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Recollage as a tool for self-care: Reflecting multimodally on first five years in the academy through Schwab's lines of flight

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(Re)collage as autoethnographic method: Reflecting multimodally on the first five years in the academy through Schwab's lines of flight

Abstract

Working in the academy can be both challenging and exciting as it can be trying and difficult to negotiate if one is unprepared. Past research has acknowledged the importance of reflective practice in order to face such trials positively. This study utilised arts-based/multimodal reflection to contemplate the lived experience of one early career researcher in her first five years of employment. Adopting an autoethnographic approach, the researcher regularly reflected via the medium of collage. This paper reports on recollaged artefacts. These were analysed in relation to meta-semiotic meanings as well as how they corresponded to Schwab's 'lines of flight' taking both positive and negative acuties. Findings showed that taking the time to delineate feelings via arts-based reflection can reveal silent thoughts and deliberations and support an early career academic in appreciating and improving awareness of higher education regularities. Implications highlight how autoethnographic recollage can be effective for early career academics.

Keywords: (re)collage, reflection, arts-based research, autoethnography, early career researcher, the academy

Introduction

Working in the academy has been noted to be both challenging and rewarding, particularly for early career researchers within the first five years of their employment (Herbert, Coveney, Clarke, Graves & Barnett, 2014; Sutherland, 2017). Negotiating within these complex spaces (McKay & Monk, 2016) is therefore important for academics to be able to work both productively and positively (McAlpine, Amundsen & Turner, 2014). An examination of the literature reveals that reflecting on the everyday and lived experience of academia is beneficial in understanding policies, procedures and consequently practices (Barkham, 2007; Lew & Schmidt, 2011). Challenges reported by early career scholars include high workloads (Graham, 2016), lack of professional development opportunities in technology use (Gregory & Lodge, 2015), confusion as to what counts as achievement (Altbach, 2005), diversification

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3 in the workforce (Whitchurch, 2018), casualisation (Loveday, 2017), capitalism impacting on
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5 academia (Rhoades & Torres-Olave, 2015), sexism (Gutiérrez, Neimann, González, &
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7 Harris, 2012; Tindall & McWilliams, 2006) and race (Tippeconnic-Fox, 2008).
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10 With so many pressures on early career academics, it is important that effective and
11
12 consistent reflection is actioned (Matsuoka, 2016). Reflection enables a certain kind of
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14 thinking that asks how things are going, why they are going the way they are, and how can
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16 things be improved for next time (Ryan & Ryan, 2013). Reflective thinking has been noted to
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18 be particularly important for those working within the higher education sector (Warren,
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20 2016), particularly given the constant pressures placed upon academics as noted in the
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22 literature. According to Chickering, Dalton and Stamm (2006), reflection is:
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27 ...the absolutely necessary intervening activity that converts input—whatever the
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29 experiences are—into meaningful working knowledge that can be tested in other
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31 settings. Without reflection, whatever new experiences we have, whatever new
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33 information and concepts we encounter...end up like the residue from food we don't
34
35 metabolize. (p. 121)
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39 This paper consequently shares my experiences as an early career academic in my first five
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41 years of ongoing full-time employment. Using autoethnographic and arts-based approaches to
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43 reflection, I regularly undertook reflection through multiple means in the aim to understand
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45 the academic environment in which I worked. Methods included collaged artwork,
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47 improvised music compositions and journaling. For the purpose of this paper, only the
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49 collaged work and journaling will be explored. The overarching research question for this
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51 study therefore was:
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56 How effective is arts-based/multimodal reflection in supporting an Early Career
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58 Researcher's professional growth and reflection in the academy?
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Theorising arts-based research as a reflective autoethnographic method

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is essentially about oneself and the journey of personal experience in different contexts. Adams, Ellis and Holman Jones (2017) describe autoethnography as a research method that uses “personal experience to describe and interpret cultural texts, experiences, beliefs and practices” (p. 1). These authors highlight one purpose of autoethnography is to share insider knowledge of a particular cultural or social experience.

As a qualitative method, autoethnography utilises reflection and reflective practice in varied ways. Written autoethnographies have dominated research but more recently, researchers have experimented with other modes of reflection including dramatic performance and script writing (Denzin, 2003), dance (Barbour, 2012), and poetry (Prendergast, 2013). Findings from such autoethnographic studies research have proven that presenting information through other modes other than language can powerfully represent meaning—often unbeknown to the researcher. Adams et al. (2017) for example, believed other methods often enable the opportunity to be able to capture everyday experiences that may not be possible through written means. For autoethnographers, reflection or ‘rigorous self-reflection’ (Adams et al., 2017) is a key skill needed to record personal information.

Reflection and professional practice

Being a ‘reflective practitioner’ is important for our professional working lives (Behari-Leak, 2017; Schön, 1983). In fact, Schön (1983) in his seminal work, noted that in our professions we reflect *on* action and *in* action. This means that reflection is an important tool for when we go about our daily work as well as when we think about it after the fact. Similarly, Jennings and Baldwin (2010) stated that reflection allows the possibility to explore relationships

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3 between mandated practices within systems compared to an individual's purposeful intent
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5 within these spaces. An example was where creative health workers needed to reflect
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7 regularly in order to carry out self-care practices (AUTHOR, 2016).
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11 Deep reflection can lead to critical and transformative practice where we become empowered
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13 to initiate change (Ryan, 2015). Ryan and Bourke's (2012) work refers to this as being
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15 reflexive professionals. They drew on Archer's (2007) framework of reflexivity to explore
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17 how "teachers manage competing influences and deliberate about pedagogic action in the
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19 classroom" (p. 413), arguing the need for teachers to be the drivers of quality rather than
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21 accepting mandated practices from 'top-down'. Archer's (2007) framework included a
22
23 number of reflexive modes known as meta reflexive, autonomous reflexive, communicative
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25 reflexive and fractured reflexive arguing that meta reflexive is where we are most effective
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27 (Goodman, 2016) and can professionally grow (Hofer, 2017).
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33 Such work aligns with Schwab's (1970) notion of 'flights from the field' for the professional.
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35 Schwab (1970) notes these flights as: to other fields, flights upward, downward, to the
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37 sidelines, flights of preservation and final flight. Without reflexive skills, it is not possible for
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39 educators to consider the 'flights' they may encounter in their professional lives and therefore
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41 they may continue to have limited knowledge and understanding of the mechanisms of power
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43 within systems. Further, the research of Moffatt (2014) explored creative reflection that
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45 encouraged more critical thinking and creativity in the reflection process. This study showed
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47 that for creative people, reflecting through modes other than words allowed them to express
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49 certain strengths and creative traits that would otherwise be impossible and/or unrewarding
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51 (Croft, 2015).
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Arts-based research and meta-semiotic meanings

Many researchers have noted how reflecting through words alone can fail to uncover deeper instincts/manifestations evident in the person (Black, 2019; Clarke & Bautista, 2017; AUTHOR, 2018). In fact, Park-Fuller (2000) stated that a 'revealing of what has been kept hidden' is possible through autobiographical narrative performances:

...the performer often speaks about acts of social transgression. In doing so, the telling of the story itself becomes a transgressive act—a revealing of what has been kept hidden, a speaking of what has been silenced—an act of reverse discourse that struggles with the preconceptions borne in the air of dominant politics. (Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 26).

Such an approach aligns with Ryan and Bourke's (2012) notion of reflexivity, whereby participants can discover what discourses are privileged in certain work environments, and how they can push back against these. Arts-based and multimodal approaches can support professionals' work in reflecting on the context, content, and space in which they work. Yuen's (2016) study for example showed how the arts can be used as a method of inquiry in Indigenous communities when reflecting on the meaning of leisure and experiences in healing (p. 338). Yuen (2016) presented how the use of metaphor, symbolism and other forms of communication assisted the Indigenous women to express strong messages of social justice. Kovach (2009) similarly highlighted how arts-based methods disclose the fluidity of metaphor which can unsettle dominant discourses; empowering other- for example - Indigenous ways of knowing (p. 60).

In relation to an autoethnographic method, Leitch's (2006) work showed how teachers developed their identities through arts-based reflective methods. The participant in Leitch's (2006) study used creative narrative approaches to express emotional and social

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3 characteristics that assisted them to identify new action and directions in their lives (p. 566).
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5 Studies such as Leitch's (2006) influenced the research presented in this paper, largely due to
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7 the researcher being an artist/musician and new to the academy.
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Background to the study: On being in the academy

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13 Many researchers have grappled with the ongoing pressures associated with working in the
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15 academy alongside the many benefits with what such roles provide. Personally, when I first
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17 found out I was successful in gaining an ongoing position in academia in 2012, I was very
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19 excited. It took me 11 years post-PhD to successfully find a full-time academic role
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21 (AUTHOR, 2014). It did not take very long for me to realise that many colleagues struggled
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23 with everyday stressors due to the negative content of conversations in the workplace
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25 (Behari-Leak, 2017). Issues such as workload, limited support for administrative duties, and
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27 the uncertainty surrounding the future of higher education all featured in this discourse. I
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29 therefore recognised my need to spend time regularly to reflect on my own experience and as
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31 an artist I was craving creative practice—largely to maintain sanity. In order to do this I used
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33 the qualitative research methodology of autoethnography through arts-based methods. Such
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35 an approach allowed me to reflect on my experiences as both the researcher and researchee.
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41 Ellis (2009) explains the role of an autoethnographer:

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44 “As an autoethnographer, I am both the author and focus of the story, the one who
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46 tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and the
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48 created. I am the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking
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50 and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller” (Ellis,
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52 2009, p. 13)
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57 Being able to record personal, social and cultural experience through autoethnography
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59 allowed a sense of flow in reflective thought (Johns, 2009). As previously discussed in the
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3 review of the literature, much autoethnographic work is carried out through written
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5 composition (Gullion, 2016) but it has been acknowledged that diverse modes facilitate
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7 deeper perspectives (Leitch, 2006). As an arts-based researcher, I often engage in multimodal
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9 reflection when investigating certain phenomenon (see AUTHOR, 2013; AUTHOR, 2016 for
10
11 example) as I know the power it can have in revealing veiled notions of identity—ones that
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13 are not so obvious but are drawn out through arts-based and multimodal practice (Adams et
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15 al., 2017).
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Research design: Materials, methods and analytical approach

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23 At the core of this study was the desire to express my thoughts and feelings about my
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25 everyday work, to reflect on the challenges and subconsciously place on the page what might
26
27 be the solutions. I sought to interact with an inner dialogue through collage and other arts
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29 practice as a way to reveal intrinsic knowings (MacKenzie & Wolf, 2012) that may for the
30
31 most part be hidden due to the busyness of academic life. According to Irwin (2004), such
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33 work creates a space to for “knowing (theoria), doing (praxis), and making (poiesis)” (p. 27)
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35 whereby artists/teachers/researchers create an “existence that desires an aesthetic experience
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37 found in an elegance of flow between intellect, feeling and practice” (Irwin, 2004, p. 29).
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42 As qualitative research, I approached this study from both practical and interpretative lenses.
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44 I utilised collage as a means of expressing ideas—both intellectual and emotional—with the
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46 aim to analyse these images through two theoretical frameworks. The first was Schwab’s
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48 (1970) ‘flights from the field’ that act as an interpretive tool in revealing differences,
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50 similarities and tensions of my perceived experience in academia (Lemon & Garvis, 2014b).
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52 The flights can be used to identify similarities, differences, tensions and contentedness within
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54 academic life. Schwab’s work has been used in numerous self-studies (see Schwab, 1970;
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56 Garvis & Lemon, 2014a and 2014b for example). The lines of flight allow an individual to
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3 reflect on their roles and personal and professional experiences and how they may learn from
4 these. Schwab's belief that any issues faced might be 'slippery to grasp' (Lemon & Garvis,
5 2014b, p. 4) because they "intrinsically involve states of character and the possibly of
6 character change" (Schwab 1970, p. 3). He stated that not all flights are "equally
7 reprehensible" (p. 4) as they can be positive or negative but above all we can learn from them
8 all.

9
10 Schwab (1970) identified six different flights that Lemon and Garvis (2014a, 2014b) expand
11 upon. These include:

- 12 1. General flight – experiences that contribute to motivations in entering academia.
- 13 2. Flight upwards – opportunities that are stimulating or inspiring throughout career
14 trajectory
- 15 3. Flight downward – the challenges/barriers/questions that are asked in relation to
16 experiences, lack of opportunities or how people have been treated.
- 17 4. Flight to sideline – moment(s) when a step to the side is taken to observe, reflect and
18 reconsider what is happening.
- 19 5. Flight of perseveration – a repetition of old and familiar knowledge in new languages
20 which add little or nothing to the old meanings embodied
- 21 6. Final flight – when questions are asked about where to next? what needs to be
22 achieved? what strategies help in focusing on growth and career development?
23 (Lemon & Garvis, 2014a, p. 235, 2014b, p. 5)

24
25 For the purpose of this paper, reflecting on my own direction and growth as an early career
26 academic enabled the opportunity to 'see' any issues I was facing, that may have not been
27 easily viewed prior to the deliberate reflection through the use of collage.
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In addition to Schwab's notes of 'flight from the field', I used Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) three meta-semiotic meanings of representational, interpersonal and compositional meanings to both describe and interpret the images. Ideational or representational meanings take into account those that are constructed by the forms of representation of events in the material world. These include visual meaning associated with images, objects and participants as well as the circumstances in which symbolic meaning occurs. Interpersonal or interactive meanings involve the relationships between the participants as well as between the viewer or reader and what is viewed or read, and textual or compositional meanings relate to the ways in which objects and/or people are placed within a space. All three metasemiotic meanings can often signpost information value or planned emphasis on what is privileged over other subject matter (AUTHOR, 2014; AUTHOR, 2014). Exploring each of the meanings within the collages allowed me to 'see' meanings that were perhaps hidden prior to undertaking the methods in the study.

A number of methods were used for the whole study. These are outlined in Table 1 below:

Type of data	Number and timeframe of this set	Materials and techniques used
Collage	9 over 5 years (ongoing)	Coloured paper, magazines, scissors, glue, ripping paper by hand, acrylic paint
Improvised music compositions	16 over 5 years (ongoing)	Piano, electric keyboard or violin
Journaling	22 entries over 5 years (post collage and music compositions)	Hand written or typed or audio recorded

Table 1: Methods used in this study

For the purpose of this paper I report on four of the collaged reflections and their associated journal entries (numbers 1, 2, 4 and 8). I have termed these works as *Recollages*, that is collaged and written recollections/reflections.

Results: (Re)collaged findings

Flight 1: All at the beginning

I created my first *Recollage* within 12 months of commencing my new position. The following discourse will firstly describe the image using the two of the three meta-semiotic meanings and secondly, interpreting the interpersonal meaning and line of flight it relates to.

<INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE>

Wow – the thing that stands out to me the most with this Recollage are the eyes looking right at me. I would say this is how I feel a lot in my new job—always trying to do what I think people want but also knowing that whatever I do will be seen. I just need to keep working, working, working...The other main feature of this Recollage is how I possibly feel closed in and dark but there are all these really nice things, like baking, flowers, candles and natural environments that I know are out of reach...at the moment.

Figure 1: Recollage#1 (2nd of September 2013)***Description***

Recollage#1 distinctively represents a framed darker section—like a doorway—where eyes are staring back at me. The text says “The more I do, the more frightened I get. But that is essential. Otherwise why would I go on doing it?” Compositionally, there is a separation between this part of the image and a framed lighter section running down the left side, along the bottom and up the right-hand side of the page. Within this framed section are objects such as flowers, cupcakes, candles and natural materials from the environment.

Interpretation

Reflecting on this image interpersonally, I would say it is a Flight Downward even though I was excited about being in a permanent position in the academy. Metaphorically, I felt that the dark ‘system’ was always keeping a watch over me and that I had to say ‘yes’ to everything asked of me else I may not keep this job—an achievement that was some time coming. I remember feeling that all those ‘nice’ images around the outside were so far out of reach given my current workload and the pressures to have to publish written work. I

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3 remember feeling sad when I completed this *Recollage*, as I knew deep down that I just had
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5 to get on with work as I did not have time to engage with other aspects of my life that I
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7 enjoyed. The words in the picture are extremely relevant even though at the time when I
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9 pasted them there I did not really know their meaning. I knew that my workload was way
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11 over what it should be but I did not want to say anything about this; I just wanted to keep on
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13 with the job. This aligns with Sutherland's (2017) work on expectations in the academy for
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15 early career researchers and in particular confusion as to what to focus their career on. It also
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17 highlighted the importance of work-life balance (Bozzon, Murgia, Poggio & Rapetti, 2017).
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Flight 2: Gaining and maintaining momentum

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25 <INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE>
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29 *In this Recollage I can see a bit more hope than my first one. Even though there is a*
30 *bit of a theme—the inner enclosed workplace as well as the things I would like to do*
31 *more of on the outside—some of what I like to do is creeping more into my work*
32 *environment. I spent some time living in India so the objects in the middle section*
33 *really remind me of the textures, colours and patterns there. Nature and natural*
34 *objects really calm me. I am being reminded to spend more time outside off the*
35 *computer!!*
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Figure 2: Recollage #2 (22nd November 2014)***Description***

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43 Some 5 months later I completed *Recollage#2*. In relation to the representational meaning
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45 this image shows a doored frame in the middle of the page. Within this patterned frame sits
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47 other interesting shapes and patterns; the materials are organic and natural such as string or
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49 jute, and the earth. There is a machine ploughing the field which is dry and dusty.

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52 Surrounding this bordered doorway are green plants, colourful flowers, trees and timber. The
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54 colours pink and blue stand out with a lot of greens and natural earthy colours. No space is
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56 left uncovered.
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Interpretation

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3 Interpersonally this image is a Flight Upwards. Even though a framed section was still
4 present—delineating my work and family life, it was smaller than *Recollage#1*—I felt that a
5 bit of the weight between the two was lifted. Natural and organic materials feature heavily in
6 this work and this reminds me of how important it is to re-connect with nature from time to
7 time, enabling me to feel refreshed and clear in the mind. The colours and natural objects
8 made me feel calm. The archway in the middle, along with the work machinery, reminds me
9 that I am always working but when I was creating this *Recollage* I felt much calmer than the
10 first and accepted the type of employment environment that I had entered (Louth & Potter,
11 2017).

Flight 3: Recognising work-life balance

<INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE>

I am actually really proud of this Recollage. I know the purpose of them is not about effective technique or aesthetics but I think doing these regularly has really made me improve my technique and the artistry of the work. I was deeply entranced in the cutting up of the smaller pieces that weave themselves along the river (of life). Sadly though this image shows an abrupt distinction between my work and desired life. At the time of making this Recollage I was feeling pretty stressed out—lots of marking, course development for the next semester, major changes, program directorship including some really serious issues some students were facing, having to keep doing research, blah, blah, blah—and on the outside of all this, my life, was the calming water and trees I hardly get to see but pasting them made me feel better.

Figure 3: Recollage#4 (14th June 2015)**Description**

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48 In *Recollage#4* there is a distinct break in the image drawing the eye from the top right hand
49 corner of the page to the bottom left. The break is created by small pieces of paper that have
50 been cut up and pasted on the blue background paper—forming a kind of a river through the
51 entire work. On the top half of the ‘river’ are images of natural objects and environments
52 including Uluru, water, a large gum tree with misty fog in the background and flowers. Also
53 on this side is a violin. On the other side is a shape of jagged black and white lines, a clock,
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lots of books and other busy inorganic shapes. In the middle of the image I pasted individually cut out letters to spell ‘academia’ which was added to some pre-existing text – “It’s mad, mad...”

Interpretation

Recollage#4 continues the theme between my working life and the life I desire—to be outdoors and relaxed doing the things I love. Clearly I am still grappling with the heavy workload as a new academic and this is another Flight Downward but also one to the sideline as the actual process of collaging allowed me to take a much needed break to reflect on what was happening in my life (Lemon & Garvis, 2014a). The work side of my life is extremely busy—lots of sharp objects and busyness on the ‘work side of things’. However, the framing of the entire image with a natural green border shows there is strength and hope for the good things in life. There are moments of reflection (including these *Recollages*) and calm. Even looking at the image of the trees and water in these magazines made me feel relaxed. Creative practice enabled me to find that ‘quiet, contemplative’ time needed in amongst my working life (Moffatt, 2014).

Flight 4: Feeling somewhat settled

<INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE>

Figure 4: Recollage#8 (August 30th 2017)

For me, this Recollage is quite metaphorical. I recently began a new role at a new university, at a higher level in leadership. I am really proud of what I have done and become. I have worked bloody hard for it, that’s for sure! I like the colour palette of this image. I feel like I can find more time to enjoy what I love—baking, walking in nature, yoga, relaxing—things feel more smoothed out. Maybe the pressure is off a bit. I can tick this one off my list – haha. I am not sure about the sharp tools though? Maybe they are a reminder for one to accept that academia can be cut-throat, sharp and you may need to pick some of these up from time to time. The words certainly highlight this. Anyhow I feel good...I am really excited about my new role and where that can lead me.

Description

Recollage#8 represents a number of pasted images from the same colour palette—mainly pale green, light grey and darker shades of green. Most of the images are in abstract form aside from an image of trees and one of a mountain view. In the middle of the picture is a large yellow-orange tick that is bordered with red. Many of the pasted images have textured patterns for example, a knitted rug, light photographed from a distance, leafy materials and metal finishings.

Interpretation

Due to the pale palette of this image the interpersonal meaning could be recognised as calming. In fact, I did feel calmer creating this Final Flight as an early career academic, as I felt the pressure had been lifted due to my being promoted and moving from early to mid-career. The large red and orange tick indicates my success in achieving a goal on my never-ending list. Less sharp objects enter this *Recollage* although the ones that do are organised and tidy—I have learnt how to deal with the workload associated with academia more effectively as I have also learnt to say ‘no’ more; an achievement that has been revealed in this *Recollage*.

Discussion and conclusion

Ongoing reflection is essential for professional development and growth (Aldridge, 2015; Börjesson, Cedersund, & Bengtsson, 2015). More importantly, my data showed how reflecting through *Recollages* allowed me to see what issues I was facing in my daily work. Such reflection creates space for positive outcomes in determining what is needed in order to deal with any challenges faced (Corbin Frazier & Eick, 2015; Schwind et al., 2014). Regular *recollaging* allowed me to critically reflect on issues related to working in the academy. If I journaled through language alone, the potentialities of reflection would have been limited. It

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3 is clear that the arts-based and multimodal ways of reflecting assisted me in knowing what I
4 was facing—bringing the intrinsic out into the known (Moffatt, 2014; Morton, van der Bles,
5 & Haslam, 2016).
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10 A number of distinct themes featured in all of the work—something I was unaware of until
11 analysing the work. Representationally, each of the images featured two separate worlds—
12 my working life and my desired life. The colours strongly indicated that my desired life was
13 to be outside in nature with hues of green and brown featured in organic materials, while my
14 working life was full of rough textures and objects showing the busyness in my life and my
15 struggle in trying to find a work-life balance as an early career academic.
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25 As an early career researcher I was always conscious of doing the right thing and not saying
26 ‘no’ to those in more powerful positions than me. Roper, Ganesh and Inkson (2010) explored
27 how neoliberal environments permeate and shape our thoughts and actions. Noting the
28 influence of neoliberalism as ‘boundaryless’ on careers, the authors argue that a reproduction
29 of discourses can negatively impact on people’s professional growth and lives, leading to a
30 “normality of boundaryless careers” (Roper et al., 2010, p. 674). Good leaders, I believe, will
31 be consciously aware of these pressures and discourses and support staff in negotiating them,
32 ensuring positive health and wellbeing. Sadly, this is not often the case in university systems.
33 Upon reflection, I should have been assigned a mentor in my first five years of the academy;
34 someone who looked out for me and protected me against the workload and pressures to
35 ‘always perform’ in a corporate culture (Giroux, 2002; Morrissey, 2015).
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51 In regard to Schwab’s lines of flight, I predominantly felt flights downwards as an early
52 career academic even though at the same time I was flying upwards in my career. My non-
53 working life however, was not faring well. Berg, Huijbens & Larsen (2016) shared work
54 about the levels of anxiety and stress produced in neoliberal university environments. The
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3 interpersonal meanings uncovered in my arts-based, multimodal reflections clearly showed I
4 was under pressure and overloaded. Irwin's notions of knowing, doing and making supported
5 my professional growth through such a process. Without the creative practice of *Recollage* I
6 would not have been able to make my feelings conscious. The 'doing' and 'making' allowed
7 me to have the time and space to be a reflexive professional (Irwin, 2004). Even though it
8 was not exactly what I desired—to be outside in the natural environment—the collaging
9 provided me some creative respite from my working life.

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11
12 In concluding I offer four key tenets of this study in answering the question: How effective is
13 arts-based/multimodal reflection in supporting an Early Career Researcher's professional
14 growth and reflection in the academy? The first is that arts-based and multimodal reflection
15 allowed a form of inquiry that facilitates the internal and emergent expression of professional
16 knowledge and understanding. This in turn, validated an early career academic's
17 practitioners' own internal sense of self as well as ensuring a greater awareness of the system
18 in which they worked. Secondly, creative, multimodal meaning-making supported
19 professional growth as, over time, I could see how my career was progressing through the
20 images as well as by relating these to Schwab's lines of flight. Knowing explicitly the
21 feelings I had towards my work enabled me to reflect on how I might best address these
22 including the creative practice itself. Thirdly, this study highlighted the need for scheduled
23 and committed participation to professional reflection and most particularly through arts-
24 based and multimodal processes. Finally, being a reflexive professional has potential to
25 support early career academics' career projection, wellness and awareness of the neoliberal
26 environments in which they work. If early career academics participate in regular arts-based
27 and multimodal reflective work within their professional lives then they may be more able to
28 critically view and transform both their own actions within their working and personal lives.
29 Sharing such work also has potential to raise awareness of the issues that early career
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3 academics face in their first five years of employment, resulting in positive change and
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5 support for the work they initially showed excitement and passion for. It is therefore
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7 recommended that leadership teams and university-wide systems value and enable time and
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9 space for much needed professional reflective practice.
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Declaration of interest statement

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(Re)collage as a tool for self-care: autoethnographic method: Reflecting multimodally on the first five years in the academy through Schwab's lines of flight

Abstract

Working in the academy can be both challenging and exciting as it can be trying and difficult to negotiate if one is unprepared. Past research has acknowledged the importance of reflective practice in order to face such trials positively. This study utilised arts-based/multimodal reflection to contemplate the lived experience of one early career researcher in her first five years of employment. Adopting an autoethnographic-arts-based approach, the researcher regularly reflected via the medium of collage. This paper reports on recollaged artefacts .-These that were analysed in relation to meta-semiotic meanings as well as how they corresponded to Schwab's 'lines of flight', taking-revealing both positive and negative acuties. Findings showed that taking the time to delineate feelings via arts-based reflection can reveal-illuminate silent thoughts and deliberations and support an early career academic in appreciating and improving awareness of higher education regularities. Implications highlight how authoethnographic recollage can be an effective tool for the self-care of early career academics.

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Keywords: (re)collage, reflection, arts-based research, autoethnography, early career researcher, the academy, self-care

Introduction

Working in the academy has been noted to be both challenging and rewarding, particularly for early career researchers within the first five years of their employment (Herbert, Coveney, Clarke, Graves & Barnett, 2014; Sutherland, 2017). Negotiating within these complex spaces (McKay & Monk, 2016) is therefore important for academics to be able to work both productively and positively (McAlpine, Amundsen & Turner, 2014). An examination of the literature reveals that reflecting on the everyday and lived experience of academia is beneficial in understanding policies, procedures and consequently practices (Barkham, 2007; Lew & Schmidt, 2011). Challenges reported by early career scholars include high workloads

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(Graham, 2016), lack of professional development opportunities in technology use (Gregory & Lodge, 2015), confusion as to what counts as achievement (Altbach, 2005), diversification in the workforce (Whitchurch, 2018), casualisation (Loveday, 2017), capitalism impacting on academia (Rhoades & Torres-Olave, 2015), sexism (Gutiérrez, Neimann, González, & Harris, 2012; Tindall & McWilliams, 2006) and race (Tippeconnic-Fox, 2008).

With so many pressures on early career academics, it is important that effective and consistent reflection is actioned (Matsuoka, 2017) in order for improved self-care to occur (AUTHOR et al., 2016). Reflection enables a certain kind of thinking that asks how things are going, why they are going the way they are, and how can things be improved for next time (Ryan & Ryan, 2013). Reflective thinking has been noted to be particularly important for those working within the higher education sector (Warren, 2016), particularly given the constant pressures placed upon academics as noted in the literature. According to Chickering, Dalton and Stamm (2006), reflection is: ...the absolutely necessary intervening activity that converts input—whatever the experiences are—into meaningful working knowledge that can be tested in other settings. Without reflection, whatever new experiences we have, whatever new information and concepts we encounter...end up like the residue from food we don't metabolize. (p. 121)

This paper consequently shares my experiences as an early career academic in my first five years of ongoing full-time employment at an urban university in a major city in Australia. The university has multiple campuses and services many students who are first in family, entering university after some time in the workforce, and/or who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Using autoethnographic and an arts-based approaches to reflection, I regularly undertook reflection through multiple means in the aim to understand the academic environment in which I worked. Methods included collaged artwork, improvised music

compositions and journaling. For the purpose of this paper, only the collaged work and journaling will be explored. The overarching research question for this study therefore was:

How effective is arts-based/multimodal reflection in supporting an Early Career Researcher's professional growth, ~~and~~ reflection and self-care in the academy?

Theorising arts-based research as a reflective **autoethnographic method tool for self-care**

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is essentially about oneself and the journey of personal experience in different contexts. Adams, Ellis and Holman Jones (2017) describe autoethnography as a research method that uses “personal experience to describe and interpret cultural texts, experiences, beliefs and practices” (p. 1). These authors highlight one purpose of autoethnography is to share insider knowledge of a particular cultural or social experience. As a qualitative method, autoethnography utilises reflection and reflective practice in varied ways. Written autoethnographies have dominated research but more recently, researchers have experimented with other modes of reflection including dramatic performance and script writing (Denzin, 2003), dance (Barbour, 2012), and poetry (Prendergast, 2013). Findings from such autoethnographic studies research have proven that presenting information through other modes other than language can powerfully represent meaning—often unbeknown to the researcher. Adams et al. (2017) for example, believed other methods often enable the opportunity to be able to capture everyday experiences that may not be possible through written means. For autoethnographers, reflection or ‘rigorous self-reflection’ (Adams et al., 2017) is a key skill needed to record personal information.

Reflection ~~and~~ for professional growth and practice

Being a 'reflective practitioner' is important for our professional working lives (Behari-Leak, 2017; Schön, 1983). In fact, Schön (1983) in his seminal work *The Reflective Practitioner*, noted that in our professions we reflect *on* action and *in* action. This means that reflection is an important tool for when we go about our daily work as well as when we think about it after the fact. Similarly, Jennings and Baldwin (2010) stated that reflection allows the possibility to explore relationships between mandated practices within systems compared to an individual's purposeful intent within these spaces. ~~An example was where creative health workers needed to reflect regularly in order to carry out self-care practices (AUTHOR, 2016).~~

Deep reflection can lead to critical and transformative practice where we become empowered to initiate change (Ryan, 2015). Ryan and Bourke's (2012) work refers to this as being reflexive professionals. They drew on Archer's (2007) framework of reflexivity to explore how "teachers manage competing influences and deliberate about pedagogic action in the classroom" (p. 413), arguing the need for teachers to be the drivers of quality rather than accepting mandated practices from 'top-down'. Archer's (2007) framework included a number of reflexive modes known as meta reflexive, autonomous reflexive, communicative reflexive and fractured reflexive arguing that meta reflexive is where we are most effective (Goodman, 2016) and can professionally grow (Hofer, 2017).

Such work aligns with Schwab's (1970) notion of 'flights from the field' for the professional ~~and also Guattari and Deleuze's (2000) concept of 'lines of flight'~~. Schwab (1970) notes these flights as: to other fields, flights upward, downward, to the sidelines, flights of preservation and final flight. Without reflexive skills, it is not possible for educators to consider the 'flights' they may encounter in their professional lives and therefore they may continue to have limited knowledge and understanding of the mechanisms of power within systems ~~(Guattari & Deleuze, 2000)~~. Further, the research of Moffatt (2014) explored

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creative reflection that encouraged more critical thinking and creativity in the reflection process. This study showed that for creative people, reflecting through modes other than words allowed them to express certain strengths and creative traits that would otherwise be impossible and/or unrewarding (Croft, 2015).

Reflection and self-care

Reflection has also been noted to be critical for ongoing self-care in various professions (AUTHOR et al., 2016). The act of reflecting in and on action means that people can consciously review challenges in their working lives and consider possible solutions, ensuring wellbeing and positivity (AUTHOR et al., 2019; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Jennings and Baldwin (2010) for example, engaged corporate participants in deep and effective reflection by exploring the interconnection between their everyday work and mandated evaluation processes. Rather than reviewing their work in an automated way, the participants were able to also reflect on their own involvement and how they might improve their working life and consequently wellbeing (Jennings & Baldwin, 2010).

In addition, much research points to the importance of reflecting not only through language or linguistic mode but via multimodal and arts-based approaches (King et al., 2014; Lavina, Fleet, & Niland, 2017; Power & Bennett, 2015). In AUTHORs work for example, a number of benefits are highlighted in relation to arts-based and multimodal approaches to reflection. These include the ability to reflect in different ways and express ideas through other modes, being able to make meaning beyond having “to translate or transcribe their felt experiences into words” (p. 766), and being able to access the unconscious and make it explicit for reflection purposes. Another study carried out by Bailey and du Preez (2010) encouraged creative approaches to reflection. The findings showed that such approaches to reflection were more rewarding, particularly for those working in creative and arts-based fields.

Reflection, Arts-based research and meta-semiotic meanings multimodality

Many researchers have noted how reflecting through words alone can fail to uncover deeper instincts/manifestations evident in the person (Black, 2019; Clarke & Bautista, 2017;

AUTHOR, 2018). ~~In fact, Park-Fuller (2000) stated that a ‘revealing of what has been kept hidden’ is possible through autobiographical narrative performances:~~

~~...the performer often speaks about acts of social transgression. In doing so, the telling of the story itself becomes a transgressive act—a revealing of what has been kept hidden, a speaking of what has been silenced—an act of reverse discourse that struggles with the preconceptions borne in the air of dominant politics. (Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 26).~~

~~Such an approach aligns with Ryan and Bourke’s (2012) notion of reflexivity, whereby participants can discover what discourses are privileged in certain work environments, and how they can push back against these.~~ Arts-based and multimodal approaches can support professionals’ work in reflecting on the context, content, and space in which they work.

Yuen’s (2016) study for example showed how the arts can be used as a method of inquiry in Indigenous communities when reflecting on the meaning of leisure and experiences in healing (p. 338). Yuen (2016) presented how the use of metaphor, symbolism and other forms of communication assisted the Indigenous women to express strong messages of social justice. Kovach (2009) similarly highlighted how arts-based methods disclose the fluidity of metaphor which can unsettle dominant discourses; empowering other ~~for example~~ **Indigenous** ways of knowing (p. 60).

In addition, to Schwab’s notes of ‘flight from the field’, I used Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) work shares an approach that reveals meanings behind a range of texts including those with images such as artworks. They share three meta-semiotic meanings of known as representational, interpersonal and compositional. These meanings can be used to both

describe and interpret the images as well as other modes of meaning. Ideational or representational meanings take into account those that are constructed by the forms of representation of events in the material world. These include visual meaning associated with images, objects and participants as well as the circumstances in which symbolic meaning occurs. Interpersonal or interactive meanings involve the relationships between the participants as well as between the viewer or reader and what is viewed or read, and textual or compositional meanings relate to the ways in which objects and/or people are placed within a space. All three metasemiotic meanings can often signpost information value or planned emphasis on what is privileged over other subject matter (AUTHOR, 2014; AUTHOR, 2014). Exploring each of the meanings within particular artworks can the collages allowed allow me to 'see' meanings that were perhaps hidden prior to undertaking the methods in the study. hidden meanings to be unveiled.

In relation to an autoethnographic method, Leitch's (2006) work showed how teachers developed their identities through arts-based reflective methods. The participant in Leitch's (2006) study used creative narrative approaches to express emotional and social characteristics that assisted them to identify new action and directions in their lives (p. 566). Studies such as Leitch's (2006) influenced the research presented in this paper, largely due to the researcher being an artist/musician and new to the academy.

Background to the study: ~~On being in the academy~~

Many researchers have grappled with the ongoing pressures associated with working in the academy alongside the many benefits with what such roles provide. Personally, when I first found out I was successful in gaining an ongoing position in 2012 at the university I had been working in as a casual academic and also on contract, in academia in 2012, I was very

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1
2
3 excited. It took me 11 years post-PhD to ~~successfully~~ find a full-time continuing academic
4 role (AUTHOR, 2014). I had very much enjoyed working in this university as it catered for
5 diverse students and had a positive reputation in the community for its education programs; it
6 was where I wanted to be. It did not take very long for me to realise that many colleagues
7
8 struggled with everyday stressors due to the negative content of conversations in the
9
10 workplace (Behari-Leak, 2017). Issues such as workload, limited support for administrative
11
12 duties, and the uncertainty surrounding the future of higher education all featured in this
13
14 discourse. I therefore recognised my need to spend time regularly to reflect on my own
15
16 experience and to ensure self-care. ~~and a~~As an artist I was also craving creative practice, —
17
18 largely to maintain sanity. In order to do this I used the qualitative research methodology of
19
20 autoethnography through arts-based methods. Such an approach allowed me to reflect on my
21
22 experiences as both the researcher and researchee. Ellis (2009) explains the role of an
23
24 autoethnographer:

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34 “As an autoethnographer, I am both the author and focus of the story, the one who tells and
35
36 the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and the created. I am the
37
38 person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an
39
40 ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller” (Ellis, 2009, p. 13)

41
42
43 Being able to record personal, social and cultural experience through autoethnography an
44
45 arts-based and multimodal approach to reflection allowed a sense of flow in reflective
46
47 thought (Johns, 2009) and enabled me to uncover issues I was facing through my work. The
48
49 reflective process of collage allowed my unconscious feelings to be revealed both through the
50
51 process of making but also within the final art products. As previously discussed in the
52
53 review of the literature, much autoethnographic work is carried out through written
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55 composition (Gullion, 2016) but it has been acknowledged that diverse modes facilitate
56
57 deeper perspectives (Leitch, 2006). As an arts-based researcher, I often engage in multimodal
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reflection when investigating certain phenomenon (see AUTHOR, 2013; AUTHOR, 2016 for example) as I know the power it can have in revealing veiled notions of identity—ones that are not so obvious but are drawn out through arts-based and multimodal practice (Adams et al., 2017).

Research design: Materials, methods and analytical approach

At the core of this study was the desire to express my thoughts and feelings about my everyday work, to reflect on the challenges and subconsciously place on the page what might be the solutions. I sought to interact with an inner dialogue through collage and other arts practice as a way to reveal intrinsic knowings (MacKenzie & Wolf, 2012) that may for the most part be hidden due to the busyness of academic life. According to Irwin (2004), such work creates a space to for “knowing (theoria), doing (praxis), and making (poiesis)” (p. 27) whereby artists/teachers/researchers create an “existence that desires an aesthetic experience found in an elegance of flow between intellect, feeling and practice” (Irwin, 2004, p. 29).

A number of methods were used for the whole study. These are outlined in Table 1, below:

Table 1: Methods used in this study

Type of data	Number and timeframe of this set	Materials and techniques used
Collage	9 over 5 years (ongoing)	Coloured paper, magazines, scissors, glue, ripping paper by hand, acrylic paint
Improvised music compositions	16 over 5 years (ongoing)	Piano, electric keyboard or violin
Journaling	22 entries over 5 years (post collage and music compositions)	Hand written or typed or audio recorded

Table 1: Methods used in this study

For the purpose of this paper I report on four of the collaged reflections and their associated journal entries (numbers 1, 2, 4 and 8). I have termed these works as *Recollages* to include

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1
2
3 the collaged artwork as well as their accompanying, ~~that is collaged and~~ written
4
5 recollections/reflections.
6
7

8 The process undertaken for the collaged work involved allowing designated time to carefully
9 cut selected images from a wide range of Australian magazines. I chose images that ‘spoke to
10 me’ whether due to colour, shape or patterning etc. I then began to paste them onto an A4
11 page being conscious to cover all areas of the paper. Throughout the pasting process I worked
12 within a flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) shifting each image around the page until I
13 wanted to paste it on. I purposefully aimed to not think directly about work or life but rather
14 by enjoying the artistry and by just being meditative throughout the process (Raelin, 2002).
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24
25 Once the collaged work was completed ~~As qualitative research,~~ I approached the qualitative
26 analysis this study of the images from both a practical and an interpretative lenses. I utilised
27
28 collage as a means of expressing ideas—both intellectual and emotional—~~with the aim to and~~
29 then aimed to analyse the completed artworkse images through two theoretical frameworks.
30
31
32
33

34 The first was Schwab’s (1970) ‘flights from the field’ that act as an interpretive tool in
35 revealing differences, similarities and tensions of my perceived experience in academia
36 (Lemon & Garvis, 2014b). The flights can be used to identify similarities, differences,
37 tensions and contentedness within academic life. Schwab’s work has been used in numerous
38 self-studies (see Schwab, 1970; Garvis & Lemon, 2014a and 2014b for example). The lines
39 of flight allow an individual to reflect on their roles and personal and professional
40 experiences and how they may learn from these. Schwab’s belief that any issues faced might
41 be ‘slippery to grasp’ (Lemon & Garvis, 2014b, p. 4) because they “intrinsically involve
42 states of character and the possibly of character change” (Schwab 1970, p. 3). He stated that
43 not all flights are “equally reprehensible” (p. 4) as they can be positive or negative but above
44 all we can learn from them all.
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Schwab (1970) identified six different flights that Lemon and Garvis (2014a, 2014b) expand upon. These include:

1. General flight – experiences that contribute to motivations in entering academia.
2. Flight upwards – opportunities that are stimulating or inspiring throughout career trajectory
3. Flight downward – the challenges/barriers/questions that are asked in relation to experiences, lack of opportunities or how people have been treated.
4. Flight to sideline – moment(s) when a step to the side is taken to observe, reflect and reconsider what is happening.
5. Flight of perseveration – a repetition of old and familiar knowledge in new languages which add little or nothing to the old meanings embodied
6. Final flight – when questions are asked about where to next? what needs to be achieved? what strategies help in focusing on growth and career development?

(Lemon & Garvis, 2014a, p. 235, 2014b, p. 5)

For the purpose of this paper, reflecting on my own direction and growth as an early career academic enabled the opportunity to ‘see’ any issues I was facing, that may have not been easily viewed prior to the deliberate reflection through the use of collage. The second

framework was Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) metasemiotic meanings so I had a way of discussing the image before me. The findings are presented by firstly describing the images factually and then revealing the inner emotions that were represented.

~~In addition to Schwab’s notes of ‘flight from the field’, I used Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) three meta-semiotic meanings of representational, interpersonal and compositional meanings to both describe and interpret the images. Ideational or representational meanings take into account those that are constructed by the forms of representation of events in the material world. These include visual meaning associated with images, objects and~~

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~~participants as well as the circumstances in which symbolic meaning occurs. Interpersonal or interactive meanings involve the relationships between the participants as well as between the viewer or reader and what is viewed or read, and textual or compositional meanings relate to the ways in which objects and/or people are placed within a space. All three metasemiotic meanings can often signpost information value or planned emphasis on what is privileged over other subject matter (AUTHOR, 2014; AUTHOR, 2014). Exploring each of the meanings within the collages allowed me to ‘see’ meanings that were perhaps hidden prior to undertaking the methods in the study.~~

Results: (Re)collaged findings

Flight 1: All at the beginning

I created my first *Recollage* within 12 months of commencing my new position. The following discourse will firstly describe the image using the two of the three meta-semiotic meanings and secondly, interpreting the interpersonal meaning and line of flight it relates to.

<INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE>

Wow – the thing that stands out to me the most with this Recollage are the eyes looking right at me. I would say this is how I feel a lot in my new job—always trying to do what I think people want but also knowing that whatever I do will be seen. I just need to keep working, working, working... The other main feature of this Recollage is how I possibly feel closed in and dark but there are all these really nice things, like baking, flowers, candles and natural environments that I know are out of reach...at the moment.

Figure 1: Recollage#1 (2nd of September 2013)

Description: Representational and compositional meanings

Recollage#1 distinctively represents a framed darker section—like a doorway—where eyes are staring back at me. The text says “The more I do, the more frightened I get. But that is essential. Otherwise why would I go on doing it?” Compositionally, there is a separation between this part of the image and a framed lighter section running down the left side, along

1
2
3 the bottom and up the right-hand side of the page. Within this framed section are objects such
4
5 as flowers, cupcakes, candles and natural materials from the environment.
6
7

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9 ***Interpretation: Interpersonal meaning and flight***

10
11 Reflecting on this image interpersonally, I would say it is a Flight Downward even though I
12
13 was excited about being in a permanent position in the academy. Metaphorically, I felt that
14
15 the dark ‘system’ was always keeping a watch over me and that I had to say ‘yes’ to
16
17 everything asked of me else I may not keep this job—an achievement that was some time
18
19 coming. I remember feeling that all those ‘nice’ images around the outside were so far out of
20
21 reach given my current workload and the pressures to have to publish written work. I
22
23 remember feeling sad when I completed this *Recollage*, as I knew deep down that I just had
24
25 to get on with work as I did not have time to engage with other aspects of my life that I
26
27 enjoyed. The words in the picture are extremely relevant even though at the time when I
28
29 pasted them there I did not really know their meaning. I knew that my workload was way
30
31 over what it should be but I did not want to say anything about this; I just wanted to keep on
32
33 with the job. This aligns with Sutherland’s (2017) work on expectations in the academy for
34
35 early career researchers and in particular confusion as to what to focus their career on. It also
36
37 highlighted the importance of work-life balance (Bozzon, Murgia, Poggio & Rapetti, 2017).
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45 **Flight 2: Gaining and maintaining momentum**

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47 <INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE>

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51 *In this Recollage I can see a bit more hope than my first one. Even though there is a*
52 *bit of a theme—the inner enclosed workplace as well as the things I would like to do*
53 *more of on the outside—some of what I like to do is creeping more into my work*
54 *environment. I spent some time living in India so the objects in the middle section*
55 *really remind me of the textures, colours and patterns there. Nature and natural*
56 *objects really calm me. I am being reminded to spend more time outside off the*
57 *computer!!*
58

59
60 **Figure 2: Recollage #2 (22nd November 2014)**

Description: Representational and compositional meanings

Some 5 months later I completed *Recollage#2*. In relation to the representational meaning this image shows a doored frame in the middle of the page. Within this patterned frame sits other interesting shapes and patterns; the materials are organic and natural such as string or jute, and the earth. There is a machine ploughing the field which is dry and dusty. Surrounding this bordered doorway are green plants, colourful flowers, trees and timber. The colours pink and blue stand out with a lot of greens and natural earthy colours. No space is left uncovered.

Interpretation: Interpersonal meaning and flight

Interpersonally this image is a Flight Upwards. Even though a framed section was still present—delineating my work and family life, it was smaller than *Recollage#1*—I felt that a bit of the weight between the two was lifted. Natural and organic materials feature heavily in this work and this reminds me of how important it is to re-connect with nature from time to time, enabling me to feel refreshed and clear in the mind. The colours and natural objects made me feel calm. The archway in the middle, along with the work machinery, reminds me that I am always working but when I was creating this *Recollage* I felt much calmer than the first and accepted the type of employment environment that I had entered (Louth & Potter, 2017).

Flight 3: Recognising work-life balance

<INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE>

I am actually really proud of this Recollage. I know the purpose of them is not about effective technique or aesthetics but I think doing these regularly has really made me improve my technique and the artistry of the work. I was deeply entranced in the cutting up of the smaller pieces that weave themselves along the river (of life). Sadly though this image shows an abrupt distinction between my work and desired life. At the time of making this Recollage I was feeling pretty stressed out—lots of marking, course development for the next semester, major changes, program directorship

1
2
3 including some really serious issues some students were facing, having to keep doing
4 research, blah, blah, blah—and on the outside of all this, my life, was the calming
5 water and trees I hardly get to see but pasting them made me feel better.
6

7 **Figure 3: Recollage#4 (14th June 2015)**
8

9
10 **Description: Representational and compositional meanings**
11

12
13 In *Recollage#4* there is a distinct break in the image drawing the eye from the top right hand
14 corner of the page to the bottom left. The break is created by small pieces of paper that have
15 been cut up and pasted on the blue background paper—forming a kind of a river through the
16 entire work. On the top half of the ‘river’ are images of natural objects and environments
17 including Uluru, water, a large gum tree with misty fog in the background and flowers. Also
18 on this side is a violin. On the other side is a shape of jagged black and white lines, a clock,
19 lots of books and other busy inorganic shapes. In the middle of the image I pasted
20 individually cut out letters to spell ‘academia’ which was added to some pre-existing text –
21 “It’s mad, mad...”
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35 **Interpretation: Interpersonal meaning and flight**
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38 *Recollage#4* continues the theme between my working life and the life I desire—to be
39 outdoors and relaxed doing the things I love. Clearly, I am still grappling with the heavy
40 workload as a new academic and this is another Flight Downward but also one to the sideline
41 as the actual process of collaging allowed me to take a much needed break to reflect on what
42 was happening in my life (Lemon & Garvis, 2014a). The work side of my life is extremely
43 busy—lots of sharp objects and busyness on the ‘work side of things’. However, the framing
44 of the entire image with a natural green border shows there is strength and hope for the good
45 things in life. There are moments of reflection (including these *Recollages*) and calm. Even
46 looking at the image of the trees and water in these magazines made me feel relaxed. Creative
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practice enabled me to find that ‘quiet, contemplative’ time needed in amongst my working life (Moffatt, 2014).

Flight 4: Feeling somewhat settled

<INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE>

Figure 4: Recollage#8 (August 30th 2017)

For me, this Recollage is quite metaphorical. I recently began a new role at a new university, at a higher level in leadership. I am really proud of what I have done and become. I have worked bloody hard for it, that's for sure! I like the colour palette of this image. I feel like I can find more time to enjoy what I love—baking, walking in nature, yoga, relaxing—things feel more smoothed out. Maybe the pressure is off a bit. I can tick this one off my list – haha. I am not sure about the sharp tools though? Maybe they are a reminder for one to accept that academia can be cut-throat, sharp and you may need to pick some of these up from time to time. The words certainly highlight this. Anyhow I feel good...I am really excited about my new role and where that can lead me.

Description: Representational and compositional meanings

Recollage#8 represents a number of pasted images from the same colour palette—mainly pale green, light grey and darker shades of green. Most of the images are in abstract form aside from an image of trees and one of a mountain view. In the middle of the picture is a large yellow-orange tick that is bordered with red. Many of the pasted images have textured patterns for example, a knitted rug, light photographed from a distance, leafy materials and metal finishings.

Interpretation: Interpersonal meaning and flight

Due to the pale palette of this image the interpersonal meaning could be recognised as calming. In fact, I did feel calmer creating this Final Flight as an early career academic, as I felt the pressure had been lifted due to my being promoted and moving from early to mid-career. The large red and orange tick indicates my success in achieving a goal on my never-ending list. Less sharp objects enter this *Recollage* although the ones that do are organised

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1
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3 and tidy—I have learnt how to deal with the workload associated with academia more
4
5 effectively as I have also learnt to say ‘no’ more; an achievement that has been revealed in
6
7 this *Recollage*.
8
9

Discussion and conclusion

10
11
12 Ongoing reflection is essential for professional development and growth (Aldridge, 2015;
13
14 Börjesson, Cedersund, & Bengtsson, 2015). More importantly, my data showed how
15
16 reflecting through *Recollages* allowed me to critically reflect onsee what issues I was facing
17
18 in my daily work, improving my self-care. Such reflection creates space for positive
19
20 outcomes in determining what is needed in order to deal with any challenges faced (Corbin
21
22 Frazier & Eick, 2015; Schwind et al., 2014). ~~Regular recollaging allowed me to critically~~
23
24 ~~reflect on issues related to working in the academy~~. If I journaled through language alone, the
25
26 potentialities of such reflection would have been limited. It is clear that the arts-based and
27
28 multimodal ways of reflecting assisted me in knowing what I was facing—bringing the
29
30 intrinsic out into the known (Moffatt, 2014; Morton, van der Bles, & Haslam, 2016) and
31
32 supporting me through such challenges.
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40 A number of distinct themes featured in all of the work—something I was unaware of until
41
42 analysing the work. Representationally, each of the images featured two separate worlds—
43
44 my working life and my desired life. The colours strongly indicated that my desired life was
45
46 to be outside in nature with hues of green and brown featured in organic materials, while my
47
48 working life was full of rough textures and objects showing the busyness in my life and my
49
50 struggle in trying to find a work-life balance as an early career academic.
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54 As an early career researcher I was always conscious of doing the right thing and not saying
55
56 ‘no’ to those in more powerful positions than me. Roper, Ganesh and Inkson (2010) explored
57
58 how neoliberal environments permeate and shape our thoughts and actions. Noting the
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3 influence of neoliberalism as ‘boundaryless’ on careers, the authors argue that a reproduction
4 of discourses can negatively impact on people’s professional growth and lives, leading to a
5 “normality of boundaryless careers” (Roper et al., 2010, p. 674). It was therefore important
6 for me to recognise the need to make space for regular reflection and creative practice for my
7 own wellbeing. ~~Good leaders, I believe, will be consciously aware of these pressures and~~
8 ~~discourses and support staff in negotiating them, ensuring positive health and wellbeing.~~
9 ~~Sadly, this is not often the case in university systems.~~ Upon reflection, as an early career
10 academic, the university I should have been assigned a mentor in my first five years of the
11 academy; someone who looked out for me and protected me against the workload and
12 pressures to ‘always perform’ in a corporate culture (Giroux, 2002; Morrissey, 2015).

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27 In regard to Schwab’s lines of flight, I predominantly felt flights downwards as an early
28 career academic even though at the same time I was flying upwards in my career through my
29 achievements in teaching, service and research. My non-working life however, was not faring
30 well as I rarely took time out to do activities I enjoyed. Berg, Huijbens & Larsen (2016)
31 shared work about the levels of anxiety and stress produced in neoliberal university
32 environments. The interpersonal meanings uncovered in my arts-based, multimodal
33 reflections clearly showed I was under pressure and overloaded. Irwin’s notions of knowing,
34 doing and making supported my professional growth through such a process. Without the
35 creative practice of *Recollage* I would not have been able to make my feelings completely
36 conscious. The ‘doing’ and ‘making’ allowed me to have the time and space to be a reflexive
37 professional (Irwin, 2004). ~~Even though it was not exactly what I desired—to be outside in~~
38 ~~the natural environment—the collaging provided me some creative respite from my working~~
39 ~~life.~~

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57 In concluding, I offer four key tenets of this study in answering the question: How effective is
58 arts-based/multimodal reflection in supporting an Early Career Researcher’s professional
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1
2
3 growth, and reflection and self-care in the academy? The first is that arts-based and
4
5 multimodal reflection allowed a form of inquiry that facilitates the internal and emergent
6
7 expression of professional knowledge and understanding. This in turn, validated an early
8
9 career academic's practitioners' my own internal sense of self as well as ensuring a greater
10
11 awareness of the system in which they-I worked. Secondly, creative, multimodal meaning-
12
13 making supported my professional growth and self-care as, over time, I could see how my
14
15 career was progressing through the images as well as by relating these to Schwab's lines of
16
17 flight. Knowing explicitly the feelings I had towards my work enabled me to reflect on how I
18
19 might best address these including the creative practice itself. This would consequently assist
20
21 in me dealing with issues more positively. Thirdly, this study highlighted the need for
22
23 scheduled and committed participation to professional reflection and most particularly
24
25 through arts-based and multimodal processes. Finally, being a reflexive professional has
26
27 potential to support early career academics' career projection, wellness and awareness of the
28
29 neoliberal environments in which they work. If early career academics participate in regular
30
31 arts-based and multimodal reflective work within their professional lives then they may be
32
33 more able to critically view and transform both their own actions within their working and
34
35 personal lives. Sharing such work also has potential to raise awareness of the issues that early
36
37 career academics face in their first five years of employment, resulting in positive change and
38
39 support for the work they initially showed excitement and passion for. It is therefore
40
41 recommended that leadership teams and university-wide systems value and enable time and
42
43 space for much needed professional reflective practice for improved self-care and enjoyment
44
45 of work.

Acknowledgments

56
57 I acknowledge the use of images from a range of Australian magazines.
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Declaration of interest statement

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Recollage as a tool for self-care: Reflecting multimodally on the first five years in the academy through Schwab's lines of flight

Abstract

Working in the academy can be both challenging and exciting as it can be trying and difficult to negotiate if one is unprepared. Past research has acknowledged the importance of reflective practice in order to face such trials positively. This study utilised arts-based/multimodal reflection to contemplate the lived experience of one early career researcher in her first five years of employment. Adopting an arts-based approach, the researcher regularly reflected via the medium of collage. This paper reports on recollaged artefacts that were analysed in relation to meta-semiotic meanings as well as how they corresponded to Schwab's 'lines of flight', revealing both positive and negative acuties. Findings showed that taking the time to delineate feelings via arts-based reflection can illuminate silent thoughts and deliberations and support an early career academic in appreciating and improving awareness of higher education regularities. Implications highlight how recollage can be an effective tool for the self-care of early career academics.

Keywords: recollage, reflection, arts-based research, , early career researcher, the academy, self-care

Introduction

Working in the academy has been noted to be both challenging and rewarding, particularly for early career researchers within the first five years of their employment (Herbert, Coveney, Clarke, Graves & Barnett, 2014; Sutherland, 2017). Negotiating within these complex spaces (McKay & Monk, 2016) is therefore important for academics to be able to work both productively and positively (McAlpine, Amundsen & Turner, 2014). An examination of the literature reveals that reflecting on the everyday and lived experience of academia is beneficial in understanding policies, procedures and consequently practices (Barkham, 2007; Lew & Schmidt, 2011). Challenges reported by early career scholars include high workloads (Graham, 2016), lack of professional development opportunities in technology use (Gregory & Lodge, 2015), confusion as to what counts as achievement (Altbach, 2005), diversification

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3 in the workforce (Whitchurch, 2018), casualisation (Loveday, 2017), capitalism impacting on
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5 academia (Rhoades & Torres-Olave, 2015), sexism (Gutiérrez, Neimann, González, &
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7 Harris, 2012; Tindall & McWilliams, 2006) and race (Tippeconnic-Fox, 2008).
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11 With so many pressures on early career academics, it is important that effective and
12
13 consistent reflection is actioned (Matsuoka, 2017) in order for improved self-care to occur
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15 (AUTHOR et al., 2016). Reflection enables a certain kind of thinking that asks how things
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17 are going, why they are going the way they are, and how can things be improved for next
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19 time (Ryan & Ryan, 2013). Reflective thinking has been noted to be particularly important
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21 for those working within the higher education sector (Warren, 2016), particularly given the
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23 constant pressures placed upon academics as noted in the literature.
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28 This paper consequently shares my experiences as an early career academic in my first five
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30 years of ongoing full-time employment at an urban university in a major city in Australia.
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32 The university has multiple campuses and services many students who are first in family,
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34 entering university after some time in the workforce, and/or who are culturally and
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36 linguistically diverse. Using an arts-based approach to reflection, I regularly undertook
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38 reflection through multiple means in the aim to understand the academic environment in
39
40 which I worked. Methods included collaged artwork, improvised music compositions and
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42 journaling. For the purpose of this paper, only the collaged work and journaling will be
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44 explored. The overarching research question for this study therefore was:
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49 How effective is arts-based/multimodal reflection in supporting an Early Career
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51 Researcher's professional growth, reflection and self-care in the academy?
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Theorising arts-based research as a reflective tool for self-care

Reflection for professional growth and practice

Being a 'reflective practitioner' is important for our professional working lives (Behari-Leak, 2017; Schön, 1983). In fact, Schön (1983) in his seminal work *The Reflective Practitioner*, noted that in our professions we reflect *on* action and *in* action. This means that reflection is an important tool for when we go about our daily work as well as when we think about it after the fact. Similarly, Jennings and Baldwin (2010) stated that reflection allows the possibility to explore relationships between mandated practices within systems compared to an individual's purposeful intent within these spaces.

Deep reflection can lead to critical and transformative practice where we become empowered to initiate change (Ryan, 2015). Ryan and Bourke's (2012) work refers to this as being reflexive professionals. They drew on Archer's (2007) framework of reflexivity to explore how "teachers manage competing influences and deliberate about pedagogic action in the classroom" (p. 413), arguing the need for teachers to be the drivers of quality rather than accepting mandated practices from 'top-down'. Archer's (2007) framework included a number of reflexive modes known as meta reflexive, autonomous reflexive, communicative reflexive and fractured reflexive arguing that meta reflexive is where we are most effective (Goodman, 2016) and can professionally grow (Hofer, 2017).

Such work aligns with Schwab's (1970) notion of 'flights from the field' for the professional and also Guattari and Deleuze's (2000) concept of 'lines of flight'. Schwab (1970) notes these flights as: to other fields, flights upward, downward, to the sidelines, flights of preservation and final flight. Without reflexive skills, it is not possible for educators to consider the 'flights' they may encounter in their professional lives and therefore they may

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3 continue to have limited knowledge and understanding of the mechanisms of power within
4 systems (Guattari & Deleuze, 2000). Further, the research of Moffatt (2014) explored
5 creative reflection that encouraged more critical thinking and creativity in the reflection
6 process. This study showed that for creative people, reflecting through modes other than
7 words allowed them to express certain strengths and creative traits that would otherwise be
8 impossible and/or unrewarding (Croft, 2015).
9

Reflection and self-care

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12 Reflection has also been noted to be critical for ongoing self-care in various professions
13 (AUTHOR et al., 2016). The act of reflecting *in* and *on* action means that people can
14 consciously review challenges in their working lives and consider possible solutions,
15 ensuring wellbeing and positivity (AUTHOR et al., 2019; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison,
16 2011). Jennings and Baldwin (2010) for example, engaged corporate participants in deep and
17 effective reflection by exploring the interconnection between their everyday work and
18 mandated evaluation processes. Rather than reviewing their work in an automated way, the
19 participants were able to also reflect on their own involvement and how they might improve
20 their working life and consequently wellbeing (Jennings & Baldwin, 2010).
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23 In addition, much research points to the importance of reflecting not only through language
24 or linguistic mode but via multimodal and arts-based approaches (King et al., 2014; Lavina,
25 Fleet, & Niland, 2017; Power & Bennett, 2015). In AUTHORs work for example, a number
26 of benefits are highlighted in relation to arts-based and multimodal approaches to reflection.
27 These include the ability to reflect in different ways and express ideas through other modes,
28 being able to make meaning beyond having “to translate or transcribe their felt experiences
29 into words” (p. 766), and being able to access the unconscious and make it explicit for
30 reflection purposes. Another study carried out by Bailey and du Preez (2010) encouraged
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3 creative approaches to reflection. The findings showed that such approaches to reflection
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5 were more rewarding, particularly for those working in creative and arts-based fields.
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Reflection, arts-based research and multimodality

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11 Many researchers have noted how reflecting through words alone can fail to uncover deeper
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13 instincts/manifestations evident in the person (Black, 2019; Clarke & Bautista, 2017;
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15 AUTHOR, 2018).
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19 Arts-based and multimodal approaches can support professionals' work in reflecting on the
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21 context, content, and space in which they work. Yuen's (2016) study for example showed
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23 how the arts can be used as a method of inquiry in Indigenous communities when reflecting
24
25 on the meaning of leisure and experiences in healing (p. 338). Yuen (2016) presented how the
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27 use of metaphor, symbolism and other forms of communication assisted the Indigenous
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29 women to express strong messages of social justice. Kovach (2009) similarly highlighted
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31 how arts-based methods disclose the fluidity of metaphor which can unsettle dominant
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33 discourses; empowering other ways of knowing (p. 60).
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39 In addition, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) work shares an approach that reveals meanings
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41 behind a range of texts including those with images such as artworks. They share three meta-
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43 semiotic meanings known as representational, interpersonal and compositional. These
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45 meanings can be used to both describe and interpret images as well as other modes of
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47 meaning. Ideational or representational meanings take into account those that are constructed
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49 by the forms of representation of events in the material world. These include visual meaning
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51 associated with images, objects and participants as well as the circumstances in which
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53 symbolic meaning occurs. Interpersonal or interactive meanings involve the relationships
54
55 between the participants as well as between the viewer or reader and what is viewed or read,
56
57 and textual or compositional meanings relate to the ways in which objects and/or people are
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placed within a space. All three metasemiotic meanings can signpost information value or planned emphasis on what is privileged over other subject matter (AUTHOR, 2014;).

Exploring each of the meanings within particular artworks can allow hidden meanings to be unveiled.

Background to the study

Many researchers have grappled with the ongoing pressures associated with working in the academy alongside the many benefits with what such roles provide. Personally, when I first found out I was successful in gaining an ongoing position in 2012 at the university I had been working in as a casual academic and also on contract, I was very excited. It took me 11 years post-PhD to find a full-time continuing academic role (AUTHOR, 2014). I had very much enjoyed working in this university as it catered for diverse students and had a positive reputation in the community for its education programs; it was where I wanted to be. It did not take very long for me to realise that many colleagues struggled with everyday stressors due to the negative content of conversations in the workplace (Behari-Leak, 2017). Issues such as workload, limited support for administrative duties, and the uncertainty surrounding the future of higher education all featured in this discourse. I therefore recognised my need to spend time regularly to reflect on my own experience and to ensure self-care. As an artist I was also craving creative practice..

Being able to record personal, social and cultural experience through an arts-based and multimodal approach to reflection allowed a sense of flow in thought (Johns, 2009) and enabled me to uncover issues I was facing through my work. The reflective process of collage allowed my unconscious feelings to be revealed both through the process of making but also within the final art products. As an arts-based researcher, I often engage in multimodal

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reflection when investigating certain phenomenon (see AUTHOR, 2013; AUTHOR, 2016 for example) as I know the power it can have in revealing veiled notions of identity—ones that are not so obvious but are drawn out through arts-based and multimodal practice (Adams et al., 2017).

Research design: Materials, methods and analytical approach

At the core of this study was the desire to express my thoughts and feelings about my everyday work, to reflect on the challenges and subconsciously place on the page what might be the solutions. I sought to interact with an inner dialogue through collage and other arts practice as a way to reveal intrinsic knowings (MacKenzie & Wolf, 2012) that may for the most part be hidden due to the busyness of academic life. According to Irwin (2004), such work creates a space to for “knowing (theoria), doing (praxis), and making (poesis)” (p. 27) whereby artists/teachers/researchers create an “existence that desires an aesthetic experience found in an elegance of flow between intellect, feeling and practice” (Irwin, 2004, p. 29).

A number of methods were used for the whole study. These are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Methods used in this study

Type of data	Number and timeframe of this set	Materials and techniques used
Collage	9 over 5 years (ongoing)	Coloured paper, magazines, scissors, glue, ripping paper by hand, acrylic paint
Improvised music compositions	16 over 5 years (ongoing)	Piano, electric keyboard or violin
Journaling	22 entries over 5 years (post collage and music compositions)	Hand written or typed or audio recorded

For the purpose of this paper I report on four of the collaged reflections and their associated journal entries (numbers 1, 2, 4 and 8). I have termed these works as *Recollages* to include the collaged artwork as well as their accompanying written recollections/reflections.

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3 The process undertaken for the collaged work involved allowing designated time to carefully
4 cut selected images from a wide range of Australian magazines. I chose images that ‘spoke to
5 me’ whether due to colour, shape or patterning etc. I then began to paste them onto an A4
6 page being conscious to cover all areas of the paper. Throughout the pasting process I worked
7 within a flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) shifting each image around the page until I
8 wanted to paste it on. I purposefully aimed to not think directly about work or life but rather
9 by enjoying the artistry and by just being meditative throughout the process (Raelin, 2002).

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Once the collaged work was completed I approached the qualitative analysis of the images from both a practical and an interpretative lense. I utilised collage as a means of expressing ideas—both intellectual and emotional—and then aimed to analyse the completed artwork through two theoretical frameworks. The first was Schwab’s (1970) ‘flights from the field’ that act as an interpretive tool in revealing differences, similarities and tensions of my perceived experience in academia (Lemon & Garvis, 2014b). The flights can be used to identify similarities, differences, tensions and contentedness within academic life. Schwab’s work has been used in numerous self-studies (see Schwab, 1970; Garvis & Lemon, 2014a and 2014b for example). The lines of flight allow an individual to reflect on their roles and personal and professional experiences and how they may learn from these. Schwab’s belief that any issues faced might be ‘slippery to grasp’ (Lemon & Garvis, 2014b, p. 4) because they “intrinsically involve states of character and the possibly of character change” (Schwab 1970, p. 3). He stated that not all flights are “equally reprehensible” (p. 4) as they can be positive or negative but above all we can learn from them all.

Schwab (1970) identified six different flights that Lemon and Garvis (2014a, 2014b) expand upon. These include:

1. General flight – experiences that contribute to motivations in entering academia.

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- 2.
3. Flight upwards – opportunities that are stimulating or inspiring throughout career trajectory
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
8. Flight downward – the challenges/barriers/questions that are asked in relation to experiences, lack of opportunities or how people have been treated.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
13. Flight to sideline – moment(s) when a step to the side is taken to observe, reflect and reconsider what is happening.
- 14.
- 15.
- 16.
17. Flight of perseveration – a repetition of old and familiar knowledge in new languages which add little or nothing to the old meanings embodied
- 18.
- 19.
- 20.
- 21.
22. Final flight – when questions are asked about where to next? what needs to be achieved? what strategies help in focusing on growth and career development?
- 23.
- 24.
- 25.
26. (Lemon & Garvis, 2014a, p. 235, 2014b, p. 5)
- 27.

28. For the purpose of this paper, reflecting on my own direction and growth as an early career
29. academic enabled the opportunity to ‘see’ any issues I was facing, that may have not been
30. easily viewed prior to the deliberate reflection through the use of collage. The second
31. framework was Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) metasemiotic meanings so I had a way of
32. discussing the image before me. The findings are presented by firstly describing the images
33. factually and then revealing the inner emotions that were represented.

43. **Results: (Re)collaged findings**

46. **Flight 1: All at the beginning**

47. I created my first *Recollage* within 12 months of commencing my new position. The
48. following discourse will firstly describe the image using the two of the three meta-semiotic
49. meanings and secondly, interpreting the interpersonal meaning and line of flight it relates to.

55. <INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE>

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2
3 *Wow – the thing that stands out to me the most with this Recollage are the eyes looking right*
4 *at me. I would say this is how I feel a lot in my new job—always trying to do what I think*
5 *people want but also knowing that whatever I do will be seen. I just need to keep working,*
6 *working, working...The other main feature of this Recollage is how I possibly feel closed in*
7 *and dark but there are all these really nice things, like baking, flowers, candles and natural*
8 *environments that I know are out of reach...at the moment.*
9

10
11 **Figure 1: Recollage#1 (2nd of September 2013)**
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14 ***Description: Representational and compositional meanings***
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17 *Recollage#1* distinctively represents a framed darker section—like a doorway—where eyes
18 are staring back at me. The text says “The more I do, the more frightened I get. But that is
19 essential. Otherwise why would I go on doing it?” Compositionally, there is a separation
20 between this part of the image and a framed lighter section running down the left side, along
21 the bottom and up the right-hand side of the page. Within this framed section are objects such
22 as flowers, cupcakes, candles and natural materials from the environment.
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31 ***Interpretation: Interpersonal meaning and flight***
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33
34 Reflecting on this image interpersonally, I would say it is a Flight Downward even though I
35 was excited about being in a permanent position in the academy. Metaphorically, I felt that
36 the dark ‘system’ was always keeping a watch over me and that I had to say ‘yes’ to
37 everything asked of me else I may not keep this job—an achievement that was some time
38 coming. I remember feeling that all those ‘nice’ images around the outside were so far out of
39 reach given my current workload and the pressures to have to publish written work. I
40 remember feeling sad when I completed this *Recollage*, as I knew deep down that I just had
41 to get on with work as I did not have time to engage with other aspects of my life that I
42 enjoyed. The words in the picture are extremely relevant even though at the time when I
43 pasted them there I did not really know their meaning. I knew that my workload was way
44 over what it should be but I did not want to say anything about this; I just wanted to keep on
45 with the job. This aligns with Sutherland’s (2017) work on expectations in the academy for
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3 early career researchers and in particular confusion as to what to focus their career on. It also
4
5 highlighted the importance of work-life balance (Bozzon, Murgia, Poggio & Rapetti, 2017).
6
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8 **Flight 2: Gaining and maintaining momentum**

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10 <INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE>

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14 *In this Recollage I can see a bit more hope than my first one. Even though there is a*
15 *bit of a theme—the inner enclosed workplace as well as the things I would like to do*
16 *more of on the outside—some of what I like to do is creeping more into my work*
17 *environment. I spent some time living in India so the objects in the middle section*
18 *really remind me of the textures, colours and patterns there. Nature and natural*
19 *objects really calm me. I am being reminded to spend more time outside off the*
20 *computer!!*
21
22

23 **Figure 2: Recollage #2 (22nd November 2014)**

24

25 ***Description: Representational and compositional meanings***

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29 Some 5 months later I completed *Recollage#2*. In relation to the representational meaning
30
31 this image shows a doored frame in the middle of the page. Within this patterned frame sits
32
33 other interesting shapes and patterns; the materials are organic and natural such as string or
34
35 jute, and the earth. There is a machine ploughing the field which is dry and dusty.
36
37

38 Surrounding this bordered doorway are green plants, colourful flowers, trees and timber. The
39
40 colours pink and blue stand out with a lot of greens and natural earthy colours. No space is
41
42 left uncovered.
43
44

45 ***Interpretation: Interpersonal meaning and flight***

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48
49 Interpersonally this image is a Flight Upwards. Even though a framed section was still
50
51 present—delineating my work and family life, it was smaller than *Recollage#1*—I felt that a
52
53 bit of the weight between the two was lifted. Natural and organic materials feature heavily in
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55 this work and this reminds me of how important it is to re-connect with nature from time to
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57 time, enabling me to feel refreshed and clear in the mind. The colours and natural objects
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made me feel calm. The archway in the middle, along with the work machinery, reminds me that I am always working but when I was creating this *Recollage* I felt much calmer than the first and accepted the type of employment environment that I had entered (Louth & Potter, 2017).

Flight 3: Recognising work-life balance

<INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE>

I am actually really proud of this Recollage. I know the purpose of them is not about effective technique or aesthetics but I think doing these regularly has really made me improve my technique and the artistry of the work. I was deeply entranced in the cutting up of the smaller pieces that weave themselves along the river (of life). Sadly though this image shows an abrupt distinction between my work and desired life. At the time of making this Recollage I was feeling pretty stressed out—lots of marking, course development for the next semester, major changes, program directorship including some really serious issues some students were facing, having to keep doing research, blah, blah, blah—and on the outside of all this, my life, was the calming water and trees I hardly get to see but pasting them made me feel better.

Figure 3: Recollage#4 (14th June 2015)

Description: Representational and compositional meanings

In *Recollage#4* there is a distinct break in the image drawing the eye from the top right hand corner of the page to the bottom left. The break is created by small pieces of paper that have been cut up and pasted on the blue background paper—forming a kind of a river through the entire work. On the top half of the ‘river’ are images of natural objects and environments including Uluru, water, a large gum tree with misty fog in the background and flowers. Also on this side is a violin. On the other side is a shape of jagged black and white lines, a clock, lots of books and other busy inorganic shapes. In the middle of the image I pasted individually cut out letters to spell ‘academia’ which was added to some pre-existing text – “It’s mad, mad...”

Interpretation: Interpersonal meaning and flight

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3 *Recollage#4* continues the theme between my working life and the life I desire—to be
4 outdoors and relaxed doing the things I love. Clearly, I am still grappling with the heavy
5 workload as a new academic and this is another Flight Downward but also one to the sideline
6 as the actual process of collaging allowed me to take a much needed break to reflect on what
7 was happening in my life (Lemon & Garvis, 2014a). The work side of my life is extremely
8 busy—lots of sharp objects and busyness on the ‘work side of things’. However, the framing
9 of the entire image with a natural green border shows there is strength and hope for the good
10 things in life. There are moments of reflection (including these *Recollages*) and calm. Even
11 looking at the image of the trees and water in these magazines made me feel relaxed. Creative
12 practice enabled me to find that ‘quiet, contemplative’ time needed in amongst my working
13 life (Moffatt, 2014).

Flight 4: Feeling somewhat settled

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32 <INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE>

Figure 4: Recollage#8 (August 30th 2017)

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38 *For me, this Recollage is quite metaphorical. I recently began a new role at a new*
39 *university, at a higher level in leadership. I am really proud of what I have done and*
40 *become. I have worked bloody hard for it, that’s for sure! I like the colour palette of*
41 *this image. I feel like I can find more time to enjoy what I love—baking, walking in*
42 *nature, yoga, relaxing—things feel more smoothed out. Maybe the pressure is off a*
43 *bit. I can tick this one off my list – haha. I am not sure about the sharp tools though?*
44 *Maybe they are a reminder for one to accept that academia can be cut-throat, sharp*
45 *and you may need to pick some of these up from time to time. The words certainly*
46 *highlight this. Anyhow I feel good...I am really excited about my new role and where*
47 *that can lead me.*

Description: Representational and compositional meanings

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53 *Recollage#8* represents a number of pasted images from the same colour palette—mainly
54 pale green, light grey and darker shades of green. Most of the images are in abstract form
55 aside from an image of trees and one of a mountain view. In the middle of the picture is a
56 large yellow-orange tick that is bordered with red. Many of the pasted images have textured
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3 patterns for example, a knitted rug, light photographed from a distance, leafy materials and
4
5 metal finishings.
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Interpretation: Interpersonal meaning and flight

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11 Due to the pale palette of this image the interpersonal meaning could be recognised as
12
13 calming. In fact, I did feel calmer creating this Final Flight as an early career academic, as I
14
15 felt the pressure had been lifted due to my being promoted and moving from early to mid-
16
17 career. The large red and orange tick indicates my success in achieving a goal on my never-
18
19 ending list. Less sharp objects enter this *Recollage* although the ones that do are organised
20
21 and tidy—I have learnt how to deal with the workload associated with academia more
22
23 effectively as I have also learnt to say ‘no’ more; an achievement that has been revealed in
24
25 this *Recollage*.
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Discussion and conclusion

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33 Ongoing reflection is essential for professional development and growth (Aldridge, 2015;
34
35 Börjesson, Cedersund, & Bengtsson, 2015). More importantly, my data showed how
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37 reflecting through *Recollages* allowed me to critically reflect on what issues I was facing in
38
39 my daily work, improving my self-care. Such reflection creates space for positive outcomes
40
41 in determining what is needed in order to deal with any challenges faced (Corbin Frazier &
42
43 Eick, 2015; Schwind et al., 2014). If I journaled through language alone, the potentialities of
44
45 such reflection would have been limited. It is clear that the arts-based and multimodal ways
46
47 of reflecting assisted me in knowing what I was facing—bringing the intrinsic out into the
48
49 known (Moffatt, 2014; Morton, van der Bles, & Haslam, 2016) and supporting me through
50
51 such challenges.
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58 A number of distinct themes featured in all of the work—something I was unaware of until
59
60 analysing the work. Representationally, each of the images featured two separate worlds—

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3 my working life and my desired life. The colours strongly indicated that my desired life was
4 to be outside in nature with hues of green and brown featured in organic materials, while my
5 working life was full of rough textures and objects showing the busyness in my life and my
6 struggle in trying to find a work-life balance as an early career academic.
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13 As an early career researcher I was always conscious of doing the right thing and not saying
14 ‘no’ to those in more powerful positions than me. Roper, Ganesh and Inkson (2010) explored
15 how neoliberal environments permeate and shape our thoughts and actions. Noting the
16 influence of neoliberalism as ‘boundaryless’ on careers, the authors argue that a reproduction
17 of discourses can negatively impact on people’s professional growth and lives, leading to a
18 “normality of boundaryless careers” (Roper et al., 2010, p. 674). It was therefore important
19 for me to recognise the need to make space for regular reflection and creative practice for my
20 own wellbeing. Upon reflection, as an early career academic, the university should have
21 been assigned a mentor in my first five years of the academy; someone who looked out for
22 me and protected me against the workload and pressures to ‘always perform’ in a corporate
23 culture (Giroux, 2002; Morrissey, 2015).
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39 In regard to Schwab’s lines of flight, I predominantly felt flights downwards as an early
40 career academic even though at the same time I was flying upwards in my career through my
41 achievements in teaching, service and research. My non-working life however, was not faring
42 well as I rarely took time out to do activities I enjoyed. Berg, Huijbens & Larsen (2016)
43 shared work about the levels of anxiety and stress produced in neoliberal university
44 environments. The interpersonal meanings uncovered in my arts-based, multimodal
45 reflections clearly showed I was under pressure and overloaded. Irwin’s notions of knowing,
46 doing and making supported my professional growth through such a process. Without the
47 creative practice of *Recollage* I would not have been able to make my feelings completely
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3 conscious. The ‘doing’ and ‘making’ allowed me to have the time and space to be a reflexive
4 professional (Irwin, 2004).
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8 In concluding, I offer four key tenets of this study in answering the question: How effective is
9 arts-based/multimodal reflection in supporting an Early Career Researcher’s professional
10 growth, reflection and self-care in the academy? The first is that arts-based and multimodal
11 reflection allowed a form of inquiry that facilitates the internal and emergent expression of
12 professional knowledge and understanding. This in turn, validated an my own internal sense
13 of self as well as ensuring a greater awareness of the system in which I worked. Secondly,
14 creative, multimodal meaning-making supported my professional growth and self-care as,
15 over time, I could see how my career was progressing through the images as well as by
16 relating these to Schwab’s lines of flight. Knowing explicitly the feelings I had towards my
17 work enabled me to reflect on how I might best address these including the creative practice
18 itself. This would consequently assist in me dealing with issues more positively. Thirdly, this
19 study highlighted the need for scheduled and committed participation to professional
20 reflection and most particularly through arts-based and multimodal processes. Finally, being
21 a reflexive professional has potential to support early career academics’ career projection,
22 wellness and awareness of the neoliberal environments in which they work. If early career
23 academics participate in regular arts-based and multimodal reflective work within their
24 professional lives then they may be more able to critically view and transform both their own
25 actions within their working and personal lives. Sharing such work also has potential to raise
26 awareness of the issues that early career academics face in their first five years of
27 employment, resulting in positive change and support for the work they initially showed
28 excitement and passion for. It is therefore recommended that leadership teams and university-
29 wide systems value and enable time and space for much needed professional reflective
30 practice for improved self-care and enjoyment of work.
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Declaration of interest statement

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