Abstract

Eight teacher educators used self-study methodology to engage in reflective practice to overcome their isolation as individual teachers and researchers, and to facilitate professional development. Their research question asked: How can we continue to develop our teaching practice to ensure we are high quality, contemporary teacher educators? They contributed collaboratively in one overarching research project as well as through several focussed projects that explored issues in their individual teaching practices including: sustainability, creativity, curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment, and the learning experiences for students.

This paper explores the outcomes from collaborative inquiry that five of the eight educator/researchers engaged in during a research-writing retreat. It documents their experience using arts-based strategies in which drawings were created about their experiences of engaging in a collaborative project and smaller focussed self-study projects. Analysis involved inquiring into each other’s drawings through recorded conversation. The metaphoric representations found through analysing the drawings provided insight...
into participants’ teaching practices and identities as teacher educators. Six months later when the participants had developed their projects further and used other arts-based methods to understand these experiences, they reflected on the key issues for their teaching practices that had arisen from undertaking this Collaborative Reflective Experience and Practice in Education research.

Arts-based inquiries and reflective analysis over six months, constitute this paper. The experiences and analyses are shared to show how creating and sharing metaphoric meaning of visual representations is useful in self-study research to drill down into the real issues. Importantly, this in-depth sharing provides authentic interdisciplinary links when individual educators share their own approaches to teaching in their disciplined area. Findings suggest that gaining new insights into each other’s discipline-based approaches to teacher education through these methods, revealed different responses to pedagogical challenges and allowed for new possibilities for understanding the landscape of teacher education.

**Keywords:** teacher education, collaborative research, self-study methodology, arts-based inquiry

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**Introduction**

Teaching can be an isolating experience in universities. In response to this, a group of eight teacher educators from Deakin University came together mid-2014 to investigate their teaching practices using self-study methodology. A research group was formed: ‘Collaborative Reflective Experience and Practice in Education’ (CREPE). We came from a range of different discipline areas: two members taught and researched in the arts, two in science, two in mathematics, and two in core educational studies. We focussed on synergies and shared aims in teacher education with attention paid to the resistances and opportunities offered when crossing discipline boundaries.

The authors are five members of the CREPE group who participated in a three-day research-writing retreat, six months into the project. The retreat was held at a beach house and was the first opportunity to collaborate in-person and outside the university. Prior to this retreat, the CREPE group had engaged in five monthly meetings that were facilitated in online and on-campus environments. Although relationships had formed during these meetings, the limited time afforded was not conducive to deepening understandings. This off-campus writing retreat offered an opportunity to lounge, walk, write, chat and eat together. This generated deeper insights into each other’s personalities and higher
education teaching practices. What follows unpacks arts-based research, which unfolded during this retreat time.

**Methodology**

As CREPE members were interested in using self-study methodology to research (and ultimately understand and improve) our teaching practice. Our research question asked: *How can we continue to develop our teaching practice to ensure we are high quality, contemporary teacher educators?* We engaged critically with the literature and shared understandings of self-study methodology. We agreed to follow Samaras’ (2011) five foci of self-study, provided in the left hand column of Table 1. The right hand column of this table provides insight about how we specifically applied this foci to our teaching scholarship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Samaras (2011, p.10) foci of self-study</th>
<th>The CREPE group utilisation of this definition for their research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal situated inquiry</td>
<td>We drew on our own experiences as teacher-educators but also personally invested ourselves into a situation worthy of inquiry to find ways forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical collaborative inquiry</td>
<td>We work in the same faculty of Deakin University and in the same field as teacher educators. Our multiple and interdisciplinary lenses were applied to our own situated inquiry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved learning</td>
<td>We were keen to learn about our teaching practices, but recognise that this learning is holistic as it is also about our personal and professional lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A transparent and systematic research process</td>
<td>We set up semi-structured interviews, had structured meetings that started with informal check-ins, discussed readings, wrote multiple papers and regularly shared updates on our developing research projects. Key to this was collaboration based in trust, care, and honesty and being critical and supportive friends.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge generation and presentation</td>
<td>The knowledge generation for CREPE emerged through discussion, provocation, sharing and offering advice. The interdisciplinary nature of CREPE enabled us to generate new knowledge and contribute knowledge to our fields and practices. Presenting our work regularly through meetings, writing projects and arts-based inquiry sessions was vital to this.</td>
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</table>

Table 1

*The CREPE Group’s Response to Samaras’ Foci of Self-Study*
Samaras and Freese (2006) describe successful self-study of teaching as *com-munitas*: “a professional community where there are strong feelings of social togetherness and belongingness, often with rituals of practice” (p. 18). Our rituals of practice were the monthly meetings and arts-based inquiry sessions that took place over time (see Table 1), but also our own teaching that we engaged in regularly. As a supportive community, we researched and help each other to research our teaching practices by sharing and “letting each other in”. We did this by inviting CREPE colleagues to observe our teaching and by airing our interests and concerns with them. Self-study acknowledges that a practice cannot be separate from the self (Samaras, Hicks & Berger, 2004).

Self-study can become ‘high-jacked’ and appear at times as a way of evaluating a program or project. To avoid this and go deeper into the messy rhizome of our practice field, practice approaches, and personal influences on these, we used arts-based inquiry methods. When undertaken communally, arts-based inquiry provides a generative shared space for researchers to engage in collective meaning making as they come to better understand their own and others’ experiences and ideas (Black & O’Dea, 2015; Radley & Bell, 2007; Weber & Mitchell, 2004).

The specific purpose of the method was to interrogate, over time, our individual practices of teaching and the practice field of teaching itself, and not shy away from the personal influences in our work. We conducted our research by developing a community of practice through our collaborative overarching project and within each of the focussed projects – both of which are explained in the author narratives and drawings later.

**Arts-based Inquiry**

The two arts educators within the group had prior experience using arts-based research methods. As the focussed projects within the CREPE group, branched out into specific fields of interests (creativity, student engagement, etc.), they both fed on and were fed by the reflective practice of the larger group issues. Arts-based research methods were chosen to explore this complexity.

Hermeneutic-phenomenology helped us to frame the way experience and knowledge was being communicated and interpreted. We understand hermeneutic research as “the study of human cultural activity as texts with a view towards interpretation” where texts can be “written or verbal communication, visual arts and music” (Laverty, 2003, p. 9). Art expression, description, dialogue and interpretation were central to the way we used arts-based inquiry in a hermeneutic spiral of communicating and interpreting over time. Laverty (2003) explains that “the interpretive process is achieved through a hermeneutic circle which moves from the parts of experience, to the whole of experience and back and forth again
and again to increase the depth of engagement with and the understanding of texts” (p. 9). This article focuses on the outcome of this dynamic.

**Arts-based Research Methods**

Expressing and communicating through art is useful, because art expression is immediate and can offer metaphorical expression about what participants experience at particular stages in their research journey (Malchiodi, 2010). The benefit of expressing and communicating through drawing and painting is that it can capture “the hard-to-put-into-words” (Weber, 2008, p. 44). Drawing research provides “opportunity to pay attention in new ways” and “communicate more holistically, incorporating multiple layers and evoking stories or questions” (Weber, 2008, p. 45), rather than representing categories already known.

When undertaken communally, arts-based inquiry provides a generative shared space for researchers to engage in collective meaning making as they come to better understand their own and others’ experiences and ideas (Black & O’Dea, 2015; Radley & Bell, 2007). For these reasons, arts-based inquiry is sometimes taken up as a method used within self-study (Samaras, Hicks & Berger, 2004).

**Individual Drawings on Paper: Unpacking and Exploring the Focussed Projects**

For the first arts-based inquiry, Shelley provided a box of crayons and two sheets of cartridge paper for the five participants, herself included. She asked that everyone spend 15 minutes creating a drawing of how they understood their focused project.

Once participants had completed their first drawings, Shelley asked everyone to stand up, look away, stretch, then look back at their drawing and be aware of the part of the drawing they were drawn to. She asked that each member of the group imagine what it would be like to be in that part of their drawing. A further fifteen minutes was provided for participants to each create a second drawing from this provocation.

As an inquiry, each participant took turns to pin these two drawings on the wall and describe each drawing in terms of form (line, colour, shape, etc.). Describing form at this stage of the drawing inquiry, equips the group with visual art language they may need such as: “firm line”, “geometric shape” or “drawn with the side of the crayon”. This approach is a phenomenological one as it interrupts the experiences of creative art making, by getting participants to look differently at the artworks and focus on describing the form. This then leads to a focus on interpreting the thing itself and what it means (Lett, 2001). When interpreting others’ artworks, it is appropriate to state how you feel about someone else’s work.
and to suggest what it might mean but important to own these personalised statements by saying “For me…” or “I feel that…” (Lett, 2001). As way of demonstration, Shelley followed the descriptions of the artworks by asking the creator of the drawing what they thought or how they felt about different aspects of the drawing and encouraged others to also ask questions.

A rich insight emerged into each creator’s focussed research project along with insights into how they identified the research problem in a personal and relational context, how they relate to teacher education, and a reflexive take on their practice. These drawings are displayed below accompanied by statements from each creator/participant.

Leicha

Upon commencing my first drawing (Figure 1) the red thick lines illustrated my discombobulated state during my introduction to self-study, which had an unsettling effect on my typically comfortable position as a reflective mathematics teacher educator. I was unsure of what constituted self-study. I questioned the legitimacy of my approach to this project and felt both tentative and apprehensive. The pacifying clouds of pink expressed how the collaborative process of discovering self-study with my research partner (represented by the golden oval) through our readings, reflections, and correspondence has had a settling, almost soothing, effect on me. I was attracted to creating a unifying band of green as a way to represent the nurturing and supportive nature of the group. This first drawing highlighted the struggles and successes I was having in formalising my self-study journey.

Figure 1. Leicha’s initial drawing.
My second drawing (Figure 2) represented the unexpected calmness that had descended on me as a result of my involvement in self-study. Some small anxieties were visible as thin, purple cracks within a sea of blue calmness. These anxieties may always sit with me. Overall, I have realised that the connections with my paired collaborator, the CREPE group, and the written contributions from those in the field of self-study have elevated my comfort level in this satisfying and profitable journey to improve my pedagogical practice and relationships with my students and peers. Through this exercise I better understand the safety net my colleagues’ support offers within our self-study group as I refine my teacher education practices.

![Figure 2. Leicha’s second drawing reflecting on initial drawing.](image)

*Jo*

My first drawing that depicted the self-study project focused on drama as pedagogy for teaching sustainability. In my second drawing (Figure 3) I drew an enclosed organic sphere-like shape to depict the drama workshop with pre-service teachers. Using the broad side of the crayon I attempted to soften the edges to suggest that while the workshop experience was contained, it was permeable, and open to other influences. Inside it, shapes (with eyes) were placed randomly depicting diverse workshop participants. Placed amongst them, were two irregular
shapes representing the two teacher educators and the different ideas (colours) and energies they bring to the space as facilitators and co-participants in the learning process. I drew other matter around the shapes to depict the theory and ideas that we (students and teachers) were collectively exploring in the workshop. I added pulses of energy to show constant movement as the participants worked together in embodied and practical ways.

Figure 3. Jo’s second drawing.

Upon reflection we noticed that my drawing resembled a biological cell. I wondered if this occurred through semi-conscious recognition of the connections between my familiar field of drama and issues of sustainability of life. The living reproducing cell offered a metaphor for understanding the workshop when ideas within it are reproduced by pre-service teachers in their future teaching.

John

As an unreconstructed, logical, positivist, the idea of representing my research as a drawing (Figure 4) was confronting. However immersion in the physical act of creating colours and shapes immediately demanded companion colours and forms, excluded others and thus drove forward through the fear. The aesthetic demands of the drawings exerted an impulse that was independent of the representation. Both drawings represented journeys: the first (Figure 4), in the fleshy richness of pastels, of curved lines flowing downward from left to right; the second (Figure 5) with earthy, acerbic browns and black, straight lines and sharp angles jerking upward from bottom left to top right.
Figure 4 carolled of the joys of collaboration. Figure 5, represented my trepidation of doing research. My research project is to simultaneously understand and enhance collaboration within the group. We describe it as the overarching collaborative research project (with the focussed research projects forming under this umbrella). It is an enquiry into the giving and taking of reasons (Brandom, 2000), the exchange of trust, and the formation of collective identity (Vygotsky, 1987). The creation of our community of practice expands the possibilities of our practice (Engeström, Y., Pasanen, A., Toiviainen, H., & Haavisto, V., 2006).

Figure 4. John's initial drawing.

While my research is enthralled to the sirens of theory-saturated abstraction it is also bound to the mast of my teaching: working with a team of talented tutors to articulate and model the professional practice of teaching. This tension is represented in the contrast between my two pictures.

Figure 5. John's second drawing reflecting on initial drawing.
Shelley
The two-dimensional, flower-type form with dark green lines protruding out from a central point, represented my multiple careers as artist, art educator, and creative arts therapist. I drew lines in pale green, blue and pink to show how I understand creativity, artistic and other aspects of my teaching from this wellspring of self and professional experiences. These lines went back and forth to show how I convey my knowledge and experience to my students in different ways but also listen to them and respond to their feedback. This is a two way process.

Figure 6. Shelley’s initial drawing.

As this drawing developed, it resembled a fruit. My focussed project had been to try to understand a complex creativity issue through meeting with art teachers and reviewing creativity theory and practice theory. This fruit form represented this body of work, which linked back to my multiple, professional identities but was symbolic of the good solid basis of theoretical knowledge, teaching and research experience I had built. I was feeling excited about a number of related research projects that I was beginning to develop with colleagues, which were represented as the green organic shoots from this fruit. I was learning more about the landscape of my teaching practice and how my multi-practiced self (and the fruits of this work), were being put to good use as a teacher educator. I had felt uncomfortable having different practices and professional identities as artist, aca-
ademic, teacher as this had not been encouraged by past mentors. The CREPE group supported me in this and to be interdisciplinary. Figure 7 represents feeling centred and invigorated by undertaking my research project into creativity.

![Figure 7. Shelley's second drawing reflecting on initial drawing.](image)

**Peta**

As I mapped the methods and research interactions of our self-study focussed project I wanted to make an accurate representation, although I was disappointed with how literal my diagram appeared (Figure 8). Yet this clarity (for me) seemed useful and generative. I drew the developing relationship between my co-researcher and me and how our research is action orientated and really coming from the heart (meaning that it is enjoyable and based in our teaching practice).

My second picture (Figure 9) stemmed from a place I was drawn to and then represented how I felt when I was there. This picture was a joy to draw and share. I knew the colour and the shape the instant my eyes landed on the place in my first diagram. I knew it by heart! It was strong, bright green yet flexible and responsive, and it filled me with joy… this is how I feel when my research project and reflexive practice ‘sings’.

The act of mapping the project as a drawing and then responding to the observations of my colleagues with my interpretations enabled a deep and critical view. I was able to (re)consider the project and forward plan where I might like it to go next. The practices of self-study (sharing, interpreting, being critical and supportive, and valuing others opinions), and especially these arts-based methods, support my teaching practice.
Figure 8. Peta’s initial drawing.

Figure 9. Peta’s second drawing reflecting on initial drawing.
Discussion: Drawing Our Individual Projects

The sharing of our art works was approached with mixed feelings and some of us apologised in advance for the inadequacies that we perceived in them. Each one of us was surprised by how much we had to say about our drawings as there was more to them than we had realised at the time of drawing. Listening to each other’s explanation of how we understood our research project while viewing the accompanying art image focused us and gave rise to a deeper, more attentive listening. In this task we were engaged in a simultaneous process of learning about each other as well as each other’s teaching practices, role in the collaborative CREPE project, and individual or partnered CREPE research projects. These aspects of our self/work/identity/practice/history/aspirations etc. were expressed and articulated in more holistic and integrated ways showing how wrong it is to separate our work from our individual selves. With this in mind, Jo suggested extending Shelley’s drawing exercise with a second one on the beach that would consider body, space and the place experience (Malpas, 1999) of our beach-house retreat.

Collaborative Project: Individual/Collaborative Drawings on Sand

Drawing our collaborative research into the sand resonated with Jo’s understandings about aesthetic learning and arts-based research methodologies that are often based in embodied experiences and communal reflective dialogue (Finley, 2011). The beach offered us an opportunity to draw large scale in ways that involved the entire body. It offered us a physical experience of using seaweed and found objects amongst the wind and sea. Keeping in line with changing places as part of our reflective work about our practices, we felt it important to be in the wide, open space of the beach, free of all the usual trappings of our academic work. We were building on knowledge that arts-based research is a way to create “a spatial metaphor that is not only of a semantic, cognitive or graphical nature but also importantly of a physical nature” (Heracleous & Jacobs, 2011, p. 31).

The drawings we created are presented along with excerpts about how we each made sense of this stage of our self-study journey and how we each mapped our CREPE research project.

Leicha

The low tide at the beach offered us a 40 metre wide expanse of flat, damp sand. I focussed on the myriad of fragments washed up by the sea. I wanted to take inspiration from the sea matter offered. Some of these fragments appeared to be carefully placed on the sand by the tumultuous waters and had unified to form a collective. I was drawn to an assembly of debris that hemmed the hint of a line
formed by the foamed edge of a wave. Each piece of the debris had started their journey from varied beginnings but had come together to this single space in time as a result of the sea’s action sweeping them there. Similarly, our CREPE members have varied experiences but were buoyed together by the desire to respond to the call of one member of our group to explore self-study. We came as many to form the singular. I drew a rectangular, landscape-oriented frame into the sand around the debris and titled it “Collaboration” (see Figure 10). I collected other small items from the beach to add to my beach art as a way to represent the external influences on our self-study group: our students and colleagues, key academics in the field, and our university.

Figure 10. Leicha’s beach drawing.

Shelley
I was drawn to a small smooth black rock protruding from the smooth sand. It’s positioning represented the slight isolation I was feeling living and working so far away from the others in our regional/rural university campus. Its mountain-like form represented my focussed project on different definitions of creativity, between myself and my students (see Figure 11).
I was attracted to this rock as it was close to where Leicha was drawing. She and I had shared insights into teaching and planned to explore interdisciplinary links together. The retreat time and space outside of our university environment, had enabled me to know my colleagues and their practices more deeply; I created a path of rocks to Leicha’s drawing and wrote “stepping stones”; I drew lines that connected back and forth to each participant’s drawing on the beach which required long walks across the sand dragging a specially selected stick for each participant’s double arrowed line. I did this to represent evolving interconnections that I had identified with each CREPE member.

Jo
I began by drawing a large circle to represent our CREPE research group and its overarching project. Inside that circle were smaller circles that represented our focussed projects and within even smaller circles represented the individuals in-
involved. I used arrows to represent the theoretical and conceptual influences that flow both ways in the project (see Figure 12).

![Figure 12. Jo’s beach drawing.](image)

I felt my first attempt was inadequate; it did not capture a sense of how our focussed projects could influence and inform each other’s research and teaching practices. In my second attempt I scribed two large concentric circles. The outer one represented our CREPE group and the inner one the overarching collaborative research. Inside the inner circle were overlapping circles that represented the focussed projects. In this model, the focussed projects appeared distinct while also connected to the other projects within the group offering potential for our self-studies of teaching practice to influence and inform the practice of others. Although this diagram (see Figure 13) seemed to come a little closer to depicting the way I understood the project, I was still not satisfied. My colleagues commented that I had chosen to draw my models perilously close to the rising tide. I was quite comfortable with the idea that these diagrams would soon be washed away. I welcomed a clean sweep of sand and a new blank canvas on which to attempt to understand the emerging possibilities of our collaborative research.
Figure 13. Jo’s beach drawing continued.

John
At the time I was interested in boundaries and connections (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). The outer circle represents the group encompassing a number of focussed research projects (strange shapes) and the people involved (tangled, organic seaweed). Research is connected and people are connected not only to other members of the group but also to people outside the group. Although it is not clear from the photo there are multiple forms of connection (arrows, broad scrapings, footsteps, lines … ) which represent not only the modes of communication (face-to-face/technology mediated; textual/image; cerebral/embodied) and our epistemologies, but also the values that bind us together and drive us forward.

The mystery of this drawing is what the stones wandering in from the sea on the left might mean. I am reminded of walking stones of Death Valley (Norris, Norris, Lorenz, Ray, & Jackson, 2014), and, almost a year later, now see them representing the opportunities and disruptions that creep in, unobserved unless we practice attentiveness, to our group (see Figure 14).
Peta
I loved the idea of an expansive wet canvas, big enough for me to ‘feel’ with my entire body. I felt that I intuitively knew what I wanted to represent, but it was the embodied (entire body) effort required to make the representation that felt invigorating (this and the chill wind). My first efforts were, in my opinion, (again) hopelessly literal. They captured my thoughts without any creative expression and I wanted to try again (see Figure 15). I moved to a different place and attempted a different space. I used words to represent ideas and played with lines, shape, objects, and sizes.

Figure 14. John’s beach drawing.
The outcomes were a step-wise deepening of my ideas and considerations as to what it is that we are really doing in this research group/project. The embodied process allowed me to push myself beyond the literal and into a more creative and representational depiction of our research. This, the fresh air, the coastal energy, and the wild sky moved me forward and, simultaneously, bound me close to my collaborators and co-researchers (see Figure 16).
I, too, represented a series of focussed projects bound by our overarching collaboration project and with arrows of interchange in and out of our group. The next diagram included a wavy, outer line representing the flexible and responsive nature of our group with intersecting circles representing our focussed projects. There was a core to this representation – a flat, black rock… it represented our strength in collaboration.

**Discussion: Drawing Our Research**

Having continued to work through our focussed and overarching collaborative research projects in the intervening seven months, we reflected on the beach-house arts-based inquiry. Sharing, bracketing out assumptions, and owning our interpretations of other’s art, listening, interpreting, checking we understood each other had been a hermeneutic spiral (Laverty, 2003) of engaging the two arts-based inquiry sessions then dialoguing as a group and within more focussed projects.

We had set out to understand *how we could continue to develop our teaching practice to ensure we are high quality, contemporary teacher educators*. We had ended up (1) learning about our self and practice as teacher educators but had at the same time (2) trialled and learnt about using arts-based, self-study, hermeneutic methodology. It was through our preparedness to explore arts-based methods that this second aspect had emerged and this aspect had strongly informs how we understand (1). These two aspects of our research are summarised:

**What We Each Learnt About Our Self/Practice as Teacher Educator:**

*Leicha*

The major issue that arose out of collaborating in the CREPE research is about connectedness. Connectedness has raised more questions for me as I consider more deeply how am I making the multitude of connections between my assessment practices, unit and program content, stated graduate learning outcomes, the current foci in schools, the needs voiced by my students, and the voice of our global community.

The CREPE group has influenced my noticing of issues around connectedness through the rich environment of belonging that this collaboration has offered us. If I can feel more fulfilled in my teaching through connecting with a diverse cohort of educators then connecting to the larger web of our educating community, will enhance my curriculum and assessment design practices and in turn the outcomes for my students.
Shelley
My focussed project explored how my different practices contributed to my definition of creativity and how this definition might be different to that of my students and therefore a cause of the different kinds of student engagement. Analysing my own narratives, reading student reflections, exploring practice theory and creativity theory had helped me to understand this issue more. Members of the CREPE group had been sounding boards for my ideas, offering advice about their own issues of creativity in their teaching practices. Learning (from my CREPE community) that my colleagues had encountered similar issues to me, made me feel less alone in my teaching and part of a community of practice – particularly as we began to plan research plan to research projects together building on common issues.

Expressing ideas through my drawings and then inquiring into their meanings within the CREPE community had been central to identifying this problem of creativity in my practice and resolving it. At the time of writing this conclusion, I was being more courageous about the kinds of creative experiences I was giving my students and, because of my research I was able to articulate how important these creative experiences were for them as developing teachers.

Jo
Each of my drawings included representations of people in spaces of learning and the relationships between them. In each case my drawing attempted to show movement and dynamism, depicted by pulses of energy in one drawing and arrows in all directions in another. Learning, for me, is depicted as something generated in and amongst the learners and these learners include both students and teachers – in what Freire (1970/2011) would call co-intentional education. I realised when I look back at the drawings that I have attempted to draw the ways I value relationships, opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogues, and working with colleagues from different disciplines to design and implement pedagogy that makes a difference. The pre-service teachers, as both students and soon-to-be-teachers, are also contributors to the discussion about the learning experiences. Learning flows all ways. Not satisfied with my attempts, I welcomed the rising tide to provide a new blank canvas and another chance to depict my continually emerging understandings. This knowledge, as Freire (1970/2011) suggests, “emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p.72).

John
This collaboration, and the research I have been doing on our and other collaborations, has spawned new research for me. I have gained insights into my colleagues’
practices and with Peta I am investigating the off-campus student experience. As a science educator the arts-based research and collaborations with the art educators in the group, have inspired me to explore creativity across the Arts and Science.

Peta
I engaged wholeheartedly, excited to see life breathe into the wings of our research community – we had shuffled along and made it to this place and were now fledging. The metaphor of the bird learning to soar stays with me. It feels magical, exciting, and possible! I have learnt about leadership, collegiality and continued on my adventure of embodiment. I have grown to love self-study in this application for the positive, homelike feeling I get when I engage with most of what it means to be in this community.

Teaching and educating are relational activities (based on and in relationships) and being a teacher educator turbo-charges the practice of ‘relationship’. Working in a community of practice I feel supported and empowered to explore my own inquiries of practice. Through our retreat I had many opportunities to flex my relationship muscles as I gave and took and lead and followed and enjoyed the challenges of nutting things out together. The power of the collective is something I find replenishing.

I learned about my limitations and imperfections and how these added to, rather than detracted from, the richness of our collaborations. Sharing my hesitations felt useful in the same way that being positive and ‘dreaming’ collectively felt invigorating.

I took some time to consider my scholarship since the retreat and I believe that it is through my self-study research that I have come to be a better educator, colleague, and person.

What We Learnt About Doing Arts-Based, Self-Study, Hermeneutic Methodology?

Leicha
Arts-based research was a new approach to me; it was both nerve-wracking and liberating. The process was initially daunting as it took me into foreign territory. I concur with Malchiodi’s (2010) suggestion that arts-based methodology is an immediate and metaphoric expression of my scholarship journey.

The breakthrough from being self-conscious to accepting this process was when we were asked to describe the form of our pictures rather than be a critic of our drawings. It was a useful step in making me feel more comfortable about what you noticed in the picture without being judgmental about composition. This is an effective way to lead people who are novices in art to be equipped with suitable
language like line, tone etc. These are observational not judgmental words. The fact that I have allowed my drawings to be shared with the readers of this paper is in itself an enormous step to feeling comfortable with sharing my self-study journey through arts-based methodologies. The realisation that I do not have to be an artist to accessing my thinking through this way has opened up an alternative vehicle of self-awareness.

**Shelley**

Doing arts-based research with colleagues, who had not used this in self-study before, was rewarding. I felt supported as my colleagues had stepped into my world a little. I had learnt that some participants who are not used to art expression and discussion had felt uneasy about the experience. As one of the facilitators for the arts-based inquiry, I had come to terms with sometimes feeling like a captain of our communal ship that was in unchartered waters because we were trying to find “the new” that was happening with our research and as a community of practice.

**Jo**

This project was not the first time for me to use arts-based research but it was the first opportunity to explore arts-based methods with colleagues from across non-arts discipline areas. As an arts educator, I have long understood the potential of the arts to say the things that cannot be said in other ways. Eisner (2002) reminds us: “The arts make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor number exhaust what we can know. The limits of our language do not define the limits of our cognition” (p.71). The approach to drawing our research, combined with collaborative self-study was new to us all, and in shifting us away from more usual research approaches, it placed us, as fellow explorers, in a kind of liminal space of possibility. This was a space in which we became open to conversations and shared understandings about research and teaching practice that we were unlikely to have had otherwise. We have continued to draw upon arts-based methods in our self-study. I realise that the aesthetic quality of the arts-based approach appeals to us as humans, as well as researchers, by reaching us through more of our senses. Through the recursive hermeneutical interpretive processes of this approach we explore rich veins of symbol and metaphor that explain and reveal more than just words.

**John**

My understanding of reflection and self-study has grown through arts-based research. It has helped me to consider not just what I express in my communication but how to deeply and respectfully listen and reflect. These new insights into listening differently translate to my teaching practice.
Peta
I learned that I can express myself despite limitations with my drawing skills and that expression is just one aspect of what is beautiful in the amalgamation of these methods/methodologies. I value living the nexus, the possibility, and the potential. I also value the hermeneutic spiral that reminds me of the place I embody as well as the colleagues I share this space with and the potential of all future collaborations. I feel evangelical about arts-based methods and found myself reaching for my new drawing folio (provided by our CREPE group) to unpack a theoretical problem the other day... the process of drawing it out helped me to interpret and analyse the situation I was unpacking. Beautiful!

My self-study practice generates collaborations and collegiality and I now crave scholarship and embodied practice in this way. As a new person on staff I was aware of my lack of ‘friends’. The CREPE community has given me research collaborators who stretch and cultivate me simultaneously.

Conclusion
In the open, natural, and shared space of the beach house retreat and the collaborative research space we had created, each person metaphorically mapped out their experiences of their projects, scholarship, collaborative relationships, feelings, self, practice and stages of their research journey. They created these metaphoric maps in their drawings and discussions that guided each other through these personal/practice landscapes. Through the collaborative sharing, that has in turn been shared in this paper we came to understand the terrain of our research: where people had travelled from, what they had learnt, what we were learning from each other and also, the way we were coming to understand the project/s. Importantly, we communicated our experiences through art that had not been previously realised through talking or writing alone.

The crayon and beach drawing experiences reminded us that we spend a great deal of time communicating through written words, engaging in conversations, both face to face and mediated by screens, and most often in seated positions. Over our careers we have also spent a lot of time bound in our discipline groups dwelling on issues unique to these discipline areas of teacher education. The project described in this paper shifted us into spaces that were new to all of us - the physical space of the beach house and the aesthetic space of the drawing activities. Some of the CREPE members were a little unsure of self-study and even more uncertain about doing arts-based inquiry. These unfamiliar spaces that we shared were a significant factor in our ability to collaborate openly and deeply. The arts-based research at the beach house provided what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) might call a smooth space of becoming, one that was free of the constraints and conventions of our usual workplaces and discipline concerns and one that would
give rise to new possibilities for seeing things differently and as people started to see things differently, they believed more in the process.

The arts-based, self-study research discussed in this paper, enabled contours of our practice landscape to be examined, explored through individual and collaborative research, then re-configured or sculpted, with the findings revealed above. As a discourse community, we have offered these new perspectives as a way to continue to develop an individual’s teaching practice in a collaborate setting to ensure the development of high quality, contemporary teacher educators.

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Endnotes
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References


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**Dr. Jo Raphael** is Lecturer in Drama Education in the Faculty of Arts and Education at Deakin University. As a teacher educator and researcher in arts education she regularly spends time in school classrooms and in community arts contexts. Jo’s recent research interests and publications have been in the areas of drama education, inclusive education, and applied drama and theatre. Her PhD study incorporated arts-based methods and brought together her interests in, drama as pedagogy, inclusive education and teacher education. Jo is Artistic Director of Fusion Theatre, an inclusive theatre company and is currently on the board of Drama Australia.

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**Dr. Leicha Bragg** is a Senior Lecturer in Mathematics Education at Deakin University, Melbourne. As a member of the Collaborative Reflective Experience and Practice in Education Team, her research examines pre-service teachers’ assessment tasks and online learning through a self-study approach. Her work also focuses on the educative use of mathematical games, children's literature in primary mathematics classrooms, mathematical reasoning, and in a joint research project with the University of British Columbia, Canada, she explores posing and adapting rich mathematics problems residing in photographic images.

**Dr. John Cripps-Clark** is a lecturer in Science and Technology Education and Science Communication at Deakin University. He has taught in universities, secondary and primary schools in Victoria and N.S.W. He conducts research in primary science education in rural and urban schools in Victoria, NSW and the ACT focusing on exemplary primary teachers of science and their use of practical activities. He is founder a long running international discussion group in cultural historical activity theory and conducts professional development activity in Victoria, Vanuatu and Lithuania.