

## **Creative Self-Beliefs and the Ecologies of A/r/tographic Knowing: Generalist Primary Teachers Developing Praxical Creativity**

Katie Hotko  
Southern Cross University, Australia

Alexandra Lasczik  
Southern Cross University, Australia

Suzanne Hudson  
Southern Cross University, Australia

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores a study that investigated the creative self-beliefs of 20 generalist primary teachers and how these beliefs might impact their delivery of high-quality art experiences in their classrooms. The study aimed to gain greater insights into primary teachers' self-beliefs about their own creativity and artmaking agency and how these beliefs are impacted through focused artmaking in a studio environment with others. Building on the strong history of a/r/tographic methodology, this paper examines the potentialities of the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing, namely poiesis, praxis and theoria and how these ways of knowing increase creative self-belief. This study found that artmaking impacts teachers' creative self-belief in positive ways and expanded understandings of creativity and art practice. This was demonstrated in ongoing self-reported changes to pedagogical approaches in the teachers' classrooms as well as shifts in more positive attitudes and personal artmaking praxis.

## **Introduction**

This article explores the impacts of artmaking on the creative self-beliefs of generalist primary (elementary) teachers (GPTs). Specifically, 20 GPTs engaged in artmaking workshops over a period of six weeks as a/r/tographers, documenting their practice in their visual diary. It is an important study in the contemporary context of Australian education, given that educators are required to meet the needs of their students in developing their critical and creative thinking skills as required through the national curriculum, specifically through the Cross Curriculum Priorities (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], n.d.). More important, in our view, is the motivation to support teacher ingenuities that do not automatically connect to serving the needs of their students but to their own creative needs, first. To do this authentically, teachers need to have a solid understanding of their own creativity and how it may be enhanced. One way to do this is through the inquiry processes of the arts-based approach of a/r/tography (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). This study developed out of a desire to explore the creative self-beliefs of GPTs and how these beliefs might influence their delivery of high-quality art experiences for their students.

As a self-identified artist/teacher, Hotko chose to engage a/r/tography as the theo-methodological grounding of the inquiry. First, this article contextualizes the study by unpacking creative self-belief as a construct, exploring the need for creative self-belief in GPTs. This discussion is followed by the methodology of the study, with a specific focus on what we refer to as the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing, namely poiesis, praxis and theoria. Some data is shared as part of this discussion to demonstrate how engaging in these ways of knowing, being and becoming gives GPTs (and a/r/tographers) the means to develop practical creativity.

### **Creative Self-Belief: An Enabling Construct**

Broadly speaking, creative self-beliefs encompass people's perceptions about not just their own capabilities regarding creativity but also their views on the nature of creativity itself (Karwowski & Barbot, 2016). Creative self-belief is a higher-order construct that conceptualizes multiple lower-order self-concepts, including creative self-efficacy, creative personal identity, creative role-identity, creative metacognition and self-rated creativity (Beghetto & Karwowski, 2017). Karwowski and Barbot (2016) contend that "self-concepts set interests, which in turn translate into activity effort and ultimately, lead to achievement" (p. 305). High creative self-concept is linked to creative behaviours, and a teacher with a high creative self-concept is more likely to teach creatively and teach creativity (Patston et al., 2017). It would follow that high creative self-concept is tied to creative self-belief, which in turn activates creative teaching, for the creative benefit of students.

A study by Patston et al. (2017) found teachers' creative self-concept to be fairly consistent

across genders, countries and subject areas; however, GPTs were found to have slightly lower creative self-concept than secondary school teachers. One reason offered was that primary (elementary) teachers are required to teach the whole curriculum and, as a result, may not have mastery over all key learning areas. Patston et al. (2017) assert that “a person is more likely to be creative when they have a solid foundation of knowledge in a particular domain” (p. 30), which could explain why GPTs’ creative self-concept is lower. It was also suggested by Patston et al. that GPTs need to develop ‘expertise’ to strengthen their confidence and more education on the definitions of creativity within subjects could be the key to developing creative self-concept. This inquiry was developed from a desire to see if time spent making art would increase creative beliefs in GPTs and identify the optimal conditions to encourage an increase in creative self-belief.

Creative self-efficacy is an important component of creative self-beliefs. Teachers who hold high creative self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to teach creatively and are also more dedicated to their work (Karwowski & Barbot, 2016). Hall and Thomson (2016) found that teachers’ beliefs about their own creative capacities affected their ability to teach the Visual Arts effectively. The teachers in that study believed that students could learn to be creative, but had very little confidence in themselves as creative people.

There have been a number of studies conducted in Australia exploring the self-efficacy beliefs of teachers and pre-service teachers with respect to the Arts (Collins, 2016; Cutcher, 2014; Garvis & Pendergast, 2011, Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Lummis et al., 2014; Morris et al., 2017; Power & Klopper, 2011). These investigations are important given that the Arts foreground creativity and creative practice, although it is recognized that they are not the sole domain of creativity. Yet, we acknowledge that in the primary school context, many teachers conflate the Arts with creativity (Cutcher, 2014). Hudson and Hudson (2007) found that many pre-service teachers felt they did not have the necessary self-efficacy for teaching the Arts in schools. Self-efficacy beliefs in this context are important, as “teacher self-efficacy beliefs about their capacity to deliver Arts education shapes their perceived competence in teaching the Arts, which in turn impacts on the degree and nature of inclusion of Arts in the curriculum” (Lemon & Garvis, 2013, p. 2). The strongest predictor for self-efficacy in the Arts was prior experience in the Arts, which aligns strongly with Bandura’s (1982) theory that mastery is the strongest determinant of self-efficacy.

Since self-efficacy in the Arts is strongly linked to past experiences, this has a cyclical effect on education. If a student experiences poor quality or non-existent education in the Arts and then becomes a teacher who avoids teaching the Arts (or teaches it poorly), students taught by them are bound to grow into adults who have low self-efficacy in the Arts (Morris et al., 2017). Studies that identify teachers’ areas of low-self efficacy support pre-service teacher educators and professional learning providers to target better learning experiences that help

teachers achieve mastery in skills and experiences, to equip them to be more confident being ‘artists’ in their classrooms (Cutcher, 2014; Cutcher & Cook, 2016; Morris et al., 2017). This important nexus between confidence in practising and teaching the Arts, particularly the Visual Arts, with high creative self-efficacy, is the core connection of this inquiry.

Creative personal identity, another component of creative self-belief, is developed through a person’s unique background and experiences over time (Karwowski et al., 2018). Individuals with a creative personal identity will seek out opportunities that reaffirm their personal identity (Jaussi et al., 2007). Because the current study focuses on the domain of the Visual Arts, the type of creative personal identity that is relevant here is not just a broad type of creative identity but rather the identity of a creative practitioner or artist, someone who engages in art practice regularly.

A mixed-method study by Carr (2015) revealed that adopting an artistic identity encouraged pre-service teachers to gain self-efficacy in teaching the Arts. The adoption of an artistic identity in several studies (Carr, 2015; Sinclair et al., 2015) was achieved after teachers and pre-service teachers engaged in artmaking practices of their own in either professional development or Arts method classes. Both Evans-Palmer (2018) and Pavlou (2021) found that GPTs can increase their artistic identity through the use of visual diaries, as undertaken in this study. Chapman (2015) takes this one step further and states that “educators can influence the formation of students’ identity...by becoming creators and perceivers of the Arts, we take on the mantle of an artistic identity, expressing our thoughts and opinions through aesthetic expression and aesthetic responses” (p. 95). Developing a strong identity as an artist may better equip GPTs to deliver quality visual arts education for their students.

This paper now seeks to explore the methodology engaged in this inquiry, as it provides a significant approach that supported creative self-belief in the teachers who participated in the study. The findings drawn from this study offer a way forward for GPTs to engage in creative practice that supports their creative self-belief and ultimately their teaching of the Visual Arts to their students.

### **Methodology: A/r/tography**

This study was conducted through the processes and practices of a/r/tography, which “is an arts and education practice-based research methodology that emphasises living inquiry and an examination of the spaces between arts-making/researching/teaching (a/r/t)” (Carter et al., 2011, p. 17). A/r/tography activates the interplay between, through, across, and with the identities of artist, researcher and teacher through writing and active artistic praxis to progress knowledge and experience through a continuous feedback loop that allows the researcher to attend to the multifaceted and entwined nature of research, artmaking and teaching.

At a/r/tography's heart is working in the in-between spaces. This is drawn from the theoretical work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), a Chicana-American scholar. Her work theorises the marginal, the in-between and mixed cultures living along borders, work that is pivotal in postcolonial feminist theory. Anzaldúa (1987) theorises the Borderlands as being both geographical and cultural and is interested in the juxtaposition of identities that both conflict and intersect. Anzaldúa (1987) also refers to the 'new mestizas', namely people who inhabit multiple worlds because of their multiple identities. Anzaldúa's (1987) work on borderlands can be engaged to align with Irwin's (2004) call for a/r/tography to trouble the borderlands, to dwell in the liminal spaces. A/r/tography is a relational process, and it traverses the boundaries of the single researcher working alone, with participants as objects of study. Rather, those involved in a/r/tography are referred to as co-researchers rather than participants (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008). For the purposes of this study, the term co-inquirers (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019) was adopted for the GPTs who engaged in a series of workshops as they investigated their own creative self-beliefs. Further, in a/r/tography, the researcher is in a constant state of becoming, never coming to an endpoint in the research (Irwin, 2013). The term co-inquirer alludes to more pliable and flattened edges between the researcher and their collaborators, which was important for the relational ontology of the study and the intertwined nature of knowing and becoming in a/r/tographic research.

Right from its inception, a/r/tography centred on the three different kinds of thinking, described by Aristotle as *theoria* (knowing), *praxis* (doing) and *poiesis* (making) (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). These three concepts are frequently described in the literature about a/r/tographic practice (Gouzouasis, 2006; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004), yet are rarely explicitly unpacked. Nor are they interrogated for their overlap and the movement between them as they intermingle and bump up against each other in the living inquiry of a/r/tography (Lasczik et al., 2022). This paper, therefore, seeks to explicitly explore the relationship between these three types of knowing and how they were foregrounded throughout the inquiry. These three concepts provided fertile spaces for creative, artistic, and pedagogical becomings and subsequently in this study, creative self-efficacy. We assert that *theoria*, *praxis* and *poiesis* are entangled as ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing, which we explore further below, synthesising them with our findings in the discussion regarding the GPTs' enhanced creative self-beliefs.

### **Data Generation Methods**

Multimodal data generation methods were deployed within this a/r/tographic inquiry. As the GPTs worked together across six weeks after school for 2-3 hours a week, they created visual diaries. Data was generated through the artmaking processes of both the co-inquirers and the lead author Katie Hotko in visual journals, autoethnographic journaling (Adams et al., 2022), poetic responses (Lasczik et al., 2022) and informal and formal interviews.

### **Ecologies of A/r/tographic Knowing (Findings and Theorising)**

It was Aristotle who identified three epistemological positions of *theoria* (knowing), *praxis* (doing) and *poiesis* (making), foreshadowing the central role of the importance of the arts as a way of knowing through history (Eisner, 2008). In a/r/tography, these three actions fold in upon and with each other and form the basis for how a/r/tographers operate in, with and through inquiring, teaching and artmaking, including the liminalities of the in-between.

Over the last twenty years, through the practices of a/r/tography, *theoria/ praxis/ poiesis* have been frequently mentioned in the literature (Gouzouasis, 2006; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Lasczik et al., 2022). Yet, in the context of a/r/tography to date, they have not been explored in detail, and thus, we deliberately examine the ecologies here as a way to push them further and create new theoretical territory. To underpin the findings of this study, the lineage of each way of knowing is teased out here to examine how they can be enacted, including in the third space of the in-between, the space of troubling. The ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing are entangled and difficult to separate. They are rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), always coming from the middle, in constant flux, and it is from this movement (Hotko & Peisker, 2024) that the understandings and findings of this study emerged.

The ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing offer a lens through which to understand and explore experience. The intermingling and movement of these ecologies are challenging to explain through words alone, or even through a two-dimensional image, as there are movement and entangled processes between them that seep and leak between and within them. The gesture of hands weaving around more accurately demonstrates the entanglement of these ecologies of knowing visually. Figure 1, adapted from Hotko's visual diary from the data analysis phase of this study, seeks to conceptualise how the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing blend and bleed together to enable creative becoming. It is in this space of *creative becoming*, the liminal space where friction is created and between the *praxis* and the *poiesis*, *theoria* and *praxis*, or any other combination of them bleeding into, moving, and resonating together.

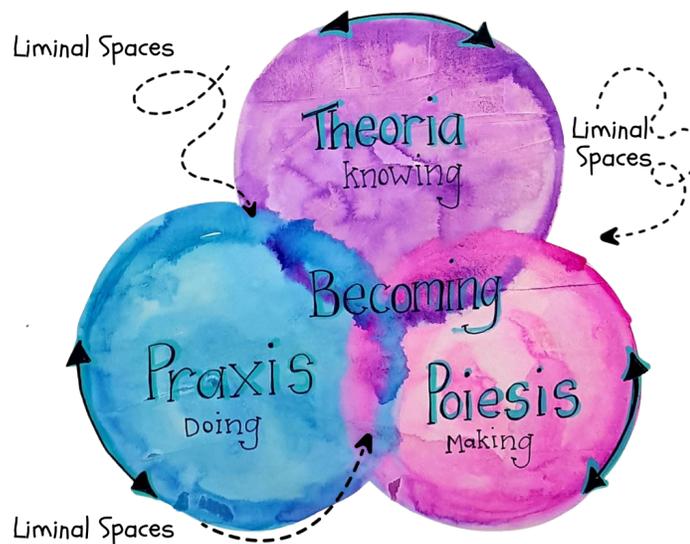


Figure 1. Image taken from my visual journal ©Katie Hotko.

The ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing are often referred to and engaged within a/r/tographic research (Gouzouasis, 2006; Irwin, 2004; MacKenzie & Wolf, 2012; Rousell & Cutcher, 2014). Whilst the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing are exciting within their individual domains, when they are considered in the context of process, as an ecology, they come to life. Knowings circulate in everyday life, “not only theoretical claims...but also practical, interactive knowledge and productive, goal-oriented knowledge” (Nilsson Hammar, 2018, p. 114). A/r/tography transforms the idea that theory is an abstract system, something that is separate from practice, towards the concept of “theory as practice becom[ing] an embodied, living space of inquiry” (Irwin & Springgay, 2018, p. 163). A/r/tography is practice-based and situates itself in the in-between spaces; those spaces include not just in-between identities but also in-between “theory-as-practice-as-process-as-complication” (Irwin & Springgay, 2018, p. 164). Each of the entities in the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing will be unpacked individually below to demonstrate their individual significance, drawing on the data generated through this inquiry.

### ***Poiesis***

Aristotle’s concept of poiesis is used to describe forms of knowledge that emerge from aesthetics and art. Poiesis was initially defined as ‘knowing by making’ (Gerber & Myers-Coffman, 2018, p. 591). In philosophy, poiesis from the Ancient Greek ποιησις, means “the activity in which a person brings something into being that did not exist before” (Polkinghorne, 2004, p. 115). Aristotle interchanges the terms poetry with poiesis, both containing the etymological root verb *poieo*, which literally means “to make, to fabricate, to

build’’ (Marini, 2014, p. 172). Poetry or poetics in English is often considered to be a noun or adjective, yet the word poiesis “carries a present continuous emphasis” that can be interpreted as both “the production an artwork” as well as “the produced artwork” (Liddell & Scott, 1996, as cited in Marini, 2014). Consequently, poiesis holds a dual meaning of both the process of production of an artwork and the final produced artwork itself. A distinction between the arts as an object and the process of producing art is made by Aristotle, who used the word *poetry* to signify the arts, and he uses the word *poiesis* to indicate how art can be produced.

Poiesis is further expounded upon by Heidegger as a relational process, one where the artist is not just making the art; the art is also making the artist. Poiesis assumes a *creative reciprocity* (Marini, 2014). As a/r/tographers, we consider poiesis as recognising something that exists inside the artist, the ineffable. Art’s function is “to switch our intensive register, to reconnect us with the world. ... it transforms, if only for a moment, our sense of our ‘selves’ and our notion of our world” (O’Sullivan, 2001, p. 28). Art moves beyond a representation of a thing into a thing in and of itself because “Art is its own essence, rather than a substitute for another form of language...Art is itself” (Lasczik Cutcher, 2018, p. 94).

Hotko’s inquiry with GPTs as co-inquirers explored the potential of poiesis in developing creative self-belief. As the co-inquirers engaged in the creative reciprocity of poiesis through the workshops each week, they identified through reflecting on and in their diaries and group conversations that making art changed them and what they believed about themselves and their capacity to be creative. The examples below (Figure 2) show the art making of one of the co-inquirers. She was thinking deeply about her increased confidence and how she is drawn to create outside our workshops, and in ways she would not normally have chosen.



Figure 2. Images taken from a Co-inquirer’s Visual Journal.

Whitehead (2003) describes what he calls an *experimental poiesis* when the raw materials of the imagination (ideas, concepts) meet with raw materials of the environment (clay, paint, paper). It is through this living materiality that the artist and the artwork meet and are co-created through poiesis, praxis and theoria in a living inquiry. During the workshops, the co-inquirers in this study discussed how engaging in an experimental way with materials helped increase their understanding of artmaking. This discussion is reimaged in comic form in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3. Graphic Illustration I created of the Co-inquirers' Creative Becoming in Process

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Collaborative conversations about artmaking and the connections made to the GPTs' classroom practices created space for them to grow in their understandings of what creativity could be and how it could be lived out in the GPTs' lives and classrooms.

The poet Juan Ramón Jiménez has aptly said, "let us think more with our hands" (Whitehead, 2003, pp. 7-8), a concept supported by Sullivan (2010), who argues that artists think through the material engagement of artmaking. The work of poiesis is a form of kinetic gesturing, the stroke of a brush or the shaping of a poem (Whitehead, 2003); poiesis requires the work of both 'the head' and 'the hands' as an active 'bringing forth' of an object or idea. For a/r/tography, Irwin (2017) describes poiesis as a making, a calling into existence, drawing on Leggo's statement about poetry when he said, "writing is not self-expression: writing is self-construction" (Leggo, 1995, p. 6). Irwin (2017) further makes the case that a/r/tographers are not just waiting there to be discovered; instead, we create ourselves in the doing. We contend that this making of ourselves, this self-creation, is not just as a result of the written poetic word, as Leggo (1995) contends, but also involves the poiesis of the Visual Arts as in this study, and indeed all a/r/tographic inquiry forms. This self creation is a perfect environment for increasing creative self-belief, through an increase in creative self identity.

Polkinghorne (2004) describes Aristotle's differentiation of poiesis and praxis as different kinds of reasoning. Poiesis, in deciding how to make something, calls for a kind of reasoning Aristotle calls *techne*. *Techne* as a word is often translated to *craftsmanship*, *craft* or *art*, and the word *epistêmê* is most often translated as *knowledge* (Parry, 2014). Often there is a divide in modern scientific thought between theory and practice. However, Aristotle's account of *techne* includes *episteme* as the practice is grounded in a type of practical knowledge (Parry, 2014). Ancient philosophy offers an interesting opposition to the traditional scientific bifurcation between practice and theory, one in which a/r/tography seeks to entwine.

### ***Praxis***

There is a distinction between poiesis and praxis, where the former is concerned with the making of an object, for example, the painting of an artwork, and the latter is the *doing* itself, performing the action in a specific way (Bernstein, 2011). The word *praxis* has a common definition through the word *doing*. However, praxis takes on a distinctive meaning in Aristotelian usage. Aristotle draws the contrast between knowledge for its own sake (*theoria*) and the practical wisdom one needs to live life well (*praxis*) (Bernstein, 2011).

It is crucial that the translation of praxis as practice or practical in the English language is not confused and reduced to a lower form of practical or unthinking action. Praxis is not just

about going through the motions; instead, it is infused with purposeful reflection. Praxis means thoughtful and practical doing. It seems paradoxical to be linking thinking and doing; however, it is this precise combination that makes praxis such a powerful concept.

Freire (1970/2005) viewed praxis as a combination of both action and theory. In his major treatise *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire describes the importance of both action and reflection in the process of liberation from the oppressor, often summarised with the apocryphal phrase “action without reflection is blind, reflection without action is impotent.” Praxis is not purely action; it incorporates *theoria* through reflection. As mentioned above, it is challenging to tease out each of these ecologies of artful knowing as they are so entangled within each other. However, praxis is not praxis without *theoria*, and *theoria* cannot be static thinking alone; it must be accompanied by a doing.

When Schön (1983) speaks of reflection-in-action, they are not referring to reflecting on past action, or even a state of reflecting, or seeking feedback while one is acting. Instead, the term reflection-in-action can be conceptualised, as Schön calls it, as the backtalk of unexpected feedback. Backtalk is an integral part of praxis. This concept has synergies with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994) swimmer learning from the ocean’s feedback. Schön (1987) suggests that “when someone reflects in action, he [sic] becomes a researcher in practice and context” (p. 68). Schön’s (1983) reflection-in-action is vital to *a/r/tography* in that theory cannot exist without practice, “the two are intertwined in a perpetual dance for (and in) understanding, to come to a point of ‘interstanding’ (de Cosson, 2003, p. 109). Sullivan (2010) describes it this way, “effective practitioners have the capacity to bring implicit and tacit understandings to a problem at hand and these intuitive capacities interact with existing systems of knowledge to yield critical new insights” (p. 67).

Reflection in action was evident in this study through the use of visual diaries as a location for recording visual and written evidence of praxical thinking. The co-inquirers worked in their visual diaries, recording their thoughts and their creative growth. This practice of reflecting in the visual diaries was an intuitive one with little guidance from Katie Hotko, however, there were key times during the data generation phase when enabling constraints (Davis & Sumara, 2010; Fendler & Hamrock, 2018; Manning & Massumi, 2014) were used to prompt praxis through backtalk. One example of this was during the fourth workshop, all the co-inquirers were asked to write a Haiku, a form of Japanese poetry that uses the meter of 5-7-5 on three lines of poetry—five syllables, seven syllables, and then five syllables. A strict time limit of three minutes was given to respond to the prompt, “How have you felt coming to the workshops over the last three weeks?” These constraints enabled a sense of urgency and relieved the pressure to be perfect. This form of backtalk was confronting for many of the co-inquirers, being in the position of the learner themselves tasked with an activity perhaps out of their comfort zone. Below are some haiku created by the co-inquirers.

*To play with colour*

*Not being judged by another*

*Relaxes the mind*

\*

*Experimenting*

*with creativity is*

*fun to do. You too?*

\*

*Free and colourful*

*New, exciting, fun, safe*

*Art's alive in me*

\*

*Freedom to be me*

*Creating artistically*

*Experimental*

Another Haiku highlighted the move toward greater self-belief:

*Art is fun today*

*I can do this now I know*

*Here we go again*

Pushing praxis further, Figure 4 showcases some examples from the co-inquirers' visual

journals, where both text and images are used contiguously to explore creative self-belief (Irwin & Springgay, 2018). This is praxis and poiesis in action.



Figure 4. Excerpt from Co-inquirer and my Visual Journal—Praxis and Poiesis Vibrating Together ©Katie Hotko

In this inquiry, artmaking, teaching and researching actions and materials backtalked, further developing an understanding of creativity and the self in relation to creativity. Aoki (2004) further supports this notion of praxis being the integration of theory and practice when he asserts that we need to extricate ourselves from the “dichotomized view of ‘theory and practice’” (p. 3). Using visual diaries throughout our time making art together gave us the ability to actively pursue the iterative process of theory and practice as a reflective moment in action.

Aristotelian praxis is the form of conscious, self-aware action described above, which is a “sense of knowing what one is doing in the doing of it” (Kemmis, 2010, p. 10). Kemmis (2010) describes praxis as a form of *self-formation*, in both the individual and the collective sense. This means that praxis forms the identity of the individual who acts and the communities in which they are a part. In this inquiry, this was evidenced by the creative

growth of the co-inquirers, as they moved towards an acceptance of themselves as creative beings with the capacity for creative action.

In a/r/tography, praxis is both a reflective practice and thinking while doing—or reflection *through* action—for social change, knowing as being, emerging from engagement in and with the arts (Chilton et al., 2015). Knowing through doing and making is foundational to an epistemological understanding of a/r/tographic knowing and creative becoming. Emergent forces of creation are enacted through aesthetic sense-based, embodied and emotional ways of being and becoming (Gerber & Myers-Coffman, 2018). Embodied, process-based knowing that emerges from engaging in artmaking experiences is central to the development of creative self-beliefs in the Visual Arts.

### ***Theoria***

The English word theory is derived from the Greek *theoria*, which directly translates to contemplation. The root word *thea*, means sight or view (Case et al., 2012). The early Greek thinkers of the 4th century BCE sought to define philosophy and the role of the philosopher and Plato's use of *theoria* required a separation of the senses; *theoria* was to aim for pure reason separate from experience. The common usage of the word *theoria* at the time referred to a journey made to a religious festival by a *theoros* (a person who goes to see). The philosopher who practiced *theoria*, according to Plato, was to be impartial—separate from earthly matters (Nightingale, 2004; Weber, 2006b). *Theoria* encompassed the whole journey; the *theoros* would return and recount what they had seen to their community.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle considered *theoria* to be a separate activity from praxis. Rather than *theoria* leading to praxis, Aristotle argued that “*theoria* is a completely disinterested activity that can only be pursued for its own sake” (Nightingale, 2004, p. 38). There is contention in the literature surrounding Aristotle's definition of the concept of *theoria* as being solely about the contemplation of knowledge already acquired, rather than a broader definition that includes scientific and philosophical enquiry (Guthrie, 1981; Roochnik, 2009). In the context of the ecologies of a/r/tographic ways of knowing, the debates around whether *theoria* is for pure philosophical contemplation or linked to practice are inconsequential. This is because, in a/r/tography, all things are in constant process (Leggo & Irwin, 2013). There can be no real separation between *theoria* and praxis, given that all is in flux and constant movement as each entity blends and bleeds into one another through the ecological nature of a/r/tographic knowing (Kemmis, 2010).

Dewey offers an alternative to the Greek philosophers' static view of *theoria*. Rather than being able to know through objective contemplation, Dewey's theory of inquiry developed over a lifetime of writings in different guises; he described an epistemology, often referred to as *my theory of knowing* (Dicker, 1973). *Spectator theory of knowledge* was a term coined by

Dewey in his criticism of all epistemological positions that place the knower and the known (subject and object or any other combination of knowledge-relation) in a form of relationship where the knower is a viewer or a passive spectator of the thing/object (Dewey, 1929). Like Dewey, an a/r/tographic understanding of theoria is not static; rather, it combines with the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing to break down any separation between knowing and doing, theory and practice, subject and object. In this study, knowing came through the process of doing, reflection in action, and ultimately through the process of artmaking.

Both the Platonic and Aristotelian versions of theoria are incomplete when working with a/r/tography. When a/r/tographic researchers engage in theoria, it is neither a solely cognitive affair, separate from the body, nor is it purely contemplative in nature; there is always an interplay between the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing as in this study and a/r/tography more broadly. Dewey's use of the gerund in *knowing* rather than just *know* highlights the ongoing, processual nature of theoria in a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004). Figure Five below is an excerpt from Hotko's visual diary. It is an example of the emergent process of theorising through artmaking, and reflection in action and on action, through the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing.

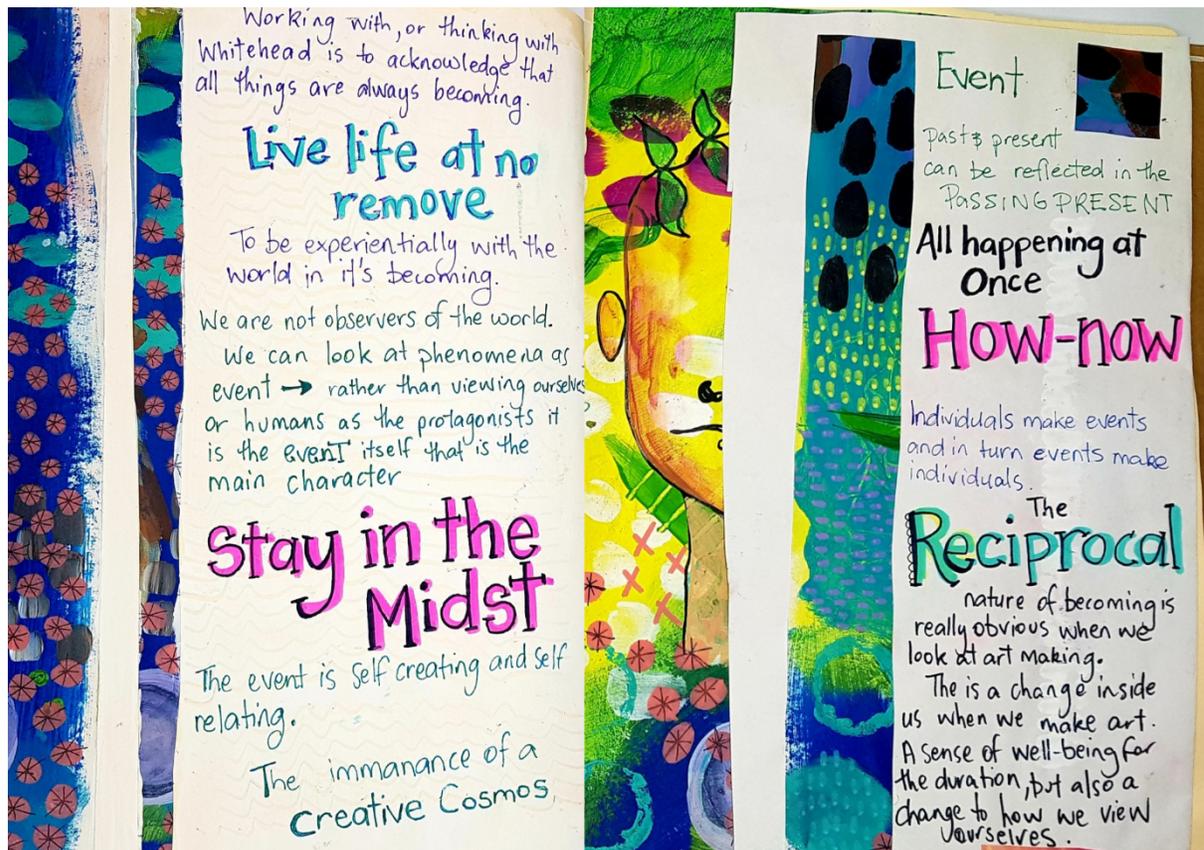


Figure 5. Excerpt from my Visual Journal ©Katie Hotko.

A/r/tographic research, while adopting Aristotelian notions of *theoria*, extends this processual approach to an embodied, subjective, ever-evolving concept of knowledge: knowing that is continuously in the process of becoming (Whitehead, 1929/1978). For this study and for a/r/tography more broadly, *theoria* encapsulates a *doing* with knowledge, an active thinking, a verb rather than a noun. *Theoria* is “an activity that goes on whenever one brings certain truths to mind... anyone who is actively reflecting on any proposition, whatever its content, maybe loosely said to be engaged in *theoria* with respect to that proposition” (Kraut, 1989, p. 73). Without *praxis*, *theoria* is impotent, but when combined with *poiesis*, *praxis* and *theoria*—the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing are generative and provide a fertile space for new understandings about creative self-belief and engagement in the three ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing proved to be a catalyst for growth in creative self-belief for the GPTs involved in this inquiry. After six weeks of time spent together engaging the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing, the GPTs met back together ten weeks later to review the impact that the artmaking had on their own creative self-belief and practice in the classroom. The responses from the teachers were overwhelmingly positive. Figure Six shows a summary of the answers to the questions: *What changes have there been to what you believe about your capacities to engage in the Visual Arts in your classroom?*

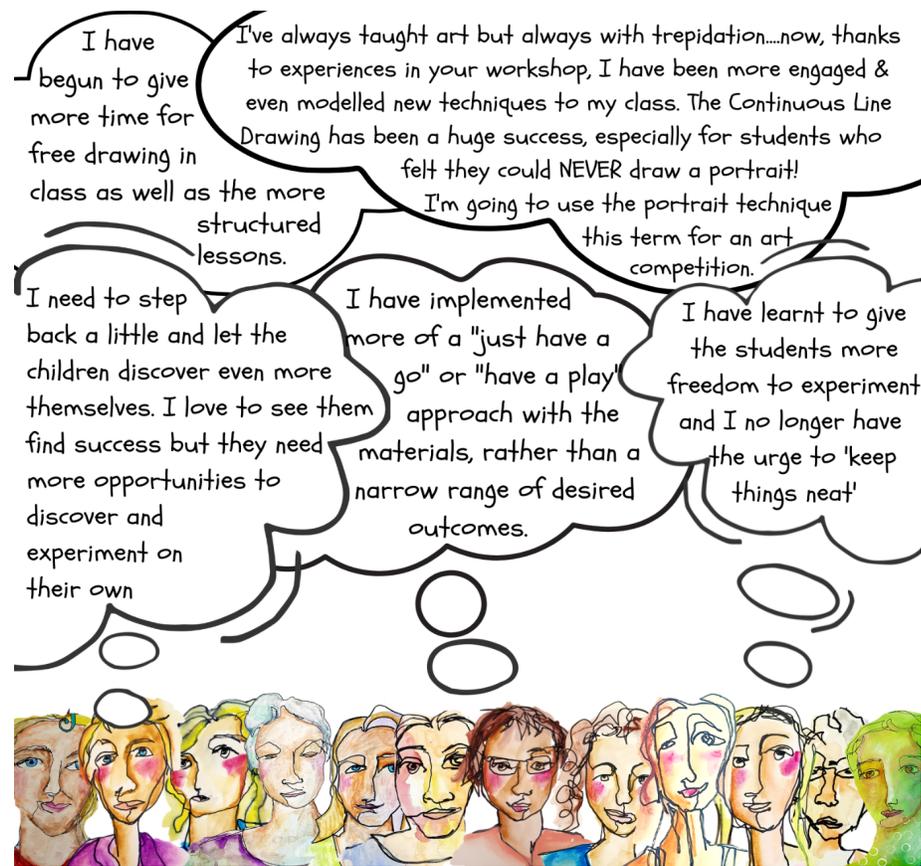


Figure 6. Graphic Illustration I created of the Co-inquirers' Responses ©Katie Hotko.

When the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing were lived by the researcher and co-inquirers, as in this study, they tapped into more than just each of the individual ways of knowing; they formed a powerful and useful entanglement, which produces multiplicity, an exponential growth in potential.

### Implications: Praxical Creativity

Engaging in a/r/tographic, living inquiry through the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing is a deep affair of metacognition, materiality, relationality and practice. This engagement of the ecologies of a/r/tographic could be described as *praxical creativity*, a creativity rooted in praxis. Praxical creativity enabled the co-inquirers in this study to gain confidence and ownership over their own creative actions, thinkings and knowings. Enhancing creative self-belief is important for GPTs' pedagogical skillset. But for the delivery of effective, authentic Visual Arts education, they must also develop praxical creativity, a creativity that is founded on deep engagement in artistic action (Cutcher & Cook, 2016). This praxical creativity is achieved through authentic engagement in the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing—poiesis, praxis and theoria activated most usefully in a personal, practical visual diary. This is something that is usefully developmental, a creativity that is immersed in practical (praxis),

reflective (theoria) experiences in hands-on artmaking (poiesis). Praxical creativity empowers teachers to not just understand their own identity as creative makers but gives them firsthand experience as artists (Cutcher & Cook, 2016). Praxical creativity increases one's understanding of what it means to be creative through the Arts. It allows for an understanding of the things that Eisner (2004) asserted that the Arts teach us—namely that praxical creativity enables the confidence to sit in uncertainty, to generate multiple ideas, to engage in experimentation, to use imagination, and so much more. As asserted by Greene (1995), engaging in the Arts makes us “aware of ourselves as questioners, as meaning makers, as persons engaged in constructing and reconstructing realities with those around us” (p. 382).

Engaging with, in and through *the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing* is the catalyst that develops praxical creativity. The findings of this study concur with Cutcher and Cook (2016) when they call for communities of practice within initial teacher education whereby pre-service teachers should be engaged in collaborative studio-based activities to provide embodied Arts experiences that increase not just their confidence but also their competence with the Art form. They become artists—and artists have high creative self-belief and creative self-efficacy. This need not be limited to just pre-service teachers but extended to all in-service, generalist, primary teachers as well.

The ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing describe the multiple ways a/r/tographers engage with knowledge-making practices, including making, doing, knowing and telling (Cutcher, 2016). The ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing are entangled and embody the relational approach of a/r/tography. By engaging the ecologies in meaningful and authentic ways, a/r/tographers can move beyond mere cognitive ways of knowing and into embodied, sensorial and deeply affective ways of knowing, being, and becoming (Coleman, 2018; La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Lasczik Cutcher, 2018). In this study, the ways of knowing and being through the ecologies of a/r/tographic knowing generated the eminently useful creative becomings of the co-inquirers, an outcome that was at once developmental and joyous.

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### **Disclosure of Interest**

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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### About the Authors

**Dr. Katie Hotko** is an arts-based educational researcher with expertise in a/r/tography, participatory methodologies, and arts-informed inquiry. Her doctoral thesis, *We Make Art and It Makes Us: An A/r/tographic Exploration of Generalist Primary Teachers' Creative Self-Belief* (Southern Cross University, 2022), employed Whiteheadian process philosophy to investigate the dynamic relationship between art-making and teacher identity. Building on

generalist teacher capacities, Katie is also very interested in Praxis-based teaching for Initial Teacher Education, both in person and online. Another focus of Katie's research is climate justice and environmental education through child-framed participatory research. A self-taught visual artist, she is committed to making the visual arts accessible and inclusive for all learners. Katie is an editor for the International Journal of Education through Art and co-editor of the forthcoming International Handbook of A/r/tography. She is also a member of the Sustainability, Environmental, and the Arts in Education (SEAE) Research Centre.

**Alexandra Lasczik** is Associate Dean, Education Partnerships and Professor of Art Education in the Faculty of Education at Southern Cross University, Australia. She is currently co-Leader of the Sustainability, Environment and the Arts in Education Research Centre [SEAE]. Alexandra is an artist and writer, whose work has lately settled on A/r/tography, Art Education and Climate Change Education. Alexandra is an *Artist*, committed to equity and social justice, and her spirited advocacy for a high-quality Arts education for all spans across her entire career of more than 40 years. She is a multi-awarded academic who has been recognized for her teaching, research and service, and currently has an Australia Research Council Discovery Project entitled "Climate Country: Advancing Child and Youth-led Climate Change Education with Country."

**Suzanne Hudson** has been involved in teaching and teacher education for over 30 years. Suzanne is now based at the Gold Coast campus at SCU. Prior to coming to SCU she was at QUT where she was responsible for initiating the Bachelor of Education (primary) at the Caboolture campus. Suzanne was the successful applicant of a \$1.45 million grant for the implementation of the Teacher Education Done Differently (TEDD) project. Sue's research is embedded in her work at the university and within the education community. Currently Sue is researching models of professional experience, the role of the School Coordinator before, during and after professional experience as well as mentoring models that support pre-service teachers to teach in rural and remote communities.