



## FEATURE

# A Work In Progress: Investigating the identity of the artist teacher/ freelance artist tutor and its implications for learning throughout the life course.

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## A Work In Progress: Investigating the identity of the artist teacher/freelance artist tutor and its implications for learning throughout the life course.

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### **Synopsis**

This feature addresses the beginning of a qualitative research study investigating the identity of the artist teacher/freelance artist teacher and its implications for learning throughout the life course. The intended purpose of this study is to explore the multiple identity constructions of the artist teacher/freelance artist tutor and the relational interdependence between the individual and the social. This study is a work in progress and concentrates heavily on visual/arts-based research methods. These methods were deemed as important tools for the participants because of the participants' knowledge and participation in the visual arts community.

**Keywords:** artist teacher; identity; life course; arts-based research; visual reflexivity.

### **Introduction**

This feature addresses the beginning of a qualitative research study investigating the identity of the artist teacher/freelance artist teacher and its implications for learning throughout the life course. This study is from the standpoint of sociocultural and relational ontology, in which, individuals learn in and through the experiences they have dependent upon the historical and cultural environment they are in. (Billett, 2008) The intended purpose of this study is to explore the multiple identity constructions of the artist teacher/freelance artist tutor and the relational interdependence between the individual and the social. First, I will address the background, context and rationale of the study followed by a discussion of methodologies and tools used. This study is a work in progress and concentrates heavily on visual/arts-based research methods. These methods were deemed as important tools for the participants because of the participants' knowledge and participation in the visual arts community.

### **Background, Context and Rationale**

The artist teacher is a combined identity between being an artist and being a teacher. In Scotland there are three types of artist teachers: a Secondary Art and Design Teacher (11-18 years), a Visiting Primary Art Specialist (5-10 years) and a Freelance Artist Tutor (all age

groups). A Secondary Art and Design Teacher and Visiting Primary Art Specialist teach within the educational sector whereas Freelance artist tutors are artists who work within the community and educational sector. Freelance artist tutors visit schools, galleries, museums and community centres to conduct art-based experiences. These artist tutors tend to work on a part-time basis with a high percentage of their time focused on their personal art practice. The identity of the artist teacher/freelance artist tutor contributes to the relational interdependence between the individual and the social.

Individuals experience three different planes of focus which attribute to one's unique socially shaped life history: apprenticeship, guided participation and participatory appropriation. (Rogoff, 1994) These three planes are relational and not hierarchical and speak to the community/institutional, interpersonal and personal. Apprenticeship involves individuals participating with others in culturally organised activity (i.e. going to school). Guided participation refers to face-to-face interaction as well as side-by-side joint participation. As expressed by Rogoff (1994, 60) "The 'guidance' referred to in guided participation involves the direction offered by cultural and social values, as well as social partners; the 'participation' in guided participation refers to observation as well as hands-on involvement in an activity." Participatory appropriation refers to how individuals change through their involvement of one activity against another.

The artist teacher/freelance artist tutor identifies with various identity constructions through the processes of: learning to be a student of art, learning to be an artist, learning to be a teacher of art (if they so choose to), and learning to work within the social environment they are engaged in. As du Gay (1996) argues, 'the relationship between a person's sense of who they are-their personal identity- and the paid work they perform for a living' has been a topic of concern to those researching work-related identification. In the constant change of work practices, individuals' agency plays an important role in reinforcing participation within them. (Billett, 2011) It is the aim of this study to explore the identity of the artist teacher/freelance artist tutor and its implications for how artist teachers/freelance artist tutors learn throughout their life course.

Learning throughout the life course embraces, in principle, a wide range of social spheres and policy areas. For the artist teacher/freelance artist tutor, one's identity is contingent upon their personal biography as an individual, as an artist and as a teacher/tutor. It is the intention of this study to work closely with a number of artist teachers/freelance artist tutors to explore the ambiguities, contingencies, and changes in identity that may occur alongside a key moment of transition in their lives. Life-as-transition investigates movement through life stages, bridges that connect old and new, 'crisis-events', or 'critical incidents' which are rooted in theories of 'typical' adult maturation. (Ecclestone et al., 2010) From this context, a series of questions and art works will be asked and created to gather an in-depth data set in relation to: artistic identity, pedagogical identity, creative identity and professional identity.

## **Methods**

This study is from a qualitative approach focusing upon the content, meaning, cultural influences and biography of the artist teacher/freelance artist tutors involved in the research. The appropriateness of qualitative research to this study is the narrative insight of the artist teacher's identity within multiple contexts and constructs.

A sociocultural approach is being used because narrative inquiry reveals ambiguity rather than tidying it away. Narrative inquiry (a form of narrative learning) is not so much about the end product of a narrative but the process of unfolding, reconstructing and recounting one's life story. (Biesta et al., 2008) It is my argument that life narrative can be a site for both learning and the generation of the learning processes for the artist teacher/freelance artist tutor.

In support of Narrative Inquiry I will be using Visual/Arts-Based Research Methods to allow the artist teacher/freelance artist tutor to express their creative identities in the process that suits them best: producing artwork. This in turn, will inform the data by providing verbal and visual data to the analysis of the study. Participants will create works of art that display visually their personal conception of their identity. A conversation will take place in and around the artwork as an exercise in knowledge construction: a process of coming to know. In practice-based inquiry, analysis of images is only a part of a reflective process; the creation of images is the primary mode of inquiry. (Marshall, 2007) Both art and narrative reveal a fundamental structure and quality of personal and social experience. (Elliott, 2011) Visual research looks into the interpretation of visual phenomena in human societies and the many ways that humans negotiate individual and shared meanings. (Howell et al., 2015) Visual methodologies are the media and mode in which artist teachers/freelance artist tutors produce visual data.

## **Tools**

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted throughout the study. Answers given will inform subsequent semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a suitable approach when seeking rich data that illuminates individual experiences and attitudes. As expressed by Pinar (1975), teachers re-tell past educational experiences as a tool of critical reflection to examine personal and social educational beliefs. In support of this, artist teachers/freelance artist tutors will be asked questions in relation to: personal narratives of the art making process, the experience of the art making process in the context of their lives, the discovery of new meanings and relationships expressed through narrative dialogue, and how their art practice informs their pedagogical practice. Questions will be asked in a 'narrative

environment' (the natural environment of the participant) which may be the artist teacher's/freelance artist tutor's Studio, art classroom, or personalized location.

Another method of inquiry used within this research will be the use of visual reflexivity. Visual reflexivity is an ethnographical process I will be undertaking to get to what Malinowski states, 'the native's point of view' (Malinowski, 1922 cited in Anderson, 1989, 250). Visual reflexivity falls within the research branch of Visual/Arts-Based Research methodologies. The intention of using visual reflexivity is to assist the researcher in generating insights, explaining events and seeking understandings. In using visual reflexivity within the research study, I will be able to be consciously aware of my stance within the research study.

Visual reflexivity also lends itself to the process of self-reflexion that can 'unmask complex political/ideological agendas' hidden in our writing'. (Richardson, 1994 cited in Finlay, 2002, 211) Through the process of visual reflexivity I will actively construct interpretations of 'what do I know' while at the same time questioning, 'how do I know what I know'. Through visual reflexivity I will be keeping a journal/drawing log as well as creating artworks, on my interpretations, introspections, and placement within the research study. The journal/drawing log will contain verbal accounts and visual imagery of the interviews taking place and the environment in which they were created. A reflexive journal is an explicit evaluation of the self and unveils decision making, thinking, values and experiences which are made visible to both the self and the reader (Shaw, 2010). In keeping a journal log, I will be able to revisit thoughts and ideas constructed during the research study. The process of keeping a journal/drawing log will inform subsequent questions used in semi-structured interviews and narrative dialogues.

Calling on imagery helps the artist teacher bring out through their work their personal identities, history, conversations and social lives. Artist teachers/freelance artist tutors will create artwork throughout the research study to inform the process of inquiry. As artists, artist teachers/freelance artist tutors are exposed to different media to express themselves within their art practice. It is important that alongside created works, the artist teacher expresses (through audio recording or written text) 'What it is they have created?' and 'How the work is associated with them as an artist teacher/freelance artist tutor?' The use of visual image acts as a "supplement and as a means to bypass the restrictions of verbal discourse alone." (Leitch, 2006, 556)

Throughout the course of this study a collection of artworks will be collected from participants to be exhibited in a local gallery/museum/university/community centre. The process of creating an exhibition informs the data being collected for the research study. The reasoning for an exhibition is to unveil to the community the importance of the artistic identity to learning throughout the life course. In the construction of the exhibition the work produced in a written context will be presented in a visual context. Also, the construction of the exhibition work will

act as a process of reflexivity for the participants involved. Documentation of this process by means of verbal and visual context will inform the written portion of the study as well.

## **Conclusion**

This research study aims to explore the multiple identity constructs of the artist teacher/freelance artist tutor and the interdependence between the individual and the social. Through the use of Narrative Inquiry and Visual/Arts-Based Research methods, artist teachers/ freelance artist tutors will critically reflect on their personal and social educational beliefs. It is the aim of this research to contribute to theory development in the domain of art education as well as create public awareness on the importance of the artist teacher/freelance artist tutor to learning.

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