

The Graduate School of Education  
at The University of Melbourne present

# UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

.....

**SPECIAL ISSUE**

## A/r/tography and the Literary and Performing Arts

**Volume 3 | Issue 2 | 2013**

.....

Guest Editors

*Rita L. Irwin  
Anita Sinner*

Editor

Associate Editor  
Designer

*Lindy Joubert*

*Naomi Berman  
Rosie Ren*

# UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

Volume 3 | Issue 2 | 2013

## EDITORIAL TEAM

### Guest Editors

Rita L. Irwin  
Anita Sinner

### Editor

### Associate Editor

### Designer

Lindy Joubert  
Naomi Berman  
Rosie Ren

## ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

*The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.*

*Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.*

ISSN 1835 - 2776

Published in Australia

Published by

The Graduate School of Education

© The University of Melbourne

The University of Melbourne, Parkville,  
Victoria 3010.



# Special Issue: A/r/tography and the Arts

## Guest Editors

*Rita L. Irwin | Anita Sinner*

### THEME

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess, which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/>).

This special issue of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts invites original creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical debates and issues regarding a/r/tographical methodologies; are exemplars of critical approaches to a/r/tographical research; and/or extend the boundaries of inquiry-based research. Contributions are welcome from disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences and in a wide range of formats including articles, essays, and artistic interludes, which explore diverse forms of the arts from drama, dance, poetry, narrative, music, visual arts, digital media and more.

# Creative River Journeys: Using an a/r/tographical framework for a multifaceted PhD project.

**Kylie J. Stevenson**

*PhD Candidate, Edith Cowan University (ECU)*

*B.Ed. (Melb) M.A. (RMIT)*

*M.Ed. (Melb) M.Phil. (Cantab)*

## AUTHOR

Kylie Stevenson is a PhD candidate in the School of Communication and Arts at Edith Cowan University, in Perth, Western Australia. In her PhD research project, Kylie has engaged closely with a group of artist-researchers through a/r/tography and reflective arts practice in order to explore their emerging practice-led research methodologies. Kylie has worked at RMIT University, Melbourne, teaching creative writing, and as a teacher and curriculum writer for the Victorian Department of Education, Australia. Kylie has been the recipient of four postgraduate scholarships and awards. In 2008, Kylie was awarded a Cambridge Commonwealth Trust scholarship for an M.Phil. degree in Arts, Culture and Education at the University of Cambridge.

## ABSTRACT

In my PhD study, *Creative River Journeys* - an inquiry into postgraduate education and practice-led research at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia - I have employed a/r/tography as my research methodology and a/r/tography underpins the conceptual framework of the research project. Making the connections between the research concerns in the project and the theory of a/r/tography as a practice was a crucial step in the research design process. As the project has unfolded, further unexpected connections have become apparent, particularly in relation to the reflective practice inherent in the project, my own poetic inquiry, and my researcher identity. In this paper, I outline the relationship between the research design and a/r/tography as a methodological approach, and share insights that I have arrived at in my PhD project, especially in relation to how the project has led me to embody the multiple roles of artist, researcher and teacher.

## KEYWORDS

*A/r/tography, poetic inquiry, postgraduate education, practice-led research, researcher identity, reflective arts practice*

## THE CREATIVE RIVER JOURNEYS PHD PROJECT

*The centrality and the power of the arts as agencies of human understanding and community processes are at the creative and critical core of a/r/tography. (Sullivan 2008, p.240).*

The past two years have seen me deeply immersed in designing and enacting an a/r/tographic PhD research project, Creative River Journeys. The project involves me working with a group of nine artist-researchers who, like me, are also completing their PhDs (or research Masters) at Edith Cowan University, Western Australia (ECU) and for whom creative practice is a key component of their projects. Through conversation and reflection on their creative process, each participant and I are together attempting to document the critical moments – that is, moments of significance or change – in their creative journey. I am particularly driven by my deep interest in practice-led research and in finding meaningful methodologies for practice-led researchers.

Haseman asserts that practice-led research is the most appropriate term to apply to the creative work conducted by artists as part of their learning and research in the academy, because the term practice-led research ‘asserts the primacy of practice and insists that because creative practice is both ongoing and persistent, practitioner researchers do not merely ‘think’ their way through and out of a problem, but rather they ‘practise’ to a resolution. (Haseman 2007, p.147). Smith and Dean elaborate on a definition of practice-led research thus:

*In using the term practice-led research, we [...] are referring both to the work of art as a form of research and the creation of the work as generating research insights which might then be documented, theorised and generalised [...] we would expect a research element to be present in both research and [art]work creation, though we would normally see the documentation, writing and theorising surrounding the artwork as crucial to its fulfilling all the functions of research. (Smith and Dean 2009, p. 7)*

My PhD project is framed as an a/r/tographical inquiry. A/r/tography, which explores the inter-relationships between the acts of art-making, research and teaching and the importance of reflection to elucidate these relationships, met very closely with

my aims to examine the key concepts of art, research and teaching (and the in-between spaces between these key concepts) in the postgraduate experience of artists doing PhDs and research Masters. Another close match between my project and a/r/tography was the concern to elucidate the relationship between text and art-making in practice-led degrees. Bickel states that a/r/tography 'combines and unites the visual and the textual, allowing a double meaning to emerge from the art and the writing, which is distinct and complementary' (2006, p. 119). Furthermore, a/r/tography's application in multifaceted contexts such as performance art (Bickel 2008), theatre (Beare 2009), autobiography (Leggo 2008a) and poetry (Wiebe 2008) illustrated the potential of the methodology for my own PhD project.

My project is called Creative River Journeys, a title drawn from the charts I have employed to document my participants' creative practice, the River Journey chart, which can be described at its simplest as a data capture tool that uses reflection to document critical moments experienced during the art-making process (Burnard 2000; Burnard 2004; Kerchner 2006). The use of the chart was applied previously in other projects; for example, in interviews with children about their experiences of music (Burnard 2000) and with arts educators to identify key influences in their decisions to be teachers (Kerchner 2006). In my PhD study, I have used the River Journey chart to seek an understanding of the creative practice of artist-researchers, thus the addition of 'Creative' to the chart's title. The chart, which I will refer to in this paper as the Creative River Journey, does more, however, than chart a process; it establishes and develops reflective practice within each individual's postgraduate art practice. In my PhD project, the pivotal moments or critical incidents identified through the use of the Creative River Journey are akin to a/r/tographical 'reverberations': 'shifts in new meaning, new awareness and new discoveries' (Irwin & Springgay 2008a, pp. xxvii-xxxi). Such moments have been captured in the research process through the use of the below pro-forma Creative River Journey chart:

Figure 1  
The Creative River  
Journey chart for data  
capture in interviewing

**Creative River Journey: A critical moment river journey chart**  
(adapted from Kerchner, 2006, p. 128)

Name.....Date.....  
Artwork/Performance/Text.....



Whether the purpose was to give a picture of one's professional identity, to give an overview of one's experiences, or to construct a narrative of an event that one has found powerful, the charting of critical moments into a coherent narrative via the Creative River Journey combines the visual and the textual. It provides opportunities for deep reflection by the research participant, as Burnard states:

*As a tool for reflection, creating "Rivers of Musical Experience" encourages active involvement from participants in an emancipatory and democratic way. Like rivers, the words start to flow because the participants, either on their own or with the help of their tutor/teacher or researcher, draw them in ways that they own and feel appropriate. (2004, p. 8)*

I have used the Creative River Journey in three distinct phases of my research project, with each phase leading to greater autonomy for the student, and with each phase having specific data collection methods. In the first phase, I co-construct with the research participants a record of the critical moments experienced whilst developing one work of art or one contained aspect of their practice. These critical moments are documented using the Creative River Journey chart and the method of data collection in this phase is semi-structured interview.

In the second phase, I ask the research participants to independently construct their own record of the critical moments experienced whilst developing another work of art or aspect of their practice using the Creative River Journey model. In this phase, a student may choose to draw on their previously preferred method of reflection on the critical moments in their practice (if they had one), for example, a reflective learning journal (Moon 1999; Kerchner 2006), or a visual journal (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008).

In the third phase of the study, I ask the research participants to engage in a group process of collaborative reflection in which they share their experiences of reflective arts practices during phase one and two of the research project, and explore the implications for their own practice-led research methodology. In this group collaboration stage, the data is collected via a focus-group moderated discussion.

In the co-construction of the Creative River Journeys with each artist-researcher, I have aimed to capture narratives about the process of postgraduate arts practice. Murphy has described the importance of narratives of practice as follows:

*Becoming a narrator of one's practice entails a productive tension between being inside and outside the practice at the same time. It encourages an oscillation between immersion in and reflection on practice that is useful when taking one's art-making into a research context (2012, p. 21).*

The postgraduate artists in my study are conducting their arts practice in the research context of the university. In a/r/tography, the T represents teaching, and I conceptualise teaching in my project to be this university context, and to encompass ideas about teaching, learning, education, mentorship, collaboration, the academy and such. Thus, the project explores the complexities of the inter-relationships arising in arts practice, in research, and in the teaching context. In designing this project with a/r/tography as its methodology, I deliberately chose to inquire into the interstitial spaces in this context. The importance of art, aesthetic inquiry and education are

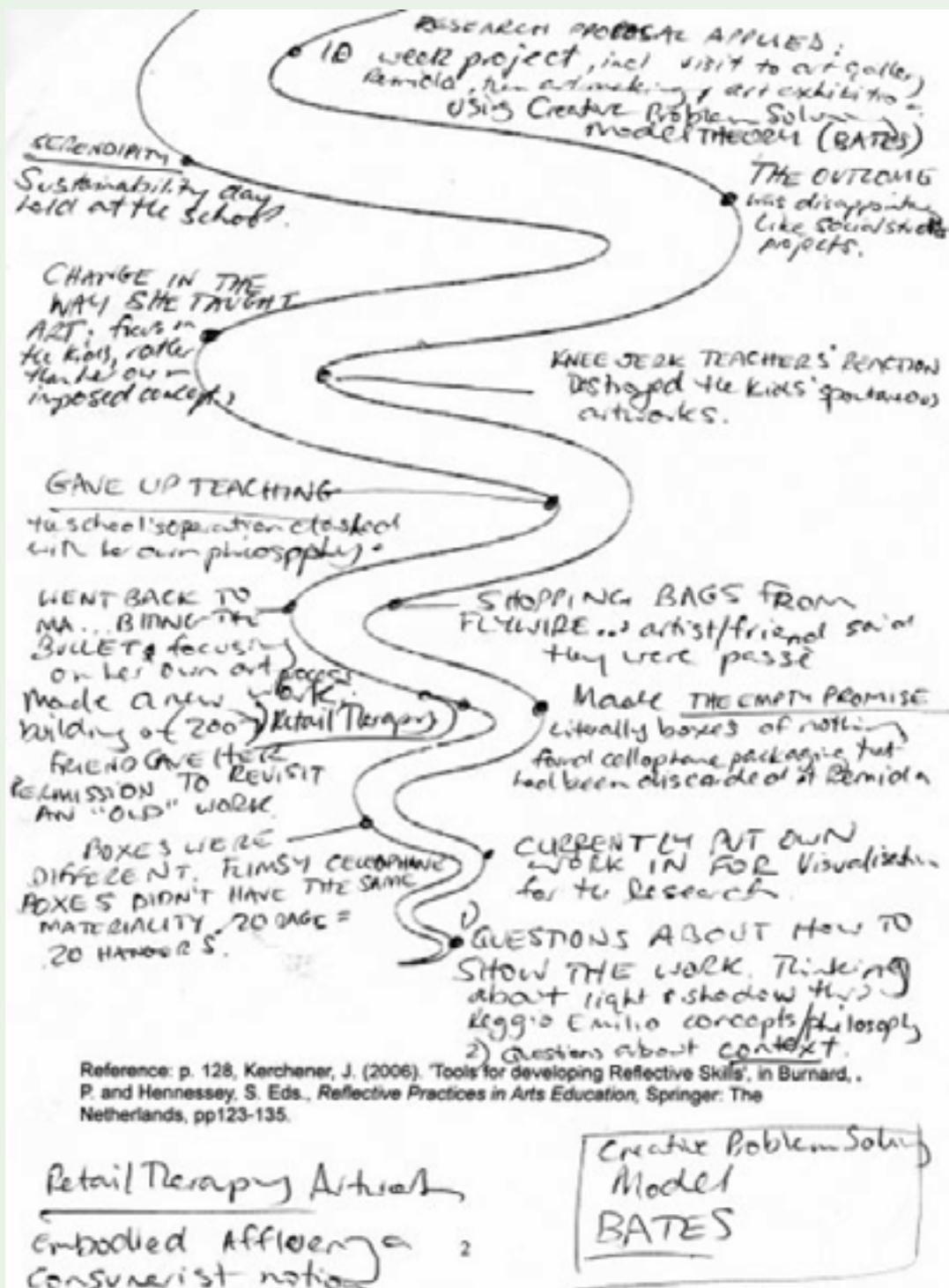
central to a/r/tography, just as they have been central to the Creative River Journey project which, in keeping with the a/r/tographical method, which 'inquires into educational phenomenon through artistic and aesthetic means' (Springgay, Irwin & Kind 2005, p. 898).

A completed Creative River Journey looks like this (figure 2 & 3 overleaf):

Figure 2  
Completed creative  
river journey chart  
(page one) – June 2011



Figure 3  
 Completed creative  
 river journey chart  
 (page two) – June 2011



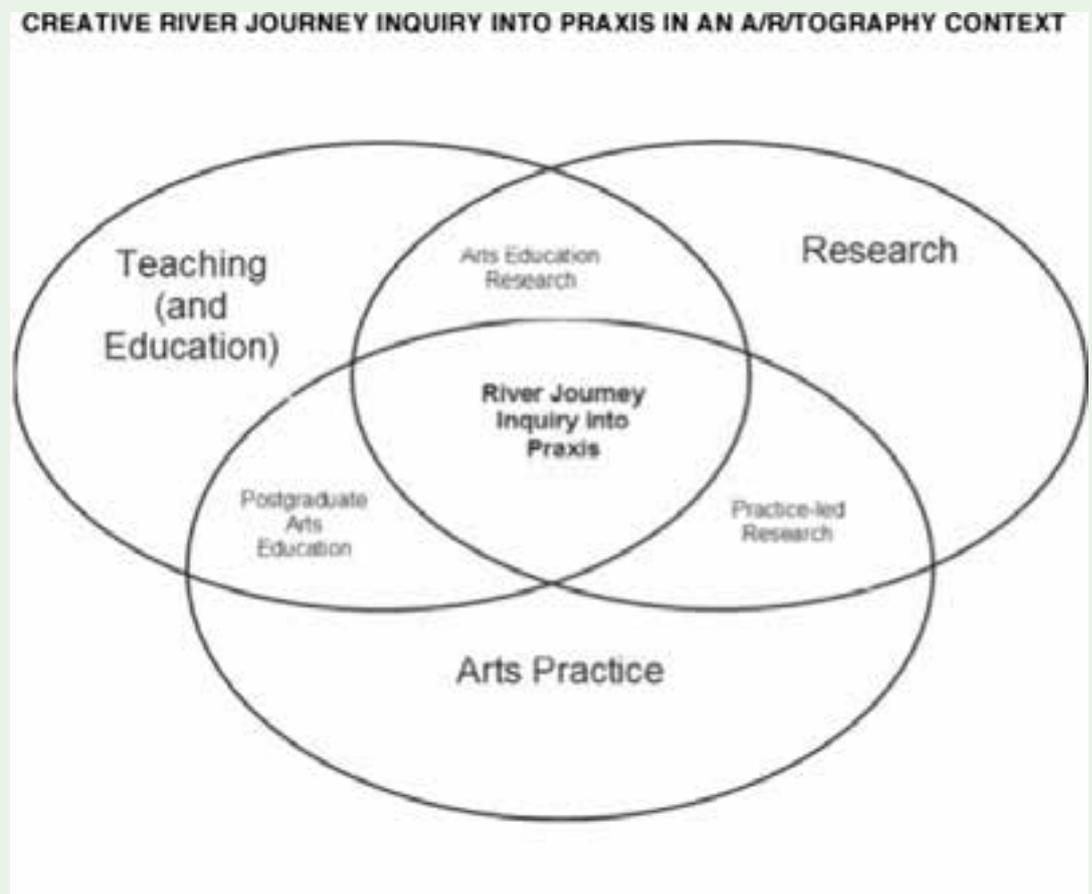
## STUDY'S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The key ideas that form the conceptual framework through which I have designed my project are: arts practice, research and education. You will see in the following diagram of the study's conceptual framework that the intersections of these three broad concepts also form some of the research concerns of the study as follows:

- the intersection between arts practice and education in this study is post-graduate arts education;
- the intersection of arts practice and research in this study is practice-led research; and
- The intersection between research and education is arts education research.

At the centre of these three intersections – arts education research, postgraduate art education, and practice-led research – is the Creative River Journeys inquiry into arts practice, the reflective arts practice that is at the heart of this study.

Figure 4  
*Creative River Journey  
Project conceptual  
framework*



## CONCEPTUALISING THE PROJECT AS A/R/TOGRAPHY

*A/r/tography is an arts research methodology emphasizing living inquiry and reflective practice through examination of the in-between spaces of art-making/ researching/ teaching (a/r/t) (Beare 2009, p. 163).*

The inter-relationships between the acts of art, research and teaching is fundamental to both a/r/tography and my own research project, as is the importance of reflection to elucidate these relationships. The project's conceptual framework shows focal intersections between these three broad concepts of Arts Practice, Research and Teaching (and Learning). These focal intersections define more closely the concepts under investigation in my project: postgraduate art education, practice-led research, arts research methodology. These conceptual intersections are interstitial spaces between art, research and teaching and are evoked as each participant conducts their art practice as research in the teaching and learning context of their postgraduate studies.

In my study, these interstitial spaces are explored through the reflective practice of the Creative River Journey. My project is a/r/tography as an arts-based research methodology whereby, as Le Jevic and Springgay state: 'a/r/tography is more than a mode of scholarly inquiry or a method of representing research through artistic means, it is an embodied query into interstitial spaces between art making, researching and teaching' (2008, p. 68). The study itself embodies these interstitial spaces by focusing on the experiences of the artist-researchers as they make their art, the creative component of their PhD, as they are researching both their practice and theory around their practice, and as they engage in the teaching and learning environment of their postgraduate degree. However, the project also sees me as researcher embodying these interstitial spaces of art-making, researching and teaching and learning. This occurs as I engage in poetic responses to my participants, make sense of the experiences in the project through synthesis and research, and engage in and consider the implications of the teaching and learning environment for myself and my participants.

A definition of a/r/tography as a methodology has been put very simply by Bickel: 'A/r/tography as living inquiry incorporates the transformative practices of action research and autoethnography' (2006, p. 118). A/r/tography's similarity to action research lies in the reflection asked of the artist/researcher/teacher on the process they are engaged in. However, in a/r/tography, that reflection is not solely on a process of planned action to solve a problem, as is the case in action research (Creswell 2005, p. 550). In a/r/tography, being 'in process' rather than examining 'a process' is important, as Winter, Belliveau and Sherritt state: 'In a/r/tography, process matters. This is because meaning is alive – always moving, always growing. A/r/tographers view constructions of knowledge as infinite and in-process' (2009, p. 8).

Being only two years into a three/four year PhD project, I can very clearly state that I am in-process, just as my participants are in-process in their research degrees. I can also say that this project is not seeking a snapshot of artist-researchers' practice but rather creates engagement and immersion in a process of knowledge construction. The Creative River Journey does not capture an instance of practice fixed in time and place. Rather, the Creative River Journey is reflective art practice (Burnard

2006) in which the artist-researcher and I are engaged in an ever-deepening process of knowledge construction. Critical moments documented on the Creative River Journey chart are points of opening, and expansion of knowledge for both the artist-researcher and myself.

In designing the project, I was informed by Pam Burnard's (2006) work on reflective arts practice, in addition to a/r/tography. Burnard is a University of Cambridge academic, music educator and musician who's passionate championing of the arts through meticulous research in the field of arts education was an inspiration for this study. Burnard states:

*As individuals, and collectively, we are constrained only by our willingness to engage with and our capacity to use reflective processes effectively as a source and resource for professional agency [...] In the present global context, artists and art educators face the challenges of politically driven agendas that, most commonly, focus on accountability and pupil attainment. It is timely to open the debate about whether a focus on reflective activity should dominate our thinking about arts teaching and learning, not least in an understanding of what reflective practice discourses might mean within the context of developing arts communities. (2006, p. 3)*

Burnard argues that there are three imperatives that need to be addressed in arts education and that these imperatives are best served by developing reflective arts practice. A/r/tography, with reflective practice inherent in the methodological approach, meets these imperatives soundly. The first imperative she suggests is related to the way education plays a role in extending the boundaries of the arts profession: 'An educational imperative is to expand the borders of professionalism between teachers and artists [...] in consultation with learners and to connect the uniqueness and sameness of artistic elements in reflective discourses shared across arts communities' (2006, p. 7).

In each phase of my project, the reflective discourse crosses and expands boundaries, for example, between researcher and artist as participants themselves engage in practice-led research whereby there is a meld of the boundary between practice and research through praxis (Stewart 2001). There is also a discourse between artist and artist through informal corridor conversations and introductions, and in the more formal third phase focus group. In this phase of the project, the postgraduate artists from three discipline areas – performing arts, creative writing and visual arts – were greatly affirmed by both the unique and the correlative aspects of participants' experience. Due to the deep relationship between academic PhD supervisors and each postgraduate artist, and with many of the postgraduate artists themselves working as teachers, discourses about teaching and learning were a common element of reflections.

The second imperative that Burnard suggests is met by reflective arts practice (and thus, I assert, by a/r/tography) is the transformation of artistic experience into meaningful learning:

*Artists seek to reveal meaning. What we attach ourselves to, identify with, and become vitally interested in depends a great deal on the ways in which we reflectively construct personal meaning within a situation. The challenge for artists and artist educators come in terms of what they do in their studios, their classrooms and how they see their roles in the classroom. So, how do we turn experience into meaningful learning? (2006, p. 8)*

The Creative River Journey is reflective arts practice. It helps artist-researchers to identify moments in their art-making process that are meaningful for them and that are critical in influencing or shaping their art and their ideas. It adds another avenue of meaningful learning to the experiential journey of art-practice in the academy. It becomes a tool in the artist-researcher's practice-led research. In this way, it directly meets Burnard's conceptualisation of reflective art practice. Burnard cites van Manen in suggesting that the way to transform experience into meaningful learning in art education is through reflective practice: 'Gaining a reflective grasp of the subjective experience calls upon "a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying and of making explicit the structures of the lived experience."' (van Manen 1990, p. 77, cited by Burnard 2006, p. 9)

The third and last imperative that Burnard posits is for the legitimacy of reflective arts practice, alongside already established models of reflective practice, such as that suggested by Schön (1983; 1987). Burnard states: 'For the artist, self-reflection is the means by which they simultaneously analyze situations, make judgments, and determine how successfully they handle the challenges through the transforming participation associated with art making'. (2006, p. 9)

In my study, the reflective process elicited by the Creative River Journey throughout the three phases of my study engages students in a rich and transformative process of reflection on their arts practice in the arts education context. Thus the Creative River Journey meets with Burnard's further description of reflective arts practice to include 'involvement of mutuality, engagement with artistic materials, multiple perspectives, individual style, and transformative participation in artistic endeavours in which reflective processes are central' (2006, p. 10).

Burnard is not alone in proposing reflective arts practice as a means for transformative learning. In a text guiding art and design students on the research process, Carole Gray and Julien Malin provide an excellent description of reflective arts practice:

*We learn most effectively by doing – by active experience, and reflection on that experience. We learn through practice, through research, and through reflection on both. This active and reflective learning makes a dynamic relationship between practice and research. Practice raises questions that can be investigated through research which in turn impacts on practice (2004, p. 1).*

As Gray and Malin's suggest, the dynamic relationship between practice and research requires active and reflective learning, and I have sought to develop this active learning in Creative River Journeys project. Common to the Creative River Journey and Burnard's description of reflective arts practice is the material and personal participation in the art making process:

*Reflective arts practice, as with educational practice, features on the spot judgements, criticizing, restructuring, and testing of intuitive understanding of experienced phenomena[...] but what is different in reflective arts practices is the involvement of mutuality, engagement with artistic materials, multiple perspective, individual style, and transformative participation in artistic endeavours in which reflective processes are central. (2006, p. 10)*

The Creative River Journeys project echoes the notion that reflective processes are central in a/r/tography, in reflective arts practice, in practice-led research, thus the reflective processes encapsulated in the Creative River Journey are placed at the centre of this project and at the heart of the research conversations with postgraduate artists. The benefit to postgraduate artists accords with Dawson's assertion that reflection on practice 'empowers students to be producers rather than receivers of knowledge, and to develop critical skills focusing on process rather than product' (2003, p. 5). It is one aim of this PhD project to explore the potential benefits for the participants through engagement with the Creative River Journey process and the reflective practice it embodies, in their own practice-led research processes.

## A/R/TOGRAPHY, RENDERINGS AND MY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

*We interpret concepts to be flexible, intersubjective locations through which concepts, or renderings as we prefer to call them, guide our participation in making meaning through artful, educational, and creative inquiry. (Irwin & Springgay 2008b, p. 115)*

The inter-relationship of art and writing is fundamental to a/r/tography and is embodied in the name of the research methodology itself, that is, art and graphy. My PhD project uses reflective practice to explore the interstitial space between art and graphy, between the practice and documenting the practice, and seeks to construct a dialogue about the interconnection between art and graphy. A/r/tographers describe this interconnection as a 'coming together of art and graphy, or image and word. It is a doubling of visual and textual wherein the two complement, extend, refute, and/or subvert one another.' (Springgay, Irwin & Kind 2005, p. 900)

Some practice-led researchers have adopted the a/r/tography approach for self-study and in these instances a/r/tography is somewhat akin to autoethnography (Irwin & Springgay 2008a) which Creswell defines as 'a reflective self-examination by an individual set within his or her cultural context' (2005, p. 438). However, the self-examination in a/r/tography deliberately addresses not just cultural contexts, but embodied aesthetic understandings and the exchanges that arise from the spaces within and between art and text, between artist/researcher/teacher roles, and between art and viewer/reader.

The ideas that arise in these intersections in a/r/tography are captured as 'renderings' which are described as: 'conceptual organisers used by a/r/tographers to interpret qualities deemed significant during an artistic or creative process' (Beare 2009, p. 164). The concepts that are the building blocks of my research conceptual framework are equivalent to a/r/tographical renderings. Clear descriptions of six renderings of a/r/tography are offered by Irwin and Springgay (cited by Beare 2009, p. 164), and these can be used to interpret specific features of the research:

1. Contiguity: giving attention to the spaces in-between art, education, and research, in between 'art' and 'graphy', and in-between art a/r/t;
2. Living Inquiry: giving attention to the complexity and contradictions of relations between people, things, and understandings of life experiences;
3. Openings: attention to dialogue and discourse;
4. Metaphor and Metonymy: giving attention to new connections and intertwined relationships;
5. Reverberations: giving attention to shifts in meaning, new awareness, and new discoveries; and
6. Excess: giving attention to what lies outside the acceptable (Irwin & Springgay 2008a, pp. xxvii-xxxi).

In my study, these renderings guide the researcher and the participant in identifying potential critical moments in art practice. For example: Metaphor and Metonymy - a critical moment for a postgraduate artist might be when a new connection or inter-relationship is identified in their work; Reverberations - shifts in meaning, awareness, and discovery may be identified by the participant as critical moments; Excess - an event or experience which lies outside the acceptable norm of their art practice might be interpreted as a critical moment.

However, Springgay, Irwin and Kind are assertive in declaring that these renderings in a/r/tography are not a set of criteria with which to identify research with an a/r/tographical approach. They state:

*Renderings are not methods. They are not lists of verbs initiated to create an arts-based or an a/r/tographical study. Renderings are theoretical spaces through which to explore artistic ways of knowing and being researched. They may inform the doing of research, the final representation, and/or the ways in which viewers/readers understand and access an a/r/tographical text. (2005, p. 899)*

## WHY CHOOSE A/R/TOGRAPHY?

*A/r/tography calls for an inner collaborative relationship between my artist self, researcher self, and teacher self. Each role engages a critical hermeneutic, self-reflexive practice of art-making and writing. (Bickel 2008, p. 126)*

I come to this research project from three areas of vocational experience, each correlating with a/r/tography's framing of the a/r/tographer as artist/researcher/teacher, and each deeply informing the methodological path upon which I have embarked. Just as the 'renderings' of arts practice, research and education underpin my theoretical thinking in this project, fundamental to the choice of a/r/tography as methodology is my role in the research and what aspects of my identity I enact in that role (Stevenson 2012a). Of a/r/tographer identity, Bickel states:

*At its best, a/r/tography encourages the combined creative freedom and risk-taking of the artist with the theory, rigor, and responsibility of the academic researcher, along with the ethics and compassion of the educator. Combining these three roles with the integrity and awareness of what is called for in each area is a demanding undertaking. During my thesis art-making and research process, I tended to privilege the role of the artist. (Bickel 2008, p. 136)*

In my research project I am attempting to integrate three areas of my identity that I have mostly kept separate in my professional life: creative writing practitioner, academic researcher and teacher. Rather than privilege one, I am seeking to give equal time to each. Thus, the 'a' in a/r/tography and my art practice identity have required me to actively engage with creative writing in response to my research. Part of my experience has been as a practice-led researcher in the field of creative writing. In 2004, I completed a Masters by research degree in creative writing at RMIT University, Melbourne. This involved me writing a novel and an exegesis (Stevenson 2004). This created the initial fascination for me in the dynamic relationship between arts practice and research, brought about as I wrestled with how my exegetical component related to my creative component, a novel. In my exegesis, rather than taking an abstracted critical evaluation of my novel, I documented the process of writing the novel in relation to Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) model of creativity, flow.

My creative writing practice identity took a back seat to my academic researcher identity when I followed on from this creative writing Masters with an MPhil degree in the Education faculty at the University of Cambridge. (Stevenson 2009) In designing my PhD project, I deliberately chose the a/r/tography approach to re-engage with my creative writing practice, and I envisaged the A for artist being related in some way to my artistic practice as a creative writer, though the specific iteration was yet to be resolved.

The work of ECU researcher Dr John Ryan in a PhD research project quite different to mine, on the aesthetics of Southwest Australian flora, called my attention to Ryan's use of poetry as a method of inquiring into the nature of the flora: 'My poetry evokes – and mimics at times – the processes of plants in order to express their mutability. The conflation of living plants with objects of art rests on the perception of their shared stasis.' (Ryan 2011, p. 8). Ryan used poems as a method of capturing reflection on his field research and this approach led to a crucial breakthrough for me in defining the A in my a/r/tography method: it became A for poet. This

critical moment in my own research journey resulted in the development of poetic inquiry in the project (Prendergast, Leggo and Sameshima 2009) and the discovery and enactment of my own poetic voice. In the Creative River Journeys project, my focus is on the practice-led research of other artist-researchers, not my own creative writing process, thus, my poems are written in direct response to engagement with my participants and research material.

In order to imbed poetry into the already complex research process of my a/r/tographical project, I have needed to draw on understandings of poetic inquiry within research frameworks. (Leggo 2008a,b; Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima 2009a,b; Butler-Kisber 2010a,b; Faulkner 2010). Within the Creative River Journeys project, my use of poetry has closely reflected Butler-Kisber's conceptualisation of poetry in research as two-fold: 'two helpful ways for framing and thinking about poetic inquiry are as "found poetry", when words are extracted from transcripts and shaped into poetic form, and as "generated" or more autobiographical poetry, when the researcher uses her own words to share understandings of her own and/or others' experiences' (2010b, p. 83).

The following excerpt is from one such generated poem, *Deep Water Point* (Stevenson 2012b, p. 58-60), the title of which refers to a bend on the Canning River in Perth, the city where I live. The poem, written in the first year of the project, was redrafted extensively in 2012 during a year-long series of poetry masterclasses at the Peter Cowan Writers' Centre situated on a campus of ECU. The poem illustrates my engagement with the metaphor of the river, through which my artist-researchers' creative practices are documented, but is also an autobiographical reflection on the way my identity as a mother and as a researcher are inter-related.

*DEEP WATER POINT  
(CANNING RIVER)*

*At Deep Water Point  
The sky is gosling grey.  
Clouds arc over us like Odette's wrists  
We are keeping the water's edge.*

*There, a boy just three,  
Speeds a remote control battleship along the shore  
Tiny jet fighters and helicopters line its deck.  
He thrills in the promise of return, the risk of loss,  
Of it sailing into Deep Water Point, no return.  
"Twenty bucks on eBay", his father says,  
Another boyish delight altogether.*

*There, a girl of seven,  
Prances her knees upwards almost to her chin  
Seersucker flutters on her gypsy tiered skirt.  
She beams pleasure at the skip of her feet on soft sand,  
Singing across the waves of Deep Water Point, no return.  
"Don't get wet", her mother calls,  
Another song altogether.*

*Further on, a man hovers the sand,  
Sweeps his metal detector like a robotic arm.  
The beep, beep, beep foretells his discoveries.  
He bends up and down, a toy bird drinking on a cup's lip,  
His gaze lost in the sands of Deep Water Point, no return.  
"Mine, mine, mine", I imagine he chants  
Another dream altogether.*

...

*I am at the river's edge,  
The shore fringed with sand and tea-tree,  
The hum of the freeway nearby like persistent life,  
The old college solid on a hill above,  
A child's idea of a mansion,  
Red on a green velvet plinth.*

*A small boy, mine,  
Another flash of red in this grey, watery world,  
Flits by the shore,  
Stops to sink his toes into silt,  
Grins as the icy waters touch his shins.  
"You've got to see this", he shouts.*

*But I have now sunk myself into grass,  
The skipping girl has long gone,  
The battleship boy I can see at the café,*

*His ship marooned on the table,  
Metal detector man is way down the shore,  
His dark back firm against inquisitive eyes.*

*I feel the cool earth beneath me,  
The welcome rest of soil,  
See the quiet shimmy of the paper-bark,  
Want to close my eyes and hear only  
The river gum's rattle-rustle above me,  
"You've got to see this", he gull-cries.*

*I stand at the water's shore,  
His small hand slips into mine,  
Our feet, his small and pale,  
Are like white fishes in the tannin shallows  
The river bed is an intricate lacework  
Of thousands of pearly, sparkling shells.*

*At Deep Water Point,  
The sky is gosling grey.  
Birds reel over us like Dervish dancers  
We are keeping the water's edge.*

In terms of the R in a/r/tography and my research identity, three successive masters degrees, two by research, have impacted on my understanding of research and have aided the formation of my researcher identity. In addition to the aforementioned creative writing masters, I completed a master of education degree at the University of Melbourne, Australia, in 2007, which included instruction in the university's Centre for Evaluation, Curriculum and the Humanities. Studies in Cambridge in 2008/2009 heightened my qualitative research interests in a degree which itself was concerned with interstices: a master of philosophy in Arts, Culture and Education. In Cambridge, we were pressed to consider the way that the arts and culture, research, and education interplay. The nexus of arts, culture and education in this research degree has informed my understanding of the relationship between art, research and teaching in my PhD project and in a/r/tography.

As a result of this postgraduate study, my researcher identity has been predominant over the past decade. In electing to frame my Creative River Journeys project through a/r/tography, I have deliberately placed myself in the familiar role of researcher whilst at the same time confronting any complacency in that role by integrating two other aspects of my self, artist and teacher. In a/r/tography, a multiplicity of identities and the movement between these identities is acknowledged and the thoughts, feelings, habits and work of all of one's identities need to flow together. (In two of my poems included in this paper, this is acknowledged with the repetition in both poems of the word 'in-between').

As Irwin and de Cosson state, an a/r/tographer: 'embraces a métissage [meaning multiple identities] existence that integrates knowing, doing, and making... [He or she] desires an aesthetic experience found in an elegance of flow between intellect,

feeling and practice' (2004, p. 29). In the Creative River Journeys project, one way for my 'métissage' existence to be expressed is through poetry, where the usually polyphonous nature of these identities is given a clear voice.

The following poem was written after one of many days spent in my home office. Despite working in this space for nearly two years, I had never realised that there was a shared wall between the kitchen and the study. The poem came to mind as I contemplated that shared wall and the multiple roles in my life. Following Leggo's (2008) lead about autobiographical writing and research, I considered not only my roles of artist/researcher/teacher, but also my roles as parent and family provider. Just as there is a flow between artist/researcher/teacher in a/r/tography, this poem grapples with the flow between parent and poet.

### *TWO WALLS*

*There are two hubs  
In my home  
The kitchen  
The study  
A shared wall in-between  
In the kitchen  
The wall is red  
Tomato? Fire engine? Fury?  
I like to think of it as  
Appetite red, blood red  
Mother feeding womb red  
On the other side  
A wall of books  
About art fiction methodology  
I trail my fingers along their spines  
My spines.  
But where is the poetry?  
Which wall should it rest upon?  
Perhaps both, or neither.  
Perhaps it lies in the dance in-between.*

In considering the T in a/r/tography and teaching identity, I decided to specifically work with postgraduate artists with the clear intention of exploring the university education context and its intersections with participants' creative practice. This focus built upon my experience of this context through postgraduate education, but I was also motivated by a lifelong interest in the transformative power of education, with its roots in my teaching background. I have a lengthy and diverse background as an educator including ten years' teaching in secondary schools and adult education, and three years teaching creative writing at tertiary level. This has taken me into further educational areas such as developing project-based curriculum for students at risk; designing thinking skills curriculum for early secondary school teaching; and writing distance education and creative writing curriculum for adult learners. The possible implications of this research for curriculum and pedagogy in the creative

arts are of vital interest to me, as is the way in which my experience as a teacher/educator might be integrated with my arts practice background and my research background as I enact the study.

The words teaching, learning and education are seeded throughout descriptions of a/r/tography as a methodology:

*A/r/tography is a form of practice-based research steeped in the arts and education. [...] one of many emerging forms of inquiry that refer to the arts as a way of re-searching the world to enhance understanding. Yet it goes even further by recognizing the educative potential of teaching and learning as acts of inquiry. Together the arts and education complement, resist and echo one another through rhizomatic relations of living inquiry. (Irwin et al 2006, p. 70)*

The phrase 'rhizomatic relations of living inquiry' is an apt descriptor of the complex nature of relations within my participants' practice-led research, and within the Creative River Journeys project itself. The co-constructive process of reflecting on and documenting creative practice with the participants has illustrated relational generation of shared meaning between myself as teacher and artist-researchers as students, and it has facilitated a fundamental growth in my understanding of teaching. Whilst my previous teaching style was never simply an instructive-style pedagogy, with the Creative River Journeys project I have now come to think of my teaching as 'emergentist' pedagogy' (Kalin, Barney, & Irwin 2009, p. 357). Furthermore, my understanding of teaching now includes Irwin and Springgay's conceptualisation of teaching as living inquiry: 'giving attention to the complexity and contradictions of relations between people, things, and understandings' (2008a, pp. xxvii-xxxi).

'Rhizomatic relations of living inquiry' is also an excellent way to describe the connections that have been created within and outside the Creative River Journeys project. One artist-researcher was motivated to become a participant in the Creative River Journeys project because of her own use of a/r/tography as a methodology. This led to a shared generation of understanding of a/r/tography between participant and researcher, and unexpected reciprocal mentoring between us. The following quote is drawn from several references about mentorship and a/r/tography forwarded to me by this artist-researcher, and explains 'emergentist pedagogy' more fully:

*To interrogate our assumptions and unsettle our understandings, mentorship within a/r/tography requires provocation and flexibility so that the conditions of relational aesthetic inquiry become 'a passage to somewhere else' (Springgay et al. 2005, p. 909), a somewhere that remains unpredictable at the onset. Similarly, mentoring for emergence is concerned with the generating of meaning rather than the transfer of predetermined knowledge. This 'emergentist' pedagogy requires mentors to be cognizant of how their actions might cause the reproduction of their ways of understanding to the exclusion of emergent understandings. (Kalin, Barney, & Irwin 2009, p. 357)*

The reciprocal mentorship in the project has also come about through my experience and admiration of my research participants' own 'métissage' existences as practice-led researchers, including my fellow a/r/tographer participant. Below is a poem written after reflecting on how that participant juggles multiple roles in her life and it is also a comment on how her representation of this feat draws my attention to the multiplicity of my own roles:

## ACTUALITY

*She tells me she is still working  
Whilst this one heads OS  
This one bunkers down for TEE  
This one recovers from lost LOVE  
and first-year university.*

*She is a circus performer  
Spinning all the plates in the air  
Carefully balancing each support  
This one on her knee  
This one on her head  
This one on the ring finger  
of her left hand.*

*Yet her fingers on the right  
Are tapping at the keyboard  
Shooting me email after email  
In-between  
Flicking the pages of a book.*

*Her mind is a mansion of many rooms  
Holding all selves  
Sculptor  
Performer  
Academic  
Teacher  
Mother  
More.*

*And all the while she is reeling out conversation  
Like carefully plaited rope  
Tying all the parts of herself together  
In words and thoughts and actuality.*

In this paper, I have set out to explain the choices I have made in designing my PhD project, Creative River Journeys, an inquiry into postgraduate education and practice-led research at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia, as an a/r/tographical inquiry. In particular, I have drawn attention to how my project design's conceptual framework corresponds closely to the concerns of a/r/tography – art, research and teaching.

Furthermore, I have sought to explain how the reflective art practice of Creative River Journeys closely corresponds with a/r/tography's use of reflective practice as a means to elucidate interstitial spaces between these terms. I have also touched on how the explorations of the intersections between artist, researcher and teacher in the project and in a/r/tography have resulted in a more coherent sense of my own identity.

To close this discussion about the qualitative research methodological pathway that I have chosen in my PhD project, a/r/tography, I draw again on the work of a/r/tographer Barbara Bickel who describes the demands that a/r/tography places upon the artist/researcher/teacher:

*The path of the artist as researcher and educator is demanding on many levels. Not all artists have the support and guidance available to take on the multiply complex practice of a/r/tography. I have found it requires external support from others willing to be critical allies, as well as an internal personal practice that assists in working through emotional, ethical, and spiritual issues that arise when engaged in this practice. (Bickel 2008, p. 131)*

In my PhD project and a/r/tographical practice, I am fortunate to have outstanding supervision support from my own PhD supervisors, along with the support of a diverse and lively research community at Edith Cowan University. But also, as I hope the few poems I have included in this paper illustrate, my practice as a/r/tographer is guided and motivated by the inspiring artist-researchers who are participants in my project and whose journeys I share. In revealing and exploring their own Creative River Journeys, they partner me in my a/r/tographical one.

## REFERENCES

- Beare, D. (2009). A/r/tography, Secondary Theatre Teaching and The Theatre of Possibilities project. *Youth Theatre Journal*. 23 (2), 162-175.
- Bickel, B. (2006). Book Review - A/r/tography: rendering self through arts based living inquiry. *Studies in Art Education* 2006, 48 (1), 118-122.
- Bickel, B. (2008). Who will read this body? An a/r/tographic statement. In Cahnmann-Taylor, M. and Siegesmund, R. (Eds). *Arts-based research in education: foundations for practice*. (pp.125-136). New York: Routledge.
- Burnard, P. (2000). How Children Ascribe Meaning to Improvisation and Composition: rethinking pedagogy in music education. *Music Education Research*, 2, (1), 7-23.
- Burnard, P. (2004). Using Critical Incident Charting for Reflecting Musical Learning. *The Mountain Lake Reader*, 2004 (Spring), 7-13.
- Burnard, P. (2006). Rethinking the Imperatives for *Reflective Practices in Arts Education*. In Burnard, P. and Hennessey, S. (Eds.), *Reflective Practices in Arts Education*. (pp. 3-12). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Butler-Kisber, L. (Ed.)(2010a). Poetry and Education: Possibilities and Practices. *Learning Landscapes* (online journal), special issue Autumn 2010, 4 (1), from <http://www.learninglandscapes.ca/images/documents/LL-no7-v-final-LR.pdf>, viewed 17 July 2012.
- Butler-Kisber, L. (Ed.)(2010b). *Qualitative Inquiry: thematic, narrative and arts informed perspective*. London: Sage.
- Creswell, J.W. (2005). *Educational Research*, 2nd Edition. New Jersey: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Dawson, P. (2003). Towards a New Poetics in Creative Writing Pedagogy. *Text*, 7 (1), April 2003, from <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april03/dawson.htm>, viewed 18 May, 2009
- Faulkner, S.L. (2007). Concern with Craft: using Ars Poetica as criteria for reading research poetry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13, (2), 218-234, from <http://qix.sagepub.com/content/13/2/218.abstract>, viewed 17 July 2012
- Gray, C. and Malins, J. (2004). *Visualising Research: a guide to the research process in Art and Design*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.
- Haseman, B. (2007). Rupture and Recognition: Identifying the Performative Research Paradigm. In Barrett, E. and Bolt, B. (Eds), *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*. (pp. 147-158). London: Tauris.
- Irwin, R. and de Cosson, A. (2004). *A/r/tography: Rendering self through arts-based living inquiry*. Vancouver: Pacific Educational Press.

- Irwin, R. and Springgay, S.(2008a). A/r/tography as practice-based research. In Springgay, S. Irwin, R. Leggo, C. Gouzouasis, P. (Eds), *Being with a/r/tography*. (pp. xix-xxxii). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Irwin, R. and Springgay, S. (2008b). A/r/tography as practice-based research. In Cahnmann-Taylor, M. and Siegesmund, R. (Eds), *Arts-based research in education: foundations for practice*. (pp. 103-124). New York: Routledge.
- Irwin, R. (2004). A/r/tography-A metonymic métissage. In Irwin, R. and de Cosson, A. (Eds), *A/r/tography: Rendering self through arts-based living inquiry*. (pp.27-38). Vancouver: Pacific Educational Press.
- Irwin, R., Beer, R., Springgay, S., Grauer, K., Xiong, G. Bickel, B. (2006). The rhizomatic relations of a/r/tography, *Studies of Art Education*, 48 (1), 70-88.
- Irwin, R. and de Cossen, A. (2004). A/r/tography: Rendering self through arts-based living inquiry. Vancouver: Pacific Educational Press,.
- Irwin, R. and Springgay, S. (2008). A/r/tography as practice-based research. In Springgay, S. Irwin, R. Leggo, C. Gouzouasis, P. (Eds), *Being with a/r/tography*. (pp. xix-xxxii), Rotterdam: Sense Publisher.
- Kalin N., Barney, T. & Irwin, R.(2009). Complexity thinking mentorship: an emergent pedagogy of graduate research development. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 17 (4), 353-367
- Kerchner, J. (2006). Tools for Developing Reflective Skills. In Burnard, P. and Hennessy, S. (Eds), *Reflective Practices in Arts Education*. (pp. 123-136). Dordrecht: Springer.
- La Jevic, L. and Springgay, S. (2008). A/r/tography as an Ethics of Embodiment: Visual Journals in Preservice Education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 14 (1), 67-89.
- Leggo, C. (2008a). Autobiography: researching our lives and living our research. In Springgay, S. Irwin, R. Leggo, C. Gouzouasis, P. (Eds), *Being with a/r/tography*. (pp.3-24). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Leggo, C. (2008b). The ecology of personal and professional experience: a poet's view. In Cahnmann-Taylor, M. and Siegesmund, R. (Eds), *Arts-based research in education: foundations for practice*. (pp. 89-97), New York: Routledge.
- Moon, J. (1999). *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development*. London: Kogan Page Ltd.
- Murphy, S. (2012). A Narrative of Practice. In Fenton, D., Mercer, L., Robson, J. (Eds), *Live Research*. (pp. 21-31). Nerang, Queensland: Ladyfinger.
- Prendergast, M., Leggo C. and Sameshima, P. (Eds). (2009a). *Poetic Inquiry: vibrant voices in the Social Science*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

- Prendergast, M., Leggo C. and Sameshima, P. (Eds). (2009b). Poetic Inquiry Special Issue. *Educational Insights journal* (online), 13 (3), from <http://www.ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/v13n00/toc.html>, viewed 17 July 2012.
- Ryan, J. (2011). Plants, Processes, Places: Sensory Intimacy and Poetic Inquiry'. *Axon: Creative Explorations journal* (online). Issue 1, from <http://axonjournal.com.au/issue-1/>, viewed 11 October 2011
- Schön, D. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner*. New York: Basic Books.
- Schön, D. (1987). *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey and Bass Ltd.
- Smith, H. and Dean, R. (Eds) (2009). *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Springgay, S. Irwin, R. and Kind, S. (2005). A/r/tography as living inquiry through art and text. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11 (6), 897-912.
- Springgay, S. Irwin, R. and Kind, S. (2008). A/r/tography as practice based research. In Cahnmann-Taylor, M. and Siegesmund, R. (Eds), *Arts-based Research in Education: Foundations for practice*. (pp. 103-119). New York: Routledge.
- Springgay, S. Irwin, R., Leggo, C. and Gouzouasis, P. (Eds). (2008). *Being with a/r/tography*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Stevenson, K. (2004). *Filling the Empty Drawer: Towards a Theory of Emerging Writer Praxis*. M.A. dissertation, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.
- Stevenson, K. (2009). *Stories about Stories: Exploring Creative Writing Praxis*. M.Phil. dissertation, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK.
- Stevenson, K. (2012a). Embodying three aspects of my self through a/r/tography. *Axon: Creative Explorations journal* (online), Issue 3, from <http://www.axonjournal.com.au/issue-3/embodying-three-aspects-my-self-through-artography>, viewed 4 December 2012.
- Stevenson, K. (2012b). Deep Water Point. In Abbs, C. & Konrad, C. (Eds), *Breath of the Sea: ten eclectic poet*. (pp. 58-60). Joondalup, Western Australia: Peter Cowan Writers Centre.
- Stewart, R. (2001). Practice vs Praxis: Constructing models for practitioner-based research. *Text*, 5 (2), Oct 2001, from <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct01/stewart.htm>, viewed 18 May, 2005.
- Stewart, R. (2003). (Re)inventing Artists' Research: constructing living forms of theory. *Text*. 7 (2), Oct 2003, from <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct03/stewart.htm>, viewed 23 May 2005.
- Sullivan, G. (2002). Artistic thinking as transcognitive practice: a reconciliation of the process-product dichotomy. *Visual Arts Research*, 27, (1), 2-12.

- Sullivan, G. (2007). Creativity as Research Practice in the Visual Arts. In, Bresler, L. (Ed.), *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education, Part Two*. (pp. 1181-1194). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Sullivan, G. (2008). Afterword. In Springgay, S. Irwin, R , Leggo, C. and Gouzouasis, P. (Eds), *Being with a/r/tography*. (pp. 233-244). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching Lived Experience, 1st Edition*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- van Manen, M. (2006). *Researching Lived Experience, 2nd Edition*. Ontario: The Althouse Press.
- Wiebe, S. (2008). A/r/tography: resonations in writing. In Springgay, S. Irwin, R. Leggo, C. Gouzouasis, P. (Eds), *Being with a/r/tography*. (pp. 95-107). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Winter, K., Belliveau, G. and Sherritt-Fleming, L. (2009). Shifting Identities, literacy and a/r/tography. *Language and Literacy Spring 2009*, 11 (1), from [www.langandlit.ualberta.ca/Spring2009/Winters.pdf](http://www.langandlit.ualberta.ca/Spring2009/Winters.pdf), viewed 1 October 2011.