Optimising flow through material engagements in the visual arts: an a/r/tographic inquiry

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Optimising Flow through Material Engagements in Visual Arts: An A/r/tographic Inquiry

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I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

Signed Jemma Peisker

Date 23/04/2019
Abstract

The middle years of schooling are viewed as a time when students are at the greatest risk of disengagement from learning, with student motivation and engagement viewed as critical. Disengaged students are at risk of a range of adverse social and academic outcomes, which have significant implications for the school experiences and life trajectories of young people. Therefore, this study seeks to refocus educational agendas in Australia towards vital early adolescent educational experiences, which promote engagement and flow. As flow is a psychological state accompanied by highly-engaging activities, flow experiences in school are necessary to avoid student disengagement from learning. Flow is correlated with outcomes in adolescents such as increased concentration, enjoyment, happiness, resilience, motivation, optimism and future-mindedness, academic achievement, self-esteem and belonging to school community. As adolescents spend the majority of their time in compulsory education, the occurrence of flow within the school setting is an important area for research.

Flow demands an active engagement in a task and characteristically engages concentration, pleasure and interest through meaningful, stimulating activities which balance challenge and skill. This study draws upon the persistent patterns of human interest in artmaking to explore flow in early adolescent students. Artmaking tasks such as ceramics and painting have endured throughout human history, as such it is posited that the challenge and skill required for artmaking occasions flow experiences. This study thus explores the primacy of material engagement in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and examines students’ self-reported flow experiences within and through Art and text.

Using A/r/tography as the methodology, this study was framed by Material Engagement Theory and Flow theory, and engaged seventeen Year 9 students in a Visual Arts Program, resulting in two types of information being collected, namely student self-reported written responses and student artworks. The A/r/tographer responded analytically to this information in turn, with the creation of a body of artworks, exegetic and analytical statements. Further, this research is enhanced by
intentional and idiosyncratic visual and design elements deliberately posed in the architecture of engagement of this thesis, so that the reading engages artful, textual and aesthetically reflexive positionings and layered readings.

The study found that the majority of Year 9 students experienced flow from active engagement with Art materials, demonstrating that Visual Arts can positively engage students in an educational context. Furthermore, the study found that artmaking tasks promoted social, cooperative and collaborative behaviours within the classroom environment. The findings of this research are supported by visual and aesthetic analyses of the information gathered by the A/r/tographer as a central tenet of A/r/tographic inquiry.

The study proposes a shift away from neoliberal agendas, which position school students as economic commodities, towards education that is inclusive of persistent patterns of human activity such as material engagements, and prioritises a focus on developing the whole child through social, emotional, moral and intellectual development.
Acknowledgements

Associate Professor Alexandra Lasczik and Dr Sue Hudson, your time, guidance and input into this work is something I will forever be grateful for. I deeply admire and respect you as academics and individuals, and consider myself very fortunate to have you as colleagues and mentors.

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Background and Context

A number of years ago I became aware that Arts education was suffering from curriculum adversity, being isolated from other curriculum areas (Gibson, Fleming, Anderson, 2015), and viewed as expendable, expensive and non-essential in the educational setting (Cutcher, 2014; Fowler, 1996; Rabkin & Remond, 2006). As a primary, middle and secondary school Visual Art teacher, I was deeply concerned as I experienced the purposes and practices of education become entrenched by neoliberalism.

I witnessed national curriculum and administrative decisions altering subject priorities, despite a lack of insight surrounding practical based subjects (Robertson, 2017). School environments became sites of “constant and significant curriculum changes” and shifting school organisational structures affected practice-based subject teachers’ agency, resulting in marginalised teacher input (Roberts, 2017, p. 1).

I felt educational reform was disconnected to some of the most valuable and vital functions of Australian schooling, as emphasis moved towards student as human capital. The social and curricula shift devaluing the Visual Arts didn’t align with my educational observations within the classroom. It is my experience that students deeply value their time in Visual Arts as a place where students form social bonds that transcends other environments that are offered to them in their education.

In the Visual Art classroom I saw firsthand that student engagement is not simply about good classroom behaviour or attendance, amongst other things it is about a connection with learning.
I began to view the pervasive influence of the dark side of neoliberalism (van der Walt, 2017) in education as absurd. There were aspects of neoliberalism that defied my belief as having authority in schools such as extreme cost containment, disempowerment and deskilling of teachers, commodification of knowledge and technicism (van der Walt, 2017).

I wrestled with the disconnect as I had experienced that education can provide for students’ personal character needs and their educational needs (Berkowitz, Althof & Bier, 2012). I felt afraid for the consequences of students losing valuable time in Art.

Humans have made Art for tens of thousands of years, in every place and in every time (Dissanayake, 1996), and I felt students being denied access to the Arts as a right in their education was a social justice issue. However, to mount my arguments to push against the rising tide of neoliberal curriculum narrowing and devaluing, I began to distinctly articulate those indefinable aspects of Art education that engaged students so much. I grounded my thoughts theoretically in anthropology in order to understand and explain the innate passion for Art that I witnessed my students had.

I wanted to promote the views of the students themselves, as student voice is a significant priority for me as it can can guide policy makers to “gain a better understanding of how students make sense of learning and develop capacities to influence improvement” (Robertson, 2017, p. 1). Furthermore, in my thinking I considered anthropological engagement in materials, [in this case the techniques, technologies and processes in Visual Arts, (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2018)] and the social context of creativity (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996) to explore student engagement in the Visual Arts classroom.

I therefore committed to the inquiry through the processes and challenges of the PhD, and I developed a research aim in response: To explore the primacy of material engagement in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and examine students’ self-reported flow experiences with and through Art and text.
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Overview

School challenges adolescents socially, emotionally and intellectually, as students navigate academic learning, peer groups and biological changes (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Educational engagement is necessary for adolescents’ sense of belonging within the school environment and culture (Schall, Wallace & Chhuon, 2016), yet the current neoliberal climate demands that classrooms focus solely on limited academic goals in order to increase student performance in high stakes testing.

Such a focus on academic-only goals can prompt reduced motivation in youth (Schall, et al., 2016), and together with the proliferation of high-stakes testing and standardization, this may result in suppression of creativity, imagination and individuality (Robinson et al., 2015), and may also engender diminished motivation in many youths (Meece, Anderman, & Andreman, 2005). Such reduced motivation and a perceived lack of belonging, “leads to disengagement from schoolwork and overall disconnection from school” (Schall, et al., 2016, p. 472).

Middle school is a vital area of education where early adolescents experience physiological and psychological changes, which require expert guidance in the school setting (Hudson & Hudson, 2012). Effective creative and aesthetic intervention strategies for fostering adolescent engagement in high school increases feelings of belonging within the school environment (Willms, 2000), as well as myriad other social, psychological and educational benefits (Cutcher, 2013; 2014; 2015).

This inquiry is an A/r/tographic exploration with seventeen Year 9 Visual Arts students’ regarding their material engagements and flow experiences, in one Gold Coast classroom in Queensland, Australia. The A/r/tography
also includes aesthetic, visual and analytical response by me as the A/r/tographer that deeply explores the aesthetic and material engagements in my own experience of flow, as well as responding analytically and aesthetically to those of the students.

Specifically, the students’ engagements with artmaking allowed the inquiry to consider the relationship between material occupation and flow. Further and importantly, the study explored how students’ creation of aesthetic objects and images promoted social and cooperative behaviour, happiness and pleasure, as well as resulting in the forming of expressive and creative artefacts.

Flow (or optimal experience) was targeted in this inquiry as it is connected with engagement (Pascha, 2017) and correlated in the literature with outcomes in adolescents such as increased concentration, enjoyment, happiness, strength, motivation, self-esteem, and optimism (Hanson, 2009). Furthermore, flow promotes attitudes of greater personal engagement in the resolution of problems and “more suitable coping strategies” (Scorsolini-Comin, Fontaine, Koller, & Santos, 2013, p. 668), appropriately addressing the unique challenges that adolescence presents (Hudson & Hudson, 2012; Pendergast & Bahr, 2010).

Our culture has become disengaged, being too “dependent on passive, redundant entertainment” (Csíkszentmihályi, 1993, p. 198), resulting in little flow being experienced. However, as adolescents spend the majority of their time in compulsory education (Hanson, 2005; Pagels, Raustorp, Guban, Froberg & Boldmann, 2016), the occurrence of flow within the school setting has the potential for socially positive consequences allowing individuals to flourish and function at their best (Burkewitz, 2014; Larson, 1988). Similarly, Art education privileges a connection with persistent patterns of human activity and aesthetic need (Dissanayake, 1995) that honours flow (Burkewitz, 2014; Chilton, 2013; Vialle & Botticchio, 2009) and helps educate students to be more successful and

1 The capital signifier ‘A’ for all permutations of Art, A/r/tography, Arts etc. is engaged in this inquiry as an act of political resistance that operates against the marginalization of the Arts in education. See Lasczik Cutcher (2018).
more productive human beings (Fowler, 1996). The “existence of a strong positive relationship between participation in the Arts and benefits for individual learners” (Ewing, 2010, p. 13), demonstrates the affirmative effects derived by Arts-rich education programs (Catterall, 2009; Ewing, 2011; Fowler, 1996) as is asserted in this study.

1.2 Research Aim

The research aim of this inquiry is therefore: To explore the primacy of material engagement in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and examine students’ self-reported flow experiences with and through Art and text.

The Year 9 classroom was chosen as the initial site for this A/r/tography because the physiological and psychological changes and challenges of adolescence require expert guidance in the school setting (Hudson & Hudson, 2012). As such, the Year 9 classroom afforded the opportunity to explore a Visual Art Program [VAP] which nurtured, engaged and challenged students within these important adolescent years.

The research engages A/r/tography (Irwin, 2013; Irwin et al., 2017; Irwin & De Cosson, 2004) as the overarching methodology, examining students’ artmaking engagements and their responses with and through Art and text. The theoretical framework aligns with the practices of A/r/tography and entwines Material Engagement Theory [MET] (Malafouris, 2013; Roberts, 2015) and psychological flow (hereon in called flow) (Csíkszentmihályi, 1975; 1993; Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2009; Schall, Wallace & Chhuon, 2016). A/r/tography provides a uniquely transformative opportunity to foreground the students’ creative works and self-reports in their own voice. Such affective and rich outputs are authentic and sincere declarations of student ‘truths.’ In turn, my suite of creative works calibrates, transcends, analyses and harmonises the student voices.
1.2.1 Research questions.

In unpacking and addressing the research aim, the research questions are as follows:

1. What is material engagement in Visual Arts?

2. Are the outcomes of material engagements in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom aligned with persistent patterns of human aesthetic activity?

3. Does flow occur in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom?

The three research questions directly unpack the research aim to explore the primacy of material engagement in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and examine students’ self-reported flow experiences with and through Art and text. The research questions are framed around three themes within the research aim: the primacy of material engagement in Visual Arts, material engagements in the Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and flow. Therefore, each of the research questions address the themes within the research aim. Furthermore, the three research questions are informed by the literature to provide context and foundation to the study, and to ensure academic rigor within the research.

1.3 Composition of the Thesis

The research aim and research questions are explored within this inquiry using A/r/tography. A/r/tography merges the relationship between educational theory, research and Arts practice into an Arts-based educational research [ABER] methodology (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, 2008). As an A/r/tographic inquiry (Irwin, 2008), artistic modalities are imperative and foundational (Barone & Eisner, 2006), and represent unique means for enhancing educational perspectives by communicating the indefinable dimensions of experiences within schools. As
such, this thesis is unique in its arrangement, format, ordering, and privileging of aesthetic form, which may differ from other qualitative inquiries, particularly in the findings and analysis chapters. This is seen as a deliberate design strategy, for a particular architecture of engagement (Lasczik Cutcher, 2018).

1.3.1 Introduction to literature review.

Following this introductory chapter, the inquiry begins with a literature review (Chapter 2). The literature presents the ways that the ubiquity of the Arts in contemporary human life has its roots as far back as tens of thousands of years (Dutton, 2009; McKay, 1972; Spivey, 2005) - and in Australia, 80 000 years - through material engagements that occupy a special place in the life of humans as an inseparable component of human thought and sociality (Malafouris, 2015; Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010; Roberts, 2015). The literature also explores how the universality of aesthetic behaviour demonstrates the importance of Art to humans and the significance of Visual Arts in education today (Cutcher, 2013). The literature review is followed by the theoretical framework (Chapter 3).

1.3.2 Introduction to theoretical framework.

The theoretical framework is positioned by the literature in this inquiry in Chapter 3 and theoretically frames material engagement (Malafouris, 2004; 2010) and flow theory (Csíkszentmihályi, 1993; Csíkszentmihályi, Abuhamdeh & Nakamura, 2014) as the two overarching and entwined theories in this study.

The way in which material culture shapes the manner in which people act, perceive and think is beginning to be understood through a creative integration of archaeology, anthropology and neuroscience (Malafouris, 2015) in “new cross-disciplinary synergies, capable of transforming our understanding of the relation and co-evolution of brains, bodies and things” (Malafouris & Renfew, 2010, p.1). Material Engagement Theory [MET] (Malafouris, 2015) reinstates the priority of material engagement in the evolution of human intelligence in the processes of learning, enskillment, development and evolution (Malafouris, 2015). In using the theoretical framing
of MET, the “mechanisms [by] which humans are able to engage in art” (Pearce et al., 2016, p. 267) intersects the suggestion that Art has the essence of positive reinforcement (Stucky & Nobel, 2010), as it originates from activities concerned with human survival (Dissanayake, 1995). As such, in this study, the “ways in which art and art materiality should be understood in relation to the ecological, social and technical environment” (Malafouris, 2015, p. 353) are understood through the overarching theoretical field of Material Engagement Theory.

Flow and the term ‘optimal experience’ are used interchangeably within flow theory (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990) to describe those occasions when a sense of exhilaration or a deep sense of enjoyment and engagement are felt. Flow is an informative, instructive and useful theory for educators, particularly as “educators reconsider pedagogy, access, and creating climates conducive for teacher and student engagement” (Beard, 2015, p. 353). Flow is correlated with outcomes in adolescents such as increased concentration, enjoyment, happiness, strength, motivation, self-esteem, optimism and future mindedness (Hanson, 2009).

1.3.3 Introduction to methodology and research design.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology and research design for this study. This chapter addresses the ways in which the research aim and questions, and the A/r/tographic research approach and methodology align. A/r/tography is not a method of data collection or analysis, but rather is an onto-epistemological stance about how meaning is made. The onto-epistemological position of this study is A/r/tography. The ways of knowing and being in the world are as an artist, researcher and teacher and the spaces in-between as knowings, beings and becomings (Irwin, 2004). The onto-epistemology exists through the experiences of the Artist (a), Researcher (r) and Teacher (t) or A/r/tographer (Springgay, et al., 2008). As the A/r/tographer’s identities are interwoven within methodological perspectives, the personal orientation to the research is also positioned within this chapter (see Section 4.3.2.1) as a further alignment to A/r/tographic inquiry.
As Arts-based educational research offers a variety of approaches (Barone & Eisner, 2006), the method of inquiry engaged in this study merges educational theory, research and Arts practice, praxis, and poiesis (Springgay et al, 2008) to develop a Visual Arts program [VAP] for the students. As noted previously, the Visual Arts program was implemented in one Year 9 classroom of 17 students, in one Queensland secondary school, and was conducted over 9 lessons in a six-week period for a total of 580 minutes, or almost 10 hours.

The research design enacted three phases of the inquiry in gathering information, with the first being the delivery of the VAP to the Year 9 students, where information was gathered around students’ artmaking and written reflections pertaining to flow. Phase 2 was an A/r/tographic response and analysis, in the creation of a body of artworks both responding to and transcending Phase 1, while Phase 3 was the concluding analysis of all of the information gathered. This is further discussed in Section 4.5.3.

In this thesis, a prelude is also included, and is located before the findings, discussion and analysis chapter and provides an orientation and background to the creative and practice-based elements that inform Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

1.3.4 Orientation to findings, discussion and analysis.

There were several types of information gathered for discussion and analysis in this study, those being students’ material engagements with artworks created during the Visual Arts Program, the student self-reported reflections, and the A/r/tographic body of work. Chapter 5 discusses, presents and analyses students’ material engagements and the products of their material engagements (the artworks). The chapter is curated as an exhibition of the students’ works, to layer, enhance and make meaning through artistic ways of knowing (Eisner, 2002), by

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2 In A/r/tography, the term ‘data’ is at odds with its epistemology. In this inquiry, the word ‘data’ is therefore replaced with ‘information gathered’ or ‘gathered information’.
employing design elements that were carefully selected (Barone & Eisner, 1997). The design elements are crafted as
architectures of engagement (Cutcher, 2015; Lasczik Cutcher, 2018) to allow for a layered and complex aesthetic and
scholarly readings.

Chapter 6 presents a discussion and analysis of the students’ self-reported experiences of flow. The students’
self-reports were manually coded and organised under three themes of flow, namely concentration, pleasure and
interest (Csíkszentmihályi, 1975; Ullen, et al., 2012), which aligned synergistically with the findings
(Csíkszentmihályi, Schneider & Shernoff, 2003; Hanson, 2009; Hektner & Asakawa, 2000; Schmidt, 2010). Most
students reported that they did in fact experience flow as a result of their artmaking in the VAP.

These two analysis chapters (5 & 6) were separated in their discussion as a strategic A/r/tographic device. As
Chapters 5 & 6 contain exhibits of student’s artworks, the reading is disrupted and enhanced to allow for deeper
understandings to emerge (Irwin, 2004).

Chapter 7 analyses the two bodies of information gathered (in Chapter 5 & 6) as an aesthetic and analytical
process in my own ‘voice,’ as an A/r/tographic riposte to the research. The creation of a body of works that both
reflect and diffract the information gathered from the students, illuminates the ways creative output and practice occur
as an integral part of the research process (Candy, 2006), as well as creating an aesthetically posed, analytical layer
to the inquiry.

The reader will notice that a particular aesthetic is evident within the design and presentation of Chapters 5, 6
and 7, which is significant in the way concepts or thoughts are conveyed (Abe, 2013) in this inquiry. I invite the reader
to engage with the curated presentation of the findings, discussion and analysis chapters as a site of activity for shared
interaction, knowledge and access (Demarrais & Robb, 2012), the site for the intertextuality of students, A/r/tographer
and audience. The thesis closes with a concluding remarks in Chapter 8.
1.4 Implications of this Research for Education and Educational Stakeholders

The A/r/tographic methodology of this inquiry is aligned with the purposes of Arts-based educational research being for the betterment of educational policy and practice (Barone & Eisner, 2006). As such, I intend this inquiry has implications for, and will contribute to the realm of adolescent studies, positive psychology, teaching and learning pedagogies, educational administration, and educational policy.

Implications of this research address adolescent studies, positive psychology and educational pedagogies, and administration and policy, as the inquiry aligns with political concerns over mental and emotional conditions of citizens, which has seen a significant growth in sociological research (Brunila, 2014; Carlisle, Henderson & Hanlon, 2009; McLeod & Wright, 2014) and interventions to develop emotional well-being (Ecclestone, 2014, p. 35), including in education (Fleming et al., 2015; Seligman, et al., 2009; Waters, 2014).

Education can contribute to student well-being (Fleming et al., 2015; Seligman, et al., 2009; Waters, 2014), as schools are sites where adolescents spend most of their time, while they “experience significant cognitive, emotional, physical, and socio-cultural development that impact on their behaviour, learning, and interactions with others” (Hudson, 2011, p. 32). Student well-being is both made possible, and limited by, the environment in which youth are living (Wyn et al., 2015).

Schools play a critical socialisation role, which can establish and maintain positive cultural values and promote well-being for youth (Kern, Water, Adlera and White, 2014), and this inquiry demonstrated that material engagements in the Visual Arts promoted social, cooperative and collaborative behaviours and connected students to their peers, their learning and their learning environment (see Chapter 6).
The findings of this research therefore demonstrate that this inquiry has implications for educational policies and practices for early adolescents. Furthermore, this research has implications for positive education practices which are viewed to have the ability to form the basis of a new prosperity that values both wealth and well-being (Seligman, et al., 2009). Seligman, et al., (2009) write that,

Positive education is defined as education for both traditional skills and for happiness. The high prevalence worldwide of depression among young people, the small rise in life satisfaction, and the synergy between learning and positive emotion all argue that the skills for happiness should be taught in school. There is substantial evidence from well controlled studies that skills that increase resilience, positive emotion, engagement and meaning can be taught to schoolchildren. (p.293)

The teaching of well-being factors to school children (as Seligman et al. suggest in their 2009 research) is being integrated into Australian education (Green et al., 2011; Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2015). Student well-being is “emerging as an important approach to the development of students’ social, emotional and academic competence and a significant contribution to the ongoing battle to prevent youth depression, suicide, self-harm, antisocial behaviour [such as bullying] and substance abuse” (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, p.4, 2008).

The framework for teaching well-being in schools is divided into three different realms (Seligman, 2009), being positive emotion, engaged life (flow), and meaningful life. Most obviously, the implications for this research align with ‘engaged life’ (Seligman, 2009) as the students self-reported flow being experienced in the VAP\(^3\). Additionally, this inquiry also found that artmaking increased pleasure and happiness in the school environment for

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\(^3\) as flow sits under engagement (Csikszentmihályi, 1975)
students (see Chapter 6), thus this research also has implications for the realm of ‘positive emotion’ for well-being in schools (Seligman, 2009).

This study presents a case for education to move away from the dark side of neoliberal agendas (van der Walt, 2017) towards a more student focused direction. As Western society is presently dominated by the unending pursuit of economic growth, there is a “growing sense of individual alienation, social fragmentation and civic disengagement [which correlates] with the decline of more spiritual, moral and ethical aspects of life” (Carlisle et al., 2009, p.1556). This argument for the unending pursuit of economic growth and the implications on well-being must be addressed in current educational policy, particularly as “the aim of wealth should not be to blindly produce more wealth, but to produce more well-being” (Seligman, 2009, p. 307).

1.5 A note to the reader

The reader is encouraged to consider the materiality of the printed, hard copy thesis, as opposed to its digital counterpart, in order to intensify, complement and layer information as a further material engagement, transforming theory as distinct from practice into theory as practice (Irwin, 2008). I have deeply contemplated the aesthetic experience for the reader of this thesis, considering the material elements such as paper choices – texture, colour, style and weight, insinuating a language reflective and responsive to the aesthetic nature of research (Wallin, 2013). The thesis is designed so that it can be read in a lineal style, but chapters may also be engaged with individually and in any order (Cutcher, 2015); with each chapter artfully presenting a portion of the whole, yet able to operate transcendent from the whole.
1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Definition of key terms can be found in Appendix A.

1.7 Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter presents the background and context for the study and its design, with the research aims and questions. This chapter also presents a summary of the theoretical framework of material engagement and flow, which frames this study, as well as the research design that incorporates A/r/tography. Overall the research introduced in this chapter is a deliberate departure from lineal ways of knowing, and invited the reader to engage with this study in dynamic momentum, movement and flow (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2013) as it explores the primacy of material engagement in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and examine students’ self-reported flow experiences with and through Art and text.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Preview

Chapter 2 presents the literature review for this study. This chapter begins by providing an overview of the Visual Arts in contemporary Australian contexts in Section 2.2. Following this, the chapter is arranged to present the literature directed towards the research questions. Section 2.3 addresses research question 1 and presents the literature surrounding material engagement in Visual Arts. Section 2.4 addresses research question 2 and presents the literature surrounding persistent patterns of human aesthetic activity. Section 2.5 addresses research question 3 and presents the literature surrounding Arts making in educational contexts. Following this, the chapter summary is presented in Section 2.6.

2.2 Setting the Scene for Visual Arts in Contemporary Australian Educational Contexts

This section (2.2) addresses the Visual Arts in Australian educational contexts, to provide a foundation for the research to rest upon. Summarising the Visual Arts in current Australian educational climates affords the context upon which this research proceeds. While predominantly Australian literature is reviewed, it is acknowledged that education has commonalities across global contexts (Education Services Australia, 2008), and thus international literature in this summary relates to matters relevant to Australian educational issues. This is mentioned as Australian educational history and climate are unique to the Australian nation, in spite of education becoming increasing globally scrutinised (Robinson & Aronica, 2015).
The Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority [QCAA], is the state body that provides syllabuses and assessment policy to schools in Queensland. They propose (QCAA, 2015; 2017) that the 21st century skills required in the senior syllabus are critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, collaboration, personal and social skills and ICT skills (QCAA, 2017). The degree to which these skills are embedded into teaching and learning strategies within the general syllabus is determined by the distinctive nature of the subject.

Associated with creative thinking, for example, is innovation, initiative and enterprise, curiosity and imagination, creativity, generating and applying new ideas, identifying alternatives, and seeing or making new links (QCAA, 2015, p.11). It should be noted that these skills are fundamental to learning in and through the Arts (Eisner, 2002) and are a repeated theme used in education agenda and reform (Albury, Beresford, Caple & Peterson, 2016; Australian Government, 2017; Parliament of Australia, 2017; QCAA, 2015; Robinson et al., 2015). In fact, the then Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, reinforced the importance of creative thinking through an inquiry ensuring “universities and public and private providers of vocational education and training can meet the needs of a future labour force focused on innovation and creativity” (Australian Government, 2017).

Whilst creativity and innovation are continuously reinforced as essential to the 21st century learner, it is often underlined as a key factor in education because of its link to economic prosperity (Albury et al., 2015; Australian Government, 2017). Although the suggestion that the way we “educate our young people has never been more important,” it is thought that this is because “investment in human capital has been shown to generate three times the rate of return in terms of economic growth as physical investments” (Albury et al., 2015, p.2).
2.2.1 Visual Arts, creativity and innovation.

Former Prime Minister Malcom Turnbull noted that “the Australia of the future has to be a nation that is agile, that is innovative, that is creative,” (Turnbull, 2015, para. 6). The Australian Government has reforms in place which promote creativity and innovation in education through Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths [STEM] (Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes, 2016). However, Robinson (2011, p. 41) states, “if the government were to design an education system to inhibit creativity, it could hardly do better,” since governments, educational sectors and schools all promote the importance of creativity but in reality they suppress it (Robinson, 2011). For example, Robinson et al. (2015) claim the proliferation of testing and standardisation suppresses creativity, individuality and imagination.

Whilst the skills of collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity and innovation can be gained through a STEM-based curriculum, a STEM-preferred curriculum is a further unnecessary curriculum narrowing - as one could assert that the above mentioned skills are the core business of Arts programs (Eisner, 2002), yet they are not privileged in a STEM curriculum. Indeed, Fowler (1996) believes that when subjects that promote creativity and innovation such as the Arts are perceived to have little value, they suffer from reduced time and funding in current educational reforms, as it is thought to be happening in Australia currently (Cutcher, 2014).

Anderson (cited in Gibson et al., 2015), in agreement with Robinson (2011), muses that schools extol the virtues of creativity but are organised against the possibly of it actually emerging. The irony is that although “governments, businesses and communities now widely regard creativity and innovation as fundamental to social, economic, cultural and technological growth” (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training, and Youth Affairs [MYCEETYA], 2007, p. 4), authentic support for the Arts in the curriculum has not transcended the rhetoric (Cutcher, 2014).
To establish from where this “contradictory gap between rhetoric and reality about the importance of the Arts” (Ewing, 2010, pp. 28-29) originates, recent policy and educational practice reveal the ongoing and sometimes difficult position for the Arts to be included as a relevant and valued part of education. Robinson’s (2011) statement about creativity being promoted by the government as method for economic prosperity is authenticated in the very lines of the Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes (2016) paper,

Education systems and schools also need to better support students in learning skills such as collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity and innovation. These so called ‘21st century skills’ will be essential for students entering a workforce that is undergoing massive rapid technological change. (p.11)

Anderson’s (2011) position is visible through this support demonstrated in the Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes (2016) agenda that it is considered the domain of STEM subjects, rather than through the Arts to assert creative learning experiences. Although creativity is not the sole domain of the Arts, it should be recognised as the central business of the Arts (Eisner, 2002), as the “arts foster imagination, risk-taking and curiosity—important aspects of creativity” (Ewing, 2010, p. 16).

Due to the current educational reforms with a STEM focus, the role of Visual Arts in Australian education appears to be uncertain and although creativity and innovation are regarded as fundamental to social, economic, cultural and technological growth (MCEETYA, 2007, p. 4), authentic support for the Arts in the curriculum is questionable (Ewing, 2010). Despite suggestions that the Arts should be considered an essential component in any respectable economic policy-maker’s development strategy, it is found that too often the way people experience culture takes second place to its impact on phenomena such as the economy (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016).
Furthermore, the literature suggests that educational design promoting increased funding, time allocations, teacher training and value of the Arts is not translating into schools (Ewing, 2010; Fowler, 1996). The terms ‘innovation’ and ‘creativity’ are widely used in new educational agendas, yet the systematic implementation of pedagogy that encourages these skills is not being applied or foregrounded by government, as many teachers attest (Cutcher, 2014).

However, institutions and policy makers independently interpret innovation and creativity, and it seems, exclude the Visual Arts in order to achieve political goals aiming to create an economically competitive nation (Cutcher, 2014). The Australian Secondary Principal’s Association [ASPA] (2016) claim that the policy direction regarding assisting Australia’s transition to a more creative, innovative and entrepreneurial nation requires more than just a focus on literacy, numeracy and STEM. Rather, they state that “it requires a shift in learning and in the leadership of that learning” (ASPA, 2016, p. 5).

Such an economic educational agenda in contemporary time has left Visual Arts languishing (O’Connor, 2016) at the corners of the curriculum, despite the value of Arts in education asserted repeatedly to be of benefit to cognitive, behavioural, health, social and economic ways, as well as having an overall positive impact on learning (Crossick et al., 2016; Cutcher, 2014; Ewing 2010, 2011; Green, 1995; Worzel, 2011).

However, in Australian contexts how the “arts are valued in curriculum statements is tied to issues of power, cultural practices and professional, personal and political dispositions” (Ewing, 2010, p. 30). One example of this dynamic is evident in the recent history of the development and implementation of the Australian National Curriculum.
2.2.2 A note on the national curriculum.

In 2008, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA] was established with the task to finally create an Australian National Curriculum. This national curriculum initially intended on developing a “curriculum in English, mathematics, the sciences and history and also, at a later stage, geography and languages other than English” (ACARA, 2014, p. 65). The initial phases of the Australian National Curriculum did not include the Arts. Due to this exclusion, The National Advocates for Arts Education [NAAE] lobbied until successful and the announcement of a second phase of the national curriculum that included the Arts into the framework (Ewing, 2010; Gattenhof, 2009).

The Australian Curriculum has a focus on seven general capabilities that work across subject areas. These capabilities are literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology, critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical understanding and intercultural understanding (ACARA, 2016). These general capabilities are elaborated and foregrounded in the Gonski 2.0 report, asserting that they be at the centre of our curriculum, assessable and accountable in their implementation (Gonski, Arcus, Boston, Gould, Johnson, O’Brien, Perry & Roberts, 2018; Australian Government, 2018).

In 2014, the ‘Australian Curriculum, The Arts,’ was released with the explicit direction that all students must study the Arts: namely Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts. This direction suggests that from Reception to Year 8 for a minimum of two hours per week (24 minutes per subject per week), students are to engage in the above Arts disciplines. When students reach Years 9 and 10 they have the option to specialise in one or more Arts subjects through elective courses as provided at the direction of the relevant state and territory school authorities.

However, research conducted by Gibson, Fleming and Anderson (2015), showed that one-quarter of schools in their study did not offer Visual Arts at all – despite the direction of the Australian Curriculum. While the Arts
shares equal footing as a key learning area, its actual importance in schools may be substantially lower (Cutcher, 2014; Garvis & Pendergast, 2010). This lack of the Arts being offered in Australian schools is just one area of concern for Arts advocates (Ewing, 2010; NAAE, 2009), as inadequate pre- and in-service teacher education and professional learning, and ongoing lack of adequate resourcing in the Arts is also a concern (Cutcher, 2014; Ewing, 2010).

Among the current educational reforms in Australia, which privilege a narrow suite of subjects (and potentially getting narrower still with the trend towards STEM), the core business of the Arts, including creativity and innovation (Eisner, 2002) remain key agendas and driving forces in education in Australia (Albury et al., 2016; Australian Government, 2017; Parliament of Australia, 2017; QCAA, 2015; Robinson et al., 2015). However, the initial exclusion of the Arts from the Australian Curriculum, and its status being unregulated in terms of time allocations, may be an indication of a decline in the perceived value of the Arts. Positions of this perceived value are observable in literature relating to both policy and Australian educational contexts overall, leading some to claim the value of Visual Arts is in question and is viewed as expendable, extraneous, and non-essential in current educational reforms (Fowler, 1996; Rabkin & Remond, 2006).

2.2.3 Summary of setting the scene for Visual Arts in Australia.

The literature in summary, demonstrates that the objectives for policies in Australian education are focused on Science, Technology, English, Math and Languages (Australian Government, 2016) as “strong education outcomes result in better work and life opportunities for us all as individuals and benefit Australia more broadly through improvements to national productivity, workforce participation, stronger communities and economic prosperity,” (Australian Government, 2016, p. 1). As the agencies who develop policies and reforms in Australia are driven from economic and political standpoints, the purposes of education are weighted towards fostering human
capital for the nation by developing students the “skills to participate productively in the economy” (Reid, 2009, p. 5).

The current schooling system, dominated by a “grinding regime” of national testing (O’Connor, 2015, p. v), challenges and conflicts with the foundation of this research, which focuses on the purposes of education beyond just an economic agenda. This section purposefully asserts the undervalued climate for Arts in schools to distinctly highlight the deficiencies in Australian educational policy. After all, “Australia is known as the lucky country, but in our national pursuit of wealth and success, have we forgotten about our children?” (The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth [ARACY], 2008, p. 20).

In spite of contemporary educational directives which limit the Arts (Rabkin & Remond, 2006), it remains that the Arts are a field of activities, objects and experiences that appear naturally in human life (Dutton, 2005). The Arts are universally human, and yet they are uniformly overlooked (Dissanayake, 1995).

2.3 Material Engagement in Visual Arts

In alignment with the research aim, and particularly research question 1, this section reviews the literature surrounding material engagements in Visual Arts. The literature in this section purposefully addresses material engagement to also succinctly align with the theoretical framework within the study. Whilst materials in Visual Art are commonly acknowledged to be the techniques, technologies and processes in Visual Arts forms or media (ACARA, 2018), this study further examines Visual Arts materials beyond simply media, but as engagement.

In essence, material engagements have occupied a special place in the life of humans as an inseparable component of human thought and sociality (Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010). As such, this study references Visual Arts
media framed as a deep immersion in material (Schiffer & Miller, 1999); an immediate, sensual and assimilable (being capable of being assimilated) material engagement (Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010) with Visual Arts media (ACARA, 2018; Dissanayake, 1995). The Visual Arts learning environment has unique demands of material engagements of the subject (Hetland, 2013).

Material engagement specifically acknowledges the relationship between brains, bodies and things, recognising that anthropological and archaeological perspectives are incumbent (Malafouris, 2015; Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010; Roberts, 2015). As such, the review of literature surrounding material engagements in the Visual Arts is presented, recognising that the ubiquity of the Arts in contemporary human life has roots as far back a tens of thousands of years (McKay, 1972; Spivey, 2005), as a life lived between brains, bodies and things (Malafouris, 2015; Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010; Roberts, 2015).

2.3.1 Material engagements in the Visual Arts: brains, bodies and things.

Historically, human material engagement meant learning, identification, attention and transformation of the human world (Roberts, 2015), as materials provided a “scaffold to think through, with and about” (Malafouris, 2015, p. 359, emphasis in original). At some stage in human ancestry, humans combined their brains and the dexterity of their hands, with the distinctly human capacity to use imagination to engage with materials to create Art (Ellerin, 2015; Dissanayake, 1995; Kassuba & Kastner, 2014; Kosky, 2012; Spivey, 2005). From the earliest stages of human history, human interests in aesthetic activities (as active producers and as consumers), developed a specific form of social consciousness, in which the aesthetic relations of man to reality were established through material engagements with Art media (McKay, 1972).
2.3.1.1 Bodies and things. In alignment with the research aim and theoretical framework of this study, this section discusses material engagement, and human biology in the development of Art (Malafouris, 2015; Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010; Roberts, 2015). The relationship between bodies and things occurred for humans when “the brain came to understand the self as an agent that was able to modify the environment with its hands” (Ellerin, 2015, p.95).

Human bipedalism meant that the hands were free for activities such as making weapons and tools, and importantly for this research, the creation of Art (Spivey, 2005). Aristotle (cited in Kosky, 2012) viewed the freedom of the human hand as the basis for human creativity, which made humans the most capable of acquiring the most varied Arts. Over tens of thousands of years, humans engaged with materials to make objects and “things special or extra ordinary” (Dissanayake, 1995, p. 51). Historically, such material engagements meant humans eventually discovered they could influence the outcome of an action beyond the immediate (Ellerin, 2015).

To explore human origins of material engagements through archaeology and artefacts (Thomas, 2014), the literature turns to tool use (Haidle, 2010), as Haidle (2010) notes that overall certain material traits in tool use give archaeological definitions of human behaviour, but that “tool use is the main database to track down behavioural” developments in the archaeological record and thus human evolution (Haidle, 2010, p. 149). In particular the hand axe is one such tool, which reflects the “establishment of a way of life in which we recognise the beginnings of our human characteristics” (Ashton, 2014, para. 2), and in which we can begin understand the beginnings of material engagements and human aesthetic interests through these human characteristics (Ashton, 2014).

Although tool making is not only found in humans (Ellisen, 2015; Toth & Schick, 2009), the hand axe is the earliest evidence of human cultural behaviour (University of Missouri, 2015). The hand axe exists as the longest manufactured object in human history and prior to the 20th century; no other object has been found to have spread
over such a wide ranging geographical area (Ashton, 2014). Indeed, the hand axe is thought to have dominated early human technology (Baldo, n.d.).

Although toolmaking dates vary, because the “location and timing of human population dispersals are not uniform across the globe” (Ellerin, 2015, p. 97), below (Figure 2.1) is an example of the timeline of anthropological periods that will be used as reference point in this review.

![Figure 2.1. Timeline of the Stone Age (Ellerin, 2015, p. 97).](image)

Ellerin’s (2015) timeline (see Figure 2.1) is based on Clark (1968), Foley & Lahr (2003) and McEvoy’s (2011) use of tool ‘modes’ according to industry and production. Figure 2.1 (above) demonstrates the era, mode and approximate period of Oldowan (mode 1), Acheulean (mode 2) and Mousterian (mode 3) industries. Distinct divisions from mode 3 onwards are “increasingly arbitrary, as features of different traditions intermingled with the migration and mixing of populations, so that later features (such as microlithic techniques) often long predated the later modes with which they are typically associated, whence the inherent uncertainty” (Ellerin, 2015, p.98). Figure 2.2 below,
displays industry from the three periods to demonstrate the changing skill, refinement and complexity (Presnyakova, Archer, Braun & Flear, 2015), visually noticeable from the Oldowan (mode 1) to Mousterian period (mode 3).

![Oldowan Chopper](image)

- **Oldowan Chopper**
  - Size: 7.2 x 6.5 cm
  - Location: Swaziland, Southern Africa
  - Source: University of Missouri, 2015

![Acheulean Handaxe](image)

- **Acheulean Handaxe**
  - Size: 9 x 6 cm
  - Location: Sahara Desert, North Africa
  - Source: University of Missouri, 2015

![Mousterian Tool](image)

- **Mousterian Tool**
  - Size: Unknown
  - Location: Unknown
  - Source: Bradshaw Foundation, 2017

*Figure 2.2. Tool making from modes 1, 2 and 3*

The Oldowan tool is said to correspond to simple imitation and primate gestural communication, while the Acheulean tool corresponds to complex imitation and protolanguage (Abib, 2011). It is claimed that the Acheulian industry onward displayed increased complexity in the raw material attainment and selection, provisioning systems and perhaps a possible increase in socially facilitated information transfer “within and between artefact producing groups” (Presnyakova, et al., 2015, p. 2). It is claimed that following this, a cultural evolution which resulted in an “explosion of innovations in tool making and social organization” (Abib, 2011, p. 259) occurred.

The human capacity for tool making and the importance of its development along with the role it may have played in the “explosion of innovation” (Abib, 2011, p. 259), should not be underestimated in exploring material
engagements, as some claim tool making to be the “chief biological characteristic of humanity that drove the evolution of our powers of mental and bodily co-ordination” (Stout, 2016, p. 28).

So much did tools become a part of human self-understanding that the current human brain is able to represent a hand-held tool rather than the hand as the end effector of an intended action (Arbib, Bonaiuto, Jacobs & Frey, 2009). In addition, since touch perception has been selected to recognize the presence of a tool, even though nerve endings terminate at the fingertips, the human brain is able to distinguish between a touch sensation emanating from the fingertip and one emanating from a tool (Takahashi, Diedrichsen & Watt, 2009). These neurological mappings, which strongly suggest that the human motor system expects to use tools to execute actions, assisted in the execution and learning of tool use and tool manufacture. Born of the need to serve food oriented survival objectives, tool use and manufacture furnished the basis for the training and cultivation of the motor and process skills (Crepeau, Cohn, & Schell, 2003; Hocking, 1997) that would later inform the physical competencies of human occupation (Ellerin, 2015).

Ellerin (2015) describes the relationship between the tool becoming such a “part of human self-understanding” that our “current human brain” (p. 95) recognises the tool, which responds to stimulus rather than the hand, and this stimulus can be felt through the tool, as though it were an extension of the body (Roberts, 2016). This informs material engagement in Visual Arts, aligns with the neuroscientific and cognitive aspects of material engagement (Thomas, 2014) and demonstrates how the material world may be viewed as extension of self, when achieving completion of task through media (Roberts, 2016).

This co-development of human and tool is so important to humans that it is identified as one of the defining characteristics of human beings (Hocking, 1997; Williams, Gordan & Richmond, 2012) as a “chief biological characteristic of humanity” (Stout, 2016, p. 28). This biological characteristic is also descriptive of the role of the brain in material engagement (Malafouris & Renfrew, 2014).
2.3.1.2 **Brains.** The relationship between material engagement and the brain is of interest within an array of fields (Roberts, 2015) through the disciplines of archaeology, cognitive archaeology, neuroscience (Lambros, 2015; Roberts, 2015), cognitive neuroscience (Whitley, 1998) and neuroaesthetics (Marin, 2015). Huang (2009) notes, the time to study the connection between Art and cognition has come, and “in the arena of education, teachers are especially hopeful for answers to the question “what is arts’ role in cognitive development?” (p. 24).

The literature can only “speculate on the selective pressures that have shaped the human brain in a direction that forged the practice of Art” (Ziadel, 2010, p. 182), however there is the suggestion that early humans demonstrating an ability to create, symbolise and make meaning of the world through Art is indicative of certain brain functions and innate aptitudes in humans (Ramachandran, 2009). Ramachandran and Hirstein (1999, p. 16) explore what biological function artistic “behaviour could possibly serve” and go on to deliberate if there might “be some sort of universal rule or ‘deep structure’, underlying all artistic experience.”

Brain and tool making technology are seen to have coevolved (Stout, Toth, Schick & Chaminade, 2008), as stone tool technology did not only change the different grips that our hands can accomplish, but it also changed our brain (Ellerin, 2015; Kassuba & Kastner, 2014). Ellerin (2015, p.95) writes that,

> specific regions of the brain would become specialized for spatiomotor representations of tool action [i.e., knowledge of correct alignment of a tool to a task object], for tool-specific spatiomotor knowledge [i.e., proper use of a tool to achieve a task once the tool was correctly aligned], and for functional action knowledge [i.e., judgment whether the tool could achieve the intended goal].

Ellerin (2015) also describes early tool development with a current tool/brain relationship and makes a clear distinction, foundational to the present research, which suggests that Art is a behaviour which may have developed thousands of years ago, but which may assert the value of the “archaeological record of technological change in
understanding human cognitive evolution” (Stout et al., 2008, p. 1947). Interestingly, there is a recent trend in research to support this idea in understanding human cognitive functions in early tool making. Research of knapping (Early Stone Age [ESA] toolmaking technique), early human technological change and cognition such as that by Stout (2016), Ellerin (2015), Williams, Gordan and Richmond (2012), Haidle (2010), Stout, Toth, Schick and Chaminade (2008), as well as research compiled by Roux and Bril (2005), Ashton (2007) and de Beune (2004) are some examples which demonstrate how ESA tool making and cognition may be related, and support human material engagements in artefact creation.

Research by Stout et al. (2008) investigated the brain correlation of ESA toolmaking in human cognitive evolution and demonstrated definitive results. The results documented that there was a trend of increasingly sophisticated,

hominin engagement with materials in ESA toolmaking, supported by neurally based capacities for effective visuomotor coordination [the coordination of movement and visual perception by the brain] and hierarchical action organization [body movement action, as well as language and music organisation]. (Stout et al., 2008, p. 1947)

The research also found the neural circuits that support ESA toolmaking support more general human capacities for complex goal orientated actions, and thus evolved in a mutually reinforcing way (Ellerin, 2015).

The neuroscience of Art is categorised as a subdivision of empirical aesthetics (Seely, 2011), or under the umbrella of research in cognitive science, which broadly investigates how “organisms acquire, represent, manipulate and use information from their environment in the production of behaviour” (Seely, 2013, p. 445). The cognitive neuroscience of Art, like material engagement theory, aims to understand neurocognitive and evolutionary “mechanisms which humans are able to engage in art” (Pearce et al., 2016, p. 267), beyond the purely aesthetic level
Cognitive neuroscience of Art is noted for its “significant uptick of interest in research” (Seeley, 2013, p. 443), as a theory which is popular (Alva, 2015, para. 7) yet developing and untapped in its use for education in schools (Fleming et al., 2014). Cognitive neuroscience of Art research is said to demonstrate ways in which the Arts can “improve cognitive function” (Posner & Patoine, 2009, para. 26), and cognitive neuroscientists are learning about largescale neural integration, “the conjoint function of brain areas working together as large-scale networks” (Bressler & Menon, 2010, p. 277), which can emphasize the potential for creativity (Fleming et al., 2014).

Among other things, the cognitive neuroscience of Art incorporates “reflecting about self-referential aspects of Art; understanding personal or social meaning of an artwork; recognising the relation among medium style, and content; grasping the significance in art historical or art-critical contexts” (Pearce et al., 2016, p. 268). These examples by Pearce et al. (2016) could serve as a framework in understanding how the biological form of the human species and modern human mind characteristics (Roberts, 2015) communicate and interact with Art.

Researchers, such as Gazzinga (2008) note that the cognitive neuroscience of Art can be “a life-affirming dimension [which] is opening up in neuroscience” (p. vi). Gazzinga (2008) goes on to discuss that cognitive neuroscientific studies of Art have the potential to understand how the performance and appreciation of the Arts “enlarges cognitive capacities” and can even contribute to learning, “more enjoyably and productively to live” (p.vi). Whilst much research, such as Gazzinga (2008), suggests impressive and wide-ranging applications for the cognitive neuroscience of Art, it should be noted not all researchers agree, with some observing, “whether neuroscience can aptly define Art is a highly controversial topic among artists and neuroscientists” (Huang, 2009, p.26).

The field of cognitive neuroscience of Art has attracted some criticism predominantly due to the nature of Art as a far-reaching, “encompassing entity that often escapes definition” (Alva, 2015; Huang, 2009, p.26). Dietrich and
Haider (2015) assert that while creativity, for example in terms of original thinking (Runco, 2012), is “omnipotent in transforming human civilizations” researching the neural basis of such has been “doggedly frustrating” (p. 887), and also contend no coherent picture has emerged from current work in the field. Drago and Hilman (2012) suggest that the reason for the inconsistent findings across the variety of disciplines interested in creativity, may partially be due to the fact that creativity is a complex process, with researchers providing “different explanations for the mechanisms which might underlie creative thinking” (p. 606).

While there is acknowledgement of the coevolution of the brain with the development of technology (Arts, creativity, tools making etc.) the relationship between them remains controversial and poorly understood (Alva, 2015; Stout, Toth, Schick & Chaminade, 2008). In reviewing the literature, it could be thought this controversial and poorly understood relationship could perhaps be because consideration should be given to the “active life of the whole, embodied, environmentally and socially situated animal” (Alva, 2015, para. 20) that is the human. This suggests that factors beyond the largely brain-focused realm of neuroscience of Art, contribute to the overall “life of the whole” (Alva, 2015, para 20) beyond just the brain. Similarly, Seeley (2013) addresses criticisms and emphasises that while it is thought that “successful reductive explanations in psychology and neuroscience art cannot account for the defining features of our artistic practice or the range of objects and events we ordinarily categorize as art works” (p. 443), he notes that the concerns are misplaced, sceptical worries.

Boon and Piccinini (2016) acknowledge that the term cognitive neuroscience is almost an oxymoron as “cognitive neuroscience is supposed to deal with the mechanisms that implement cognitive processes, not with cognition proper” (p. 1510). Yet they go on to claim that the traditionally conceived view is currently being superseded by a more broadly construed interdisciplinary investigation of cognition (Boon et al., 2016), which is changing the “edgy” relationship between neuroscience, education and the Arts (Mc Khann, 2009, p.67).
Despite the criticism questioning cognitive neuroscience in Art, research continues in fields such as neuroeducation (The Dana Foundation, 2017) to grow the field of the neuroscience of creativity including Art (Society for the Neuroscience of Creativity, 2017). At the very least, the literature suggests that research in the neuroscience of Art can “contribute to philosophical questions about the nature of our physical engagement with artworks and related questions about the ontology of Art” (Seeley, 2013, p. 443). Thus, the cognitive neuroscience of Art considers that humans have evolved as “relational self-conscious beings that undergo situated ontogenetic histories and lead creative cognitive lives” (Malafouris, 2015, p. 351), but that the essence of Art is difficult to define (Zaidel, 2010) and to some degree is elusive to scientific laws.

However, material engagement in Visual Arts may be understood through the brain, as the brain is an “evolving plastic organ that moves with the body, engaging, transforming, and actively exploring the world” (Malafouris, 2015, p. 354). The human capacity for Arts making in contemporary contexts (Fleming et al. 2014; Ziadel, 2010) stems from the “neurological potential to create Art [that] was established within all of the human populations who remained within and migrated out of Africa” (Morris-Kay, 2009, p. 174). The human neurological aptitude for Arts making (Morris-Kay, 2009), including but not limited to mark making, construction, pattern, tool and image making, provides evidence of the long history of the relationship between the human brain, material engagement and artistic behaviour (Spivey, 2005; Ziadel, 2010).

Ziadel (2010) claims that the factors that contribute to the uniqueness of Art practice in human societies are biologically motivated, brain-evolution associated, symbolically deliberated and communitive. While Ziadel (2010) notes insights can be obtained by the literature addressing established artists with brain damage, the artistic evolution of early Homo sapiens, and discussing biological motivations for Arts making (Ziadel, 2010), the latter two are applicable to the scope of this research and suggest an appropriate alignment with the research aims.
The factors which Ziadel (2010) attributes to the “uniqueness of art practice in human societies” are commonly agreed to in the literature (Dissanayake 1995, p. 33; Dutton, 2009; Fleming, et al., 2014; Morriss-Kay, 2009; Spivey, 2005). However it must also be noted that,

several factors have simultaneously shaped the search for the elusive underpinnings of art in the brain, namely its ubiquitous presence in human societies, in contradistinction to its absence in animals, art’s symbolic and representational essence, its seeming lack of functionality and its relatedness to pleasure. (Ziadel, 2010, p. 177)

Whilst Ziadel’s (2010) points are generally agreed upon in the literature, in relation to the seeming “lack of functionality” (p. 177), some researchers believe that Art developed from serving a very real and practical function (Dissanayake 1995; Dutton, 2009; Fleming, et al., 2014; Morriss-Kay, 2009; Spivey, 2005).

### 2.4 Persistent Patterns of Human Aesthetic Activity: Artmaking

In alignment with the research aim, specifically research question 2, this section (2.3) addresses persistent patterns of human aesthetic activity. This section continues the archaeological discussion in the previous section, regarding the earliest technologies humans developed to better control nature - upon which material production depended (Dissanayake, 1995). As artmaking is an activity within all of human populations in all places and times, and is universal in existence (Morris-Kay, 2009), the review of literature in this section surrounds the human proclivity to create Art as a sustained pattern of interest, and as an extension of tool production.

Human aesthetic activity has become an integral part of human nature (Watson, 2016), and humans have become “obsessed” with creating artistic experiences (Dutton, 2009, p. 2). Dutton (2009) claims, humans developed
an “art instinct” (p.8), evident through the early human manufacture of Arts materials (ornaments, aesthetic objects, musical instruments etc.), which were expressions of the material culture of a population (Haidle, 2010). One such example of early material culture can be seen in the earliest known decorative patterns which appear on the Blombus Cave stone (see Figure 2.3 below) and the Quneitra artefact (see Figure 2.4) (Morriss-Kay, 2009, Spivey, 2005).

*Figure 2.3. Various aspects of Blombus Cave stone M1-6 (Henshilwood, et al., 2009, p. 34)*
Figure 2.3.1 Blombus Cave Stone M1-6 (Henshilwood et al. 2009, p. 35).
One such Blombos Cave stone (various aspects in Figure 2.3 and Figure 2.3.1 and above) is titled M1-6, and presents as incised with a cross-hatch pattern which was cut with multiple strokes (Henshilwood, d’Errico & Watts, 2009). Henshilwood et al. (2009) found that microscopic analysis of M1-6 indicates that ochre designs were made by holding a piece of pigment with one hand while impressing lines into the pigment with the tip of a stone tool. The presence of pigment on M1-6, as well as the effort used for tool engagement, indicates a concerted effort to engage in an aesthetic activity.

*Figure 2.4. Quneitra artefact (a) and tracing of pattern (c) (d’Errico et al., 2003, p. 21).*
The Quneitra artefact also demonstrated early human aesthetic activity. The Quneitra artefact is a flat flint cortex, 7.2 cm in size, “incised with nested semicircles and vertical lines” (Morriss-Kay, 2009, para. 18). It is not known if the humanoids responsible for the Quneitra artefact engravings were Neanderthals or anatomically modern humans (d’Errico, Henshilwood, Lawson, Vanhaeren, Tillier, Soressi, Bresson, Maureille, Nowell, Lakarra, Backwell & Julien, 2003).

It is claimed that the patterns engraved on the ochre found at Blombos Cave (Figure 2.4 & 2.4.1) are the earliest manifestations of this “ability on which all human cultures are based” (d’Errico et al., 2003, p. 31). It is widely accepted that a “fundamental turning point in the evolution of human cognitive abilities and cultural transmission was when humans were first able to store concepts with the aid of material symbols and to anchor or even locate memory outside the individual brain” (d’Errico et al., 2003, p. 31).

Dissanayake (1995) includes suggestions as to the motivations behind use of material symbols, stating,

In every human society of which we know - prehistoric, ancient, or modern- whether hunter-gatherer, pastoral, agricultural, or industrial, at least some form of art is displayed, and not only displayed but highly regarded and willingly engaged in. By the criteria of energy investment, pleasure, and universality, it would seem that these activates fill a fundamental human need, satisfy and intrinsic and deep human imperative. (p. 34)

This statement demonstrates that it would seem that this material engagement somehow fulfils and satisfies a deep innate need and is a persistent pattern of human interest (Dissanayake, 1995; Dutton, 2009; Spivey, 2005). It is claimed that over time humans became less dependent on instinctive reactions and more reliant on cultural aspects (Dissanayake, 1995), and material evidence of symbolic mediated behaviour (Henshilwood et al., 2009; Ziadel, 2010), material symbols (de’Errico, 2003), geometric and iconographic representations (such as Figure 2.4), personal
ornaments (such as Figure 2.5) (Henshilwood, 2009) and Arts making (Dutton, 2009; Morriss-Kay, 2009) as activities at the very base of human culture (d’Errico et al., 2003; Dissanayake, 1995).

Figure 2.5. Ornamentation beads from the Middle Palaeolithic. Showing five aspects of the *N. gibbosulus* shells (nos. 1–13) used for ornamentation beads from the Middle Palaeolithic layers of the Grotte des Pigeons, Morocco (modern specimens, no. 14, for comparison) (Bouzouggar et al., 2007).
Through the passage of time and generations, early human aesthetic interests in “material symbols” (d’Errico et al., 2003, p. 31) and body decoration, is likely to have been pre-cursor to the creation of ‘Art’ (Morriss-Kay, 2009).

Cave paintings and Venus figurines (see Figure 2.6), along with different “cultural and environmental influences, changes in climate, different available materials and technological skills” were “important factors influencing stylistic development, culminating in the regional variety apparent in world art today” (Morriss-Kay, 2009, p. 165).

*Figure 2.6. Venus Figurines. Showing A. Venus of Vestoniche, which is safeguarded and rarely accessible to the public; and B. Venus of Willendorf, kept at the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria. Both 10cm high. (Morriss-Kay, 2009, p. 167).*
Venus figurines (such as in Figure 2.6), like much prehistoric Art, pose an interesting challenge for archaeologists who have reached a variety of conclusions as to their meanings (Vandewettering, 2015). However, the literature widely accepts that persistent patterns of human interest in Arts making, since early human sapiens evolution, has become an integral part of human nature (Watson, 2016; Ziadel, 2010), with the universal Venus figurine (Figure 2.6) being just one example.

Examples of ‘human Art’ go back in prehistory 77,000 years (Spivey, 2005), 82,000 years (Bouzougar, et. Al, 2007) or even 100,000 years or so (Dutton, 2009), demonstrating that human artmaking and aesthetic marking is a continued persistent pattern of human interest. This persistent pattern of interest, indicates a human proclivity to make objects special through aesthetic manipulation (Dissanayake, 1995).

2.5 Material Engagement, Occupation, and Human Nature in Education

In alignment with the research aim, and particularly research question 3, this section reviews the literature surrounding material engagement in Visual Arts contexts. The literature in this next section purposefully addresses material engagement to succinctly align with the theoretical framework within the study. In presenting the early development of Art (Section 2.4) and highlighting the ways humans developed a “normal, natural and necessary” capacity for Arts making (Dissanayake, 1995, p. 33), the review of the literature presents the universality of Art as a persistent pattern of human aesthetic interest.

This universality of aesthetic behaviour demonstrates not only the importance of Art to humans, but also directly lays the foundation for the significance of Visual Arts in education today (see Section 2.2). What if Art was not only considerably important to humans anthropologically as a basic human need, but education limited the fulfilment of those needs? Could it be possible that in limiting Arts engagements in schools, there could be significant
implications for students? Dissanayake (1995) claims that the need for Art is indeed a deep human, emotional, sensual and cognitive imperative, which is biological in nature as it helps humans to “better survive and survive better than they would without it” (p. 34).

As such, this section of the literature explores whether Art is indeed a biological behaviour to draw upon and understanding whether Art is actually needed, and by extension needed in education. Whilst there is no single rationale for seeing Art as the primary form for an adaptive behaviour (Chaplin, 2005), one feature of Art is that all Art involves the process of “making special” (Dissanayake, 1995, p. 42) or the aesthetic marking of something as special (Dissanayake, 1995, p. 57) with the intention of making something more than ordinary. The view Dissanayake (1995) presents is that in viewing Art this way, the question of whether one thing or another is ‘Art’ becomes irrelevant and redundant as artmaking is the essential behavioural core of “making special” which is entirely relevant to human development (Dissanayake, 1995, p.58).

In looking at Art as a behaviour for making something special (Dissanayake, 1995), it is claimed that humans use the elements of cultures (such as the Arts) to get what is needed biologically, as much as learning to think is needed; such as the predisposition to learn cultural things because doing so, helped hominoids to survive (Dissanayake, 1995). In this way, Art can be seen to exist beyond cultural constructs, towards biological needs or basic driven urges. Changeux (1994) further supports this idea by stating the “invention of Art is a cultural phenomenon that […] exploits inborn predispositions, previously set in the genes in the course of paleontological history” (p. 199).

2.5.1 Needs and needing artmaking.

Humans adapted to different environments, cultures, institutions, and practices. Making objects special through aesthetic intention (Dissanayake, 1995) required social and cooperative behavior, and intelligence which
mutually reinforced the traits of the human being - as all of these attributes were necessary for survival (Ellerin, 2015; Stout, 2016). In essence, Art engagement also provided positive reinforcement such as wellness and healing (Stucky & Nobel, 2010) because of the “biological survival” value (such as found in sleeping, eating, sex, children, etc.) with which it is associated (Dissanayake, 1995, p. 33).

To further illustrate, Dissanayake (1995) explains,

We are cultural creatures as we are tool-using and language-using creatures; indeed, tools and language are parts of culture. We use cultures - the elements of our cultures, like tools and language and the Arts – to get what we need, biologically, as well as what we are taught to think we need. We are predisposed to learn cultural things because doing so, helped us hominoids, to survive. (p. 16)

There is no certainty for the exact purpose of some artefacts, however we can be sure they were to satisfy a need (Haidle, 2010), as artefacts were developed for food (Ellerin, 2015) or sexual selection (Dutton, 2009) and this biological need (to eat or reproduce, for example) has driven the production and use of artefacts (Dutton, 2009; Ellerin, 2015; Haidle, 2010). The argument for the biological functional nature of Art and artefact production (Dissanayake 1995; Dutton, 2009; Fleming et al., 2014; Morriss-Kay, 2009; Spivey, 2005) encompasses the “trail of gradual and cumulative changes” (Deitrich & Haider, 2015, p. 899), left behind by humans, which aids our understanding of artmaking today.

In turn, occupational therapy literature may provide insights into how the trail of gradual changes may have a place in human life. While it is beyond the parameters of this study to go into comprehensively addressing occupational therapy, there are key points fundamental to this study’s aims that are found within the occupational therapy literature. One such significant point is the claim by Wilcock (1993) that occupations that resemble those of prehistoric men and women would be optimal for promoting health and well-being for modern humans (Clark, 1997;
Kosma, Bryant & Wilson, 2013). This claim by Wilcock (1993) also aligns with the literature which focusses on anthropology and archaeology within material engagement (Malaforis & Renfew, 2010; Thomas, 2014).

Wilcock’s (1993;1999) work, and that of others in the field (Clark, 1997; Hammell, Whalley & Iwama, 2012), identifies the “fundamental importance of occupation in promoting health, well-being and even survival” (Kosma, et al., 2013, p. 179). It is thought that if a “person’s occupational nature is expressed through choices that stimulate and balance their capacities, then they might experience occupational balance, enhancing their health and well-being” (Kosma, et al., 2013 p. 8). It is here in this literature that the direct link is made to the research aim of the present study, not only between material engagement and flow, but also to suggestions in the literature that occupations, such as the Arts, may be an integral part of human nature and indeed an actual need (Dissanayake, 1995; Wilcock, 1993).

Before unpacking this literature further, it is useful to first define occupation so it can understood in the contexts of this research. Thus,

Occupation[s] [are] a collection of activities that people use to fill their time and give life meaning, [they are] organized around roles or in terms of activities of daily living, work and productive activities, or pleasure, for survival, for necessity, and for their personal meaning. (Hinojosa & Kramer, 1997, p. 864)

The reason occupation in the literature has arisen in this study is because occupation is closely linked to the field of occupational therapy. Occupational therapy is a “health profession concerned with promoting health and well-being through occupation” (Occupational Therapy Australia, 2017, para 1). Whilst this study is not primarily concerned with occupation as therapy, it is concerned with the benefits of occupation. That occupation is artmaking through material engagement.
Furthermore, the link between the Arts and occupational therapy has a long history (Ede, 2014). In occupational therapy settings, it has been found by Ede (2014) that engagement in Art occupation offers participants opportunities for social inclusion, occupational balance and promotion of independence. Occupation is said to be subjectively experienced, situated in time, and universal (Occupational Therapy Australia, 2017). Again, the idea of universality in occupation further reinforces the literature (above in Section 2.3) asserting the universality of such occupations like artmaking. Occupational Therapy Australia (2017) states that, “time and culture influence which occupations are meaningful and adaptive, however that humans have used occupation to survive, thrive, healing and health promotion is evident since the dawn of time” (para. 5).

Through positioning artmaking as a ‘need’ as the literature suggests in the anthropological, archaeological and occupational discussion above, this section on occupational therapy is significant for this study in discussing education, and the needs of students. For example, taking the well-known Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, it is possible to gauge how at least five sets of goals (physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization) are organised (Green, 2000). In Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, it is thought that humans are motivated by the desire to achieve or maintain the various conditions upon which basic satisfactions rest, and so, Maslow’s hierarchy takes the form a pyramid (Green, 2000) (see Figure 2.7 below).
Maslow’s hierarchy presented in Figure 2.7 (above) builds on Maslow’s (1943) original five tier model and shows (in blue text) revisions that added an additional three tiers published in 1971 and 1998 (Kendrick, Griskevicius, Neuberg, Schaller, 2011). Green (2000) describes the format of the needs being met through the pyramid shape by stating,
These basic goals are related to each other, being arranged in a hierarchy of prepotency. This means that the most prepotent goal will monopolize consciousness and will tend of itself to organize the recruitment of the various capacities of the organism. The less prepotent needs are minimized, even forgotten or denied. But when a need is fairly well satisfied, the next prepotent (‘higher’) need emerges, in turn to dominate the conscious life and to serve as the center of organization of behaviour, since gratified needs are not active motivators. (p. 394-395)

This statement demonstrates the way Maslow’s (1943) theory places physiological needs at the foundation of the pyramid, as needs which must be fulfilled before one may fulfil needs at the next level of the hierarchy. It is here that the literature suggesting Art as a biological need may conflict with Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs. Firstly, Maslow’s hierarchy places artistic endeavour in the self-actualisation category when he states “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a [human] can be, [they] must be. This need we may call self-actualization.” (Maslow, 2000, p. 26). However the literature as presented in Section 2.3, demonstrated that the human proclivity to make special stemmed from survival investment (Dissanayake, 1995), thus placing Arts making at the base of Maslow’s hierarchy (for example, tool making). Furthermore historically, artmaking demonstrated a deep concern for base physiological needs as in both human and animal representations, as “fertility is the dominant theme in both portable and parietal (cave wall) art” (Morriss-Kay, 2010, p. 166) (see Figure 2.8 and Figure 2.9 below).
Figure 2.8. Pubic triangles. “Pubic triangles are common symbols of female sexuality; these are carved on a limestone block (56 × 40 cm) from La Ferrassie, Dordogne (Aurignacian, ~ 32 000–34 000 BP)” (Morriss-Kay, 2010, p. 168).

Figure 2.9. Pubic area in charcoal, with white line for vulva. Drawn on a natural projection from the Ceiling, Chauvet cave, Ardèche (~ 29 000–32 000 BP) (Morriss-Kay, 2010, p. 168)
Whilst these images (Figure 2.8 and Figure 2.9) demonstrate artmaking concerned with the basic human needs, it is acknowledged that this is not fulfilling the needs themselves. Rather, it is the act of the artmaking, or the occupational material engagement that symbolises it. It is here that in framing Arts making as an occupation through Wilcock’s (1993) *A theory of the human need for occupation*, the human needs hierarchy is reconfigured beyond Maslow’s pyramid for the purposes of this study.

Wilcock (1993) argues that ‘needs’ relate to the correction of disequilibrium and to “facilitating what is required for living organisms - plants, animals or humans to fulfil potential and flourish” (p. 19). Wilcock (1993) looks at needs in the way of health. In this way biological needs are seen as “inborn health agents” (p.19), which recognise the organism as a whole in interaction with the environment. As such, needs do not differentiate between “physical, mental or social issues in the way of modern society [but works as a way of flow processes within the] biological hierarchy relating structures and function, and are integral to the collaboration between biological rhythms and homeostasis” (Wilcock, 1993, p. 19).

In viewing need this way, artmaking is not limited to be accessible to only some as the hierarchy (Figure 2.7) would suggest. Rather, artmaking would drift across as a form of action to satisfy a need, prompt use of capacities and then reward those capacities. By understanding artmaking as an activity which fulfils a “fundamental human need” and “satisfies an intrinsic and deep imperative” (Dissanayake, 1995, p. 34), the literature on anthropological, archaeological, evolutionary perspectives - and the occupational literature align. As the literature above (see Section 2.3) demonstrates that hunter gatherer societies utilised tools and material engagements to aide the provision of daily requirements, so too this structure caters for physiological needs (Wilcock, 1993). This simple occupational structure does not obscure innate needs, but rather provides for them.
This logic is pivotal to this study in understanding how by developing personal capabilities the human organism can flourish. In this way, Wilcock’s (1993) presentation of the three major functions in species survival offers something Maslow’s hierarchy does not – the placement of Art as a fundamental human need enabling human flourishing.

2.6 Chapter Summary

Following the introduction to this chapter, Section 2.2 provides an overview of Visual Arts in contemporary Australian contexts, which sets the scene for this research, and provides a foundation for the research to rest upon. This was followed by Section 2.3 which presented the literature surrounding material engagement in Visual Arts. Section 2.3 provides an overview of material engagement, and specifically aligns material engagement to artifact making through an anthropological lens. Section 2.4 addresses research question 2 and presents the literature surrounding persistent patterns of human aesthetic activity. Section 2.4 outlines how human aesthetic activity has become an integral and obsessive part of human nature. Section 2.5 presents the literature surrounding flow in educational contexts. This section first addressed occupation, followed by human needs. Finally this section presents literature on character strengths which further contextualise engagement.

Following this chapter, Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework for this study, while Chapter 4 presents the methodology and design of this study. The chapters that follow (5,6 & 7) present the findings and discussion while Chapter 8 concludes this thesis.
Chapter 3
Theoretical Framework

3.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework for this study. First, this chapter presents a preamble to explain how the overall positioning of the theoretical framework for this study is influenced by the literature presented in Chapter 2. The preamble also introduces the two major theoretical frameworks used in this study, being Material Engagement Theory and Flow theory. In concluding this chapter, a summary is presented which revises the key points of Material Engagement Theory and Flow theory, and how they are interrelated to each other and tied to the study overall.

3.2 Preamble

Theoretical framing is the mediator of connections between the vertices of practices, problems and research (Ngulube, Mathipa & Gumbo, 2015). Thus, this chapter presents what is considered to be the building blocks of theory, which are models, concepts, constructs and propositions for the study (Ngulube, et al., 2015). The theoretical framing for this study relates directly to the research aim, which is to explore the primacy of material engagement in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and examine students’ self-reported flow experiences within and through Art and text. The theoretical framework for this study relates to two specific factors within the research aim. The first factor relates to the primacy of material engagement in the Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and the second factor relates to self-reported flow experiences.

In theoretically framing this study, the positioning of these two factors build on the literature, since an appropriate theoretical framework is selected through information contained within the literature (Ngulube, et al.,
Thus, the components within the literature (as revealed in Chapter 2) that position and influence the theoretical framework in this study are underpinned by the suggestion that humans have innate interests, predispositions and inclinations for artistic experience as expressions of human evolutionary adaptations (Dutton, 2005). Stemming from this view is the suggestion that the human manufacture of Arts materials grows from expressions of a human material culture as a means of satisfying fundamental human needs (Dissanayake 1995; Dutton, 2009; Fleming, et al., 2014; Haidle, 2010; Morriss-Kay, 2009; Spivey, 2005; Willcok, 1995).

As such, this chapter addresses the two research question components, positioned by the literature, to theoretically frame material culture (Malafouris, 2004; 2010) and material as occupational interaction in flow theory (Csíkszentmihályi, 1993; Emerson, 1998; Hocking, 1997; Wilcock, 1993).

As previously mentioned, this study’s research aim is addressed through three research questions,

1. What is material engagement in Visual Arts?

2. Are the outcomes of material engagements in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom aligned with persistent patterns of human aesthetic activity?

3. Does flow occur in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom?

These research questions require a holistic theoretical underpinning to determine not only what material engagement is, but why and how material occupation is enacted within Visual Arts classroom contexts to potentially affect flow.

In this study, MET (Malafouris, 2004; 2010) and flow theory (Csíkszentmihályi, 1993; 1997; 1998) are addressed as separate, yet interrelated theoretical systems. In addressing the two theories in this way, the theoretical framing for this study has the possibility to enhance the understanding of material occupational engagement and increase the authority of the explanations (Ngulube, et al., 2015).
3.3 **Material Engagement Theory**

The way “material culture shapes the manner in which people act, perceive and think” (Malafouris, 2015, p.35) is starting to be understood through a creative integration of archaeology, anthropology and neuroscience, or *neuroarchaeology* (Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010; Malafouris, 2015; Roberts, 2015). The theoretical framing for this creative integration occurs within “new cross-disciplinary synergies, capable of transforming our understanding of the relation and co-evolution of brains, bodies and things” (Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010, p.1) through Material Engagement Theory [MET].

MET determines that *things matter* (for example, materials, occupational objects) and emplaces things/objects/materials at the forefront of the theory (Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010). Linking this theory to the research presented in the literature review, namely that humans have a proclivity to ‘make special’ by embellishing objects (Dissanayake 1995; Dutton, 2009; Fleming, et al., 2014; Haidle, 2010; Morriss-Kay, 2009; Spivey, 2005), MET asserts that these *things* helped humans “find their way in the world” (Malafouris, 2015, p. 359). This study interprets that the positioning within the literature can be addressed directly in MET through the two major threads of inquiry of MET (Roberts, 2015).

These two major threads of inquiry claim that human cognition and object interaction stem from: a) human speciation characteristics; and b) interaction of material culture and cognition (Roberts, 2015). Roberts (2015) explains that these two major threads of MET are, “the discernment of the cognitive changes that characterize human speciation and more recent cognitive developments in our species, including […] broader considerations of the interaction between material culture and cognitive change” (p.11).

Therefore, in this study, it is understood that MET incorporates evolutionary mind characteristics, whilst placing the object or thing as material product of internal cognitive capacities (Roberts, 2015), as supported by the
literature presented in Chapter 2. As such, the positioning of these two major threads mean the cognitive characterisations of the human speciation *inform* the contemporary human interaction in material culture. In this way, it could be suggested that the need to interact, manipulate and engage with materials to make special as an innate and instinctive human drive (Dissanayake, 1995; Morriss-Kay, 2009), can be comprehensively and holistically framed by MET. This claim would also determine that innate factors must be present from birth, genetically inherited, fundamental to representational structure and shared with other members of species (Carey 2009; Cummins & Cummins 1999; Smith 2004), factors which align with the literature review.

As human sensory and cognitive engagement with materials can be viewed as bound up with the “formation, development, perception and even production of the mind” (Roberts, 2016, p. 11), it is thought that the openness of the human mind to creative evolution (through learning and material engagement) is one of the distinctive features of the human species (Malafouris, 2015). In linking the two main threads of MET (Roberts, 2015) to this thread in the literature, it is thought human engagement in the world through material means, alters “the ecology of our minds, re-configure[s] the boundaries of our thinking and the ways we make sense of the world” (Malafouris, 2015, p. 351).

As it is claimed that the sense of control of one’s own body actually evolved for interaction with the environment (Robert & Foglia, 2017), this study is theoretically framed by MET as an expansive theory underpinning occupational material engagement. MET expands to “incorporate bodily activity, cultural practices and transformations in material culture” (Gosden & Malafouris, 2015, p. 352) moving beyond traditionally external/internal understandings of mind and object (Roberts, 2015). Furthermore, the interrelationship between body, brain and material through a neuroarchaeological lens, is crucial in providing ownership of movement and experience of the human body (Robert & Foglia, 2017).
3.3.1 **Brains, bodies and things.**

MET describes that historically when materials and humans engaged (Roberts, 2015), there was learning, identification, attention and transformation of the human world, as materials provided a “scaffold to think through, with and about” (Malafouris, 2015, p. 359). In transforming the human world by thinking through, with and about materials (Malafouris, 2015), this study extends to address the role of brains, bodies and things in MET (Malafouris, 2010).

This thinking through, with and about materials in brains, body and thing contexts, is supported by findings of a study about modern humans’ prehistoric toolmaking (de Beaune, 2004). The study found a situation can be solved either from shared knowledge passed on from generation to generation, such as the cognitive characteristics of human speciation, or from the subject’s individual experience stored in long term memory to stimulate creative activity, such as in the interaction of material culture and cognition (de Beaune, 2004; Roberts, 2015).

In placing material interaction at the forefront of a theory (Roberts, 2015), it is thought that artefacts and people are caught up in a network of action that has resulted in the transformation of the human world (Coward & Gamble, 2017). This transformation is distinctive, as human material diversification is gained from cultural transmission through social relationships and the sapient body (Coward & Gamble, 2017). MET aims to demonstrate this sapient body–material diversification association (Coward & Gamble, 2017) through the relationship between brains, bodies and things. In doing so, new ways in which the “flow and experience of time among brain-body-world” can be understood (Malafouris, 2015, p. 366).

As a theoretical framework must assert the way in which the theory works and how it is relevant to the study (Ngulube, et al., 2015), MET interprets the fluid and relational transactions between people and things (Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010) and constructs material culture as an analytic object for cognitive science (Malafouris, 2011).
Malafouris (2011) suggests that this analytic object can be applied to studies on internal mental phenomena, which are influenced by external factors and occupations, which in this study, is the nuanced relationship between material engagement and flow. Importantly MET asserts that meaning is generated through skilful engagement with materials and that this engagement stimulates responses within an individual prompting the emergence of meaning, representation, and metacognition (Malafouris, 2004; 2010; 2011; 2015).

### 3.4 Material Engagement and Flow Theory

To understand the theoretical framing of object and material in this study, the study turns to occupational descriptions of object/material to inform MET, and to address how this framing is unequivocally interrelated with flow theory. As such, this section addresses the theoretical framework that aligns with the second factor of the research aim, to examine students self-reported flow experiences within and through Art and text, as the “experience of flow is relevant to the experience of occupational engagement” (Reid, 2011, p. 50). Thus, in framing MET, this section refers to material engagement as *occupation*, a concept which was briefly highlighted in the literature review.

In the present study, occupation refers to the active process of a person “engaged in a goal-directed, intrinsically-gratifying, and culturally-appropriate activity” (Evans, 1987, p. 627). As occupation has the ability to reconnect the individual with his or her natural environment (Emerson, 1998), this interrelates with the occupational actions of material engagement in MET where brain and body are not separate, but rather “material culture is consubstantial [of the same essence] with mind” (Malafouris, 2006, p. 58). In positioning occupational engagement as consubstantial with mind, the theoretical perspectives between occupation, material engagement and flow are linked, as occupational interactions can enable satisfaction, by engaging flow states (Reid, 2011).
Hocking (1997) describes interaction with objects contributes to the development of human capacities and skills, and recognised person and object interaction is paramount in inter-relatedness of mind and body. Hocking (1997) claims when an object is created, such as in the research act within this inquiry, the meaningfulness of the occupation is “enhanced to the extent to which the object has personal, social or cultural meaning” (Hocking, 1997, p. 33), so much so, that the interaction is emotional rather than functional to the point at which it can affect well-being (see Section 3.4. below). Some research suggests objects (such as artefacts) can possess agency (Cochrane, 2008), which is an “ability to evoke some sort of change or response in individual humans or in an entire society, by the very humans who create them” (Russo, 2007).

This agency of objects (Cochrane, 2008) relates to this study, by evoking a change or response through the flow state induced by material engagement, which further solidifies the theoretical positioning that material culture was a priority in the evolution of human intelligence (Malafouris, 2015).

### 3.4.1 Flow theory.

Since a theory is chosen for its ability to explain a social phenomenon (Ngulube, et al., 2015), the theoretical framing of flow directly relates to occupational material interaction (or material engagement) in this study, as flow is the “holistic sensation an individual has when he or she acts with total involvement with an occupation” (Reid, 2011, p. 51). As flow states occur from absorbed material or occupational engagement, the framing for this study is focused by the suggestion that the social and physical environments of the Visual Arts classroom may relate to the experience of flow (Csíkszentmihályi, Hektner, Hektner & Schmidt, 2006).

Flow in the present study pertains to the psychological state of flow, or psychological flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1993; 1998; 1997). Flow and the term optimal experience are used interchangeably in flow theory to describe those occasions when a sense of exhilaration or a deep sense of enjoyment is felt (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). Flow or optimal
experience is cherished as a landmark in human life, which tends to occur when a “person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something that is difficult or worthwhile” (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990, para 3).

On a larger scale, flow is one aspect of psychological well-being, and is positioned as an element of the PERMA [(P) Positive Emotion; (E) Engagement; (R) Positive Relationships; (M) Meaning; and (A) Accomplishment/Achievement] model developed by Martin Seligman (see Figure 3.1 below). The PERMA model depicts the five core elements of psychological well-being and happiness (Pascha, 2017). Flow fits into the engagement arm presented in Figure 3.1 below displayed in purple.

Figure 3.1. PERMA model depicting the position of flow as an element of engagement (Seligman, 2018)
The PERMA model depicts where flow is located as an element of engagement within the well-being model overall. It is beyond the scope of this research to detail all the elements of well-being and PERMA, however in summary, engagement is a sub-section of well-being, but an overarching theme for flow.

Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi (2009) identify that flow is a subjective state stemming from a subjective experience. In understanding the facets of the flow experience, Csíkszentmihályi (1993) discusses the eight distinct dimensions of flow as global and universal aspects experienced by all who experience a flow state. The characteristic dimensions of the flow experience are:

1. Clear goals: an objective is distinctly defined; immediate feedback: one knows instantly how well one is doing;

2. The opportunities for acting decisively are relatively high, and they are matched by one's perceived ability to act. In other words, personal skills are well suited to given challenges;

3. Action and awareness merge; one-pointedness of mind;

4. Concentration on the task at hand; irrelevant stimuli disappear from consciousness, worries and concerns are temporarily suspended;

5. A sense of potential control;

6. Loss of self-consciousness, transcendence of ego boundaries, a sense of growth and of being part of some greater entity;

7. Altered sense of time, which usually seems to pass faster;

8. Experience becomes autotelic: If several of the previous conditions are present, what one does becomes autotelic, or worth doing for its own sake. (Csíkszentmihályi, 1993, p. 178-179)
This list of the eight characteristics of the flow experience have been repeatedly described cross-culturally and asserted in the work of Csíkszentmihályi (1993) for the past four decades. Flow theory denotes the holistic sensation an individual has when he or she acts with total involvement with an occupation (Csíkszentmihályi, 1975), with this occupational positioning aligning closely with the theoretical framing of MET in this study. In addition, flow theory also recognises the importance of cognitive characteristics of human speciation (Roberts, 2015) and the role of human ancestry in shaping the modern human experience of the world. Csíkszentmihályi (1993) writes,

> how we experience the world is limited and structured—but not determined—by the chemical instructions encoded in the genes. These instructions have been passed on more or less unchanged for many millions of years from ancestor to ancestor, and down to our parents. What they tell us to do is to follow the best strategy for survival that our ancestors were able to develop. (p.64)

As such, both MET and flow theories recognise that the human manufacture of Arts materials stem from expressions of a human material culture as a means of satisfying human needs (Dissanayake 1995; Dutton, 2009; Fleming, et al., 2014; Haidle, 2010; Morriss-Kay, 2009; Spivey, 2005). Furthermore, the brain, body and thing relationship that is emphasised in MET highlights the way that through occupational material interaction “people develop skills which meet biological needs and gain an experience in satisfaction” (Hocking, 1997, p. 27). Interestingly, when in a state of flow, it is common to be so completely engaged in activity that one may forget their embodied being-in-the-world altogether (Reid, 2011).

It is claimed that flow has important long-term effects as people who are often in flow have higher self-esteem than those who experience flow rarely. Additionally, it is thought that when people experience a flow state and act at the peak of their capacity, their well-being is improved; this has the potential for socially positive consequences as it is hypothesised that flow allows an individual to flourish and function at their best (Larson, 1988).
3.4.2 Flow and education.

Flow and engagement are necessary for adolescent belonging within the school environment (Schall, Wallace & Chhuon, 2016). It is thought that pressures “to create classrooms focused solely on academic goals in order to increase student performance on high stakes testing” can prompt reduced motivation in youth (Schall, et al., 2016, p. 472). This reduced motivation and perceived lack of belonging “leads to disengagement from schoolwork and overall disconnection from school” (Crosnoe, 2011; Schall, et al., 2016, p. 472). However, it is claimed that effective intervention strategies for fostering adolescent engagement in secondary school could increase feelings of belonging for adolescents, as they desire to make authentic and productive contributions to their environment (Willms, 2000). For example, when students make artworks for public viewing, their engagement tends to be greater (Hetland, 2013). Additionally, academic autonomy and belongingness in school “have been found to contribute independently to student engagement and academic achievement” (Ryzin, Gravely & Roseth, 2009, p.2) as engagement is not simply about good classroom behaviour or attendance, but an authentic connection to learning.

Flow is correlated with outcomes in adolescents such as increased concentration, enjoyment, happiness, strength, motivation, self-esteem, optimism and future-mindedness (Hanson, 2009). Furthermore, flow states promote attitudes of greater personal engagement in the resolution of problems, “prioritizing personal attitudes in the development of more suitable coping strategies and the capability of promoting significant changes” (Scorsolini-Comin, Fontaine, Koller, & Santos, 2013, p. 668). Notably, as adolescents spend the majority of their time in compulsory education, it is thought that occurrence of flow within the school setting is perhaps the most important area for researchers to focus on (Hanson, 2005).

Teenagers who report more flow experiences tend to be happier, and they develop academic talents further than teens that are in flow less often (Csíkszentmihályi, 1993). In addition, it has been demonstrated that the amount
of flow experienced during an academic course was a better predictor of success than measures of aptitude (Hanson, 2009).

However, unfortunately for society at large and for education in particular, Csíkszentmihályi (1993) claims that contemporary everyday life provides little flow as our culture has become too “dependent on passive, redundant entertainment” (p. 198). This claim aligns with Wilcock’s (1992) occupational research (see Chapter 2). Alongside passive and redundant entertainment, it is claimed that most of our time is spent doing unpleasant things (Csíkszentmihályi, 1993; Csíkszentmihályi, 2004; Csíkszentmihályi, Abuhamdeh, Nakamura, 2014). This is in part because of the objectification of incentives into money and status as a motivational system, so that communities can produce desired behaviours predictably (Csíkszentmihályi, 1975) and because of the general acceptance of the value external rewards.

This perspective underlines the assumption that money and status are basic human needs. However, Csíkszentmihályi (1975) notes that the need for possessions is not a universal trait, thus debunking this misconception. Continuing this idea, extrinsic motivation (behaviour driven by external rewards) features in the first pages of chapter one in Csíkszentmihályi’s seminal *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (1975), as he discusses how this extrinsic thought is at odds with the intrinsic nature of the flow experience,

The fact is that the ease with which external rewards can be used conceals real dangers. When a teacher discovers that children will work for a grade, he or she may become less concerned with whether the work itself is meaningful or rewarding to students. Employers who take for granted the wisdom of external incentives may come to believe that workers’ enjoyment of the task is irrelevant. As a result, children and workers will learn, in time, that what they have to do is worthless in itself and that its only justification is the grade or paycheck they get at the end. This pattern has become
so general in our culture that by now it is self-evident: what one must do cannot be enjoyable [...] among the consequences of such a state of affairs is the deep-seated alienation of workers in industrial nations. (Csíkszentmihályi, 1975, p. 3, emphasis in original)

The thread within the literature (see Chapter 2), which focuses on the economic priority afforded within educational agenda, purposefully aligns and blends within the discourse of the above. When extrinsic rewards and material possessions are misused beyond meeting necessities, it creates alienation among its members, with a system that uses extrinsic rewards “to compensate people for the empty drudgery of life” (Csíkszentmihályi, 1975, p.4).

Furthermore, it is thought the complexity and stress of contemporary life is taking a toll on Australian students with at least 25% of young people having a mental health disorder (Waters, 2011). It is argued that twenty first century schooling should focus on the need to develop the whole-student through social, emotional, moral and intellectual development helping students to thrive by building on their strengths and virtues (Waters, 2011).

3.4.3 Flow and artmaking.

It was established by Hektner and Asakawa (2000) that school-related activities were found to create the most flow states in teenagers, with individual and group work, such as that found in the Visual Arts classroom, being more conducive to flow than lecture style teaching. It is also asserted that vocational courses, computer science and Art were found to engender the highest levels of flow (Hanson, 2009).

It is claimed that flow is essential to creativity and to well-being (Nelson & Rawlings, 2010). Significantly, one study also found that aesthetic experience is similar to the optimal mental processing phenomenon of flow (Markovic, 2012), and Berleant (1991) states that the experience of Art is beyond just intellectual involvement, perhaps explaining why Arts making is found to elicit a higher rate of flow in students (Hanson, 2009).
Art ‘feels good,’ and is one source of pleasure in life (Dutton, 2009). It is thought that this may stem from the activity of Arts making for early humans who found elements of artistic creation gratifying and enjoyable (Dissanayake, 1995). Instinctively, humans find pleasure and positive reinforcement in performing activities that are essential to our survival, because one of the ways “in which nature has ensured that we do things that are essential to our survival is to make them feel good” (Dissanayake, 1995, p. 31).

Exploring the idea of the way Arts material engagements and flow relate, is one such notion named Einfühlung. Developed by Theodor Lipps, Einfühlung describes the “object and the pleasure drawn together in a single act” (Berleant, 1991, p. 17). Einfühlung is the activity of feeling oneself into the aesthetic object, and empathy or the “imaginative projection of a subjective state into an object so that the object appears to be infused with it” (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2017, para. 1). Through intuition, empathy, involvement and engagement there is a significance in Arts makings that goes beyond the aesthetic realm (Berleant, 1991).

Involvement with the material world is integral to our species, and not to engage with the material disregards our fundamental human nature (Dissanayake, 2000). This material involvement is multisensory, generating an exchange between mind and body, which may facilitate insights into the human condition (Dissanayake, 2000). Thus, inherent in human biological adeptness, the materiality of Arts making further links to flow, engagement and flourishing because this in turn leads to belonging and meaning (Dissanayake, 2000). Unfortunately, current policies have narrowed the focus of schools, which have resulted in a general progression away from more holistic models of working with students (Cutcher, 2013; Snow & Beck, 2018).
3.5 Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter presents the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Following the preamble to the chapter, Section 3.3 provided a comprehensive overview of Material Engagement Theory as the overarching theory for this study. Section 3.3 described the process of material engagement as understood through brains, bodies and things (Section 3.3.1), and how human engagement with material alters the way in which we make sense of the world (Malafouris, 2015). Section 3.4 described flow theory as a theoretical framework for this study. Additionally, Section 3.4 outlined the alignment between flow theory and MET, describing that flow occurs when one is involved in engagement with material as an occupation (Reid, 2011).

This chapter is now followed by the methodology and research design engaged in this study.
Chapter 4
Methodology and Research Design

4.1 Chapter Preview

Chapter 4 presents the methodology and research design for this study. This chapter outlines how the research aim and questions are addressed through the methodology in Section 4.2, with the research approach and methodology discussed in Section 4.3. Following this, Section 4.4 details the method of inquiry by addressing the context for gathering information. Section 4.5 follows, presenting ethics and confidentiality, followed by permissions (Section 4.6). Finally, the chapter is summarised in Section 4.7.

4.2 Research Aim and Questions

The research questions (see Section 1.2.1) have structured the literature review, research design and methodological approach. Aligning with the literature in a previous chapter (Chapter 2), as previously mentioned, the research questions are framed around the primacy of material engagement in Visual Arts, material engagements in the Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and flow.

To unpack the research aim and questions in the first instance within the context of the research design, the literature review explored and established the origins, purposes and effects that material engagement has had in the evolution of human species, as well as contextualising the context for the study’s design. In contextualising the literature within anthropological and archeological frameworks, the foundations for how material engagement manifests though Visual Arts making has been established. Underpinning the overall research, theories of material
engagement and flow in Visual Arts are foundational to the development of this study and to the research design overall (see Chapter 3). As mentioned previously, this research explores the research aim, through Art and text and includes phases of information gathering and analysis, which is performed through the creation of an artistic body of work. In this way, the previous chapters have laid a foundation for the performance of this research.

4.3 Arts-based Educational Research

Johnson and Onwuebuzie (2004) state that, “research methods should follow research questions in a way that offers the best chance to obtain useful answers” (p. 18). As such, to obtain the most useful answers, this study adopted an Arts-based educational research [ABER] approach, specifically the methodology of A/r/tography. This section contextualizes the paradigm of ABER, and is followed by a specific discussion of A/r/tography.

ABER has a long tradition, with numerous methodological approaches engaging the Arts and inquiry (Knight & Lasczik Cutcher, 2018; Siegesmund, 2018). ABER methodologies are recognised as legitimate and useful, especially in the field of education (Pentassuglia, 2017), where researchers must be equipped with a diverse range of methods to investigate educational problems (McNiff, 1998). ABER was developed as a way to employ the “evocative force of aesthetics” (Pentassuglia, 2017, p. 3), and encourages artistic creations where meanings are formed beyond what words can convey in educational contexts (Eisner, 1997; Langer, 1953). ABER enhances perspectives related to human activities and ABER works are infused with aesthetic qualities which enrich the inquiry process (Barone & Eisner, 1997).

ABER’s purpose is to enhance perspectives pertaining to educational activities for the betterment of educational policy and practice, through research, which includes artistic and creative forms (Barone & Eisner, 2006).
As a qualitative research methodology, ABER recognises that there are many layers to inquiry (McNiff, 1998) and this explains why I have used the term ‘gathered information’ to replace ‘data’ in this study. Furthermore, ‘gathered information’ is a term used by Irwin (2008) to describe the processes of the ABER method of A/r/tography. I have therefore used the term ‘gathered information’ as it references the multitude of information obtained and gathered in this ABER study, nestled among the layers of material that was beyond the scope of the inquiry in order to recognise the impossibly of gathering every existing ineffable dimension of information, including artistic modalities. ‘Gathered information’ also delineates any connection to other modes of inquiry.

Artistic modalities are imperative and foundational to ABER, as Barone and Eisner (2006) argue that artistic modalities represent unique means for enhancing educational perspectives by communicating the indefinable dimensions of experiences within schools. ABER is an umbrella concept, meaning there is no specific procedure to produce an Arts-based educational research product, rather there are variety of approaches (Barone & Eisner, 2006). ABER does however lean towards achieving the heuristic purposes of “enhancing perspectives and raising important educational questions in the minds of readers” (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p. 96), which is different to that applied in more conventional educational research (Barone & Eisner, 2006).

One such approach to ABER is A/r/tography, a theoretical and methodological disposition that emerged among a group of researchers “working in-between the fields of curriculum studies, fine arts and social sciences” (Sinner, 2016, p. 39). The methodological approach of this study, A/r/tography is therefore unpacked below.

4.3.1 A/r/tography.

A/r/tography is an ABER methodology that emerged from the Art practices and “lived experiences of educators, artists, and researchers which developed in the context of arts-based educational research”
(Kampouropoulou, 2015, p. 60). A/r/tography merges the relationship between educational theory, research and Arts practice into an ABER methodology (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, 2008).

A/r/tographic methodology is employed in this inquiry to rigorously address the research questions in alignment with the research aim, since A/r/tography is an arts and education practice-based methodology (Given, 2008). The research aim explores the primacy of material engagement in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and examines students self-reported flow experiences with and through Art and text, and therefore an ABER approach, such as A/r/tography is entirely appropriate and aligned, as this study is concerned with Arts-based research within an educational context.

In A/r/tography, there are six renderings that are designed to suggest a variety of possibilities (Pourchier, 2010). These renderings resist the formation of methodological criteria (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Pourchier, 2010), but Sinner, et al. (2006) assert that “A/r/tographical work is rendered though the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations, and excess which are enacted and presented or performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings” (p. 12224).

These renderings are explained as (Winters, 2010, p. 164):

1. Contiguity: giving attention to the spaces in-between art, education, and research, in between ‘art’ and ‘graphy’, and in-between art and a/t/t;

2. Living Inquiry: giving attention to the complexity and contradictions of relations between people, things, and understandings of life experiences;

3. Openings: giving attention to dialogue and discourse;

4. Metaphor/Metonymy: giving attention to new connections and intertwined relationships;
5. Reverberations: giving attention to shifts in new meaning, new awareness, and new discoveries; and


These six renderings strengthen the way A/r/tographers represent their questions, practices, emergent understandings, and creative analytic texts as they integrate knowing, doing, and making through aesthetic experiences (Springgay & Irwin, 2004). They do not all need to be engaged simultaneously in A/r/tography, nor would they be engaged evenly. For example, in this inquiry the renderings are indeed engaged unevenly, with some being foregrounded and others not present at all. It is not the intention of the renderings to be any type of guideline or criteria (Springgay & Irwin, 2004). Rather, they perform as conceptual organizers of ideas to interpret significant understandings as they emerge. A/r/tography is a methodology that expresses its rigour through continuous reflexivity as an organizational signifier for meaning making and analysis. Thus, these renderings are not exhaustive as A/r/tography is an evolving process open to the re-interpretation and discovery of new adaptations (Winters, 2010). The six renderings are “flexible, intersubjective locations through which close analysis renders new understandings and meanings” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. 34).

A/r/tographic inquiry engages the very being and identity of the A/r/tographer (Irwin & Springgay, 2008), and the name purposefully reiterates the positioning and roles of the ‘A’rtist / ‘T’eacher / ‘R’esearcher within the methodology. Thus A/r/tography is the methodology in this study as it is situated in a) an educational context; b) engages Art materials and creative forms; c) is inclusive of artist/researcher/teacher perspectives, and (d) curated by the A/r/tographer.

A/r/tography is not a formula-based methodology; rather, it is a contiguous methodology that interweaves threads of theory (knowing), praxis (doing), and poesis (making) (Kampouropoulou, 2015). A/r/tographic
methodology recognises that the theoretical, practical and making aspects of the study are not separate and distinct but rather deeply connected and interwoven, allowing for deeper understandings to emerge (Irwin, 2004). These deeper understandings between teacher, artist and researcher inform the “intertextuality and intratextuality of ideas” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxiv).

To illustrate, in alignment with the methodology, these relational understandings of the A/r/tographer’s journey through the inquiry, created a folding together of rhizomatic ways of experiencing the world (Irwin & Springgay, 2008), whereby the rhizome theorized by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), is a departure from lineal ways of knowing to thought that moves and flows in an entangled assemblage of dynamic momentum (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2013). In this study, information is gathered to explore how the world is experienced through Art and text, imagery and analysis. A/r/tography is not a method of data collection or analysis, but rather is an onto-epistemological stance about how the world meaning is made, and experienced.

4.3.2 Onto-epistemology

Ontology is the way reality is viewed, while epistemology is the way we acquire knowledge (Crotty, 1998). My ontology and epistemology are entwined in my work as an artist, teacher, and researcher - A/r/tographer; thus this entwinement is reflected through use of the entwined positioning of onto-epistemology. A/r/tography pragmatically enables the needs of the research to align with the A/r/tographer’s onto-epistemology, knowing through artistic ways of “being, doing, knowing and becoming” (McDougall, Bevan & Semper, 2011, p. 6).

Knowing, being and becoming (Irwin, 2004) in the world is created through exploration and immersion by the artist in, through and with their Art making. There is no one truth or even reality, but rather a range of perspectives and decisions made
as the artist explores through a variety of artistic approaches, inquiries and becomings. Knowledge is acquired through the exploration of Arts materials (or material engagements) and the interactions of the and between the identities of artist, researcher and teacher. As such, the A/r/tographer is unable to do other than bring their personal involvement and empathetic understanding into the research (Glesne, 1992). As an artist and a teacher, this research is authentic and aligned to my onto-epistemology.

It is through the onto-epistemology of A/r/tography that gives the researcher the permission to research in ways that are idiosyncratic, iterative and generative – and authentic. It is the layers in A/r/tography that are determined by the deep context of the study, and thus the A/r/tographer’s ways of knowing and being are central to the design and unfolding of the research and its portrayals. An A/r/tographic onto-epistemology embraces subjectivity and nuance, and in the context of this study, embraces the subjectivity of human and material relations resulting in rich and meaningful differences, experiences and outcomes for the students and the A/r/tographers, with respect to in ways of knowing, being and becoming through their respective Arts practices, products and experiences.

Barone and Eisner (1997) draw our attention to taken-for granted-assumptions, such as the ways that a particular and layered Art/research/teaching onto-epistemologies are present and palpable within the inquiry. Through such inquiry, Art experiences and Art works become the mediums through which artists come to know, always becoming as artists, researchers, and teachers, always becom-ing A/r/tography (Irwin, 2013, emphasis added).

Arts inquiries and interactions with the world occur and are disseminated through creativity, imagination, critical analysis, experimentation, and material engagement: all of which are ways of knowing, being and becoming to the Arts-based researcher, and in this case, the A/r/tographer. The demands of the inquiry and the onto-epistemology of the research and the researcher coalesce to design the research and its onto-epistemology. In this way, the A/r/tographer is central to the research, and ever present in it. The A/r/tographer brings with them their own set of beliefs and values, their own practise and experiences and thus the role of the A/r/tographer in this study and my philosophies are discussed below in order to further contextualise the onto-epsitemology of this work.
4.3.3 The A/r/tographer.

A/r/tography incorporates the “systematic use of the artistic process, [and] the actual making of artistic expressions are the primary way of understanding experiences” (McNiff, 2007, p. 29). A/r/tography purposefully engages the forward slashes ‘/’ between the a/r/t to present an equality and coexistence between and within the three A/r/tographer identities (Winters, 2010), and considers the spaces and relationships in the liminal spaces between, across and through the three identities. The A/r/tographer’s subjectivities, onto-epistemologies, and identity are fundamental to A/r/tographic inquiry, as the roles of the artist/researcher/teacher are intertwined and fluid within “contiguous relationships” that cannot be separated (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxix).

The A/r/tographer’s rhizomatic ways of experiencing the world (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) are privileged in A/r/tography by meaningfully blending the A/r/tographic identities within its name, and its methodological perspectives. This is done through A/r/tography permitting a methodological license to honour and allow for the researcher’s knowing, being, and becoming to occur through doing and making (Detlefsen, 2012).

Living inquiry is “giving attention to the complexity and contradiction of relations” (Winters, 2010, p.164), and is fundamental to A/r/tography as it is a living practice. Living practice provides the lens to consider the identities of the artist/researcher/teacher as essential to the methodology (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxix) as it is a “life writing, life creating experience into the personal, political, and professional aspects” (Springgay, et al., 2005, p. 903) specific to the A/r/tographer. “A/r/tography cannot be limited to the study of the mechanics of doing art, nor can it be
defined as multiple identities. A/r/tographers are connected to, not separate from, the researching, the teaching, and the art-making process” (Winter, 2010, p. 123). Thus, “through attention to memory, identity, autobiography, reflection, mediation, storytelling, interpretation, and/or representation, artists/researchers/teachers expose their living practices in evocative ways” (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005, p.903), as has been achieved in this living inquiry.

In alignment with A/r/tographic methodology, this study is underpinned through the experiences, thoughts and perspectives of the A/r/tographer, which are interconnected, fluid and flowing in dynamic momentum (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2013) with the inquiry. As such, the personal orientation to the research is presented (see Section 4.4.2.1) within this chapter in order to explore my identities, contexts and the experiences that give rise to them, thereby contextualising an important aspect for any A/r/tography and certainly this one. After the personal orientation is a discussion on the integral nature of Art, creative forms and text in A/r/tography (see Section 4.3.3).

4.3.3.1 The A/r/tographer: Personal Orientation to the Research. This section presents my personal orientation to the research and the fundamental beliefs that drive my daily practice and purpose as an A/r/tographer - in Visual Arts education (Bolin & Hoskings, 2015). A/r/tography recognises that these beliefs and purposes should be explicitly presented as Art, education and Art education, are filled with an abundance of purposes and practices (Bolin & Hoskings, 2015), this section clarifies the personal orientation to the research through the artist/researcher/teacher lens, and contextualises the study.
The methodology of A/r/tography is in keeping with the personal orientation to the research, as it must be noted that it is a methodology that requires the examination of personal and professional lives (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; McNiff, 2007). Essential to this research and its placement in the methodology, is the emphasis that A/r/tographic inquiry engages the very being of the A/r/tographer, and as such the subjectivities, ways of living in the world, and indeed identities are fundamental to determining the orientation to the research (Given, 2008). As the roles are intertwined and fluid within the “contiguous relationships” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxix), they cannot be separated. However, for the purposes of this discussion they are addressed independently yet noted to be distinctly relational in their contiguity in building an overall picture of the personal orientation to the research. Fundamentally, an A/r/tographer is committed to a “life commitment to the arts and education through acts of inquiry” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxix). To establish this positioning my personal artmaking practices are briefly considered before discussing my teaching philosophy and principles.

Authors such as Dissanayake (1995; 2002), Dutton (2006), Hickman (2010) and Chatterjee (2014) claim that making Art is a fundamental human urge (as previously discussed in Chapter 3), which often unfolds naturally, and that this stems from our human ancestral instincts. While reflecting upon my own artmaking I can think of many examples regarding how my creativity manifests, the reasons for my doing so can only be described as natural as “the impulse to make and feel art is fundamental to [my] nature” (Chatterjee, 2014, p.164). Artmaking for me has always been “an intensely personal activity” that provides “an opportunity for meaning-making and self-reflection” (Choe, 2012, p. 175). Creating Art, which is viewed by authors and evolutionary psychologists as an “essential pre-requisite of being human”, means, “young people need to be in environments which promote this” (Hickman, 2010, p. 123), and my Arts practices have been able to flourish in supportive home and school environments.
The how and why of my being an Arts-maker has always escaped my ability to define it. Onto-
epistemologically being an Artist is my way of being and knowing in the world. Making Art has always existed as something that I have done instinctively. It is how I became and how I become. I have memories as a very young girl of painting, building, creating, crafting and making things ‘extra special’ (Dissanayake, 1995). As I grew, I expanded my repertoire and immersed my creative passions into sewing, crocheting, cooking, digital design and clay sculpting.

Figure 4.1. Making porcelain bowls in 2016. My sculpting technique is highly experimental and guided by my aesthetic instincts. I rarely research methods of production rather preferring my works to authenticate their individual creation and process.
Figure 4.2. Detail, demonstrating the tactile nature of my practice; as a physical activity and as a deeply personal endeavor which is created, processed and reflected upon. Artmaking for me, has always been “an intensely personal activity” that provides “an opportunity for meaning-making and self-reflection” (Choe, 2012, p. 175).

I have continued to create Art and Figures 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 show my recent clay works. These works are examples of artmaking as an entirely personal activity to understand life experiences (Hickman, 2010), as the figures below are inspired by the waters of Samoa where my son and I lived in 2015. The experience of living in Samoa was deeply meaningful as it was a time of genuine connection of self, humanness and the environment which manifested for me creatively in porcelain sculptures.
Figure 4.3. Porcelain bowl with dripping lapis glazed rim. Deep blue contrasts and drips into the porcelain, capture the movement of the ocean meeting the reef outside our village in Samoa.
Figure 4.4. Watery turquoise stoneware bowl with gold detail. They depict the shoreline of Lalumanu, Samoa.
Figure 4.5. Porcelain vessel and lid with copper detail. It portrays the To Sua waterhole in Samoa.
These images are but one small sample of how I have creatively processed just one life experience. My artist-led belief is that “Art in itself should be respected as one of the most significant rights that any human being deserves to enjoy” (Choe, 2012, p. 176). Sadly, however, creativity and artmaking “can be stunted or developed by cultural influences, including schooling” (Hickman, 2010, p. 1), and this leads to the personal orientation of my important role as a Visual Arts teacher in secondary schools.

To establish the personal orientation to the research both my teaching philosophy and principles, which guide my teaching practice, are also considered here. First in addressing my teaching philosophy, the proposal that the purposes of education are to promote positive community and democratic citizenry (Siegesmund, 2013) is supported by the Australian Government’s Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008) as well as informing my philosophy. It is thought that the interconnectedness of humans are the driving force for the modern world (Hartman, 2017, p. 151) and as humans are social beings evolved to exist in communities, positive community in my philosophy is taken to mean groups that inspire members to promote self-discovery, connection, encouragement of beliefs and values, and relationship building (Positive Psychology Program, 2016). Starkey (2002) suggests Art is something that equips humans to play an active part in public life and to shape in a responsible way, their own destiny and that of their society, and by instilling a culture of human rights. Dealing with difference knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly and morally, Art “strengthens social cohesion, mutual understanding and solidarity”(p.8), which I think is powerful and moving.

While education in Australia has been going through a time of change due to educational reform over the past decade (Gibson et al., 2016), it is my belief that these reforms still have some work to do in terms of creating successful outcomes for learners. As a Visual Arts educator, I have critically reviewed educational research trends (McLeod & Wright, 2015) in an effort to identify improvements within my profession, to create a better educational experience for my students and outcomes for my school. The suggestion that education is being reduced to
benchmarking with no regard for character development and growth in moral citizenship (Bolin & Hoskins, 2015) by simply placing orientation on economic growth (Gibson et al., 2015), deeply concerns me as I have noted in Chapter 2. The very term ‘positive education’ is defined as education for traditional skill and for happiness (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich & Likins, 2009).

![Figure 4.6. Year twelve students on an excursion to the Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (GoMA) to view the 8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in 2016 (myself far right). Excursions give students an opportunity to experience Art beyond digital images, allowing them to encounter texture, size, meaning and emotion in the works, also providing space to develop student/ teacher trust and teambuilding outside the classroom.](image-url)
There is a suggestion in the literature that students who have the safety, support and space to thrive, discover and grow have a greater likelihood of higher academic achievement (McLeod, 2014). This is important, however, beyond the focus of academic achievement (McLeod, 2014), my personal teaching philosophy promotes the idea that school education can build confident students. Confident students who have positive educational and rich life experiences in safe and supportive environments, for purposes beyond mere academic achievement. The Arts, it is claimed, can help develop well-rounded individuals, improving not just education but also the lives of students (Worzel, 2011). I have certainly witnessed this in my classrooms.

Some of the concepts of progressive education also underpin my personal teaching philosophy. The concepts of progressive education combine with the aspects of positive education in my personal teaching philosophy and recognize that education should not just curtail the disabling conditions of life, but rather build the enabling conditions of life (Seligman, et al., 2009), which a plethora of literature suggests can be found thorough engagement in the Arts.

Beyond philosophy, my teaching principles are also important in understanding the role of the artist-teacher/teacher-researcher in A/r/tography. In 2004, the State of Victoria released “Effective pedagogy: Principles of Learning and Teaching P–12,” which forms a framework for effective pedagogy. There are six primary principles the paper identified, and I have engaged them here as an overview for the principles as foundational to my Visual Arts classroom and teaching pedagogical principles. In summary, my pedagogy promotes a learning environment that is supportive and productive, promotes independence, interdependence and self-motivation, and considers students’ needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests, which are reflected in the learning program (State Government of Victoria, 2004). Furthermore in my classroom, students are challenged and “supported to develop deep levels of thinking and application”, and learning that connects strongly with communities and practice beyond the classroom (State Government of Victoria, 2004, p. 9). These aspects of teaching are all germane to my philosophy and practice.
Perhaps as a more practical explanation, Bolin and Hoskings (2015, p. 47), suggest the Art educator, “reflect on their purposes and motivations” by identifying and selecting items that outline the 50 Purposes for Art Education. Bolin and Hoskings (2015, p. 41) suggest that by selecting five items from the list, the foundational beliefs of an Art teacher are revealed. In revealing the motivation for the Art practices by which they employ with learners, personal purposes of an Art education can be established and aid in identifying the personal orientation to the research. Below is a list of 12 selected reflections of my own views.

In order of appearance on the original paper, the educational motivations that guide my teaching principles are so that students can:

1. Grow in their independent and divergent thinking;

2. Discover and develop their artistic talents;

3. Recognize and explore the rich and varied possibilities of humanity; and

4. Develop democratic behavior as an engaged citizen.

Furthermore my motivations as an Art educator encourages students to:

5. Be creative and self expressive;

6. Be provided with opportunities for social and emotional growth;

7. Experience a universal language spoken by all people (such as Art);

8. Experience the opportunity for identity exploration and development;

9. Build skills in problem solving and critical thinking;

10. Engage in meaning-making through the analytical interpretation of Art and ideas;
11. Use Art as a therapeutic outlet; and finally

12. For students to experience respect for one’s own effort and the effort of others

(Bolin & Hoskings, 2015, p. 41).

I have selected the items from the list compiled by Bolin and Hoskings (2015, p.41) in order to demonstrate how my personal teaching principles promote both a valuable and meaningful education overall, not only through engagement with the Visual Arts, but also with social and emotional growth, character development and growth in moral citizenship. The list also demonstrates skills exclusively relating to the current educational agenda, which the Visual Arts explicitly teaches, being growth in divergent thinking, problem solving, critical and creative thinking and analytical interpretation. Arts research demonstrates that students who are actively engaged in the Arts also are more motivated in other school subjects, have higher self-esteem, higher levels of life satisfaction, and a greater sense of meaning in life (Anderson et al., 2015).

However, the argument for the Visual Arts in this research is not to serve the academic accomplishment in other subjects, but rather to demonstrate a compelling argument for the importance of Visual Arts in the curriculum and education system in its own right (Anderson et al., 2015). The Review of the Australian Curriculum (Australian Government Department of Education, 2014, p. 5) notes that approaches to teaching and learning should take heed how students best learn and develop a deep knowledge of the subject disciplines and suggests that any national curriculum should be “flexible and responsive to diversity and designed so that teachers can tailor learning experiences to the interests and needs of students” (ACARA, 2014, p. 57). This recommendation is a constant within the teaching and learning practices of my classroom. Not only do I as an A/r/tographer and Art educator have a deep knowledge of disciplines through constant engagement with research and professional experience, I also value and
create engaging learning experiences specifically tailored to the needs and interests of my students. This last point leads to a discussion on how my classroom teaching, principles and pedagogy influence and are oriented towards the present research.

Much of the literature that informs my knowledge about education within Visual Arts is broad and situated within anthropological, neuroscientific, occupational, aesthetic, psychological, cognitive and educational fields, as has been previously noted. Within these fields there is the suggestion that the human capacity for and existence of Art is a natural behaviour and intuitive to humans as a “field of activities, objects, and experience that appears naturally in human life” (Dutton, 2009 p. 51). Whilst the notion of Art as an essential part of human nature (Dissanayake, 1995; Dutton, 2009) is not the driver of my professional practice, it does add a layer to the seemingly inexplicable nature of Art to be mulled over among all of the things that inform my professional practice.

Figure 4.7. Students working on carvings.

4 Safety protocols were strictly adhered to as per school safety policy and procedure during the creation of sculptures
I have worked as a Visual Arts teacher in boys’ education in Australian Greater Public Schools (GPS), and have also worked in co-educational schools in both the private and public sectors in various socio-economic demographics in Queensland over 12 years. Figure 4.7 (above) and Figure 4.8 (below) show photographs of Year 8 students creating sculptures.

![Image of a carving being created by a Year 8 student.](image)

*Figure 4.8. Year 8 student creating a carving.*

Closely related to the anthropological contexts of this research, boys’ education is where I first observed that levels of focus and behaviour changed with different material engagements. Through frequent observation, I noted there were positive and beneficial changes in focus and behaviour from the students that occurred when working with clay and stone. These changes were opposed to the behaviors I observed in some other, perhaps more tedious, artmaking activities, including theoretical lessons and interestingly, particularly during digital tasks. This was
interesting because I noticed that in some inexplicable ways, the boys enjoyed the clay and stone in a way in which, I ventured to speculate, seemed almost natural to them.

Figure 4.9 and Figure 4.10 below show details demonstrating the material engagements and tactile nature in the creation of a carving by a Year 8 boy in my class. They also capture a moment relevant to artistic engagement itself. In speculating further on the ‘natural’ concept that I ventured to use in the above paragraph, is the concept of Csikszentmihályi’s (1993) flow.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework (Chapter 3), the concept of flow describes a rare state of consciousness, or transcendence, when humans are engaged in a highly challenging task that uses the utmost personal skills resulting in participants feeling involved, concentrated, and absorbed in a task (Csikszentmihályi, 1993). It was this concept that appeared to complement my classroom observations of positive behaviour and creative task engagement. At first it seemed like the students were working in an im magically (Cutcher, 2015) natural or innate way, a positive change in their behaviour, engagement and work ethic that I could not pinpoint, but could speculate was essential to a productive and enjoyable lesson by all (myself as the teacher included).

Flow theory has seemed to connect to my observations, not only during practical engagement with tasks, but also in the negative responses of my students to the end of the lesson and pack up time. Students responded undesirably to my interruption and demands to stop work, with some students begging to remain working and miss their next lessons; some even going so far as to hide with their stones to avoid leaving the work area.

Whilst initially I suspected this was simply because they enjoyed the task, I came to understand such behaviour is actually an indication of flow. When one is immersed in flow, interruptions are very frustrating because they break the spell and force us to return to the everyday state of consciousness. It is thought that almost any activity can achieve a flow experience with the main value of the goal to simply offer an “opportunity to use and refine one's abilities”
(Csíkszentmihályi, 1993, p. 180), such as the opportunity to use and refine the abilities required for Arts making - to carve into stone or create with clay.

I usually observe students using their spare time to come to the Art room and work on Art projects. It is my practice in boarding school settings to open the Art room outside of set class time at 7am, during morning tea, lunch, and one night a week after school until 8:30pm, so students are able work further on class tasks, or ask that I give them a special task to extend themselves. During the time that an alternative clay or stone carving unit was in effect in 2016, students were requiring even more time in the Art classroom, requesting that I come to school as early as 6:30am so they could work on their clay and carving projects. While I had assured many of them their works were of an exceptional standard, and they were likely to receive the highest possible grade, they chose to devote more time to continuously refining their works, because they were simply enjoying the process.
Figure 4.9. Close up demonstrating the tactile nature of carving.
Figure 4.10. Close up demonstrating the tactile nature of carving.
Whilst these observations are open to interpretation, particularly through the informal nature of the analysis, I venture to consider that there are indeed changes in students’ attention, engagement, and enjoyment of practical tasks, which enable certain positive Arts material engagements in contrast for example, to digital tasks. My reflective practices coupled with the relevant literature, which always informs my teaching, have lead me to the focus of this study. Thus, my research builds on observations of classroom practices. It is my professional experience, willingness to extend and influence the possibilities of curriculum, promote effective teaching and learning models through robust research, which provides a practical groundwork for this study.

Throughout this section the roles of the A/r/tographer are contextualized in relation to this study, and the intertwining and fluid nature of the artist, teacher, and researcher are thus made evident in this personal orientation. The personal orientation details how Art and Arts making is a part of my onto-epistemology, and so an explanation of how Art and creative works feature in A/r/tography follows.

4.3.4 Art, creative forms and text in A/r/tography.

Artistic and creative works are integral to A/r/tography. In this study, artworks were created by the both the students, and the A/r/tographer. A/r/tography resides in the practices of artists and educators (Irwin, 2008), and this positioning occurs as A/r/tography transforms theory distinct from practice, into theory as practice (Irwin, 2008, emphasis added) and vice versa (Lasczik Cutcher, 2018). This positions the significance of creativity as a crucial dimension of Art education research and practice (Bastos & Zimmerman, 2015).

In A/r/tography, the “artistic process, [and] the actual making of artistic expressions” is “the primary way of understanding experiences” (McNiff, 2007, p. 29). As such, creative outputs such as artmaking, occur as a vital part of A/r/tography (Candy, 2006), employing the evocative force of aesthetics (Pentassuglia, 2017).
Artistic and creative works are developed in A/r/tography, as A/r/tographers probe their questions, practices, emergent understandings, and creative analytic texts as they integrate knowing, doing, and telling (Cutcher, 2015) through aesthetic experiences, such as artworks and poetry, that convey meaning, rather than facts (Springgay & Irwin, 2004). The conveyance of meaning rather than facts stems from ABER’s purpose to enhance perspectives, as opposed to a quest for certainty (Barone & Eisner, 2006).

Sinner, et al. (2006) assert that A/r/tographic creative work is rendered through methodological concepts which are enacted, presented or performed when aesthetic inquiry is envisioned as embodied understandings. In A/r/tography, this assertion describes the practice of artistic creation by “being in, and engaging with, our surroundings in a deep visceral manner” (Johnson, 2015, p. 875). Put simply, A/r/tographic inquiries interweave the “ongoing interaction between an organism and its physical and cultural environments” inclusive of “the actions by which we continuously transform our experience” (Johnson, 2015, p. 875), which affect and interweave in the artworks created.

Whilst the creation of creative forms/artworks are foundational to the methodology, A/r/tography also includes the thoughtful interweaving of image and text. Indeed being engaged in the practice of A/r/tography is to inquire “through an ongoing process of art making and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create additional and/or enhanced meanings” (Sinner et al., 2006). In this way, text and creative forms are entangled and woven to create enhanced meaning, which “instantiates a style of language adequate to its project” (Wallin, 2013, p. 94) and encourages new ways of thinking, approaching and interpreting (Oliveira & Charreu, 2016) through Art and text-based inquiry.
4.4 Methodological Alignment

The alignment of A/r/tography as an ABER methodology to the research aim of exploring the primacy of material engagement in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and to examine students self-reported flow experiences with and through Art and text, is visible as this study is situated in Arts-based contexts. A/r/tography is used as the methodological approach in this study, since A/r/tography is an “arts and education practice-based methodology recognizing that the practices of artists and educators are often reflective, reflexive, recursive, and responsive acts of living inquiry” (Given, 2008, p. 28), aligning with the intentions and practices of inquiry.

The relational understandings of A/r/tography are explored through “interrelationships, synergies, tensions and complications” which may be affiliated and liquefied in arts-research-education (Lasczik Cutcher & Knight, 2017, p. xvi). As such, I acknowledge the difficulty and fluidity in attempting to align the research questions to the methodology, as A/r/tography often resists such categorisation, preferring to be simultaneously creative and critical, evocative and provocative, material and immaterial, and iterative and generative (Irwin, 2017). However, to provide a cohesive and holistic explanation of the methodology and research design, for the purposes of this thesis, I attempt to make such alignments, whist acknowledging the ‘in-betweeness’ (Irwin, 2008) and interwoven nature of A/r/tography. This is further demonstrated in Chapter 7.

To establish a well-defined alignment between the research aim, questions and A/r/tographic methodology, exploring the merging of educational theory, research and Art practice as the overarching theme of ABER and A/r/tography (Springgay et al, 2008) is a solid nexus with which to begin. This merging of educational theory, research and Arts practice (Sinner, et al., 2006) is visible within the approach of this study, in exploring the three research questions through the students’ practice and my own. In addition, to inform the A/r/tographic threads of theory, practice and poesis (Kampouropoulou, 2015), intertwined with the A/r/tographic identities of artist,
researcher, teacher, the following provides an explanation of the cohesive approach in addressing the research aim through each of the three research questions.

First is the alignment between A/r/tographic methodology and research question one, which explores what material engagement is in Visual Arts. This research question demonstrates the interconnected contiguous nature of A/r/tography, being concerned with poesis, praxis and artist identity. Research question one is primarily concerned with the act of artmaking, which is underpinned by both the theoretical framework (MET, Flow), and the literature engaged in this inquiry (see Chapter 2). In this way, research question one is concerned with Arts-based research, exploring the very artmaking practices which are fundamental, integral and vital to A/r/tography (Barone & Eisner, 2006; Irwin, 2008; Sinner et al., 2006), where the “visual is not just a tool for recording, analysing or interpreting” but rather a generative tool (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008, p. 101).

Specifically, the students in this study created a suite of artworks, exploring material engagements with clay, weaving and glazes. These artworks were engaged as a generative tools for both written and visual analyses. To this end, I purposefully curated the students’ artworks for a particular reading in this work, specifically a gallery experience, designed to fit within the thesis document. The way the artworks were composed and photographed, arranged and positioned on the page, not only fit within the limitations of this thesis, but also create yet another, generative artwork as an assembled collection. This is intentional, and in and of itself, an analytical moment.

As A/r/tography invites “multiplicities of understanding to come together to explore the parts to the whole experience” (Detlefsen, 2012, p. 73), I wove my experiences and observations together with the artmaking, thinking and experiences of the students to create a body of my own artworks. In alignment with the methodology and research questions, I explored and analysed the information gathered in the VAP through my material engagements of
photography, paint and clay; intentionally selected material engagements presented as an evocative, generative, analytical body of work. Meaning is thus formed within this study beyond just words (Eisner, 1997; Langer, 1953).

Secondly, is the alignment between A/r/tographic methodology and research question two, which explores whether the outcomes of material engagements in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom are aligned with persistent patterns of human aesthetic activity. Research question two situates the study within the Year 9 Visual Art classroom and thus defines the educational paradigm, essential to A/r/tographic inquiry as an ABER methodology. This question is interwoven within, and in-between praxis, poesis, and theory as well as the teacher and researcher identities which inform this inquiry. Exploring artmaking in educational contexts, fundamentally aligns with A/r/tography as insights, understandings, and meaning making is brought about through Art and text, which assist in the processes of questioning, thinking and doing (Oliveira & Charreu, 2016). This questioning, thinking and doing lead to further workings and doings in the form of my responsive body of work.

Third, is the alignment between A/r/tographic methodology and research question three, which explores whether flow occurs in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom. As A/r/tography continually asks “questions in an effort to engage with ongoing practices in art and education in order to create knowledge” (Irwin, 2017, p. 2), this research question aligns with the learning aspects of the methodology. After making their artworks, the students responded in writing to reflective prompts (see Appendix B), which explored research question three regarding flow experiences. In addition to a written analysis, I engaged with the students’ reflections in artful ways, aligned with the students’ artmaking practices and thus, I generated the contours of another living inquiry, adding my artworks to the students thoughts, to layer, to analyse and to enhance meaning (Detlefsen, 2012) and to generate further insights. As such, question three merges and engages praxis and theory, within and through the A/r/tographer identities and practices.
Additionally, theoretical lenses can be drawn upon, whist still aligning with A/r/tographic methodology (Sinner et al., 2006). Cahnmann-Taylor (2008) describes the theoretical framework developed by Barone and Eisner (1997) for Arts-based educational research. Cahnmann-Taylor (2008) reiterates Barone and Eisner’s (1997) eloquent qualities of Arts-based texts, which include:

- the creation of a virtual reality and a degree of textual ambiguity; the presence of expressive, contextualized, and vernacular forms of language; the promotion of empathetic participation in the lives of a study’s participants; and the presence of an aesthetic form through the unique, personal signature of the researcher. (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008, p.8)

In alignment with Barone and Eisner’s (1997) theoretical framework, each of these qualities are reflected with this study as it unfolded above. Additionally, the artistic modalities communicate the indefinable dimensions of experience (Barone & Eisner, 2006) within an educational context. In this way, A/r/tography provides access to the contours of this study (Detlefsen, 2012) by presenting, responding and analysing the written perceptions, reflections, artworks and creative experiences of students and the A/r/tographer through both text and Art.

In summary, this section demonstrates how A/r/tographic inquiry moves beyond the use of existing criteria for qualitative research (Springgay, et al., 2005) into a space where multiplicities of understanding come together to explore the whole experience (Detlefsen, 2012).

4.5 Method of Inquiry

To gather information for this study, I merged educational theory, research and Arts practice, praxis, and poesis (Springgay et al, 2008) to develop a Visual Art program [VAP], engaging the A/r/t identities, at a Year 9 level,
which aimed to specifically encourage material engagement with clay, weaving and glaze. The VAP was implemented in one Year 9 classroom, in one Queensland secondary school (see Table 4.1) and was conducted over 9 lessons within a six-week period. The VAP was designed to address the three research questions, through exploring the students’ experiences in the Visual Arts classroom. The program was designed so that I could gather information on:

1. Students’ artmaking processes and their artworks: relating to material engagement; and
2. Students’ written self-reported reflections: relating to flow.

Gathering information relating to students artmaking and artworks, embraces ABER methods of inquiry, which engage artistic modalities to communicate the indefinable dimensions of experience (Barone & Eisner, 2006). Additionally, gathering information relating to students self-reported reflections engages writing (‘graphy’) which assists in the process of questioning, thinking, approaching an interpreting (Oliveria & Charreu, 2016).

The following presents and contextualises the student participants, setting, research practices, contexts for gathering artworks, and contexts for gathering students’ reflections, which are pertinent to the method of inquiry used within this study.

4.5.1 The students.

In Australia, school education includes preschool, preparatory, primary school, secondary school and senior secondary school. There are government run and non-state (private) schools, and overall schooling in Australia lasts for 13 years and is compulsory until the age of 16 (Australian Government, 2018). Primary School runs for 6 years from kindergarten or prep through to year 6, secondary school also runs for 6 years (Australian Government, 2018). In some schools in Australia, more commonly in non-state schools, schooling is divided into Junior (prep-year 6),
Middle (Years 7 – Year 10) and Secondary school (Years 11 & 12), which are commonly distributed across one campus. This research was conducted in a school whereby the Year 9 class is situated in a Middle School Setting, where students are 13-14 years of age. Middle years schooling is a unique time which covers the early adolescence period (the life stage between 10 and 15), and should be responsive specifically to the developmental needs, interests and characteristics of young adolescents (Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2010).

Middle school is seen as a vital area of education where early adolescents are experiencing physiological and psychological changes which require expert guidance in the school setting (Hudson & Hudson, 2012). The school context in which this study was conducted states that “early adolescence is a wonderfully exciting time of change for our children. Middle schooling affords us the opportunity to focus specifically upon this age group and, accordingly, provide an educational environment which nurtures, engages and challenges students through these important years” (Lutheran Education Australia, 2018).

A class of seventeen Year 9 middle school Visual Art students volunteered to be a part of the in-class VAP. The students were enrolled in the Visual Arts class prior to the study commencing. The school, without the researcher’s influence, selected the targeted class and the choice was made largely to minimise disruption, avoid exclusion and promote equity. The students in the class could decide whether they wanted to participate or not. The class randomly contained 6 males and 11 females.

The students involved in this study have been allocated pseudonyms throughout the text, and all students, student artworks and student responses have been de-identified for ethical purposes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The students pseudonyms are as follows: Priam, Leonatus, Iras, Boyet, Amiens, Martius, Lorenzo, Perdita, Marina, Oberon, Salerio, Exter, Reigner, Hamlet, Lorenzo, Caphis, and Marina. The pseudonyms are intentionally intended to be holistically dis-identifying.
The students in this study were enrolled in a school that actively promotes and practices student well-being initiatives through a number of programmes to develop “personal character and positive behaviours” including parenting programmes, and student group therapy activities (Lutheran Education Australia, 2018, para 13). Additionally the school focuses on Positive Education which is designed to enhance students’ well-being by focusing on Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment [PERMA] (Lutheran Education Australia, 2018). Well-being concepts, such as flow (as one element of the PERMA framework, see Chapter 3) were familiar to the students. Students participated in an information session regarding the main concepts of the research as well as the concepts of flow and how to recognise flow upon commencement of this VAP, based on Csíkszentmihályi’s (1993) research. Thus, the students were familiar with the concept of flow, and reported having experienced flow through various other activities before commencing the VAP. Students were also informed as to how they could reflectively respond to the prompts without explicitly giving directions or a formula, and informed about what the reflective prompts were asking, as a requirement of Ethics approval.

4.5.2 Setting.

To explore students’ experiences in an authentic way, the VAP was minimally disruptive to students’ regular classroom and school practices and the activities in keeping with what they would normally experience in this class. In keeping with the school’s structure, the VAP was conducted during the students’ regular timetabled Visual Art lessons, in their usual classroom contexts, and with the typical availability of Visual Arts materials. Hence, the information gathered could be expected to be found in other Visual Arts classrooms with a similar student demographic.

This study was situated in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom setting, in one private school in Queensland in an urban environment. The school is de-identified in this study for ethical purposes. The Visual Arts classroom is a
purpose-built Art studio, with purpose-designed facilities, ample storage and clean spaces/desks. The classroom setting provided an indoor teaching space as well as an outdoor covered area. The classroom is also positioned close to an outdoor, grassed area, which was used during the VAP, and is surrounded by well-kept gardens.

The schools educational philosophy (as mentioned above) is integrated within the school’s setting, learning environment, and social/learning contexts.

4.5.3 Gathering information.

The A/r/tographic method of inquiry in this study is committed to “continuously asking questions, enacting interventions, gathering information, and analyzing that information before asking further questions and enacting more living inquiry” (Irwin, 2008). As such three Phases of Inquiry were enacted within this research.

Phase 1 responds to all three research questions and involves delivering a Visual Arts Program [VAP] to Year 9 students where they engaged in materials and artmaking. As part of this program, students were asked to reflect upon their experiences of flow by responding to thinking and the reflective prompts provided (see Chapters 5 and 6 for a fulsome explanation). In Phase 2, I explored an A/r/tographic response to the information gathered in Phase 1 through the creation of a Body of Work of various material engagements. Phase 2 also responds to all of the research questions, both directly or indirectly (see Chapter 7 for a fulsome explanation). Phase 3 is the analysis of all of the information gathered (see Chapters 5 & 6), and occurred through, in and with Phase 2 (see Chapter 7).

4.5.3.1 Phase 1. The following describes the ways information was gathered for this inquiry in Phase 1, through the Inquiry Timeline below (Table 4.1). This table outlines the overall Phase 1 inquiry as 580 minutes in total over 9 lessons, engaging students in various artmaking tasks.
Table 4.1 *Inquiry timeline: Phase 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Gathering Information Year 9 students</th>
<th>Gathering Information A/r/tographer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 1</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>1 x 40 min lesson</td>
<td>Introduction / information on flow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 2</td>
<td>Paperclay sculpture</td>
<td>2 x 40 min lessons</td>
<td>Artworks</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 3</td>
<td>Paperclay sculpture</td>
<td>2 x 40 min lessons</td>
<td>Artworks</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 4</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>1 x 20 min lessons</td>
<td>Informal verbal feedback</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 5</td>
<td>Terracotta sculpture Glazing</td>
<td>2 x 40 min lessons</td>
<td>Self-reported written reflections Artworks</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 6</td>
<td>Glazing</td>
<td>2 x 40 min lessons</td>
<td>Self-reported written reflections Artworks</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 7</td>
<td>Weaving</td>
<td>1 x 40 min lesson</td>
<td>Self-reported written reflections Artworks</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 8</td>
<td>Weaving</td>
<td>2 x 40 min lessons</td>
<td>Self-reported written reflections Artworks</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 9</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>2 x 40 min lessons</td>
<td>Self-reported written reflections Artworks</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total in-class time: 580 minutes

Table 4.1 shows how the Visual Art Program gathered two types of information: student written self-reported reflections, and student artworks. Furthermore, the table shows further information was gathered by the A/r/tographer in the form of photographs, as the basis for A/r/tographic response and the creation of the subsequent body of work, and their synthesis and analysis, as well as observations and teaching experiences (in phases 2 & 3).

Table 4.1 also indicates students engaged with *tasks* during their participation in the VAP, which were with clay, weaving and painting throughout the VAP that provided information regarding intellectual, imaginative and insightful work products (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). Clay, weaving and painting were selected for students to engage
with as this is my particular area of practice, meaning I can provide a high quality learning experience for the students (Ewing, 2011). Additionally the materials of clay, raffia and paint/paper were able to be provided as a quality resource, and Ewing (2011) writes that good learning experiences need quality resources, accomplished artists and teachers, and quality interactions.

Qualitative research methods, such as those used in A/r/tography, can obtain intricate information and details through discovering concepts and relationships in raw data (Strauss & Corbin, 2008), such as in the gathered information in this study. Table 4.1 demonstrates that information was gathered in various creative and self-reflective modes (Irwin, 2008) with and through various material engagements, producing a ‘critical meaning’ within the productions and information (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7 for analytical detail). Primarily, table 4.1 outlines a map of students’ artworks and students’ reflections that were gathered for analysis.

4.5.3.2 Gathered Information: Artworks. As the “ways in which art and art materiality should be understood in relation to the ecological and technical environment” (Malafouris, 2015, p. 353), the practical Visual Arts making tasks undertaken in the VAP directed the research to understand the “mechanisms [by] which humans are able to engage in art” (Pearce et al., 2016, p. 267), addressing research questions 1 and 2. In addition, the material engagements that exist in the Year 9 classroom, such as clay, weaving and glazes, also inform research question 3, to empirically explore if artmaking can influence flow in students, and the importance of such to learning.

Students chose to participate in artmaking during the VAP, and were able to opt out at any time. The teaching pedagogy was within my typical teaching practice, with the students’ usual Visual Arts teacher also being present as observer. At no stage did I nor their teacher touch the students’ artworks to direct them. The artworks authentically belong to the students and are authentically all their own work. Hence, given all of these conditions, the artworks
created could be expected to be created in other Visual Arts classrooms with a similar student demographic, resources and with similar teacher direction and Arts media knowledge.

Through the VAP, students created artworks rich in information for analysis (Flick, 2009) to be reflected upon, synthesised and analysed through A/r/tographic means (Phase 3). This is shared in Chapters 5, 6 & 7.

4.5.3.3 Gathered Information: Students Self-Reported Reflections. In order to explore research question 3, the students reflected on their artmaking through written self-reports. The written self-reports responded to prompts (see Appendix B) exploring students’ flow experiences (or not) whilst engaged in artmaking.

The definition of flow (see Chapter 3) is widely accepted, however the methods for flow measurement have continuously been developed, validated and modified with a “gold standard” not yet being reached (Moneta, 2012). There are flow studies which use various methods of data collection (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996; Csíkszentmihályi, Schneider & Shernoff, 2003; Hektner, 2010; Larson & Csíkszentmihályi, 2014; Salkind, 2010), however in line with the A/r/tographic methodological and theoretical frameworks used in this study, self-reporting of students was used for the exploration of flow experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997). The solid process of self-reporting (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997) has proven results in universality and stability (Csíkszentmihályi, 2007), and is the root of effective valid research in health and psychology (Garcia & Gastavson, 1997). It is acknowledged that this study does not engage in quantitative research and terms such as validity and reliability do not apply. Rather, A/r/tography seeks the generating of new questions rather than answering those scientifically posed. I acknowledge this tension; yet also rely on Csíkszentmihályi’s (1997) assurances that self-reported reflections are appropriate in the context of this study with respect to acknowledging flow experiences.

Students’ self-reported reflections were obtained through reflective prompting. The reflective prompts (see Appendix B) were designed and posed by me during each lesson so that the information gathered would be most
suitable to the observed experience and particular material engagement, and tailored to suit the purposes of the research (Hektner, 2010). This tailoring reflected the particular material engagements of the lesson as well as the teaching practice (praxis), and allowed for flexibility as a usual part of classroom teaching practice.

As parameters can be tailored, based on the research purpose (Salkind, 2010), the reflective prompts were completed by students after the period of artmaking, ten minutes prior to the class ending in Visual Arts lessons 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 (see Table 4.1) so students could reflect on meaningful, contextual and relevant stimuli (Hektner, 2010; Salkind, 2010). The reflective prompts were written and completed in-class and in context, as evidence suggests that “people are not good at reconstructing their experience after the fact” (Larson & Csíkszentmihályi, 2014, p.23). Students chose if they wanted to participate in self-reporting, and were able to opt out at any time.

The responses from the students’ self-reports were manually coded. Coding is a “word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative” of data (Saldaña, 2008). The students self-reports were organised into three themes. These three themes were determined according to three elements of flow theory, namely concentration, pleasure and interest (Csíkszentmihályi, 1975; Ullen, et al., 2012). Concentration, pleasure and interest, aligned synergistically with the findings (Csíkszentmihályi, Schneider & Shernoff, 2003; Hanson, 2009; Hektner & Asakawa, 2000; Schmidt, 2010), which allowed the findings to align with extant flow theory. This is further explained in Chapter 6.

4.5.4 Phase 2: The A/r/tographic response to the information gathered.

In A/r/tography, the A/r/tographer is positioned to intensify, complement and layer information (Irwin, 2008), which is specifically the way in which I chose to respond to the information gathered through the literature and the VAP. This positioning of the A/r/tographer is appropriate and rigorous as A/r/tography transforms theory as being distinct from practice into theory as practice (Irwin, 2008, emphasis added). As such, further layers of information
are gathered by the A/r/t/ographer through (in this case) photographs, creative reflections, synthesis and analysis (see Table 4.1, column 5). I responded A/r/t/ographically to the synthesis and analysis in textual, and artistic ways as a display and assemblage of makings and writings in alignment with A/r/tographic inquiry.

The aspects which influence the method of inquiry play an important and valid part of the information gathering (Irwin, 2008). A/r/tography is the pursuit of an inquiry committed to “continuously asking questions, enacting interventions, gathering information, and analysing that information before asking further questions and enacting more living inquiry” (Irwin, 2008, p. 26). Living inquiry is a significant A/r/tographic conceptual organiser (Pourchier, 2010) which is enacted and presented as a relational aesthetic inquiry, envisioned as embodied understanding (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Sinner, et.al., 2006). This means that this inquiry engages living inquiry, which is “giving attention to the complexity and contradictions of relations between people, things, and understandings of life experiences” (Winters, 2010, p. 164). In this study, living inquiry was enacted through my giving attention to the experiences with, through and in the VAP, my personal journey as an artist/teacher/researcher, the students’ experiences and reflections, my responsive and analytical body of work, as well as the ecology of them all. The study operated across multiple, intertextual registers (Wallin, 2013) to question and reflect upon assumptions through the research design and through my own artmaking.

Through my own artful living inquiry (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxix), my presence within this thesis intertwined, indistinguishable and imperative to the methodology (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). As such, my own aesthetic is influential and indistinguishable in its relationship to the study, and appears throughout Chapters 5, 6 and 7, within discussions, and analysis (see Section 4.3.2.1). Indeed the presence of the researcher is a necessary strength of ABER (Barone & Eisner, 2006).
Chapters 5, 6 and 7 contain my A/r/tographic and aesthetic analyses as a presence, which layer, enhance and make meaning through artistic ways of knowing (Eisner, 2002). Through A/r/tographic analysis, I continually asked questions of the gathered information and my own pedagogies through my own practice in an effort to engage with ongoing practices in Art and education in order to create knowledge rather than to discover it (Irwin, 2017). I questioned and practised my emergent understandings to integrate knowing, doing, and telling (Cutcher, 2015) through aesthetic experiences attempting to convey meanings (Springgay & Irwin, 2004). The analyses demonstrate rigour through engagement, analysis and learning (Irwin & Springgay, 2008), and thus “the discussion and analysis of text, combined with visual imagery which emerges from educational experience” (Bickel, 2006, p. 118). Importantly, each chapter illustrates the qualities deemed significant during the artistic and creative processes of this study (Beare 2009, p. 164; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Winters 2010) as crucial dimensions of Art education research and practice (Bastos & Zimmerman, 2015).

4.5.5 Concluding Discussion.

As previously discussed in Section 4.3.3, A/r/tography uses the term rendering to offer “possibilities of engagements” (Springgay, et al., 2005, p. 899). The possibilities of engagements which A/r/tographic renderings provide may be to give, present, perform and become within the research (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Springgay et al., 2005). These verbs describing the possibilities of renderings to give, present, perform and become, express actions (as is the nature of a verb) and “inform the doing of the research” (Springgay, et al., 2005, p. 899). As such in this study, renderings are spaces which inform the doing of the research, as concepts that direct inquiry (Irwin, 2008). The renderings were the means of guiding inquiry into the primacy of material engagements in the Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and the examination of students’ self-reported flow experiences. The renderings
provided the opportunity for living inquiry and offers of action, and in this instance attend to the process of creativity through artistic and aesthetic means (Springgay et al., 2005) (see Chapters 5, 6 &7).

As mentioned above, the renderings inform the *doing* of the research, and resist the formation of methodological criteria (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). As the renderings do not offer “a criterion-based model” (Springgay et al., 2005), they have not been foregrounded to frame the concluding discussions in Chapter 8. The intentional decision to use a criterion-based framework in the concluding discussion (see Chapter 8) allows the reader to clearly verify that Arts-based educational research benchmarks have been met in this study, since examiners indicate they pay attention to criteria in thesis examination (Mullins & Kiley, 2002). As A/r/tography is not separate from previous discourse (Springgay et al., 2005), and is practice-based research within the Arts and education (Irwin, 2013; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004), the concluding discussion in Chapter 8 is mounted on Barone and Eisner’s (1997) seminal text “Arts Based Educational Research” (p. 95), and is framed by the ABER criteria outlined in their section titled “some criteria for appraising arts-based educational research” (p. 101). The ABER criteria (Barone & Eisner, 1997) affords a rich, meaningful and comprehensive concluding discussion of the findings of this research. Despite the term criteria potently being problematic in ABER, it my understanding that Barone and Eisner (1997) use the term simply to describe a set of standards, of which criteria defines. Barone and Eisner’s (1997) seminal work focused the format of the concluding discussion, and provided a scaffold to unite the final chapter with the content of this thesis, particularly after Chapter 7 which is deeply aesthetic. Each of Barone and Eisner’s (1997) ABER criteria including illuminating effects, incisiveness, generativity, and generalizability are used as points for discussion in Chapter 8.
4.6 Ethics and Confidentiality

This research recognises that there are ethical considerations for and responsibilities to the research participants, the students’ school, Southern Cross University, and the people to whom the findings are presented. In considering the ethical concerns of this research, the four important areas to be considered in educational research are the students, sponsors/administrators/teachers/or beneficiaries, areas of knowledge, the researcher and fellow researchers (Govil, 2013). In addition, two further ethical considerations to the research are consent and confidentiality (Patton & Cochran, 2002).

The Australian Association for Research in Education [AARE] (2017) state that the consequences of research, including social consequences of publication and application, must enhance the general welfare of the participants. AARE (2017) also notes that the researcher must be aware that educational research is an ethical matter, and the purpose of such research should be for the development of human good. Furthermore no risk of harm is permissible, unless a “person is of age and has given informed consent to the risk” (AARE, 2017, para. 7) and the respect for the dignity and worth of persons and the welfare of students takes precedence over the self-interest of the researcher and the research.

This research ensures participant involvement does not adversely affect the participant’s educational progress (AARE, 2017), as it is conducted within regular Art classroom contexts. The process of the inquiry is conducted as a typical part of a Visual Arts faculty education program, which meets curriculum and course guidelines, and the research is based on the participant’s benefiting by their participation in the research and research results. The research does not include significant risks (AARE, 2017) outside of the usual classroom risks engaged in ordinary Arts making practices in school contexts.
All participants involved in this study have freely consented to participation, without coercion or pressure (Patton & Cochran, 2002). They were informed, outlining what participation entails and were repeatedly assured that declining and withdrawing would not have any negative effects. The information on the consent letter considered “the nature and methods of the research, its purposes, any risks run by the participants, and the likely social and personal consequences of its publication and any other factors which might reasonably be expected to influence their willingness to participate” (AARE, 2017). Participants and parents of the students were encouraged to contact me through email if they had questions relating to their participation, however I did not receive any communications or queries.

As confidentiality is essential to protect the identity of the person from whom you gather information (Patton & Cochran, 2002), the identity of the participants is protected at all times. The participants for this research are minors, and the removal of identifying descriptors from published data may not be waived by minors or their parents (AARE, 2017). As such, this study utilises opaque pseudonyms, as previously mentioned. It ensures that all the students were well-informed about the research objectives. The application for ethics clearance was approved by the SCU Ethics Committee (see Appendix C).

As this research takes place within a school, permission was also sought by “authorities before the work is commenced, should work within agreed guidelines and should in any case inform authorities of the results before the work is published” (AARE, 2017, para, 40), in this case, the school principal.

AARE (2017) also notes that researchers should recognise that the uncertainty of all claims to knowledge are disputed and uncertain, and that the existence of alternative professional opinions should be honest and measured. This research addresses these concerns in the literature review, which also includes the relevance of other sub-disciplines to maintain a breadth of research. In addition to the literature review, any further professional opinions
appear in alignment with the A/r/tographic methodology throughout this thesis. The research method also considers that the methodology used for this research “tends to foster ethical sensitivities, interpretive talents, and thoughtfulness and tact in professional activities, relations, and situations” (van Manen, 2016, p. 59).

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology and research design for this study. Firstly, this chapter reiterated the research aim and questions for this study, which is to explore the primacy of material engagement in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and examine students’ self-reported flow experiences within and through Art and text.

The discussion on Arts-based Educational Research, and specifically A/r/tographic Methodology, demonstrated that this study is strengthened through the experiences, thoughts and perspectives of the A/r/tographer, which are interconnected, fluid and flowing in dynamic momentum (Cahmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2013) within the inquiry. As such, I presented a detailed personal orientation to the research within this section, since A/r/tographers are “connected to, not separate from, the researching, the teaching, and the art-making process” (Winter, 2010, p. 123).

Following this, the chapter then explored the methodological alignment of A/r/tography to this study. This section briefly noted that A/r/tographic methodology engages understandings (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) that move and flow in an entangled, dynamic momentum (Cahmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2013), which are explored through “interrelationships, synergies, tensions and complications” (Lasczik Cutcher & Knight, 2017, p. xvi).

This chapter then addressed the methods of inquiry presenting information on the students and the setting involved in this study. The Research Inquiry Timeline (see Table 4.1), illustrated the contexts of gathering the
information through artworks, students self-reported reflections and the A/r/tographer, through 3 Phases. Ethics and confidentiality were then discussed.

This chapter is followed by a prelude to Chapter 5, which provides a background to the creative and practice-based elements that form Chapters 5, 6 and 7. As such, the next chapters take an aesthetic turn, and Chapter 5 presents and analyses the students’ material engagements and artworks created during the Visual Arts Program. Following that, Chapter 6 presents and analyses the information gathered through the students’ self-reported reflections. Chapter 7 illuminates the ways in which creative output and practice occur as an integral part of the research process in A/r/tographic approaches. Following that, Chapter 8 concludes this work.
Prelude to Information, Gathering, Finding, Discussion and Analysis

This prelude provides a background to the creative and practice-based elements that inform the presentation of the information gathered, the findings, analysis and results chapters to come. In alignment with A/r/tographic methodology, chapters 5-7 present an entwined staging of research and Alts practices (Springgay, et al., 2008) through the experiences of the study's, the A/r/tographer and the A/r/tography.

In the following chapters, rhizomatic ways (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) of 'reading' and experiencing the research are enfolded, as a deliberate departure from lineal ways of knowing, to push thought into movements and flows, in a dynamic momentum (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2013). As such, the theoretical, practical and making aspects of this study are not presented as separate and distinct but rather are to be experienced by the reader as connected and linked in order to both disrupt and enhance the reading, to allow for deeper understandings to emerge (Irwin, 2004).

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 thus contain an A/r/tographic Analysis of what would traditionally be known as findings and discussion. Each chapter has been curated to layer, exhibit, enhance and thereby make meaning through artistic ways of knowing (Eisner, 2002).

In alignment with the research methodology of A/r/tography, during the Visual Art program students engaged with Visual Art materials before reflecting on their experience of flow as a result of their Art making. Emerging and generating from this process, I responded artistically, creating a body of artworks as both 'data' creation and 'data' analysis. As such these chapters follow the temporal order the research undertook in order to present, discuss and analyses the fi...
Chapter 5

Material Engagements and the Products of Material Engagements: Artworks

5.1 Chapter Preview

Chapter 5 presents and analyses the students’ material engagements and artworks created during the Visual Arts Program. Following the introduction to the chapter (see Section 5.1) is an explanation of the structure of the discussion (see Section 5.2). Following this, the students’ artworks are exhibited (see Section 5.3) as a response to research question 1, which is followed by a visual narrative of the creation of student’s artworks in response to research question 2 (see Section 5.4). The chapter synopsis concludes this chapter in Section 5.5.

The Visual Arts program [VAP] in this study aimed to acquire two types of information, written self-reported reflections and artworks. This chapter is concerned with research question 1 and research question 2, which explore students’ artworks and their material engagement experiences. The following chapter (6) explores research question 3, students self-reported flow experiences.

5.2 Structure of the Discussion

During the VAP, students created finished artworks as a result of their material engagements in the Visual Arts classroom. They engaged with materials such as clay, ceramic glazes, raffia (for weaving) and watercolour paints (see Table 4.2). All students created at least four finished artworks each, during the program. The finished artworks were documented through photography, and are shared in this chapter as visual narratives, so as to ensure a visual engagement in critical reflection (Bach, 2001; Lasczik Cutcher, 2018).
The visual narratives address research question 1. The photographs affirm and examine students’ material engagements, artworks and artmaking experiences and have been edited and consciously curated to position and portray the production and aesthetic qualities of each piece. Any images of students have been de-identified for ethical purposes, and the photographs contain no identifying features, such as faces where students may be recognised (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

I have curated the display of artworks in this chapter as an exhibition, in order to layer, enhance and make meaning through artistic ways of knowing (Eisner, 2002), and I have employed design elements that are carefully and consciously selected (Barone & Eisner, 1997). As such, my own aesthetic is evident throughout, and it is acknowledged that this plays a significant role in the way concepts or thoughts are conveyed (Abe, 2013). My aesthetic judgment for example, in the arrangement of images, and in the composition, capturing and placement of photographs is a deliberate, analytical decision and relies on the ability to discriminate with opinions, will, desire, preferences, values, subconscious behaviour, and conscious decision (Nilson, 2013).

Images of students’ artworks are not individually indexed; this has been done so as to create a cohesive, seamless and artfully presented body of work. This enables the viewer/reader to experience vicariously what has not been “experienced directly”, speaking to the audience through emotions (Eisner, 2002, p.11) and understanding the experience as mediated overall. The display also features back to back printing so that there is a tension and unity between images and images, and images and text.

The composition of the images presented in this chapter is deliberate and as such position their reception in a conscious manner. The reader will note that the images are centred, full size on a white page which I intended to replicate a ‘gallery’ viewing experience within the confines of this document. The white page enables the photograph to sit in an uncluttered manner on the page. Additionally, curatorship of the photographs in this chapter
distinctly exhibits the students’ artworks as the focal point of each page, to be lingered with and engaged. My curatorial aesthetic allows the students’ artworks to be on display, which adds to the richness, meaning and beauty of each of the works, privileging students’ efforts and outcomes.

Thus, the curated and edited presentation of students’ artworks creates sites of activity for shared interaction, knowledge and access (Demarrais & Robb, 2012) between the students, A/r/tographer and audience. It is in and of itself an analysis that is both embedded and transcends the purposes of this doctoral thesis.

5.3 Exhibition of the Students’ Material Engagements: Artworks

In addition to the literature discussed in Chapter 2, and my A/r/tographic responses presented in Chapter 7, this section presents an exhibition of the students’ artworks to address research question 1: *What is material engagement in Visual Arts?*

The images and photographs of the students’ artworks in this section have been arranged according to the timing of the lesson from which they were created (see Table 4.1) as a visual presentation of the VAP. This intentional arrangement also documents chronologically, the students’ material engagements in the VAP. The curated presentation of students’ artworks creates sites of activity for shared interaction, knowledge and access (Demarrais & Robb, 2012) between the students, A/r/tographer, audience and reader.
Teacher example of imprinted paperclay using Australian native seed pods.
The world is messy. School life is messy. There is stress and all rest, but there are sudden moments of joy and happiness. There are some days where your emotions flow out in what you do. When I was in art, I walked away from it all. Experiencing flow was what changed a day. Art was how I let go. Art was how I coped with life. Art was everything.
My painting shows how joyful I felt when creating my pots through all the bright colours, it shows how I feel by experimenting with all the brush strokes. It also reflects my experience in making clay pots and that both these art pieces turned out beautifully.
5.4 Visual Narrative: Creation of Student’s Artworks

This section explores research question 2: *Are material engagements in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom aligned with persistent patterns of human aesthetic activity?*

The literature review (see Chapter 2) presented in detail, the historical, ontological and anthropological perspectives of Arts making as a persistent pattern of human interest. Specifically, from earliest stages of human history, human interests in aesthetic activities (as active producers and as consumers) developed a particular form of social consciousness, in which the aesthetic relations of humans were established (McKay, 1972). Humans have left “behind a trail of gradual and cumulative changes” (Deitrich & Haider, 2015, p. 899), which aids our understanding of Arts making in contemporary life (Changeux, 1994; Morris Kay, 2009). The Arts in contemporary human life has genesis as far back as tens of thousands of years (McManus & Furnham, 2010), and over this time humans have developed the capacity to make objects and “things special or extra ordinary” (Dissanayake, 1995, p. 51). Two such themes of persistent patterns of human aesthetic interests are used as concepts in this section, to guide discussion in this chapter with respect to research question 2 and to indicate the patterns of human aesthetic activity engaged with in this study.

The first of these themes is that the making of Art involves the intention of making something more than ordinary – something special (Dissanayake, 1995, p. 42). The second of these themes is that the making of Art may provide what is needed for humans biologically (Hinojosa & Kramer, 1997), such as social, cooperative and collaborative behaviour (Dissanayake, 1995; Wilcock, 1993). These points established through the literature (in Chapter 2), outline the persistent patterns of human interests and engagement in artmaking, in this study.
5.4.1 Visual Arts and the intention of making something more than ordinary: making special.

When the students in this study engaged in their artmaking practices, they demonstrated an intention to make something special, more than ordinary. The aesthetics of making of something extra special or extra ordinary align with a pattern of human aesthetic interest, as Dissanayake (2003) notes:

The best word for this [nonutilitarian] characteristic of the arts seemed to be special. Extraordinary with a hyphen might have served, but it is too easily read as “astonishing” or “remarkable” - that is, as a synonym for non-hyphenated extraordinary. Unnecessary and nonutilitarian emphasis what the arts is not, and also smack too much of Western ideas of art-for-art’s sake. Elaboration used alone disregards the importance of shaping, and link enhance suggests, in Western culture at least, the superficial or merely added. While “special” might seem too imprecise and naively simple, or suggest mere decoration, it easily encompassed an array of what is done in making the arts that is generally different from making nonarts: embellishing, exaggerating, patterning, juxtaposing, shaping and transforming. (p. 26 emphasis in original)

Students were shown how to create simple objects, such as pinch pots and slab cut pots, which could be considered functional; however, they demonstrated aesthetic engagement with the Arts materials in order to make their objects special. This was evident in the students’ processes, and in the students’ reflections. For example, Prita reflected, “I love the texture and the feel of creating something so simple into something amazing and fantastic.”
Dutton (2009) and Morriss-Kay (2009), like Dissanayake (1995) all claim that “making objects special” and aesthetic embellishment (Dissanayake, 1995, p. 51) is one aspect that humans used as an element of culture. The students’ reflections (see Chapter 6) demonstrate they were intrinsically motivated by, and utterly absorbed in the material engagements in the Visual Arts program. This is important to note, as it was not I who directed the students to engage in the process of embellishing their artworks. Whilst I provided and demonstrated the materials, as well as skills in glazing and weaving, transforming the clay into artworks was a self-motivated choice made by the students. Students were never ‘obliged’ to make artworks, and knew they had the option to ‘opt out’ at any time, due to ethics protocols. This is a central tenet of the research findings, as rarely in a school setting would students be told that they don’t have to work, that they can opt out. However in this research, students could freely choose to engage in the class or not, without repercussions of any kind. However, the students who participated in the program, without exception, expressed enjoyment, pleasure and excitement in attending the class, and working conscientiously with the materials to make something special. No students opted out – in fact without exception, they all enthusiastically opted in.

All students were provided with a similar piece of cut clay to start their artwork. The images of the clay in Figure 5.1 demonstrate the starting point for all students’ artworks. There is no suggestion that the starting point for the artworks is extra-ordinary or special or suggestive of a particular form; rather the clay is simple in colour and shape and the same for each student. Indeed, the processes of material engagement explored in this section, illustrate how students made their artworks special from the same humble beginnings; as student Hamlet reflected, “[the artworks] came from humble beginnings and turned into amazing art.”
Figure 5.1. All students were provided with a piece of cut clay - paper clay (white) and terracotta (red).

Through the process of “embellishing, exaggerating, patterning, juxtaposing, shaping and transforming” (Dissanayake, 2003, p. 26), students transformed their lump of clay into something more-than-ordinary. They took care in the creation of their artworks, smoothing the clay and perfecting the shape (see below). They utilised tools where necessary to obtain the desired outcome, and carefully moulded the pots with their fingertips.

The lump of clay (see Figure 5.1) demonstrates the starting point for the following visual narrative. The photographs of students’ working demonstrate the processes that the students engaged in, with the intention of making something more-than-ordinary, making something special. Unlike the images presented in the previous section (see Section 5.3), the next visual narrative focuses on the students’ processes of making special – from shaping and sculpting with their hands and tools, to colouring plain pots with brushes and glazes, to embellishing the finished fired and glazed works with weaving.
From a generic block of clay, to a textured, coloured, resolved artwork, the visual narrative supports observations that students were highly self-motivated, interested, engaged and desired to continue to work on their pieces throughout the 6 week VAP. This narrative progressively demonstrates how students transformed, decorated and embellished their clay works resulting in detailed and interesting artworks; how students ‘made special’ (Dissanayake, 2003).

5.4.2 Visual Arts and biological needs: social, cooperative and collaborative behaviour.

This section explores the second pattern of human aesthetic interest: that Art may provide for biological needs, such as social, cooperative and collaborative behaviour. Dissanayake (2003, p. 31) writes that “art actually originated and thrived for most of human history as a communal activity: in the smaller and more interdependent and like-minded societies in which humans evolved, the need to make sense of experience was satisfied in communally valued and validated activities.”

The manufacture of Art from material culture is a means of satisfying fundamental human needs. The uniqueness of Art practice in human societies is biologically motivated and communicative (Dissanayake, 1995; Dutton, 2009; Fleming, et al., 2014; Haidel, 2010; Morris Kay, 2009; Spivey, 2005; Ziadel, 2010). In material culture, a combination of social, cooperative and collaborative behaviour reinforces the traits of humans necessary for survival (Ellerin, 2015; Stout, 2016).

Positive classroom management helps adolescents learn self-monitoring techniques and behaviours, in addition to learning classroom material (Gray, Culpepper & Welsh, 2012). The classroom was a well-managed space and included activities that challenged students to practise greater levels of adolescent autonomy. The literature suggests that this in turn, prevents academic and emotional problems for adolescents, and allows for self-confidence and academic achievement (Gray, et al., 2012).
The following visual narrative describes and demonstrates socialisation, cooperation and collaboration in the Visual Arts classroom during the program, and presents visual evidence of social, cooperative and collaborative behaviours, depicting students working together, alongside one another, with autonomy. Social, cooperative and collaborative behaviours as central to the well-being of social groups within school communities (Luengo Kanacri, et. Al., 2017). At no stage were students asked to collaborate or socialise with other students in the class. Indeed the students were not directed to sit with others (although they had the freedom to do so). Though students were not asked to be ‘friendlier’ than they usually would be, it was obvious that all students worked together in a friendly social, cooperative and collaborative manner. Socialisation, cooperation and collaboration was not addressed with the students during the VAP, however my observations aligned with a reflection made by (student) Martius that everyone was “working together.” The following images candidly capture the ways the students self-directed their social, cooperative and collaborative behaviours whilst making Art. This visual narrative demonstrates students’ self-directed ways of working in groups, socialising, cooperating and collaborating whilst working diligently.
5.5 Chapter Synopsis

This chapter has presented the processes of the students’ material engagements in the Visual Arts classroom as a result of the VAP. The exhibition of artworks in Section 5.3, illustrates an example of what material engagement may be in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, exploring research question 1. Research question 2 was attended to in Section 5.4, which explored the two themes indicating material engagements, aligned with persistent patterns of human aesthetic activity.

The exhibition of artworks and visual narratives in this chapter align with the literature, suggesting the human proclivity to ‘make special’ exists in the Year 9 Visual Arts classroom. As Dissanayake (2003) writes:

“Special” also denoted a positive factor of care and concern that is absent from the other words. It thus suggests that the special object or activity appeals to emotional as well as perceptual and cognitive factors – that is, to all aspects of our mental functioning. […] Hence “special” can indicate that not only are our senses arrested by a thing’s perceptual strikingness (specialness), but that we make something special because doing so gives us a way of expressing its emotional valence for us, and the ways in which we accomplish this specialness not only reflect but give unusual or special gratification and pleasure (ie. are aesthetic). (p. 26)

The act of artmaking, or making special (Dissanayake, 2003), demonstrate that brains, bodies and things (materials) matter as they have helped humans find their way in the world (Malafouris, 2015, p. 359). Dissanayake (2003) demonstrates that the ways in which we accomplish this specialness gives a distinctive gratification. Making artworks are a way of satisfying fundamental human needs (Dissanayake, 1995; Dutton, 2009; Haidle, 2010; Spivey, 2005). The visual narratives demonstrated students’ occupation with material engagement engaged
them in a “goal-directed, intrinsically-gratifying, and culturally appropriate activity” (Evans, 1982, p. 627; Emerson, 1998) with their education, their teachers and their peers.

This chapter illustrated what material engagement looks like in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom context and how engagement with Art materials can align with persistent patterns of aesthetic interests, such as making special, and social, cooperative and collaborative behaviours.
Chapter 6

Presentation and Analysis: Student A/r/tography

6.1 Chapter Preview

Chapter 6 presents and analyses the information gathered through the students’ self-reported reflections, and explores research question 3. Following the introduction to the chapter, the context for the information gathered (see Section 6.2) will be presented followed by an analysis of the students’ self-reported reflections (see Section 6.3). Following this, the chapter will then be summarised and concluded (see Section 6.4).

6.2 Context of Gathering Information for Student Self-Reports

The students in this study were enrolled in a ‘well-being’ school, which means that well-being concepts, such as flow (Csikszentmihályi, 1975) were familiar to them (see Section 4.9). Nevertheless, it was important for this study to ensure that students participated in an information session regarding the concepts of flow and how to recognise the experience a flow state (see Table 4.1). All students are thus familiar with what flow is, and reported having experienced flow through various other activities prior to commencing the Visual Arts Program [VAP] in this study. Students were also informed as to how to reflectively respond to the prompts, which was an ethics requirement.

In order to explore the students’ experiences in an authentic way, the VAP was minimally disruptive to students’ regular Art classroom and school practices. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, in keeping with the school’s structure, the program was conducted during normal timetabled lessons, in regular classroom contexts, and with the usual availability of Visual Arts materials. Hence, it would be logical to assume that the quality of materials available and artmaking activities could normally be found in other Visual Arts classrooms within similar structures and practices.
6.3 Self-Reported Information

The third research question asks if there is an alignment between material engagement and self-reported flow experiences in the Year 9 Visual Arts classroom. In alignment with this question, students were asked to reflect on their flow experiences or absence of flow experiences as a result of their artmaking in Visual Arts lessons 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 (see Table 4.1), through self-reported, written reflections. The de-identified written reflection sheets were distributed and collected at the end of lessons 5-9 and were completed during the lessons so that the students could reflect on meaningful and relevant stimuli (Hektner, 2010; Salkind, 2010) – that is, the lesson activities they had just completed. Most students reported that they did in fact experience flow as a result of their artmaking (see Appendix B and below).

Flow is a state of concentration, pleasure and interest (Csíkszentmihályi, 1975; Csíkszentmihályi, Schneider & Shernoff, 2003; Ullen, et al., 2012). As such the three organisational themes and subthemes are concentration, pleasure and interest:

Theme 1: Concentration

Concentration subthemes identified:

1. Concentrating on Visual Arts material engagements can result in student flow experiences;
2. Disruption.

Theme 2: Pleasure

Pleasure subthemes identified:

1. Happiness and enjoyment is derived from the Visual Arts making processes and valuable use of time;
2. Creative accomplishment;
3. Increased pleasure in learning.
**Theme 3: Interest**

Interest subthemes identified:

1. Autonomy of learning in the Visual Art classroom;
2. Creative expression.

The presentation of the following analysis section involves the reader in co-constructive analysis by placing Art and text alongside one another (Irwin & Springgay, 2008), encouraging new ways of reading, thinking, approaching and interpreting (Oliveira & Charreu, 2016), and mirroring the presentation of the students’ artworks in the previous chapter (see Chapter 5).

The artful placement and display of students’ reflections that follow in this chapter create sites of activity for shared interaction, knowledge and access (Demarrais & Robb, 2012; Leggo, 2005) between the students and myself as the A/r/tographer. The students’ reflections are arranged as thematic patterns that captured interesting components (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) and are artfully presented and curated as a “visual symphony of objects that exist on their own, but also in concert with one another” (Hoptman, 2012, para. 3).

The artful display of students’ self-reported reflections, gives attention to contiguity, the spaces in between ‘art’ [image] and ‘graphy’ [text] (Beare, 2009). The design of this chapter has been created and arranged in order to layer, enhance, analyse and make meaning of the information gathered through the students’ reflections through artistic ways of knowing (Eisner, 2002). There are two aspects for the audience to consider when reading the students reflections. The first is to engage with the students’ authentic, thoughtful and powerful ‘voices’ presented through their written reflections. The second is the A/r/tographic encounter designed as a response to the students’ reflections, to aesthetically reverberate meanings of the students’ voices, and my A/r/tographic observations and experiences with the students during this inquiry.
The students worked outside, with natural materials (see Chapter 5); my body of work calls upon the Australian landscape, nature and the students’ work in a diffractive (Barad, 2007) manner (see Chapter 7 for further detail). These contiguous elements thus also impact upon my choice to present the students’ reflections with a distinct Australiana theme for an intensified reading. I created artworks reflective of their outdoor experiences to sing through and harmonise with their written reflections. The Australiana theme operates as both enhancing borders and an analytical layer that in turn links to Chapter 7’s body of work.

The artworks I created in an Australian fauna and flora theme are presented on each page, to heighten, enhance and nurture each of the students’ reflections. It is my intention that the layout and design extends on the interaction with nature that was captured within both the students’ (see Chapter 5 visual narratives) and my A/r/tographic response/analysis (see Chapter 7), as well as my own exploration of contiguity—the spaces in between art and text (Winters 2010) - within those intra-actions (Barad, 2007). I was unconsciously compelled to draw upon my memory of vintage Australiana tea towel designs when drawing the artworks for this chapter.

I envisioned being in my nanna’s house drying the dishes whilst avoiding my older cousins snapping me on the back with a wet tea towel when nanna wasn’t looking whilst we pretended to pay attention to the task at hand. Perhaps it was this innocent cheekiness and fun of early adolescence of my own experiences that I saw reflected in the student’s comments that drew me to this memory. Perhaps it was the rural-like setting of the school surrounded by scrub and featuring gum leaf green roofing that reminded me of the gums on my nannas tea towels. Perhaps it was the student’s insights that mirrored in my unconscious memories of days and days at my nannas house learning how to embrace my creativity as she taught me how to knit, crochet and sew. Maybe it was the outdoor setting on which the students were reflecting upon. Perhaps it was simply an indistinguishable memory that sometimes floods the mind when a certain smell fills the nostrils. Whatever it was, I revisited my nannas printed tea towels when I developed the borders for these student’s reflection (see Appendix D). I considered the tea towels and I was reflective.
of how they included images of Australian flora and fauna, but also in many cases, factual text layering and synergising the intra-action between Art and text (Barad, 2007) made the link to the reflections of the students.

I kept the image/text dynamic in mind whilst considering the spaces in between art and graphy (Beard, 2009). I drew the artworks for the students’ reflections using my images as a repetitive patterned frame to resonate with the students’ experiences, mindful that each and every reflection is individual and should be cherished. Similarly, like the tea towels, each ceramic work and painting went to a different house, which held different, but perhaps resonating memories. Each tea towel hung on the handle of a different oven. Each artwork was placed in a different home.

The Australiana borders ‘cradle’ the text, noting and elevating the importance of the students’ reflections. The borders provide an environment for the presentation of the reflections, like the Australian context of the VAP and the surrounding environment. The following pages demonstrate my A/r/tographic response to the students’ reflections within this chapter, as individual and curated artworks. This is then followed by an explanation and analysis of the themes which have emerged from the student artmaking and reflecting as they align to the relevant literature on flow.

6.3.1 Theme 1: Concentration.

As noted above, to address the third research question, students were prompted to reflect on their experience of flow during the Visual Art Program. Sustained attention, or concentration is a component of flow (Ullen, et al., 2012), and fittingly, students’ self-reported Visual Arts lessons prompted a state of deep concentration. This could be observed as the students created their artworks in a focused way, and some commented that they were so involved in the task, they didn’t realise it was time to pack up.
Concentration is indeed associated with flow, as flow occurs when one is acting with total involvement and focus, intense concentration or absolute absorption (Phillips, 2013; Reid, 2011). Indeed, Csíkszentmihályi (2014, p. 134) writes:

The first thing that people report that happens [when in flow] is this extreme concentration and focus, what some people call one-pointedness of mind […]. In everyday life, it’s not very sure that your body and your mind are in the same place. You may be sitting with 30 students in front of you and you assume that just because their bodies are there that their minds are also in the same place. But that is rarely the case; you don’t have this merging of action and awareness, this merging of mind and body. But when you are in flow, that begins to happen. You begin to become so much a part of your actions that your mind cannot have a chance to go off on tangents, to think about a date or a football game or lunch.

In their written reflections, the students’ confirmed they did indeed experience flow and concentration during their artmaking. They noted that concentration had positive effects on their engagement and their learning experience, which resulted in flow experiences. Students noted the ability to focus without interruption, and that the level of concentration in the classroom enabled high quality engagement with the Visual Arts materials. Students reported states of concentration during the lessons and made links to their personal feelings of flow during these experiences.

The following pages present the most frequently noted responses from students who identified that they had experienced concentration as a result of the Visual Arts experiences. As with all of the student reflections, these responses were provided in lessons 5-9 from the prompt Did you experience flow in today’s lesson? Why/ why not?
I was in the moment, nothing from the outside world affected what I was doing.
There were no interruptions
I was having fun and wasn’t really interrupted by anything and it was good
I felt concentrated in my work and I felt like I could make great artwork.
I felt in the zone and was concentrated
Art is my favourite class
and I feel time goes fast and
I can concentrate easily
I was in flow because I was concentrated
It was enjoyable and we weren’t interrupted and could do our own thing
I kept staying in the moment while making my art
I was in the mode
I felt in the zone
I felt focused on my pot making today
These twelve responses emerged as the students self-identified a link between concentration and flow during their material engagements. As Iras stated, “I felt concentrated [sic] on my work,” and Imogen, “I kept staying in the moment while making my artwork.” Concentration, or as Oberon and Priam put it, being “in the zone” or “in the mode,” demonstrated that the activity with the Art materials allowed the students to feel absorbed, focussed, and concentrated.

6.3.1 Concentration subtheme 1: Concentration in material. This relationship between flow, concentration and material engagements of artmaking was evident in many of the students’ written reflections. This is an important dynamic as flow occurs during activities that are challenging, but matched in difficulty to the person’s skill level (Ullen, et al., 2012) such as the artmaking tasks at hand. Csíkszentmihályi (2014, p. 134) writes that in flow, “the focused concentration means that you are only paying attention to what you are doing right there, and all of your additional processes and capacities are used to do whatever you are doing.” In alignment with this thought, beyond noting concentration, students reflected that their concentration was focused particularly in the Arts materials. This is an important finding, as flow is not simply concentration, but a state of high attention to a specific task, in this case material engagements (Csíkszentmihályi & Nakumara, 2010).

To illustrate this finding further, Jachimo noted, “I felt focused on my pot making today.” Here, Jachimo notes he was focused, but extends his reasoning to include that he was focused on the pot making. Jachimo’s reflections were mirrored in other comments, where students identified they experienced flow through concentration in making their artworks. For example, Reigner reflected, “I was in the flow because the painting was a change from making pots, I enjoyed doing it,” while Lorenzo reflected, “I had flow [sic] when I was painting the pot.” Here, Reigner and Lorenzo noted that they felt they were in flow, because of their engagement with painting. Students often reported they were focused, engaged, and absorbed with the Visual Arts materials, experiencing flow. These responses provide forceful insights into Arts material engagement in the Visual Arts classroom, illuminating the
finding that concentration in and with Visual Arts materials has indeed a strong relationship with a state of flow (Philips, 2015; Csíkszentmihályi, 2014).

From the students’ written reflections it also appears that focus and concentration experienced by students occurred in tandem with recognition that the “outside world” can be distracting. To illustrate, four of the twelve students highlighted that their ability to concentrate related directly to their surroundings. Interestingly, the students’ identified that their concentration and focus on the Arts materials was enabled because they “weren’t interrupted” (Iras) or distracted by “anything and it was good” (Imogen).

6.3.1.2 **Concentration subtheme 2: Distraction.** As a sub theme of concentration, three students self-reported that distractions hindered their experience of flow. During the VAP, the number of times disruptive behaviour was self-reported by students was minimal. In total across all the lessons, with over one hundred responses, there were only three reflections of disruptive behaviour reported. The responses about distraction varied between students, however the reflections mostly noted that talking a lot, being involved in fun and laughter, and the heat (weather temperature on the day), all impacted on their ability to concentrate and they could not get “into the flow” as Lorenzo noted.

Disruptive students generally have negative impact on students’ learning (Clunies-Ross & Little, 2008) and teachers’ ability to teach in the classroom. As Clunies-Ross and Little note, teachers spend “considerable amount of time on behaviour management issues” (2008, p. 693), which can distract from student learning. In fact, disruptive students have been labelled as a major learning inhibitor (Seidman, 2005). Disruptive students have been shown to have “negative ramifications for their peers” (Figlio, 2007, p. 376) and are often a cause of frustration for both the teacher and for students who want to learn. In the case of this research, disruptions may have impacted on students’ ability to experience flow, although the disruptions were minimal. It is not clear whether the nature of the tasks ensured the disruptions were minimal, or whether the students are disruptive in their classrooms ordinarily.
Flow theory suggests that distraction comes by not knowing what you have to do, and by not knowing how well you are doing. Csíkszentmihályi (2014), suggests that if the challenge and skill of a task are out of balance, rather than experiencing flow, distraction may result. Csíkszentmihályi (2014) states that three forms of distraction in schools are threats to flow. Those are explained as the student’s ego (feelings of inferiority and vulnerability), interruption to the task (stifling of organic development to student interests), and focus on the results (rather than the process). He also notes that to make flow possible in schools, distraction should be minimised (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014).

The three students who commented on their own distraction as a limiting factor, focused on their own experience. These three students did not reflect on the task, their ego, interruption or results-driven focus as factors for their distraction – rather two students identified they were simply having too much fun. The students did not recognise they may have been an interruption to others or how this may have impacted on their peers’ experience of flow. The Visual Arts classroom is a unique environment where talking, fun and laughter are sometimes encouraged (Hetland, 2013) (see Section 6.3.3). However, as these students self-reported, the distraction of the hot day, or too much talking can also be inhibitor to experiencing flow in the Visual Arts classroom.

### 6.3.2 Theme 2: Pleasure.

The second theme that emerged from the analysis of the reflective feedback was that students experienced pleasure as a result of their Visual Arts lessons. Students identified that happiness, enjoyment and pleasure resulted from the artmaking process. Csíkszentmihályi (2014) writes that when concentration reaches a certain point, people begin to feel ecstasy, enjoyability, serenity, happiness and a loss of worry.

Whilst happiness and enjoyment are singular but related concepts, they are used interchangeably here, as commonly they are used to express positive emotional states. It is logical to assume that enjoyment creates happiness, or vice versa. In addition, both happiness and enjoyment are words students used interchangeably in their self-reports,
and both concepts are engaged in flow theory (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014). Happiness is the state of being happy, and being happy is defined as “feeling or showing pleasure or contentment” (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). Similarly, enjoyment is defined as the “state or process of taking pleasure in something” (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). Both definitions describe happiness and enjoyment as pleasurable. As such, pleasure is used in this context to envelop the aforementioned terms.

6.3.2.1 Pleasure subtheme 1: happiness and enjoyment. Flow is an experience of enjoyment (Ullen, et al., 2012), and the students’ self-reported frequent pleasurable experiences such as happiness and enjoyment as having occurred during their Visual Arts lessons. Flow can be a cause of happiness, and happiness can be found in active engagement with the world (Krueger, 2018). In Krueger’s (2018) framing, it is possible to see that when in flow, happiness is derived from active engagement. In this case, students are reflecting on an active engagement with the Visual Arts classroom and with specific Art materials.

The theme of happiness and enjoyment experienced in Visual Arts lessons was a recurring and varied theme provided by the students. The students reported their Art lesson experiences were related to:

- happiness directly;
- increased enjoyment in the school experience;
- happiness for engagement in the Arts materials;
- happiness in having fun in class;
- improvement of the day because of the Art lesson;
- and enjoyment in the lesson as a creative outlet.

Responses in students’ reflections of pleasure, happiness and enjoyment are noteworthy and can not be underestimated. The literature notes that pleasure, happiness and enjoyment are indicators of flow (Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2009). Also of significance was that the students responded explicitly that the Visual Arts
experiences were the reason they felt pleasure, happiness and enjoyment. The following students’ comments are just 13 of the self-reported responses, which made the connection between pleasure, happiness and/or enjoyment, the Visual Art lessons and the material engagements.
Art is a creative outlet that can improve your whole day.

Every time I come to Art I leave happier

I look forward to Art lessons
Yes I enjoy doing Art it was the highlight of the day
I felt proud and happy about what I did.

I felt like I could make more and do it all day
I do think Art has made me feel happier
It’s always the highlight of my day
I felt having art as a class improved my happiness because I enjoyed spending time throughout the school day to do art as it is relaxing and very enjoyable and having fun.
I was really happy when I saw my work with the glaze and it just felt really good to see something that I made finished with glaze.
I was really enjoying it [Art] and when they said we have ten mins left I was like

“ohhhh” because I didn’t want to stop
I like to spend time with my art and it most definitely increased my happiness.
Art definitely makes me happy at school.

It is pretty valuable.

Even though the time would be useful for catching up on homework and assignments, you wouldn’t get the enjoyment you get from art.

That enjoyment is what makes art different.
I would like to have more art time.

I feel like I am much more happy and can express myself through my art and increase my happiness.
I feel that art is really good and it is a valuable way of using my time.

It is very enjoyable and makes me very happy.
Coming to art today was my favourite part of the day and it made me a lot happier
The 13 comments presented here highlight the students’ relationship between Art and pleasure and demonstrate a range of reasons as to why students made this connection. Interestingly, and in alignment with the flow literature, students identified time as being an influential factor in their experience of Art and pleasure (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Students noted that being able to devote time to making Art was desirable, as humans seek out pleasurable experiences, particularly in artmaking (Dissanayake, 1995). For example Marina commented, “I like to spend time with my art”, while Oberon commented, “I would like to have more art time.”

Like Dissanayake (1995), Csikszentmihalyi (2014) notes that people will seek out flow experiences, they want to spend more time in flow, and more time feeling good. This creates an intrinsic feedback loop. In this study, students reflected that they did indeed want to spend more time feeling good by participating in Visual Arts, and this is highly visible in the comments by Imogen and Priam. Imogen reflected that she wished she could have “a whole day of just Art”, while Priam reflected, “I felt like I could make more and do it all day.” What is significant in these comments, is the relationship between time in artmaking and the students’ perceptions of happiness, enjoyment and pleasure. Students wanted to continue to make Art as it was pleasurable to them. There was no indication from the comments that that the Visual Arts lessons were a waste of time, rather they hoped for more time. Insightfully, Iris highlighted that the time spent on Visual Arts could be used to do other things such as “assignments and homework,” but in doing so, the same amount of “enjoyment” would not be found. Such a finding should not be underestimated.

Csikszentmihalyi (2014) discusses that time can be spent on other things. Like Iris, he notes that much of our human time is spent in apathy, doing things that don’t bring us the same level of pleasure. Csikszentmihalyi (2014, p. 141) goes on to say that people seek out flow experiences, and that if students can’t find flow experiences at school, they will find it somewhere else, perhaps even by “breaking into cars or burning down buildings.” Csikszentmihalyi (2014) further argues that educators should ensure students’ energies are used for productive purposes, rather than destructive ones.
Therefore, it is notable that students consistently indicated their time spent in Art resulted in happy and pleasurable experiences. As Plato noted (cited in Homiak, 2016), educators should teach students to have pleasure in the ‘right things’. From the students’ reflections, it would seem that the Visual Arts activities in this study were an outlet for students to experience pleasure whilst engaging in productive purposes – that is, the right things.

Furthermore, student reflections indicated that artmaking was a valuable use of time; time used to foster happiness and enjoyment. The responses highlighted the students’ views that Art is of great worth or value to them. Lorenzo viewed Art as a “highlight of the day” and Imogen felt Art could make a “happy day.” Not only do Lorenzo and Imogen’s comments indicate pleasure from Art, they also indicate that perhaps the pleasure derived from Visual Arts experiences impacted on the students for longer than just the length of the Visual Arts lessons.

Students responded that Art is of great worth or value to them and this is significant in its alignment to the literature. Catterall (2009) notes that students who study with and through the Arts outperform their peers who do not; are more likely to enjoy their learning, stay in school, attend regularly and graduate; are more likely to go on to university and are more likely to be successful there; are more likely to become lifelong learners and feel better about themselves; are more likely to contribute to economic and social benefits; and are more likely to display pro-social behaviour. As Cutcher (2013, p. 324) notes that “Davis (2012) asserts, ‘These students come to school for art classes and stay for the rest.’”

Csikszentmihályi (2015) states that on the occasion that flow occurs, it serves as a landmark in memory for what life should be like, an experience of enjoyment that is long cherished. Whilst Lorenzo and Imogen reflect on the impact of Art in terms of the length of a day, Reigner extends this thought by noting the impact over the course of a week. Reigner reflects that Art, “is definitely a highlight of my school week” demonstrating that the pleasure value of flow experienced in Art lessons can exist beyond the immediate.
6.3.2.2 Pleasure subtheme 2: Creative accomplishment. Shernoff et al. (2004) suggest activities (such as artmaking), may provide a feeling of creative accomplishment and satisfaction, which can impact on flow. Creative achievement refers to actual real-life creative accomplishments (Jauk, Benedek, & Neubauer, 2014), such as the artworks the students made during the lessons.

Creative achievement is positioned here as a subtheme of pleasure, a condition of flow. To further explain, feedback reflective of pleasure in this study was provided through student’s creative achievements (artworks) as flow theory determines that constant feedback is imperative to the experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997). To further explore this, students were prompted to reflect upon what it felt like to see and hold their artworks that had been through a process of transformation after being fired in the kiln. If correctly made and fired, the transformative process the clay undertakes in the kiln is a wonderful and exciting moment for students. The quick turnaround of firing positioned early in the study (lesson 5), was purposefully designed in the VAP, as flow theory determines the need for frequent feedback (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997). In this way, students received feedback for their creative accomplishment when they retrieved their artwork from the kiln, noting their artistic achievement and its transformation when fired.

In education, through frequent feedback we can reach the “obligation we have as teachers, to make life count moment by moment to the students” (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014, p. 142). Csíkszentmihályi (2014, p. 142) further argues:

If you don’t learn to enjoy the moment, if you don’t know why you are doing it moment by moment, you keep postponing the payoff for what you’re doing and you end up fairly miserable, knowing that you have wasted all you like doing things for which you expect to get a reward down the line but never at the moment.

It was a purposeful design of my research that conditions were created so that students could have the opportunity to experience pleasure and satisfaction through their creative accomplishments, and that they would receive frequent positive feedback from the teacher regarding these. Interestingly, evidence of students experiencing
satisfaction in their creative achievements emerged within the reflective comments. Reigner commented, “I was really happy when I saw my work with the glaze and it just felt really good to see something that I made finished with glaze.” Similarly, Priam commented, “I felt proud and happy about what I did.” These comments identify the pleasure the students derived from their experience of creative accomplishment. Students identifying feelings of pleasure through creative accomplishment further aligns with flow theory as, “feeling good about the self, excited, proud, sociable, active as well as being in the conditions for flow experience” are predictors of trait happiness or pleasure (Csíkszentmihályi & Hunter, 2003, p.186).

Students unknowingly reported the very definition of achievement, and described the proud feeling of having done something worthwhile (Merriam Webster, 2018) in their reports. Students reflected a sense of amazement, delight and triumph at their finished artworks. As Hamlet reflected, “when I held my artwork I felt proud of it” demonstrating pleasure and satisfaction as a result of his skills.

Further analysing the self-reported responses, the students acknowledged that their work processes affected their sense of creative accomplishment. Students identified that their sense of achievement existed beyond just the finished product, to include the work they put into achieving it. As achievement is a thing done successfully with effort or skill (Oxford Dictionary, 2018), it is fitting that the effort students put into the creation of their artworks was expressed. Oberon wrote, “It was a good feeling to see the pots after they’d been glazed. They came from humble beginnings and turned into amazing art.” Here, Oberon acknowledges the process required to turn a lump of clay into “amazing art” and that it was a good feeling. Martius and Perdita further elaborated on the making aspect influencing the pleasurable outcome of the artefact, noting:

“When I saw my artwork it looked very different from being in the kiln. It felt pretty cool to know that I made all the stuff” Martius
“When I held my artwork I felt a sense of achievement. My hard work paid off in a beautiful way”

Perdita

Despite only being prompted to reflect upon what it felt like to see their finished artefact, Martius and Perdita linked the work processes to the associated pleasurable outcomes, after all the “effortless enjoyment of the flow experience doesn't come without effort” (Csíkszentmihályi, 2015). Martius and Perdita’s reflections are evidence that it was pleasurable for them to know that they “had made all that stuff,” and that their hard work had not only paid off, but paid off in “a beautiful way.”

Salerio identified the change that occurred in the artefact by stating, “I felt really accomplished to see how well my artwork had turned out.” Using the phrasing “turned out” indicates an acknowledgement of the process which occurred before the finished product. This phrasing was replicated in Amiens’ reflection, “When I saw my artwork it felt amazing and I was so surprised on how my artwork turned out.” Here, Salerio and Amiens convey accomplishment and that it “felt amazing” seeing how the artefact had “turned out”. Exter further referred to the “turned out” phrasing commenting:

“I was so excited to see my pots, they look really good and I love how they turned out. I can’t wait to take them home. When I held my artwork it felt great to see something I did in my own way”

Here, Exter acknowledges a sense of creative accomplishment which made him feel “excited.” Exter highlights the excitement of taking the artwork home. He describes that because he was able to be creative in his “own way” it felt “great.” Creating in one’s “own way” summons thoughts of creative freedom; an “attitude, a feeling, a perspective, an experience” (Jones, 2017, p. 47). Students did receive positive feedback from the teacher regarding their artefacts, however in Art, feedback reaches beyond teacher commentary. Often, the feedback is delivered through the very success of the process, culminating in a successful artwork. Csíkszentmihályi (2014) writes that there are many notions of feedback, but that teachers should be striving for students to get feedback for themselves
so that they are no longer dependant on the teacher’s response – they can tell if they are doing right or wrong on their own. Of the students’ reflections presented here, Oberson, Martius, Perdita, Salerio and Exter, all identified pleasure in their creative achievements, and all were derived from self-feedback.

6.3.2.3 Pleasure subtheme 3: Increase of pleasure in learning. To further explore how the use of time creating Art can foster pleasure is demonstrated in the third subtheme: the increase of pleasure in learning. This subtheme emerged as students indicated an increase in happiness, which was reported to be contrary to their emotions before the Art lesson. Some students self-reported that not only did the Art lesson increase their happiness, it also cleared negativity, and allowed them to forget about stress. In addition, students self-reported the comparison of happiness in coming to an Art lesson as opposed to other subjects.

The following pages portray students’ reflective responses highlighting how Art impacted upon their happiness, and the pleasure they experienced while learning.
This [Art] increased my wellbeing as I got the chance to create something that I liked and I could do it my way. I was happy in this class as I could forget about any stress and just create something that I loved.
I felt happy and made any stress go away
Yes it released me from the boring world stress that is school
I was down before and Art made me feel happy
Art will always make my day better as it is almost like meditation for my mind and soul.
Art got me into a mindset that cleared any bad that happened during the day from my mind.
Art makes me feel happy as I enjoy it
Taking a break from classes such as Maths, I enjoy having lessons like these.
The making of the artwork was therapeutic, relaxing and enjoyable. It is so fun to be able to create something of your own.
Due to the constraints of ethics approval, students were asked not to discuss their emotional health. Rather, students were asked to self-report any feelings of unease, depression, anxiety or sadness to their parent, teacher, home teacher, trusted adult or school counsellor – rather than disclose such emotions in the reflections. However, 8 student reflections do highlight how the Visual Arts lessons influenced an increase in happiness and enjoyment. It is unclear how the limitations of the ethical restrictions may have affected the depth of the students’ reflections.

Nevertheless, these 8 reflections demonstrate a relationship between Art and an increase in pleasure. This can be seen in comments such as Hamlet’s when he wrote “I was down before and Art made me happy.” Additionally, Perdita reflected having an Art lesson can increase pleasure to make a “day better.” This may be because students such as Marina found the Art lessons to be “therapeutic, relaxing and enjoyable,” or as Priam stated, they “could forget about any stress” and create something they “loved.”

These students comments are valuable, not only to this study, but to the overall educational agenda in Australia. With a focus on the purposes of education having been reduced to producing compliant workforces (Buchannan, 2011; Fleming et al., 2015; Fowler, 1996; Moyle 2010), the Arts are viewed as expendable, extraneous, and non-essential in educational reforms (Fowler, 1996). However, it is clear that the Visual Arts were identified by students as being a welcome break from other subjects such as “Maths” as Boyet stated. This was a comment that repeatedly occurred throughout the written reflections over the course of the VAP.

It is known that in school situations, there are subjects that are more likely to be in the anxiety and boredom regions, rather than flow regions (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014). Csíkszentmihályi (2014) writes that Maths, Science, Social Sciences and Humanities tend to sit within the anxiety and boredom regions, with “worry and anxiety happen[ing] a lot in school” (p. 140). This is a concern for students as currently educational fashion favours STEM reforms (Australian Government, 2017), which narrow the curriculum and exclude many important disciplines from student learning. The students in the VAP however, clearly and categorically expressed their own thoughts on STEM
subjects in school. Iris stated, “when I find out I have art and not science I get very excited”, and Oberon stated, “Art is a different subject. It is amazing. Because I get excited when I find out we have art and not math[s].” As a more forceful statement, Selerio commented:

“In math[s], there is always one right answer, in english [sic] there is always structure to follow. In art, as long as we are making a pot, we are doing the right thing”

These are important insights by the students who note that STEM subjects aren’t always the most valued for them. Indeed they reported that the Visual Arts influenced their experience of pleasure beyond simple comparisons of subjects. Prium, Exter and Martius reflected on the effects of Visual Arts on their stress levels. Exter reflected that Art “released me from the boring world stress that is school,” while Martius reflected that Art “made any stress go away.” Students such as Reigner further reflected that it was the Art experience that “cleared any bad that happened during the day from my mind.”

From the analysis of the students’ reflections discussed above it is evident there was a link between experiences of increased pleasure and engagement with the Visual Arts (Cutcher, 2013). This emergent theme is aligned with current research that artmaking can increase pleasure for humans as it originated from activities concerned with survival (Arts Council England, 2016; Dissanayake, 1995; Spivey, 2005). Additionally, as noted in the literature, flow activities, including intellectually demanding tasks, such as artmaking, can be enjoyable and satisfying (Shernoff, Csíkszentmihályi, Schiender & Shernoff, 2014), and this may explain the reasons the students’ reflections indicate an increase in pleasure as a direct consequence of the Visual Arts lesson. The students’ reflections highlight that not only do the Visual Arts enable an experience of pleasure (see Section 6.3.2), but it can also actually increase feelings of pleasure. Csíkszentmihályi (2014) notes that, “after an experience of flow, people experience their own self as being stronger and more vital than it was before.” This is a highly significant finding that has
ramifications for education generally and for student engagement in particular, since it is pleasure that may sustain interest in learning.

6.3.3 Theme 3: Interest.

The third theme that emerged from the students’ self-reported reflections is that their various interests influence their experience of flow. Interests, defined here as self-interests, motivation, perceptions of autonomy and competence, are all positively related to flow (Kowal & Fortier, 1997).

Analysis of the reflections demonstrated that the students were interested in unique aspects promoted within the Visual Arts classroom and in the subject of the Visual Arts. Visual Arts appears to be pivotal in students’ self-interests, and perceptions of autonomy, which is one such element that exists in the Visual Arts classroom environment (Hetland, 2013). Students repeatedly identified that the ability to work autonomously in their own way engaged their interest.

The instructional format is one such factor in the Visual Arts classroom environment. Research by Stodolsky (1988) suggests that students are better engaged in student-controlled versus teacher-controlled learning environments and activities. The students’ reflections align with Stodolsky’s (1988) findings, as in Visual Arts classrooms, a student self-directed teaching and learning environment is promoted (Hetland, 2013).

To illustrate this point, Hamlet and Imogen identified their interest in being self-directed in the Visual Arts classroom, rather than being teacher directed. Hamlet reported, “I got to do something in my own way rather than being told to do, which I like,” and Imogen reflected, “we get to work freely and do what we want.” Whilst this is not entirely the case (that students get to “do what they want”) in an Art classroom, what Imogen is suggesting is that she has agency and autonomy in directing her learning and material engagements within the enabling constraints (Manning & Massumi, 2014) of the practical tasks.
The Art classroom is a unique learning environment, which allows for the students to be self-directed in their learning through the pedagogical approaches of the teacher and the demands of the material engagements of the subject (Hetland, 2013). In order to promote flow in learning, teachers should enable students a measure of control, choice and autonomy in the classroom environment (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014). This sense of independence, certainly engaged the interests of the students in this study.

It is the Art teacher’s construction of the learning environment that affects students’ sense of freedom and authority (Hetland, 2013). Unprompted, Exter reflected upon this stating, “Art is different from the other core subjects because the teachers are way better and the lessons are much more enjoyable.” In this revealing comment, it is possible that students perceive the Art teacher/student dynamic positively affects the uniqueness of the learning environment, making the lessons “more enjoyable.”

Csíkszentmihályi (2014, p.146) notes that the teacher has done the “greatest service you can do” if the student becomes intrigued, self-motivated and autonomous in learning and motivation. The sense of autonomy, captivation and freedom in the Visual Arts classroom is echoed in the students’ reflections. For example, Salerio reflected:

“Art is a very personal subject and you can create the way you want to. You work with the materials to create a piece of art that has meaning and impact. Being able to do this for yourself can foster immense happiness. It makes your day better, it is something to look forward to”

Here, Salerio identifies that his participation is personal and that Art affords him the opportunity to “create the way you want to.” He notes that doing so fosters immense happiness, and research supports that classroom factors such as instructional format do effect student engagement and flow experiences (Shernoff et al. 2004).

Another element of instructional format is feedback, which differs from that mentioned previously in the context of self-feedback. Csíkszentmihályi (2014) suggests that teachers are effective to successful learning when students feel validated by the teacher’s interest and attention. Mirroring this, throughout the study students were given
frequent personalised positive feedback on their artmaking – this is a necessary process when making successful artworks. As such, when students were prompted to reflect on how it felt to receive feedback from the teacher, responses included:

“It feels really reassuring and it makes the whole experience more positive and it boosts your self-esteem but it also makes you bond with your teacher more and you become more open and willing to share with your teacher” Reigner

“It feels great to have a teacher that can tell you you’re doing well and making good work that your [sic] proud of” Leonatus

These two comments are indicative of the student/teacher dynamic and are symptomatic of Visual Arts teacher classroom management approaches. Such management includes the way Art teachers personalise instruction, engage in just-in-time interventions whilst circling the room, and “stimulate students critical and self-reflective skills during regular critique sessions” (Hetland, 2013, p. 9).

Visual Arts classrooms have a unique ‘feel’ that other disciplines don’t appear to have (Hetland, 2013), and students noted that this was of great interest to them. For example, Caphis reflected that:

“Art is different because you make it what you want it to be. I can sit with friends, talk, and create something wonderful and unique. You don’t get exact instructions on what to do, that [sic] why it impacts wellbeing in a good way”

Again, Caphis’ comment demonstrates that students are interested in autonomy in their learning, and that this is provided in this Visual Arts classroom. Hetland (2013, p. 13) describes the unique teaching method of the Arts classroom when she writes:
Walk into a studio art class, and you may feel like you have left school. The students look relaxed; sometimes they sit on the floor or music plays softly. After materials are set up students dig in, not concerned about getting clay on their hands or paint on their jeans. You see the teacher introducing concepts and demonstrating, and then you watch as students become engrossed in their projects.

Students talk among themselves quietly as they begin to work, and the teacher circles around, watching for teachable moments and zeroing in on individual students with a complement, suggestion, question, or critique. At a mid-point or the end of class there are often critiques in which students are gathered to share and discuss their work, sessions in which critical judgement and metacognition are nurtured.

A studio classroom is much more complicated than it looks at first impression. The students who originally appeared so casual were actually working hard - they are thinking visually, analytically, critically, creatively.

In this quote, Hetland (2013) exposes the unique environment of the Visual Arts classroom, mirroring the students’ self-reported reflections emerging from this research. Being allowed to talk and express their social interests as they work was a recurring theme in the students’ self-reported reflections, and was a source of student interest and wonder. The unique environment and instructional format of the Visual Arts classroom enabled student autonomy and the indulgence of student social interests’ whilst being educationally engaged and productive. For these outcomes to be successfully gained from the Visual Arts classroom a quality Arts educational experience must be provided. Ewing (2010, p.19) states one feature of providing a quality Arts educational experience includes:

- a personal, persistent and passionate drive or commitment to shape quality arts learning experiences.

This shaping includes learning experiences with quality resources, works of art and accomplished artists and teachers, and experiences of quality interactions, performances and expressions.
From the above quote (Ewing, 2010) it can be understood that the role of the teacher in providing a quality Art educational experience is essential. Indeed Ewing (2010) highlights that the teacher’s personal, persistent and passionate drive and commitment shapes a quality Arts learning experience. Similarly, Garvis and Pendergaast (2010) note that Visual Arts teachers own self beliefs, confidence, abilities and self-efficacy, plays an important part in students outcomes.

On a practical level, the teachers’ role transcends the environment of the Arts classroom (Hetland, 2013) because it is the teacher whose instructional format, skills and pedagogies enables students’ interests to be engaged. It is the teacher who decides the environment of the classroom, the content that will be taught, the materials that will be provided, and the way knowledge is discovered. In the context of the VAP, my own skills, talents and manner were inclusive, effective and thorough, promoting my genuine interest to provide a quality Visual Arts educational experience for students which resulted in their interests being engaged.

Indeed my framework for quality teaching which shapes Arts learning experiences within the classroom, ensures that students’ are set up for highest chance of success, engagement and positive experience. My role as the teacher is central to the learning experience of the students’ as it is my knowledge, experience, values and attitudes that direct the classroom. There is an element of uniqueness and artistry to enable a quality Arts educational experience. Ewing (2010) refers to “teaching as artistry” (p.34), and references Eisner’s (2002) view of artistry citing that teachers have to provide transformative learning opportunities. Eisner (2002, p. 382-384) writes,

Artistry requires sensibility, imagination, technique and the ability to make good judgments about the feel and significance of the particular ... Good teaching depends on artistry and aesthetic considerations ... Artistry is most likely when we acknowledge its relevance to teaching and create the conditions in schools in which teachers can learn to think like artists.
My thinking like an artist because I am an artist, means I have compressive multi-disciplinary Arts experiences which bring my sensibility, imagination, technique, artistry and aesthetic considerations into the classroom, and this contributes to the quality educational experience. However, this did not occur on a whim. I have committed ten years of full-time study at university and twelve years of teaching learning and refining my teaching and Arts making, skills and knowledge. Additionally developing these skills has been an ongoing process throughout my childhood, teenage years, adulthood, and professional lives. Indeed it my very way of being and knowing in the world as I live my artist onto-epistemology.

Art teaching is multi-disciplinary and is not just pedagogy; it is inquiry. Arts teachers are always, critical, reflective and becoming (Irwin, 2004) and this is essential and significant to the practices and experiences within the Visual Arts classroom. Successful Arts classrooms embrace the subjectivity of the students, the classroom, and the teachers’ own practice. This is one such reason that students’ comments are indicative of the unique teacher/student and learning dynamic within the Visual Arts classroom. I emphasise the importance of teacher proficiency, aptitude, expertise, and capability to students’ educational engagement. A successful Visual Arts classroom which provides a quality learning experience will have a proficient teacher enabling the constraints of the Visual Arts experience for students.

Next is a selection of comments that express students clearly identifying that talking in class and engaging their friendships and the culture of the Art room is pivotal to their interests in engaging in Art, and demonstrates the social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours enabled by the teacher in the Visual Arts classroom.
I like Art because I find it relaxing and I get to do my own design. I also like being able to hang with my friends without getting into trouble.
I could talk and express myself through my Art
I got to spend time with my friends and having fun with clay; it made me feel happy.
I got to sit down and relax while making pots.

I also get to talk and sit with my friends.
I like to come and just have fun
working independently and working with friends
Art is different from other subjects you get to express your emotion into something like painting. It never turns out the same, every painting or clay making is different and very special.
I like the feeling of being able to do what I want

without instruction and I get to sit with my friends
It was nice being able to relax and talk to friends and the end of the day
It is different as I can be myself and enjoy what I am doing with my friends
I love Art and being able to sit with my friends and connect with them and nature is definitely a highlight.
I found that Art increased my wellbeing.

It was very enjoyable as I got to do different styles eg. painting and clay.

I also like being able to move around
Art is different to other lessons because you get to express yourself without judgement and I also love it because I can talk and laugh with my friends.
I got to spend time with my friends and having fun with clay; it made me feel happy.
I like painting and I felt happy when creating things with my friends around me.
6.3.3.1 Interest subtheme 1: Social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours. These reflections demonstrate social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours in the Visual Arts classroom, and show students feel a sense of autonomy in the Visual Arts classroom. Students such as Priam did not fear “getting into trouble” when being with friends. Students felt there was a freedom from external control or influence while they made their artworks, which Salerio, Reigner and Exter noted, is an experience different from other subjects. These thirteen reflections also illustrate that middle school students place value on and interest in the ability to socialise and be with friends whilst learning. This is important as the social aspects of school can influence behavioural and academic outcomes (Anderman, 2002; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Hughes & Kwok, 2007). The positive association between students’ experiences in the Visual Arts and socialising with friends illustrates that students felt “nice”, “happy”, and loved (Perdita, Amiens, Oberon, Martius and Exter).

Interestingly, a few times students noted in their feedback a collective reflection, further demonstrating the social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours which were present during the VAP. For example, students used the term “we” when discussing a personal idea. This was an interesting finding as students were speaking for others in the class, as a part of a collective whole, perhaps to illustrate a sense of belonging within the Visual Arts classroom (Camalcilar, 2010). This observation is included here in order to further illustrate the positive social climate and environment of the Visual Arts classroom, which may stem from the social aspects of middle school (Hudson & Hudson, 2012), flow (Sawer, 2003) or Artmaking (Dissanayake, 2003), or a combination of these.

To illustrate further, Martius commented that everyone was “working together to create something different” in the Visual Arts lesson. He indicated that he felt everyone “was working together” despite each person very much working on their own task, with no explicit instruction for collaboration. There was also no opportunity for other students to speak with Martuis about whether they felt they too were, “working together” before completing the reflective feedback, which would have prompted him to respond in such a way; thus this comment is entirely his own perspective.
Other students also wrote reflections that presented their thoughts as representative of the group. For example, Perdita reflected, “I enjoy Art over most lessons because we learn and enjoy ourselves at the same time.” Here Perdita starts her reflection as personal, but moves onto representing others by stating “we learn and enjoy ourselves,” rather than, I learn and enjoy myself. This was mirrored in other reflections also. Leonatus commented, “in other subjects, we are always told what we are meant to do, whereas in art we have more freedom and choice.” Here, Leonatus feels that it is not just he who is always being told what to do, but rather we. He notes that in art we have more freedom and choice. Likewise, Amiens also commented “we got to work freely”. This collective perspective aligns with the literature that suggests students who extend from individual representation, through cooperative engagement can have powerful effects on students learning (Brown, 2010). Brown (2010) notes that through classroom collaborative learning experiences students have the “notion that ‘my ideas’ are made up in part of ‘your ideas’ and ‘our ideas’” (p. 227).

Importantly, no students reflected on any negative aspects of socialising, such as conflict, or exclusion from peers in the lessons. Rather, social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours are shown as the reflections indicate students’ willingness to speak for others in the group. The direct effect of satisfaction with peer relationships is important, and gains even more importance as peers become the centre of information and social support as they get older (Cemalcilar, 2010; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992). It is clear from the interactions in the VAP that the conditions of the Visual Arts learning environment enabled relaxed social engagement as a significant and effective learning outcome. Students cannot learn successfully with and from people they don’t like (Pierson, 2013).

These social aspects of the Visual Arts classroom did not appear to have any negative effects, aside from one lesson where two students had “too much” fun and laughter, which inhibited the flow experience for them (as mentioned above). However, this was an isolated incident (see Section 6.3.1.2). Analysis of the artworks created by students in the program (see Section 6.3.1.2) determine that despite students socialising, talking, and being with friends, students still created quality, skilfully made artworks demonstrating proficiency and engagement.
6.3.3.2 Interest subtheme 2: Creative engagement. Students were asked to reflect on their engagement with the Art materials. Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p.4) found that flow occurs when individuals are, “so intensely involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.”

The reflections demonstrated that the tasks, or the activities in the VAP were of interest to the students. This was particularly true for Jachimo, who wrote:

“I would rather make something with my hands or paint/draw than anything. It just makes me very happy and I would rather be doing art than [being] on a computer or doing other subjects/work”

This example demonstrates that Jachimo’s creative interests in hands-on activities were nurtured through her artmaking. Her response also demonstrated that she would rather be creatively expressing herself than sitting at a computer and, that artmaking promoted her happiness.

Csikszentmihalyi (2014) writes that it is interest in the activity that produces flow, and that in itself becomes its own reward. In the classroom, students identified that working on the given tasks was of interest to them as they expressed themselves. Hamlet wrote, “the task definitely involves me. It takes me to another world in some ways.” Hamlet described he felt that he was taken to another world in some ways, specifically by his involvement in the task, strongly indicating a deep flow state (Ilies, Wagner, Wilson, et al., 2016).

Other students were even more descriptive in their reflections, and noted it was specifically working with the material of clay that interested them. As Marina reflected, “this task is very fun and interesting, I haven’t felt bored once whilst [sic] making the clay objects.” Extending this thought, Perdita reflected, “playing with clay is always very fun, as is creating.” These two comments by Marina and Perdita are further examples of how creative expression was of interest. It should be especially noted, Perdita’s comment about “play”. Play is a fundamental learning pedagogy in early childhood and is often under utilised in formal schooling in the later years of education.
(Cutcher, 2013). Here, Perdita notes its importance to her engagement. Both students thought the task was interesting, and both related that experience to engagement with Arts materials, in this case clay.

Furthermore, in their reflections to the prompt, I enjoy the task I am doing, the students’ further noted that it was a specific interest in the qualities of the task that promoted their enjoyment. For example, three students reflected that:

“I extremely enjoy playing with the clay,” Hamlet;

“I thoroughly enjoy working with clay as it gets your hands dirty,” Oberon;

“I find making pots really fun and enjoyable. I wish we had more lessons a week,” Imogen.

These three comments demonstrate that the students’ interests were due to the task involving clay, or “making pots.” The students’ interest in the material engagements and creative and expressive aspects of the tasks were further reported in other lessons in the program. The following reflections are a selection of comments where students identify the ability to be expressive, creative or being able to work in their own way as an element of interest.
The making of something was where the flow is
Making things makes me happy
If we were not to make something during art, it would be dreaded.

The main reasons I like art is because I get to be creative and express myself through the making of something.
I could talk and express myself through my Art
It was so fun creating a different look with different paints.

Everyone was working together to create something different
I think that making Art is good for your wellbeing because it gives you an outlet to express your feeling and thoughts through Art.
Doing Art increased my wellbeing as it is fun to come along and experiment with different materials and just have a go.
It doesn’t matter how the outcome turns out, it is special and unique.
It improved my wellbeing because I found mixing and experimenting with different colours [was enjoyable]. I was very happy and enjoying my time in this art class.
Making things helps improve my wellbeing
Being creative and being able to sculpt, weave and paint etc helps make me happier
Students identified that being creative, expressive or being able to experiment was of interest to them and reported that it enhanced their well-being. Perdita described that it was being able to experiment with “different materials,” while Reigner identified that “experimenting with different colours” was of interest to him. These comments align with flow theory as flow is intrinsically satisfying and should therefore lead individuals to be pleased with their decision to pursue their activity (Csíkszentmihályi & LeFevre, 1989). Both Perdita and Reigner identified that being able to do these experimentations increased or improved their “well-being” (both Perdita and Reigner were discussing their interpretations of well-being as understood through their ‘well-being school,’ which promotes Character Strengths and Virtues within their educational philosophy, see Section 2.4.2.1).

Other students identified that they were interested in the expressive aspects of Visual Arts making. For example, Priam and Oberon identify that being able to “express” themselves promoted their interest. Other students simply identified that making was how they found flow, with Imogen reflecting, “the making of something was [sic] where the flow is.” Similarly, Lorenzo also identified that being able to be “creative and being able to sculpt, weave and paint” made him happy as he was interested in the tasks.

The comments presented in this section demonstrate that students found the classroom environment, and the creative, or expressive elements unique to the Visual Arts program as a source of interest to them. Hektner and Asakawa (2000) found that individual and group work such as that found in the Visual Arts classroom in school related activities were the most conducive to flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014; Hektner & Asakawa, 2000).

6.4 Chapter Synopsis

This chapter explored research question 3 Does flow occur in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom? through student’s self-reported reflections. From the discussions and analysis of students self-reported reflections, flow did indeed occur in this Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, as experienced by the majority of students. The discussion and
analysis exploring flow is understood through three themes related to flow theory, namely concentration, pleasure and interest.

Theme one explored the students’ self-reports relating to concentration with Visual Arts tasks and materials. Through discussion and analysis of students’ self-reports, Section 6.3.1 presented that students concentrating on Visual Arts materials can result in student flow experiences. To strengthen the discussion of concentration, the analysis also noted that although minimal in occurrence, disruption was found to inhibit students’ experiences of flow. Overall the discussion on concentration in Visual Arts aligned with flow, as flow occurs when one is acting with total involvement and focus, intense concentration or absolute absorption (Phillips, 2013; Reid, 2011). Furthermore, students reflected that their concentration was focused particularly on the Arts materials, and their engagements with those materials. This is an important finding, as flow is not simply concentration, but a state of high attention to a specific task (Csíkszentmihályi & Nakumara, 2010).

Theme two discussed and analysed the students’ self-reports relating to pleasure within the Visual Art program. Overall, Section 6.3.2 presented a discussion and analysis of the students’ self-reports, which asserted three main findings, namely:

1. That happiness and enjoyment is derived from the Visual Arts making processes and viewed by students as valuable use of time;

2. The students experienced feelings of creative accomplishment; and

3. The students self-reported an increased pleasure in learning.

The analysis of pleasure occurring in the Visual Arts program may serve as a landmark in memory for the students, of what learning should be like as experience of enjoyment that is long cherished (Csíkszentmihályi, 2015). This is a significant finding as much of our human time is spent doing things that don’t bring us the same level of pleasure (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014). As educators, we should ensure students’ energies are used for productive
purposes, rather than destructive ones (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), and it is a powerful finding that students self-reported their participation in the Visual Arts program was pleasurable, enjoyable and satisfying (Arts Council England, 2016; Cutcher, 2013).

Theme three discussed and analysed the student self-reports relating to interest in the Visual Arts program, self-interests, motivation, perceptions of autonomy and competence, are all positively related to flow (Kowal & Fortier, 1997). Section 6.3.3 presented a discussion and analysis of the students’ self-reports which asserted two main findings. Firstly, the findings demonstrated that students were interested in the autonomy available in the Visual Art classroom. Students reflected that they were self-directed in their learning through the pedagogical approaches of the teacher and the demands of the subject (Hetland, 2013). Secondly, the discussion illustrated that students placed value in the ability to socialise and be with their friends whilst learning. The discussion showed that social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours are engaged within the Visual Art classroom. This is important as the social aspects of school can influence behavioural and academic outcomes (Anderman, 2002; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Hughes & Kwok, 2007). Finally, the analysis of students’ self-reported interest in the artmaking tasks together with the opportunity to be creatively expressive, revealed that having an interest in the activity allowed for, and produced, flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014).

The three themes presented, discussed and analysed indicated that flow does indeed occur in the Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, within enabling conditions of material engagements. The identification that flow does occur through Visual Arts material engagements is paramount to this study and within the field of education, as individuals who engage in the Arts are shown to be more motivated in other subjects, have higher self-esteem, higher levels of life satisfaction and greater sense of meaning in life (Anderson, et al., 2015).

As discussed in the theoretical framework, flow is an element of engagement (Pascha, 2017; Tay, Pawelski & Keith, 2017), and engagement is entirely necessary for adolescent belonging within the school environment (Schall,
Wallace & Chhuon, 2016). Currently in education, there are pressures, “to create classrooms focused solely on academic goals in order to increase student performance on high stakes testing”, which may prompt reduced motivation and engagement in youth (Schall, et al., 2016). This reduced motivation and perceived lack of belonging, “leads to disengagement from schoolwork and overall disconnection from school” (Schall, et al., 2016, p. 472; Crosnoe, 2011). Adolescents desire to make authentic and productive contributions to their environment (Willms, 2000). Both academic autonomy and belongingness in school “have been found to contribute independently to student engagement and academic achievement” (Ryzin, Gravely & Roseth, 2009, p.2) as engagement is not simply about good classroom behaviour or attendance, but a connection with learning. In the VAP, academic autonomy, belonging, engagement and creative accomplishment were overwhelmingly apparent.

Students in the VAP self-reported a connection with their peers, their learning, and their learning environment through their artmaking experiences, as they experienced flow. Beneficially, flow is correlated with outcomes in adolescents such as increased concentration, enjoyment, happiness, strength, motivation, self-esteem, optimism and future mindedness (Hanson, 2009). Flow also promotes attitudes of greater personal engagement in the resolution of problems, “prioritizing personal attitudes in the development of more suitable coping strategies and the capability of promoting significant changes” (Scorsolini-Comin, Fontaine, Koller, & Santos, 2013, p. 668). Notably, as adolescents spend the majority of their time in compulsory education, it is thought that occurrence of flow within the school setting is perhaps the most important area for researchers to focus on (Hanson, 2005). As such, 21st century schooling ought to prioritise a focus on developing the whole-student through social, emotional, moral and intellectual development (Waters, 2011). In the engagement of the VAP in this study, such a focus is unerringly apparent and suggests that there are lessons to be learnt for education generally from Visual Arts curricula, pedagogies and learning environments.
I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which I work and live, and recognise their continuing connection to land, water and community. I pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.
Chapter 7 presents the information gathered as an A/r/tographic analysis with the research, in alignment with the research methodology. This chapter demonstrates how I, as the A/r/tographer, engaged with and through living inquiry as a responsive analytical act (Irwin, 2004) to the research, resulting in the creation of a body of work through various artmaking experiences, and
material engagements (Hocking, 1997). This chapter illuminates the ways in which creative output and practice occur as an integral part of the research process in A/r/tographic approaches (Candy, 2006), and is directly aligned to research question 1, What is material engagement in Visual Arts? This chapter is also aligned to research question 2, Are the outcomes of material engagements in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom
“Arts based research is an effort to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable.” (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 1)

aligned with persistent patterns of human aesthetic activity?, and research question 3, Does flow occur in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom?, in subtle and nuanced ways. In this way, this chapter brings all the threads of this research together.

Following the introduction to the chapter, the introduction to the artworks is presented. Within this section, the A/r/tographic responses to the research are presented as creative works with differing material engagements, in my own voice. Finally, the chapter summary is presented.

This chapter is designed through my personal aesthetic, as a site in which I used to analyse and formulate ideas, and intentions within the creative process (Art Gallery of NSW, 2018). Presenting this chapter through my personal aesthetic is employed as rhetorical device to convey artistic meaning, and to characterise the visual and narrative content as evocative, contextual and vernacular (Barone & Eisner, 1997).

This chapter is also spatially considered in order to slow the reader, and the reading. The intention is for the words to be lingered with, for the images to be savoured.

The design of this chapter is presented in a harmonious way, so that words and images balance one another in
A/r/tographic contiguity with the doubling of ‘Art’ and ‘graphy’ (Irwin, 2004). Within this chapter the text font and style changes, and images may appear without introduction or reference as A/r/tography is a coming together of image and word wherein visual and textual elements complement, extend, refute, and/or subvert one another (Springgay, et al., 2005).

This is purposefully intended as an authentic representation of this chapter, in my aesthetic and my voice.

The reader is invited to read the chapter continuously as it appears, considering each page to continue from the previous, as image and word may operate conditionally or separately or in synergy (Lasczik Cutcher, 2018). All pages, photographs, and images of artworks on the pages are my own, unless otherwise noted.
**INTRODUCTION TO THE BODY OF WORK**

A/r/tography incorporates the “systematic use of the artistic process, [and] the actual making of artistic expressions [which] are the primary way of understanding experiences” (McNiff, 2007, p. 29). As such, I created artworks immediately following the Visual Arts program to analyse and to understand the A/r/tography of this study.

In alignment with the A/r/tographic research methodology and method of this research, the information presented in this chapter was gathered through the A/r/tographer’s own experience, observations, documentations and artmaking.

As the A/r/tographer, I was positioned to intensify, complement and layer information, transforming theory as distinct from practice into theory as practice (Irwin, 2008).

In this method of analysis through my own A/r/tographic artmaking, I was influenced by my identities of artist, researcher and teacher, the literature review, the students’ material engagements, and the students’ self-reported reflections; to layer, enhance and make meaning through artistic ways of knowing (Eisner, 2002).

The lived, creative and practice-based experience of the relationship between the primacy of material engagement and flow was critical to the development of this analytical layer in responding to the research aim **exploring the primacy of material engagement and flow in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom**.

A/r/tography is a responsive act of living inquiry, and my artworks layer meaning instantiating a style of language (Wallin, 2013), which is reflective and responsive to this research.
It is thought that, “the impulse to make and feel art is fundamental to nature” (Chatterjee, 2014, p.164), and so the intertwining of human nature and the environment of nature took a central position in my thinking, analysis and artmaking.
I considered how my artistic inquiry is represented through my own experiences as an A/r/tographer, and I made artworks to present and explore the intangible, complicated and intertwined elements of human and environmental nature (Lasczik Cutcher & Irwin, 2018).
A critical element influencing the creation of my artworks were the lessons in the VAP that occurred in the outdoor settings. These lessons particularly had a profound impact on my creative practices, as I observed students working in confident, creative, and contented ways. I observed the effects of their enjoyment in working outside creatively, in flow, socialising with classmates, enjoying the artmaking process.

There is growing evidence to suggest that exposure to natural environments can be associated with mental health benefits such as lowering levels of stress (Pearson & Craig, 2014). Some students reflected on the effect that working outdoors had on their artmaking experience, they wrote:

“It was better being outside and in the fresh air”

“I love art and being able to sit with my friends and connect with them and nature is definitely a highlight”
“It is as if doing art helps you connect with others, nature and yourself” 
(Exter)
The students’ clear liking of working outside was thought-provoking, as were their comments. I observed the positive impact that working outside had on the students’ interest, engagement and socialisation in the class.

Creative output and practice occur as an integral part of the research process in A/r/tographic approaches (Candy, 2006), and students outdoor experiences were illuminating for me.

Their enthusiasm for the outdoor environment was reflected in my teaching practice.

Particularly as I personally

was longing

for the land.
As mentioned, this chapter illustrates my thinking aesthetically, to slow the reading, so that the reader may linger-with the writing, and with the writer (Lasczik Cutcher & Irwin, 2018).

I wrote the following journal entry after reflecting on the outdoor lessons where students engaged with natural materials. I observed how students enjoyed creating artworks and working outside.

I wrote the following journal entry prior to creating my artworks and my writing serves as an orientation to my artworks in this chapter.
The process of writing this research has been intensive. All of my professional focus has been seeing this research come to fruition. Every day I come to the university at 8am, I let myself into the office, I sit at my desk, and I read and I type.

Invariably.

I don’t eat lunch, I rarely take a toilet break.

I leave to pick up my son from school. I park in the same car park and collect him. His every breath and word, I relish with my whole heart.

I take him to training, every afternoon, I watch every note, or step, or stride, or stroke, or kick. I see it all. Every day he fills me with pride.

This is a certainty.

We return to the home I built for us. I built a huge fence around the perimeter. With my own hands. I close the gates, we have a guard dog.

Here we are constant, stable. Safe.

But the world around me changes.

In my street one house is replaced with two. A side road becomes a major highway.

My son grows older, my friends have come and gone,
And people close to me have left the Earth.

I am an observer; sometimes I am a participant. But it is undeniable that the world around me changes.

My changing world means I long to connect. Not to fill an empty space, but rather to enrich the pieces that already exist -

I think.

When my father passed away a friend said to me that his blood is in my veins. That he is in the very cells in my body.

The pieces already exist -

I think.

My family were sawmillers, and farmers. They had sawdust in their veins.

I am an observer and a participant in my world that is constant and unvarying, yet forcefully changed with tremendous brutal force.

I am an only child.

And so whilst I faithfully work on my research, persistent and steadfast, I contemplate the changing world around me, in the depths of my mind.

To layer meaning, to analyse, it is necessary for me to experience. A genuine experience.
Not something cloaked in an academic veneer.

I am an artist. I am a researcher. I am a teacher.

I am a human who longs for the land my family endured.

The dirt, the soil, the sawdust.

The sawdust that is in my veins.

Considering my A/r/tographic responses, my artworks... that these things are on my mind, is in no doubt. I have fertile and rich thoughts, ripe for harvesting.

The land.

Australia.

My blood.

Human nature.

My environment.

My thoughts sit at the interface of where understandings and meanings collide. In my own head as possibilities. To the A/r/tographer these things are deeply meaningful, synergistic and dynamic.

I am conservative.

I am an introvert.

I am feeling exposed.

This backstory, this subject matter, it is an important side note in this research - but not the main plot.
It explains the thought processes. The active, forceful, influential notions that would make their way into the artwork whether they were invited or not. Like little creatures compelling the materials to be shaped a certain way, or a brush stroke to swipe persuasively on the canvas.

These notions are compelling and influential, potent and convincing.

They are powerful because when I think to make Art, I think of them. I can not think of anything else. So I will make Art with these thoughts.

But it is only the side note.

The real plot is in the making. This explains the who, what, why and when. It is informative. But it isn’t the focus. It isn’t the main storyline.

And so to make this body of work I return to the land.

I’ve been there before.

To the countryside.

The little town.

The cemetery.

Where my family rests.

The corner store that sells crocheted tea towels.
I go back to the land because I feel like something is there for me.

And now I have time.

Some peace and quiet to listen to the tale that blows through the trees.

I can let the stories paint themselves.

Capture themselves.

A place where there are no distractions.

To get back to the very basics of my own humanness.

My own self.

So I leave my house.

I leave the fence around the perimeter that I built with my own hands. I pack the dog into the car. Next to me is my son who is the light of my days. I close the gates and drive down the street.

Where there was one house, now replaced with two.

We drive down the side road. Now a major highway.

We go back to the land.

So I can hear the stories.

Mother. Artist. Teacher. Researcher. As a human waiting for the land to talk.

I am listening.
SCHOOL REPORT 1961

YERONGA INFANTS' STATE SCHOOL

NAME Tony

GRADE II (a) Dec.

NAME Tony Dresker
Reflexive, recursive, and responsive (Given, 2008) to my experiences and observations of the students and the VAP, I have A/r/tographically and artistically reflected on an outdoor environment away from my home. I traveled to Moore, towards western Queensland, to get closer to the ‘sawdust in my veins.’

Moore is close to where my Grandmother and her family worked our family sawmill in Linville. Going to Moore was a sort of ‘coming home,’ a sort of returning back to my roots.

It also helped me to separate myself from the work environment.

I viewed going west like I was going back to the essence of who I was, not because the artworks were about me, but because it was me making them. To think in a way untainted and to authentically and artistically reflect on my research experiences. Going to Moore was a way to focus, filter and reflect on the information I had gathered, and take it rhizomatically to another level of thought (Deluze & Guattari, 1987). To diffract (Barad, 2007).

As Shakespeare wrote in 1624 in As You Like It, there is a façade in everyday life, and this façade, I felt, had to be washed away.

The works had to stem from a place of purity, in the sense of self and material only, to capture the way human life is lived between bodies and materials, or brains, bodies and things (Gosden & Malafouris, 2015).

The first part of these artistic responses, developed as a body of photographic artworks, were a starting point to explore and respond to the surrounding natural environment, and to the inquiry that inspired it.
The photographs were created as an act of living inquiry (Irwin, 2004), as a direct response to the outdoor environment I experienced in the VAP, synergistically from the A/r/tographic experiences in the classroom. I used the concept of the natural environment to focus on the Australian landscape.

In photographing the Australian landscape, I explored my own position in the environment. I considered the vastness of the landscape, the positioning of myself as just one human, both free of and circumscribed by the environment.

*Landscape and the Heart rang in my ears.*
Landscape and the Heart

How does this connect with landscape? Most of our normal environments, home, meeting places, and certainly work places, become imbued with a sense of self, a sense of achievement or worse, of tasks still looming and ominously not yet done. To me, the undone tasks hang like accusing ghosts on the wall. So, defocussing the attention there may be difficult. On the other hand, immersion in nature can allow us to defocus, if we’re wandering in it purposelessly - unless we’re there for a specific purpose, such as fighting it for a garden, or for chopping it down.

But digging in the soil as a gardener or spending long periods of time with a fishing line dangling in the water, or doing nothing at all, just hanging there, can defocus us so much that we become immersed, losing consciousness of the self, of self importance and public stature and more importantly, our inner chatter ceases, and we can find an absorption that can bring contentment so that, in Bunkse’s words, the outer peace becomes our inner peace.

Rodger Ulrich speculates that during our evolution, specific landscapes such as bodies of water, higher areas, tall trees with canopies, trees with lower trunks may have been so central to our survival that natural selection favoured those who acquired positive responses to them. In other words, we are wired to love landscape. But, I thought, most of us know intuitively that being in open, natural spaces does us good. But I’m arguing more- I’m saying that being immersed in landscape can bring us a very special sort of peace.

Sue Woolfe (2013)
The old Patterson family saw mill established in 1912 in Linville, Queensland, Australia.

Patterson’s curse

is what they all called it, tongue in cheek.

The work was demanding

the timber was firm and resisted their saws, their muscles ached and sawdust filled the air.

But my Grandmother, she was an only child too.

With her generous country heart, she would’ve longed to see this shed

after a weeks away,

and days of dusty travel.

Patterson’s curse to her was home.

This land was home.

This is the land that is my veins.
My photographic engagement, portrays an important analytical moment in this research. The photographs initially responded to the outdoors as experienced in the VAP, but then also gave rise to the subsequent bodies of work. Combining my own longing for the land with this experience, I A/r/ photographically responded as I explored, analysed and synthesized the inquiry through these photographs.
Through creating the photographs, I considered the way that physical environments inform practice, to be beyond the visual, to be ingrained and immersed in not only the subject, but the material engagement of photography as an analytical riposte.

My photographs depict my artistic expression as the primary way of understanding my experiences (McNiff, 2007), in this case, the experiences of research and teaching. They also further the experience of artmaking inspired by the outdoor environment relished by the students.
MATERIAL ENGAGEMENT: PAINTING

The acts of photographing the outdoor environment and the landscape created a ‘space’ for me to reflect on the environmental and material encounters A/r/tographically within the research.

This space allowed me to consider material engagement in a creative way, different to, but in synergy with, my text-based ‘academic’ analyses.

Reflective of my photographs, and experiences in the VAP, I used the landscape as both subject and site to engage with Art materials. The layering of materiality and the physical act of making the artworks was considered and cogitated on throughout the process.

Painting the second body of work was primarily an exploration of material engagement. The act of painting uninhibited and in large scale, for me incorporated a certain freedom of movement and mark making.

I chose to work with oils on canvas, to connect with the traditionality of the Australian landscape artists who went before me, and their paintings.

The canvas and oil connected me to the many artists who had sat silent and still; in awe of the unique and powerful landscape that surrounded me.

I waited for the earth to show me, but I also waited for the past experiences of those artists, and the lives of those who lived in this vast country, to talk.

For the warm breeze that blew through the eucalyptus trees....to breathe into me.
Returning to the bush enabled a freedom from the façade too, and so there was an essence of existence that could just be focused on the task at hand.

Focused on just the materials I was engaging with.

Focused like it was meant to be simple.

And it was simple.

It was a fire, or tea in a billy can.

It was gathering sticks, or sleep.

It was listening to the birdsong, or touching my brush to the canvas.

It was a walk with my son, or a vibrant sunset in muted Australian tones of mauve and ochre.

I had come home in the most simple way.

The artworks originated simply too. Reflecting a purity of my intentions and essence of mind.

Constable (1823) wrote, “A sketch will not serve more than one state of mind & will not serve to drink at again & again — in a sketch there is nothing but the one state of mind — that which you were in at the time.”
The creative reflections on canvas began with a stick my son burnt for me to sketch with. A piece of deep red hardwood we found on our walk that afternoon. We picked it up because it was so organically raw, and rich with purpose. My son burnt the smaller end, which had a flat uneven surface. In flow, I let the burnt wood make the marks on the canvas without cognitive intervention. The timber drew the images and used my hands as a vessel. My eyes? Yes, my eyes had seen the landscape. But the timber came from that very place, and it knew better than I did.

I drew without worry or concern.
After all, what knows better to draw a tree than a tree itself?
en plein air... the act of painting outdoors

Materials
Art Spectrum Oil Paint
Titanium Yellow, Aureolin, Cadmium Red, Alizarin Crimson, Pthalo Blue, Prussian Blue, Prussian Blue, Australian Leaf Green, Australian Leaf Green, Light, Australian Green, Gold, Australian Leaf Green, Dark, Olive Green, Yellow Ochre, Umber Black, Burnt Umber Oil, Galleria Primers x 4.
I worked outside, en plein air. Outside was responsive both to my photographs and to the students’ own material engagements. Working outside to create Art is a rich artistic tradition, and I wanted to connect with this tradition.

Landscape painter John Constable (1834), wrote that his canvas soothed him into forgetfulness of the scene of turmoil and folly around him. He found refuge in his landscape paintings, writing “the sound of water escaping from mill dams etc. willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts, and brickwork, I love such things” (Constable, 1821).

Here, Constable describes his love of the natural state of outdoor things that would otherwise remain unnoticed, but with artistic attention become notable.
Like Constable (1821), Vincent van Gogh also highlighted the importance of making art in and with nature, prolifically referencing nature 266 times in his unabridged and unannotated letters curated by Michael Douma (2018).

Van Gogh wrote:

I have a terrible lucidity at moments when nature is so beautiful. I am not conscious of myself any more, and the pictures come to me as if in a dream (September 27, 1888).

Now as for me, I am doing very well down here, but it is because I have my work down here, and nature, and if I didn’t have that, I should grow melancholy (May, 20, 1888).

Is it not emotion, the sincerity of one’s feeling for nature, that draws us, and if the emotions are something so strong that one works without knowing one works…. (July 7, 1888).

For my part, I know nothing with any certainty, but the sight of the stars makes me dream in the same simple way as I dream about the black dots representing towns and villages on a map (Van Gogh in Gire, 1996, p. 91).

Yet you have to make a start, no matter how incompetent you feel in the face of inexpressible perfection, of the overwhelming beauty of nature (June 18, 1888).
Nature is a powerful and revered force for artists such as van Gogh and Constable. Though my A/r/tographic living inquiry, by giving attention to the complexity and contradictions of relations between people, things, and understandings of life experiences (Winters, 2010), I discovered nature was woven into the essence of the theory and practice of this study. In the way I found nature was ingrained in the creation, I worked freely in the way van Gogh (1888) describes “one works without knowing one works.”
I sat by the fire early in the morning for a week with my canvases.

Layering and pushing the oil paint to first make a mound,
    then a small hill,
    then a mountain in the distance.

    The fire warmed the paint, making it easy to move.

Ash caught on the wind and stuck to the paint, and smoke covered
    the surface of the canvas.

    Captured there forever.

I enjoyed the way nature was participating and interjecting into
    the artwork.

    Sometimes gently.                  Sometimes more forcefully.

    I felt that the wind blowing the canvas off the easel
    or the unexpected sprinkle of rain were just interposing reminders.

    For which I was grateful.
These interposing reminders made me think of Andy Goldsworthy who makes artworks with and in nature. Goldsworthy said “we often forget that we are nature. Nature is not something separate from us. So when we say that we have lost our connection to nature, we’ve lost our connection to ourselves” (Goldsworthy cited in Caponigro, 2014). Goldsworthy’s words reverberated throughout my creative reflections while I was painting.

I was nature.

As was the paint.

As was the canvas.

The charcoal.

The wind.

The soot.

All of it.

Just varied in expression.
By the week’s end, I had completed a quadriptych. I positioned the individual canvases alongside one another, to create a landscape in itself. Like Fred Williams the artist, I had tried to capture the light, scale and harsh beauty of the Australian landscape and also reminiscent of Williams, I considered the scale and positioning of the canvases (Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2018). I intended for the canvases to embrace the viewer through their size. To draw the viewer into the landscape, to experience my experience of material engagement, and flow, for themselves.
Following on from my paintings of the environment, I wanted to explore artmaking from the environment, to further explore material engagement (Malafouris, 2015) as an A/r/tographic exploration of the literature.

For example, I intended to explore the research that suggests occupations that resemble those of prehistoric men and women would be optimal for promoting wellness (Clark, 1997; Kosma, Bryant & Wilson, 2013; Wilcock, 1993). As hunter gatherer societies utilised material engagements to aide the provision of daily requirements (Wilcock, 1993), the making of subsistence materials enabled humans to better control the aspects of nature upon which they depended (Dissanayake, 1995).

This appropriation from nature, or engagements with natural materials, includes psychological or emotional components such as wellness (Dissanayake, 1995). As such, the use of clay, and creation of simple organic objects and vessels, was my interpretation of the occupation and making of subsistence objects (Dissanayake, 1995; Wilcock, 1993), which were also reflective of the student’s simple pinch pots and plates.

Thus, my own clay works were both embedded in the students’ work, and the literature, but also transcendent of them.

Dissanayake (1995, p. 88) asserts, that the Arts are “equally fundamentally emotional and sensual as well as cognitive.” This aspect of the literature is pertinent, as analysis of the students’ experiences clearly
demonstrates that they experienced flow, concentration, pleasure and interest when making their clay works (see Chapter 5 & 6 for detail). Aligning with Dissanayake’s (1995) research, the students had demonstrated emotional and sensual experiences during the VAP.

As flow is correlated with increased concentration, enjoyment, happiness, strength, motivation, self-esteem, optimism and future mindedness (Hanson, 2009), I aimed to personalise the link between working with clay and creative outcomes.

In this way, my own artmaking becomes further layered information, as well as analysis (Cutcher, 2015): a living inquiry (Irwin, 2004).

I chose to use a stoneware clay with heavy contrasting grit,
which I believed to be closer to an authentically organic state of clay (as opposed to a highly refined, processed clay). Whilst I usually work with Southern Ice Porcelain, I found the gritty clay had better buildable qualities.

The clay I used was a more refined version of a heavy grit clay usually used in classrooms, as it is easy to work with, and tolerates students’ building practices (Clayworks Australia, 2018), as observed in this research.

I also used a hand building technique, rather than casting, to explore the materiality of the clay, as the students had done. Hand building meant that I sculpted the pieces in a similar fashion to the students, pinching, kneading and forming with my hands.

I chose not to embellish my forms with coloured glazes, so as to draw attention to the hand building procedures undertaken in sculpting the forms. I used a clear glaze to highlight the material processes undertaken in their creation. The clear glaze enabled the pieces to exhibit the gritty quality of the clay emphasizing the organic forms of the pieces.

I sculpted simple functional organic vessels, reminiscent of Dissenayake’s (1995, p. 92) perspective that simple material productions such as “hand axes, spear throwers, digging sticks and clothing” are the simple material conditions for life and essential to the human condition.

The simple functionality of the items I sculpted was intentional.

Something to hold

water or seeds.

Perhaps store berries or flour.

Or sit unobscured as tribute
to sculptural form.
In creating the clay forms, I was also influenced by other sources of the past. In 2017, I created an educational program exploring the pottery of ancient Mesopotamia. Although I never taught this program, the irregularity of the pottery shapes and basic mark making drew my close attention. Perhaps, as Harris (2017) notes, humans long for a sense of intimacy with the far distant past, which is entered into through sensuous communion with the traces of past lives - in this case, material artefacts. Perhaps, the organic nature of the Mesopotamian pottery underlined my longing for a sense of intimacy with the far distant past.
Although I enjoyed the qualities of the Mesopotamian pottery, I was not aiming to replicate it. Rather I wanted to just explore the basic sense of the materials. It was important that I engaged with the clay, as this allowed me A/r/tographically to try to understand the clay material through the body; through touch rather than just by observing the students engagement with this material. A/r/tographers Irwin and Springgay (2008) state that, “understanding through touch reconfigures the ways in which we perceive objects, proving access to depth and surface, inside and outside” (p. 108).
Irwin and Springgay (2008) go on to analyse the way materiality and touch interconnect with A/r/tographic inquiry by acknowledging that,

“Touch expresses active involvement with the subject matter. Touch becomes a mode of knowing through proximity and relationality and poses different ways of making sense of the world, challenging the mechanisms of visual perception. Similarly, it draws attention to sensory experiences and knowledge that is interconnected with our bodies and with others.” (p. 107)
Here, Irwin and Springgay (2008) describe active involvement with the subject matter, in this case, through my making of these artworks. Through this material engagement I became more aware of the experiences of the students. Perhaps even deeply empathic with their artmaking experiences (Irwin & Springgay, 2008).
In summary, my A/r/tographic analysis, with and through living inquiry, is a responsive analytical act (Irwin, 2004). This analytical act is responsive to the information gathered in this study, and occurred through creative output as a part of the research process. My creative outputs and artworks expressed personal meanings that would otherwise be ineffable (Barone & Eisner, 2011). Meanings and deeper self-reflective thought on the nature of materials and the nature of self-creative output were illuminated, where they may have remained hidden without creative engagement (Barone & Eisner, 1997).

This chapter displays my performance of A/r/tography, and presented my A/r/tographic analysis and synthesis though artworks, and text. The A/r/tographic process resulted in evocative creative outcomes, many of which emerged unexpectedly as a part of the research process. The emergence of creative outcomes such as poetry, and the complex practices in the body of work, illuminate the autoethnographic components within A/r/tography. In the same vein as this chapter, this synopsis is also written in my own voice as journal reflection. This synopsis summarises the findings that were revealed and illuminated to me through my artmaking.

Creating artworks and interweaving the Australian landscape into my creative explorations, I internally unearthed and contemplated the significance and meaning of this Australian land to Australian education. My reconnection to the land, my slowing within the landscape, and my creative enactment of materials with and from the landscape, enabled me to deeply process who I was within the land.
Surely the sharpness and thinning of grass during this drought is within me.

The red dust in my nose goes into my lungs. Mixed in with my very breath.

The water that floods towns and breaks river banks is the same as the water within my body.

The sweat, triumphs and tears from farming families is in me; the food from their land is in my stomach.

The salt from the sea is matted in my hair.

The burning sun stings my darkened skin.

I love this country, this land, this soil.

I am grateful that this lands allows me to place my feet upon it. To dig into it. To reside upon it. To educate my son within it.

Because this land could take me if it wanted to.

It is so powerful and strong.

It is inspiring and gentle.

It is harsh and formidable.
Australia is a unique country, with diverse citizens, who live in a distinct land with rich cultures and heritage. Australia’s sunburnt red soil, eucalyptus trees, farming land, stretches of coast and winding river systems define us. The land in which we inhabit is a part of who we are, who our children are, where our communities live. Rather than looking globally for comparisons, competitions and initiatives, we should be focusing on the heart of Australia, both the land and the people and creating an education system that meets the needs of our diverse population. How can you compare a test score of a student living in metropolitan Singapore to a student living in the Australian outback studying via the School of the Air?

Within our diverse, multicultural population and unique landscape, it is difficult to understand why global targets have dominated Australian education. Alternately I suggest that Australian education should nurture the needs of every child and looking inward towards the needs of the Australian people. As an education system there is a need to prioritise our children’s lives and educational experiences to affect positive social development for the betterment of Australian society, and in turn, the world.

As every Australian must be afforded an education, it is my contention that the realisation of a prosperous, burgeoning education system advances
the positive growth of a flourishing and thriving Australian society. It is also my argument that the dominating emphasis on educational reform focussed on testing regimes, obscures the more fundamental purposes at the heart of education, and dangerously inhibits the functioning of schools, classrooms and the work of teachers.

While reforms can serve the betterment of education, it appears recent Australian reforms are not focussed on students…. but rather academic test scores. Reforms are so frequent that often the implementation of reforms fall short leaving little time for evaluation, reflection and refinement. The number of reforms have resulted in teachers being limited, constrained, and impeded from doing their core business which is educating and nurturing children and young people. Reforms appear to be led by economic priorities rather than the development of students which in my view, can be damaging and harmful to Australian children and Australian society. Australian children and young people deserve an education that supports them as whole citizens, as individual people.

We need to bring the focus of Australian education back to the needs of Australian children, so they in turn, contribute positively to humanity and the planet.
Chapter 8

Concluding Discussion

8.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter presents a concluding discussion of this study, framed through Barone and Eisner’s (1997) seminal Arts-based Educational Research [ABER] “criteria” (p. 101) (see Section 4.5.5). Barone and Eisner (1997) developed the ABER criteria since ABER research “plays by rules that differ to those applied to more conventional educational research” (p. 101) and thus cannot be judged by the same measures. ABER’s purpose is to enhance perspectives for the betterment of educational policy and practice through many layers of inquiry (McNiff, 1998) including artistic and creative forms (Barone & Eisner, 2006). In response to the varied and layered forms which ABER inquiry can include, Barone and Eisner (1997) developed the ABER criteria so that the merits of ABER research can be evaluated. Barone and Eisner (2011) note that essentially the criteria can facilitate the “perusal and judgement made by someone regarding the significance or value of what has been created” and what can be highlighted in the evaluation of a work (p.146).

The ABER criteria are not intended to assert standardisation, rather Barone and Eisner (2011) offer the criteria as a starting point for thinking about the appraisal of ABER works. It is for this reason that I have purposefully utilised the ABER criteria to frame this concluding discussion, as this research is an ABER thesis that uniquely contains surprise, imagination, and aspirations (Barone & Eisner, 2011), which should not be contained by more conventional research measures. In this way, I have purposefully framed this concluding discussion with Barone & Eisner’s (1997) ABER criteria to allow the reader to verify that ABER benchmarks have been met in this research (Mullins & Kiley, 2002). Barone and Eisner’s (1997) seminal work and seminal development of the ABER research criteria enabled me to focus the concluding discussion, and provided a scaffold to unite the final chapter with the content this thesis. This concluding discussion addresses each ABER criteria of illuminating effects, generativity, incisiveness (or educational
salience), and generalizability (Barone & Eisner, 1997) to inform the imaginative reviewer, as well as organise and enrich the dialogue within this chapter.

8.2 Illuminating Effects

The first criteria explored in this chapter is *illuminating effects* (Barone & Eisner, 1997). One distinguishing feature of ABER is the aesthetic and artistic qualities employed to illuminate and unveil educational experiences (Donoghue, 2009; Eisner, 2008) and reveal what would otherwise remain unnoticed (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Yuan & Hickman, 2015). Barone and Eisner (1997) note that the merits of ABER can, in part, be evaluated through these “illuminating effects” (p. 102), and as such form the framework for this conclusion.

This discussion explores the illuminating effects of my artistic practice in exploring students’ artmaking and students self-reported responses, which is followed by a discussion on the generativity of this research in Section 8.3. Firstly however, I will briefly discuss the methodological findings that were illuminated through the A/r/tographic renderings of living inquiry, contiguity and reverberations. In alignment with A/r/tographic methodology the renderings were not engaged evenly or simultaneously (Springgagy & Irwin, 2004), as the renderings living inquiry, contiguity and reverberations emerged at the forefront of this research (see Chapter 7, for example). These three renderings materialised throughout the phases of the inquiry, and are discussed in further detail below.

8.2.1 Illuminating Effects: Living Inquiry, Contiguity, Reverberations.

I engaged with this research through the processes of A/r/tography to explore the research aim and questions of this study, resulting in this concluding discussion of methodological and analytical findings. The A/r/tography of this study interwove the threads of theory, praxis, and poesis (Kampouropoulou, 2015), enabling educational research to be engaged with “through the process of Art making” (Beare, 2009, p. 164), to enhance meaning and broaden “ongoing conversations about educational policy and practice” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 102).
The A/r/tographic renderings inform the *doing* of the research (Springgay et al., 2005), and were saliently present throughout this study, interwoven as robust companions informing the research design, analysis, discussion and presentation of the thesis (see Chapter 5, 6 & 7 and Section 4.5.5). Living inquiry, contiguity and reverberations presented themselves through the process of the the A/r/tography and prompted me to respond aesthetically and sensitively through analysis and artworks that illuminated and unveiled particulars within the research (Barone & Eisner, 1997; 2011; Yuan & Hickman, 2015). As such, I have addressed these three renderings within the exploration of illuminating effects.

### 82.1.1 Living Inquiry

Living inquiry means to give attention to the complexity and contradictions of relations between people, things, and understandings of life experiences (Winters, 2010), and this research gave attention to the students’ Art experiences, their material engagements, and their experiences of flow. I deeply explored both my students’ experiences and understandings as well as my own understanding of my life experiences through my artmaking as I was compelled to return to the country to reflect upon how the ‘sawdust in my veins’ influences my own analytical processes and material engagements in artmaking (Chapter 7). In this way, the living inquiry continues to live on in this work and in me.

Through a living inquiry, the A/r/tography came to embody the research and analyse the understandings and experiences of the research, through in and with my own artworks, which allowed me to understand and analyse the students’ own experiences. As noted in Chapter 7, the creation of my bodies of work, and the analysis of students’ artworks and responses, emerged from my engagement with and though the research as a rendering of living inquiry (Irwin, 2004).

Additionally, living inquiry was rendered in this study through my very being as an A/r/tographer. I enacted through, between and with my A/r/tographic identities as the Artist / Researcher / Teacher to explore students’ material engagements in artmaking and flow by gathering the literature, designing the research, teaching the VAP,
and analysing and presenting the information within this thesis, as well as responding visually through practice. The A/r/tographer is intertwined, indistinguishable and imperative to A/r/tographic methodology (Irwin & Springgay. 2008), and thus my presence within the research is tangible. My presence may be read and felt within this research through my voice, my aesthetic, my design choices and my artmaking, which illuminated, foregrounded and unveiled the experiences (Donoghue, 2009; Eisner, 2008).

It was through artmaking that I was able to unearth the intricacies, subtleties and nuances of the students’ own experiences in artmaking. Through artmaking, the information gathered from the students became layered as I responded to their experiences and embodied that experience through a living inquiry. For example, the students sculpted in clay and I sculpted with clay. I embodied their experience to explore what the experience of material engagement felt like for the students. I felt the grit on my skin, I felt the mud under my nails. I focussed my attention on the sensation of sculpting with my fingertips, creating an artwork from a damp lump of dirt.

I glazed my clay sculpture, just as the students did. As such, I furthered my understanding of what it felt like to work with the unpredictable nature of glazes. I felt the risk from the need to surrender to the unknown, as the glaze erratically transformed in the kiln. I felt what it was like to relinquish control and to trust the creative process. I realised the relationship of trust that is built among peers, as I waited for the piece to come out of the kiln unscathed. I felt the elation of handling a functional and beautiful artwork that I knew I had sculpted from mud, by myself.

I painted too, like the students. I used painting as a reflective tool, as the students did. I experienced the movement of the paint; the creative union between paper, brush and body. I felt the clarity in my mind that was evoked through the task. I felt the liberation that comes during and after creative expression.

I felt the flow that the students experienced through Visual Arts material engagements. I kept the students’ written self-reports in my mind as I artistically re-enacted, created and experienced their artmaking tasks. I questioned
my own experiences, looking for similarities and differences of their described experiences. I embodied the research aim, just as the students did.

Through this embodiment (Leggo, Sinner, Irwin, Pantaleo, Gouzouasis & Grauer, 2011), this study ultimately demonstrated that students’ artistic explorations would not have been as realised in quite the same way in the inquiry had I not had the experience of creating through my own visual responsiveness. Thus, through my artistic practice, I absorbed and synthesized the students’ own experiences in an analytical process of claymaking, glazing and painting. It was therefore through this living inquiry that my Arts practice illuminated the students’ experiences tangibly and implicitly, just as their experiences illuminated my own. My Art explorations deepened and enriched the research, as well as deepening and enriching my own practice, enabling my analysis to resonate with the experiences and meanings the students shared, in our collective artistic and written responses.

8212 Contiguity. The A/r/tographic rendering of contiguity is ubiquitous throughout Chapters 5, 6 & 7, and reveals the power of ABER to bring together Art and graphy; image and word (Irwin 2004). The visual and textual elements thoughtfully positioned and designed within this thesis complement, refute and extend one another (Springgay et al., 2005). I purposefully rendered contiguity, intensifying the meanings within the text through artworks, which became a central feature within this A/r/tography. The architecture of engagement (Lasczik, 2018) was purposefully and self-consciously designed and enacted in the many readings possible in this work.

Chapter 5 highlighted the tensions within contiguity as I interwove the ‘exhibition’ (designed to fit within the limitations of the thesis form), showcasing students’ artworks in-between the more prosaic academic discussion. The provision of the ‘gallery’ experience enables the exhibition of images to flow uninterrupted until balanced with the text, activating and proposing a thematic change. The exhibition presented the students’ processes with their material engagements, documenting the sculptures from wet clay to bone dry pieces, to bisque fired works, and finally completed glazed sculptures.
This contiguity between image and text in Chapter 5 enabled the visual narrative to emerge (see Section 5.4). This emergence of the visual narrative intentionally positioned the reader to make connections and assumptions beyond the obvious, thereby provoking the readers’ heuristic interactive engagement (Barone & Eisner, 1997). The visual narrative in Chapter 5 portrayed the students’ creation of artworks, and demonstrated the social, cooperative and collaborative behaviours prevalent within the Visual Arts classroom during the program.

Contiguity was central to the discussion in Chapter 6 which analysed students’ self-reported written responses. Not only was tension between text and image intertwined through the academic analysis, yet it was also between students’ reflections and the artworks I created to frame, hold and elevate the students’ words. The consideration I gave to discern the difference in texts between my writing, presentation and students’ reflections in Chapter 6 was deliberate and deeply contemplated.

Promoting empathy (Lasczik, 2018), I individually considered and nurtured students’ written responses through the framing of each reflection within artwork that considered balance and harmony, which can be present within contiguity. As revealed in Chapter 7, Australian flora and fauna came to the foreground of my own art explorations, and by paying attention to the contiguity between Art and text I created the frames for the students’ responses (see Chapter 6). In doing so, I amplified each students’ written response by highlighting its impact, placement on the page, and positioning the reading, cradling it on the page.

I left my ‘signature,’ my response through the presence of aesthetic form and the architecture of engagement (Lasczik, 2018). Through my artistic engagement with and through the written responses, I emphasised the meaning contained within the students’ reflections engaging contiguity, creating meaning in the in-between spaces of Art and text (Beare, 2009). I thus foreground and illuminate the significance of student voices. The students’ perspectives revealed that they were reflective and insightful about their own education in the Visual Arts classroom and in broader educational research contexts (see Section 6.3.3). This agency of the students is a deeply satisfying outcome.
8.2.3 Reverberations. Artography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of Artmaking and writing to create enhanced meanings (Sinner, et al., 2006). It is the rendering reverberations which gives attention to these enhanced meanings through giving attention to shifts in new meaning, new awareness, and new discoveries (Beare, 2009; Winters, 2010). I gave attention to the reverberations within the research, which revealed a new awareness of persistent patterns of human interests (Dissanayake, 1995), flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; 1993; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009) and material engagement (Malafouris, 2004; 2010) in practical educational contexts (see Chapter 5 & 6). Specifically, these reverberations or new knowledge affirms that patterns of aesthetic interests, making special and a flow-inducing propensity once engaged with the materials of artmaking, are important as these are potentially everyday activities in a well-stocked, well-supported and engaging and challenging art classroom, anywhere in Australia and indeed, the world.

These new insights regarding persistent patterns of human interests, flow and material engagements are discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 in detail both textually and through a particular aesthetic and visual narrative uniquely enabled by the engagement of ABER research methodologies (Barone & Eisner, 1997) – specifically, a/r/tography. This layered complexity in presentation is a reverberation within and of itself; it honours the processes of the study, the agency and enjoyment of the students, as well as their thinking and offers original ways to complete and present the PhD thesis in ways that honour the theoretical thrust of the study. The intentional crafting of this research text to enable these reverberations was designed for a perceptive, proactive and imaginative reader (Barone & Eisner, 1997; 2011). The reverberations were thus evident in the crafting of form, to stimulate an actual material engagement in the thesis itself, and in its desire to engender a flow experience for the reader. Like all ABER works, this thesis thus relies on the discernment and appreciation of the reader (Barone & Eisner, 1997), particularly to engage with the ambiguity of the aesthetic and artistic experiences within the research (Lasczik, 2018), that are both embedded in, and transcendent of the research.

8.3 Incisiveness: Educational Salience

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Barone and Eisner (1997) note that ABER works must also be incisive. Incisiveness in the context of ABER, means works must focus on educationally salient issues and questions, addressing what is educationally significant (Barone & Eisner, 1997). This PhD has demonstrated its educational salience, since the research aim and questions are concerned with educational issues within early-adolescent and Visual Arts educational contexts and engagements.

One such salient educational issue that the research explores is the lack of insight and perhaps understanding into the benefits of practical-based subjects (Roberts, 2017); a dangerous underestimation of the value of Visual Arts
(Ewing, 2010). This was addressed through the literature, attesting to persistent patterns of material engagements (Dissanayake, 1995; Morriss-Kay, 2009), promotion of the students’ own reflections, where compelling insight was provided by the students’ themselves into the affirmative value of Visual Arts in their educational experiences in Year 9 (see Chapter 5 & 6).

Through utilising the students’ own actions, thoughts, words and voices, a persuasive argument for the unique value of the Visual Arts is presented to support policy makers in promoting educational improvements in schools (Robertson, 2017). Students’ actions highlighted their active engagement with Visual Arts materials and underlined their proclivity to make special (Dissanayake, 1995). The students’ reflections emphasised the myriad and powerful benefits of their active engagement in Visual Arts and noted them to include flow, engagement, happiness and enjoyment, which can be experienced through the artmaking process. This is a powerful finding.

The elements of character education (Berkowitz, Althof & Beir, 2012), student engagement, and positive learning and social experiences (see Section 6.3.3) demonstrated within the Visual Arts classroom, demonstrate the potential for a change in educational priorities beyond curriculum studies only. In addition to curriculum studies, schools ought to foster the development of the whole student to enable them to act in socially effective and productive ways (Berkowitz, Althof & Beir, 2012; McGrath, 2018). This argument is supported by the literature describing that early adolescence as a unique and demanding time in human life (Jaworska & MacQueen, 2015), which requires expert guidance in the school setting (Hudson & Hudson, 2012).

The unique challenges that face early adolescents in the context of middle schooling (Hudson & Hudson, 2012; Pendergast & Bahr, 2010), such as increased risk-taking, emotional activity, autonomy (Jaworska & MacQueen, 2015), dis-engagement and alienation (Pendergast, Renshaw & Harris, 2010), must be given particular attention in middle and secondary schooling. The clear potential revealed in this study for the Visual Arts to engage early adolescents and provide opportunities for students to practise autonomy, experience flow (and the myriad of
benefits associated with flow) (Burkowitz, 2014; Csíkszentmihályi, 2009; Hanson, 2009), and exercise social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours within the classroom, demonstrates this area of research is incisive and educationally salient. This study thus demonstrated educational salience and incisiveness, however there were also questions raised as a generative outcome of this study as generativity echoes emergence within complexities (Kalin, Barney & Irwin, 2009).

8.4 Generativity

Generativity in ABER refers to the ability of the research to promote and encourage further questions (Barone & Eisner, 1997; 2011). Barone and Eisner (1997) write that ABER works should be judged on their generativity, and the research text’s ability to generate questions rather than answering them. Interestingly, many of the generative questions arose from the delimitations of this study; delimitations being areas that the study is not designed or intended to cover (Simon & Goes, 2013), thus logically providing areas which incite more questions. Many questions arose alongside the three research questions. As such, for continuity, I will discuss the generativity of each research question as they were exposed in this inquiry, and discuss each delimitation within the context of each of the questions. These can also perform as openings for further research.

8.4.1 Generativity: Research Question One.

The first question that this research posed explored material engagement in the Visual Arts. To recap, this question was addressed through explorations within the literature (see Chapter 2), my own A/r/togrophic explorations (see Chapter 7), and within the Visual Arts Program (VAP) (see Chapters 5 & 6). The review of the literature knitted together a variety of readings from the fields of anthropology, Art history and biology, establishing the origins, purposes and effects that material engagement has had on the evolution of the human species (see Section 2.3), persistent patterns of human material engagement and the definitions of material engagement (see Section 3.3).
My artmaking explored the material engagements of photography, claymaking and painting as I responded to both the students’ works and reflections, and the Australian landscape as I interwove my own practice with the VAP experiences (see Chapter 7). The students’ artmaking addressed the first research question, and the findings were discussed and demonstrated through a comprehensive display of their artworks (see Chapter 5).

As mentioned, this question explored material engagements in the Visual Arts and was generative, insomuch as it opened questions for further exploration and inquiry. Thus, whilst I discussed material engagements from an anthropological perspective in the literature review (see Chapter 2), noting the importance of tools, stone, and rock markings to early human aesthetic activity, I was limited in the breadth of the discussion regarding Art history due to the constraints of the PhD. I was unable to address the archaeological record in its entirety as it is beyond the scope of this study to address all and any traits related to Arts making (Coolidge & Overmann, 2012) going back in prehistory 77,000 years (Spivey, 2005).

8.4.1.2 Questions and Recommendation for Further Research 1. Therefore the historical human interest in making Art with a variety of materials beyond those discussed in Chapter 2, lends itself to the possibility of further exploration. Cave painting, knapping, body adornment, land Art, and the use of natural materials such as shells, sticks, rocks, pigments and animal products (de’Errico et al., 2003; Dutton, 2009; Morriss-Kay, 2009) can further illuminate students’ perceptions of artmaking with materials beyond clay, weaving and painting, as anthropological and archaeological perspectives are incumbent (Malafouris, 2015; Malafouris & Renfew, 2010; Roberts, 2015).

Despite being limited in the breadth of discussion regarding Art history in Chapter 2, it was possible to expand on the line of inquiry in the literature into stone sculpture, as I threaded examples of my students’ engagements of stone carving into my personal orientation to the research (Section 4.3.2.1). In the personal orientation I was able to discuss my observations of students’ clear engagement with the activity of stone carving, thus making the link to a historically significant method of Arts manufacture. It is here where I made the connections between historical Art
forms and student engagement in artmaking, such as that I had experienced with the students’ stone carving, and this very link inspired this research, and thus is generative and abundant with questions which can be explored further, as noted below.

A vast variety of Visual Art materials demonstrate scope to further explore how Art materials affect students experiences of flow and engagement in school contexts, which requires further attention, inquiry and questions. For example, *Can some Art materials be more engaging to students than others? Which Art materials result in students’ flow experiences? Under what conditions? What is the relationship between Art materials and the embodied interaction required to engage with any given Art material? Does this effect how we understand flow in practical subjects?* Such questions (and others) are potentially rich with possibility.

Additionally, the variety of Visual Arts materials may also be informative in gauging how artmaking provides for positive reinforcement that may lead to wellness and healing (Stucky & Noble, 2010). Researchers (Clark, 1997; Kosma, Bryant & Wilson, 2013; Wilcock, 1993) suggest that occupations that resemble those of prehistoric men and women would be optimal for promoting health and well-being for modern humans as is touched upon in this study. Therefore, exploring the relationship between artmaking materials and the health and well-being of students is an avenue for further research. Questions generated include: *Is there a difference between students’ well-being in practical artmaking lessons compared to theoretical or digital-based lessons? Is it possible to influence students’ well-being through specialised Art programs? Which materials would those programs engage to be most effective?*

Essentially, as confirmed in this study in part, the myriad materials used in artmaking that have persisted throughout human history, demonstrate that artmaking is a vital concern to human life (Dissanayake, 1995). We are only just beginning to understand how Art materials, particularly those used by prehistoric peoples (Wilcock, 1993), may be vital for human health and happiness, particularly in educational contexts. This study further affirms such a
position, however further research into Visual Arts materials that is reflective of anthropology, may afford researchers the opportunity to reconcile the position of Art in education and role Art plays in student engagement and more within the school setting.

**8.4.2 Generativity: Research Question Two.**

Related to the previous discussion, the second question that this research presented, explored the outcomes of material engagements in a Year 9 Visual Arts classroom, and questioned if those material engagements were aligned with persistent patterns of human aesthetic activity. The persistent patterns of human aesthetic activity in this context, related to the students’ propensity to *make special* through the transformation, decoration and embellishment of their artworks (Dissanayake, 1995; 2003). The transformation, decoration and embellishment of artworks in this study was revealed in the gallery of students’ works (see Section 5.3), where students demonstrated their intention to and accomplishment of making special through their processes and aesthetic engagements with the Art materials (see Section 5.4.1).

In addition to the students’ artworks, the literature presented (see Chapter 2) how Arts manufacture became a persistent pattern of human interest, as it appears that the Arts provide for biological needs (Dissanayake, 1992; Dutton, 2009; Fleming, et al., 2014; Haidel, 2010; Moriss-Kay, 2009). Biological needs that were noted within the literature include the social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours that accompany Art experiences (Ellerin, 2015; Stout, 2016), given that Art originated as a communal activity (Dissanayake, 2003). During the VAP, I witnessed, noted and the students recorded their experiences of social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours (Section 5.4.2) which were then presented through visual narratives.

Social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours exhibited by the students in this study were thus largely unearthed in my A/r/tographic observation and analysis, and evidence of them can been seen in the photographic documentation (see Section 5.4.2), student self-reported reflections (see Section 6.3.3), and A/r/tographic
observations (see Section 5.4.2), all of which were revealed post-research in the analysis and discussion phase. It is important to note here that the students were not guided in their self-reported reflections to consider the social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours in the classroom, since the study was focused on flow. However it was apparent, and therefore, if further research would be directed to respond to the social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours in the classroom, students may reveal further insights into their own social, cooperative, and collaborative potentials in the school setting which enhance engagement. Such enhancements can have myriad benefits for learning (Anderman, 2002; Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

8.4.2.2 Questions Raised and Recommendation for Further Research 2. The social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours displayed in the Visual Arts classroom in this study are valuable. Schools ought to increase social interaction opportunities to enhance engagement and academic achievement (Crosswell, Bahr, Pendergast & Newhouse-Maiden, 2010), and thus the significance for Visual Arts to offer social, cooperative, and collaborative behavioural opportunities beyond the core curriculum is notable for educational stakeholders.

Such social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours are central to the well-being of social groups within school communities (Luengo Kanacri et al., 2017). This study amply demonstrated that these behaviours do indeed occur in the Visual Arts classroom. One further question to be explored, which stems from this finding is: What role does Visual Arts participation play in the socialisation aspects and well-being of students within school communities?

Social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours in school environments can also contribute to positive adult outcomes such as improved mental health, self-esteem, and enhanced peer relations (Luengo Kanacri et al., 2017). The notable inclusion of the term adult outcomes (Luengo Kanacri et al., 2017), demonstrates the potential for longitudinal studies which explore the social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours in the Visual Arts classroom and how practices, pedagogies and material engagements can enhance learning in other disciplines. For example, a useful question to further explore through inquiry is: What are the effects that social, cooperative, and collaborative
behaviours in the Visual Arts classroom have on peer relationships in the senior secondary years and post-school life?

Schooling should provide for a full range of needs for early adolescent students (Middle Years Schooling Association, 2008), and indeed all students, such as the need to experience belongingness (Osterman, 2000). The theme of students’ belongingness was not explored in this study, however middle school students have an intense need to belong (Jong, 2010), and the driving force of social interaction is essential to early adolescents (Crosswell, 2010). Both flow and educational engagement are necessary for adolescent belonging within the school environment (Schall, Wallace & Chhun, 2016). Therefore, an inquiry question could be posed: Does social, cooperative, and collaborative behaviours, and the experience of flow in the Visual Arts classroom, promote feelings of belonging for adolescents in school contexts?

8.4.3 Generativity: Research Question Three.

The third question that this research presented, explored if flow occurred in the Year 9 Visual Arts classroom. In this study, flow, psychological flow or optimal experience pertained to the theory developed by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (1993) and sits within the engagement wedge of the PERMA well-being model developed by Martin Seligman (2011; 2018). The term flow is used to describe a positive psychological state which is the “holistic sensation an individual has when he or she acts with total involvement with an occupation” (Reid, 2011, p. 51).

Students indicated that they indeed experienced occasions of flow in this study, and this is a consistent finding. This is significant to early adolescent education, as research has demonstrated that teenagers report being “significantly more happy, strong, satisfied, creative, and concentrated” when in a state of flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1993, p. 202). Students in this study self-reported feeling concentrated, happy, and interested in the creative expression the VAP afforded them (see Section 6.3). This is an important finding.
Flow is associated with positive outcomes in adolescents such as resilience, enjoyment, motivation, self-esteem, well-being, optimism and future mindedness (Hanson, 2009), and the occurrence of flow within the school setting also develops academic talents further than students who are in flow less often (Csíkszentmihályi, 1993). Furthermore, flow is also essential to creativity and well-being (Nelson & Rawlings, 2010). The occurrence of flow allows individuals to flourish and function at their best (Burkewitz, 2014), and after an experience of flow, people view themselves as stronger and more vital (Csíkszentmihályi, 2009).

8.4.3.1 Questions Raised and Recommendation for Further Research 3. This study explored flow experiences and flow outcomes through an A/r/tography. The A/r/tographic methodology enabled an exploration of the processes, complexities and ambiguities inherent in Visual Arts experiences, and resulted in a generative discussion of findings that illuminated students flow experiences (see Chapters 5 & 6). As generative and illuminating as A/r/tography is in this study, qualitative research methodologies in the Arts do not “readily allow for generalising of research findings across projects” (Ewing, 2011, p.16). This leads to a contemplation of the potential to explore flow and Visual Arts making in educational contexts through quantitative and mixed method methodologies.

This study revealed that students experienced flow (see Section 6.3), and the presentation and discussion of students’ flow experiences were analysed through the organisational themes of flow theory (Csíkszentmihályi, 1993; 1997; 1998). Questions generated by this study, which may be better suited to quantitative and mixed method research studies are: What percentage of students experience flow in a VAP? How many students experienced flow when working with each material (clay; paint; weaving)? Do these correlate?

Whilst this A/r/tographic study was illuminating, insightful and generative for the reasons discussed in this chapter and elsewhere, some aspects of qualitative studies, such as number analysis, may be more palatable to educational stakeholders when looking to implement VAP’s based on the likelihood of flow experiences. Stakeholders may find comparative studies useful, such as exploring Is the occurrence of flow in Visual Arts greater
or lesser than other subject areas such as Maths and Science? How do students who experience flow in the Visual Arts classroom compare academically in other subjects to students who do not?

8.5 Generalizability

Barone and Eisner (1997) note that generalizability in a research text relates to its relevance to phenomena outside the research text, and the researcher’s ability to allow the reader to make connections that were not there before. However, the term generalizability is somewhat dated in the context of the development of ABER as beyond qualitative paradigms. Rather, the term generalizable ought to be replaced with generative, universal, authentic. It is not the work of a/r/tography to generate findings that are generalizable. However, this study may be considered to be generative, universal, authentic in that it threaded together Visual Arts, middle schooling, and flow experiences, to broader educational issues highlighted through students own voices, making new and original connections within the field of Arts-based educational research (see Section 6.3.2.2). The new and original connections presented in this study speak to the gap in Arts research in middle schools, where Ewing (2011) notes research is needed “in order to broaden evidence-based findings in the field” (Ewing, 2011, p. 16). It is important to note that the culture of the school with respect to Art is not the focus of this inquiry as this is not an ethnography, so notions of culture are not examined. It is acknowledged that the ‘culture’ (more accurately the ontology and epistemology) of the artist/teacher, researcher is evermore important in this work. These aspects are picked up in the Personal Orientation (see.75) and the suite of a/r/tographic analyses in Chapter 7.

This study contributed unique evidence-based findings to in the area of engagement with and through Visual Arts in middle school. The middle years of schooling are viewed as a time when students are at the greatest risk of disengagement from learning, with student motivation and engagement being viewed as “critical” (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 10). Therefore, this ABER body of work revealing early adolescent students experienced a sense of engagement by experiencing flow through their participation in the Visual Arts, is noteworthy.
As this study makes connections to educational phenomena outside the research text, reader is able to observe that adolescent students have needs beyond a limited range of curricula areas (Luengo Kanacri et al., 2017). Through the power of student voice (Hunter & Forest, 2010), this study showed that early adolescent students’ interests are engaged in the Visual Arts, which provides a myriad of social, psychological and educational benefits (Cutcher, 2013; 2014), as well as enabling students to release their imaginations, identify alternatives, make connections and newly inform their encounters of the world (Green, 1995).
Paradoxically however, educational administration and policy in Australia continues to promote an educational agenda that supports the exclusion of the Arts from STEM and other standardised and curriculum narrowing in schools. This research demonstrates that an Australian school was able cater to students’ interests in the Visual Arts, as well as STEM as a usual part of the school timetable. This is an ideal outcome, as curriculum ought to be broad as well as deep. This study also demonstrated that through the VAP, students’ capacities and interests in the Visual Arts were enabled rather than limited, resulting in engagement and flow experiences for these early adolescents in their school setting.

Unfortunately, in an era of standardisation and national testing, the teachers’ capacity in the classroom has been reduced (Campbell, 2018). Campbell (2018) notes further that,

it is a fundamental paradox of teaching that teachers, who have the potential to be creative individuals, are placed, and asked to function productively and with a continuous sense of the importance of their role, within a schooling system that often seems to constrain them and reduce their capacity for creativity. (p. 7)

Similarly, students capacities should be enabled in the “dynamic spaces of possibility where individuals and cultures come into contact with one another creating interstitial conditions for learning” (Irwin, 2018, p.207). Each student possesses intrinsic worth as a human and should be afforded educational opportunities for a meaningful life (Baez, 2005). Young people are positively changed through Arts educational experiences (Polin & Rabkin, 1999) as Arts education has been shown to engage multiple skills and abilities, nurturing the development of cognitive, social and personal competencies (Fiske, 1999). The convincing consensus on the “existence of a strong positive relationship between participation in the Arts and benefits for individual learners” (Ewing, 2010, p. 13), demonstrates the positive effects derived by Arts rich education programs (Ewing, 2011). Arts experiences are rich with meaning, and this study also resulted in methodological findings.
8.6 Methodological Findings

The onto-epistemological position of the study is within the A/r/tography. The research is deeply entwined with my own ways of knowing and being in the world as an artist, researcher and teacher and the spaces in-between as knowings, beings and becomings (Irwin, 2004). The methodological findings acknowledge my own struggle to recognise the taken for granted deep knowledge of Art teacher’s teaching and Art practices. I found it difficult to critically reflect upon my own practices and honour them explicitly, as in the whirlwind of secondary teaching, I have learnt to operate somewhat automatically upon my experiences and onto-epistemology. There is no other way for me to be and knowing the world because, for me, Art experiences and Art works are how I come to know, and see the world. I am always becoming: as an artist, researcher, and teacher, as I am always becoming A/r/tography (Irwin, 2013, emphasis added). My struggle to acknowledge, recognise, and appreciate my teaching and artistic expertise was a genuine challenge in this work, and perhaps a worthy finding in and of itself. It was the lens as researcher, which has enabled an authentic recognition of my artist and teacher selves, practices and agency. The layers within the research and the learning environment I created through the VAP, that were determined by the context (the school, myself as teacher and curriculum designer, communicator and artist), the types of works (the curriculum design, the resources and spaces available) and the ways I designed the inquiry, communicated with the students, developed relationships with them and set the learning culture, for the possibility of flow, which resulted in this inquiry, as gloriously idiosyncratic, deeply iterative and fully generative.

The idiosyncratic, iterative and generative nature of this study, synergised with my being and knowing within the design and presentation of the study. The thesis document became an Art product in itself, almost subconsciously. It is because I am an artist that this research document is wholly aesthetic, is an artwork, is a designed art object – I could do it no other way. As discussed throughout the thesis (see Sections 2.5 & 5.4.1), Art products are the result of the human proclivity to make special (Dissanayake, 1995). The behaviour of making special, or aesthetic marking and design as something special, demonstrates a human intention to make something more than ordinary. More than
curiosity and insight, making special includes a sensual pleasure and delight rolled into the human desire for new experiences (Dissanayake, 1995). Making special also emphasises importance, Dissanayake (1995, p. 97) notes that,

…making special, apart from perceiving or solving problems, takes ordinary things and makes them more than ordinary, heightens their emotional effect, or- to say the same thing- uses sensual/emotional was of drawing attention to them emphasising their importance and significance…

It was through my innate desire to creatively synthesise information, aesthetically present and process new experiences that this thesis itself became an artefact of making special. Through my own emotional and aesthetic investment in the study, the importance and significance of artistic experiences were emphasised, and resulted in a thesis that flourished into something more than ordinary. Whilst I have previously discussed the detailed design choices of elements such as paper colour and texture overall the thesis design and presentation represents much more than a series of cognisant choices.

The thesis overall, when realised as a collection of a body of works, is a sensual, intellectual and aesthetic experience – it is the PhD thesis made special. The behaviour of making special was essential within the thesis to satisfy my need (and indeed the universal human need) for “the resolution of tension, the emotion of wonder, the urge to explain, and the instinct for workmanship” (Dissanayake, 1995, p.10) which I explored through my Art and design sensibilities. In many ways, these choices were made at the subconscious level – I can know in no other way than as artist and teacher. The thesis is therefore a further, highly layered, deeply nuanced example of how my behavioural tendency to make special reinforced the materiality of the thesis, and thus underlined and solidified the very subject that the thesis explored.

The materiality of this thesis, not only provides evidence of explorations of material engagements, but is an example of materiality within and of itself. Indeed the reader’s handling of the thesis is indeed a material engagement
with an Art product. For this reason, the thesis’ weight, binding, matt white cover, fabric wrapping and cotton gloves serve to enhance the experience and unify the reader with the very materiality of the thesis. The innate human behaviour of making special and material engagement coalesce to provide an immersive experience for the reader of this thesis. Through my own desire to provide an immersive encounter, I heightened the emotional effect of the experience for the reader through a deliberate architecture of engagement (Lasczik, 2018) and emphasised the significance of the thesis’ content through the materiality of the thesis itself as the reader holds the thesis in their hands and feels its weight, texture and material presence.

8.7 Chapter Synopsis

Art has the power to bind communities together, cultivate individuality, offer consolation in moments of life crisis and edify the soul (Dutton, 2009). Students who study the Arts, outperform peers who do not; are more likely to enjoy their learning, stay in school, attend regularly and graduate; and are more likely to display pro-social behaviour (Catterall, 2009; Cutcher, 2014). It is no accident that the myriad of benefits the students self-reported in this study align with the suggestion Art is an ancient, persistent pattern of human interest, capacity and preference; and indeed is a part of the very nature of who we are (Dissanayake, 2005; Dutton, 2009). The students I worked with exhibited an aptitude for artmaking which revealed consistent patterns of human interests in creative material engagement.

The Visual Arts is important to humans and always has been (Dissanayake, 2005). It would seemingly go against our very nature to overlook the value of Visual Art material engagements to education and to life. As Dutton (2009, p.243) reminds us,
We remain like our ancestors in admiring skill and virtuosity. We find stylish personal expression arresting, as well as the sheer wonder of seeing the creation of something new. Art’s imaginary worlds are still vivid in the theatre of the mind, saturated with the most affecting emotions, the focus of rapt attention, offering intellectual challenges that give pleasure in being mastered. And in over all this, we still share our ancestors a feeling of recognition and communion with other human beings through the medium of art. Preoccupied we are with the flashy media and buzzing gizmos of daily experience, we forget how close we remain to the prehistoric women and men who first found beauty in the world.

Their blood theirs runs in our veins.

Our art instinct is theirs.
Appendix A
Definition of key terms

**Art:** all Art involves the process of “making special” (Dissanayake, 1995, p. 42) or aesthetic marking of something as special with the intention of making something more than ordinary. As such, the question of if one thing or another is ‘Art’ becomes irrelevant as it is the essential behavioural core of “making special” which is relevant (Dissanayake, 1995, p.58).

**A/r/tography:** an Arts-based research methodology that inquires into educational phenomenon through artistic and aesthetic means engaging in pedagogical inquiry (La jevic & Springgay, 2008).

**Flow:** A theory developed by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (1993), to describe a positive psychological state which is the “holistic sensation an individual has when he or she acts with total involvement with an occupation” (Reid, 2011, p. 51). Teenagers report being “significantly more happy, strong, satisfied, creative, and concentrated” when in a state of flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1993, p. 202). Flow is one aspect of the well-being (P) Positive Emotion; (E) Engagement; (R) Positive Relationships; (M) Meaning; and (A) Accomplishment/Achievement [PERMA] model. The PERMA model, developed by Martin Seligman, depicts the five core elements of psychological well-being and happiness (Pascha, 2017). Flow sits as an element of engagement within the PERMA well-being model. For this study, engagement is a sub-section of well-being, but overarching subject of flow. Engagement is necessary for adolescent belonging and engagement within the school environment (Schall, Wallace & Chhuon, 2016).

**Material Engagement Theory:** a theoretical framework developed by Lambros Malafouris (2010; 2013) as a creative collaboration between archaeology and neuroscience to understand human material-mind relationships (Roberts, 2015).

**Neuroarchaeology:** the pre-eminence of material culture, embodiment, time and long term change in the study of mind, brain and culture (Malafouris, 2010).

**Occupation:** refers to the active process of a person engaged in a goal-directed, intrinsically-gratifying, and culturally-appropriate activity (Evans, 1987). In this study, terms object and material are interchangeable with occupationn as describing the act of occupational or material engagement.

**Self-Directed:** directed at oneself, under one’s own control or showing initiative and the ability to organise oneself (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018).
**Visual Arts (in Australian Secondary Education):** includes the fields of Art, craft and design. Visual Arts develops student’s perceptual and conceptual understanding, critical reasoning and practical skills. Visual arts has the capacity enrich the lives of students, encouraging them to reach their creative and intellectual potential (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010).
Appendix B

Sample of students' self-reported reflections to reflective prompts

1. Discuss the possible relationship between art as a subject in school and your well-being/empowerment.
4. Discuss something you learned in your presentation/lecture?

I learned that...

5. Do you think your comments on the feedback form are fair and accurate?

Fair and accurate, neither, or not applicable.

6. Would you do this again?

Yes/No

10/10

Art is a different subject. It's amazing.

Because I get excited when I find out more.
Appendix C

Ethics Approval Letter

Office of Research

SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCU HREC)
NOTIFICATION
Expedited Application Approval

To:        Jemma Poloker and Dr Lisa Lascziki,
From:      Professor Bill Boyd
           Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)
Project name:  Historical forms and contemporary agendas: Trends, transitions and transformations in Australian Visual Arts Classroom
Approval Date:  18 September 2017
Approval Number:  ECN-17-131
Expiry Date:  17 September 2020

Dear Jemma and Lisa,

Thank you for the expedited ethics application received 20 June 2017. Your application was considered by the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), Professor Bill Boyd, and found to be of merit, low risk and meeting the Statement principles.

I am pleased to advise you that ethics approval has been granted for this research project. Please note the ethics approval number above.

Your responsibilities under this approval are as follows:

1. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will report to the SCU HREC annually in the specified format and notify HREC when the project is completed.
2. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will immediately notify the SCU HREC, on the appropriate form, of any change in protocol.
3. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the SCU HREC if the project is discontinued at a participating site before the expected completion date, with reasons provided.
4. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the SCU HREC of any plan to extend the duration of the project past the approval period listed above and will submit any associated required documentation.
5. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will immediately report anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project on the Adverse Events form.

Researchers conducting a study in a country other than Australia, need to be aware of any protocols for that country and ensure that they are followed ethically and with appropriate cultural sensitivity.

Should you have any queries about the SCU HREC’s consideration of your project please contact ethics.letters@usc.edu.au. The SCU HREC Terms of Reference, membership and standard forms are available from http://usc.edu.au/humanresearch/documentation.php?cat_id=2775&cat=2725.

SCU HREC wishes you every success in your research.

Kind Regards,

[Signature]

per
Prof. Bill Boyd
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee
Appendix D

Australiana Tea Towels
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