

# Making meaning with narrative shapes: what arts-based research methods offer educational practitioners and researchers

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## Abstract

Arts-based inquiry which emphasises the language, practices and forms commonly employed in the arts is offering rich opportunities for exploring knowledge, meaning, and learning beyond creative arts education.

Educational researchers and practitioners across a range of educational settings and sectors are recognising the potential of arts-based inquiry for explicating the complex realities, changing issues, emotions and dilemmas that constitute educational worlds. And for revealing the complexity underpinning critical educational questions such as ‘what does it mean to teach?’

This paper illustrates the remarkable meaning-making and pedagogical capabilities of arts-based research methods. It offers a sonata-styled narrative that tracks the journey of an early childhood educator as she engages in a personal and collaborative inquiry into what it means to teach. It follows her experimentation with arts-based shapes—story, drawing, and metaphor—artistic and literary shapes that worked to access her knowledge. Shapes that became visible products of reflection, and acted as catalysts for awareness, knowledge construction and transformation. Shapes that like torches, shed light on the particular educational dilemmas and situations that mattered to her, and helped her see, think and respond differently to her work.

For researchers and others interested in educational matters, this paper demonstrates how arts-based methods support the investigation of educational questions in personal, social, engaging and connected ways. Ways that invite meaning, story, and empathy, and that reach and are accessible to diverse audiences.

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## Understanding the experience of teaching

Teachers work in a climate of continual change and uncertainty and the complexities of this world of work continue to increase (Hargreaves, 1992; Spalding, Klecka, Lin, Wang, & Odell, 2011). To teach is to be faced with a

barrage of issues and dilemmas and a myriad of unpredictable, multi-dimensional expectations, roles and circumstances (Black, 2002).

To fully understand the experience of teaching, it must be considered in terms of its importance and consequence for the teacher (Black, 2001; Hostetler, Macintyre Latta, & Sarroub, 2007). The management of ongoing demands and manifold roles is a difficult personal activity, involving personally created meanings and aesthetic responses (Kelchtermans, 2009). It is therefore important that teachers have opportunities to reflect on issues of personal significance—on who they are, on *their* conceptions of teaching, on personal and professional meanings, and how these inform practice (Black & Halliwell, 2000). It also, I suggest, makes sense that arts-based educational research—research that explicitly uses aesthetic qualities in the inquiry itself, and in the presentation of the research—is highly relevant in this quest to understand (Barone, 2006).

## **Arts-based research: A recognised mode of inquiry**

Researchers interested in the human experience have been attracted to inquiry approaches that possess aesthetic and artistic qualities and characteristics and that draw primarily from the arts and humanities, rather than positivist approaches (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1997; Greene, 1980).

Educational researchers now recognise the relevance and power of autobiographical, narrative, literary, and arts-based modes of inquiry (Barone, 2009; Eisner, 2008; Leavy, 2009; Markauskaite, 2011; Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006). Currently a rapidly growing field in education, the acceptance of the contribution of creative arts as a valuable mode of inquiry is evident in the increasing number of peer-reviewed journals including research about, or dedicated to, arts-based research in education (Cole & Knowles, 2011; Finley, 2003; Mullen, 2003).

Arts-based methods are being recognised for their capacity to engage and transform the practices of individuals and for their ability to open up public discourse and empathetic understanding (Leavy, 2009; McWilliam, 2009; Pink, 2006; Rolling, 2010). They offer ways to make sense of difficult and complex questions that are not easily answered in linear telling. They also support personal and professional development with their unique and transformational abilities to ‘access and represent’ knowledge and to incorporate practice, process, and product all at once (Black, 2002; Sinner et al., 2006). As well as encouraging a creative inquiry process, arts-based methods can reveal tacit knowledge and make knowledge and meaning construction visible. They offer representational forms and products to communicate stories of experience and to support reflection and action (Bagnoli, 2009; Leggo et al., 2011). In educational research, these methods can be used during ‘all phases’ of the research endeavour from data collection to analysis, as well as continuing to serve as a subject of inquiry and a pedagogical tool (Leavy, 2009; Markauskaite, 2011).

## The language of arts in narrative inquiry: A methodology of representational shapes

Narrative inquiry is closely connected with arts-based research and has been identified as perhaps the most familiar type of arts-based research (Leavy, 2009). Narrative inquiry is inquiry in the midst of (re) living and (re) telling the stories that make up people's lives (Clandinin, 2007). The arts too are considered a way of living and telling, enabling us to “see more in our experiences, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routine have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed” (Greene, 2000, p.123).

For this paper, narrative and arts-based shapes of story, drawing and metaphor are used as a means to (re) live and (re) tell what it means to teach, and as a way of expressing meaning about educational experiences. These arts-based and literary shapes are applied in a narrative inquiry of what it means to teach and are the basis of the whole research process (Mello, 2007). They create a space for reflection, are part of the data-gathering process, they narrate experiences, and are representational forms that support reflection, awareness and analysis.

### Story

The principal attraction of story is its capacity to reveal understandings and life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways (Bullough Jr, 2010; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010). Stories can encapsulate years of information, experience, thought, knowledge, context and emotion into a form that we can convey to others and that promotes understanding and empathy (Pink, 2006; Savvidou, 2010). Telling and writing stories of experience can promote self-directed growth by bringing to consciousness forces and events shaping knowledge, and alerting teachers to ways to take command of personal growth and development (Clandinin, 2010).

As well as being recognised as a methodology and way of explaining learning, story and narrative are recognised as essential life aptitudes integral to human understanding and experience (Gargiulo, 2007; Pink, 2006). Narratives help us to understand more insightfully people's lives as they act, reflect and develop in their complex social and cultural, institutional or organisational contexts (Leitch, 2006; Savvidou, 2010).

Storytelling was one of the major features of the larger study from which this paper is drawn—the aim being to bring to the profession an understanding of the realities of teaching, grounded in teachers' accounts of everyday teaching situations. For a period of four months, seven early childhood teachers engaged in cycles of inquiry where conversations, journal writing, drawing and metaphor creation supported meaning-making efforts. Teachers met fortnightly to share ‘stories of teaching’, to talk about dilemmas and experiences with each other, and to discuss the products and processes of reflection.

This paper presents one of these teacher's stories. Andrea's story serves as a source of insight and understanding about what it means to be a teacher in a child care centre and how she, as an experienced teacher, was experiencing teaching in this setting.

## **Drawing**

Drawings have been used for decades as mirrors of personal identity (Haney, Russell, & Bebell, 2004). They provide an excellent forum for self-reflection because they bring to light nuances and subtleties that can otherwise remain hidden (Weber, 2008). Drawing can support the capacity to concretise thought and express ideas that are not easily put into words—the not-easy-to-define, the elusive, the abstract, the not-yet-thought-through, the tacit (Bagnoli, 2009; Cole & Knowles, 2011; Haney et al., 2004).

The power of drawing also lies with its ability to offer ‘a glimpse of the whole at a glance’, while capturing complexity and layers of meaning that ordinarily might require multiple pages of written material or hours of speech to convey (Weber, 2008). Drawing as a form offers flexible visual representations of abstract ideas, emotions, tensions and ideals. It is immediately evocative, stimulating reflective processes and providing a catalyst to document, change and improve what goes on in educational settings (Haney et al., 2004).

## **Metaphor**

Metaphor was combined with drawing and storytelling to assist teachers’ efforts ‘to put together the pieces’ as they accessed various dimensions of their knowledge (Bullough, 1994; Pink, 2006). Visual and literary shapes such as drawing and metaphor encourage connection-making and storytelling (Black & Halliwell, 2000). They facilitate discoveries of relationships and capture the affective and moral dimensions of knowing (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Metaphors are closely linked with teachers’ views of teaching and learning, and are grounded in teachers’ personal histories as learners and educators (Mahlios, Massengill-Shaw, & Barry, 2010). They can be used as a backdrop for in-depth understanding of problematic situations.

## **A sonata-styled narrative**

The following narrative account is presented in a sonata-format style. Sonata-form is an experimental technique for understanding and responding to primary source narrative data. It involves presenting a central story and responding to this story, illuminating the development of insights or themes via a communication pattern that allows secondary conversations or dialogue alongside the primary story (Chang & Rosiek, 2003; Sconiers & Rosiek, 2000).

In this paper, the primary story is told in first person by early childhood teacher Andrea. The primary source data includes her spoken and written words and arts-based representations. The researcher follows the aesthetic plotline of Andrea’s experience, offering reflections to connect methods and meaning, and responding to the activity, interactions and connections occurring across the representational shapes of story, drawing and metaphor. The sonata-format seeks to demonstrate how story, drawing and metaphor support the examination of particular experiences, and work together to develop an informed view of the ideals, contradictions and complexities inherent in Andrea’s world of teaching. This format is also open to organic, evolving, and ongoing meaning-making—for Andrea, for the researcher, and for the reader.

## A sonata of meaning-making

Andrea, 27 years old, had been teaching for five years and held a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood) degree. She said she chose teaching as a career because she wanted ‘to help children, to make a difference to their world, and give them a good start’ (Manuel, 2003). She worked in child care because of the relaxed environment and smaller group sizes. She wanted to be involved in this inquiry to further her knowledge, to hear how other teachers felt about their work in child care and to have an opportunity to rejuvenate professionally (Dinham & Scott, 1997).

For the past three years Andrea had been working as the kindergarten teacher (four year old children) in a privately owned child care centre in Brisbane, Australia. For the two years prior to this she had worked in another centre as Teacher/Director. Andrea had 24 children in her kindergarten room each day. Because of part-time enrolments she worked with 43 different children across a week. She was keen to continue teaching this age group.

### Andrea’s story



Figure 1. Andrea’s first drawing

*I drew myself with lots and lots of arms, and my legs are running, because that is all I do all day. I hit the floor running every morning. I drew light bulbs because I’m always thinking. I’m always busy. It is a standard joke at work that I’m always racing, racing from here to there, with my assistant running after me. I feel like I’m doing a hundred things at once.*

*You don’t realise how much knowledge you have, use and call on each day to make your job successful. It really is a*

*multifaceted role—teacher, cleaner, counsellor and everything in between.*

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## **Arts-based methods focus reflection and motivate change to practice**

It was interesting how drawing immediately called Andrea's attention to the range of roles and responsibilities she managed and to her teacher intentions and values. Andrea's first drawing was of a smiling teacher on the run, with six arms and lots of ideas flashing above her head (Figure 1). Representing her work using drawing reminded Andrea that across each day she was managing many interactions and activities—and unearthed her sense that she was 'doing everything'.

### **Andrea's story**

*My drawing of myself as a teacher encouraged me to re-think a few things which led to changes being made in our program. I think we were trying to fit too much into one day, so we've adjusted our program and routines.*

*Because I had fifty million arms going everywhere I thought 'maybe we should slow things down a bit'. So, mid-way through that week we changed our routine. We cut out the middle play so that we are not inside rushing outside and then rushing back in for lunch. We now have a really long expansive time to play.*

*The drawing worked a lot out for me and helped me to 'cut off a few busy arms'. My assistant and I have noticed that the changes have slowed the pace of our day while giving the children extended time to work longer at projects...so a positive change has come out of the drawing process already!*

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As a direct result of drawing and reflecting on her image of 'self as teacher' Andrea changed the structure and pace of her program. Her drawing brought to awareness some of the challenges and contradictions in her program. She began to identify some dissonance between espoused philosophy and what really happened in practice. For instance, Andrea wanted children to be busy and engaged in their play/work. But while she wanted children to be busy, she wanted a calm atmosphere to pervade the room. She wanted activity and engagement but not at the expense of calm. Andrea also valued practices that respected the ideas of individuals and she wanted to have time in her program to show children she was interested in them and what they had to say. Being busy, and fitting in a multitude of routines, involved rushing the children and didn't allow her to spend quality one-to-one time with children.

Dramatic play was also important to her. She believed imaginative play was an important catalyst for learning. Yet, dramatic play also tended to be noisy and again didn't fit neatly with her ideal of 'a calm learning environment'. The constant rush to meet routine deadlines meant there also wasn't time for children to get lost in their play, to explore ideas in in-depth ways, or for their understandings to emerge.

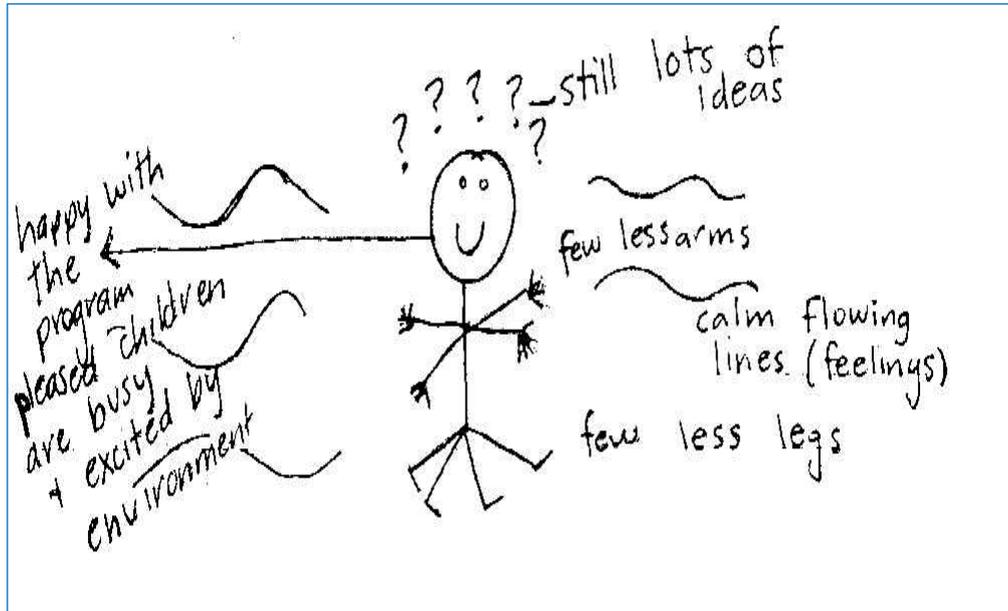


Figure 2. Andrea's second drawing

The outcomes of Andrea's deliberate changes to the structure and routines of her program were captured in a second (Figure 2) and third drawing (Figure 3).

In these new drawings Andrea represented the alignment she was seeking and finding between her teaching actions and ideals. Drawings were useful ways of documenting the development and transformation of her experiences and her knowledge. Her second drawing had flowing lines, representing the pleasure and sense of calm enabled by program changes. She drew fewer arms and legs this time—symbolising greater focus and her new deliberate pace as she created a more responsive learning environment for children.



Figure 3. Andrea's third drawing

### Andrea's story

*In my third drawing I drew my assistant and myself in little groups with the children. We have had a lot more time to sit and be with them. Slowing down the program has given us this time.*

*I feel like past experiences and knowledge are coming together to help me create a really harmonious room. Our planning is very responsive to the children and our room this week was full of rich interactions. We had time to really be with the children, and to extend their play.*

*As I have been thinking about myself as a teacher in the last few weeks and making changes to support children's play, I have noticed that many parents have been making positive comments about our program, asking for advice and ideas and giving us great support. This has really boosted my motivation, pride and good feelings.*

*It has been nice to feel appreciated and respected, and this too has added to our enthusiasm for the children and the program. That sounds funny—but you do feel more motivated, more eager and enthusiastic when your efforts are acknowledged. That burnt-out feeling, that 'I need a holiday' feeling, seems to take longer to kick in.*

*Thinking over my previous work experiences, and comparing them to now, I can notice the difference. I feel physically and mentally more alert. The program and learning environment here is of a much higher standard than compared to when I was trying to simultaneously juggle a myriad of tasks, or when I was a Teaching Director.*

Andrea's third drawing (Figure 3) depicted the benefits of allocating more time to spend with children, and how getting to know children during individual and small group interactions had positively influenced interactions and relationships between children, staff and parents.

Slowing the pace of her program gave Andrea a greater sense of control and supported her desire to take more detailed observations of children and respond to their needs and interests in meaningful ways. She also became more aware of her evolution as a teacher, how she was growing and developing over time. In conversations she described a general feeling of 'loving teaching' and her work environment as 'relaxed and happy'

Yet, later on, her metaphors highlighted something more.

As Andrea listened to the stories of other teachers she grew interested in how she had managed past teaching situations. She discovered she was motivated by both her satisfaction and dissatisfaction with teaching. She revisited times of support and encouragement and times where she had felt depressed, unappreciated, and overworked. She also considered how her perceptions of herself as a teacher were closely linked to the perceptions and responses of others.

## Connecting past and present experiences of teaching

Interestingly, in the process of considering what made her feel good about her work Andrea made connections with challenges of past experiences. In particular she reflected back to her previous job where she been a ‘Teaching Director’ juggling a range of challenging administrative roles alongside teaching responsibilities. And then to a more recent experience with a child who had exhibited disruptive and difficult behaviours.

As Andrea listened to the stories and experiences of other teachers, she considered the challenging nature of teaching and reflected on the personal investment that teaching required. Andrea appreciated that teaching wasn’t straightforward. It wasn’t always ‘relaxed and happy’. She reflected ‘forwards and backwards’, to current ‘re-building’ experiences and to past ‘eroding’ experiences.

### Andrea’s story

*Sandy’s teaching experiences reminded me of a situation I had last year. I too had a horror situation involving a child who had enormous behavioural problems and an incredibly challenging family life. Trying to manage this situation was very stressful. Stress in my daily work became a huge factor. I even made moves to leave teaching, but those plans fell through. I cried all day when I found out I was stuck with this situation.*

*I looked forward to every holiday and I took every rostered day off that I could. My health really suffered from the stress. I had really high blood pressure and I had to have exploratory blood tests. Late in the year my body gave up—I had pneumonia. One of the most important lessons I learned was about self-preservation. Without realising it, your resources get ‘eroded away’. You need to look after yourself.*

*This year I’m going through the re-building mode, and I certainly will take ‘erosion prevention measures’ to ensure I never feel as bad as I did last year. Next time a ‘horror situation’ like that comes along I’ll be on alert from day one.*

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Andrea recognised that teaching could be a difficult personal activity and knew firsthand how work experiences can affect teachers deeply. Both she and Sandy had experienced situations that impacted upon their health and wellbeing. Talking with other teachers and hearing common stories and teaching dilemmas was essential to Andrea’s growth and learning. She also empathised with these teachers. That sense of isolation that can accompany teaching was greatly reduced (Pomson, 2005).

During discussions with other teachers, and after reflection on her arts-based representations, Andrea mused about past experiences and the teaching decisions she had made during times of stress, challenge and dilemma. She wondered whether making routine changes to ‘slow the program down’ might have also made a positive difference to the ‘horror situation’. As Andrea remembered and revisited

this difficult situation she thought about her methods for motivating children and managing behaviour. She reflected on options for structuring routines and identified alternative strategies for working with parents and families.

Andrea subsequently created two metaphors and both captured something of the dynamic, uncertain, unruly and demanding nature of teaching. Andrea's first metaphor likened the experiences of teaching to canoeing or white water rafting. It was interesting that Andrea didn't see teaching as a 'calm lake'—even though her current teaching experience was 'flat' and 'uneventful'. Andrea was articulating that to teach was to be in constant negotiation, managing a myriad of events, relationships and situations. 'Roller-coasters' and 'erosion', and 'rough water and rocks' were common features of teaching despite her not experiencing them at that moment.

Metaphor communicated powerfully what teaching in child care was like for Andrea—the skill required, the many facets to consider and observe, the knowledge, understanding and the resilience needed. On the one hand she identified with the complexity and challenges of teaching and on the other she described happy and calm images. Her discovery was not unlike Nias (1999) who described the experience of teaching in this way:

...the teachers' role is ambiguous and ill-defined, hedged about with uncertainty, inconsistency and tension. To 'be' a teacher is to be relaxed and in control yet tired and under stress, to feel whole while being pulled apart, to be in love with one's work but daily talk of leaving it (Nias, 1999, p. 237).

### Andrea's story

#### Metaphor 1:

*Teaching is like paddling upstream and against the tide. A lot of the time you feel like you are paddling and paddling and getting nowhere. The tide is pushing you back, but you have got to keep going. There are also the smooth times when you negotiate the water and you get around the obstacles and everything is going along calmly.*

*If you are canoeing with a partner in the back, you have to negotiate with them about where you are going. You have to be in time with them, and heading in the same direction. If you don't it will all go off course and everything will be crazy.*

*Sometimes you have to test the water before you go on ahead. You have to stop that boat, hop out, and look to see what is going on up ahead. You have to think about whether you will keep going that way or turn back and try something new. You have to be familiar with the waters, and feel confident to negotiate the waters. I see rough water and rocks. I don't see a calm lake. There is nothing calm about it.*

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Andrea used metaphor a second time as she continued to explore the challenges and complexities of working in child care. She likened the challenges of managing relationships to 'playing rugby'.

## Metaphor 2:

*In terms of relationships, you take to the field each day never sure of the tactics of the others, the tactics of the children, or the parents, or your co-workers. Their feelings can change the things I say, the way I act.*

*Sometimes you need to plan the defence and the attack as well. You have to have strategies, your offensive, and defensive, to keep things going.*

*You have to treat each player on your team, on the opposing teams, or the local teams, with respect. You need to respect their individual skills. Every player in the game has a different thing to offer, so you have to respect that and be aware of that.*

*You need the strength to go the distance. It also makes a difference if the crowd is on your side, if you are playing at home, if the loud speakers are blaring in the background. It also makes a difference if you have cheerleaders on your side cheering you on and giving you support.*

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## **Teacher meanings are the heart of effective professional development**

For Andrea, arts-based methods offered personally meaningful ways to represent understandings and experiences. They supported a process of knowledge generation that provided impetus for changes to practice—changes that otherwise may not have occurred.

Her story contributes to the growing appreciation of the human and contextual complexities involved in teaching. We are reminded that teaching is a complex activity that asks of teachers a huge personal investment.

What is also shown is how engaging in ongoing examination of personal meanings and experiences about teaching can support teachers' efforts to understand past and present challenges and to confront, critique and value dilemma situations rather than be dominated by them.

### **Andrea's story**

*I feel my teaching role is so multi-dimensional that the true essence of a teacher would take so much in-depth writing to capture—the many roles, the many variables each day, the many people we are associated with, the many emotions we experience, the many highs and lows of each day, week, month and year. It seems my experience this year is almost 'flat' whereas last year it was a 'roller coaster'.*

*Writing metaphors has shown me the essence of what teaching is like for me! Drawing and metaphor have*

*clarified my thinking and ideas and provided a new perspective.*

*My experiences over the last few years seem to have come together and I am now able to make sense of the good and bad experiences. I am a professional, and I am proud to call myself a teacher. I feel happy and content and I believe those feelings are being reflected back in my work with the children and their families.*

*As a result of these reflections I have a better understanding of myself and my work. I feel more certain, confident, in control, and assured about being a teacher in child care.*

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Effective professional development efforts are those that are alive to the voices of teachers, to *their* experiences, to *their* meanings and to *their* inquiry of what it means to teach. Methods such as story, drawing and metaphor engage teachers in personally relevant meaning-making and inquiry. With such resources, teachers can look to themselves, to past and present experiences and to feedback from colleagues to examine and re-examine their living and telling of what it means to teach—to examine their work in the context of their lives (Manuel, 2003). And, through such opportunities, transformed understandings and experiences are possible.

## Coda

Arts-based inquiry has much to offer educational practitioners and researchers. A teacher's world of work is complex, demanding and multi-dimensional. Arts-based inquiry offers resources for revealing these various aesthetic qualities of everyday experiences and recognises the centrality of stories for understanding the realities and dimensionalities of lives. Because they are commonly used in everyday worlds to convey ideas and meanings, arts-based methods—such as story, drawing and metaphor—have a natural and powerful ability to make visible and bring to awareness (for practitioner, researcher and others) the emotional, sensory and complex dimensions of experience (Bagnoli, 2009).

Andrea's story and its sonata-style analysis demonstrate how arts-based methods support understanding and reveal the complexity underpinning educational questions like 'what does it mean to teach?' and 'how do teachers working in child care settings experience teaching?' In this particular instance, the creative inquiry process supported the making sense of a life in the midst of that life as it was currently understood. Story, drawing and metaphor enabled processes of inquiry into Andrea's world of work in a child care setting. These narrative arts-based shapes functioned as visible products of, and catalysts for, teacher reflection and supported awakenings that encouraged investigation into tacit knowing. They enabled the qualities of experiences to be seen, heard and felt, and promoted awareness, insight, empathy and engagement. In so doing, they open up possibilities, perspectives and dialogue about how teachers in different settings are experiencing, and might experience, teaching.

This type of creative inquiry process can also enable personally significant professional and scholarly development (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010). Arts-based methods offer opportunities for ongoing cycles of inquiry, for multiple probes into

ways of knowing. Setting aside time to examine and represent experiences, meanings, conflicts and tensions, and to talk about these with others, can empower teachers as they get (back) in touch with values, emotions and priorities, and (re) construct experiences to become more intentional (Bullough Jr, 2010). Andrea's story is an example of this, as she traced her stories of experience, charted her identity across time and (re) constructed her knowledge to reconcile pedagogical dilemmas. Story, drawing and metaphor highlighted her shifting images of teaching linked to shifting concerns and priorities. They highlighted ideals and values, past and current experiences, and a myriad of roles and responsibilities. They encouraged Andrea to ask new questions and imagine new possibilities for practice. They connected her with personal conceptions of what it means to teach and gave her ways to "bring form, coherence and harmony to what may seem to be disparate aspects of [her life], to work to reconcile opposites, and to integrate the knower and the known" (Beattie, 2009, p.62). In this way, this research inquiry was incredibly significant for *her*.

Beyond this, Andrea's story is also significant for *us*. Andrea's arts-based representations invite meaning and open up spaces for understanding and empathy. Through her story, drawings and metaphors, we can get a sense of the challenges and emotional experiences associated with teaching, and with work in child care. Andrea's way of looking at the world can be seen, and her voice can be heard. As a result, we have an opportunity to see more in her experience, understand more, and empathise more. We are given an opportunity to make connections. We are given an opportunity to relate to similar experiences or meanings, or, where our experiences are dissimilar, be prompted to (re) consider personal meanings and values, to question taken-for-granted attitudes or practices and consider alternate stories, perspectives or ways of thinking (Barone, 2006). We can also consider the sense-making strategies that are articulated in Andrea's story—the value of moving backward and forward within one's story of experience and how arts-based methods can represent and make visible the way conceptions of work and identity are (re) constructed over time.

Arts-based methods offer a unique opportunity to enter and understand another's life and world. They can also lead us to reach our own conclusions, construct personal knowledge and better understand our own lives (Mello, 2007).

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