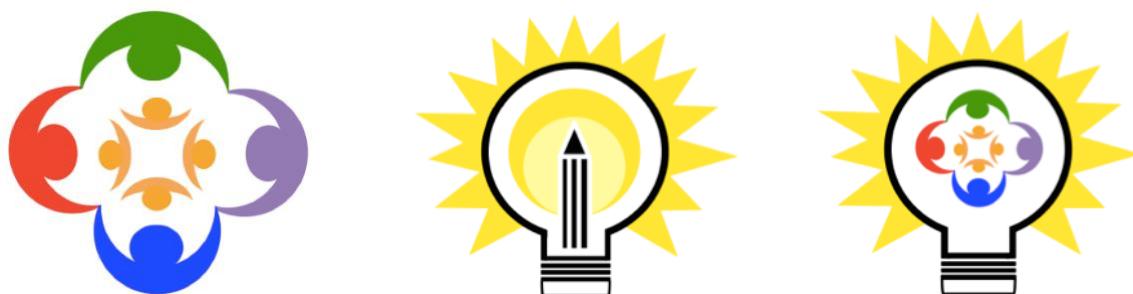
Figure 6. Leanne's Drawing Self-as-Teacher/Researcher, Representing Personal Understandings of Present Teacher Self

Personal Reflections: What We Thought We Knew about Ourselves

When we began this auto-ethnographic project, there was a shared sense that exploring our identity journeys through visual processes of reflection could potentially yield something 'more' in our understandings of identity journeys and self-as-teacher. Exploring images that traced our early experiences of teacher, experience in place and evolving sense of self-as-teacher, brought into being chapters of self and experience that we thought concluded. What we learned, was that history matters. These chapters were not disparate, neatly organised memories of little consequence. They continued to speak in our thoughts and actions. These (often forgotten) fragments carried with us, speak in discreet ways and remain part of us, embedding themselves in our thought and practice. Where and how we have travelled, and those influential companions encountered along the way, each played a role in shaping how we presently came to see and experience the world (van Manen, 1997; Schutz, 1970). Sharing our inner identity journeys with each other revealed this understanding and more.

Imaging is Different

In speaking about our early childhood teacher identities, we both agreed that written forms of reflection were comfortable pedagogical spaces of safety where we asked ourselves hard questions about children's (and our own) learning, about theories made and tested, and thought carefully about how dialogues were engaged and valued. We felt confident in our capacity to readily use these schemas to refine thoughts about self and practice and to critically examine the flow of teaching and learning (Siraj-Blatchford, 2012). Given our acknowledgement of the importance of words (Griffiths et al., 2009), making conscious efforts to depart from them to invite visual forms of facing the vulnerabilities of self and associated challenges of practice, required peeling back the edges of easy-fit stereotypes to find our own aesthetic sense of voice. Doing so meant that we were able to closely examine the power of images for creating and generating essential understandings of identity. Stepping outside the familiarity of words to invite the visual meant that what we discovered was deeply felt, revealing, and transformative. Thinking through images showed us the immense potential of aesthetic spaces for investigating and re-connecting learning about self, pedagogy and practice. It also affirmed that reflection can occur in multiple aesthetic modes (Griffiths et al., 2009), and that combining these modes offers much in re-defining and further nourishing personal images of teacher needed to make sense of ever-shifting identity journeys (Weber & Mitchell, 1996).

Contextualised Self-portraits

Whilst aesthetic frames do not capture the entirety of our teacher and personal selves, the aesthetic framework used here and elsewhere (see Lavina et al., 2017) embodies an auto-ethnographic approach where "specific focus on turning points" shaping professional identity development are examined within sociocultural understandings (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner,

2010; Winkler, 2017, p. 1). Offering a reflexive place of return (Humphreys, 2005; Lincoln & Denzin, 1998), these frames offer artistic representations that capture significant moments in our identity development; whereby understandings of our teacher selves and practice were challenged, stretched or heightened in response to identified stages of significance. Where "discovery…and retell[ing] an epiphany" (Saldana, 2003, pp. 224-225) broadened understandings beyond superficial study (Pelias, 2003). Using this process, we hoped to bring to our lived stories wider relevance; to engage teacher and qualitative academic audiences so that they might "feel ethnographic 'truth'…and thus become more fully immersed – morally, aesthetically, emotionally and intellectually" (Richardson, 1994, as cited in Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 4).

Embracing nontraditional representations can prompt others to share our aim to "re-envision what it means to conduct research and to engage in scholarly production" (Knowles & Thomas, 2002, p. 122). Merging elements of Creates' artistry (see Creates, 1991), aesthetically rich representations of "lives-in-context" (Knowles & Thomas, 2002, p. 123), moves our aesthetic framework beyond data, to embrace aesthetic modes of inquiry where the audience is prompted to identify with and further explore multi-modal forms of representation. As shared conversation pieces, aesthetic frames embrace "challenges, struggles, insights, and new perspectives" (Knowles & Thomas, 2002, p. 127) gained as a result of renewed seeing of our teacher selves, our searching for "points of resonance" (Knowles & Thomas, 2002, p. 127) defining key shifts in thinking, being, and enacting our roles as 'teacher.' Such reflexivity enhances seeing of multiple voices, providing greater authenticity in stories presented and prompting audience identification (Winkler, 2017). By focusing on how we have come to understand ourselves and teaching practice (see Jackson & Mazzei, 2008), we invite others to see themselves in our experiences, with the understanding that "culture flows through all of us" (Winkler, 2017, p. 8). Using artistic auto-ethnographic approaches (see Scott-Hoy, 2000), we hope to provide a reflexive framework for mobilising "deep learning, the kind of learning that fosters personal agency" (Vasconcelos, 2011, p. 437). In this way, the audience enters a dialogic space where teachers' stories of identity are emotionally felt. Our intention to capture multiple dimensions of teaching experience prompts teachers and other academic audiences to take ownership of "…their own stories" (Siegesmund & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008, p. 244).

Collaborative Auto-ethnography

Collaboratively exploring our identities through an aesthetic framework created a space where past and present images mingled to reveal shadowy depths of knowing self that had long been obscured (Griffiths et al., 2009). Presenting memories of self and teaching through representations that echoed "life history-like researching processes" (Knowles & Thomas, 2002, p. 122), created responsive aesthetic frames for capturing identity. Creation and viewing

of aesthetic frames involved searching for 'visual fit' between images, metaphors and meanings (Weade & Ernst, 1990) as we focused on the "coherence of the images with the text" and portrayals of place-based identity relationships (Knowles & Thomas, 2002, p. 126). At times this left us contemplating how to capture pictures of teacher-self as we wondered if 'readings' would reflect our intentions. In the end, we found that by talking through the meanings of our images, we learnt a great deal about each other and ourselves, this process in itself freed us to express "deeply felt knowledge" (Spouse 2000, p. 260) about our teacher identities. The process of creating through "artistic auto-ethnography" (Scott-Hoy, 2000, p. 322) enlarged our ways of seeing links that have influenced conceptualisation of our teacher selves. As "...an authentic means of both introspection and expression" (Scott-Hoy, 2000, p. 322), artistic auto-ethnography offers alternate ways of visualising experience by capturing elusive thoughts through representation. Whilst some might question the value of visual approaches (see Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), there is growing acknowledgement that the visual provokes different ways of seeing and understanding experience. "No text can do everything at once. The perfect ethnography cannot be written" (Eisner, 1991; Denzin, 1997, p. 287). Arguing this point further, Scott-Hoy (2000, p. 323) wrote:

> In an ever-changing world…there is a need to continue to push the boundaries of ethnography, in seeking to find forms of expression which are more accountable to subjects, more honest, more engaging and more likely to achieve the goal of empowering, understanding and improving lives.

In our auto-ethnographic journeying, working with visual modes of reflection assisted 'finding' and re-connection with our teacher identities. Embracing visual forms of reflection prompted us to let go of words and search for images that captured the 'feeling' aspects of our identity development. Whilst we returned to narrative to explain the meanings of experiences depicted, the visual remained our primary mode of identity representation to "evoke emotional responses from the audience" (Scott-Hoy, 2000, p. 340). Acknowledging the cultural construction of images within time and place (see Chaplin, 1998) means we are also aware that our identities as teacher-researcher and teacher-director will continue to evolve, as will the culturally embedded images we use to express understanding of them. Given the discomfort such tensions of representation may present (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), our publicised 'snap-shot' of identities (experienced so far) both invite and challenge audiences to better understand 'lived' intersections of teaching journeys (Denzin, 1998), with meanings residing within social systems of learning and being in the world.

Looking Forward: The Continuing Journeying

So what space might aesthetic forms of reflection occupy in our everyday practice and have we been changed as a result? For Leanne, collaborative ways of exploring her visual self

served to connect teacher-researcher identities and supported aesthetic ways of understanding learning-teaching experience. She continues seeking visual ways of exploring teachers' understandings of identity in her research and remains committed to motivating others to pursue aesthetic modes of representation as a means of expanding knowing about self and the world. Apart from nourishing "perceptivity," that is, "seeing what most people miss" (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 92), multi-dimensional forms of gathering and representing (see Knowles & Thomas, 2002) identity prompt introspective insights into the emotionality of lived experience (Scott-Hoy, 2000). For Fiona, using multiple visual modes for exploring identity provided another way of seeing pieces of her teacher-director self, the visual reaffirming concept of identities taking form in specific social contexts of knowledge and learning (for example, Weber & Mitchell, 1996). Inspired by our collaborative approach, Fiona has begun using aesthetic processes of reflection with her teaching team to encourage better understandings of teacher selves and deepen pedagogical relationships.

Our experiences with this new framework illustrate the power of using aesthetic modes as they seek richness, provoke thought and imbue reflections with greater presence (see also Knowles & Thomas, 2002). Placing emphasis on the emotional and relational nature of teaching journeys also opened opportunities to experience our identities through multiple personal and professional lenses, thereby connecting and bringing forth different aspects of self that have shaped our identities in time and place. We encourage others to take this journey as such 'coming-together' takes you from spaces of comfort to encounter new aesthetic territories of thinking and practice (Griffiths et al., 2009), and as we both discovered, there is much more to be learned.

Concluding Thoughts: Wider Implications

For teachers and qualitative academic audiences, using artistic auto-ethnography assists seeing of 'the person' behind the professional, and moves identity understandings beyond sociological methods focused on "rational order in the world" (Hochschild, 1983, as cited in Scott-Hoy, 2000, p. 339) to engage pictures of teachers that explore multiple aspects of place informing approaches to learning and teaching (see Knowles & Thomas, 2002). The "organic processes" of this multi-modal approach (Knowles & Thomas, 2002, p. 131) resist 'containment' or programming of individual responses (Ellis, 1991) to explore the uniqueness of educational pathways taken and pedagogies adopted in teaching lives. As representations that have the power to transform approaches to pedagogy and practice, we urge those involved in educational research and teacher education to increase the prominence of visual forms of reflection in their methodologies and programs. In this way, modes of representing teachers' identities are expanded to embrace "inquiry processes and methodological designs" (Knowles & Thomas, 2002, p. 131) that reveal different meanings of teaching, prompting audiences beyond the educational community to begin interrogating prevalent images of early childhood

teacher as 'caretaker' (see Weber & Mitchell, 1995, 1996). Building upon these understandings with an informed public audience can change how society sees our role, elevating the status (and ultimately the working conditions) of early childhood professionals.

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About the Authors

Leanne Lavina. After working as an early childhood teacher in prior-to-school settings, Leanne is undertaking her PhD at the Department of Educational Studies (Early Childhood) at Macquarie University. Continuing her interest in teacher education, Leanne works as a sessional tutor/lecturer and educational consultant. Her research involves an arts-informed approach to understanding the formation of early childhood teacher identities and the influence of the social world in shaping teachers' narratives of identity. Her co-authored 2017 publication is "The varied textures of an arts-informed methodology: Exploring teachers' identities through artful expressions" and appears in the Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy.

Fiona Lawson works as a Centre Manager at Gumnut Cottage, an Early Education and Care Service at Macquarie University. Having been in the sector for over 15 years, Fiona has a passion for Educational Leadership, exploring the power of pedagogy, and professional development. Fiona continues to engage action research projects with her team to support both teacher identity and the impact this has on leadership and pedagogy.