

# **Re-Imagining Professional Learning: How an Organic Exploration of Creativity and its Connection to Learning Illuminates New Possibilities**

**Désirée Gilbert**  
(BA, Grad Dip Ed, MEd)

*Thesis submitted to Flinders University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Research  
College of Education, Psychology & Social Work  
11/7/2023*



Lotus  
I am open to all  
new ideas.

John Tiong Chunghoo, 2009

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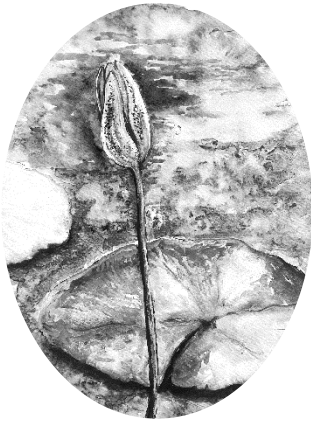
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## Abstract



In this study an organic inquiry approach was used to openly explore and better understand creativity and its connection to learning. This approach was inspired and motivated by personally disorienting experiences in which varying theoretical perspectives in research created uncertainty about my understanding of creativity as a life-fulfilling and generative learning experience. A further purpose was inspired by my context as a facilitator of teacher professional learning, namely to explore ways to enhance and enrich teachers' learning experiences.

This purpose challenged me to draw synchronously upon my enhanced understanding and knowledge of creativity and learning and engage in a deepened exploration of how teacher professional learning may be re-imagined. Research which invites new ways to enhance learning, and centres on the experience of the learner and learning, provided inspiration for this exploration.

In this study, I adopted a qualitative phenomenological methodology and organic inquiry approach to incorporate different ways of knowing to explore creativity and its connection to learning, and gather, analyse, interpret and make meaning of data. Perspective taking, storytelling, collective inquiry, reflective practice, including liminal encounters and discernment were embedded in this study to create space

for possibilities to be explored and actuated. These strategies for exploration drew upon the organic inquiry approach to research.

Findings from this study illuminated my research question: *How can expanding my understanding of creativity and its connection to learning assist me to re-imagine professional learning for teachers so that their learning experiences are enhanced?* Early findings highlighted the importance of personal and environmental conditions, and ways of working that foster and enhance creativity and learning. Also illuminated were the iterative and fluid phases in the process of creativity. Re-looking at data from this study revealed deepened insights in relation to the connection between creativity and learning. These included an enhanced awareness of the need for balance between creativity and critical reasoning, and the vital role of reflection, for fulfilled learning.

Continued examination of data from this study, along with self-reflection, provided ontological insights into the connection between creativity and learning and created a “thirdspace” for the generation of new ideas, and for critical reflection and discernment. Nearing the end of this study, an unexpected insight emerged from this generative and reflective space. This insight shed light on the importance of connecting to the imaginal as a source of creativity and to generate new possibilities for re-imagining teacher professional learning.

As a consequence of this study, my enhanced knowledge and understanding of the interrelationship between creativity and learning, and heightened consciousness of the imaginal, transformed my being and

practice as a professional learning facilitator. For participants in this study, engagement in the organic inquiry approach to research catalysed their creative potential and inspired them to re-imagine their teaching practice. In addition, findings from this study contribute to educational research in relation to re-imagining professional learning whereby the focus is on enhancing teachers' experiences of learning.

## Declaration

I certify that this thesis *Re-imagining professional learning: How an organic exploration of creativity and its connection to learning illuminates new possibilities*

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university
2. and the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University;  
and
3. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed:

Date: 1/04/2023

## **Acknowledgements**

I am most fortunate to have had, as my supervisors for this study, Dr Leigh Burrows and Dr Michael Bell. Throughout the years of research and writing they have been wise and inspiring guides and have provided me with insightful and timely counsel. I am especially appreciative of the energising conversations and valuable feedback provided by Dr Leigh Burrows in her role as primary supervisor. In addition, I am deeply appreciative of the professional editing of my thesis by Kate Leeson and for her beneficial suggestions.

I am also grateful to all those who have supported and encouraged me through the various stages of my research and have helped me to overcome challenges and obstacles and to celebrate new discoveries. In particular, I thank my friends and work colleagues who have, in unique ways, encouraged me and have contributed so positively to my experience during this study.

However, my deepest gratitude goes to my family - my son, Benjamin, my daughter, Emily, and my mother, Carole. Their love and encouragement throughout my engagement in this study has been inspiring. I am especially indebted to the endless hours of support and counsel provided by my mother, Carole.

## **A glossary of key words and concepts**

The following glossary highlights key words and concepts used in this study and provides transparency for how they are used in the context of this research.

**Creativity:** In keeping with my perception and lived experience of creativity, I adopt Piirto's (1998) definition of the phenomenon for this study:

Creativity is in the personality, the process, and the product within a domain in interaction with genetic influences and with optimal environmental influences of home, school, community, and culture, gender, and chance. The creative, poetic self is close to our spiritual, personal self, and when we express our creativity, we express our personal side. (pp. 41–42).

**Imaginal:** The imaginal is an intermediary domain that is neither "material", "nor immaterial". It is where the "acting imagination operates" (Bottici, 2015, p. 55). In this domain resides images as possibilities for seeing differently and for breaking free from restrictions imposed by fixed paradigms.

**Liminality:** In this study I draw upon Clements (2004) and Heading and Loughlin's (2017) definitions of liminality. According to Clements (2004), the "liminal realm" is a state "where the ego is barely perceptible" which may be visited "by the individual psyche to gather useful experience" (p. 27). Heading and Loughlin (2018) highlight that liminality is "a portal that leads to a previously inaccessible way of thinking about something" (p. 658). In this study, I refer to the liminal as a threshold

space between unconscious and conscious domains (worlds), where new ideas, possibilities and ways of being beyond rational knowledge are brought to light. Also in this study, I liken liminality to Soja's (1996) "thirdspace" as a place of openness and space for seeing phenomena in a new light.

**Rational and non-rational ways of knowing:** I draw on multiple sources including Carper (1978), Clements (2004), Jung (1959/1968), Langer (2005) and Van Stralen-Cooper (2003) to illuminate and differentiate between rational and non-rational ways of knowing in this study. In this study, rational knowledge refers to cognitive or rational knowing (conscious, acquired and stored knowledge). Non-rational ways of knowing refers to unconscious knowledge sources including intuition, sensing and feeling. Together, rational and non-rational ways of knowing draw on all functions available to us as humans and support knowledge building and meaning making.

**Reflection:** In this study reflection is associated with stillness, looking inwardly, and time and space for suspending rational thinking and giving attention to non-rational ways of knowing (senses, feelings and intuition). As Hunt (2021) states, reflection creates opportunities for individuals to "understand oneself and one's 'internalised knowing' better" (p. 39).

Inspired by Stewart and Alrutz's (2012) definition of contemplation, **deep reflection** (and contemplation) in this study refers to heightened moments of reflection in which "our consciousness becomes open to



flowing, temporal, and non-linear content thereby deepening and expanding awareness and insight” (p. 304). Non-linear content refers to untapped unconscious (non-rational) knowledge.

**Re-imagining:** In this study the word re-imagining is defined as re-creating or *imagining anew* (seeing in a new light). In contrast to *improving*, which focuses on making an existing situation or experience better (or moves closer to a standard), *re-imagining* involves the formation of a brand-new (previously unseen) conception.

**Transformative learning:** I adopt Mezirow’s (2003) following definition as a foundation for exploring transformative learning in this study:

Transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change. (p. 58)

**Unconscious (and conscious) knowledge:** In this study, I refer to unconscious (non-rational) knowledge as that which resides in an individual’s inner world. Unlike conscious (rational) knowledge, which is perceptible and is accessible, unconscious (non-rational) knowledge is not readily perceptible or accessible, but can be awakened and brought to light to harmonise conscious knowledge and to create more options. This interpretation of unconscious knowledge is inspired by Jung’s (1959/1968) notion of the unconscious as an “illimitable field” (p. 276) and as the “mother of consciousness” (p. 280). According to Jung

(1959/1968), the conscious and unconscious need to collaborate and harmonise, as they are both aspects of life. As Jung (1959/1968) states,

Conscious and unconscious do not make a whole when one of them is suppressed or injured. If they both must contend, let it be a fair fight with equal rights on both sides. Both are aspects of life. (p. 288)

## **Preface: The genesis of this study**



Two years before I commenced this study I went on a vacation with my son to Vietnam. While wandering through the tumbling and winding streets of Hoi An, I saw a lotus floating in a large terracotta pot outside a shop. I was struck by the beauty of the lotus. The uniqueness of the waxy bloom emerging from the shadowy water, with its vibrant colour and perfectly shaped petals and flurry of yellow stamens, appeared to me as a manifestation of creativity.

In my mind's eye I imagined the lotus seeds hidden beneath the shadowy water. As I continued to gaze at the water, the sun moved behind a cloud and, by squinting my eyes, I could just make out an indistinct mass of sinuous and interconnecting stems and roots beneath the water's surface. I marvelled at how this mass of stems and roots and colourful blooms had generated from the small and unpretentious seeds. As the sun emerged from the clouds and the water resumed its mirror-like appearance, I reflected upon the lotus' flourishing presence and how it seemed to be a physical expression of the harmonious existence and interaction between the unseen life-giving seed and external vitalising conditions.

Returning from Vietnam to my work as an educational consultant and facilitator of teacher professional learning, I felt inspired by my visit to Hoi An. The image of the lotus was ever present in my mind and I

found myself frequently reflecting upon my wonderings about its existence, and my metaphorical comparison of the bloom with creativity.

With a sense of deepening curiosity, I mulled over my own experiences of creativity and my understanding of the phenomenon as a unique and joyful experience, and its connection, as a generative and productive experience, to learning. In light of my encounter with the lotus in Hoi An, I wondered if creativity, like the lotus flower, was generated from a “life-giving seed” within us. I also wondered what the conditions might be that stimulate this “seed” to open and generate new life. Dreamily, I also contemplated how a better understanding of creativity might shed light on new possibilities for engaging teachers in rich and potentially transformative learning experiences. This was the genesis of my research.

# Chapter One: An introduction

## The background and rationale for this research



This thesis explores the phenomenon of creativity and its connection to learning and examines how a better understanding of these human phenomena (creativity and learning) may illuminate possibilities for re-imagining teacher professional learning. Deep professional curiosity and a commitment to improving my practice as an educational consultant with key responsibilities for designing and facilitating teacher professional learning underpinned this research. Moreover, this research was motivated by an appetite to openly explore the phenomenon of creativity, and to candidly investigate my intuitive sense that creativity is foundational to purposeful and inspirational learning, and for satisfying and transformative life experiences.

Disorienting experiences in the months leading up to the commencement of my research also provided motivation for this study. These disorienting experiences, which I will explain in greater detail later in this chapter, emerged from my observation of educational practice in a range of independent schools in South Australia (SA) and in state and national teacher professional learning organisations. In effect, I became conscious that the focus of learning experiences in school and professional learning environments was engaging learners in the acquisition of content; developing understanding of acquired knowledge; learning skills;

and building competency with processes involved in critical reasoning. While these are all unquestionably crucial for learning success and achievement, my observation of learning experiences in different educational settings highlighted the overall absence of space and time for creativity beyond settings involving visual, expressive and dramatic arts.

In addition, I noticed that teachers of young and adult learners were often aware of, and concerned by, this lack of attention to creativity, but were unable to see or imagine how they could reconceptualise timetables and/or event structures to create space for creativity in learning experiences. I was also concerned about how this lack of opportunity for creativity might constrain the potential of learners (young and adult) to generate their own meaning and understanding, and to engage in learning experiences that are transformative.

Looking to educational literature to help me make sense of my observation about the lack of time and space given to creativity in educational contexts, I became aware of the many diverse perspectives about creativity and learning. While some educational research made strong connections between creativity, learning and personal fulfilment, I was particularly concerned that other research made no mention of the phenomenon of creativity in connection to learning at all, or simply focussed on creativity as a learned skill.

Additionally, this initial exploration of the educational literature did not reveal any research that illuminated connections between creativity, learning and enhancing teachers' experiences of teacher professional

learning. This highlighted an interesting and provocative space for exploration and research and helped me form a guiding question for this study: *How can expanding my understanding of creativity and its connection to learning assist me to re-imagine professional learning for teachers so that their learning experiences are enhanced?*

Therefore, the overarching rationale or motivation for this study was to expand my knowledge about the connection between creativity and learning so as to be able to reconceptualise my understanding and facilitation of professional learning for teachers. In particular, I wanted to use this opportunity for research as a means to enhance my awareness of creativity and its connection to learning in order to enhance the experience of teachers in this adult learning context. At the outset of this study, I was also motivated by the need to make sense of my perception of the imbalance in time and space for creativity and critical reasoning processes in educational contexts. I was curious about whether this “perceived imbalance” impacts upon the experience of learning for teachers in professional learning contexts.

In addition, this research provided a valuable opportunity to contribute knowledge to educational research in relation to re-imagining teacher professional learning beyond strategies for improvement. In so doing, this study responded to research by Webster-Wright (2010) and Netolicky (2016) in which learning organisations are challenged to look for new ways to reframe and reconceptualise teacher professional learning.

For this study I chose a qualitative phenomenological methodology, and specifically an organic inquiry approach (Clements et al., 1998). This phenomenological research approach provided an authentic way to deepen my understanding of the phenomenon of creativity and to explore its relationship with learning. Moreover, this approach supported a rich exploration of lived experiences and perceptions of creativity and learning; enabled me to see creativity and its connection to learning “through different eyes” (Curry & Wells, 2006, p. 34); and generated new possibilities for re-imagining teacher professional learning.

Specific research approaches used in this study included engagement in the organic inquiry repeated three-step process of preparation, inspiration and integration; and the use of non-rational as well as rational ways of knowing (Carper, 1978; Clements, 2004; Jung, 1959/1968; Langer, 2005; Van Stralen-Cooper, 2003) to engage in exploration, analysis and meaning making. Collective inquiry, perspective taking, storytelling and deep reflection were also adopted as ways of working to access liminal insights and to openly explore the phenomena (creativity and learning).

### **The impetus for this research**

A series of synchronous experiences or events, connected through “a meaningful relationship of simultaneity” (Jung, 1969, p. 428), but without any direct connection, occurred prior to my study. These experiences, together with my general observations of the imbalance in educational



contexts in relation to time and space for creativity and critical reasoning, provided the impetus for my research.

The first experience and source of inspiration for this study occurred outside of my work context, and involved my intimate encounter with the lotus in Vietnam. This experience has been portrayed in the Preface to this thesis and therefore will not be described again in this chapter. However, this deeply personal experience should be considered the initial catalyst for this study. In contrast to the personal nature of my Vietnam experience, the second and third experiences occurred in the context of my work as an educational consultant. These will be described in the following subsections: "An educational impetus for this study"; and "A disorienting dilemma".

### **An educational impetus for this study**

After my vacation in Vietnam, I returned to my job as an educational consultant in the South Australian independent school sector. In this role I work collaboratively with colleagues to support teachers across a diverse range of schools. A core aspect of my role is designing and facilitating professional learning for teachers and school leaders that builds professional capacity and fosters improved education for students. To do this, I engage with educational research, including that by Fadel et al. (2015), Masters (2010), Netolicky (2016) and Riley (2013), and look for inspiration and new insights in relation to improving my teaching and learning practices. The question, "how can I re-envision my practice to

create conditions where teachers feel motivated and empowered to engage in deep learning, and inspired to be creative in their own unique ways in the process of learning?”, energises and drives me to seek new ways to re-imagine my role as an educational consultant and facilitator of professional learning.

Shortly before I commenced this study, I was immersed in educational research centred on approaches and strategies for improving learning and teaching. Included in this research were articles and papers by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2022), Fadel’s (2015) Foundational White Paper for the Center for Curriculum Redesign and Masters’ (2015) article “A 21st century curriculum”. Reading this research, I became conscious of the focus upon, and dialogue around, the need for attention to transformative competencies (including critical and creative thinking) as a way to optimise learning and achievement.

I was initially energised by this research and its focus on engaging learners in how to think, rather than just recalling learned facts. However, as I continued to engage with this educational research, I also became aware and rather concerned that creativity was often referenced as a cognitive skill. This challenged my perception of creativity as a complex human disposition and experience for generating new ideas, with creative thinking as one facet of this human experience.

With continued exploration of educational research about creativity I became increasingly aware of what seemed to be a paradox or

inconsistency in information and understanding about creativity. Some research, such as that by Craft (2001), relates creativity to learning as a way to add value and richness to experiences. Other research, including that by Perkins (1999), Clark (1974) and Braud (2006), describes creativity as being foundational to developing deep understanding and constructing new and unique meaning and knowledge. In contrast, Beghetto and Karwowski (2019) highlight the need for teachers to intentionally provide opportunities for students to explore creative potential.

From a holistic perspective related to satisfaction and success, Stoltz and Wiehl (2021) connect creativity to “personal effectiveness” (p. 3), and Cropley (2011), Gallate and Keen (2011), Kaufman and Sternberg (2007), Piirto (1998, 2011) and Robinson (2009) see creativity as an innate human disposition that, when fostered, enables personal fulfillment. By contrast, Owens (2011) presents creativity as a skill that can be learned and enhanced through focus on practice, and Hartmann and Kunzendorf (2006) describe creativity as a unique trait of some, but not all, humans. Some research, such as that by Greene and Yu (2016), also discusses how learning can be optimised but makes no mention of creativity.

The rich diversity and breadth of research prompted deep soul searching, and in this reflexive space I started to wonder about many things related to creativity and learning. In particular, I wondered how other people experience and understand creativity. I also wondered how

individuals' lived experiences of creativity might influence their educational beliefs and practices. These wonderings also inspired me to reflect on my own practice as an educational consultant, and to open myself to new perspectives and the possibilities that might be uncovered through a deepened exploration of creativity and its connection to learning.

I realised, with a feeling of growing disquiet, that, in spite of my intention to embed opportunities for creativity in teacher professional learning, my facilitation often centred around critical reasoning experiences. I was aware that, as my workshops were focussed on content learning goals, I repeatedly "ran out of time" for teachers to *be* creative and to *experience* creativity. While I believed that all teachers were imbued with the creativity instinct and that engaging in creativity would enhance their learning experiences, I realised how inconsistent I was in actuating these opportunities. Feeling disoriented, I asked myself: "Isn't creativity central to your childhood and adult memories of experiences of deep and fulfilled learning?" and, "if so, why do you push it aside in your professional learning workshops? What don't you understand that is compelling you to do this?" These questions accompanied by my feeling of disorientation intensified the impetus for this research.

### **A disorienting dilemma**

Further impetus for this study came in response to reading an article by Greene and Yu (2016) during my exploration of educational research

before commencing this study. In this article, Greene and Yu (2016) state that individuals with adaptive epistemic beliefs, dispositions and cognition skills, which enable them “to construct, evaluate and use knowledge” (p. 45), are more likely to be successful in their learning.

Although Greene and Yu (2016) state their position clearly and with academic rigour, I was disconcerted by the lack of any reference to creativity as a factor associated with success in learning. The article challenged my perception and experience that successful learning is directly related to the mindful and balanced interplay between creative endeavour (the experience of creativity) *and* the development of acquired knowledge through creative and critical thinking. In accord with Mezirow’s (1991, 1994) research centred on transformative learning, my personal “meaning scheme” was challenged and disoriented by Greene and Yu’s (2016) lack of reference to creativity in relation to success in learning.

I am aware that the omission of creativity in Greene and Yu’s (2016) article does not necessarily indicate that the authors see creativity as unimportant. I am also aware that “creativity” could be implied in their description of epistemic cognition, or it may have simply not been the purpose of the article. My frustration is not a criticism specifically of the writing or research by Greene and Yu (2016). Rather, it is a personal (and emotive) response to educational research (including that by Greene & Yu, 2016) which frequently focuses on developing thinking skills to enhance learning experiences above the creation of opportunities for the experience of creativity.

Shortly after I read Greene and Yu's (2016) article, I met with my university supervisor for an initial research conversation. Over a cup of coffee and looking out onto the university courtyard, we engaged in a deep conversation about creativity. In this conversation I expressed my feelings of joy related to my own experiences of creativity. I shared my feelings of confusion and uncertainty concerning the diversity of educational perspectives about creativity and learning. I also shared my intense frustration about the seemingly imbalanced focus on acquired knowledge and thinking skills in educational research and practice.

The conversation was illuminating and, combined with the disorienting experience of reading Greene and Yu's (2016) article; my early observations of the imbalance of creativity and critical reflection in educational literature and in learning contexts; and the inspiration derived from the metaphorical image of creativity presented by the lotus in Vietnam, I felt energised and highly motivated to engage in this research. In essence, these experiences triggered a creative experience whereby the phenomenon of creativity was being opened for deep exploration.

## **The contexts of this research**

### **Personal context**

This section highlights my lived experiences of creativity as a child, adult, teacher and learner. These experiences were integral to the creation of

my worldview of creativity, and therefore provided a personal framing for this research.

Engaging in creative experiences was a natural part of my childhood. I played the piano, painted, sketched and explored literature, film, theatre and art with my mother and grandmother. It was what we did and how we experienced life. I never questioned the place of creativity; it was just a way of being. I engaged, experienced and thought creatively as part of my natural existence. My family celebrated, respected, and made time and space for creativity as a natural and organically occurring phenomenon of life and existence. Connecting with my inner self, through the activation of my imagination, gave me a sense of fulfilment and self-confidence.

When I was a primary school student, I was fortunate to experience a richly creative environment. Although the teaching practices were by no means creative, my teachers invited creativity into every aspect of school life. They created opportunities for choice, exploration and self-directed learning that engaged me in a way that opened my mind and heart to learning in and beyond the classroom. Primary school was a liberating and empowering space where I was allowed to be me.

As a secondary school student in both Australia and the United Kingdom (UK), my experiences were very different and, depending on the teacher (not the subject or country), I either soared or maintained achievement. My years 10, 11 and 12 art teachers in the UK and Australia encouraged me to develop and draw upon my intuition and senses to

expand my perception of colour, texture, form and structure. My maths teacher inspired me to look beyond obvious solutions to re-imagine connections between mathematics concepts and encouraged me to draw to make sense of mathematical situations. My history teachers supported me to dream about and imagine historic moments and to see these events and experiences through different “eyes”. My English teacher in the UK shared his love of language in a way that inspired me to see the potential of the written word, and the spaces between words, to evoke emotion and invite personal connection and understanding.

Through my different career pathways as an adult (classroom teacher, school leader and educational consultant), I have endeavoured to recreate my experiences of creativity and learning for my students (children and adults). In all contexts I have had a firm and clear intention to embed creativity in all aspects of learning and teaching.

However, despite having a clear intention, the distraction and pressure of time constraints and operational requirements implicit in school life and in facilitating workshops have, on more than one occasion, deflected my attempts to create space and time for creative endeavour. This observation of my own practice was concerning to me and was a catalysing factor for my personal engagement in this research.

### **Professional and educational context**

As an educational consultant in the independent school sector in SA, I am responsible for seeking ways to improve the design and facilitation of



professional learning that builds teachers' professional capacity and fosters improved education and learning for students. In this study teacher professional learning contexts includes face-to-face and online workshops, focus groups, communities of practice and learning hubs.

Underpinning my design and facilitation of teacher professional learning is my commitment to developing relationships and positioning teachers (as learners) at the centre of their learning experiences. This perspective is supported by educational research conducted by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), Hattie (2003), Korthagen and Vasalos (2005), Masters (2010), Netolicky (2016), Riley (2013), and Webster-Wright (2010).

Also central to my design and facilitation of learning experiences is my intention to provide time and space for teachers as adult learners to draw on non-rational as well as rational ways of knowing (Van Stralen-Cooper, 2003) to enhance learning experiences and see new perspectives. I also aim to embed critical reflection (Dirkx et al., 2006) and reflective practice (Fook, 2015) into learning experiences to help teachers identify assumptions and ways to improve their own practice. However, as previously indicated, my enactment of these intentions is often lacking due to structures inherent in the design of professional learning events and, up to this point of time, my blind adherence to these structures.

Awareness of my tendency to revert to known structures and ways of working in teacher professional learning, and a feeling of urgency to open myself to new ways of designing and facilitating teacher professional

learning, provided a strong context for this research. In particular, it highlighted the significance of this study for *re-imagining* teacher professional learning, seeing professional learning in a new light, and imagining how these experiences may be enhanced and transformed. In contrast to the *improvement* of teacher professional learning, which focuses on improving upon an existing situation or experience, *re-imagining* is centred on awakening possibilities of seeing this adult context for learning in a new and creative way.

### **The purposes of this research**

Three interconnected purposes underpin this research. In line with an organic inquiry approach, these purposes are inspired and motivated by a desire to gain knowledge, deepen understanding, and to open myself to different perspectives and new possibilities in relation to specific human phenomena. In this study, creativity and learning as human phenomena are the subject of this exploration. The three purposes for this study are:

- To shed light on fixed assumptions about creativity and its connection to learning so as to transform these acquired frames of reference.
- To create opportunities for and to invite others (participants in the study and readers) to engage in their own open exploration of creativity and its connection to learning that is purposeful for their unique educational contexts.

- To generate new possibilities for re-imagining professional learning so that teachers' learning experiences are enhanced.

### **In this thesis**

An outline of the following chapters in my thesis is provided below.

#### **Chapter Two: An exploration of the literature**

This chapter examines and explores seminal and current literature from different disciplines of knowledge and highlights the diversity of educational research pertaining to creativity, adult learning and teacher professional learning. Research focussed on approaches adopted for exploration of these subjects is also reviewed in this chapter to prepare the reader for specific methods for research used throughout this study.

#### **Chapter Three: Approaches to this research: Methodology and method**

The qualitative phenomenological methodology and the organic inquiry approach to research adopted for this study are elucidated in this chapter.

## **Chapter Four: Introducing the participants and the context for exploration**

The participants, as storytellers and co-researchers in this study, are introduced in this chapter. A visual narrative approach is also used to make acquaintance with the context for exploration.

## **Chapter Five: Individual vignettes of creativity, exploration and transformation**

Participants' individual stories about creativity and learning are shared in this chapter as a collection of vignettes. Metaphor and descriptive language are used to create these vignettes and to portray participants' unique perspectives about creativity and the experience of learning.

## **Chapter Six: A presentation of findings**

This chapter presents findings from this study in a creative manner. An unexpected finding is also shared in this chapter.

## **Chapter Seven: A discussion**

A discussion about the findings and insights from this study is provided in this chapter. A summary of the findings, and a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study and opportunities for further research are also included in this chapter.

## **Chapter Eight: A reflection and conclusion**

In this chapter, I reflect upon the organic inquiry approach to this research and how it created opportunities for deep transformational learning. Also in this chapter, I conclude my study by connecting key insights revealed through this research to the purposes of my study.



This chapter has introduced my thesis and has described my rationale, impetus, personal and educational contexts, and the purposes of this research. The outline of chapters presented an overview of how this research will be shared in this thesis. In the next chapter (Chapter Two), I engage in an exploration of previous research centred on creativity, adult learning, teacher professional learning and approaches to exploration. Also brought to light is a gap in existing educational research in relation to the connection between creativity and adult learning.

## Chapter Two: An exploration of the literature



In line with my purposes for this study, as described in Chapter One, this chapter provides a balanced and illuminative review of creativity, adult learning and teacher professional learning-oriented research. To take a broader and deeper view of creativity and to make visible the current state of play in relation to research centred on creativity and learning, I critically examine seminal and current educational research. To further illuminate diverse perspectives I also explore and review concepts and perspectives in relation to creativity and learning through other disciplines, including that of psychology.

According to Netzer and Chang (2016), a careful review of literature in an organic inquiry should reveal the need for the study by disclosing the researcher's connection to the topic and gaps in research. Therefore in this chapter, I aim to carefully illuminate my connection with the topic and with the diversity of perspectives in connection to creativity and learning. In so doing, I intend to expose what is currently known and not known about creativity and learning, and therefore where there are possible gaps in research in relation to these phenomena. As such, my literature review in this study provides a background for discovery.

In addition, my broad and deep exploration of creativity and adult learning research literature from different disciplines responds to Huntsley's and Brentnall's (2021) claim that greater criticality is needed in

educational research. According to Huntsley and Brentnall (2021) criticality is needed to help researchers question unconscious philosophies and practices and is made possible through the exploration of research and ideas beyond one's own field of experience. Furthermore, Huntsley and Brentnall (2021) argue that without criticality, practices and methods run the risk of being perpetuated without any consideration of the unique characteristics and needs of people and context. Therefore, in this literature I adopt a critical approach to explore perspectives, concepts and methods within and beyond education as a means to see alternatives and new possibilities for expanding my understanding of creativity and for re-imagining teacher professional learning.

Furthermore, the detailed illumination of what is known and not known about creativity and learning through this literature review provided inspiration for my research. In essence it highlighted possible avenues for the ensuing exploration of phenomena (creativity and learning). In this study, my review of previous research illustrated my connection with my research topic and shed light on how connections between creativity and learning, especially in relation to teacher professional learning, are often not made apparent, or are overlooked.

To explore and reveal the diversity of perspectives in relation to creativity and adult learning in research and across disciplines, I adapted and blended Fry et al.'s (2017) conceptual review approach and Creswell and Creswell's (2018) priority system for reviewing literature.

Specifically, I drew on Fry et al.'s (2017) approach to openly explore research literature across "lifeworlds" (p. 8) to expose the breadth of knowledge and diversity of theoretical perspectives centred upon creativity and adult learning. In addition, adapting Creswell and Creswell's (2018) priority system for reviewing literature helped me to filter through the wealth of knowledge exposed by my widespread review of literature, and to highlight central ideas, perspectives and insights. Also throughout my exploration of research, I applied Huntsley and Brentnall's (2021) critical stance for exploring research literature. This involved highlighting different ideas, perspectives and practices as a means to promote questioning, dialogue and possible re-imagining.

This blended approach to reviewing and exploring research literature highlighted the diversity of knowledge, while ensuring the relevance of the literature to my research question. To further support relevance in relation to my cultural context for exploration, my selection of research literature focussed on Western sources.

### **In this chapter**

Two overarching themes provide a framing for this chapter. These themes were inspired by my research question and by two of my purposes for this research: to openly explore creativity and its connection with learning; and to re-imagine teacher professional learning so that the teachers' experiences of learning are enhanced. The two overarching themes are:



- Creativity: Exploring different perspectives
- Adult learning: Exploring current knowledge.

Sub-themes within each of these overarching themes are used to highlight unique and shared perspectives, theories and ideas in seminal and current research. These sub-themes were revealed during my exploration of research literature. A stand-alone theme, entitled *Approaches used to explore these topics: Illuminating current knowledge*, is provided at the end of this chapter. While this theme is connected to my study, its objective is different to the first two.

Specifically, the first two themes aim to enhance knowledge about the research subjects in this study: creativity and adult learning. In distinction, this stand-alone theme sheds light on the approaches used for the exploration of these subjects. Examining how core research approaches are understood in research literature also prepares the reader for the methodology and methods, described in Chapter Three, which were used throughout this study.

### **Creativity: Exploring different perspectives**

In this section, I use subheadings to highlight and critically reflect upon key perspectives about creativity and connections to learning. These perspectives are drawn from a broad selection of research and educational literature that spans across disciplines of knowledge, inclusive of education and psychology. While I group together researchers and

authors under these subheadings to highlight key perspectives about creativity, I acknowledge that their worldviews and contexts are at times different and that they therefore reflect unique viewpoints about creativity. My intention in drawing together these diverse sources of knowledge is to illuminate and critically reflect upon the ways in which, in spite of their distinctive contexts and worldviews, they have points in common in relation to creativity. These points in common, along with their diverse and unique perspectives, illuminate what is currently known and understood about creativity as a background for this study.

### **Creativity: An innate human disposition and life-fulfilling experience**

In early research on creativity, including that by Guilford (1950), intelligence and creativity were seen as independent of each other. Later studies by Clements (2004), Cropley (2011), Gallate and Keen (2011), Kaufman and Sternberg (2007), Piirto (1998, 2011) and Robinson (2009) began to highlight the innate human propensity for, and generative nature of, creativity. This more humanistic orientation differs from Guilford's (1950) understanding of creativity as a psychological power independent of intelligence, by positioning it as an innate human disposition that can be enhanced through interaction between intuition, the senses, feeling and thinking.

Jung's (1968) view of the human unconscious as an innate and unlimited field of experience, and therefore as a source of creative

potential, also supports the conception of creativity as an innate and generative human disposition. According to Jung (1968), awareness of unconscious content extends the range of consciousness and enables spontaneity and creative thought.

In addition to positioning creativity as a trait or disposition present within all humans, Clements (2004), Cropley (2011), Gallate and Keen (2011), Kaufman and Sternberg (2007), Piirto (1998, 2011) and Robinson (2009) also stress that creativity can and should be fostered and enhanced to enable growth and development, and for personal fulfilment.

In his book *The element*, Robinson (2009) states that all people are born with "tremendous capacities for creativity" (p. 56), and in "seeking the Element, it is essential to understand the real nature of creativity" (p. 56). Robinson (2009) defines the "element" as a different way of defining our inner potential. It is characterised as fundamental to self-revelation, sense of identity, purpose and well-being. According to Robinson (2009), engaging in creativity and being in one's "element" demands that we reach deeply into our "intuitive and unconscious minds and into our hearts and feelings" (p. 79), finding life experiences beyond our conscious awareness.

Although arising from markedly different worldviews and contexts, it is possible to see links between Robinson's (2009) focus on inner potential and the unconscious as a wellspring for creativity and Jung's (1964) idea of the unconscious. According to Jung (1964), the unconscious contains "all those creative forces which lead men onwards to

new developments, new forms, and new goals” (p. 18). Similarly, and also emerging from different worldviews and contexts, Maslow’s (1943) theory of self-actualisation, Csikszentmihalyi’s (2008) flow theory and Robinson’s (2009) description of being in one’s “element” all connect creativity with personal fulfillment.

This initial exploration of creativity-orientated research that highlights creativity as being central to personal fulfilment, contrasts markedly with Green and Yu’s (2016) emphasis on the importance of being able to think critically as a priority for 21<sup>st</sup> century education. While Green and Yu (2016) are focussed on examining the requirements of an “educated citizenry” (p. 45) rather than personal fulfilment, it can be inferred that they place precedence on critical thinking as a skill set for enhancing learning, over the experience of creativity. Moreover, it may also be inferred that Greene and Yu (2016) perceive creativity as a subset of critical thinking and epistemic cognition. This is illuminated in Green and Yu’s (2016) definition of critical thinking in which they refer to the construction (or creation) of knowledge as being part of the process of epistemic cognition.

Critical thinking requires epistemic cognition: the ability to construct, evaluate, and use knowledge. (p. 45)

To expand my understanding of creativity as a unique phenomenon or set of skills, and to open myself to personally unfamiliar perspectives such as that posed by Greene and Yu (2016), the following review of research is centred on the illumination of diverse perspectives about

creativity. This involves a review of research that expands knowledge and insight about how the phenomenon is understood, generated, fostered and enhanced.

### **Creating space for creativity to flourish**

A common thread in seminal research by Barrett (1993) and Wallas (1931), and in more recent research by Gallate and Keen (2011), and Ritter and Dijksterhuis (2014) is how, for fulfilled life experiences, space needs to be intentionally created for individuals to enhance their experiences of creativity. While the notion of space is described in different ways in this research literature, they all emphasise that space is needed for creativity, and for enhanced opportunity to open oneself to new possibilities beyond known ways of being.

This shared view of creativity as being life-giving and fulfilling has strong resonance with research by Clements (2004), Cropley (2011), Gallate and Keen (2011), Kaufman and Sternberg (2007), Piirto (1998, 2011) and Robinson (2009). In spite of the different underpinning contexts for this array of research, they all describe in unique ways how creativity is enabled and enhanced through the careful provision of space to fully experience the phenomenon.

Specifically, Barrett (1993) and Ritter and Dijksterhuis (2014) refer to incubation as a space or period “during which initial conscious thought is followed by a period in which one refrains from task-related conscious thought” (Ritter and Dijksterhuis, 2014, p. 1). In contrast, Barrett (1993)

relates incubation directly to a dream state and Ritter and Dijksterhuis (2014) perceive daydreaming, sleep and mind wandering as opportunities for incubation and creativity.

Decades earlier, Wallas (1931), in his research on creative problem solving in mathematics, also identified the need for *incubation*, or space to disconnect from the problem at hand. According to Wallas (1931) *incubation precedes illumination* and the surfacing of a creative response to a provocation or problem. Relatedly, Gallate and Keen (2011) in their studies of intuition and creativity relate incubation to problem solving and call it “problem space”. They acknowledge that time in this space enables the human brain to generate “possible alternative solutions” (p. 687) and novel ideas.

### **Creativity is ever-present and dynamic**

In contrast to Robinson’s (2009) focus on the connection between creativity and personal fulfillment, Corazza (2019) offers a cultural and relational perspective for understanding the value of the phenomenon. According to Corazza (2019) creativity is a fundamental human predisposition for “communication, learning, and social life” (p. 298). He also describes it as being dynamic, inherently present in nature, and as having a significant role in the growth of human culture.

The value of creativity is also highlighted in research by Montuori and Donnelly (2013), and Botella and Lubert (2019). Like Corazza (2019), Montuori and Donnelly (2013) describe the phenomenon as a dynamic

human characteristic and as being core to human capacity and possibility. However, in contrast to Corazza (2019) and Montuori and Donnelly (2013) who discuss creativity in relation to human existence and life experiences, Botella and Lubert (2019) centre their discussion about creativity within the context of education. In their research, Botella and Lubert (2019) make a direct connection between creativity and learning and argue that it is essential to understand the “complex, idiosyncratic and seemingly unpredictable” (p. 275) nature and process of creativity to be able to cultivate creative classrooms and educational practices. Like Green and Yu (2016), Botella and Lubert (2019) are focussed on examining ways in which students’ educational experiences as learners can be improved and enhanced. However, unlike Greene and Yu (2016) who focus on critical thinking and epistemic cognition, Botella and Lubert (2019) place a spotlight on learning and its connection to the unique experience, nature and process of creativity.

### **Interaction as the extrinsic driving force for creativity**

According to Clements (2004), Cropley (2011), Gallate and Keen (2011), Kaufman and Sternberg (2007), Langer (2005), Piirto (1998, 2011) and Robinson’s (2009) creativity is generated from the interaction between intuition, the senses, feeling and thinking functions within each person, In contrast, Amabile (1983) and Cremin and Barnes (2014) identify the interaction between individuals and their social or environmental influences as the extrinsic driving force for intrinsic motivation and the

generation and development of creativity. In particular, Amabile (1983) describes the driving force as the primary motivation for fostering and enhancing creativity (p. 15) while Cremin and Barnes (2014) state that “creativity does not happen inside people’s heads but in interaction between an individual’s thoughts and the sociocultural context” (p. 471).

A variation on Amabile’s (1983) and Cremin and Barnes’ (2014) social and relational perspective on creativity is offered by Csikszentmihalyi (1999). Like Amabile (1983) and Cremin and Barnes (2014), Csikszentmihalyi (1999, 2008) asserts the importance of establishing a learning environment that is focussed on creating intrinsic motivation and inner drive for learning, as well as developing creative skills. He defines creativity “as a process that can be observed at the intersection where individuals, domains, and fields interact” (1999, p. 314). However, unlike Amabile (1983) and Cremin and Barnes (2014), Csikszentmihalyi (1999) posits that creativity only has useful meaning when it is adopted and recognised by others. He states, “it is the community and not the individual who makes creativity manifest” (p. 333).

### **Creativity as a natural response to the world and to uncertainty**

Meanwhile, Langer (2005) describes creativity as a natural response to the world where senses are alert, and engagement is mindful. According to Langer (2005), self-awareness enables individuals to interact with the world – and respond purposefully (and creatively) to the rules and



absolutes they confront daily. Moreover, Langer (2005) describes how individuals' investment in their own learning and creativity motivates and augments these experiences.

Langer (2005) also highlights the significance of uncertainty for engendering creativity. She asserts that uncertainty fosters the creation of "new options for ourselves" (p. 190) and describes the issues created by "absolutes". According to Langer (2005) rules and absolutes (certainties) can cause paralysis, mask individual creativity, and limit potential and possibility (p. 190). This perception of creativity being generated from uncertainty has resonance with Huntsley and Brentnall's (2021) research in which they investigate the importance of criticality in research.

According to Huntsley and Brentnall (2021) criticality (and uncertainty) is enabled through "being willing to think from different and sometimes uncomfortable perspectives" (p. 5). Moreover, the feeling of uncertainty fosters new ways of thinking and behaving and this in turn, creates opportunity for transformation. Similar to Green and Yu (2016) Huntsley and Brentnall's (2021) research does not directly reference creativity, but focuses instead on the importance of criticality. However, unlike Green and Yu (2016), Huntsley and Brentnall (2021) highlight the importance of the creative process as being a catalyst for criticality and transformation.

From an educational perspective, Beghetto and Karwowski (2019) also describe uncertainty as the catalyst for the phenomenon. They state

clearly that teachers should induce uncertainty in learning environments to foster and enhance creativity. In Beghetto and Karwowski's (2019) words, "educators need to provide opportunities for students (and themselves) to explore the creative potential that uncertainty offers" (p. 11).

### **The teacher's role in fostering creativity**

In contrast to Langer's (2005) view that the deep investment of individuals in their own learning is a source of motivation for learning and creativity, Richards (2010) and Sawyer (2010) focus on how creativity and learning are motivated, fostered and enhanced by the careful shaping of the environment by the teacher and the education system. In addition to Langer's (2005) worldview and context being distinctly different to that of Richards (2010) and Sawyer (2010), there is also a marked difference in their understandings of how creativity is motivated. While Langer (2005) relates motivation to the individual experiencing the phenomenon, Richards (2010) and Sawyer (2010) connect the enhancement of creativity to how teachers shape the environment.

Like Sawyer (2010) and Richards (2010), Kaufman and Sternberg (2007) provide an educational context for their research about creativity and how it is fostered and enhanced. While providing unique perspectives, Kaufman and Sternberg (2007), Sawyer (2010) and Richards (2010) agree that the role of the teacher is vitally important for fostering and enhancing creativity. Kaufman and Sternberg (2007) put forward that a teacher who has a deep understanding of creativity makes possible

authentic encouragement and reward and therefore enhances creative potential. Sawyer (2010) and Richards (2010) describe teachers as being vital to establishing a learning environment that creates the drive and intrinsic motivation to engage students in creative and fulfilled learning.

An alternative view of the teacher as a source of motivation for creativity is presented by Thomas (2019). According to Thomas (2019), the “charismatic charms of the teacher” (p. 130) create authentic classroom experiences where creativity is “cajoled”, “picked up” and “caught” (p. 130). Furthermore, Thomas (2019) describes the development of creative skills and values in arts education and how they are fostered and enhanced through the interaction with the teacher and classroom experiences.

### **Creativity as a reflection of boundaries between the self and the outside world**

While Hartmann and Kunzendorf (2006) and Harrison and Singer (2013) position creativity as a human characteristic in accord with research by Cropley (2011), Gallate and Keen (2011), Kaufman and Sternberg (2007), Piirto (1998, 2011) and Robinson (2009), they do not recognise creativity as being equally present in all humans.

In contrast, Hartmann and Kunzendorf (2006) and Harrison and Singer (2013) understand and describe one’s experience of creativity in relation to the “thickness” or “thinness” of boundaries of the mind between the self and the outside world. Distinctly, Hartmann and

Kunzendorf (2006) describe the individual with thick boundaries as being focussed and less likely to be distracted by feelings, emotions, or creative thoughts. They state:

The person [with a thick boundary] will have a definite group identity ("this is my group, we do such and such; other groups are totally different") and will tend to see the world in terms of black and white, us versus them, good versus evil. (p. 102)

By contrast, Hartmann and Kunzendorf (2006) describe individuals with thin boundaries as being easily distracted by feelings, intuition, their senses and creative impulses:

This person will be aware of thoughts and feelings together ("I can't imagine a thought without a feeling") and will often experience states of being half-awake and half-asleep or will become deeply immersed in daydreaming or in reverie, so that at times the boundary between real life and fantasy may be unclear. (p. 102)

Therefore, according to Hartmann and Kunzendorf (2006), individuals with a thin boundary are more creative, open to intuition, and demonstrate creative behaviours not bound by rational knowledge and predetermined solutions. This implies that creativity is a trait of some, but not all, humans.

### **Creativity as a static and measurable entity**

The notion of the unequal presence of creativity in humans is also reflected in early creativity-centred research by Torrance (1974), Barron (1969) and MacKinnon (1962). Furthermore, Barron (1969) and

Mackinnon (1962) postulate that, after a cut-off point, intelligence and creativity should be seen to be independent of each other. A later study by Jauk et al. (2013) supports this theory, finding that intelligence may increase and exert influence on creative potential only up to a specific point.

Diametrically opposed to the notion of creativity as an entity that can be measured, Runco and Albert (1986), Piirto (1998), and Beghetto and Karwowski (2019) raise the issue of the validity and authenticity of testing something as complex and, from their perspective, as dynamic as creativity. Likewise, Petrowski (2000) highlights the tension that exists between diverse quantitative and humanistic-oriented perspectives on creativity by raising a question about the legitimacy of the idea of measuring divergent thinking to make a specific judgement about an individual's creative capability. She states:

Although corporations have traditionally used such instruments to identify employees with potential for behaving in a creative manner, one might use such a test to identify students with a disposition towards research. What attitudes would the test reveal? (p. 307)

The tension between quantitative and humanistic-oriented perspectives on creativity is also highlighted by Robinson (2009, 2012), who contests early creativity-centred research, including that by Torrance (1974), in which creativity is compartmentalised and seen as being separate from and independent of intelligence.

## **Creativity as a high-level processing skill**

Counter to Corazza's (2019) perspective that creativity is an inherent human disposition and central to the growth of human culture, Owens (2011) views creativity as a skill that can be learned and enhanced through focus on practice, feedback and building capacity with the habits of perception, intellection (thinking) and expression.

Unlike Hartmann and Kunzendorf (2006) and Harrison and Singer (2013), Owens (2011) does not recognise creativity as a human characteristic. In sharp contrast, he states, "personality is not what determines how creative we are" and that creativity is not produced by cultivation of "some mysterious genetic trait" (p. 28).

## **Creativity as a unique function of the human brain**

Another distinct view of creativity involves understanding creativity from a neuroscience perspective and specifically how the brain works to produce observable (novel) behaviour. This perspective is best described by Dietrich (2004):

creativity results from the factorial combination of four kinds of mechanisms. Neural computation that generates novelty can occur during two modes of thought (deliberate and spontaneous) and for two types of information (emotional and cognitive). Regardless of how novelty is generated initially, circuits in the prefrontal cortex perform the computation that transforms the novelty into creative behaviour. To that end, prefrontal circuits are involved in making novelty fully conscious, evaluating its appropriateness, and ultimately implementing its creative expression. (p. 1023)

Likewise, Boden (2004) also presents a neuroscience perspective, but through the study of artificial intelligence and “computational psychology” (p. 17). Unlike Dietrich (2004), Boden (2004) explores “how creativity happens in people” (p. 21) in relation to human intuition by investigating the construction and programming of artificial intelligence and relating this to how the human brain and intuition works.

Like research findings posited by Clements (2004), Cropley (2011), Gallate and Keen (2011), Kaufman and Sternberg (2007), Langer (2005), Piirto (1998, 2011), Robinson (2009) and Runco (2014), findings from Boden’s (2004) research support the notion that creativity is present in all humans and that it can be fostered and developed. Likewise, Boden (2004) disputes what she calls the “romantic view” (p. 14) of creativity where creativity is assigned only to those with innate talent or giftedness. She states:

creativity enters virtually every aspect of life. It’s not a “faculty” but an aspect of human intelligence in general: in other words, it’s grounded in everyday abilities such as conceptual thinking, perception, memory, and reflective self-criticism. So, it isn’t confined to a tiny elite: every one of us is creative, to a degree. (p. 1)

While Boden’s (2004) research and humanistic philosophy share the perspective that creativity is present in every individual, her research provides a different viewpoint about how creativity can be fostered and enhanced. Unlike humanistic, transpersonal and social psychology philosophies, Boden (2004) directly relates the development of creativity to explicit teaching. Specifically, Boden (2004) states that creativity

demands expert knowledge and requires the “skilled and typically unconscious deployment of a large number of everyday psychological abilities, such as noticing, remembering and recognising” (p. 22). Owens (2011) and Dietrich (2004) also share this perspective.

My review of creativity-orientated research involving an exploration of seminal and current research from disciplines including those of education and psychology, highlighted a diversity of perspectives in relation to understanding creativity. The approach taken was both open and critical. While I opened myself to explore broad, unfamiliar, and sometimes uncomfortable perspectives, I also engaged with them with discernment, and criticality, looking for similarities, differences and unique viewpoints.

The exploration of this research also revealed how creativity is perceived as a phenomenon, as a unique set of thinking skills, as being directly related to learning and transformation, and as being a sub-set of critical thinking and epistemic cognition. In the following section which is focussed on a review and exploration of adult learning-orientated research, enhanced awareness of these diverse points of view about creativity provided a heightened lens for exploring explicit or implicit connections with creativity.

### **Adult learning: Exploring current knowledge**

In this section I highlight key ideas from a focussed exploration of research on adult learning to illuminate the current state of knowledge in



relation to this context, and specifically to teacher professional learning. To do this I illuminate key ideas in adult learning research by Bélanger (2011), Merriam and Bierema (2014) and Mezirow (1994), and highlight different perspectives on improving or reframing teacher professional learning as presented in research by Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002), Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), Desimone (2009), Korthagen (2017), Netolicky (2016), Opfer and Pedder (2011), and Webster-Wright (2009). Research inclusive of, but not unique to, adult learning is also reviewed to shed light on different perspectives on optimising experiences of learning in educational contexts. This includes research by Amabile (1983).

Noticeable in this review of research literature is the lack of explicit references to creativity in relation to adult learning and specifically teacher professional learning. While a number of research sources, including Mezirow (1994), stress the importance of developing dispositions and skills for engaging in critical reflection and reflective practice as a means to improve and transform practice, creativity is not mentioned explicitly. Rather, like Green and Yu's (2016) research, creativity in adult learning research is mentioned implicitly and described in connection with concepts and methods for effective learning. These concepts and methods include critical reflection, transformative practice and agency.

## **Adult learning**

According to Bélanger (2011), adult learning is situated within theories of human learning, including behaviourist (Skinner, Thorndyke, Watson), cognitivist (Brunner, Gagné) and socio-cognitivist (Bandura), and constructivist (Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky) and socio-constructivist (Lave and Wenger) theories. However, Bélanger (2011) also highlights that adult learning is a field of practice in its own right and the ways of learning for an adult are different to those of school-aged students. For example, in the preface to Bélanger's book Egetenmeyer (2011) states:

adult education has evolved into a field of practice and an academic discipline in its own right over recent decades. The general question whether adults are still able to learn or not is behind us now. Of course, they are! Their ways of learning are different from those of school pupils, however. (p. 7)

In contrast to Bélanger's (2011) research which is centred on diverse theories of human learning, Merriam and Bierema (2014) focus their research on the unique nature of adult learning. According to Merriam and Bierema (2014), learning takes place within a social context and this social context, or "life situation" (p. 1), is different for adults than it is for children.

Merriam and Bierema (2014) also posit that to understand the context of adult education it is necessary to understand the characteristics of "globalisation, the information society, technology, and changing demographics" (p. 2). Furthermore, Merriam and Bierema

(2014) emphasise that these characteristics of society are dynamic forces shaping adult learning.

Like Bélanger (2011), Merriam and Bierema (2014) also describe how the characteristics of an adult learner need to be taken into account when considering adult learning experiences. These characteristics, unlike those of a child, include adults' competing responsibilities and roles, and their rich resource of lived experiences.

In contrast to Merriam and Bierema (2014), Bélanger (2011) references humanist (Maslow, Rogers), experiential (Illeris, Kolb, Schön), and transformative learning-related theories (Mezirow) as being key to understanding adult learning. Moreover, Bélanger (2011) describes how these adult learning-related theories provide insight for understanding how, and in what conditions, adults learn most effectively.

Specifically, Bélanger (2011) highlights the humanist perspective on learning whereby learning is generated from within the individual. Implicit in this view of learning is that the teacher's or facilitator's role is to respectfully create opportunities for the potential of each learner to be actualised, and for the learner to "explore new territory without fear of failure" (p. 38). Alike creativity-orientated research by Gallate and Keen (2011), and Ritter and Dijksterhuis (2014), Bélanger's (2011) view of adult learning reflects the need to create space for creativity and the exploration of new ideas and practices (new territory).

Rogers (2012) also emphasises the importance of the role of the teacher for facilitating effective learning whereby the learner's potential is

actualised. Rogers (2012) states that, like a therapist who supports learners to release their own capacity to deal effectively with life experiences, teachers should create an “atmosphere of acceptance, understanding and respect” (p. 551).

The idea that experience drives learning and that reflection and reflexive practice are required to transform experiences into knowledge is a common thread in research by Bélanger (2011), Kolb (1984) and Rogers (2012). While seminal research by Kolb (1984) describes this view of learning as a process in which “knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 41), a more recent and expanded view of experiential learning is also offered by Jarvis (2009). According to Jarvis (2009), learning should be understood in connection to the holistic life experiences of individuals, the social environment, and interactions between individuals and the environment.

Mezirow’s (1994) seminal research focussed on transformation theory provides another alternative view for understanding how adults learn. In this model Mezirow (1994) highlights that being confronted with a disorienting dilemma in relation to one’s personal meaning structures triggers reflection and transformative learning. Mezirow (1994) also argues that meaning making and learning are transformed through a social process involving the interpretation and reinterpretation of “sense experiences” (p. 222). Moreover, Mezirow (1994) describes how the transformation of existing personal meaning structures (characterised by unique interpretations of social norms and expectations, personal beliefs,

thoughts and emotions, and preferred ways of learning) is enabled through deep reflection and a critiquing of assumptions.

Like Greene and Yu (2016), who posit that a focus should be placed on epistemic cognition (the creation, evaluation and use of knowledge) to prepare learners for 21st century challenges, Mezirow (2003) also focuses on the importance of critical reflection for transformative learning in relation to adult learning. According to Mezirow (2003), adult learning which is significant and enables change involves disruption or disorientation and phases of learning where the skills of reasoning, critical reflection and dialectical discourse, and the dispositions for transformative learning, can be developed, grown and realised.

Like Greene and Yu (2016), Mezirow (2003) does not explicitly mention creativity in relation to learning, but describes how the development of skills of reasoning, critical reflection and dialectical discourse supports adults to be “more critically reflective of assumptions supporting one’s own beliefs and those of others and more discriminating, open, and disposed to transformative learning”, and “a more active and rational learner” (p. 62).

In contrast to Mezirow (1994), who focuses on how critical reflection enhances dispositions for transformative learning, Braud (2004) draws attention to the need to include opportunities for learners to engage in creativity for learning. According to Braud (2004), engaging in creativity enhances the experience of learners. This notion is supported by Perkins (1999), who acknowledges an intrinsic interconnection between creativity

and learning. Specifically, Perkins (1999) describes them as experiences through which new and unique meaning is generated.

Craft (2001) also makes a direct connection between experiences of learning and creativity by describing how creativity, when embedded in learning, adds value and richness to learning outcomes. To support her research, Craft (2001) lists the characteristics of educational contexts that she perceives as being responsible for both enriching learning experiences and simultaneously enabling creativity. These characteristics include a focus on individual agency and human authenticity, and the creation of contexts which invite wondering, inspiration, imagination and innate curiosity (Craft, 2001, pp. 16, 17). While Braud (2004), Craft (2001) and Perkins (1999) do not focus on adult learning specifically, their insights about learning as a human experience connect to those raised by humanist, experiential and transformation theories in relation to adult learning, as described in earlier paragraphs.

Other studies including those by Eschenbacher and Fleming (2020) and Schon (1983) also highlight the importance of critical reflection as a characteristic of effective adult learning. Expressly, Schon (1983) highlights how learning is enabled by teachers being reflective practitioners. According to Schon (1983), this supports continual and thoughtful analysis of teaching practice, philosophy and experience.

Likewise, Eschenbacher and Fleming (2020) draw attention to the importance of reflection, along with meaning making and interpretation, for learning that is transformative. Redolent of Dewey's (2008) view of

learning as a vital and personal experience that engages the learner deeply in the experience of learning itself, and Mezirow's (1994) theory of transformative learning, Eschenbacher and Fleming (2020) highlight that critical reflection is an essential "ingredient" for lifelong learning and self-development.

Dirkx et al. (2006) expand upon the notion that critical reflection is pivotal to transformative learning. Expressly, they describe transformative learning as an outcome of the complex experience that embraces the interaction between inner and outer worlds, and as a process which occurs within and outside of awareness. According to Dirkx et al. (2006),

This rational process of learning within awareness is a metacognitive application of critical thinking that transforms an acquired frame of reference – a mind-set or worldview of orienting assumptions and expectations involving values, beliefs, and concepts ... Most of the process of learning occurs outside of awareness and may include emotional, intuitive, symbolic, imaginistic, and/or contemplative modes of learning. (p. 124)

This view of optimising the experience of learning through deep reflection and bridging inner and outer worlds is also reflected in research literature by Burrows (2014, 2015) and Braud (2006). Burrows (2014, 2015) describes the fulfilled experience of deep learning as learning that takes place from the inside out. Connectedly, Braud (2006) highlights the interplay between conscious and unconscious processes involved in transformative learning. A contrasting view about how learning is optimised is provided by Fox (2020). According to Fox (2020), learning is enhanced through "asking questions and searching for answers

collectively” (p. 19). Therefore, unlike Braud (2006) and Burrows (2014, 2015) Fox (2020) places emphasis on the importance of learning collaboratively and through networking with others. While Fox (2020) does not refer to creativity in relation to learning, it may be inferred that these ways of working (networking and collaboration) create space where alternative perspectives may be explored, and new ideas are generated. This notion has strong resonance with research by Gallate and Keen (2011), and Ritter and Dijksterhuis (2014) in relation to the need to create space for creativity to flourish, and for personal fulfillment.

In relation to learning in all educational contexts, not just adult learning, Amabile (1983) and Sawyer (2010) highlight conditions that may inhibit learning. Counter to Greene and Yu (2016), who argue that increased attention to epistemic dispositions and cognitive skills will augment learning, Amabile (1983) highlights her concern about the overemphasis upon cognitive skills. She claims that an overemphasis on cognitive skills and processes may exclude or reduce the value of intrinsic motivation, creativity and self-generated learning.

Similar to Amabile (1983), Sawyer (2010) highlights that to optimise learning opportunities, there needs to be a shift from standardised testing and “instructionism” (p. 174) to conceptual learning and creative teaching across disciplines (p. 186). Sawyer (2015) also expresses concern about the tendency to emphasise one approach to learning over another, which he calls a paradox of teaching. He describes the paradox and complexity of needing to find a balance between



creativity or “improvisational brilliance” and structure. He refers to this as the essence of the “art of teaching” (p. 20). Sawyer’s (2015) research highlights the connection between transformative learning and creativity theories by describing the processes underlying creativity as synonymous with those involved in learning (p. 28).

Clark (1974) offers an alternative viewpoint for understanding how individuals’ learning experiences are optimised. According to Clark (1974), learning opportunities should be created to engage learners in “intellectual and intuitive, conscious and unconscious, verbal and spatial, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual processes” (pp. 5–6). Clark’s (1974) notion of creating holistic learning experiences as a way to foster deep learning is also described in more recent research literature including that by Stolz (2015) and Jefferson and Anderson (2021).

According to Stolz (2015), learning is enhanced through the creation of embodied learning experiences. Moreover, Stolz (2015) posits that embodied experiences where individuals are engaged in the process of learning as holistic thinking, feeling, sensing, intuitive beings facilitate deep meaningful understanding. In a similar vein, Jefferson and Anderson (2021) describe the importance of embodied learning for all learners (young, adolescent and adult) as “a learning dynamic that affects the emotions, senses, cognition and relationships of the learners and their capacity for learning” (p. 147).

In this section key theories and ideas have been highlighted that reveal different perspectives in relation to adult learning. Theories have

been described and critically reviewed to highlight the characteristics that are unique to adult learning and pertinent to all learning contexts. Where relevant, connections have been made to creativity-orientated research. Building on this section and to expand knowledge in preparation for the exploration of my research question and topic, research is explored in the following section that focusses specifically on teacher professional learning.

### **Teacher professional learning**

In this section I highlight research which provides knowledge about teacher professional learning as a unique context for adult learning. In particular I explore seminal and current research and critically reflect upon unique perspectives, models, and processes in order to illuminate different viewpoints and to disrupt preconceived knowledge.

Seminal research by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) provides a vision of effective teacher professional learning whereby teachers are enabled to rethink their own practice. In particular, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) emphasise that, to effect successful change, professional learning needs to “involve teachers both as learners and as teachers”; create opportunity for teachers “to struggle with the uncertainties that accompany each role”; and provide “occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners” (p. 597).

A distinctly different lens for understanding teacher growth and for improving teacher education is presented by Katz-Buonincontro, Perignat

and Hass (2020). This lens focuses on the how teacher education should focus on dispelling myths about creativity and on expanding teachers' understanding about creative potential in relation to learning. In contrast to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), who focus on the experience of learners in connection to the effectiveness of teacher professional learning, Katz-Buonincontro et al's. (2020) research is centred on exploring creativity and creative potential as a body of knowledge. They posit that this approach will build teachers' capacity to understand pedagogies for fostering and enhancing creativity and this, in turn will shift and transform their teaching practices.

In sharp contrast to Katz-Buonincontro et al (2020) Netolicky (2016) extends upon Darling-Hammond's and McLaughlin's (1995) earlier research and highlights the vital role that teachers need to play in their own learning experiences to enable transformational growth. Netolicky (2016) describes how transformational teacher professional learning is "life-long" and "life-wide" (p. 275) and is not the result of professional learning alone, but of "epiphanic life experiences" beyond the context of work and education (p. 270). Specifically, Netolicky (2016) posits a view of transformational professional learning as a wider, "whole-life" experience, or as an outcome of interaction between school, life and relationship experiences. Furthermore, Netolicky (2016) describes teacher professional learning as "that which results in learners being changed by their experiences in ways that positively impact their knowing, doing, and being" (p. 282).

Patterson (2019) also extends upon Darling-Hammond's and McLaughlin's (1995) notion that successful teacher professional learning involves deep critical reflection and an openness to see oneself as a learner as well as a teacher. Similar to Netolicky (2016), Patterson's (2019) view of transformational teacher professional learning focuses on the experience of learning as being deeply personal.

This view juxtaposes with the idea put forward by Forde and McMahon (2019) that the current impetus for professional learning is "predominantly around 'updating' teachers or addressing deficiencies with regard to current policy initiatives" (p.141). However, in support of the views presented by Netolicky (2016) and Patterson (2019) Forde and McMahon (2019) further describe how the reform-oriented professional development perspective is inadequate and neglects to take into account teachers' needs, beliefs and understandings and "the complex process through which teachers reshape their practice" (p. 141).

To support this view of teacher professional learning, Patterson (2019) offers a new approach entitled, the Enacted Personal Professional Learning (EPPL) model. This model, centred on empowering teacher choice and on meaning-making advocates for teachers to conceptualise their own professional growth, rather than being driven solely by professional learning that is aligned to educational policies, compliance and accreditation. Also central to the EPPL approach (Patterson, 2019) is the use of storytelling to develop self-understanding and teacher identity.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) and Netolicky (2016) describe generative approaches to professional learning which, like that offered by the Patterson's (2019) EPPL approach, also provide opportunity for holistic and deeply personal experiences centred on re-thinking, meaning-making and developing self-understanding. While these approaches do not mention creativity explicitly, they do reflect experiences (re-thinking, meaning-making and self-understanding) that have creativity, as well as criticality at their core.

In contrast to these generative approaches centred around the deeply creative and critical experiences of teachers as learners, Desimone (2009) presents a model for professional development in which learning is aligned directly to a framework. This framework is underpinned by foundational viewpoints on how teachers are best supported to grow, change and improve beliefs, attitudes and teaching practices. These viewpoints are also reflected in the language used to describe experiences in which teachers engage in learning. Relatedly, Desimone (2009) uses the term *professional development* to directly align teacher or professional growth to "individual programs, activities, and to individual teachers" (as cited in Opfer & Pedder, 2011, pp. 396–397). This contrasts with the term *professional learning*, which according to Opfer & Pedder (2011) reflects the wider "context and the situatedness of teacher learning" (pp. 396–397).

Distinctly, Desimone (2009) positions effective learning in the context of her professional development framework and identifies specific

critical features that support teachers to grow their practice. These features of Desimone's (2009) linear model for improving professional learning include: having a clear content focus; active learning; coherence; duration; and collective participation.

In contrast, Netolicky (2016) invites educators to "think more expansively and flexibly about what it is that transforms educators, and who drives and chooses learning" (p. 282). Moreover, Netolicky (2016) describes how these transformative learning experiences are characterised by active learning; having opportunity for self-direction, self-choice, reflection and collaborative learning; having effective coaches, role models and anti-models; and having time and space for learning to be processed.

Netolicky (2016) highlights that facilitators of formal professional learning courses need to reflect an understanding of good teaching practices, and be aware that, for effective learning, "one size does not fit all" (p. 275). In addition, Netolicky (2016) illuminates how commodifying educational theory and practice is ineffective for transformational learning (p. 275). The negative consequence of commodifying teacher professional learning is also highlighted by Forde and McMahon (2019) who draw on Timperley (2007) to describe how taking a technical approach towards designing teacher professional learning is "deeply reductive" and does not take into account context, social processes, relationships or teachers' understanding of themselves as teachers.

Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) offer an alternative lens for viewing professional learning for teachers and for understanding how it can be optimised to support teachers' growth and change. Distinctly, Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) propose that professional growth is a form of learning. Therefore, research related to contemporary learning theory should be applied to develop programs to support teachers' growth. According to Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002), this involves understanding the complex process by which teachers grow and through which change occurs. Like Netolicky (2016) and Patterson (2019), Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) highlight agency, active learning and reflection as vital characteristics of the change process and therefore necessary features of professional learning.

Furthermore, in contrast to Desimone's (2009) linear model and framework for professional development, Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) propose that a non-linear interconnected model that acknowledges teachers' individuality should be applied to optimise professional learning. They state: "we must employ a model of teacher growth that does not constrain teacher learning by characterizing it in a prescriptive linear fashion but anticipates the possibility of multiple change sequences and a variety of possible teacher growth networks" (p. 965).

Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) non-linear model also contrasts to Guskey's (2002) paradigm for professional learning, which provides a carefully sequenced process for change and professional growth based on successful implementation and evidence of improvement. Underpinning

Guskey's model are three principles: that change is a gradual and difficult process; that teachers require regular feedback about student growth; and that ongoing support and "pressure" should be provided to teachers (p. 388). Guskey (2002) presents this model in response to his assessment of the failure of teacher professional learning programs to bring about change in the beliefs, attitudes and practices of teachers. According to Guskey (2002), lack of understanding about the process of change, and absence of consideration of teachers' motivation for learning by its developers are responsible for this failure.

More recent research by Keisler (2017) expands upon Guskey's (2002) view of the importance of teachers' understanding the process of change in order to be able to engage successfully in the change process itself. In particular, Keisler (2017) raises concern that professional learning programs do not always achieve their potential of opening teachers to new possibilities in relation to their role and practices as a teacher. Like Guskey (2002), Keisler (2017) highlights that these programs do not invite teachers to understand the process of change or to be part of the "professional learning journey" (p. 6); instead, they are often designed to "work on teachers" not "with teachers" (p. 5).

Also similar to Guskey (2002), Opfer and Pedder (2011) describe the disappointing results of teacher professional learning in relation to "improving schools, increasing teacher quality, and improving the quality of student learning" (p. 376). In response to this issue, Opfer and Pedder (2011) suggest that teacher professional learning should be



conceptualised as a complex system rather than as an event. According to Opfer and Pedder (2011), this “assumes that there are various dynamics at work in social behaviour and these interact and combine in different ways such that even the simplest decisions can have multiple causal pathways” (p. 378). In contrast to Guskey (2002) and his carefully sequenced process for change and professional growth, Opfer and Pedder (2011) describe how professional learning should focus on the dynamic relationship between professional learning, the conditions in which learning occurs, and how and why individuals learn.

Webster-Wright (2009) and Korthagen (2017) also offer a view of professional learning that, like Opfer and Pedder (2011), shifts the focus away from the event of professional learning as the driver for change. While Opfer and Pedder (2011) focus on the complex interactions between individuals, environment and learning as a lens to understand the impetus for professional learning, Webster-Wright (2009) and Korthagen (2017) focus on the personal experiences of teachers as they engage in and with learning.

Rather than using a “status quo” (Webster-Wright, 2010, p. 727) model of professional learning, where learning is “mandated, coerced or controlled” rather than “supported, facilitated and shaped” (Webster-Wright, 2010, p. 12), Webster-Wright (2009) poses a challenge to professional learning providers to reconceptualise or reframe professional learning models. According to Webster-Wright (2009), a reframed model for professional learning should provide teachers with opportunities to

experience learning that is congruent with their personal needs, “yet cognisant of the realities of the workplace with respect to professional responsibilities” (p. 727).

Also, according to Webster-Wright (2009), this approach would shift the model of professional learning away from a focus on deficit and the need for development, content, set programs and atomistic learning. In summary Webster-Wright (2009) argues that there is a need to re-focus the shape and design of professional learning based on “how professionals learn” (pp. 705–706) and on the view that the “learner, context and learning” are inextricably interrelated (p. 712). Similarly, Korthagen (2017) challenges professional learning providers to create learning opportunities for teachers where their personal strengths are linked with academic knowledge rather than having to “deal with expert knowledge that does not make them enthusiastic” (p. 399).

Relatedly, Mitchell et al. (2010) highlight that transformative learning and change is most effective when it is self-directed, directly related to personal need or comes from within. With a focus on the importance of core reflection to actuate intrinsic motivation and to stimulate learning from within, Korthagen and Nuijten (2017) also highlight the importance of inner learning for transformative growth. Furthermore, to heighten the effectiveness of professional learning experiences, Mitchell et al. (2010), like Netolicky (2016), propose that an emphasis should be placed on developing trust and relationships between leadership and teachers in professional learning.

Research focussed on teacher professional learning features detailed descriptions about conditions, characteristics and principles that underpin high-quality and effective learning for teachers. According to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), characteristics of effective professional learning include: active learning that illuminates the processes of learning and development; connections to “teacher’s work with their students”; participant-driven experimentation grounded in reflection and inquiry; understanding and seeing the purpose of the learning in connection to self and other areas of school change; sustained and ongoing learning, support through modelling, coaching and collective problem solving; and collaboration (para. 5).

Similarly, in more recent research, Kizel (2012, 2022) and Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) describe collaboration and reflective practice (respectively) as being central to successful learning. In relation to collaboration, Kizel (2012, 2022) describes the importance of dialogic relationship, characterised by a community of inquiry engaged in active listening, and critical, creative and caring thinking, as being central to effective professional learning.

Regarding reflective practice, Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) describe the importance of teachers being active learners in professional learning, “shaping their professional growth through reflective participation in professional development programs and in practice” (p. 948). Relatedly, Kizel (2012, 2022) emphasises the importance of self-reflective learning for learning that is deep and potentially transformative.

Likewise, Korthagen and Nuijten (2017) describe the essential purpose of core reflection in professional learning as “tak[ing] teachers’ core qualities and ideals as the starting point for reflection and link[ing] the professional and the personal in teacher development” (p. 1).

Relatedly, but using the term self-understanding rather than reflection, Braud (2006), Clark (1974), Mitchell et al. (2010) and Robinson (2009) stress the importance of developing self-understanding in uncovering assumptions and creating intrinsic motivation for learning.

In a similar vein, Webster-Wright (2013) describes how placing the emphasis on teachers as learners and reflective practitioners creates opportunities for “mindful inquiry” and a “state of still” (p. 562) where they may engage in a “reflective journey from the chatter of the world, through the heart of stillness, to sit with paradoxes and uncertainties, emerging, refreshed and revived at the very least, and on occasions with a new spark of an idea” (pp. 564–565).

Through this illustrative description of reflective practice, Webster-Wright (2013) highlights that, while rational problem solving and critical analysis are crucial for learning, equal attention, time and space should be provided for “stillness” and reflection. Further highlighting the importance of reflective practice, Webster-Wright (2013) asks:

could there be value for academics in finding places for stillness in academic life, where paradoxes, doubts, uncertainties and mysteries can be held without an immediate search for solutions? This state of still and mindful openness may be crucial for developing fresh insights and creative sparks. (p. 562)

A further exploration of the literature highlighted models and resources designed to support teacher professional learning by focussing on understanding how different people learn. These included the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Bayne, 1995), the VARK learning style model (Amaniyan et al., 2020), and the Kolb (1984) learning style model. The unique design of each of these models and resources further highlights the diversity of viewpoints that underpin how the phenomenon of learning is perceived, the unique ways that people learn, and how learning contexts can be improved.

In preparation for this study, the exploration of adult and teacher professional learning-focussed research together with the exploration of research focussed on creativity, expanded my knowledge and provided me with new insights about each of these unique phenomena (creativity and learning). Furthermore, critically examining connections, similarities and differences in research under the two themes; Creativity: Exploring different perspectives; and Adult learning: Exploring current knowledge, revealed space for deepened research. In particular it revealed the need to intentionally explore the interconnection between the phenomena of creativity and learning and to investigate what this may mean for enriching and re-imagining teacher professional learning experiences.

In the following third theme, Approaches used to explore creativity and adult learning: Illuminating current knowledge, I introduce key approaches used for my deepened exploration of the connection between creativity and learning in this study. To do this I explore how these core

research approaches are understood and described in current research literature. Further discussion about these approaches to exploration, analysis, interpretation and meaning making is provided in Chapters Three and Four and is also threaded throughout other chapters in this thesis.

### **Approaches used to explore creativity and adult learning:**

#### **Illuminating current knowledge**

In this section I expand upon definitions of key terms and concepts related to approaches used to explore these topics, as provided in my Glossary. By highlighting the current state of knowledge in connection to key approaches and techniques used for research, I provide a foundation for readers to make meaning of my study as described in the following chapters in this thesis. In particular, I illuminate current research knowledge in relation to reflection, reflective practice, critical reflection, contemplation, liminal experience and ways of knowing.

As approaches for expanding knowledge and understanding and opening oneself to new possibilities, these approaches were embedded throughout my study. Specifically, I selected and adopted them to induce a state of openness; invite inspiration; awaken unconscious knowledge; generate new possibilities; augment discernment; and engender the integration of new ideas with existing knowledge.

## **Reflection, contemplation and liminal experience**

### *Reflection and contemplation*

Moon (2007) describes reflection as “lying” somewhere around the “process of learning and the representation of that learning” (p. 4). She also describes it as being a deeply private activity, which is both hard to detect and research. In addition, Moon (2007) describes reflection as being “useful” for making sense of “human” and “everyday” functioning (pp. 91–92).

Relatedly, Fook (2015) portrays reflection as being relevant to all aspects of living, and as providing a vital means to understand one’s life and actions. By distinction, Fook (2015) describes reflective practice as being centred on scrutiny of practice, the identification of assumptions, and the improvement of that practice. Fook (2015) references the work of Schon (1983, 1987) to highlight that reflective practice provides a way to reduce the gap between theory and practice by “unearthing the actual theory that is embedded in what professionals do, rather than what they say they do” (Fook, 2015, p. 441).

Furthermore, Fook (2015) distinguishes between reflective practice and critical reflection, explaining that both are focussed on identifying assumptions and improving practice, but the latter (critical reflection) is often aligned to adult learning and transformation. Fook (2015) references Mezirow (1991) to describe critical reflection as “the ability to

unearth, examine and change very deeply held or fundamental assumptions" (Fook, 2015, p. 441).

A different perspective on critical reflection as a resource for making meaning and improving practice is offered by Jefferson and Anderson (2017, 2021). While Fook (2015) and Mezirow (1991) focus on critical reflection as a means to challenge and change assumptions, Jefferson and Anderson (2017, 2021) describe critical reflection as vital for bringing new ideas to light to improve teaching practices. According to Jefferson and Anderson (2017, 2021), engaging in critical reflection supports mindfulness and the growth and development of one's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Furthermore, Jefferson and Anderson (2017, 2021) describe critical reflection as essential for creating a culture of learning; integral to the skill of noticing; and central to creativity and the generation of possibilities.

In connection to improving teaching practice, Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) describe "core reflection" (p. 48) as vital for personal growth and a means to make "profound changes" (p. 48) in behaviours and practices. Similar to critical reflection as described by Jefferson and Anderson (2017, 2021), Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) describe core reflection as being focussed on creating room for new possibilities rather than on analysing the situation.

Clements (2004), writing from an organic inquiry approach, offers a different lens to view reflection and reflective practice to those provided by Mezirow (1991), Jefferson and Anderson (2017, 2021) and Korthagen



and Vasalos (2005). Distinctly, she highlights how reflection heightens awareness of one's own self, and brings to light feelings, senses and intuition. Moreover, Clements (2004) describes how reflection offers indications of transformative potential and, by providing space for the "controlling mind to step aside" (p. 31), invites liminal experience and the imagining of new possibilities.

Another alternative perspective on reflection is presented by Stewart and Alrutz (2012), who distinguish between contemplation and reflection. Similar to Clements' (2004) view of reflection, Stewart and Alrutz (2012) describe contemplation as "a heightened awareness of the present moment by observing the contents of one's consciousness, body, senses, and emotions" (p. 304). Like Clements' (2004) perception of reflection, Stewart and Alrutz (2012) describe contemplation as being focussed on mind-body integration and on the "development of interiority through a more complete integration of the self" (p. 304). In contrast to Clements' (2004) notion of reflection, and with greater similarity to Mezirow's (1999) notion of critical reflection, Stewart and Alrutz (2012) describe reflection as being centred "on past events" and lacking "reference to spirituality" (p. 304).

### *Liminal experience*

Clements (2004) describes liminal experience as a space for connecting with less dominant ways of knowing and with "rich and under-utilised resources" (p. 31). Further insight about liminality is provided by Arnold

and Crawford (2014), and Land et al. (2014), who describe it as a productive space for learning. Mukherji (2011) expands upon the productive nature of liminal experience by describing the liminal as a productive space where imagination thrives (pp. xviii–xxi).

In addition, Bell (2015) refers to the liminal as a generative space where potentiality and possibility can be unleashed, while Soja (1996) describes it as a “thirdspace” or “space of extraordinary openness” and “place of critical exchange” (p. 5) between conscious and unconscious states. In contrast, Heading and Loughlin (2018) specifically relate the concept of liminality to educational and learning contexts.

In their research, Heading and Loughlin (2018) define liminality as “a portal that leads to a previously inaccessible way of thinking about something” (p. 658) and as a potentially transformative learning experience where connections can be made between “apparently disparate phenomena” (p. 658). Also making connections between liminal experience and transformation, Clements (2004) describes the liminal experience as being complete when insights are interpreted, and meaning is found and integrated into “one’s conscious experience” (p. 31).

### **Ways of knowing**

According to Carper (1978) and Van Stralen-Cooper (2003) use of the four ways of knowing – knowing through rational thinking; and knowing through non-rational sources including sensation, feeling and intuition – expands self-awareness, broadens perspective, deepens understanding,

and invites transformative learning. This notion draws on the work of Jung (1959/1968) and the identification of the four ways of interpreting, perceiving and experiencing reality. According to Jung (1959/1968), all humans have a dominant conscious function, and secondary suppressed and totally unconscious functions. Also according to Jung (1959/1968), connecting with less dominant functions expands self-awareness and actuates potential.

Jefferson and Anderson (2017, 2021), Langer (2005), and Mason (2002) further describe how enhanced self-awareness and understanding is achieved by drawing on both non-rational (feelings, senses and intuition) and rational (thinking) ways of knowing. In essence, Jefferson and Anderson (2017, 2021), Langer (2005), and Mason (2002) highlight how connecting with rational and non-rational sources of knowledge, and openness to new perspectives, helps to expose the subjective nature of our beliefs and experiences and to inspire change.

Specifically, Langer's (2005) research focuses on the value of being open to different ways of knowing as a way to enhance creativity and, therefore, to liberate the "blindness of knowing" (p. 174). Similarly, Mason (2002) and Jefferson and Anderson (2017, 2021) also highlight the significance of drawing on rational and non-rational ways of knowing to deepen noticing, and to bring about transformation.



In keeping with an organic inquiry approach to research where engaging in a literature review provides an “in-depth preparation of the soil” for the inquiry (Netzer & Chang, 2016, p. 8), this chapter lays the groundwork for this study by illuminating the wealth of existing knowledge and diversity of perceptions in relation to creativity and adult learning. Also, in keeping with an organic inquiry approach, this literature review confirmed the need for this study by highlighting the gap in research in relation to deeply understanding, or making visible, the connection between creativity and adult learning. Therefore, engaging in this expansive review of research prepared me for my continued exploration of creativity and its connection to learning.

In later chapters, I refer back to a selection of these research sources to help me to discuss and illuminate my findings from this study. Also, in this chapter current knowledge about key approaches to research was highlighted to inform and prepare readers about the approaches adopted for exploration, analysis, interpretation and meaning making in this study. In the next chapter, I outline my research methodology and provide a detailed description of the methods I adopted to explore the research phenomenon.

## **Chapter Three: An approach to the research:**

### **Methodology and method**



In this chapter I describe the methodology and method chosen for this study. In particular I highlight how my choice of methodology created opportunities for an open exploration of creativity as framed by my research question: *How can expanding my understanding of creativity and its connection to learning assist me to re-imagine professional learning for teachers so that their learning experiences are enhanced?*

#### **In this chapter**

This chapter is in three sections. In the first section I describe my epistemological and ontological premise for this study and how this provided a framing for my careful selection of an organic inquiry research approach. In the second section I describe the approaches (methods) chosen to support my research process and lastly, in the third section, I describe important ethical considerations for this study.

#### **Methodology**

##### **An epistemological and ontological premise for research**

This study is founded on a holistic and relational epistemology that positions the development and generation of new knowledge as being

connected to sensitivity and attention to different ways of knowing. According to Burrows (2011), these different ways of knowing include “science and reason, as well as intuition, emotional, relational and spiritual ways of knowing” (p. 29). Furthermore, the underpinning holistic epistemological premise for this study acknowledges that not one of these alternative forms of knowing or knowledge has precedence over another. By distinction, they work together to create balanced or new perspectives and knowledge. This is best summarised by Burrows (2011), who states:

They [different ways of knowing] are not placed in a hierarchy and not understood as the “truth” or as necessarily “good” but as different forms of information and different ways of gathering it to assist in developing new forms and sources of knowledge through being receptive to emergent and creative solutions in the process of problem solving. (p. 29)

In keeping with the holistic epistemology for this study, and with its focus on different ways of knowing, it is also understood that meaning making is generated from the interaction between personal (subjective) knowledge and new knowledge generated from different knowledge sources. As Brownlee and Berthelsen (2008) state, this assumes a relational epistemology where the development of knowledge is understood in connection to the relationship and interaction between “external (social)” and “internal (individual)” (p. 408) sources of knowledge.

In keeping with the organic inquiry approach to research adopted for this study, and as described by Clements (2004, 2011), the subjective knowledge of the researcher acts as the instrument for research in

partnership with liminal and unconscious sources of knowledge and influence. In this study, these sources of knowledge include collective inquiry, dialogue, perspective taking and storytelling, together with the unconscious sources of data, including participants' imaginations and feelings, and intuitive and sensory knowledge.

A relativist ontology also underpins this study. This ontological perspective orients reality and knowledge in connection with our interaction with all that exists. According to Rassokha (2022), this includes "material, information, energy, spiritual and any other essences" (p. 1434). In this study, this relativist ontology provides a context for research where it is understood that my meaning making is unique and is interconnected to my subjective view of reality. This view is created through my personal interactions with all existing forms of knowledge. This includes knowledge gathered from conscious, unconscious and liminal domains. This relativist ontology also positions the co-researchers in this study and the readers of this thesis as having their own unique and subjective view of reality and knowledge in connection to this study.

Therefore, to support the relational and holistic epistemology and relativist ontological perspective underpinning this study, an "exploratory and discovery orientated" (Curry & Wells, 2006, p. 7) methodology for research was required. It also required a methodology that provided me with creative ways to expand my knowledge about the lived human experience of creativity from different perspectives; to reveal previously unseen connections between phenomena (creativity and learning); and to

take me, as the researcher, “into the unknown” as I explored possibilities for re-imagining teacher professional learning.

In the next subsection I outline my choice of a qualitative phenomenological methodology (Creswell, 2013; Hamilton et al., 2008; Lester, 1999; Zahavi, 2018) and my choice and adaptation of a transpersonal and organic inquiry approach (Clements et al., 1998) as a fitting research method for this study.

### **A qualitative phenomenological methodology**

In this study, I chose a qualitative phenomenological methodology for its relevance to the study of phenomena (creativity and its connection to learning) through human experience. Phenomenological research views human experiences with an open mind and acknowledges the subjective viewpoint. It allows the researcher to explore the perceptions, perspectives, understandings and feelings of those who have experienced the phenomenon. Therefore, with its focus on open reflective practice and perceptual exploration, this methodology provided me with an effective approach to gain insight into “the life-world of the subjects” (myself and the co-researchers) (Zahavi, 2018, p. 117) and to explore their experiences of creativity and learning. Expressly, it provided me with a way to deepen my understanding of the essence of the phenomenon of creativity as revealed through stories of lived experiences of creativity by participants in the study.



## **Refining my methodology**

To further hone this methodology for the specific needs of my study I chose a transpersonal research method. This approach further supported my research purposes by offering a means of study and exploration that looked beyond knowledge acquisition. This involved the adoption of alternative methods of inquiry (including storytelling, drawing and creative writing) in addition to rational and non-rational (sensory, intuitive, emotional) ways of knowing.

As Braud (2004) highlights, transpersonal qualities, such as those mentioned above, can be found in other qualitative approaches to research. Braud (2004) also emphasises that, while the organic inquiry approach draws on these qualities, it also has a unique way of combining and drawing on them. Braud (2004) states:

What is most distinctive about the Organic Inquiry approach is the rich combination of many of the features and the much greater than usual emphasis of some of these features – particularly the suggested sources of inspiration, the necessary release from egoic and other constraints during certain phases of the research, and the researcher’s aim of transformational changes in the researcher, research participants, and reader/audience of the final research report. (p. 19)

The transpersonal research approach provided me with a fitting means to enhance my awareness of how experiences of creativity, and their connection with learning, can be interpreted. As Anderson (2018) and Anderson and Braud (2011) describe, a transpersonal research methodology aims to enhance and expand opportunities to explore human

experience by “directly employing alternative modes of awareness and intuition in the conduct of research” (p. xi).

In due course, and to further hone my research approach as fitting for its underpinning relational and participatory epistemology, I chose a transpersonal organic inquiry approach. As its name suggests, this approach, with its origins in the work of Clements et al. (1998), offered an unforced and generative method for exploration and inquiry. While I did initially consider a heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990, 2014) as an explicit transpersonal approach for this study, the sequential nature of its suggested method for exploration felt at odds with my open and exploratory research objective.

By contrast, an organic inquiry approach (Clements et al., 1998), underpinned by its iterative and generative three-step process of preparation, inspiration and integration, provided a flexible and open way to engage with unique stories of creativity and to see and notice new perspectives and insights through “different eyes” (Curry & Wells, 2006, p. 34). So named to reflect the generative and often unpredictable nature of growth in nature, an organic inquiry approach was chosen to offer a means to expand my consciousness about creativity and its connection to learning. It also offered a way to engage in a personally transformative process involving a “restructuring of my worldview” (Clements, 2004, p. 27) in relation to creativity, learning and specifically teacher professional learning.

Specifically, this methodology provided an opportunity for me to: *prepare* for the exploration of phenomena by opening myself to new ideas, perspectives and inspiration; gain *inspiration* through storytelling, collective inquiry, reflection and possible encounters with the liminal; and *integrate* new insights with rational knowledge (Clements, 2004). The open and inviting nature of an organic inquiry approach to research also provided a way for the co-researchers and the readers of this dissertation to engage in their own parallel process of inquiry, deep learning and personal transformation.

A unique feature of an organic inquiry is that the researcher's expanded consciousness and deep personal awareness of the phenomenon being studied is seen as a starting place for research. This feature of an organic inquiry approach to research fitted my own position at the start of study. As explained in Chapter One, I entered this study with heightened curiosity about creativity and a deep personal awareness and perception about the connection between creativity and learning. This deepened awareness and consciousness about creativity underpinned the impetus for this research and therefore, as described in an organic inquiry approach, provided the "seed" for my research (Clements, 2004, p. 30).

Bardsley (2020) also highlights the unique nature of an organic inquiry whereby the researcher is "intrinsically and uniquely linked to the research methodology and outcome" (p. 2000). She describes how this connection between researcher, methodology and outcomes necessitates the choice and use of specific techniques or approaches that "fit most

aptly with her research topic and style" (p. 2000). The use of these specific approaches throughout the study supports the researcher to "cycle through her own investigative process of preparation, inspiration and integration" (Bardsley, 2020, p. 2000). Carefully chosen and facilitated, these approaches invite and create opportunities for open and creative exploration of the research topic and for discerning critical analysis. In essence they provide parameters for ways of working during the research process which, although they do not ensure generalisability or replicability (Clements, 2011), do balance objectivity and subjectivity and therefore ensure research rigour (Clements, 2004, p. 28).

In this study, collective inquiry, dialogue, storytelling and perspective taking, together with reflection, reflective journalling, and self-dialogue were chosen and used as approaches and techniques for exploration, analysis and meaning making. Further creative approaches including drawing and painting were utilised to assist me to travel "to the liminal realm for inspiration" (Curry & Wells, 2006, p. 9) and to connect to my own unconscious as a source of untapped knowledge.

Further description of the organic inquiry approaches adopted for this study are provided in the following section. A narrative approach is used in Chapter Four to depict how these approaches were intentionally and intuitively embedded in the research process during this study.

## **Methods**

Under the following subheadings I describe the organic inquiry research approaches adopted for this study: Inviting participation; Contexts and approaches for exploration and gathering data; and Approaches to analysis and interpretation.

### **Inviting participation**

According to Curry and Wells (2006) a key feature of an organic inquiry approach to research involves inviting participants to engage as co-researchers in the exploration of a topic or phenomenon. Also according to Curry and Wells (2006), inviting participants to engage as co-researchers “honours the role of others” (p. 35) in the research process and provides valuable opportunities for perspective taking. In this study inviting others (teachers working in SA independent schools) to participate in my research supported the inquiry process. Distinctly, participation from others supported the “cooperative, or collaborative, process of generating data” (Curry & Wells, 2006, p. 35) and provided a means to expand knowledge and perspectives about creativity.

To invite participation in my study in a way that supported the open and inviting nature of an organic inquiry, I created an email Expression of Interest (EoI) (Appendix A). To reduce the chance of bias I organised for this EoI to be emailed to approximately 150 teachers in early education,

primary and secondary schools in the independent sector of SA by workplace administration, and through a general email contact list.

Ten teachers returned an expression of interest and in response I forwarded these ten teachers a letter of introduction, a detailed information sheet about the study, and a consent form and questionnaire for participation (Appendix B). Six teachers returned consent forms and questionnaires and provided responses about how they met the participation criteria (this is described in the following paragraphs). Drawing on Schein's (1981) research on the importance of building relationships, all further communication with these six teachers throughout the study was through direct email between myself and each participant and through in-person dialogue.

### *Participation criteria*

Parameters for participation in this study were underpinned by my unique context for exploration as an educational consultant within the SA independent school sector. While my invitation to participate was open to all teachers and leaders in SA independent schools, criteria for participation (Appendix A) were clearly defined in my EoI. These criteria were provided to all interested teachers to avoid any confusion about my research, and to communicate and make clear my expectations regarding their participation. No teachers were excluded from participating in this study as long as they met the criteria for participation (Appendix A). This

criteria was not based on school context, personal view of creativity, age, gender, cultural or socio-economic background.

The main criterion for participation was that interested participants have an open interest in creativity as an individual, and as a teacher. In addition, criteria included: a willingness to explore the phenomenon through an open and honest narrative of personal lived experiences; a commitment to share these stories with others; and a readiness to engage in dialogue and reflection (Burrows, 2015; Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2016; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Kvale, 2006; Ritter & Dijksterhuis, 2014). To support my work and research context, participating teachers also needed to be employed at an independent school in SA.

A final selection criterion was agreeing to meet with myself (the researcher) and other co-researchers for three 90-minute sessions (focus groups) over a period of four to six months, engage in between-session activities, reflections and tasks, and engage in email and telephone communication when needed. To honour my inviting and open approach, I also made clear that, while face-to-face meetings were preferable for building relationship, sharing stories and engaging in dialogue, this last criterion should not hinder participation. Accordingly, I made available alternative methods for engaging and participating in the study and, where possible, responded to the individual needs of participants. On two occasions this involved re-organising times for focus group meetings. Alternative approaches included email, video conferencing and telephone.

### *Inviting participants to be co-researchers*

I invited the six teachers who returned consent forms and questionnaires from metropolitan schools in the SA independent sector to participate in my study as co-researchers. Inviting participants to be co-researchers in this exploratory study was central to the adopted organic inquiry approach. Specifically, it acknowledged the importance of the role of others in enhancing perspectives about the phenomenon (creativity), and in deepening the exploratory process.

As Curry and Wells (2006) state, "calling participants co-researchers also makes sense when relying on cooperative inquiry groups" as integral to the "collaborative process of generating data" (p. 35). In this study co-researchers were invited to work in partnership with me (as the researcher) as we explored the phenomenon of creativity. This involved participation in open dialogue with myself and teacher colleagues, sharing stories about their lived experiences of creativity, and articulating ideas, questions, wonderings and insights about the phenomenon throughout the research period.

While the participants were inextricably involved in the exploration process as co-researchers, I was also careful to make clear that the design, process and responsibilities of research were mine. Clear communication in relation to the role of the participants in this study was crucial in establishing trust, openness and collegiality.

Of the six teacher co-researchers, five were keen and able to attend face-to-face sessions. One teacher, although keen to meet with other



teachers, was not able to attend face-to-face sessions and therefore asked to meet me individually. These teachers held various positions in schools including classroom teaching in primary and secondary contexts, leadership positions in curriculum and learning diversity, and a state executive officer position for an educational organisation based in South Australia.

At a later date (mid-2019), a seventh teacher asked to be part of this study. This teacher, from a small country primary school, could not commit to meeting or attending face-to-face sessions but did engage in journalling and email communication. This participant, a visual and performing arts teacher, asked me personally about engaging in the study after hearing about it from a colleague.

In line with an organic inquiry approach, I am also included in the data as a participant. Including myself, this makes a total of eight participants involved in this research study. Important to note is that, due to unexpected competing work demands and personal responsibilities, not all eight participants were able to attend all face-to-face sessions. In Chapter Four, I introduce all participants (including myself) and describe our unique educational contexts, our perceptions of creativity, and our approach to participation in this study. For privacy, I use pseudonyms for the teacher participants at all times.

In this study, I use the term participants to refer to both myself and my co-researchers. I use "co-researchers" to describe the teacher participants only. A complete list of participants is provided in Appendix C.

### *My role as researcher and participant*

Curry and Wells (2006) describe the pivotal and compelling role of the researcher in an organic inquiry with his, her or their intuition and lived experiences as the “seed” of the research (p. 34). Relatedly, Clements (2004) describes the psyche of the researcher as becoming “the subjective ‘instrument’ of the research” (p. 26). In accord with Clements’ (2004) and Curry and Wells’ (2006) view of the researcher in an organic inquiry, my lived experiences and intense curiosity about creativity and its connection with learning provided the seed for this study.

In my role as researcher in this study, I assumed all responsibilities involved in the research process. This included: developing questions and selecting approaches to facilitate the open exploration of creativity and its connection to learning; choosing and adapting approaches to interpret and make meaning of the data and the findings revealed during the study; and then communicating my research insights in this thesis.

In addition, my responsibility for facilitation as the researcher in this study involved attention to developing trust and “reciprocity of relationship” (Schein, 1981, pp. 45–46) with and between the participants. This involved being intentional in establishing, and committed to maintaining, a safe environment for the co-researchers to engage in collective inquiry, storytelling, open dialogue and self-reflection. In essence, my role as researcher in this study was underpinned by my commitment to being “fully present in the here and now, avoiding distraction and judgment, and being attuned to the

experience" (Prince-Paul & Kelley, 2017, p. 481). To honour the participatory and relational epistemology of my research, I also included myself in the research process as a participant in the study.

## **Contexts and methods for exploration and gathering data (knowledge)**

### *A context for exploration and gathering data*

In this study I use the word *data* to describe new knowledge, insights and previously unseen connections gleaned from engaging with conscious, unconscious and liminal domains during this study. In keeping with the organic inquiry approach for research, diverse types of data were gathered throughout the study and through attention to rational and non-rational ways of knowing including intuition, feeling and sensing.

Therefore, in this study the word *data* is used to describe the stories, reflections, jottings, transcripts, annotated recordings of dialogue, as well as participants' (including my) feelings, intuitions and senses, gathered throughout this study.

Specific approaches to gathering data from conscious sources included telling and listening to stories of lived experiences of creativity, open dialogue, and reflection. I also drew on aspects of Kvale's (1996) in-depth interview method in which meaning-seeking and guiding questions woven throughout the research period are used to foster understanding, and to make meaning of the topic being explored. To counteract the

limitations posed by engaging in analysis at one point in time, this method aims to support meaning making over time and through an ongoing partnership between the researcher and participants.

Gathering data from unconscious or liminal domains involved a focus on deep reflection and on the creation of safe, relational and respectful conditions for collective inquiry where participants felt at ease to share their liminal insights. In keeping with the organic inquiry approach, gathering data from unconscious and liminal domains and sources of knowledge including feelings, intuition and sensing was vital for expanding knowledge and for inspiring vision beyond egoic influences and constraints. Therefore, to be able to access data from the unconscious, the inclusion of alternative modes of knowing such as feeling, sensing and intuiting in all phases of research was essential for this study.

### *Focus groups for collective inquiry*

Drawing on the research of Kitzinger (1994, 1995), Kitzinger and Barbour (1999) and Moloney (2011), I identified focus groups as being an appropriate and effective method and context for engaging in face-to-face sessions with participants in this study. Specifically, focus groups provided collegial and collaborative spaces for collective inquiry, dialogue and perspective taking.

The opportunity for group interaction and discourse in focus groups offered a way to “elicit data” and spark “new directions in thinking” (Curry

& Wells, 2006, p. 88). As Curry and Wells (2006) state, collective inquiry or the “group dynamic factor thus can potentially increase the depth and breadth of data that is gathered” (pp. 88–89). Adopting focus groups as an method for engaging in collective inquiry also provided a respectful environment for open and non-judgemental dialogue in which “artificial barriers between the researcher and participants were ‘dissolved’” (Curry & Wells, 2006, p. 88).

I initially identified three focus groups as being an appropriate number for collective inquiry and gathering data in this study. However, the co-researchers requested an additional (fourth) focus group as they felt there was “still so much to be discussed and discovered” (Claire). A date during August 2019 was scheduled for this fourth group.

Mid-way through 2019, I renamed the focus groups as creativity hubs. This was in response to a group discussion about the organic and creative nature of these focus groups and how these sessions awakened creative potential and *expanded* (rather than focussed) knowledge and ways of seeing creativity. Hereafter in this thesis, the focus groups are referred to as creativity hubs or hubs.

Inspired by De Nobile et al. (2021), whose research highlights how the physical environment plays a significant role in creating a sense of security and identity, and in establishing positive expectations, attitudes and behaviour, I selected a meeting room at the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) as a venue for the creativity hubs. This meeting room with its large window, natural lighting,

view of the parklands and access to amenities offered participants a comfortable and welcoming ambiance and tranquil and positive atmosphere for engaging in respectful dialogue and collective inquiry. Furthermore, this location provided a central and neutral meeting place for teachers to meet.

In consultation with the co-researchers, I chose three dates for creativity hubs over a period of twelve weeks: from March 2019 to June 2019, with three to four weeks between each hub, allowing time for between-hub reflection and journaling. I initially set a ninety-minute period from 4:30 pm to 6:00 pm for the creativity hubs to allow time for teachers to travel to the AISSA without intrusion upon their school day or workplace. However, in response to requests from five of the participants to make more time for dialogue, the hubs were extended to two hours, from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm.

Being flexible and responsive to group dynamics and the individual needs of all participants required me to re-schedule hubs when needed. This showed respect for the participants as co-researchers in this study, and demonstrated the value placed on their ideas, stories, questions and dialogue.

To support the personal needs of the co-researchers, I also provided the option of one-on-one meetings (attended by myself and one teacher participant). While the one-on-one meetings did not fully enable collective inquiry, I used approaches including storytelling and reflective and open questioning to create opportunities for open dialogue. I offered one-on-

one meetings on a needs basis and they were scheduled as close to creativity hub dates as possible. On all occasions, one-on-one meetings were held at coffee shops chosen by the individual participant. These coffee shops were selected for their ease of location, ambiance and suitability for private conversation.

Email also provided a useful means of communication and correspondence for operational processes between creativity hubs (Appendix D). Some co-researchers embraced my invitation to use email as a way to connect with me between hubs, and to share ideas and reflections that emerged after hubs and individual meetings. Email correspondence with the seventh co-researcher who joined the study later was generated by her, and was spontaneous. By her choice, email was the sole means of sharing her stories about creativity.

### *Dialogue, reflection and storytelling*

To invite participants to share stories and to allow ideas and connections in relation to creativity and learning to unfold and emerge in a natural and unforced manner, I adapted and adopted Kvale's (1996) in-depth interview method for this study. My adapted version of this method involved the use of dialogue and open questioning to enhance dialogue and to deepen inquiry. Initially, this involved the creation and use of meaning-seeking or guiding questions (Curry & Wells, 2006) (Appendix E) during creativity hubs to invite reflection.

In the first creativity hub in this study, I used guiding questions to generate dialogue and to encourage further questioning. However, as I felt these questions disrupted the natural flow of conversation, after the first hub, I only offered these questions to participants as supporting prompts for reflective journalling between sessions. Critical reflection, prompted by open questioning and time to deeply reflect, was embedded into the creativity hubs as an approach to broaden and deepen dialogue and to illuminate new and different perspectives about the phenomenon of creativity.

In accord with the organic inquiry research approach, I also adopted reflection processes to assist with my role as researcher. To do this, I opened myself to and identified transpersonally relevant resources (Braud, 2004) for reflection. These resources helped me to shift from “the normal consciousness of the logical mind” and provided access to liminal sources. In particular reflective journalling, self-dialogue, drawing and watercolour painting (as transpersonal resources for deep reflection) helped me to escape the boundaries of rational knowledge, ignite my creative potential, and uncover unconscious ideas and knowledge. This helped me to explore my understanding of creativity from within (through unconscious and non-rational knowledge) as well as from without (through conscious sources and rational knowledge) (Burrows, 2015).

Another method adopted for the exploration of creativity and for gathering data was storytelling. While my story (the researcher’s story) about creativity was the catalyst for this study, stories gathered during



collective inquiry from co-researchers were used to illuminate different points of view. Furthermore, storytelling provided a means to explore the connections between creativity and learning and prompted opportunities for critical reflection. It (storytelling) also stimulated imagination, inspiration and the generation of new ideas. In this study storytelling was also adopted as a way to communicate and present and discuss my research findings and insights in this thesis.

An additional method to explore personal perceptions of creativity, to encourage reflection and to gather data was identified as I was nearing the end of the data-gathering phase in August 2019. This method involved the use of a "Creativity Reflection Protocol" (Appendix F). This source focussed on individually engaging co-researchers in reflexive and reflective thinking about their experiences of creativity in response to their engagement in the study. Based on an existing tool developed by Habel and Bell (2015), I developed and created this resource using the words and phrases used by co-researchers when describing their feelings, thinking, sensory experiences and perceptions about creativity in previous hubs.

### **Approaches to analysis and interpretation**

In an organic inquiry, analysis and interpretation of data is a generative process and involves "re-looking" or "circling around a topic" and "inquiring again and again" (Braud, 1998, p. 10). Similar to data gathering in an organic inquiry, interpretation and meaning making draw

on both rational and non-rational ways of knowing, deep reflection and self-questioning to make sense of old and new knowledge and to create new understanding. Approaches to engaging with conscious, unconscious and liminal domains are needed to be able to see generative patterns and to “decide on what they really mean” (Curry & Wells, 2006, p. 94).

In this study, I differentiated between interpretation and meaning making as unique processes for making sense of data. As a process in which data is explained and translated, interpretation helped me to reveal initial findings and insights. In contrast, inspired by the psychological definition of meaning making as a way to turn data into “subjectively meaningful narratives” (Graci & Fivush, 2017, p. 486), meaning making in this study helped me to connect with and to see the data in previously unseen but personally relevant ways. As such, my understanding of meaning making in this study aligns with Curry and Wells’ (2006) description of interpretation in which the conscious recedes so that feelings, and sensory and intuitive knowledge can shed light on data in new ways.

Specific approaches to analysis, interpretation and meaning making in this study included: various strategies for qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2013); the practice of noticing (Jefferson & Anderson, 2015, 2021; Langer, 2005; Mason, 2002); stream-of-consciousness journaling and reflective questioning (Curry & Wells, 2006); the creation of narratives and vignettes (Armstrong et al., 2015; Barter & Renold, 2000; Curry & Wells, 2006; Raab, 2015); the use of metaphor (Farquhar &

Fitzpatrick, 2019; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980); and reflection (Clements, 2004). In the following paragraphs I provide an overview of the aforementioned approaches adopted to support analysis and meaning making. In Chapter Four I describe *how* I used these approaches to explore, analyse and interpret the data gathered during the research process.

For the initial analysis and interpretation of data in this study I drew upon Creswell's (2013) approaches and techniques for analysing qualitative data. This involved highlighting, sorting, grouping, tabling and visually representing ideas, questions and wonderings as I looked and re-looked at the data. These techniques helped to affirm some suspected patterns and also illuminated new connections. This initial sorting and grouping of data can be seen in Appendices G, H and I.

To deepen the analysis, I applied the practice of noticing as described by Jefferson and Anderson (2015, 2021) and Mason (2002), to heighten my sensitivity to the data and to raise my awareness of possible patterns and connections within and across stories. Relatedly, I practised the art of noticing to see "new things" (Langer, 2000, p. 220) as I looked and re-looked at stories, notes, reflections and recordings from the creativity hubs.

To look harder for, and to better see, patterns and connections in my data I also used stream-of-consciousness journalling (Curry & Wells, 2006) to record "impressions that came to mind" (p. 90) as I contemplated my initial sorting and grouping of the data and re-engaged

with stories. I also used stream-of-consciousness journaling to record my ideas and wonderings in relation to differing perspectives and juxtaposing ideas, patterns and connections revealed in my initial analysis and interpretation of data. According to Curry and Wells (2006), stream-of-consciousness journaling allows information and inspiration from the liminal domain to “break through” and integrate with consciousness, thereby generating new meaning and understanding.

Specific approaches used for stream-of-consciousness journaling in this study involved self-dialogue, journaling and drawing. I also used my iPad to record oral impressions, reflections and observations after, and in between, creativity hubs and meetings. To further enhance my methods for analysis and interpretation of the data, I connected my findings and insights with relevant research literature and used reflective questioning as a way to delve deeper and prompt alternative interpretations and meaning making.

The following reflective questions were used to prompt reflection, data analysis, interpretation and meaning making: “What can be said about these findings? What do I know now that I did not know before” (Curry & Wells, 2006, p. 94); “How might adopting mindful practices encourage others to consider their own practices as learners and teachers?”; and “How can self-awareness lead to re-imagining professional learning for teachers where creativity is embedded, and learning is amplified?” (adapted from McDonough & Lemon, 2018, p. 17).

Further iterations and approaches to interpreting data involved taking different perspectives to answer each of these questions and retelling co-researchers' stories of creativity. While writing answers to the reflective questions effectively enabled the exploration of possible interpretations, re-writing participants' stories facilitated further and deepened meaning making of unique perceptions and beliefs about creativity.

To retell stories, I adopted a vignette approach to act as a magnifying glass for, and to convey "the heart" of (Curry & Wells, 2006, p. 132), each participant's lived experiences and evolving understanding of creativity. Drawing on Armstrong et al.'s (2015) notion of vignettes as "illustrative exemplar cases" (p. 385), writing individual vignettes provided a means to explore, make meaning of, and engage people in discussion (Barter & Renold, 2000).

To convey participants' intuitive knowledge, feelings and emotions in connection to creativity, and to honour my intuition, senses and feelings in the deepened process of making meaning of these stories, I used illustrative and evocative language, narrative and metaphor to write these vignettes. Mertova and Webster (2019) describe narrative as being "well suited to addressing the complexities and subtleties of human experience in teaching and learning" (p. 2). Therefore, the use of narrative in retelling participants' stories of creativity and in communicating findings in this thesis provided a fitting way to highlight

the unique life experiences of individual participants in relation to creativity, and to illuminate the findings and insights from this study.

Furthermore, my adaptation of Lemon's (2006) visual narrative approach, in which I used images and descriptive language to enhance vignettes and narratives, helped to make visible each participant's unfolding story of creativity. Therefore, the use of visual narrative approaches in this study invited and inspired visualisation and re-envisioning.

In addition, I used metaphor in the vignettes as an added "mechanism for making sense" of stories of lived experiences (Fitzpatrick & Farquhar, 2019, pp. 3–4). I also used metaphor to expand "understanding [of] one kind of experience" (one experience of creativity), "in terms of another kind of experience" (other experiences of creativity and learning) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 486).

Interpretation and meaning making in an organic inquiry are further deepened through research approaches designed to access liminal sources. This deepened research approach is supported by Curry and Wells (2006), who clearly articulate the importance of accessing the liminal domain as a way to assist interpretation in an organic inquiry. They state: "the liminal domain can help with a variety of research tasks and is a valuable resource in interpreting findings" (p. 95). In this study, accessing liminal sources, including intuitive and sensory knowledge, assisted with the interpretation of data and deepened meaning making of the findings.

Moreover, Curry and Wells (2006) highlight the importance of intuition and somatosensory knowing for travelling to and engaging within the liminal domain, and for effective analysis and interpretation of data. Curry and Wells (2006) define somatosensory knowing as a “way of knowing that occurs through bodily felt awareness” (p. 131). In this study research methods that supported access to non-rational ways of knowing and liminal sources included reflective journalling, self-dialogue, drawing and watercolour painting.

### **Ethical considerations**

In this study, all efforts were made to assure the safety of participants during, and as a consequence of, the study. To do this, I adopted strategies to safeguard the rights of participants and to ensure research validity during the planning and facilitation of this study. This included submitting an application to the Flinders University Human Research Ethics Committee and ensuring that all conditions described in this application involving participation criteria, participant anonymity and data collection were upheld during this study. My ethics application was approved on Thursday, October 25, 2018. I describe my specific practices under the following subheadings: Respecting and honouring participants; and Research validity.

## **Respecting and honouring participants**

My way of being as a designer and facilitator of teacher professional learning is centred on my belief that honest and respectful relationships between the teacher (facilitator of learning) and the learners need to be created and maintained to engender positive and productive learning conditions. My conviction about the importance of relationship *for* and *as* learning supports Finlay's (2009) view that a bridge needs to be built between the researcher and co-researchers to create a dynamic and co-created space for knowledge sharing and development. Finlay states: "much of what we can learn and know about another arises within the intersubjective space between researcher and co-researcher. Each touches and impacts on the other, and that affects how the research unfolds" (p. 2).

Therefore, in this study, ethical and respectful practices to "build a bridge" between myself and the co-researchers in order to develop a dynamic space for perspective taking, open dialogue and storytelling were at the forefront of my facilitation of the research process. This involved my commitment to developing my personal and relational skills for "building bridges" between myself and the co-researchers, and ensuring my open presence in all creativity hubs, one-on-one meetings and other forms of communication. Other practices included: open selection processes and voluntary participation; the creation and communication of detailed participation criteria and a description of participation expectations; establishing safe ways of working in partnership with the



participants; and making clear to the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

An essential first step in establishing an atmosphere of trust, openness and relationship (Moloney, 2011) was the creation of a safe and aesthetic atmosphere whereby teachers felt physically and psychologically comfortable and inspired to engage in dialogue and to share their ideas. To do this, I spent time making sure that our meeting room looked and felt inviting and that it was private. I also ensured that there was protected time in the first creativity hub to explain the nature of an organic inquiry approach to research; to make visible the purpose of my study and the hubs; and to share and discuss the role of co-researchers in this study, and my role as the researcher.

In addition, I explained the nature of a collective inquiry (Moloney, 2011) and highlighted the approaches that I would be using in the creativity hubs to facilitate our ways of working together as co-researchers (Patton et al., 2015). In particular, I described how we would be listening to each other's stories as a source of inspiration to help us see and understand creativity in different ways. Furthermore, I explained that my role as the researcher was to welcome all diverse ideas and points of view and to honour their contributions and participation.

In all the creativity hubs I ensured that there was time and opportunity for open discussion and questions, and I frequently expressed that I was genuinely appreciative of their time and commitment to this study. I also expressed that I was grateful for and valued all

contributions, ideas and reflections. I communicated to the co-researchers that I was available between hubs and one-on-one meetings and welcomed their telephone calls and emails.

To further support the safety of the teacher participants and to provide anonymity and confidentiality, I made clear that pseudonyms would be used and that their places of employment would not be named. While teacher participants were invited to choose their own pseudonym at the first creativity hub, only one teacher participant chose to do this. Other teacher participants asked me to select a pseudonym for them.

### **Research validity**

My choice and facilitation of data-gathering methods were centred on guaranteeing an open, respectful and safe context for the collection of data that expanded knowledge, broadened perspectives and revealed new insights in relation to the connection between creativity and learning. Furthermore, by gathering data in different ways, over time, and from the liminal and conscious domains, I honoured the organic inquiry research process and the different perspectives that participants brought to light through their participation in this study.

Consistent with Curry and Wells' (2006) research on ensuring validity in an organic inquiry, discernment, critical thinking and reflection were central to my practices in this study. At all times, I endeavoured to use these skills to acknowledge and consider reflections, questions, ideas, opinions and comments from participants in the study. This approach

called for my integrity as the researcher to be “visible in every step of the process” (Curry & Wells, 2006, p. 54) by including open communication with my co-researchers, dialogue with my supervisors and self-reflection.

To ensure data integrity, I recorded creativity hub and individual meeting dialogue on my personal device and then uploaded them to a secure electronic location. I also transcribed and annotated recordings, reflections and notes taken at and between hubs and saved them in a secure location. All participants agreed to the creativity hubs and individual meetings being recorded, transcribed and used for research purposes in this study.

In summary, the organic inquiry research approach, and specific approaches to exploration, data gathering, analysis, interpretation and meaning making, were chosen to support the open and inviting nature of this study. Furthermore, my choice of methods, including those focussed on gathering and interpreting data through both conscious and liminal domains, enabled me to explore my topic to “all possible limits” while “staying within the boundaries” (Curry & Wells, 2006, p. 8) of my research question.



A description of the organic inquiry approach to research and the methods I adopted for engaging in this research process have been provided in this chapter. The detailed description of these approaches

aims to illuminate their significance for this study and specifically for openly exploring creativity and its connection to learning, and for re-imagining teacher professional learning.

In the following chapter, I introduce the participants in the study as the characters in this story of exploration and discovery. This is followed by a narrative that describes how the methodology and method or approaches to research described in this chapter provided a research context in which participants were invited to contribute to open exploration and dialogue and to engage in reflection and potential personal transformation.

## **Chapter Four: Introducing the participants and the context for exploration**



In this chapter, I illuminate organic inquiry approaches and methods chosen for research in this study and as described in Chapter Three. I also explain how they were embedded in this study to create the context for, and means to explore, the phenomena of creativity and learning. Also in this chapter, I introduce the participants in the study to engender a connection with each person, and her personal stories and unique perspectives about creativity.

In introducing the participants and the context for exploration in this chapter, I aim to induce imagination and to provide access to non-rational ways of knowing in preparation for the presentation, interpretation and discussion of findings in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Furthermore, I use detailed and descriptive language in this chapter to create a sensory image of the context for exploration and discovery in this study. This creative approach also invites the reader to engage in a parallel process of exploration, critical reflection and discovery.

### **In this chapter**

This chapter is presented in two sections. In both sections I use a narrative (Mertova & Webster, 2019) and visual narrative approach (Lemon, 2006) to invite visualisation and meaning making.

In the next section, a narrative approach introduces and acquaints the reader with participants in this study to provide a “rendition” of how creativity was “perceived” (Mertova & Webster, 2019, p. 3) by each participant. In the following section I also use a narrative approach to illuminate the context within which I explored the phenomenon of creativity in partnership with co-researchers. Also illuminated in that section and embedded in the narrative is how I gathered data during the creativity hubs and one-on-one meetings and the different interpretation and meaning-making approaches I adopted to make sense of this data.

### **Introducing the participants**

#### **Introducing Olivia: “Creativity is the essence of the future”**



Olivia is particularly interested in the possibilities that creativity holds and in the growing need for creative minds. However, Olivia is concerned that:

in our current school and social system, we can stifle the creative mind of a child. In the business and structure of our current lifestyle, I question whether we allow not only our children but also ourselves the time to be creative — yet I believe that it is the essence of the future. In schools, students are often required to meet specific criteria that restrict creativity. In the past and possibly still today, I am not sure whether teachers have taught creative thinking in an explicit way. (April 2019)

Olivia currently works in an all-girls early learning to Year 12 school. Her role is to support students requiring an extended curriculum. In her teaching role Olivia intentionally provides creative opportunities to engage small groups of highly able students in their learning. She uses de Bono's Thinking Hats (de Bono, 1990), the Thinkers Keys (Ryan, 2014), SCAMPER (Eberle, 1996) and other thinking routines including the Harvard thinking routines (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2019) to encourage creative thought. Over the years, Olivia has also tried to measure creativity using Langrehr's (2005) test of creative thinking.

### **Introducing Isabella: "Creativity is a source of energy"**



Isabella connected creativity in her past and current experiences to exploration, the use of imagination, a feeling of freedom, individualism and seeing the beauty in all things. She described creativity as a source of energy, positivity and happiness. Isabella described her love of photography as her creative outlet. Engaged in photography, Isabella loses her sense of time, her stress disappears, and she becomes fully engrossed in the present experience. Despite her commitment to using creative experiences in her classroom to foster students' creativity and love of learning, Isabella described the difficulty in feeling the joy of creativity in the school environment, which she believes is cluttered and too focussed on accountability.

Isabella currently works in an all-boys early learning to Year 12 school as a junior primary teacher. She teaches across all learning areas and uses open-ended tasks, a variety of resources, meaning making and experimentation as strategies for fostering and enhancing creativity in her classroom.

### **Introducing Claire: “In awe of creativity”**



In her introduction to me, Claire stated that she was in “awe” about the level of creativity of some highly able students, especially the twice-exceptional students.<sup>1</sup> With this in mind Claire explained how she tries to incorporate classroom activities that nurture and encourage creativity in her teaching and learning programs.

Claire expressed her concern about the mindset of students who find flexibility and fluency of thinking difficult, and whether it might block their creativity. Claire also asked the question, “I wonder if we are stifling creativity with the reliance upon digital technology?” She expressed a longing to expand her understanding of the phenomenon and what makes it spark.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the National Association for Gifted Children (2021), twice-exceptional is the term used to describe “gifted children who, have the characteristics of gifted students with the potential for high achievement and give evidence of one or more disabilities as defined by federal or state eligibility criteria”.



Claire worked in another profession before becoming a teacher. She now works with highly able learners<sup>2</sup> in a primary co-educational early learning to Year 12 school. It is in this context that Claire developed a curiosity about and respect for creativity.

### **Introducing Andrea: “Committed to increasing my understanding of creativity”**



Andrea expressed her deep interest in the phenomenon of creativity and a personal commitment to support ongoing learning and research. Andrea currently spends one day each week working in a faith-based school with Year 12 students. She has responsibility for pastoral care, Christian Studies and Research Project (South Australian Certificate of Education, 2019). During the other four days Andrea holds a senior position in a Christian educational organisation dedicated to supporting professional learning for teachers.

### **Introducing Sophia: “Creativity liberates and gives joy”**



Sophia summarised her perspective on creativity as being connected to complex solution finding, and a way to bring joy to a situation. She was worried by the busyness of

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<sup>2</sup> The term *highly able learners* describes learners whose academic capabilities are in the upper quartile of their age cohort (AITSL, 2016, 03:15–05:21).

school life, the focus on testing and achievement, and by the lack of time to feel the joy and liberation that come from creativity. Sophia is a middle and secondary teacher in a co-educational Foundation<sup>3</sup> to Year 12 school.

### **Introducing Grace: “Creativity burns within us all”**



In an early email communication Grace stated that “it is a struggle to make someone else’s ideas (about creativity) sing when my own are burning within me” (June 2019).

Grace believes that creativity is deeply innate and “burns” within us all. She sees a teacher’s role as enabling the conditions for it to “sing”. Grace described her understanding that creativity involves the development of analytical skills, having the ability to switch these off so that creativity can come to the foreground and then re-engaging with them to enact the ideas in an appropriate and mindful way.

Grace described creativity as the magic within us that is waiting to come out but is often shut down by the busyness of curriculum, the constraints imposed by accountability and testing, and the filling of our minds with commercial resources, research, processes and documentation. According to Grace, creativity is innately within us but with over-control and over-direction it cannot be unleashed – “it is suppressed, like using the soft pedal on the piano”.

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<sup>3</sup> In Australian schools, Foundation is the first year of formal schooling.

Grace has been teaching since the early 1990s. She currently works in a co-educational middle school context<sup>4</sup> where she teaches English and is responsible for Christian Education. Grace has qualifications in gifted education and has previously worked in leadership positions in schools and educational organisations.

### **Introducing Alicia (an unexpected participant and voice):**

#### **“Passionate about all things creative”**



Alicia contacted me in early 2019 by email. She had heard about my research and expressed an interest in sharing her story and understanding of creativity. She chose not to attend creativity hubs or meet with me or other co-researchers face to face or by a virtual platform but was happy to communicate by email.

In her second email much later in the year, Alicia introduced herself by describing her passion for “all things creative” in the following way: “*At a young age I knew I wanted to be a performer. Singing and acting were my secret passions*” (June 2019).

Alicia also described the context in which she grew up, where creativity was considered to be an “indulgence” that should only exist in

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<sup>4</sup> The middle years of schooling focus on young adolescent learners of approximately 10–15 years of age (Bahr & Pendergast, 2010).

one's "fantasies". The need to provide an income and engage in "real work" that pays the bills was the context and framing of her childhood.

Alicia reflected on the irony of this situation where the "real work" of her father was that of a cabinet maker, highly creative and artistic — yet he did not allow anyone to describe his work as creative. Despite the framing of her childhood, Alicia pursued her creative instinct and went to drama school. She sings, acts, writes music and is a creative artist and passionate primary school art teacher. In her communication about this defiant life choice, Alicia still shows surprise about choosing this career and life pathway by asking and wondering, "Where the hell did I come from?"

### **Introducing myself (participant and primary researcher):**

**"Creativity is like a moonstone; the colours glow from within, they deepen and intensify"**



I initiated this study because of my passion for creativity, and my sense that creativity is at the heart of deep learning. Without creativity, learning is just remembering facts that do not always make sense. I tend to forget these as they do not have any personal significance for me. With creativity, learning is joyful and inspirational; it allows me to make the learning "my own" and, because it makes sense to me, the learning is deep and makes a difference to my way of being.

*As a child I would visit the art gallery with my mother and grandmother and view the masterpieces. We talked about colour and shadows, light and perspective. I never felt I was being instructed in the skills of art, yet my learning was deep. My mother would create stories about the paintings, and I could often imagine myself within the paintings, observing the characters or landscapes, touching the heavy shiny fabric of dresses and gowns or walking amidst trees and by rivers. Sometimes I would imagine myself standing alongside the artist as he or she used brush strokes to create images and shapes on the canvas. I would (and still do) spend hours experimenting with colour, water and brush strokes, creating images and scenes. This is my outlet for creativity. (My Reflective Journal, March 2019)*

### **Introducing the context for exploration**

In this section, I depict the contexts in which I explored creativity with my co-researchers as four short narratives: March/April 2019, our first time together; May 2019, our second meeting; June 2019, our third encounter; and August 2019, collectively exploring creativity one last time. These four headings represent the four key periods of time within the six-month data-gathering phase of this study. Within each of these key periods of time, my depiction merges creativity hub and one-on-one meeting contexts to capture the quintessential and overarching characteristics of these encounters and how they created space and time for dialogue, storytelling and reflection. To avoid repetition, I do not repeat explicit descriptions of my contexts for exploration over the four narratives but highlight differences and unique qualities of interactions within specific hubs and one-on-one meetings.

As this chapter focuses on describing the contexts in which the data was generated and gathered through collective inquiry, I do not specify whether data came from a creativity hub or a one-on-one meeting. The importance of personal reflective time for unearthing questions and new ideas and for making meaning of data between hubs and meetings is described and discussed in following chapters in this thesis.

### **March/April 2019: Our first time together**

The date was set for our first meeting but at the last moment, due to unexpected work commitments, two co-researchers were unable to attend. Both participants were very disappointed and asked if a new date could be found. However, rather than disrupting all participants I decided to take a flexible approach and hold two separate “first” hubs, The first one with Isabella and Claire, and the second one with Sophia, Olivia and Andrea. I also arranged to meet Grace separately in a coffee shop as she was unable to attend creativity hubs.

The room I had booked for the creativity hubs was bright and airy and was slightly removed from all the other meeting rooms in my office. It was a small private space with big windows that provided plenty of natural light. Importantly, to create a private and safe space where the teacher participants felt free and uninhibited to share stories and offer ideas and ask questions, the room had a door which I could close. In the centre of this room was one large wooden table and ten comfortable office chairs. In the corner of the room a large indoor pot plant with oversized

shiny dark green leaves turned to face the light shining through the windows, emitted a pleasant earthy scent. On the wall adjacent to the windows was a large display screen.

While I was not able to make changes to the physical space of the meeting room and to the layout of the furniture, I was inspired by the principles that underpin the notion of a World Café dialogue (Brown et al., 2005) and the optimal creation of space for social interaction, collaboration and collective inquiry. Therefore, before the first meeting I spent time imagining and then planning subtle but important adjustments to the room to “evoke warmth, friendliness, authenticity and real conversations” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 77). These adjustments are highlighted throughout the following narrative. Likewise, while it was not possible to change the café chosen by Grace for our first meeting, I did arrive early to choose a table which was private, comfortable and had a pleasing outlook.

Before the participants arrived, I took care to create an environment that, in addition to feeling hospitable, also welcomed them in their role as co-researchers. To do this, I arranged the chairs around the large table in a way that invited open and respectful conversation and that did not suggest any positional authority (Curry & Wells, 2006). Making sure the room was arranged in this way was important to establish a feeling of mutual respect for each other’s knowledge, experiences, ideas and questions within the research process.

Also to create an attractive and welcoming atmosphere, I placed a small vase of brightly coloured flowers from my garden on the large central table. Their bright pink, purple and yellow blooms and green leaves looked happy on the golden wood of the table. Next to the vase on the table I put a large wooden platter with some sweet and savoury food treats and a steaming hot pot of coffee. Lastly, I filled some glasses with chilled water and positioned these in front of the carefully arranged chairs to further encourage people to fill the space around the table.

As a final touch, I pulled up the blinds covering the large glass windows and revealed the busy road with cars and, beyond that, a green, leafy park. Looking out towards the park, and slightly to the right, I could see people talking and laughing at a local coffee shop. As I looked at the outside scene, strangely silent through the barrier of the glass window, I felt satisfied that the room felt welcoming and had a positive atmosphere (see De Nobile et al., 2021).

When Olivia, Claire, Isabella, Andrea and Sophia arrived, I guided them to the meeting room, introduced myself and welcomed them as guests to my place of work and as participants in my study. Once in the room, I invited everyone to choose a seat and informally introduced participants to each other.

For the first ten minutes I offered refreshments and gave my guests some time to relax after their busy day at work. While I made sure everyone looked comfortable and had everything they needed, I refrained from leading the conversation and encouraged participants to talk to each



other. I wanted to give everyone time to feel at ease in each other's company and with the environment. This also gave me time to centre myself on my purpose and aims for my study and for the upcoming conversation.

Ten minutes into the hub, I took a seat at the table, alongside the teacher participants. As I knew from their questions and general conversation that my guests were curious about my research and wanted to know how we were going to work together during the creativity hubs and one-on-one meetings, I spent a short time explaining my research premise and question and briefly outlined the organic inquiry approach to research. I also reminded them about my commitment to ensuring confidentiality, and about their role as co-researchers in this study.

When the time was right, I shifted the focus of the conversation away from myself and the research approaches and, for the remainder of the meeting, gave the individual co-researchers an opportunity to talk, share their ideas about creativity and engage in dialogue. In my role as researcher, I asked guiding questions to prompt participation from all participants and to extend and broaden dialogue while remaining focussed on my research topic and question. I also became a listener and observer at this time and, with the co-researchers' permission, took notes and recorded key words, sentences and conversations that shed light on unique points of view about creativity. Also with permission from the co-researchers, I used my iPad to aurally record our first meeting. As a participant I contributed to stories, dialogue and questions and interacted

openly and respectfully with the co-researchers as equal partners in the exploration of creativity.

Prior to coming to this first meeting, I contacted each teacher participant (co-researcher) by email and asked her to bring to the first meeting an artefact of her choice which she related to creativity. I also asked each participant to be prepared to talk about her artefact and how and why she connected it to her perception and experience of creativity. I explained this artefact could be an object, an image, a story, or any other representation (physical or non-physical) of creativity of her choosing.

Asking participants to share and articulate their thinking and inspiration for choosing this artefact with colleagues initiated conversations about the topic being explored. It also generated questions, made visible different perspectives and helped to establish trust and openness. Specifically, it provided a safe starting place for sharing personal viewpoints through storytelling, respectful listening and open dialogue.

Furthermore, my invitation to bring an artefact to the first meeting and to share and express their connection with the image, object or memory roused and inspired participants to look beyond their rational understanding of creativity and to connect with unconscious feelings and emotions related to their experiences of the phenomenon. Expressly, it invited participants to tap into their unconscious and, in Jung's (1963) words, "to find the images which were concealed in the emotions" (p. 171). In addition, asking participants to articulate their choice of artefact

invited perspective sharing as well as perspective taking and inspired deep reflection and reflexivity.

Taking turns to share and talk about the artefacts was therefore the central focus for discussion at the first meetings. One by one, each participant took her turn to show, share and talk about her unique artefact. Andrea and Olivia brought objects to share as metaphors for their perceptions of creativity. Isabella and Sophia brought photographic images to help express the feelings of joy and freedom that experiencing creativity gave to them. Claire brought samples of student work to illustrate her understanding of the phenomenon and, in her individual meeting, Grace brought a big bag of home knits to help describe the sensory pleasure and peace that creativity gave to her. The stories (retold as vignettes in Chapter Five) were diverse, intimate and revealed insights into each participant's experiences of creativity.

While all participants started their sharing with hesitancy, their manner, voice and body language became stronger and more confident as they delved deeper into their reasons and feelings for choosing their artefact. In a general conversation after everyone had shared, one co-researcher described how sharing her artefact was deeply personal, and that it felt as if she was providing a "glimpse of herself to others" that "no one would normally see". The same co-researcher also described how seeing the interest on the faces of other participants in the room as she talked about her artefact gave her confidence to express her feelings

about her perception of creativity. In her words it was “an emotional, positive, and illuminating experience”.

After the teacher participants had shared their artefacts, I also shared my own story. My artefacts were a small, polished moonstone and a miniature statue carved from moonstone. I bought the latter artefact in a village in the Marble Mountains in Vietnam. The gemstone’s veiled iridescence in both artefacts evoked my experience of creativity as a deeply personal and internalised source of energy waiting to bring life to everyday experiences in new and sometimes unexpected ways.

During this time, I also read an excerpt from my journal involving a memory about a childhood experience of creativity. I felt it was important for me to open myself to the teacher participants so that they could gain a sense of my perspective and personal connection with creativity. Through my storytelling approach I depicted my deep, intuitive and sensory image of creativity and invited them to be viewed and explored as part of the collective inquiry. I hoped that this would engender trust with the participants and in our social environment and context for exploration. I was pleased when they each thanked me for sharing such deeply personal memories. Reading the journal also helped participants to imagine their present and future role as co-researchers in listening to and reflecting on others’ stories to deepen understanding and to imagine and generate new ideas.

After sharing my artefact and journal, I asked some guiding questions as an approach to provoke dialogue, reflection and meaning

seeking (Curry & Wells, 2006) (Appendix E). However, after a few moments I chose to put these aside and allowed the dialogue to evolve naturally in response to the interests and wonderings of the co-researchers. Using the predetermined questions felt unnatural and incongruous in the interactions and social environment created through the creativity hubs and one-on-one meetings in this study.

I closed the first meetings by inviting the co-researchers to journal their own personal stories and reflections related to creativity in any way they chose: as a diary; through drawing or photographs; as a storyboard; or in any other way. I explained that journalling offered a means for them to explore and bring to light their intuitive and sensory knowledge about creativity as well as their deep feelings about the phenomenon. Although they all understood the importance of reflection and could see how journalling was a means to do this, I was surprised by the apparent lack of enthusiasm for this reflective task. To honour the voluntary nature of my study, I left the choice of engaging in reflective journalling to co-researchers.

### **May 2019: Our second meeting**

In May it was time to meet again. Four weeks had passed since our first meeting and, apart from an email from me relating the details for the second meeting, no communication had occurred between any participants. This was not unexpected, as I had made clear to the participants that communication between creativity hubs and meetings

was invited but not required. However, I was hopeful that the co-researchers had been inspired by our conversations in the first meeting and had therefore taken up my invitation to reflect and journal their ideas, wonderings and questions about creativity between sessions.

A few days before the second meeting I sent my co-researchers an additional email. In this email I offered some key reflections from the previous meeting, and also invited them to consider some reflective questions to prompt and inspire dialogue about creativity for our next meeting (Appendix D).

One co-researcher, Andrea, responded to my email asking if she could attend through video conferencing technology as she was unexpectedly required to be interstate for work at the time of the meeting. Sophia also emailed me to let me know that, due to work pressures, she would not be able to continue in the study. She was very apologetic and expressed her disappointment in being unable to continue as "she was passionate about creativity" and fostering and experiencing creativity was "very important to her personally, and to her philosophy for teaching". I did make contact with Grace but due to personal reasons she was unable to meet with me at this time.

The day of our second creativity hub arrived and as before I spent time establishing a hospitable space (using the same meeting room in my workplace) for our continued exploration of creativity. Unlike the first creativity hub, it was late autumn and the view outside the wide window revealed a cold and wet day. Raindrops sat on the glass panes of the

window and the busy road was shiny and reflective with the rain. The park across the road looked damp, and golden-brown leaves silently fluttered around the base of the tall tree trunks.

As before, I set the room up with refreshments and flowers and arranged the chairs in the same conversational manner. To foster inclusion and collaboration I wanted the room to appear familiar and friendly and to engender a feeling of being welcomed back. Unlike last time the display screen on the wall was on and ready to host Andrea's participation from interstate. Isabella, Olivia and Claire arrived promptly at four o'clock and, soon after, Andrea's smiling face appeared on the screen. As it was the first time that Olivia, Isabella, Andrea and Claire had met as a group, I encouraged them to talk, unwind and share the events of their busy days. I wanted them to feel relaxed and secure in the environment and in each other's presence.

In a quiet moment, I asked if anyone had responded to the invitation to journal between sessions and, if so, if they would like to share their reflections with the group. To my excitement all co-researchers had engaged in reflective journalling in some way and were keen to share with the group. A natural flow of conversation followed and the co-researchers took turns to read and share their reflections. As in the first meeting, the participants were initially reserved in sharing their reflections to the group but within a short time gained courage and confidence as they saw interest, curiosity and respect reflected in the body language of their colleagues.

On occasion I used questions to prompt dialogue and to inspire the co-researchers to further deepen their reflections and to look and see beyond their acquired knowledge about creativity. To do this I encouraged them to be alert to their feelings, intuition and senses about the phenomenon and to articulate their wonderings, questions and ideas freely and without fear of judgement.

Nearing the end of this second hub I invited each co-researcher to draw on her new insights about creativity generated from ideas shared in the creativity hubs to imagine how she might re-invent a student learning experience in her unique context. I further invited the co-researchers to action this re-imagined learning experience with her students between this creativity hub and the next. I also reassured the co-researchers that, while I hoped that they would reflect upon this personal project at the next hub, a product was not required. All co-researchers were enthusiastic about this idea and, according to one co-researcher, this invitation to re-imagine a student learning task gave her "permission" to "go back to being the teacher she wanted to be". She further explained: "*this* teacher gives students time to be creative in their learning".

In the last few moments of the hub, I shared some research about the art and practice of *noticing* from Jefferson and Anderson (2017, 2021), Langer (2005) and Mason (2002). I explained that intentional and focussed noticing creates an opportunity for a situation to be seen in ways beyond our rational knowledge and assumptions. I explained that, through careful noticing, situations can be seen in a new light, or



elements of the situation or image may be intensified or highlighted in a new way. With this research about noticing in mind, I invited the co-researchers to notice how creativity is experienced and fostered in their own educational contexts and if their re-imagined learning experience brings to light any new insights about creativity.

It was quite dark outside when I called the hub to a close and said goodnight to Andrea, Olivia, Claire and Isabella. As I tidied the room and turned off the display screen and lights, I felt inspired by the conversation in the hub and was cautiously excited by the thought of what new ideas and insights about creativity might be brought to light in the next hub.

### **June 2019: Our third encounter**

Six weeks after our May hub, and at our third meeting, I suggested we change the name of the *focus groups* to *creativity hubs*. This suggestion arose from long periods of self-reflection between May and June about my role in this study's research process, and about the richness of ideas generated from these collaborative meetings centred on collective inquiry.

To call these meetings focus groups seemed to be inconsistent with their organic, generative and productive nature. While the name and concept of a focus group still theoretically fitted the purpose of these meetings, it did not feel right. Explicitly, it did not feel like it genuinely depicted or valued how ideas evolved collaboratively and generatively during these meetings as an outcome of collective inquiry, partnership

and shared perspective taking. It was for this reason that I suggested the change of name. This idea was received positively by the co-researchers.

In addition to changing the name, a subtle shift in our way of working together as we explored creativity distinguished the third creativity hub from previous hubs. From the outset of the third hub a sense of mutual investment in the exploration of creativity was evident. While the conversation did flow naturally in the first two hubs, there was still an underlying feeling of polite restraint as the co-researchers shared and discussed stories. However, in the third hub I no longer needed to stimulate or guide dialogue, as our way of working had become inherent and natural. Enthusiastic but slightly restrained participation had shifted into frank but highly respectful collaboration and discourse.

For consistency, I sent an email to the co-researchers the week before our third meeting with reflective meaning-seeking questions (Appendix E) to stimulate interest for the upcoming event and to clarify the focus for the meeting. Olivia, Isabella and Claire responded quickly to my email, saying that they were looking forward to our next “catch-up” and that they had “lots to share”. Grace and I made a new time to meet in a coffee shop. Andrea gave her apologies due to work commitments but emailed through her journaled reflections made between the second and third hubs.

The third creativity hub fell on a cold and still winter’s day. As always, the window of the meeting room framed a view of the busy road with traffic streaming continuously in both directions and green parklands.

The darkness of the time of year made the reflector lights on the cars shine brightly against the black asphalt road. As soon as Isabella, Olivia and Claire arrived, we settled in the warm and brightly lit room of my workplace.

Conversation started spontaneously and one by one the co-researchers started to share their noticings and reflections about their re-imagined learning experience for their students. In her soft voice, Olivia read aloud from her journal and used evocative language to share her reflections about how her students valued the opportunity to have more time for creativity. After Olivia, Isabella opened her iPad and shared her jottings and photo diary to respond to my reflective questions and to highlight how she had re-imagined her whole approach to teaching and learning with creativity at the centre of all experiences.

Lastly, Claire referred to her journaled notes, also framed by my reflective meaning-seeking questions (Appendix E) to describe how noticing her students' reactions to her re-imagined learning experience had transformed her understanding of creativity. As we sipped on hot cups of coffee and watched the sky outside turn black as night approached, we also mused over a number of paradoxes revealed through stories about how creativity is experienced and fostered.

Although this was to be our last hub, the co-researchers requested one more opportunity to meet and explore creativity. As one co-researcher stated, "But we haven't finished yet! There is still so much to think about and explore! I think we need at least one more meeting to

talk – it is good for our souls and minds!” Therefore, before we left the warmth of the room and said our farewells, we made a time in August for a fourth and final meeting.

After my guests left, I tidied the room and reflected on our dialogue. Once again, I had gathered a wealth of rich data and felt excited and pleased that Olivia, Claire and Isabella had asked for an extra hub. The request for an extra meeting affirmed my intuitive feeling that the open and creative approaches for engaging in exploration (as adopted in this study), had energised the co-researchers’ creative potential and imagination and had enhanced their experience of learning, exploration and discovery in hubs. I also felt that the request for an extra meeting highlighted the potential of collective inquiry as a research process and a way of expanding knowledge about creativity.

One week after the hub, I met Grace in a coffee shop. Grace had chosen a different coffee shop for this meeting and had arrived early to choose her favourite table at a window in the back room of the café. Although it was cold outside, winter sunshine shone in the window and on Grace as she waved to me from the table. After ordering two mugs of hot chocolate, we started talking about Grace’s re-invigorated focus on creativity: in her personal life, and in her classroom practice where she had tried to create extra time and space for her students to experience creativity as part of their learning.

Grace and I talked for two hours at the coffee shop. At times she seemed sad and worried as she expressed how her feelings and intuition

in relation to creativity and how (from her experience) it “enhanced learning for students”, were “so dominated” and “counteracted” by conflicting expectations from her school. To help Grace share and express her feelings and intuition about creativity free from the distraction of school expectations, I invited her to use my Creativity Reflection Protocol (adapted from Habel and Bell, 2015; see Appendix F). I hoped that this reflective protocol might help her reconnect with her unconscious understanding of creativity.

With interest and curiosity, Grace looked at the option cards as I spread them out on the wooden table and listened as I explained the questions and protocol (described in Chapter Three and shown in Appendix F). When she was ready, she started to choose option cards and described and explained her choice of specific words and phrases that illuminated her personal motivations for engaging in creativity. She also chose option cards to best describe the conditions that fostered and enhanced her experiences of the phenomenon. After using the reflection protocol Grace said how much she valued this chance to connect with her inner feelings and senses about creativity. According to Grace, it gave her “permission” to focus on her own beliefs and knowledge about creativity, rather than on those imposed on her by “expert others”.

As we waved goodbye, I invited Grace to contact me anytime and suggested that we could meet one more time in August if she was able and keen. Regrettably, this opportunity did not arise and I did not meet with Grace again after this meeting.

## **August 2019: Collectively exploring creativity one last time**

I intended that the fourth and extra hub would follow the same pattern of open sharing as the previous sessions. Unfortunately, illness and conflicting term three work pressures disrupted this plan and only one co-researcher, Olivia, was able to attend this meeting. Once again, I adopted a flexible approach and over the following months met with Claire and Isabella individually. Isabella invited me to meet with her at a coffee shop near her home and Claire asked me to meet with her at her school. Andrea was unable to meet with me due to the demands of her work.

In all three of these one-on-one meetings we discussed, shared and swapped ideas and insights about creativity that had surfaced (during reflective moments) between the third and fourth creativity hubs, and from the whole experience of participating in this study. In the last thirty minutes of each meeting, I invited Olivia, Claire and Isabella to engage with my Creativity Reflection Protocol (Appendix F). As with Grace, I invited the three co-researchers to engage with this protocol as a way to connect with their unconscious knowledge about creativity. In each case the option cards chosen by each co-researcher reflected their individual experience of participating as a co-researcher in the hubs and helped them to illuminate, articulate and describe their vision for and of creativity. Individual responses to this protocol can be found in Appendix H.

### **An unexpected participant**

Between the third and fourth creativity hub an unexpected participant joined my study. Alicia, a primary school art teacher from a small school in the Adelaide Hills, emailed me with a journal of reflections about her feelings, experiences and questions about creativity. We had spoken earlier in the year about my study and, although she expressed interest, she also explained that her busy home life and work prevented her involvement. Since this time, she had been pondering our conversation and finally decided to send me her email full of deeply personal thoughts, reflections and questions about creativity from her unique perspective. This one-time engagement in the study provided a glimpse into another perspective on the phenomenon.

### **After the final creativity hub**

After the data-gathering phase of my study, I felt inspired and excited by the wealth of data gathered during and between creativity hubs and one-on-one meetings. I also felt slightly overwhelmed by the quantity of data, and paradoxically by the different perspectives about creativity revealed during dialogues with the co-researchers. To help me make sense of my data I needed a way to view the diverse stories about stories along with my notes, reflections and recordings of dialogues.

While I began sorting and representing data in different ways (as described in Chapter Three) to explore specific perspectives revealed in

stories and through my observations, notes and reflections during and between hubs and meetings, I also started to write individual vignettes (stories). Writing vignettes provided me with a way to piece together and make meaning of each participant's story of participation in this study and her evolving understanding of creativity. Viewing the completed vignettes helped me to see patterns and connections within and between stories and, in Clements' (2004) words, provided a "setting for the integration" (p. 38) of new material gathered during creativity hubs and one-on-one meetings.

To create and write vignettes I replayed recorded dialogues from hubs and individual meetings and transcribed every word and nuance (pauses, sighs, laughter) onto paper with care and active presence — "really listening and taking in all of the verbal and nonverbal information that was being shared" (Van Cleve, 2012, p. 241). Once transcribed, I highlighted reoccurring words and phrases, synonyms, questions and wonderings. I focussed on words to look for patterns and connections within, between and across stories, and used colours to highlight differences and similarities, curiosities and wonderings.

Using scissors, glue, highlighters and coloured pencils, I highlighted, cut and re-joined copies of the dialogue as I collated and compared similar words and phrases. I also turned this data into drawings and images (Appendices G and J) to help me translate and interpret the co-researchers' experiences and stories. Throughout this study I used drawing as a technique to help me sort, look for patterns, analyse and



make meaning of all data gathered. I also used drawing as a means to engage in deep reflection and to access liminal sources. As such, drawing became my key transpersonal resource for connecting with my unconscious and liminal ways of knowing beyond rational knowledge.



In this chapter, the narrative and descriptive approach adopted to acquaint readers with the participants and with the unique contexts for research in this study provides a pathway to the following chapters. Enhanced through images drawn from non-rational and rational ways of knowing, this pathway also invites deepened engagement, beyond rational knowledge, with the following chapters in this thesis.

In the next chapter, I draw on the social environment for collective inquiry described in this chapter and the stories of creativity shared by the participants to create individual vignettes and retell stories of creativity. These vignettes portray each participant's discernible and nuanced shifts in their perception of the phenomenon of creativity throughout the data-gathering phase of this study. As such the next chapter expands upon this chapter's narrative of group interactions in hubs and meetings by providing a detailed and imaginative interpretation of each participant's individual experience throughout the research phase of this study.

## **Chapter Five: Individual vignettes of creativity, exploration and transformation**



In this chapter, I interpret and retell participants' lived and evolving stories of creativity and learning in a collection of individual illustrative vignettes (Armstrong et al., 2015; Barter & Renold, 2000; Raab, 2015). These vignettes invite readers to imagine and "explore different positions" and perspectives about creativity within the "dynamic environment" (Lemon, 2006, p. 2) defined by the social context and the participants' lived experiences of creativity.

To re-create participants' vignettes I repeatedly revisited and re-examined participants' stories and reflections; recordings, transcriptions and annotations of creativity hub and one-on-one meeting dialogues; direct quotations from co-researchers; and my own notes and jottings. During this process I observed my feelings, intuition, senses and rational knowledge in order to gain inspiration for re-creating the experience of each participant. In this study, vignettes provided a fitting and evocative way to portray and "vividly re-create" (Clements, 2004, p. 41) participants' stories and experiences and to illuminate specific insights that shed light on the phenomenon of creativity and its connection to learning.

## **In this chapter**

Seven vignettes that portray the co-researchers' unique stories of creativity are presented in this chapter along with two personal vignettes that describe my participation in the research process. My first personal vignette describes my experience as a participant and primary researcher engaged in the exploration of creativity through personal and collective exploration. My second personal vignette, placed at the end of the chapter, encapsulates my insights from viewing the vignettes collectively and holistically.

I use creative devices, including descriptive language, visual narrative (Lemon, 2006) and metaphor (Farquhar & Fitzpatrick, 2019), to provide an overarching setting for the vignettes. I also use these devices to connect individual vignettes and make unique perspectives visible and imaginable. In addition, I use metaphor to entice readers to engage in their own exploration of creativity and to enhance meaning making.

Prior to presenting the vignettes, I describe the overarching metaphor used to enhance the re-creation of the participants' stories and to induce liminal participation from readers. I also provide a prologue to *set the scene* for the reader. The prologue aims to immerse readers in an experience that further engenders deepened connection with the senses, and which potentially illuminates "otherwise shrouded phenomena" (Bell, 2015, p. 2) such as creativity.

## **A layered metaphor for the vignettes**

### **The first layer**

To portray the setting and context for this collective inquiry and personal reflection in vignettes, I chose the metaphor of a guesthouse. Inspiration for this metaphor came to me after reading about the Benjamin House in Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory. This house, with its complex and radiating design based on the Pythagorean spiral that “emanates from the central glass walled pool, forming asymmetrically varying rooms”, sparked my imagination and inspired my choice for an imaginary setting for the vignettes. In sync with this metaphor of a guesthouse, I also imagined the participants in the study as guests, dwelling in the guesthouse for indeterminate periods of time, coming and going as needed, but always welcome.

Therefore, in harmony with this metaphor, all participants are referred to as guests in the vignettes. While each guest is referenced by their pseudonym in their own vignette, the use of “we” and “us” throughout vignettes broadly refers to myself and the co-researchers in this study. Occasionally, vignettes only involve dialogue between myself and one co-researcher. In these stories I refer to the co-researcher by name to myself through the use of the pronoun “I”.

## **The second layer**

A deepened layer of metaphor within the guesthouse allegory is offered by the imagined movement between spaces (central guesthouse hub, garden, individual rooms) in the house and the fictional interactions between guests. In the following vignettes, movement and interaction are used to illuminate how, and in what way, awareness, self-awareness and understanding of creativity were enhanced for the participants over time. While the contexts for these interactions are metaphorical and often imaginary, the number of visits to the guesthouse or garden described in each vignette relates directly to the number of creativity hubs and individual meetings attended by each co-researcher.

I use the movement from the hub of the guesthouse to private rooms as a metaphor for moving from contexts of collective inquiry and dialogue to situations involving personal reflection. In the guesthouse central hub, knowledge is shared, and we hear open dialogue between guests about their observations and research into creativity. In contrast, ideas expressed in each participant's personal space (suite of private rooms, gazebo or dwelling) are generated from that co-researcher's unique perspective through deeply reflective practice.

## **The third layer**

The third layer of metaphor is used to illuminate the new ways that the phenomenon of creativity was seen, felt, sensed and intuited, as different

perspectives were explored. This third layer of metaphor is expressed by my description of changes in the ambiance and physical appearance of rooms (this includes doors, windows and blinds being opened; lights being switched on and off; and changes to the interior design of rooms). It aims to create a sensory experience for the reader where light is shone on the phenomenon “in terms of potential rather than actuality” (Fitzpatrick & Farquhar, 2019, p. 6).

### **A prologue**

The guesthouse is a large, sprawling organic structure surrounded by a garden. It is only a short walk to the beach from the guesthouse and a winding path leads directly from the back garden down to an expanse of sand and sea. Like the complex and paradoxical nature of the phenomenon of creativity with its “substantially changing discourse” (Montuori & Donnelly, 2013, p. 11), the house and garden are ever-changing and reflect the moment in time, with guests shifting states of being.

New rooms and additions to the structure appear with extended visits from guests, while some rooms disappear from view when guests stop visiting. The only space that stays constant is the central space – the hub. The hub is lit by a clear skylight; it is warm, protected and comfortable. It is the first room entered from the outside and provides access to and from the garden. A soft and inviting lounge setting in the middle of the hub invites conversation and collegiality. Leafy pot plants

clustered next to the couch emit a fresh, earthy scent. A large round table with chairs completes the central space. A desk is situated near the window and next to that is a wall lined with bookshelves. The shelves are full of books: some thick, some thin, some brand new and some quite old with tatty covers and dog-eared pages. All private guest rooms can be entered from the hub.

The guests come and go from the guesthouse. Some extend their stay, some are casual visitors, some visit frequently, and others leave and do not come back. Some guests are content with looking into the house from the outside, while others wander through the garden and crave an opportunity to enter the house.

In the guesthouse and garden, guests wander, contemplate and meet with other guests as the need or desire takes them. Each private room that emanates from the hub mirrors its occupant's lived experiences of creativity and her evolving and enhanced understanding of the phenomenon. The guests move between their private rooms, the garden and the hub as they choose. While the hub offers a space for collective inquiry, like-mindedness, collegiality and dialogue, private rooms and the garden offer a space for reflection and contemplation.

## The vignettes

### My story: As primary researcher and participant



I arrived early at the guesthouse. It was quiet. Entering the central hub, I walked over to the bookshelves and absent-mindedly let my eyes wander over a collection of books and articles by authors such as Cropley (2011), Kaufman and Beghetto (2009), Piirto (2004, 2011), and Robinson (2009, 2015). I pondered about the similar and different ideas, perspectives and theories articulated and described in these books in relation to creativity. I wondered if my guests would have similarly paradoxical views of creativity and how they might describe their experiences of the phenomenon.

On the dining table were some of my watercolour paintings. Earlier in the week, I had been trying to capture the delicate but vivid colours and texture of the petals of some brilliant orange nasturtiums with my watercolours. The paintings, along with a pot of brushes, my paints and some old paint rags were still there. I walked over and moved them from the table to the desk. I left the vase of nasturtiums on the table. The intensity of their orange petals looked vibrant on the wooden tabletop and reminded me of an artwork by one of my favourite Australian artists, Margaret Olley.

I walked over to the door leading into my private guest rooms and entered. It was a large spacious collection of rooms filled with paintings,



flowers, bric-a-brac, photographs and memories. This space was important to me; it was where I reminisced about experiences of creativity in my life — especially as a child. As I recalled these memories I looked up and noticed the gallery of photos on the walls in my rooms. Each one captured a happy memory of times past. One photo stood out amongst the others. It was the photo of the lotus from my holiday in Vietnam. Its presence in my room was a reminder of how my interest in creativity had been sparked by this fleeting event.

Sitting in my rooms with the doors to the garden wide open, I often journaled about my experiences of creativity and would spend hours engaged in watercolour painting. Occasionally I would sit outside to journal, paint and reflect. In later days of my study, I would leave the guesthouse and its garden and pass through the rickety back gate, slightly warped by weather, and walk down the winding path to the beach.

The other doors in the guesthouse were firmly shut. I knew they led to other private rooms, but I had never entered them. I wondered what stories the rooms and their guests had to tell and the differing perspectives about creativity they would bring to light.

### **Welcoming my guests**

My guests did not all arrive at once. Some arrived on the same day, some a week later and two never entered the house but looked in from the outside. Over a five-month period my guests came and left at different

times, and some stayed longer than others. I welcomed my guests whenever they arrived and made sure that they knew they were always welcome to return and visit at a later time.

### **My space in the guesthouse**

As I dwelt in the guesthouse, and talked to guests, new ideas and perspectives started to emerge and I started to see creativity, and also learning, in a new way. Mirroring the generation of these new ideas, more photographs appeared on the walls and on surfaces in my private rooms. Each one reflected an observation or new insight about creativity. In synchrony with my ever-expanding understanding of creativity, the bookshelves in my private rooms started to overflow with new literature sources, including those by Cropley and Patston (2018) and Montuori and Donnelly (2013).

Returning to the guesthouse during my study and going for walks in the garden and down to the beach helped me to de-clutter my thinking. It created a liminal space for me to put aside my knowledge and preconceived ideas and assumptions about creativity. It also provided access to liminal sources and helped me to see creativity and its connection to learning in a new light. In time it provided inspiration for re-envisioning and re-imagining teacher professional learning.

## Olivia

*The first visit (March 2019)*



Olivia entered the guesthouse with quiet confidence. She greeted us in the hub and then led us directly to her private rooms. She knew exactly where to go. Her rooms presented as a calm and contemplative open space, uncluttered, spacious and well-lit by pools of warm light extending from lamps placed around the room. There were lots of windows in Olivia's dwelling and the open windows offered glimpses of a pretty and well-tended garden. As Olivia ushered us inside her private rooms, she started to talk about her understanding of creativity. Using allegory to create an image of her understanding, she calmly stated: "Creativity is like the light from a torch; sometimes it is dim and sometimes it is bright."

Olivia demonstrated what she meant by reaching for a small torch on a side table. She twisted the rim of the torch causing the light stream from the torch to brighten and dim. She continued, "but the light needs to stay on, the light needs to be constant to experience creativity". As we reflected on her analogy, she led us over to a window and refocussed our gaze onto the outside world. She declared that her contemplative space, where she felt "at one" in her creative flow was her garden. In this space, she felt able to daydream. It was where she had time to reflect and be

*still: "I find that it is when I am in a quiet time that ideas might come to me – they float to the surface."*

For the rest of this first visit to Olivia's rooms we wandered around the large open space and engaged in dialogue about creativity. As Olivia described her experiences and feelings about the phenomenon, the pools of light in the room either brightened or dimmed. When describing the freshness and creative potential offered by the start of the day; the natural environment that values the importance of play; the significance of time uncluttered by activity; and the opportunity to daydream, the light in Olivia's dwelling shone brightly, and the garden could be clearly seen from the windows.

In contrast, the lights went dim, and the outside world retreated and faded when Olivia shared her feelings about being tired at the end of the day and her lack of "creative spark" at this time. All signs of the outside world disappeared, and shutters appeared over the windows when Olivia reflected on her observation about "how cluttered and closed her students' lives are" with their numerous after-school activities chosen by well-meaning parents to "keep them busy".

*yes, we take the capability away from them really – and parents intervening too much also stifles creativity – too much control.*

*Where is the time to daydream?*

*The second visit (May 2019)*

Olivia was waiting at the door leading to her rooms and eagerly welcomed us inside when we next gathered at the guesthouse. As she ushered us in, we saw that the windows were wide open and a slight breeze was bringing the fragrance from the garden inside, merging interior and exterior worlds. Olivia encouraged us to sit in some comfortable lounge chairs. The room was illuminated by natural light. It was clear that Olivia had been thinking and reflecting deeply about her understanding and experiences of creativity, as she was very eager to share her ideas and hastened us to settle ourselves and listen. She leaned forward and drew us into her wonderings about creativity by reading from her journal:

*Holidays, day one, the novel that has been tugging for attention, finished. The house is empty, just [my dog] at my feet – undemanding – headspace, finally. When is that space ever free from planning, ruminating, remembering ...? Childhood? Where things are new and exciting, and curiosity is sparked or is this where an adult can find creative space too? There's that word again ... space ...*

*When is it that life is robbed of naivety and curiosity? Where life can be spontaneous, organic and unforced? Is it when boundaries are pegged out by school, society ...?*

The room dimmed slightly as she paused, the breeze stopped and clouds outside cast shadows into the room. Olivia continued:

*Adolescence ... more clearly defined by rules both spoken and unspoken. Peers to judge and mould. Art, writing, sewing, cooking bounded by assessment criteria. Where was the creativity in that? Is that something that we have now recognised as important? It now becomes a "thing" in the 21st*

*century, a commodity, a prized "skill". It's often not until we realise that something is lost that we go looking for it. Can it be taught? It needs to be taught because we have squashed every bit of creative juice out of children. Lego boxed with pre-planned outcomes directed on the packaging ... Creativity, the precious commodity that will help solve the problems of our society – waste, global warming, too many people, not enough people. Yet haven't we always had problems solved through creative ideas? Now we are rewarding the students whose product falls outside the criteria. Life is still a flurry for many adolescents, overcommitted with numerous activities driven by rules – sport, music ensembles ... or for some the early arrival of the demands of adulthood in a parent-absent world.*

There was solemn silence in the room and the light looked dim. But then, like a twist of a torch, the gloom of the room lifted. A bright light filled the space as Olivia reflected on her adult experiences of creativity:

*Teaching – a vocation that gives licence to creativity, although somewhat constrained. The days at the XX School – an open curriculum – the freedom to be flexible and think divergently. A whole day, just to ourselves! No criteria to meet, just the headspace to explore – no-one to judge, just total absorption. Sometimes the unease that comes with open-endedness and the frustration of square pegs but ultimately the pleasure that comes from self-expression.*

Exhibiting a strong sense of happiness and completeness as she reminisced about her creative experience in this school, Olivia shared her positive and hopeful outlook for the future:

*Creativity is there in all environments; we just need to either deliberately explore the opportunities or be forced by some issue. Creativity doesn't have to be just about life-changing inventions or artistic expression; it is also about the smaller creative initiatives that we all make. Everyone can be creative. It's not just the realm of the arts.*

*The future, what does it hold? The future self, the aged adult. More time to explore again. Freedom to graze without pressure, to find wonder and think in unexpected ways.*

As we sat in the soft lounge chairs and watched the gentle shifts of light, we reflected upon Olivia's narrative about creativity. It was both uplifting and worrying: bright and dim, and deeply reflective and moving. Olivia's experiences and narrative highlighted the vulnerability of creativity. We saw how easily it could be suppressed and fostered depending on the environment, headspace of self and others, and by opportunities or limitations provided by time and space. As our visit came to a close, a soft light filled the room making it look and feel warm and comfortable. The garden outside, although enshadowed, was still visible. Olivia looked relaxed as she reflected on the importance of having time to talk to like-minded people: *"being around like-minded people is important. It is great to be creative by yourself but when you are bouncing ideas off of each other – it just fuels the creativity."*

Olivia expressed her eagerness to meet once again and invited us back into her residence. She also welcomed the opportunity to have time to be alone in this space, "to go back to her thinking", and continue to journal her reflections and wonderings, *"it goes back to being on our own and being with others: both are spaces for creativity"*.

*A third visit (June 2019)*

We passed through the hub of the guesthouse and entered Olivia's private rooms for a third time. The light was streaming through the open windows. The garden looked colourful and smelled fragrant, and the open space inside was brightly illuminated. The lounge chairs were still prominent and central in the room, and arranged in a conversational circle, inviting dialogue. In a corner of the room, exposed by a stream of light from a window, was a large pile of reading matter.

Books were lying open and printed pages of articles were scattered around the pile of books. One chapter, "Possibility thinking and wise creativity: Educational futures in England?" by Anna Craft (2010), was lying on top of the pile. It looked well-read, with words and sentences highlighted and scribbled notes in the margins and in all available spaces around the text.

Olivia eagerly greeted us and encouraged us to sit down so that she could share her ideas and new learning. She seemed quietly excited as she stated:

*I am changing my mindset ... and clarifying my thoughts ... creativity doesn't have to be mind-blowing ... it can be what we do every day, it is inherent in our behaviour – I try to be creative in how I say something ... I look for the most creative way of saying something. It can be really small things ... It is about standing back and creating the space for possibility thinking.*

Olivia continued her narrative by reading from her journal and sharing a recent school experience:



*Craft's article got me thinking about the so called "democratic" view of human creativity that it is "inherent in human behaviour as an everyday capability." That it can be as small as the word you use in an email or better still your reports [here I was thinking that I hadn't been creative at all since last we met] or the spice you add to a dish or the choice you make in how to use your time. Maybe it's not even product based. Can it be just the thoughts that you have when you wake in the middle of the night. Or then again does it have to be something that is a product and visible?*

Olivia then related a school experience involving her group of Year 9 students, where she had drawn upon her new insights about "standing back and creating the space for creativity" to re-design the start of the lesson. The lesson was open-ended (create a device that would balance a marble on two sides) and went for 45 minutes. Olivia started the lesson with a reflection, asking her students to brainstorm "what creativity is not". Olivia's students responded with words such as: *always obvious, restricted, correct/incorrect, using other people's ideas, conforming, dull, picking the first option, stopping when you encounter a problem and following the crowd.*

Olivia wondered whether the product would be different based on this entry into the lesson or if the thinking would be different because the space had been created for students to contemplate creativity and what this "doesn't look/feel like", before rushing to find the solution. The room looked bright and inviting as she stated:

*the idea of "creating time and space for creative learning", "standing back", really resonates with my thinking from my last journal entry ... I like the distinction that was made between "teaching creatively" and "fostering creativity",*

*allowing the agency to come from the student. Or is it the so-called "middle ground" between "creative teaching" and "teaching for creativity"?*

The room was alive with dialogue after Olivia's narrative. Every corner of her room seemed to be illuminated as the group explored possibilities and swapped questions and ideas about the phenomenon.

*Do we need to be relaxed or under pressure, or bored or engaged to experience creativity? Can we, do we or should we assess creativity? Is creativity different from creative thought and creative product? Can all people be creative? What about people that are very literal?*

A rustling of paper disturbed by a breeze from the open window interrupted the flow of questions and wonderings. After a moment's silence, Olivia broke the silence and asked:

*How can we ensure creative trusteeship is used for the greater good? ... not as marketised creativity ... on the other hand, if we are over worried about the ethics behind creativity will this then inhibit the way we create? (June 2019).*

Another lively dialogue followed. This time the conversation focussed on creativity, ethics and a concern for young students and how "hot housing" may be stifling natural creativity and passion. As the dialogue started to wane, Olivia stated:

*This conversation has made me think. If we don't create space for creativity, if we don't put it out there – our kids will never know what they are capable of creating – so for us [teachers] it is all about planting the seed and see what grows.*

As we left Olivia's dwelling, the lights were still shining brightly, and the space was alive with possibilities.

### *One more visit (August 2019)*

One last time I softly tapped at Olivia's door to her private rooms. I was alone. Rather than using the door from the hub, I chose to tap on the door that led directly from the garden into her rooms. As always, Olivia welcomed me graciously and with enthusiasm. I entered the large open-space room and looked around at the windows. They were all wide open, revealing the green and lush garden outside. The pile of reading materials had grown, and more pages and books were evident. Articles by Arthur Cropley (2011) and David Cropley and Tim Patston (2018) were especially visible. The light streaming down on these sources was brighter than ever. We settled down on the comfortable lounge chairs and started to talk. I invited Olivia to read me her latest journal entry:

*I am not sure that I am really any further along the journey to understanding creativity. Initially, I thought that "headspace" was essential and now I know that creativity can be the product of extreme pressure. I have spoken to a number of people of all ages about the concept. The Design and Technology teacher talked about quiet, thinking time that she tries not to interrupt because "it's almost like 'breaking the spell'". An elderly lady who I visited at an aged care home talked about "dwelling", which I also liked. This notion of stillness seems to be apparent. Being in "the zone" was definitely apparent during our Write a Book in a Day activity. The uninterrupted time spent producing a book over 12 hours was almost like a gift to those who participated, with amazing outcomes. The students say that "they love it" because they can think and create and then see the creativity in others that they admired. Across-generational thinking about creativity indicates the need to dwell [Olivia listed synonyms for dwell ...] – linger over, mull over, muse on, brood about, brood over, think about, spend time thinking about, be preoccupied*

*by, be obsessed by, eat one's heart out over ... the need for minimal interruptions or distractions and a stimulus.*

We mulled over these ideas for some time and agreed about the complexity of the phenomenon of creativity and how our exploration was nowhere near an end. As I said goodbye, I noted that Olivia did not shut the door nor close the windows. The light stayed on in her dwelling, creating a constant glow and making Olivia's creative space very visible. It reminded me of Olivia's torch analogy – the torch provided a constant beam of light as Olivia continued to explore and expand her understanding of the phenomenon through research, reflection and her classroom practice.

## **Isabella**

*The first visit (March 2019)*



Isabella arrived at the guesthouse and walked into the central hub. She sat heavily on the couch. She looked stressed and troubled. The day had been fraught with problems and a sad event at the end of the day had made Isabella question whether she really wanted to be present. However, she *was* present and after a drink of water and some quiet moments she affirmed her interest and eagerness to talk and learn about creativity. On this first occasion Isabella asked if we could remain in the

guestroom's central hub and listen to the shared dialogue between guests rather than visiting her private rooms.

However, just before it was time to retire for the night, Isabella stood and cautiously beckoned us over to the door of her private rooms – the door was ajar, and a dim light was shining through into the hub. We stood and walked over to Isabella who opened the door wider for us to enter. A long, narrow passageway with a dimly lit room at the far end was visible ahead of us. The passageway had white walls and was lined on both sides with framed black and white photographs from floor to ceiling. Although we tried to look at the images, they were obscured by the reflection of light on the glass in the frames.

As we walked slowly down the long passageway Isabella started to talk about the photographs. For her the photographs represented her understanding and experience of creativity. As we paused, moved closer to, and looked at the gallery of photographs, and listened to Isabella talk, the hazy reflections on the glass disappeared and the images became clearer. They were photographs of people in thoughtful and contemplative poses, engaged in learning, play and life.

Isabella explained that photography was her creative outlet; when she focussed the lens of the camera and snapped images of people, she was in a "joyous space" and full of "love and joy". Looking at her photographic portfolio also filled Isabella with pleasure and a feeling of creative engagement. She described how time just disappeared and she felt free and energised by viewing the images – reflecting on the light,

shade and composition of each photo with “love and passion”. Isabella paused near the room at the end of the passageway and sighed. She explained how the tension and sadness from the day had gone, leaving her tired, but at the same time, re-energised. We slowly walked back down the passageway past the photographs and into the hub. Isabella did not switch off the light in her room as she was eager to go back into the space. She felt energised and re-invigorated.

*The second visit (May 2019)*

Isabella arrived with a smile as she walked quickly into the hub. She sat down in an armchair and readied herself to listen to her colleagues. Reaching for her bag, Isabella pulled out a tablet device and immediately began to draw and jot down thoughts, questions and ideas that resonated with her as she listened to other co-researchers share their stories about creativity. When it was time, Isabella stood and invited us to follow her to her room. We walked swiftly down the long passageway, passing by her gallery of photographs and moved into the room at the end. It was an irregularly shaped room, with corners and spaces filled with interesting artefacts and photographic equipment. Like the passageway, the walls were covered with black and white photographs, framed and arranged to entice visitors to look at, and ponder over, the faces and images within the photographs. A computer and printer sat on a large table in one corner of the room, while individual chairs were arranged informally between other pieces of furniture and photographic collections. The

spotlights overheads were shining brightly and were illuminating the room.

Although eager for us to join her in her room, Isabella looked worried. She motioned for us to sit down and after a moment's reflective silence, started to talk: *"I don't think I am bored enough anymore – I need to have the space to feel passionate about something ... there is too much pressure now, we are too busy and too occupied – we are missing the spontaneity."*

Energised by the opportunity to express her ideas and concerns, Isabella described how, from her perspective, the focus on curriculum accountability, and preoccupation with extra and co-curricular activities, had reduced the spontaneity, creativity and fun in school life. She shared a story:

*I gave my boys a piece of paper and I said to them you can paint whatever you like – they all started squealing and saying you are the best teacher and that it is the best day of our lives! It almost broke my heart – in my mind I thought I was being lazy ... but really, I had been suppressing creativity.*

The light streaming from the spotlights shone over Isabella as she continued to express her feelings and stories about creativity.

After the first creativity hub Isabella had tried to create space for herself in her busy teaching day to be creative. To do this she decided to join in an art class with her students:

*At school we have an artist working with the boys and I decided that I would join in the class ... I got my own canvas*

*... I struggled so much to let myself go because I wanted the circles to be perfect ... like those modelled by the artist ...*

*The boys were just happy having a go and they were almost finished, and I was just trying to get this one circle right ...*

*The artist was saying, "You just have to let it go."*

*I had a really bad moment – I just couldn't get into the moment – it was interesting to see how long it took me – but once it did – it all started happening.*

Isabella was leaning forward in her chair as she shared her story.

The spotlight was now shining directly onto her face. She looked animated, and was full of enthusiasm and excitement as she continued to speak and reflect on her experience in the art room and on her past experiences with photography:

*I actually think creativity takes work – I think there is an awful lot of work that goes into it. I don't see that now in photography because it is so natural to me but when I first started it wasn't – it was work and practice – it didn't flow. But once you get past that moment it flows ...*

Isabella finished her story by thanking me for the opportunity to re-ignite her own inner creativity and for reminding her about the joy of creativity. She also thanked me for inspiring her to re-embed creativity into her classroom practice:

*The joy that the boys and I felt when we were doing this was amazing. It was well worth the experience.*

*So, thank you again – if I hadn't been involved in this I probably would have thought, "I have too much to do, Mother's Day coming up ..." but I pushed myself into it because of your study – so thank you!*



The room was quiet for a few minutes before an animated dialogue started. The one stream of light in the room transformed into a blanket of light illuminating all corners of the room. Isabella led the dialogue, sharing her deeply personal feelings about creativity:

*I feel like my brain and mind is very creative, but my body and actions are just not catching up with it ... quite often I feel like I am working in parallel with myself – my head and my thoughts are not being reflected in what I am doing. I think I am more creative than I can show but I wonder if this is due to time restraints ...*

*I feel like I need to be bored again so that I can play with my imagination. I need that time to be bored and not filled with anything else. Um, in the early stages of a new project I think you need time to just explore and play – I think that is where creativity comes in – it needs work and time ...*

*What doesn't work is when we say – okay, be creative, do it now, show me how you have been creative – we need to spend time on it – being with like-minded people to bounce ideas off. This helps as well.*

*It is about finding what sparks you, it is about letting your mind wander – it happens when I am awake at night, and I get inspiration – usually when I am thinking of something else ...*

*You have to do it [engage in creativity] for the joy of it, not for the recognition. The joy of doing it ... I can feel the joy on my cheeks and in my face and inside me ...*

*The third visit (June 2019)*

Isabella welcomed us into her private rooms with enthusiasm – this time bypassing the central hub. Her room was bright, and interspersed

between the monochrome photographs on the walls were brightly coloured paintings, collages and pastels by her students. They overlapped each other in a joyous display of colour, creativity, pride and inspiration. Books about photography and art were piled high on a small table near the window. A large picture book about Picasso was open, showing images of his artwork.

Isabella ushered us to sit down and immediately started to describe her “classroom Picasso project”. The project was designed to engage her young students in creative expression as they explored the work of the artist. Isabella specifically chose Picasso as the artist for this project, as she was keen to draw on his focus on “imperfection, as a way to try and reduce [student] anxiety, perfectionism and fear of error”.

With pride and enthusiasm, Isabella showed us her students’ work. She pointed to specific pieces and, reading from her tablet, quoted the students’ own words as a way to share the success of the Picasso project as a creative and fulfilling experience:

*I feel amazing when I am being creative; I just love to just draw and change my picture. I smile and feel good when I am being creative – it is like playing in free time. It feels right – I just like to make changes – it is fun. I like to paint because I can do my own thing and do my best. When I am creative I feel happy because it is fun – I like to use my brain to come up with ideas – I like to make my ideas come out. (Year 1 students in Isabella’s class)*

To finish, Isabella drew attention to her observation of her students during this creative experience. She noticed the students were happy,

joyful, excited, confident, taking risks, experimental, independent, engaged and positive.

Energised by recalling this creative learning episode, Isabella also reflected on her own feelings arising from her participation in art lessons with her students. She described the opportunity as a “creative space moment” where she experienced a sense of freedom and timelessness:

*It makes me forget everything – everything is just washed out of my brain ... and I feel refreshed and energised for the next lesson – I am so grateful that I have committed and followed through ...*

*I think all staff should have to have a creative space moment, [well-being] art room, yoga, etc.*

Once again Isabella ended her narrative by acknowledging the importance of meeting with like-minded people through the study: *“It has helped me and brought me back to how I started teaching ... this [creativity] is my thing, this is what I value – so it has brought me back.”*

Isabella led us back down the now brightly lit passageway to the central hub. She lingered in this space and continued to talk about her classroom experiences and creativity. She was reluctant to let go of the moment. Beyond Isabella, I could see her private rooms, the passageway and room. A window to the outside was now visible, revealing a glimpse of a garden patch, hazy in the fading sunlight. Isabella’s private rooms looked alive, energised, vibrant and open to new possibilities.

*One more visit (December 2019)*

Isabella and I met alone in the garden rather than in her private rooms. She looked refreshed and peaceful, having been away from work for some time on personal leave. Many of these moments had been spent contemplating creativity from a personal and professional perspective.

As we sat and looked at the garden, Isabella reminisced about how lucky she was as a child to have a mother who allowed her the freedom to be creative. One particularly beautiful memory for Isabella involved going down to the creek at the bottom of her garden and playing for hours, creating dams from picked flowers. On these occasions she would create her own stories as she filled the creek bed with brightly coloured flowers: *"It was just such a free experience; I was in my own world and creating all sorts of stories. I feel sorry for children who are not given freedom to explore and be creative."*

When it was time to go, Isabella walked me back through her private rooms. A bunch of brightly coloured flowers was centred prominently on a coffee table. Petals were scattered on the ground, having fallen from some over-full blooms. Their bright colours stood out in contrast with the pale wooden floorboards. As I walked through the door into the guesthouse, Isabella happily waved goodbye, turned and went back inside. She had a renewed passion to explore her own creativity and to find ways to foster and enhance the phenomenon in her students.

## Claire

*The first visit (April 2019)*



Claire entered the guesthouse with an air of anticipation and excitement. She smiled and sat on an upright chair next to the couches in the central hub. Her body language reflected alertness and interest, but slight unease. This was something new and unknown for Claire. She was fascinated by creativity and fully appreciated the depth of possibilities manifested through engagement in the phenomenon. However, it was still a mystery to her; something not quite tangible or part of her experience. Seated on the edge of her chair, Claire listened attentively as her colleagues talked about their experiences of creativity. She was in awe of the stories and experiences shared and the different perspectives on creativity that were being opened to her.

With slight hesitancy, Claire stood and opened the door to her private rooms and invited us in with a shy smile. It was a neat space, small with practical but comfortable furniture. As we entered, the natural light from the open window made the room appear fresh and bright. A white curtain fluttered quietly as an almost imperceptible breeze blew through the open window. We sat on a lounge in the centre of the room. A square coffee table piled high with books about creativity and giftedness acted as a central focus in the space. All corners of the room were visible.

Claire waited until we were seated and then started to share her understanding and wondering about creativity:

*Before I became a teacher – I saw creativity as something different – related to the arts – to people who like to paint and dance ... The children I teach have helped me see creativity differently – they have challenged my thinking. Now I see it as something that we don't naturally connect to solving a problem.*

Relatively new to the profession of teaching, Claire commented on more than one occasion that her awareness of creativity as “something” inspiring, full of endless possibility and wonder, had only awakened since shifting to this new career. As Claire continued to raise many questions about creativity, the room seemed to expand and shift shape. The clearly outlined corners blurred and two or three new doorways, hazy and indistinct in the bright light, became semi-visible. Claire, inspired and encouraged by the attention of colleagues, continued to pose questions and wonderings:

*What sparks creativity for the students? ... the play? – They are “into it” ...*

*I think creativity comes in different forms – it might be the person that has the spark, and it could also be the person that acts upon the idea – it can look different in different people – are creative thinking and creativity just different forms of creativity?*

*Is original thought being creative? Is something that isn't tangible – without product creativity?*

Claire walked us to the door when it was time to leave. She hesitated but decided to stay in her room – there was still so much to

think about and so many new corners and doorways in her private room to explore.

*The second visit (May 2019)*

Claire's room looked quite different when we entered for the second time. It was still bright, light and airy but the single room had transformed into a suite with a small number of rooms emanating from the central sitting room. One door leading from the sitting room was open, revealing a light and airy room beyond. Another door was slightly ajar and shadowy outlines hinted at other doorways still firmly shut. The square coffee table in the sitting room had been replaced by a round table and was stacked even higher with books about creativity. An open laptop showing a search engine screen was on a table near the window. The cursor on the screen blinked continuously – impatiently waiting for the next opportunity to search, explore and reveal.

Between these arranged visits to the guesthouse, Claire had called into the guesthouse on many occasions, quietly but determinedly researching creativity in the space of her own private rooms. Likewise, in this reflective space, Claire searched for memories of experiences of creativity as a child and as an adult. During this time, she journaled and researched – prying into her own thoughts and ideas to try to make sense of creativity from her knowledge, beliefs and world of experience.

On this second arranged visit, Claire invited us to sit down and, when we were settled, reached for her journal and started to read:

*I am in awe of people's creativity, especially visual artists – the originality, their ability, their talent. Creativity has previously scared me, as I do not believe that I am creative when compared to other people. How do you assess someone as being creative? To me it was a subjective concept.*

*It was not until I began teaching that I saw creativity in another light. I'd watch junior primary students engage in creative play, and wonder when did that level of creative freedom stop for me?*

Encouraged by our interest in her words and reflections, Claire continued:

*My childhood memories are vivid with creative play, with friends and by myself. From knitting clothes for my dolls to creating wonderful stories while playing on my swing. I am not an only child; however, my brother is 12-years older than me. I grew up as an only child and I think this impacted on my creativity as I would get bored and learnt to enjoy my own company and engage in creative play.*

*Was watching television the reason for the loss of my creative freedom and thinking? Probably not; however, it did stifle my creative thinking. I am a firm believer that boredom sparks creativity. The bored unstimulated mind is allowed to wander and daydream, leading to some form of creation.*

Leaning forward, Claire put down her journal and reached for her laptop. She entered a word in the search engine and waited patiently. A magazine article entitled "Boredom is interesting" by Clive Thompson (2015) appeared on the screen. Reading from the laptop screen, Claire quoted some phrases from the article:

What if boredom is a meaningful experience — one that propels us to states of deeper thoughtfulness or creativity?  
(para. 2)



Kierkegaard described boredom as a prequel to creation: "The gods were bored; therefore, they created human beings".  
(para. 3)

Giving us a moment to reflect on these words about boredom and creativity, Claire replaced her laptop on the table and once again reached for her journal. Quoting some words from Edward de Bono, she then summed up her story by reading from her journal:

*On reflection, I was creative when I was a child, and I think I have creative moments as an adult. This is evident when I create lessons for my students ... There is still a spark there! ... de Bono said, "Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way." This is what I am doing now!*

Claire closed her journal and an energetic dialogue ensued. Claire's stories, reflections and research had prompted everyone to think about their own understanding of creativity. A particular focus for conversation centred upon how teachers and parents do or do not enable students to experience creativity. Claire showed concern that children's creativity might be suppressed by technology at home and at school. She stated:

*I have a big concern about children's use of technology. I feel that children are never allowed to become bored, as they are allowed to be stimulated by iPhones, iPads and other technological devices. Does this immediate stimulation limit a child's ability to be curious and creative?*

However, Claire was also reassured by the natural presence of creativity in the students she observed at her school – especially the junior primary children who engaged so happily, easily and creatively in

free play. She mulled over the notion of free play and how important it is, not just for young children, but also for older students and adults.

After a long and productive conversation, Claire brought the visit to her private rooms to a close with an observation about how her awareness of creativity had expanded through research, personal reflection and dialogue with like-minded colleagues.

*I really like the work of Paul Torrance – he looks at it [creativity] from a perspective of fluency, having multiple ideas, flexibility, originality and elaboration – this helped me to put creativity into a context – it is not just about visual art or drama and music – I am beginning to realise that it is about different things – so much more; so, thank you Desiree, it [engaging as a co-researcher in this study] has really made me think differently about creativity.*

Claire's private suite of rooms was alive with conversation. The door that had been only slightly ajar on entry to the room was now wide open, revealing an empty space filled with natural light from an open sliding door. A fresh fragrance of cut grass wafted in through the sliding door and a lush green lawn was clearly visible beyond the doorway. Both visions invited images of creativity and free play.

### *A third visit (June 2019)*

Claire welcomed us in eagerly to her private suite of rooms when we met on a cold day in June. The sitting room was cosy and, although the window was shut to keep out the cold and wintry air, the suite was fresh and airy. Most of the doors to other rooms in the suite were open and the

remaining doors, although not wide open, were now all ajar. Claire's sitting room now looked quite different. The lightness and order of the room had been replaced by colour and a tumult of student work: images, writing, posters, artwork, construction pieces and anecdotes scribbled on paper. The coffee table and chairs and couches were strewn with students' work and examples of creative products. It was a joyous, messy celebration of student creativity as viewed and understood by Claire.

As we sat down, Claire started to talk about what she had been doing since we last met. She shared how she had intentionally tried to engage students in creative experiences in her lessons, but, due to the set timetabled topics, time and student mindset, had found this difficult:

*I found the task to enhance space for creativity difficult. This was due to the nature of the topics I was teaching the students, and also I only had one lesson a week.*

*A limiting factor [for creativity] is often when they [students] think someone else will look at it – the thought of judging their work ... when I worked with Year 7's I had to promise them that no one else would see their work – then they "let go" and were creative ...*

The colour in the room paled and, as a result of an unexpected gust of wind from the open window, the internal doors of Claire's suite blew shut. Claire looked troubled as she continued to reflect on the limitations placed on creativity by the educational system: accountability, strict achievement criteria, set topics and restricted time. She also wondered, *"Is it to do with age? My Year 1's don't seem to mind what people think,*

*while the Year 7's are worried about what people think. They seem to limit their own creativity."*

A discussion about other possible limitations on creativity followed and continued until it was time to leave Claire's private rooms. As Claire waved goodbye to us, she calmly expressed how important she believes it is to make room and time for "creative space": *"We need to allow space for different thinking – space where [the students] can let go and show what they thought and understood – this is creative space."*

*One more visit (November 2019)*

Claire invited me to her rooms for one last visit. I was on my own for this visit. When I arrived, she was waiting for me on the green lawn outside her residence; she was smiling and seemed tired but happy. It was a sunny day, so we dragged some chairs from her sitting room outside and sat on the lawn.

As we enjoyed the sunshine, Claire described some lessons that she had implemented with students. They focussed on providing space and time for creativity and used open-ended provocations to provide students with choice and agency. Specific and detailed accountability criteria had been intentionally removed to create a sense of freedom.

Claire was thrilled with the resulting engagement, thinking and learning demonstrated by her students. She described how students' creativity had been ignited and their learning had been enhanced. As I left, Claire waved from the lawn, turned and walked back into her suite.

All of the doors were open wide, revealing numerous spaces for free and creative play.

## **Andrea**

*The first visit (April 2019)*



Andrea entered the guesthouse with confidence. She walked straight to the couch in the sunny and well-lit central hub and sat down. She was ready and eager to meet and talk to others in the group.

On her lap was a lamp made from a rectangular piece of Perspex inserted into a wooden base. On closer inspection the Perspex appeared to be damaged, with fine hairline cracks radiating from a straight fracture running down the centre of the lamp. Curious to hear about the lamp, we stayed in the central hub and listened to Andrea as she started to share her story: *"The Perspex came from a radiation machine – as it gets old from use, it cracks and needs to be replaced."*

Encouraged by our interested expressions, Andrea continued to explain that her friend, recognising the unconventional and asymmetrical beauty of the damaged Perspex, recycled it and created a lamp. As she was talking, Andrea plugged the lamp into a power source and switched it on. A golden light radiated through the cracks and shone opaquely through the Perspex. It resembled a shining golden tree, with fine branches radiating from a source.



**Figure 1: Andrea's lamp – Her symbol of creativity**

Looking pleased, Andrea stated:

*This lamp is an example of a hopeful, creative solution to brokenness. In the same way, I see creativity as coming up with an alternative solution or use of something – it is about bringing hope and joy out of a broken situation.*

We did not enter Andrea's private rooms on this first meeting, but stayed in the hub, happily engaged in conversation about Andrea's story and her perception of creativity.

*The second (and last) visit (May 2019)*

The next time we talked to Andrea was in May. As before, we met in the hub. This time, however, Andrea could only attend through a virtual

platform as she had been called into work unexpectedly. I set up my laptop on the table in the central hub and projected the image of Andrea onto one of the white walls. Andrea leant in towards the screen with a warm smile on her face. She was eager to be part of the conversation and dialogue even though she was not there in person.

After some general conversation, and with some hesitation, Andrea asked if we could go into her private rooms. I unplugged the laptop and carried it carefully as we moved towards her rooms. As we walked through the door, although the décor was hard to distinguish, I became aware of a feeling of well-being and calmness. Still standing and holding the laptop in my hands, Andrea started to share her reflections about creativity since the last time we met as a group:

*I realised that after the first focus group that I am not really aware of what helps me be creative – sometimes I just have ideas and other times I don't, so it has been interesting to just reflect on whether there are certain environmental elements that help me to be creative.*

Waiting for a pause in her storytelling, I placed the laptop on a small table in her room. Andrea continued to describe and mull over her experiences of creativity:

*I thought there were some clear triggers – like personal connection and purpose – that I really want to achieve something that means a lot to me personally or that I have started something with my staff, and I really want to achieve it, so the purpose is clear.*

*Having a nice working environment that is not too crowded and not too noisy but is light and has a lovely view or outlook – this helps me to be creative ... having a deadline and having*

*the pressure to get something done – actually helps me to be creative ... I can be more creative in this pressured space than when I am overthinking it.*

At the end of her commentary, Andrea simply stated, *“I feel more creative when I am with like-minded people and/or when I can bounce ideas off of someone.”*

As Andrea spoke, the decor of the room became clearer and brighter. In the corner of the room, standing on a low cupboard was her Perspex lamp: the image of the golden tree illuminating the immediate space. On an opposite wall, a wide window with the blind pulled high was letting sunlight stream into the room. A leafy garden with an outdoor table and chairs arranged in a conversational configuration could be clearly seen.

Andrea invited us to open a door to the outside and to sit in her garden. In this outside space, with the laptop placed centrally on a white outdoor table, we discussed the significance of being with like-minded people – driven by the same purpose, to expand perspective, foster creativity and empower idea generation.

Energised by being with like-minded people (even if not in person), Andrea pondered and described past experiences of creativity and how she felt during those times. One particular experience filled her with joy as she spoke. It involved a trip away with “like-minded” work colleagues to a conference. In this lived experience, Andrea and her colleagues had a clear purpose: to share their learning with other colleagues:



*We were so buzzing with energy with the experience and, while we were waiting for flights, we wrote the session and prepared what we were going to do with the staff. We were just energised by going to the conference ... this was an experience where I was buzzing with creativity despite being tired.*

As the sun started to set in Andrea's garden, we moved back through her rooms and into the central hub. As I replaced the laptop on the large wooden table, I noticed a bible sitting among other books on a bookshelf in the corner of the room. As if in response to my observation, Andrea quietly reflected:

*I realise my Christian worldview is connected to how I see creativity because I think we are born in the image of being creative ... I know I feel energised by other people, but I also know that I need time to be reflective and energised within myself – but – it is being with others that does it for me.*

Although Andrea was keen to invite us into her house once again, our visit in May was the last. Unfortunately, Andrea's work commitments prevented any further visits to the guesthouse at this time, but I sensed that Andrea may return to her private rooms at another time.

### **Sophia: A single visit (April 2019)**



Sophia was flustered when she arrived at the guesthouse. Her workday had been troublesome, and she felt weighed down by the daily responsibilities of her teaching role. As she walked through the entrance and into the hub, she shrugged off her stresses and smiled broadly. She

stated how much she had been looking forward to this opportunity to talk about creativity. It was her passion.

When it was her turn to share her understanding of creativity Sophia eagerly signalled for us to follow her into her private rooms. She kept turning her head as she led the way, making sure that we were following closely behind. Opening the door from the central hub to her private rooms revealed a large room filled with eclectic paraphernalia: artwork, record collections and furniture. All items were specifically chosen for their uniqueness, creativity and individual appeal.

A large rug was on the floor and stacks of books about music, travel, politics, history and the street artist, political activist and film director Banksy were piled up around the walls. It was a comfortable and intimate space: a passionate display of memories and objects from Sophia's past and present life. She beckoned for us to sit with her on the rug and immediately started talking about her perception of creativity by describing her recent holiday to the West Bank in Palestine. During this visit, Sophia had spent many hours exploring and examining the graffiti on the wall between Palestine and Israel: "*Creativity is expression and freedom – it helps us 'hear' and 'see' – it opens eyes – it brings joy to misery.*"

As she spoke, Sophia showed us photographs of the West Bank and the graffiti wall. She spoke earnestly and with passion about the idea of creativity as freedom of expression and as an outlet for oppression,

tragedy and misery. Later, Sophia described her experience of creativity as a young school student:

*I was bored at school – I did all creative stuff outside of school. School had an agenda – I felt the teachers had an agenda about what they wanted me to produce. This bored me and blocked my creativity.*

*The only time that I remember feeling creative was in secondary school in a global affairs lesson – the teacher asked us to design a record cover to represent a narrative about a political view. It was enjoyable and energising. This experience engaged more than remembering facts; it engaged my senses and feelings.*

As if wearied by this memory, Sophie stood and indicated that it was time for us to leave her rooms. She walked slowly with us to the door of her room. The objects and collections in the room, once so vibrant, were now indistinct and hard to recognise in the dim light. As we started to walk through the door, Sophia asked a question. It was not directed at anyone in particular, but posed as a final contemplative thought: *“How do we teach it [creativity]? How can we stimulate ourselves to be creative as professionals so that we can model being creative to our students?”*

As we re-entered the central hub, we heard her door quietly close behind us. Whether by choice or circumstance, Sophia had chosen to stay in her own room with the door shut.

## Grace

*The first visit to the garden (April 2019)*



Grace met me in the garden outside the front of the guesthouse. She looked excited to be meeting but rather wistful that we were not going inside.

Unfortunately, circumstances meant that she could not meet with the rest of us inside the guesthouse.

Instead, Grace led me around the side of the building and onto a gravel path. The small pale grey pebbles crunched under our feet as we made our way to a white gazebo, covered on one side by a climbing yellow rose. She led me to a table and chair setting where two glasses of water were waiting for us on the table. Grace sat on a chair facing the guesthouse, and she sighed as she glanced over at the windows of the building. It seemed like she was longing to go inside.

It had been a tiring day of classroom teaching for Grace. Her mind was still filled with thoughts, questions and reflections from conversations with teacher colleagues, school leadership and students. After a few minutes Grace started the conversation about creativity with a question:

*Can you actually teach kids creativity? Or is it so innate so that all you really need to do is enable the conditions for it and sit back and watch it? And a third question is – can you shut the potential for creativity down?*

Grace looked troubled as she mulled over these questions. As we sat in the gazebo and watched the sun go down, Grace continued to talk

about how important creativity is to her. She motioned to her bag which was full of books by authors like Teresa Amabile, Robert Sternberg and Howard Gardner and proceeded to describe creativity as the “fire in her belly” and as an “awakening of wonder and joyousness”. She described engaging in sewing and knitting as her creative space. In this space the freedom of being able to create whatever she liked, combined with her needle skills, provided a joyous and fulfilling experience. Grace explained her understanding of creativity:

*We have an analytical part of our brain which responds beautifully to graphic organisers and data and that sort of thing – but that has to be switched off for true creativity to come to the foreground ... otherwise that part of the brain will block the insight ... when we are in the relaxed zone (for me this is sewing and knitting) things will come to the forefront.*

She continued to explain how she related her understanding of and passion for creativity to her teaching practice:

*As a teacher I have been acting on – either subconsciously or consciously – the idea that teaching the analytical skills will help to bring some of the creativity skills to the forefront – I believe you have to “put in” to “get out” – but the magical insights (the creativity) are just there. You need to create a creativity hot house.*

The sun was almost down as we started to bring our dialogue to a close. With the semi-darkness approaching, the yellow roses started to lose their colour and the gazebo that looked so white and bright in the sunlight started to disappear into the night light. Grace’s concerns for education and teaching and the place of creativity re-emerged:

*I think schools are generally moving in the direction of shutting down creativity – even though the words are written all over the curriculum. It is focussed on filling up our (student and teacher) time with things that are meant to be making us better and more creative – but all it is doing is filling up our head space ... and stifling what is our own – we don't have room for our own interests and for creativity – from which other things grow.*

Reflecting on these words, we stood and walked out of the gazebo and back along the crunchy gravel path, passed the guesthouse and, after saying goodnight, went on our separate journeys to our own homes.

*One more visit to the garden (June 2019)*

“Colour and flourish! This is what creativity is ...” Grace stated with a broad smile as I walked up to the gazebo. Four months had passed since I had last met with Grace. The exterior of the gazebo looked unchanged from my last visit with its bright white paint work and plants growing around the structure. The climbing rose was having its winter nap, but tiny green leaves could be seen shooting from the intertwining stems. The interior of the gazebo looked quite different. The table and chairs were still there but next to the table were big baskets filled with jumpers, balls of wool, knitting needles, embroidery threads and other resources needed for working with textiles. The solid wall at the back of the gazebo was covered in rich and complex tapestries from top to bottom. Brightly coloured knitted rugs were folded over the backs of chairs. In the middle

of this creative exuberance two steaming hot mugs of coffee sat invitingly on the table.

Grace called me over to sit down at the table. She leaned forward as she explained her words. "Creativity is colour and flourish", she repeated. "You have to be able to define it ... to understand it and work with it." Between visits to the gazebo, Grace had been thinking deeply about creativity and had intentionally tried to create a *creativity hot house* for her students at school. She looked determined as she said, "It hasn't hit the mark yet ...". She explained that she was still working on how to do this:

*The thing with creativity is that you have the constant interplay between what you need to know, what you are able to do skill wise, ... getting the ideas, and ... playing it out ... What makes you creative? Purpose, space, play, having a product at the end ... and affirmation.*

Grace sipped her coffee and, after a brief conversation about her students and school life, she shifted the conversation to focus on our meetings and conversations and how they had re-generated her passion for creativity:

*Once we talked, I felt compelled to prove my creativity. I was eager to do this. I was intent to go back to my textiles. I was re-inspired ... I think the thing with creativity is that you can't link it to one particular event, or one particular conversation, but putting it onto the agenda and foregrounding it keeps your mind open to it.*

Grace stood as she thought over her words. She looked at the wall of tapestries and reflected on a classroom unit of work that she had

carefully re-imagined to provide space and time for her students to experience creativity as part of the learning. She reflected once again that the unit still had not quite “hit the mark” but expressed happiness that she felt re-energised and optimistic about being able to embed creativity into her teaching: *“How exciting it is when creativity is in the air – the overall engagement in the learning and planning – [you can] visualise the learning and where it is going rather than being locked into the individual activities and tasks.”*

After further dialogue it was time to go. As we left the gazebo, the tapestries on the back wall were moving gently in the breeze and the sun was still high in the sky. Grace glanced in at a window of the guesthouse as she walked down the gravel path. Inside she could see people chatting in the central hub. She sighed but smiled and simply said “next time ...”.

### **Alicia: One solitary visit (June 2019)**



Alicia allowed me to enter her private dwelling one night in June. Unlike the other guests, Alicia’s private space was not in the guesthouse or even in the garden, but in a separate dwelling nearby. Alicia did not accompany me in person but gave me directions through email. With nothing but the moonlight to guide me, I walked past the guesthouse, through the garden and down a tree-lined path to the side of the house and in the opposite direction to the beach. The air was fragrant and heavy, and Alicia’s words from her email were replaying in my head:



*Creativity (when I was growing up), was an indulgence ... singing and acting were my secret passions. Secret because it was "so ridiculous" to have such fantasies in my (very working-class background) surroundings.*

*Yet, when I am creative, I feel like I am being my authentic self. When I am a part of something creative or following through on a creative project I have been planning in my head ... I am full of sunshine ... I feel like there is possibility and I feel optimistic. I have confidence.*

As I mused upon these words I sensed and imagined the tension in Alicia's world: being brought up to see creativity as an indulgence and as being "ridiculous" while at the same time knowing and feeling that being creative is fundamental to her existence and happiness. As I anxiously mulled over these thoughts, a small dwelling came into view. In the darkness, I could not make out the exterior but knew instinctively that it was Alicia's house. I entered cautiously.

It was surprisingly bright inside with moonlight streaming in from skylights. It was a one-room dwelling overfilled with expressions of Alicia's creativity: easels, paint palettes, canvases, books and an open "sleeping" computer. The silence in the room was marked, but as I walked around and looked at Alicia's creations her story, "recorded" in my head, filled the space.

In her email to me, Alicia expressed her lifelong struggle to be her creative self. Her early experiences of creativity had been hindered by her family's beliefs, and especially by her father's mindset that was firmly biased against creativity. Later in life, with the responsibilities of being a mother, Alicia at times felt "unbearable" pressure to go against her dream

of living a creative life. However, in time, Alicia followed her heart and pursued drama, music and art. Now, as an art teacher in a primary school, she immerses herself in her teaching and developing students' passion for the arts and the experiences she "loved as a kid". *"I LOVE MY JOB! I get to write and produce school musicals, manage exhibitions, everyday lesson planning and even decorating my classroom with student artworks gives me a buzz."*

As I continued to look around Alicia's private space, I sensed conflicting emotions in relation to creativity – these were joy, fear and guilt. An open trapdoor in the floor revealed a black hole leading down to a cellar, offering a place to hide and to be free of the criticism of her creativity. At the same time, it was a place to immerse herself in the creative experiences, out of view and in seclusion:

*I have turned to creating something for myself for different reasons in life. It has been to escape, or to document a chapter, to express and release emotions, to relax, to detach. As you said it ... to let my soul sing and dance!*

When it was time to leave Alicia's private dwelling, I quietly but firmly closed the door and made sure it was locked. Alicia's space was deeply private. I felt privileged to have been permitted to enter for this brief time. As I walked back down the path, Alicia's dwelling disappeared into the night and surroundings. I knew instinctively that I would not visit it again.

However, recalling Alicia's following words, I felt sure that her dwelling would not be empty for long. It was Alicia's safe and happy place and therefore nothing would keep her away:

*I feel euphoric, confident, brave, interesting ... mainly in the moment of creation I feel excitement. I can lose a day composing a song on the computer. I have adrenaline and don't care about anything else but what I am doing ... I have come to realise that I am a better person when I am being creative. I have more love to give, and I am a much easier person to love.*

### **My story: A coda – One more visit to the guesthouse**



Surrounded by books, articles, artwork and artefacts left by my guests, I listened repeatedly to recordings of dialogues and re-read reflective journals and annotations. After some time, I moved to the table and using paper and pencils started to draw, journal and craft the beginnings of these vignettes.

Over the next few weeks, moving between the large open space of the central hub, my private rooms and the garden, I sculpted and fashioned these individual, illustrative case studies using descriptive language and metaphor to illuminate stories of creativity. Never far from my reach were articles by Clements (2004) and Lemon (2006). While Clements' (2004) article reminded me that I needed to find a way to present findings where "both feeling and thinking modalities" would invite readers "in a similar process of transformative interpretation" (p. 26),

Lemon's (2006) research focussed my attention on the importance of making the narratives visible.

During this time of writing vignettes, I became aware of the individual and unique shift in thinking and understanding about creativity articulated by each co-researcher during her time as a guest in the guesthouse. I re-read them frequently, trying to make sense of the words and make meaning of the spaces and pauses between words. Some comments and reflections especially resonated with me:

*Does creativity spark creativity ... is it a symbiotic relationship? Has Google killed our intuitive knowledge? ... This conversation has got me thinking! (Sophia, April 2019)*

*It has been interesting ... especially reflecting on whether there are certain environmental elements that help me be creative. (Andrea, May 2019)*

*I certainly had fun reflecting ... I love this stuff. I think I need to look into Jane Piirto and definitely check out Ken Robinson's "The element". These are all topics I have pondered on my whole life. I love this. (Alicia, June 2019)*

*... the thing that has perhaps changed is my perception of what is creativity. The idea of "big C" and "little c" has broadened my own way of looking at the concept ... I need more time to engage in creative pursuits and to even think and read about creativity. (Olivia, August 2019)*

*These dialogues have had an impact of this on me ... you recognised the creativity within me by accepting me in your study ... that buoyed me ... this is really important, it is important, don't let creativity get swamped by life. I need to bring creativity out, spend the time doing it. [As a result of engaging in this dialogue] I have hung a tapestry opposite my bed in my new house, I completed it some years ago ... it was a restful and reflective thing to do as a mum and young*

*teacher ... it is a very beautiful tapestry, and it has inspired me to keep going ... it reminds me to keep track of my inner self (inner Grace) and my creativity as my inner thing. It reminds me that it is hard to find time to bring this out, and that when you do, you don't want it to be disregarded. (Grace, dialogue, June 2019)*

*Previously I had thought of creativity as being something artistic; however, through reflection, I have evolved my thinking to include creative thinking or thought ... not just as a tangible object. (Claire, October 2019)*

*It has helped me and brought me back to how I started teaching ... this is my thing; this is what I value, and it has brought me back. The boys have enjoyed it – I just hope it has some benefits beyond. So, thank you. (Isabella, December 2019)*

I felt energised by these comments. I was pleased that inviting guests to the guesthouse to engage in collective inquiry and explore creativity had expanded each guest's knowledge and understanding about the phenomenon. However, I knew there was still so much more for me to understand.



To coherently and vividly re-create stories as vignettes in this chapter necessitated careful examination, interpretation and meaning making of participants' stories and experiences of creativity. To do this I moved between rational and non-rational ways of knowing and drew on insights inspired and revealed through liminal sources. These insights illuminated obvious and nuanced shifts in participants' understandings of

creativity throughout the data-gathering phase of this study. In the next chapter, informed and inspired by the creative, sensory and cognitive experience of examining participants' stories and creating vignettes, I present my research findings in a similarly creative and visual mode.

## Chapter Six: A presentation of findings



The aim of this chapter is to highlight and describe my research findings as illuminated through my analysis of data and the creation of vignettes as presented in Chapter Five. Furthermore, I describe how the findings shed light on my research question: *How can expanding my understanding of creativity and its connection to learning assist me to re-imagine professional learning for teachers so that their learning experiences are enhanced?*

### **In this chapter**

In this chapter I adapt and blend vignette and visual narrative approaches to communicate my findings in two parts. Inspired by research by Lemon (2006) in which visual narrative is described as a “tool” (p. 2) to reflect on one’s own practice, I chose to use this creative approach to invite and elicit better understanding of these findings in relation to my research question. In addition, my adaption of a vignette approach to convey my research findings in this chapter acts as a “magnifying glass” for closer inspection of these findings.

In the next section I describe my findings, revealed through the analysis and interpretation of data gathered from conscious, unconscious and liminal domains, through the lens of an impromptu professional learning event. In the following section, I describe an unexpected finding

that emerged from liminal insights revealed through deep reflection and liminal experiences almost two years after the creativity hubs.

This unexpected finding involved an enhanced awareness of the imaginal as a source of creative potential and field of possibilities for personal transformation. In this study, I draw on Bottici's (2015) definition of the imaginal to describe it as an intermediary domain that resides and mediates between conscious and unconscious domains, and that brings images, as possibilities for transformative change, to light. The possibilities afforded by this unexpected finding for my study and for educational research will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

## **A presentation of the findings**

### **Introduction**

In this section, I recreate a real-life professional learning scenario and dialogue in which I shared my research findings with co-researchers. This session was organised spontaneously at the start of 2021 through an open email invitation sent to the seven original co-researchers. To recreate this scenario for the purpose of sharing my findings in this chapter, I use images of my presentation slides interspersed with excerpts from the transcript of my explanation of the findings and my dialogue with the co-researchers. I use the presentation slides to highlight my findings. The order in which slides are presented sheds light on how these findings were illuminated over time and through deepened exploration and



reflection. In addition, my transcript excerpts openly portray how I communicated these findings with my co-researchers.

To further illuminate and vivify this professional learning scenario I use embellishments. With these embellishments, which include the use of descriptive language and images, I aim to deepen and magnify the sensory experience of this presentation of findings. I also aim to stimulate readers' imaginations, induce both non-rational and rational ways of knowing, and support and enhance meaning making.

To note is that these images are my own paintings created during my data gathering, analysis and interpretation phases of this study. As I prepared for this presentation, I carefully selected specific images to include in my presentation slides to enrich my illustration of how my research findings came to light.

In the presentation slides that refer to my early observations, I chose paintings where my artistic intention was to duplicate the intimate detail of the subject matter. I used these images as a way to highlight my unintentional reliance on physical ways of knowing, including acquired knowledge, to reveal the early findings. By contrast, in my later presentation slides in which I describe deepened insights, I chose images that reflected my increased sensitivity and alertness to my senses, feelings and intuition. Through these images I aim to emphasise how the findings revealed later in my study were illuminated through increased use of non-rational ways of knowing and through attention to my imagination. To note is that the subject matter in my paintings, beyond

its role as a stimulus for painting, and as inspiration for opening myself to the liminal, is not directly related to my study or its findings.

### **The presentation of findings – A vignette**

I booked the same room that we had used for the creativity hubs to share my findings with the co-researchers. I had not planned for this session. Rather, it came about as an outcome of a chance meeting with Claire and Isabella at a work-related event. During this chance meeting, both women declared enthusiasm for and interest in hearing my findings. Therefore, in response, I sent an open email invitation to all seven participants, inviting them to a sharing session the following week. I explained that I would share the findings of my research at this impromptu session. Olivia, Claire and Isabella all replied that they were able and keen to attend.

On the day of the session, I prepared the room. Unlike earlier creativity hubs, I darkened the room to create the best conditions for viewing my presentation of the findings. The large display screen on the wall near the window was turned on and was showing my opening presentation slide. As soon as Olivia, Claire and Isabella had settled, I began.

## **A presentation of findings**



Slide 1

*Welcome everyone! It is wonderful to see you all again. I am so excited about having this opportunity to share my findings with you. I have to say, I do feel a bit nervous! This research has been very personal – I have needed to delve deeply into my unconscious to try to understand creativity better, and to open myself to see different perspectives about the connections between creativity and learning. So, as I share my findings with you today, I feel like I am opening myself to you all; it is an intimate experience ... I am nervous, but I also trust you ... so, here I go!*

Encouraged by the friendly and encouraging smiles from Olivia,

Claire and Isabella, I continued:

*To start, let me quickly remind you about my research question. I feel it is important to have this question in mind as I talk to you about my findings as it provides a context for my observations and insights. I will give you all a moment to read my question.*

# Research question

**How can expanding my understanding of creativity and its connection to learning assist me to re-imagine professional learning for teachers so that their learning experiences are enhanced?**



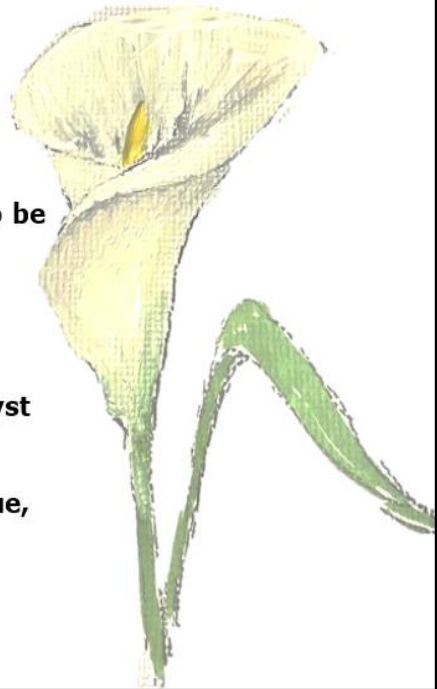
Slide 2

*So, with my research question in mind, here is a snapshot of my findings.*

## ***Findings at a glance***

Findings about creativity ...

- **Personal and environmental conditions need to be "right".**
- **Understanding how creativity is fostered and enhanced is complex and paradoxical.**
- **Organic ways of working were a creative catalyst for experiencing creativity and deep learning.**
- **Within the process of creativity are three unique, but interconnected stages.**



Slide 3

## ***Findings at a glance***

Findings about the connection between creativity and learning...

- **The connection between creativity and learning is intimate. They are related through their humanness and their generative nature.**
- **Learning is enhanced by the harmonious union between creativity and critical reasoning as opposite and co-existing forces.**



Slide 4

## ***Findings at a glance***

**Findings about reflection, reflective practice and critical reflection...**

**Reflection was revealed as**

- **being central to fostering and enhancing learning processes;**
- **a bridge between inner and outer worlds;**
- **a personal resource as and for learning in adult learning contexts;**
- **a metaphorical mirror for seeing, understanding and re-imagining.**



Slide 5

Seeing interested expressions on Claire, Olivia and Isabella's faces, I further explained:

*Initially, the findings provided new knowledge about creativity as a phenomenon and as a process. They were drawn from what I saw, heard and noticed during our creativity hubs and one-on-one meetings and, therefore, were elicited directly from my research data.*

*Re-looking at my data and initial findings, creating individual vignettes, and engaging in deep reflection also illuminated the connection between creativity and learning in new ways. In particular, really paying greater, or at least giving equal, attention to my senses, feeling and intuition, as well as my rational knowledge, illuminated the synchronous and interconnected relationship between creativity and learning. It also brought their interdependence to light. Furthermore, by re-looking at my research data and by mulling over key*



*insights I became conscious of creativity and critical reflection as co-existing human phenomena.*

*In addition, deepened reflective and liminal experiences and close examination of the findings from this study unearthed insights about reflection, reflective practice and critical reflection in connection to fulfilled creative and learning experiences.*


*Reading these excerpts from my journal might help you gain a sense of my experience as a researcher and explorer in this study. In particular, I hope you will be able to imagine how I increasingly deepened my examination of the research data and opened myself to new ways of seeing and making meaning of findings throughout the study and research process. The creative approaches to research, including increased time for self-reflection where I "listened" to my intuition and feelings, really helped to unearth insights that were less obvious and familiar.*

**Early observations reflected what I saw, heard and noticed from my outward-facing analysis of data...**

**It reminded me of the positive space in art – the clearly visible subject matter being viewed and portrayed on canvas.**

**(My journal entry, 2020)**





**Enhanced insights were revealed through deepened reflection and all ways of knowing.**

**To do this I needed to look beyond the words and stories ...**

**I related "looking beyond" to the idea of negative space in art – to all that surrounds the subject and that which provides a sharpened and balanced view.**

**(My journal entry, 2020)**

Slide 7

I paused to give Claire, Olivia and Isabella time to read my excerpts from my journal. I hoped they might illuminate my experience of how further findings emerged over time and through ever-deepening experiences of creativity, reflection and discernment.

Sensing when everyone was ready, I cleared my throat and clicked the keyboard of my laptop to move to the next slide. The momentary disruption to the silence of the room re-focussed their attention onto the new image on the screen. Glancing around the room, I resumed: *"So now let's look at my research findings in more detail."*



**Early findings:  
Findings about  
creativity**



Slide 8

***Findings about  
creativity***

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**Personal and  
environmental  
conditions need to be  
"right" to foster and  
enhance creativity.**



Slide 9

*My first finding was quite obvious. It almost seemed to "jump out at me" as I listened to and re-read transcripts of our shared stories about creativity!*

*Specifically, this finding highlighted how environmental and personal conditions need to be personally "right" to motivate and ignite creativity. By environmental conditions, I am referring to the social environment in which we interact. In relation to personal conditions, I am referring to how we are feeling, and our state of mind at the time.*

*Furthermore, I noticed that people responded in different ways to certain conditions. While specific personal and environmental conditions were motivating and energising for some, for others, they stifled creative energy and potential.*

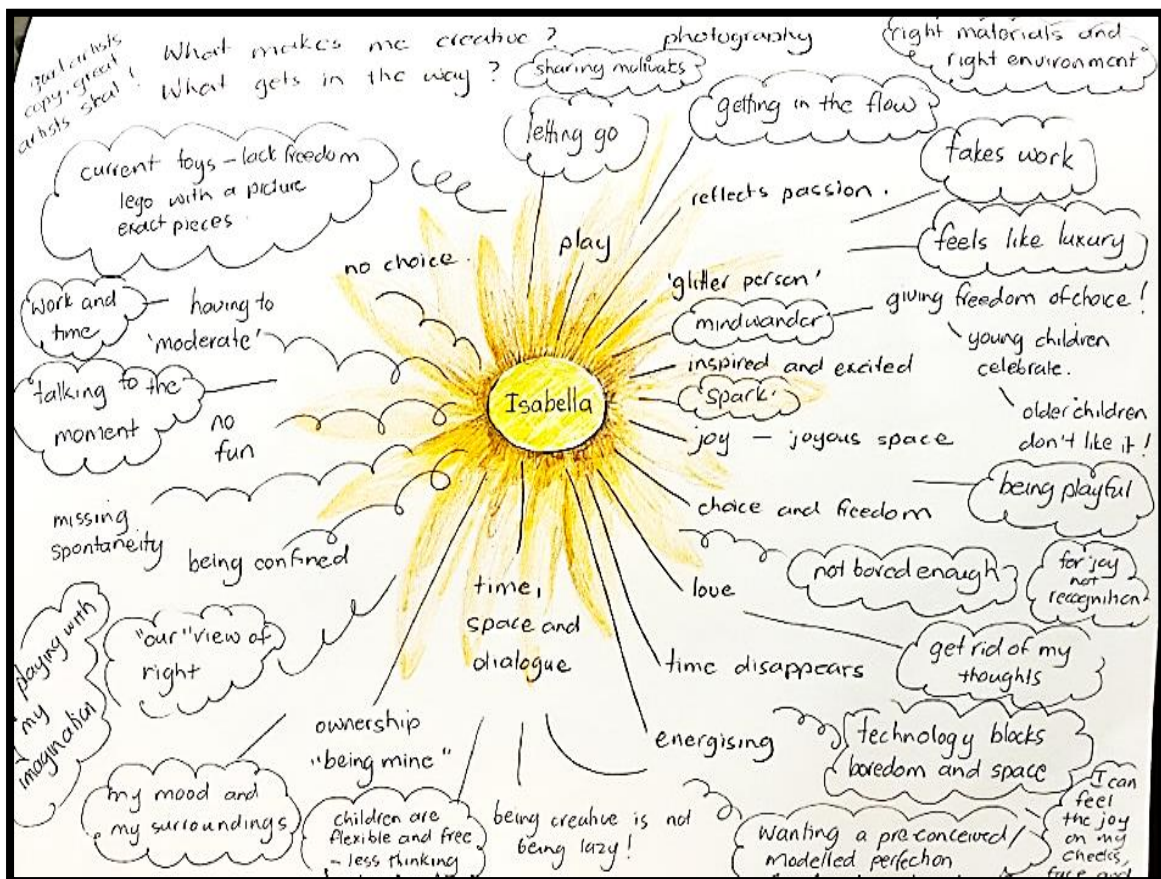
*Of interest is that in creativity hubs participants (that's us!), drew on parallel personal experiences to describe the importance of having respectful environmental conditions for creativity to manifest. Similarly, to foster creativity, we all highlighted the importance of environmental conditions that value time and space for reflection, wondering, exploration and asking questions. Physical space, especially having natural light and windows "to see outside", was also described as being important for creativity to thrive.*

*Also highlighted was that our positive interaction with the environment is a key driving force, or source of motivation, for igniting creativity. In particular, the research data show that the creativity hubs provided a comfortable, respectful and safe environment for us to work together and interact collaboratively with like-minded colleagues. This positive environment was described as being inspiring and energising, and foundational to igniting and re-igniting creative potential.*

I paused, took a sip of water and looked at Claire, Olivia and Isabella. They looked interested and attentive, so I continued:

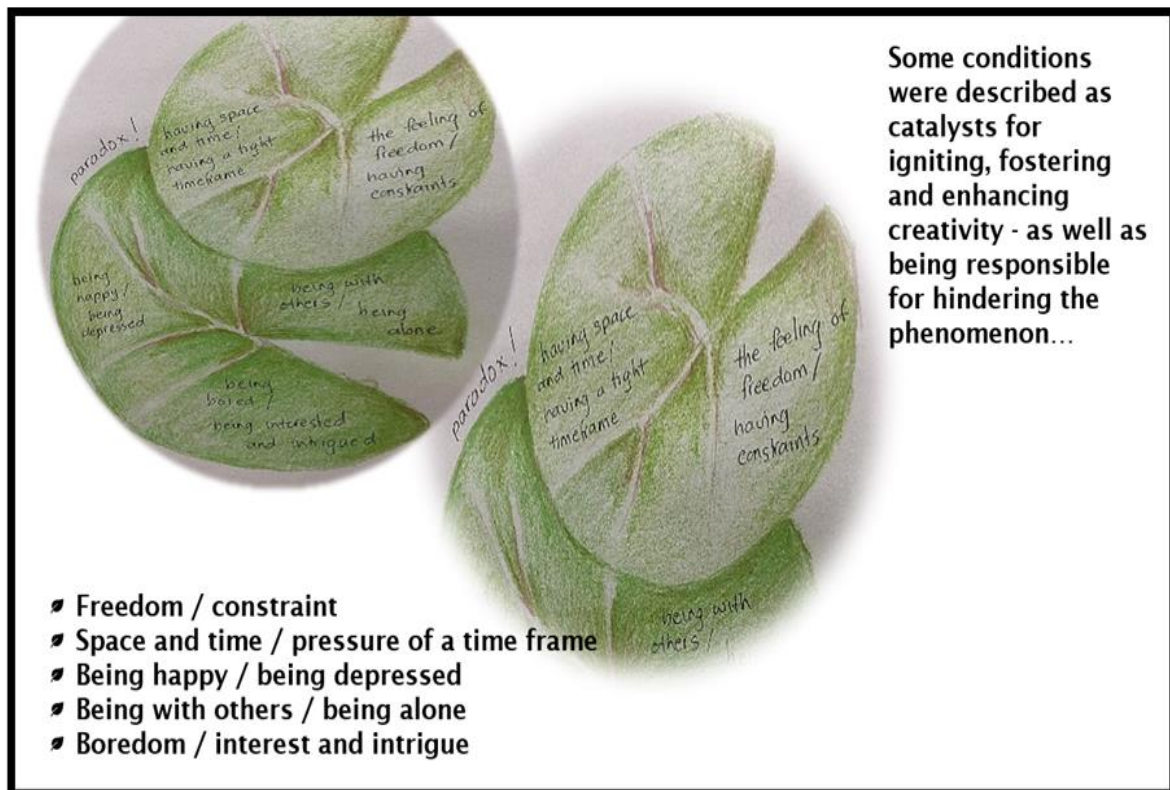
To help me make sure that I was interpreting the data carefully and openly, I sorted and "played" with it in a number of ways. I created tables and physically cut, rearranged and pasted the data to help me sort through words and sentences. I also drew and created images to help me see patterns within and across stories about creativity. These "playful" encounters with the data can be found in Appendix G of my thesis if you would like to look at them. The next two slides provide an example of how I initially interpreted the research data gathered in creativity hubs and one-on-one meetings.

Within your stories, you described both environmental and personal conditions that either enhanced your experiences of creativity – or hindered them. Your stories had many similarities but, as they were personal stories, were characteristically diverse and reflective of your lived experiences, beliefs and worldviews.



Slide 10





Some conditions were described as catalysts for igniting, fostering and enhancing creativity - as well as being responsible for hindering the phenomenon...

Slide 11

*Furthermore, taking this interpretation approach for each participant highlighted the unique and intimate significance of conditions (environmental and personal) for individuals in fostering creativity.*

Looking directly at Isabella who was sitting at the end of the table,

I continued:

*For you Isabella, this approach highlighted how you needed to be in the "right frame of mind", the conditions needed to be "right", and you needed to feel free to think beyond "what was currently happening" to "feel inspired", and "to be creative". According to your stories and reflections, "aligning these conditions" ignited your creativity and paved the way for "fulfilled and joyful experiences".*

After contemplating these images, Claire, Olivia and Isabella started talking to each other about this finding. I could hear them re-

stating the conditions that were “right” for them for fostering creativity. I also heard Olivia and Isabella commenting to each other about the conditions imposed by school environments and how these were not always conducive to creativity.

Shifting in my chair, I politely interrupted the chatter in the room and drew their attention back to the presentation on the screen.

*Before we move to my next finding, I would like to show you some more excerpts from transcripts of our creativity hub dialogue. These excerpts highlight some of the conditions that you raised in meetings as being responsible for hindering creativity.*

**One limiting factor is often when they [students] think someone else will look at it [their creative idea] – the thought of someone judging their idea is limiting ... I had to promise that no one else would see their work – only then did they ‘let go’ and were creative.**

**(Claire, 2019)**

**Creativity is oppressed by what is required and expected.**

**(Sophia, 2019)**

Slide 12

**As a consequence of the busyness,  
responsibilities and demands of personal and  
work lives, the joyful experience of creativity  
has receded from our [students' and teachers']  
lives – it has become “a shadow”.  
(Isabella, 2019)**

**Alicia described the feeling of “lack of headspace” for  
anything beyond responsibilities and duties.  
In her words, “we need empty heads to be creative”.**

Slide 13

**Co-researchers also discussed  
how:**

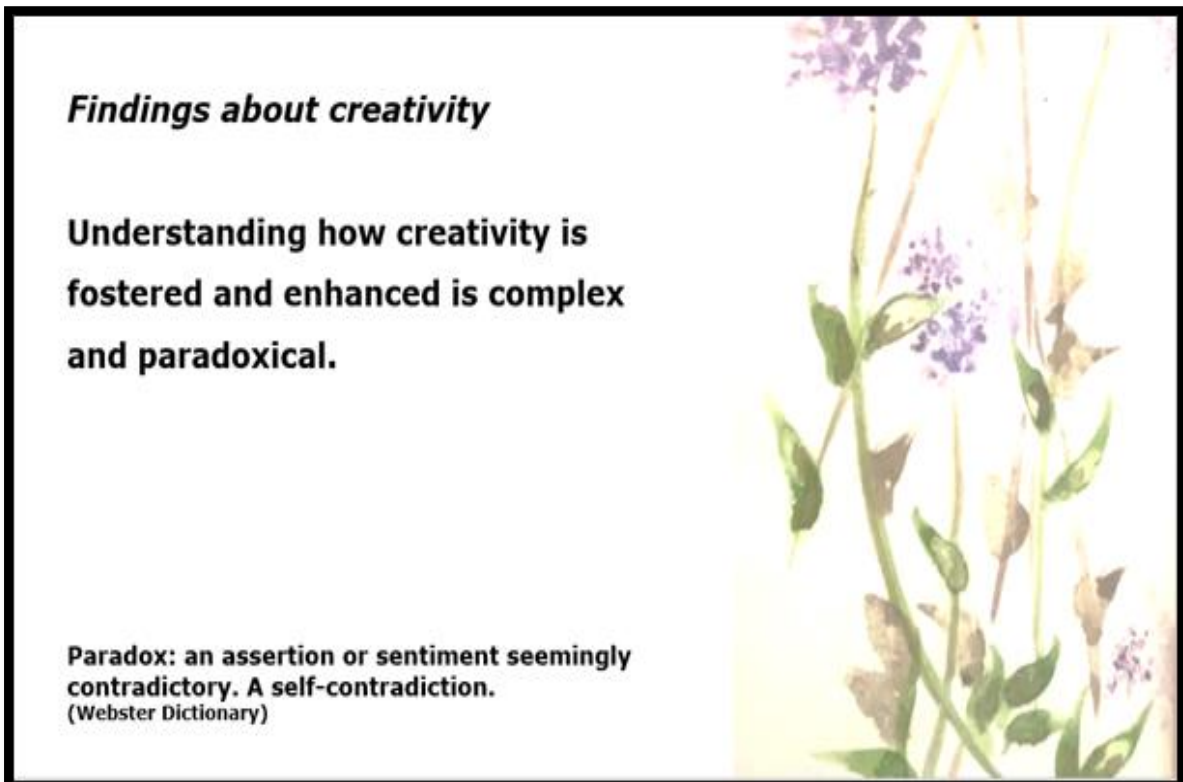
- ▀ **lack of a risk-taking culture**
- ▀ **an overemphasis on  
operational clutter**
- ▀ **over resourcing**
- ▀ **inflexibility**
- ▀ **no time for reflection**
- ▀ **A preoccupation with  
“needing to keep students  
busy”**

**hindered creativity.  
(Creativity Hub, March 2019).**



Slide 14

*So now let's look at my next finding about creativity. This finding was uncovered as I re-looked at your stories about creativity and the findings about the unique conditions which you identified as being foundational to fostering, enhancing (or hindering) creativity. Specifically, this finding sheds light on the paradoxes that were revealed in relation to understanding how creativity is fostered and enhanced.*



**Findings about creativity**

**Understanding how creativity is fostered and enhanced is complex and paradoxical.**

**Paradox: an assertion or sentiment seemingly contradictory. A self-contradiction.**  
(Webster Dictionary)

The slide features a background image of purple flowers on the right side. The text is arranged in a clear, structured layout on the left side of the slide.

Slide 15

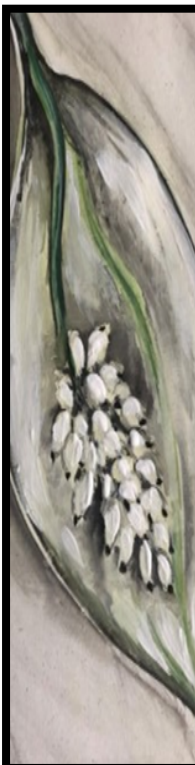
*Let me explain ... as I examined our stories of creativity I noticed how, on a number of occasions, there were direct contradictions in how experiences and conditions were described in relation to igniting, enhancing or hindering creativity.*

*For example, one of you described the "emptiness" of boredom and the "independence" of freedom as being personal conditions which ignited creativity. In a following story, the same person paradoxically stated how she needed*

*to have purpose, a sense of investment, feel interested and be supported by others, to experience creativity!*

*Similarly, another participant described the need to be alone for new ideas to form and then, in contradiction to this statement, described how working with colleagues was essential for igniting creativity and generating ideas!*

*In addition, as I re-examined stories of creativity, I noticed that our questions, comments, reflections and dialogue within hubs often shed light on the paradoxical nature of creativity and how it is fostered and enhanced – and sometimes hindered. In the following slides I have extracted some of these comments and reflections that illustrate this observation. I will let you peruse them.*



**Creativity is oppressed by what is required and expected...**

**It is about enabling conditions, creating freedom and scope - and trusting intuition ... not didactic teaching or over controlling.**

**I don't think total free choice is always needed - but there needs to be room for creativity ... let's focus on the spark.**

**... we have to be creative within real life - within boundaries - it doesn't always mean that it is totally open - we just need to ignite the spark.**

**(Sophia, Grace, Isabella and Claire, April 2019)**

Slide 16



**Creativity ...**

**Can it be just a thought?**

**Like the creative thoughts I have in the middle of the night.**

**Does a product have to come from it?**

**I am not too sure about this yet.**


**How you manage your time- can be a creative ...**

**It is different for different people and different in different contexts.**

(Olivia, 2019)



Slide 17



**Creativity ...**

**Is it different,**

- **if you are alone or in a group?**
- **if it is self-generated or part of a learning task?**
- **if there is time pressure or no time pressure?**
- **according to our beliefs, perception and understanding – and experiences?**

(Olivia, 2019)

Slide 18

*What was clearly apparent from the interpretation of the data was that we, as participants in the study, experience interaction between personal and environmental conditions differently.*

*Stories of creativity, retold as vignettes in Chapter Five, revealed how environmental conditions can act as a catalyst for creativity, while the same environmental conditions can also be a deterrent – it just depends on the individual in a specific context and moment in time.*

*Likewise, the stories of creativity also revealed that, depending on context and/or state of mind, the interaction between conditions that foster and enhance creativity at one time do not necessarily have the same energising effect at another time.*

*However, notwithstanding the paradoxical findings described by individual participants as being central to fostering, enhancing or hindering creativity, some conditions were consistently described by participants as being central to enabling the personal experience of creativity. I will describe these in connection with my next finding.*

I sat back in my chair and gave everyone a moment to discuss this second finding about creativity. When there was a lull in the conversations, I transitioned to my next slide and finding.

A watercolor painting of flowers, featuring a prominent white flower with pink and red petals and a yellow center, surrounded by green leaves and other buds. The style is soft and artistic.

***Findings about  
creativity***

***Organic ways of  
working were a  
creative catalyst for  
experiencing  
creativity and deep  
learning***

Slide 19

Waving my hand at the screen to gain everyone's attention, I explained:

*My next finding about creativity reflects upon how the organic ways of working that were used in this study acted as a catalyst for creativity as well as providing a means to explore the phenomenon. In essence the ways of working in this study were consistently described as being central to enabling the personal experience of creativity.*

*This observation became especially visible after re-examining "between-hub reflections" and responses to my Creativity Reflection Protocol (you can find these responses in Appendix H). In different ways, you all mentioned that the open and creative ways of working in the study were integral to your feeling of success and growth in your understanding of creativity. Also in different ways, you all described how the approaches used in this study to support collaborative inquiry were pivotal for motivating creativity and imagination, critical analysis and reflection, and divergent and convergent thinking.*

Transitioning straight to the next slide, I continued:

*Let me show you some of the comments that you made that informed this finding. These comments are about the social environment in which we met, and the importance of collective inquiry, dialogue and having time for personal reflection.*

environmental ambiance and relational trust

**You need to have the conditions created and the belief of a person who opens opportunity to awaken creativity ... if we don't have the conditions, and *that* person, the creative spark may never happen.**

**This happened for me in these sessions!**

(Claire, 2019)

Slide 20

# collective inquiry and dialogue

**Olivia:** ... being around like-minded people is important...it fuels creativity.

**Claire:** ...not just someone who agrees but someone who shares different ideas.

**Andrea:** often someone else will have a point of view that you have not thought about before - that helps me to be more creative.

An excerpt from a creativity hub dialogue, 2019

Slide 21

# time and space for reflective practice

**I know I feel energised by other people, but it is also nice to have time to be reflective and energised within myself.**

(Andrea, 2019)

**We need to make more time to think deeply about where we are going, and to detach from the analytical to see / hear our own insights.**

(Grace, 2019)

Slide 22

#collective inquiry and dialogue

**...dialogue with like-minded people - it spurs creativity– it can be lonely and isolating without this dialogue .... it is also why I regretted not going (into the hubs) with the other ladies.**

**The connection with like-minded people would have been so valuable.**

*(Grace, 2019)*

Slide 23

Affirmed by the interested expressions on Claire, Olivia and Isabella's faces, I moved straight onto my next finding.

***Findings about  
creativity***

**Within the process of  
creativity are three  
unique, but  
interconnected stages.**



Slide 24

*My next finding about creativity provides a reconceptualised view of the process of creativity. I am excited by this finding as it helped me to draw together previous findings about the phenomenon of creativity and also provided some initial insight for re-imagining teacher professional learning. In particular, this finding revealed the complexity of creativity. It also highlighted that re-imagining teacher professional learning requires a deep understanding of the generative process involved in experiencing the phenomenon of creativity, and each of the phases within this process.*

*Distinctly, this finding emerged as I started to write vignettes and make sense and meaning of how individuals described their experiences of creativity. While all participants described their actual experience of creativity, they also described the catalyst for the experience, and the product of the experience. In effect, without realising, all participants described the process of creativity. Therefore, through the analysis of these stories and by re-telling them as vignettes, my awareness of unique but interconnected phases that work together as a process for experiencing creativity was heightened.*

*My next slide summarises these fluid and interconnected phases of the creative process.*



<b>Themes revealed</b>	<b>Phases in the process of creativity</b>
<i>Human creative potential needs to be motivated in order to 'to spark' and 'have life'.</i>	<b>Creativity is ignited</b>
<i>Interaction between one's ways of knowing and the environment creates motivation and inspiration for creativity.</i>	
<i>Creative experiences are human and deeply personal.</i>	<b>Creative potential transmutes into creative experiences</b>
<i>Creative experiences are multifaceted, synchronous and generative; creative experiences are fostered in unique ways.</i>	
<i>Engaging with all ways of knowing optimises creative experiences.</i>	
<i>Creativity is realised in different ways.</i>	<b>Creativity is realised</b>

Slide 25

*Re-looking at participants' comments really helped me to see and understand the significance of each of these three phases for the holistic experience of creativity – as a generative and productive experience.*

*For example, the significance of igniting creative potential as an essential first phase was highlighted by narratives about how ways of working in this study (and especially the creativity hubs), re-ignited and re-energised your creative spark and resulted in a flow of creative endeavours. Isabella, you described the open dialogue and sharing of ideas in creativity hubs as a catalyst for "re-sparking" your "inner drive and purpose" – and, in turn, this generated creative ideas and new possibilities for your classroom practice. Likewise, Claire and Olivia, you both described how your creative potential was "ignited" or "re-ignited" through exploration and conversation with like-minded colleagues. You both also described how re-igniting or igniting creative potential was a pre-condition for "real" experiences of creativity. Olivia, you explained that, by "real" you were*



*referring to experiences of creativity that were personally fulfilling and satisfying, and that generated completely new knowledge, ideas or practices – not re-interpreted versions of old practices.*

*The second phase, which I have described as being where “ignited creative potential” transmutes into creative experience, was illuminated through your anecdotes as participants in this study. These anecdotes and stories about creativity highlighted how changes in state of mind and in the environment impacted on these experiences and how they were fostered, enhanced or hindered. Your anecdotes also highlighted how these creative experiences gained or lost momentum in interaction with changes in personal and environmental conditions. Also revealed was the impossibility of predicting the nature of creative experiences or the outcome of creativity.*

*Additionally, as co-researchers in this study you reflected on how your creative experiences as educators in your unique contexts were often stymied by structures imposed by school systems including timetabling, restricted time for units of learning and inflexible expectations. Interestingly, however, is that, near the end of the study, the three of you revealed that your expanded view of creativity as an outcome of creative experiences in this study had opened you to consider how these constraints – timetabling, rigid expectations and standardised testing – could be adapted creatively, rather than being seen as a barrier to creativity.*

As I said this, I waved my hand in a sweeping motion to acknowledge Isabella, Olivia and Claire’s presence at the table and their contribution to this finding.

*Lastly, the third phase, which I describe as the phase where creativity is realised in some way – as a new idea, behaviour, practice, way of being or potentially a physical product, was also illuminated through your stories about creativity.*

*As an example, Isabella, your creative experiences in this study were realised through new classroom behaviours. In particular, you described how you drew on your creative ideas, and heightened imagination, to reshape your classroom teaching practice. At the heart of your re-imagined classroom practice was a focus on creative experiences and providing opportunities for your students to have choice and agency.*

*In contrast (I nodded towards Olivia), Olivia, you described how your realisation of creative experiences in creativity hubs was not physical, but was in the way you perceived creativity. As you described, it involved "seeing" and perceiving creativity in a new way from within. When reflecting about your learning in this study, you described how your awareness and self-awareness about creativity was enhanced. You also described how the ways of working in this study helped you to re-imagine or re-conceptualise how you might embed time and space for your students to engage creatively with their learning.*

*Similarly (I now nodded towards Claire), Claire, in our conversations in creativity hubs, you also described how your realisation of creative experiences was deeply personal and involved a shift in the way you perceived creativity. Although you did change your classroom practice, your creative experiences in this study resulted in more than just a physical change. As you explained, Claire, it involved the personal transformation of your beliefs about the phenomenon. In your reflection after the third creativity hub, you described your experiences in and beyond the creativity hubs as "life changing".*

I paused and looked at Claire, Olivia and Isabella and invited them to talk to each other for a few moments about this last finding. The conversation started slowly but was soon buzzing with the noise of ideas being shared and discussed. I chose not to listen in or to

participate, but gave my guests time to make meaning of my findings in their own way.

It was a little over half-way through my presentation of findings. As it was summer, the sun was still shining brightly outside so I decided to keep the blinds drawn. I was aware that my guests needed a break, so I invited them to take ten minutes to get some fresh air, stretch and, if they wanted to, get a coffee from the café outside. I was feeling happy about the way things were going in the meeting. My findings seemed to be making sense and were stimulating dialogue. I was now keen to share my deepened findings.

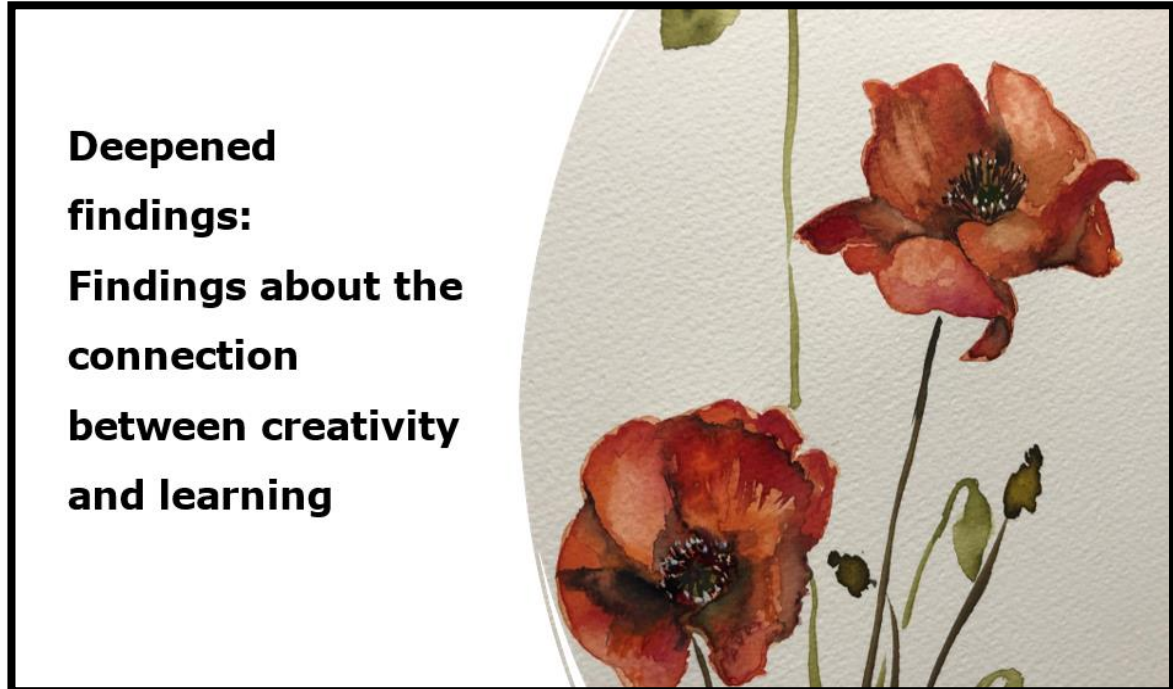
When everyone had returned to the room and they were comfortably settled in their chairs around the long wooden table, I smiled and began to speak. I was conscious that I was using my hands to talk – a habit that I had developed over years as a workshop presenter to emphasise my words and further express my thoughts and feelings.

*Continued and deepened exploration of the research data brought my next set of findings to light. In particular re-looking at, and reflecting upon, our dialogues in the creativity hubs and one-on-one meetings and re-engaging with my findings about creativity illuminated the connection between creativity and learning in new ways.*

*I am so excited about these findings! They affirmed my sense that a deep connection exists between these phenomena (creativity and learning). In addition, they expanded my knowledge and helped me to see the connection in a totally new way – and in a way that provided*

*further insights for re-imagining teacher professional learning.*

*Let me show you ...*



**Deepened  
findings:  
Findings about the  
connection  
between creativity  
and learning**

Slide 26

*As I explained earlier, these findings emerged later in my study as an outcome of my deepened understanding of, and attention to, organic inquiry approaches for exploration and meaning making. Initially these deepened findings were obscured by my existing knowledge or previous experiences. To "see" these findings I really needed to listen to my intuition, senses and feelings and open myself to new ways of perceiving the data and the insights that ensued.*

***Findings about the connection between creativity and learning***

**The connection between creativity and learning is intimate. They are related through their humanness and their generative nature.**



Slide 27

Pausing for everyone to read this slide, I sat back in my chair and waited for a few minutes. I then resumed my explanation:

*As I re-looked at your comments and reflections about your experiences of learning and creativity as co-researchers in this study, the synergy between these experiences was very clear. In particular, your interchangeable use of references to learning and creativity in relation to the new ideas and knowledge revealed through engagement in this study highlighted the generative, productive and value-adding nature of both of these human phenomena (creativity and learning). The quotations drawn from creativity hub dialogues on the next slide highlight this synergy between creativity and learning as generative and productive experiences.*

**I have learned so much coming to these hubs.**

(Claire)

**I have so many new ideas. These meetings have re-ignited my creative spark!**

(Isabella)

**Meeting with like-minded colleagues has given me so much to learn about and now I see creativity in a new way.**

(Olivia)

Slide 28

I gave Olivia, Isabella and Claire a few moments to read and consider these quotations. I hoped that they would also see how their comments highlighted the synergy between learning and creativity – as experiences that are energising and that result in the generation of something new. Eager to continue with my presentation of the findings, I interrupted the silence:

*Interestingly, the continued and deepened examination of your stories of creativity and the recordings from the creativity hubs and one-on-one meetings revealed further insights about the connection between creativity and learning. In essence I became aware of a deep interconnection between these experiences, not as parallel or similar experiences, but as being interrelated and synchronous. Distinctly, I realised that, while creativity is a unique human experience, it is also the generative*

*experience within the learning experience and, as such, is inherently interconnected.*

*In light of this deepened understanding of the connection between creativity and learning as human phenomena, I returned to my research data, and especially to recordings of the dialogue in the creativity hubs and one-on-one meetings. Closer inspection of these conversations highlighted that we all need a balance of experiences involving creativity and critical reasoning to foster and engender fulfilled learning experiences. While an opportunity for creativity is needed to generate new ideas and to see different perspectives, discernment is also needed to analyse and evaluate these new ideas and make informed and inspired decisions.*

*On the next slide my finding describes the co-existence between creativity and critical reasoning experiences as inseparable parts of the holistic experience of learning. This is followed by excerpts from my notes taken when listening to Isabella's account of her experiences of creativity and learning in this study. These excerpts provide insights about the balance needed between experiences of creativity and critical thinking for engendering deep learning. In particular, they highlight how Isabella's re-imagining of her classroom learning experiences provided balanced time for her students to be creative and to be discerning. This resulted in enhanced learning experiences for her young students.*

I paused briefly and smiled at Isabella who was sitting closest to me. As in creativity hubs, she was doodling on her tablet as she listened to the conversation in the room. Looking slightly surprised, she looked up and smiled back at me and nodded. Affirmed by her nod and smile, I transitioned to the next slide.

***Findings about the connection between creativity and learning***

**Learning is enhanced by the harmonious union between creativity and critical reasoning as opposite and co-existing forces.**



Slide 29

**Isabella re-imagined her classroom approaches to learning.**

**She created space in her lessons where students had time to be creative and to make choices. She gave them time to experiment with these choices and new ideas and to consider how these new ideas might support their learning.**



Slide 30

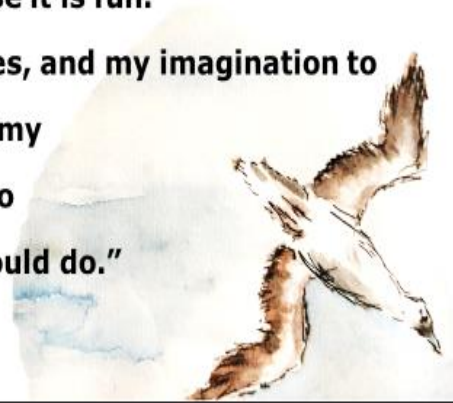


**Over time, Isabella noticed that her students seemed more joyful and excited by their learning experiences. Their confidence had improved, and they were fully engaged in their experiences. Her students were also more willing to experiment and take risks with their learning. She quoted one of her Year 1 students,**

**“When I am creative, I feel happy because it is fun.**

**I also like to use my brain to make choices, and my imagination to come up with new ideas – I like to make my ideas come out. I can also use my brain to help me make decisions about what I should do.”**

**(Notes taken during Creativity Hub, 2019)**



Slide 31

Aware that I was sitting on the edge of my chair, I wriggled back and took a deep breath. The room was very quiet as Claire, Isabella and Olivia read the slides and considered the insights that they provided about learning. Talking quietly so as not to disrupt the meditative ambiance of the room, I continued to explain my interpretation of this finding in relation to re-imagining teacher professional learning:

*This finding was illuminating for me. It affirmed my feeling that both creativity and critical reasoning processes are vital for deep learning. It also highlighted how focussed attention for creating time and opportunity for this balance to exist is foundational to re-imagining teacher professional learning.*

*As indicated in your stories of creativity, the time and scheduling constraints within different learning contexts often reduces opportunities for creativity and places an emphasis on critical reasoning and making judgements and*

*decisions. In relation to teacher professional learning, structured events focussed on the dissemination of knowledge can negate the opportunity for creativity and new ideas to be generated.*

*Therefore, this finding was truly illuminating! It clearly shed light on the need to understand creativity and critical reasoning as co-existing human phenomena. It also highlighted the importance of providing learners with equal opportunities to engage iteratively in both of these complex processes during their learning experience.*

I paused to give everyone time to think about this insight.

Glancing out of the windows, I noticed the sun which, although still bright, had paled slightly. Through the blinds I could also see that the traffic outside was building with people beginning to go home from work. I was aware of a constant soft murmur of car engines starting and stopping. Laughter in the room shook me out of my reverie and I focussed once again on sharing my findings from my study.

I had one more finding to share.

*Thanks for listening everyone. I do hope this has been interesting and illuminating for you. I hope that you might take away some insights and consider them in light of your learning contexts. Before I finish our meeting today, I do have just one more finding to share.*

Taking a breath, I proceeded to explain the last of my findings:

*Later in my study, in fact nearing the end of my analysis and interpretation of the research data, I started to give myself more time to reflect and contemplate upon my findings. I increased my time for painting and went on many walks on the beach. During these times I let my findings wander in and out of my consciousness and opened myself to non-rational ways of knowing (intuition, feelings and*

senses) to reveal new insights. During this time, I became aware of the significance of time for reflection, reflective practice and critical reflection, and of the importance of these contemplative processes for satisfying, enlightening and potentially transformative experiences of creativity and learning.

Re-looking at stories of creativity in light of this insight also revealed that all participants emphasised that time for deep reflection (as well as time for critical reflection) enhanced the opportunity for new ideas to be imagined and generated; for augmented analysis, for interpretation and meaning making; and was foundational to fulfilled learning.


Hence, my last finding that I want to share with you today is that reflection is at the heart of experiences of creativity, critical reasoning, and therefore deep learning. On the following slide, I summarise specific insights about reflection as illuminated through this study. In Chapter Seven of my thesis, I discuss these insights in depth.

Leaning forward, I pressed the transition key on my laptop to reveal these insights about reflection.

***Findings about the connection between creativity and learning***

**Findings about reflection, reflective practice and critical reflection...**

- **Reflection was revealed as**
  - **being central to fostering and enhancing learning processes;**
  - **a bridge between inner and outer worlds;**
  - **a personal resource as and for learning in adult learning contexts; and**
  - **a metaphorical mirror for seeing, understanding and re-imagining.**



Slide 32

To give Olivia, Isabella and Claire time to consider the significance of reflection for enhancing experiences of creativity and learning, I stood and poured myself a cup of coffee from the coffee pot at the end of the table. My throat felt dry from talking and the hot coffee was comforting.

Resuming my seat, I invited everyone to look at the following slides in my presentation to help them better understand this last finding:

*On the following slides I have placed some excerpts from creativity hub dialogues, and from our journaled "between hub" reflections. These excerpts illustrate the extent to which reflection was both explicitly and implicitly identified in our stories and conversation as being vital for fulfilled experiences of creativity, critical thinking and learning.*

I looked over at Claire on the far side of the table and added: "*For Claire and myself, you will see how the experience of deep reflection was transformative!*"

**Deep reflective practice  
helped to create the  
personal space for  
rational thought to be  
suspended and creativity  
to be ignited.**

(My journal, August 2020)



Slide 33

**Deep reflection fostered and enhanced the generation of new ideas.**

**I hadn't thought about creativity like this before ...**

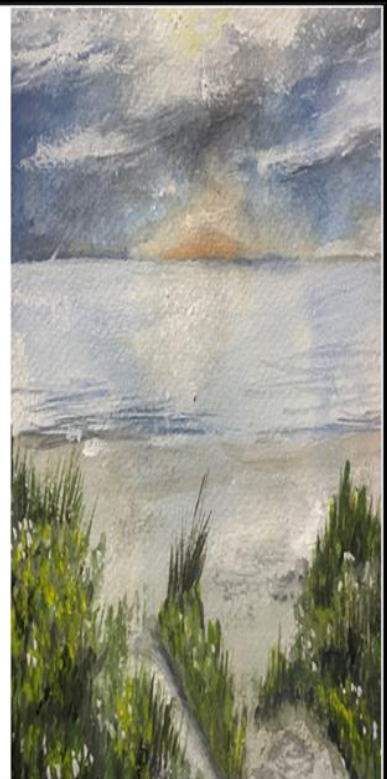
**It made me think differently ...**

**It made me question and wonder ...**

**I am looking at creativity differently now ...**

**I am now thinking differently ...**

(Creativity hub dialogue, 2019)



Slide 34

▸ Deep reflection augmented analysis, interpretation and meaning-making

**I've been thinking over what we were talking about ...**

(Olivia)

**I've been giving creativity a lot of thought ...**

(Claire)

**I have been thinking back, ... since we last met I have a renewed perspective ...**

(Grace)

**I have been playing with ideas, ... I have been contemplating, ... after mulling over these new ideas and thoughts ... (My journal)**

Slide 35

▸ Deeply reflective practice was implicit in transformative learning

**Claire's story ...**

Claire stated that it was the initial dialogue that "caused a crack to appear in her framing [her way of being and behaving]."

The crack "continued to open [widen] a little more every time we met as a group" and new perspectives were shared.

She stated, "the lack of answers and uncertainty helped to keep the crack open" and made it wide enough for me to see myself in a new light - as a creative being."

Deep reflection was core to Claire's realisation of this experience - it brought her new knowledge and understanding "to light".

(Creativity hub reflection)

Slide 36



Deeply reflective practice was implicit in transformative learning

**My story ...**

**Deep reflection provided a space for “uncertainty”. This further aroused my curiosity and inspired me to “dig deeper”. It enhanced my experiences of creativity and critical thinking.**



Slide 37

*Also of interest in light of these insights about reflection is that, in re-examining your stories of creativity and re-telling them as vignettes, I noticed that you all chose your favourite creative pursuit as a resource for engaging in deep critical reflection about your learning in the creativity hubs. This further illuminates the interconnection and relatedness between human experiences of creativity, critical reasoning, reflection and fulfilled experiences of learning.*

*The following slide summarises the creative pursuits that were chosen by participants in this study to help create space and time for reflection.*

▸ **Isabella re-engaged with photography.**

▸ **Andrea went for long walks.**

▸ **Grace went back to her needle work.**

▸ **Claire engaged in research – and exploration.**

▸ **Olivia spent time in the garden.**

(My journal entry, 2020)



## Slide 38

*For your interest, on the next slides I provide some excerpts from my journal that illustrate how I chose to engage in deep reflection during this study. Like you, I chose activities and experiences that were also my favourite creative pursuits!*

I quietly transitioned through the last few slides, giving time for Isabella, Olivia and Claire to read my journal extracts. The room was silent during this time.



**I created vignettes and engaged in reflective journal writing.**

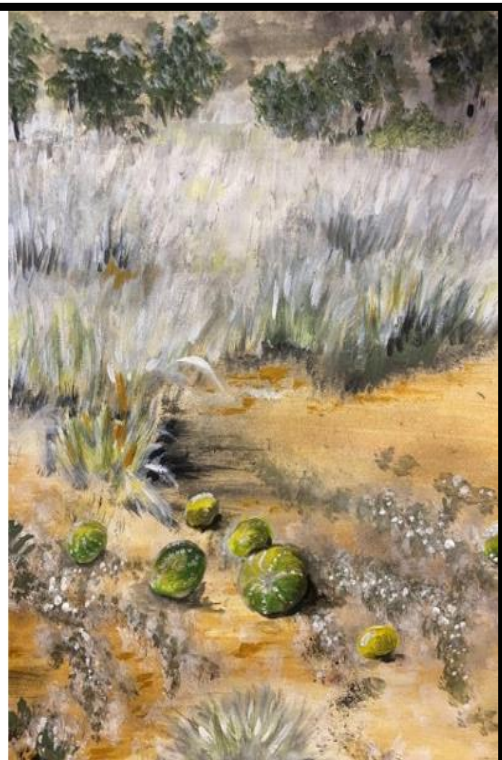


Slide 39

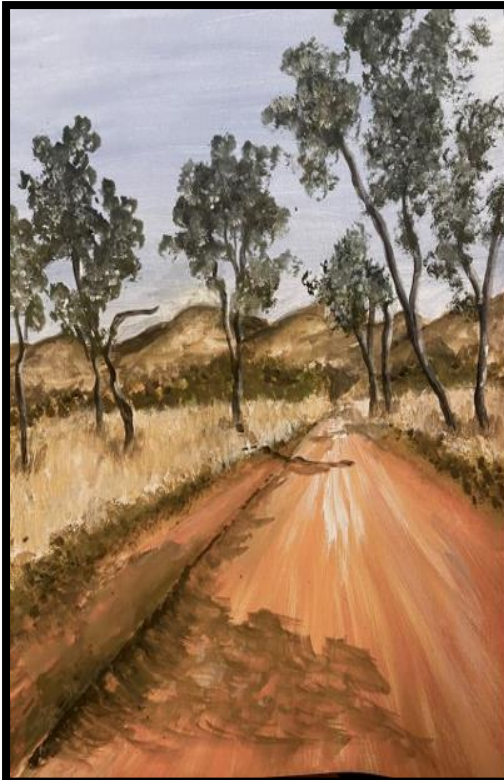
**Drawing and water colour painting provided me with a space for deep reflection where my rational thinking was suspended.**

**As I emerged from painting experiences, I felt inspired and refreshed and had new perspective.**

My journal



Slide 40



**Walking amongst nature also created a contemplative space for me...**

**In this space I was able to let go of polarised viewpoints and see interconnections and patterns across, surrounding and within stories.**

**(My journal)**

Slide 41

**Thank you**



Slide 42

As I revealed the last slide, I leaned back into my chair and looked expectantly at Claire, Isabella and Olivia. I was excited to hear their responses to my findings, and asked, "So, what do you make of the findings?"

The room was quiet for a moment, then a dialogue between Claire, Isabella and Olivia began:

*The findings intrigue me – it is like a puzzle, with all the different pieces coming together to form the whole narrative ... but each piece of the puzzle has its own unique story. Understanding each piece of the puzzle and knowing how it fits into the whole picture adds meaning to the story but also adds value to the unique puzzle piece.*

*Yes, I agree, but what does it mean for teaching? How do these findings translate into practice?*

*So, if I was going to use this new understanding to help me re-imagine learning, I would focus on creating space for collective inquiry, dialogue and deep reflection. I would also ensure that my students have time to engage iteratively in creativity and critical reasoning experiences. Using open approaches to inspire the use of non-rational as well as rational ways of knowing and to encourage time for deep reflection would also be important.*

*Yes, I agree, the findings are interesting. Some of them I expected, while some of them are quite new to me. I suppose I had not thought about creativity as being so important for learning. I think I connected it to pleasure and relaxation rather than to learning. I suppose I thought about reflection in this way as well.*

*It does make me re-think how I should include opportunities for creativity and reflection in my classroom. I probably do*

*spend more time on helping students develop their critical reasoning skills, but I need to re-think this ...*

After this short dialogue the room was quiet, and everyone looked deep in thought. Then, breaking the silence, one co-researcher looked over at me, and asked, "How has it helped you re-imagine teacher professional learning experiences? What have you learned from the findings?" After a moment, I collected my thoughts and replied:

*My knowledge about creativity has really grown. I have deepened my understanding of the process of creativity and how it is experienced by individuals – in ways that I never expected. All these new insights could be used to improve teacher professional learning as an event. Based on my findings they would undeniably improve professional learning conditions and enhance teachers' learning experiences.*

*However, my findings revealed more than this to me. They also exposed the complexity of the learning process and the interconnectivity and much-needed balance between experiences of creativity, critical reasoning and reflection to enhance and fulfil the experience of learning.*

*This was the most illuminating finding for me, as I realised that my focus for re-imagining teacher professional learning was not on the event, but on reconceptualising the experience.*

*In essence, expanding my knowledge and enhancing my understanding of creativity and its connection to learning has empowered me to see beyond teacher professional learning as an event. Rather, I now understand it (learning) as a complex and human experience which can be enhanced through deep reflection and by giving balanced time to experiences which value and foster creativity and critical reasoning processes.*

*So to re-imagine teacher professional learning I am going to have to consider contexts for learning beyond the event. I need to imagine new possibilities for enhancing the experience*

*of learning. This involves being alert to the learners and their unique qualities and needs; the social environment; the interactions between learners and with the environment; the approaches used to invite and induce non-rational and rational ways of knowing and understanding; the content of the learning; and probably so much more ...*

The conversation continued a for a while longer with co-researchers sharing their unique perspectives about the findings and how they might re-imagine their own learning contexts. The ideas being discussed were rich and generative.

When the time was right, I drew the dialogue to a close and thanked Claire, Isabella and Olivia for listening to my findings and sharing their ideas. I wished everyone a happy night as they packed up their belongings and started to move towards the exit. They looked reflective but energised by our time together. As I tidied the room and turned off the screen, I felt inspired by my findings and the possibilities that they had opened for re-imagining teacher professional learning and for transforming my practice as a professional learning facilitator

### **An unexpected finding**

After a period of distance from my study, during a particularly busy time at work, I returned to write my discussion chapter. I was excited by how my careful interpretation of findings had revealed previously unseen insights about creativity and its interconnection with human phenomena including and beyond learning. However, as I started to write I sensed and intuited that, while I had unearthed important insights in relation to

creativity, learning and re-imagining teacher professional learning, there was yet more to discover. Once again I felt disoriented (Mezirow, 1994) and my understanding of creativity and its connection to learning was further challenged.

As I contemplated this feeling of disorientation, I realised it differed from that experienced at the start of this study. My initial feeling of disorientation involved feeling disquieted by the paradoxes and gaps in existing research and practices related to creativity and learning and was catalysed by reading the article by Greene and Yu (2016) which calls for an emphasis on critical thinking and epistemic cognition to prepare students for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, while equally motivating, this current feeling of disorientation was more like a "tickle". It was exciting, stimulating and provocative and was generated by the rich and illuminating experience of research and by the uncertainty presented by having extended and deepened knowledge about creativity and learning. In a reflective moment, I realised that this feeling embodied Langer's (2005) description: "uncertainty is what allows us to see" (p. 185).

Similar to Piirto's (2011) analogy of the pricking thorn, this "tickle" triggered by the uncertainty created by the wealth of new and diverse knowledge and insights generated from this study compelled me to re-immense myself in my findings, and inspired me to look deeper in order to find and interpret the source of this "tickle". Reaching out to my



supervisor, I shared this new feeling of disorientation and a rich and animated conversation followed.

In this discussion we talked about my interpretation of the findings and the diversity of research data gathered from the conscious, unconscious and liminal domains. We also talked about my “tickle” and my instinctive feeling that there was something else to be uncovered and “seen”. We also discussed how my rational thoughts, acquired knowledge and assumptions were unintentionally preventing me from “seeing”.

Feeling re-energised by this discussion, I realised that I had not been paying equal attention to data gathered from unconscious or liminal sources. Redolent of Jung’s (1959/1968) notion of the human predisposition to connect with dominant conscious functions, I also realised that I had unintentionally placed more emphasis on cognitive data gathered from the conscious domain. Inspired by this realisation, I engaged in a period of deeper contemplation and opened myself to imaginal insights and to the possibilities offered by my imagination.

As a consequence, the missing piece of my study was revealed and my “tickle” soothed. I realised that the “missing piece” involved a deepened understanding of the imaginal, and how awakening and connecting with this inner and elusive domain and its limitless imaginative possibilities enables phenomena to be seen differently. As an echo of my own experience leading up to the emergence of this new insight, I also realised that connecting with this elusive and intermediary domain helps us to break free from limitations posed by fixed ideas and is

quintessential for enriching and enhancing phenomena such as creativity and learning.

In essence, I realised that the imaginal is that which makes imagination and imaginative possibilities realisable in the first place. Moreover, I realised that connecting with the imaginal is fundamental to *re-imagining* teacher professional learning. In addition, the illuminative and transformative experience which led to the emergence of this insight about the imaginal further highlighted the importance of balanced attention to conscious and unconscious sources of knowledge, and on learning from the inside and outside, as discussed in research by Burrows (2014, 2015) and Braud (2006).

In the following paragraphs I describe new findings about the imaginal that were revealed through my renewed attention to data gathered from unconscious and liminal sources, and especially from my engagement in ever-deepening periods of reflection. To describe my new findings, I call upon a selection of comments referenced earlier in my presentation of findings and describe how my heightened awareness of the imaginal shed new light on these comments and subsequently uncovered previously unseen insights. These new findings are: creativity hubs created learning experiences that engendered “imaginal resonance” (Netzer, 2009); and heightened awareness of the imaginal creates enhanced opportunities for transformative learning and for the development of imaginal capacities.



To assist with making meaning of these new insights, I also explored additional research focussed on the imaginal including that by Bottici (2015), Netzer (2009), Shariat (1991), Slavin (2017), Smitsman et al. (2021) and van Meer (2022). In Chapter Seven I reconnect with imaginal-oriented research to discuss the significance of this finding about the imaginal as a field of possibilities for my study.

### **The missing piece: The imaginal “as a field of possibilities”**

#### **Creativity hubs created learning experiences that engendered “imaginal resonance” (Netzer, 2009)**

In my study, my heightened awareness of the imaginal highlighted the importance of re-imagining teacher professional learning in which optimal conditions (environmental and personal) are created for teachers to connect to their imaginal for deep learning. Re-looking at, and reflecting on, comments and reflections made by the participants during and between the creativity hubs (with an imaginal lens) highlighted how my careful sculpting and facilitation of the creativity hubs had inspired participants to connect with their imagination and their imaginal. These comments include:

*You need to have the conditions created and the belief of a person who opens opportunity to awaken creativity.*

*I have a different image of creativity now. The dialogue in these hubs has done that for me. It has enhanced the way I think about creativity in relation to teaching and learning.*

*It [engaging in this study as a co-researcher] has given me a different picture of what creativity can look like in my lessons. (Claire)*

*Talking with like-minded colleagues has been so helpful. I see creativity in a new way now.*

*Listening to stories and each other and talking has helped me to see what I could do differently in my teaching. (Isabella)*

*Meeting with like-minded colleagues has given me so much to learn about and now I see creativity in a new way. (Olivia)*

Reflecting upon these comments revealed to me how ways of working in the creativity hubs (including collective inquiry, storytelling and personal reflection) provided optimal environmental conditions for participants to connect with and engage in potentially fulfilling learning experiences. They felt able, free and motivated to connect and reconnect with their creative potential and to reconceptualise creativity.

### **Heightened awareness of the imaginal creates enhanced opportunities for transformative learning and for the development of imaginal capacities**

My re-consideration of participants' comments and reflections also revealed how the creativity hubs created opportunities for imaginal learning. Smitsman et al. (2021) describe this (imaginal learning) as "a state of possibility" from where individuals "can more freely access their future potential beyond what is currently happening in their lives" (p. 42).

In the following comments, the language used by participants as they described their experiences in this study clearly reflects this feeling of freedom in relation to imagining possibilities beyond what “they already knew and thought”.

*I have so many new ideas. These meetings have re-ignited my creative spark!*

*I hadn't thought about creativity like this before.*

*It made me think differently.*

*It made me question and wonder.*

*I am looking at creativity differently now.*

*I am now thinking and seeing it differently. (Creativity hub dialogue between Olivia, Claire, and Isabella)*

*The lack of answers and uncertainty helped to keep the “crack open” and made it wide enough for me to see myself in a new light – as a creative being. (Claire)*

Revealed in these comments, and especially in Claire’s reflective comment, is how the imaginal learning experience offered by the creativity hubs and one-on-one meetings helped participants to “see creativity differently”. The experience invited personal (and professional) transformation.

Also apparent from re-reading and contemplating these comments is how imaginal learning in creativity hubs generated and enhanced imaginal capacities for transformative learning. According to Smitsman et al. (2021), imaginal capacities, include sensing, envisioning, intuiting, imagining and inquiring, are foundational to shifting conditioned ways of

thinking and behaving and, consequently, underpin transformation. In this study, the shift in participants' language from the first to last creativity hub reflects their increased motivation to inquire into, envision and re-imagine creativity in connection to their learning environments.

The following examples of comments made by two participants in the first creativity hub, compared to comments made by the same participants in our last meeting together, highlights how their imaginal capacities had developed during their involvement in this study:

*To come up with something that is creative is often having to find the headspace – I am finding that in my job I am constantly interrupted. (Olivia, the first creativity hub)*

*This learning has made me think – if you don't put it [opportunity and time for creativity] out there to kids they will never know what they are capable of – for us [as teachers] it is about "plant the seed and see what grows". (Olivia, the final meeting)*

*I am always in awe of people's creativity but I think I am stuck in the mindset of thinking it has to be aligned to the arts – like a visual artist, etc. – I don't think I am very creative because I align myself and compare myself to these people. (Claire, the first creativity hub)*

*I have so many new ideas. These meetings have re-ignited my creative spark!*

*I hadn't thought about creativity like this before. It has helped me to see it so differently. It is not just about the arts – I am also a creative being. (Claire, the final meeting)*

In addition, participants' increasing requests for more time to share their perceptions and intuition about creativity (rather than relying on lived experiences and knowledge) from the first to last creativity hub,

reveal how experiences of imaginal learning in the creativity hubs enhanced participants' intuiting and sensing capacities. This is illuminated through the following extract from my journal:

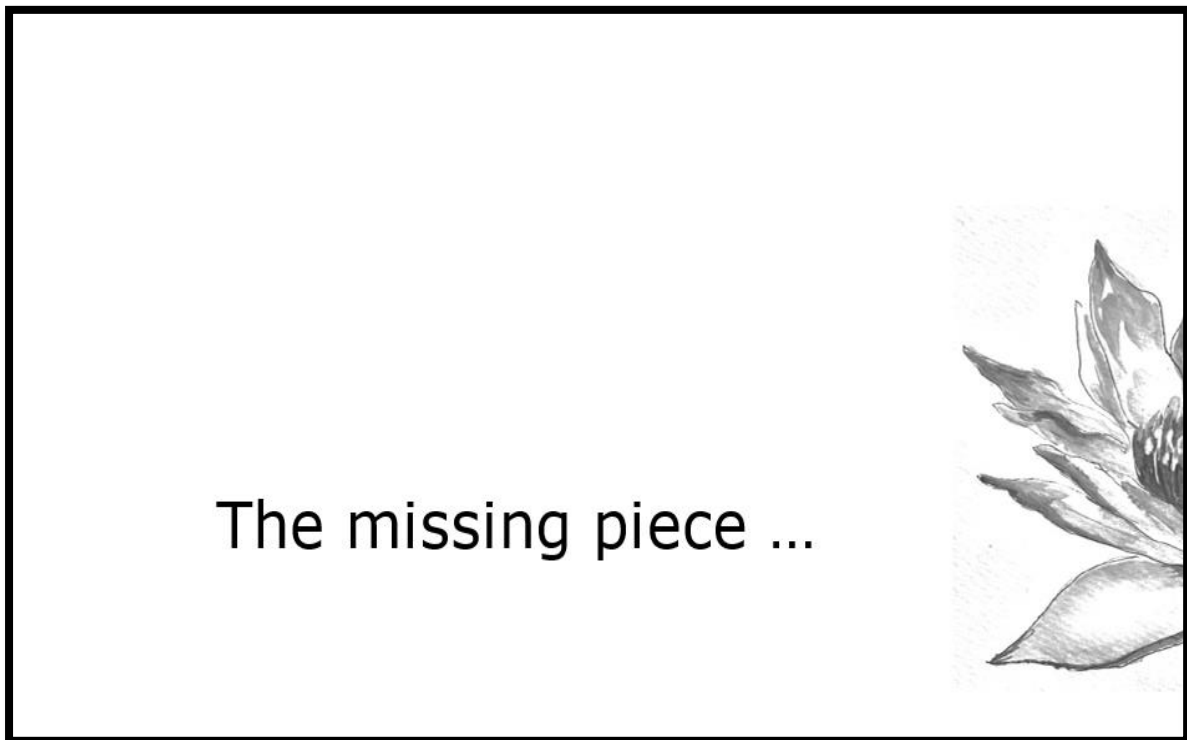
*I have really noticed how co-researchers seem to be becoming more and more enthusiastic about sharing their ideas in creativity hubs. In the first hub, they seemed to be waiting for me to tell them about creativity and were quite controlled in their sharing. Their ideas were based on what they knew, what they had read and what they had experienced either personally or in their school environments. Now, after this hub, co-researchers are bringing their own new ideas to the table and are making suggestions about what "might be possible". They seem to have greater trust in their feelings, senses and intuition, and are more confident to make suggestions beyond "what research says". They also seem to be more energised by these conversations. They have even requested a fourth hub! (2018)*

Revisiting the data gathered from this study in light of later reflection (as exemplified by the excerpt from my reflective journaling above), I became aware of previously unseen insights. I realised how my deepened engagement in reflection and connection with the liminal domain (including the imaginal) had helped me to see these comments and reflections in a new light. I also realised how my initial analysis of data had often been influenced or, in Langer's (2005) words, "blinded" by what I was expecting to see, and by what I already knew about creativity.


As an educational researcher in this study, opening myself to my imaginal side, through deep self-reflection and contemplation, and giving balanced attention to non-rational and rational ways of knowing, has enabled me to see and understand creativity and learning differently. It

has also inspired and empowered me to *re-imagine* teacher professional learning. This will be further discussed in Chapter Seven.

To conclude this chapter, I provide images of five slides. These slides will be included in my presentation of findings in the future. They offer a summary of this unexpected finding, and highlight its significance for this study.




Slide 43



The imaginal is a source of creative potential and “field of possibilities” (Bottici, 2015, p.61) for enhancing experiences of creativity and learning for teachers and for re-imagining teacher professional learning.

Slide 44

Creativity hubs created learning experiences that engendered “imaginal resonance” (Netzer, 2009)



Slide 45

Heightened awareness of the imaginal creates enhanced opportunities for transformative learning and for the development of imaginal capacities.



Slide 46

Connecting with the imaginal helps to construe new meaning of phenomena (creativity and learning) by breaking free from limitations posed by fixed ideas.

Connection with the imaginal therefore underpins the ability to re-imagine and to see new possibilities.



Slide 47





In this chapter, I used creative approaches to describe my findings and how they emerged over repeated phases of analysis, interpretation and meaning making. In my next chapter (Chapter Seven) I provide a discussion about key research findings and highlight insights that have expanded my knowledge about creativity and learning; illuminated possibilities for re-imagining professional learning for teachers so that their learning experiences are enhanced; enabled my personal transformation as an educational researcher and professional learning facilitator; and created space for teacher participants to explore creativity and re-imagine their own learning contexts.

## Chapter Seven: A discussion



In this chapter I discuss key research findings and insights from this study as described in Chapter Six. This involves centring my discussion upon those findings which build upon and provide new insight for educational research in relation to adult learning, and especially teacher professional learning. The findings discussed in this chapter also provide illumination for my research question: *How can expanding my understanding of creativity and its connection to learning assist me to re-imagine professional learning for teachers so that their learning experiences are enhanced?*

### In this chapter

In this chapter I discussed findings under the following headings:

- Creativity
- The connection between creativity and learning
- Reflection is at the heart of enhanced human experiences
- The imaginal as a “field of possibilities”.

To support my discussion, I reconnect with research reviewed in Chapter Two and, where needed, I draw upon additional research literature to further inform and support my discussion. Specifically, I reconnect with research from my first literature review theme, *Creativity:*

*Exploring different perspectives*, to discuss my reconceptualised view of the process of creativity and my deepened understanding of creativity as a phenomenon. To discuss my insights about the connection between creativity and learning and about reflection, reflective practice and critical reflection, I also reconnect with research literature from my second literature theme: *Adult learning: Exploring current knowledge*.

In my discussion about the imaginal as a “field of possibilities” (Bottici, 2015, p. 59) for re-imagining teacher professional learning I re-engage with research about creativity and adult learning (as reviewed in the literature review themes one and two). To assist me to discuss this unexpected finding I also draw upon additional imaginal-oriented research by Bottici (2015), Netzer (2009), Shariat (1991), Slavin (2017), Smitsman et al. (2021) and van Meer (2022).

As referenced briefly in Chapter Six, this research assists in making meaning of the imaginal as an elusive and intermediary domain that exists within. In relation to this study, imaginal-oriented research also helps to illuminate the potential of the imaginal as a source of creative potential or “field of possibilities” for generating new understanding about creativity and learning; for breaking free from limitations posed by fixed ideas; for re-imagining teacher professional learning; and for transformative growth.

Also in this chapter, I provide a summary of key insights for re-imagining teacher professional learning. This summary is offered as a resource for educational research and a potential source of inspiration for

leaders and facilitators of professional learning who wish to be open to exploring ways to enhance teachers' experiences of learning. The strengths and limitations of this study and possibilities for further research are also discussed at the end of this chapter.

### **Creativity**

The findings from my study illuminate that creativity is an innate human disposition and internal source of inspiration that can be fostered and enhanced to support and enrich human experiences, including learning. This insight confirmed my initial sense that creativity is deeply personal and present within all individuals and supports research by Piirto (2004) and Robinson (2015) who respectively describe creativity as "the natural propensity of human being-ness" that can be "enhanced and also stifled" (Piirto, 2004, p. 37), and as "at the heart of being human and all cultural progress" (Robinson, 2015, p. 136).

In addition, my findings corroborated Cremin and Barnes' (2014), Amabile's (1983) and Csikszentmihalyi's (1999) perspectives on creativity whereby social and environmental influences are understood as being a source of motivation for the ignition, re-ignition, generation and development of the phenomenon. This sociological perspective was also confirmed by the ignition of my own creative instinct in response to the personally confrontational interaction between my beliefs about learning and those of Greene and Yu (2016) at the outset of this study.

My analysis of the research findings also brought to light three facets or generative phases within the process of creativity: creativity as innate human potential; creativity as an experience; and creativity as a physical or abstract product. In the following paragraphs I discuss each of these three interconnected and generative phases within my reconceptualised understanding of the process of creativity. In light of my findings, I interpret this process as being organic, fluid, generated from within (in interaction with social and environmental conditions) and iterative (naturally reoccurring). To elucidate the facets of creativity unique to each phase I draw upon research literature and my research experiences to highlight key findings from my study.

### **Illuminating the process of creativity**

The three interconnected and naturally occurring phases in the process of creativity as revealed in my study are as follows:

- The first phase: Creative potential is ignited.
- The second phase: Creative potential transmutes into creative experiences.
- The third phase: Creative experiences are realised.

## **The first phase: Creative potential is ignited**

My analysis of the findings revealed that the ignition of creative potential from within is a prerequisite (and therefore first phase) for actuating and experiencing creativity. Also revealed through contemplation of my own experiences in this research is that the ignition of creative potential from within requires a catalyst to set in motion the ensuing process of creativity.

This led me to understand that catalysts create purpose, motivation and are highly energising. I also became aware that these catalysts are deeply personal and, at the same time, are influenced by the interaction between social, environmental and personal conditions at any given moment. In this study, the “tickle” or disorienting dilemmas generated by my feelings of confrontation in relation to juxtaposing views of creativity and learning acted as personal catalysts for re-energising my creative and deep learning processes.

Furthermore, my interpretation of the findings which positions the ignition of creative potential and its catalyst in the initial phase in the process of creativity supports Piirto’s (2011) view of the creative process. In her illustrative description of this process, Piirto (2011) describes the “necessary” initial stage as involving some form of catalyst which provides clarity about “what must happen” (p. 6). According to Piirto (2011), this catalyst compels individuals to create. Using the metaphor of a thorn as a catalyst for creative action, Piirto (2011) states: “The thorn of creativity is necessary ... The thorn compels the person to create ... The creative

person recognises that the thorn is pricking and the call must be answered" (p. 6).

My deepened analysis and interpretation of my research findings also revealed that the ignition of unconscious creative potential sets in motion a flow of experiences. From this analysis, I suggest that this flow of experiences, which includes imaginative and discerning experiences, creates a bridge between inner (unconscious) and outer (conscious) worlds, and synchronously fuels the generation of new ideas and opportunities. Furthermore, I propose that as an outcome of this flow of experiences, initiated through the ignition of creative potential, a creative product emerges. As indicated by my findings, this creative product can take many forms, including a deep learning experience.

Therefore, while my findings illuminated the ignition of creative potential as a first phase in the process of creativity, they also shed light on how igniting creative potential can be a gateway to fulfilled experiences including learning. This insight corroborates ideas posited by Clements (2004), Cropley (2011), Gallate and Keen (2011), Kaufman and Sternberg (2007), Langer (2005), Piirto (1998, 2011) and Robinson (2009) whereby creativity is understood as a vital source for the enrichment of learning experiences.

Furthermore, my analysis of the findings which connect the ignition of creative potential to transformative learning and fulfilled experiences through the bridging of inner and outer worlds supports research by Braud (2006) and Burrows (2014, 2015). In their research Braud (2006)

and Burrows (2014, 2015) position deep learning as being generated from within and through the interplay between conscious and unconscious processes.

Correspondingly, my interpretation of the findings from this study also revealed that, without the fundamental ignition of creative potential, creative experiences are shallow, contrived, uninspiring and do not generate any new ideas that can be perceived as having any significant value. In essence, the participants expressed that, without initial creative inspiration, the ideas that emerge are “rehashed versions” of “things that were already happening”.

This insight supports Robinson’s (2015) call to action in which he emphasises the need to transform educational practices in school settings so that opportunities are embedded for creativity to be fostered and enhanced. It also confirms his view that time should be dedicated for creative endeavour whereby the inner world of the learner can be attended to through the development of personal aptitudes, interests and dispositions.

My interpretation of findings about the need to ignite creative potential as a means to attend to the inner world of individuals also has implications for adult learning theories including those by Bélanger (2011) and Merriam and Bierema (2014). This study has found that, in order to attend to the characteristics (interests, needs and motivations) of an adult learner, and to motivate learning from within, attention needs to be given to creating the conditions in teacher professional learning whereby



adult learners feel motivated and energised to ignite their creative potential.

### **The second phase: Creative potential transmutes into creative experiences**

My analysis of the research findings illuminated how, once ignited, human creative potential transmutes into generative, productive and potentially life-fulfilling experiences. I suggest that these experiences are perceived and experienced differently by different individuals and that they can be expressed in a multitude of ways: as a physical product, a new idea or a change in being. Active making meaning of the findings has illuminated how seeing creative experiences in light of their humanness helps us to understand that these experiences are generated, fostered and enhanced in unique and diverse ways.

Furthermore, my interpretation of creative experiences as human experiences confirms Corazza (2019), and Montuori and Donnelly's (2013) view that creativity needs to be understood as a dynamic, unique and "intrinsic characteristic of being" (p. 6), not as a rare event.

According to Montuori and Donnelly (2013):

At the human level creativity is likewise a basic characteristic of being human, and this is shown in the emerging understanding of creativity as an "every day, everyone, everywhere" human capacity and possibility (Richards, 2007; Runco & Richards, 1997). (pp. 6–7)

My further exploration and examination of the research findings exposed how creative experiences are enriched and enhanced, and individual motivation is heightened, through an increased awareness of one's own catalysts for creativity. This insight confirmed Rogers' (2012) view that adult learning is centred on learners releasing their own capacity to deal effectively with life experiences. Also confirmed is Rogers' (2012) view that experiences ought to be created and facilitated that support learners to actualise their potential.

In addition, my deepened investigation of findings from this study made clear to me that agentic, reflective and respectful experiences and interactions (as exemplified by the creativity hubs in this study) provide individuals with freedom and choice to seek and create conditions that foster and enhance their own creative experiences. Furthermore, my heightened awareness of my own personal catalysts for creativity throughout this study, including the feeling of disorientation at the start of my study, enhanced my personal and professional experiences of creativity. Therefore, as a contribution to educational research, I propose that a focus needs to be placed on creating experiences where learners have agency and reflective space to bring personal catalysts for creativity to light.

The value and significance of creating agentic conditions for enhancing personal experiences of creativity also corroborates Netolicky's (2016) findings in connection to reframing teacher professional learning. Specifically, Netolicky (2016) describes the need to give attention to

epiphanic life experiences for transforming the beliefs and practices of teachers. While Netolicky's (2016) findings are centred on rethinking professional learning, rather than creativity (as is the focus of this study), they highlight the importance of attending to personal inspiration and lived experiences of individuals for enhancing and enriching human phenomena, including creativity and learning.

Re-examination of the participants' stories of creativity highlighted the vital importance of creating agentic and personally inspiring conditions for creative potential to be ignited and transmuted into rich experiences. This is illustrated by the following excerpt from a dialogue between two participants in this study:

*Talking with like-minded colleagues has been so helpful. I see creativity in a new way now. Not completely differently, I still have lots of the same beliefs, but I have so many new insights, it is really liberating – and exciting! Listening to stories and each other and talking has helped me to see what I could do differently in my teaching. (Isabella)*

*It is so interesting; it really makes you wonder and think. I have a different image of creativity now. The dialogue in these hubs has done that for me. It has enhanced the way I think about creativity in relation to teaching and learning. At the same time, I have been able to share my ideas and they have contributed to the discussion. (Claire)*

In this excerpt, one participant highlighted that the design and facilitation of creativity hub experiences in this study provided respectful time for new ideas to emerge and for new knowledge and understanding to be nurtured. The other participant reflected on how the creativity hub experiences provided respectful time for them to have agency in their

own learning. The three participants who engaged in all four creativity hubs also expressed how the inspiring and agentic conditions provided by creativity hub context and dialogue helped them to “see creativity, and how they embed opportunities for creativity in their classroom environments, differently”.

In addition, re-examination of the participants’ stories shed light on how creativity, once ignited, is fostered and enhanced through considered time and space for creative experiences, and for the synchronous development of reflective, creative and critical thinking skills. This affirms Piirto’s (2021) view that, while creativity should be understood as an innate human disposition, creative attitudes and skills can and need to be taught to enhance individual experiences of the phenomenon.

Further clarification in relation to understanding how creativity and creative experiences may be fostered and enhanced (but not explicitly taught) was provided by connecting with research new to this study by Cropley and Patston (2018) and Jeffrey and Craft (2004). Specifically, Cropley and Patston (2018) highlight that teaching should focus on “teaching *for* and *with* creativity” (p. 267), and that this involves the development of attitudes and skills to support the application of creativity across learning areas. Relatedly, Jeffrey and Craft (2004) emphasise the relationship between “teaching creatively” and “teaching *for* creativity” as a means to develop students’ creative behaviour and to make learning more interesting and effective (p. 84).

Making meaning of the findings from this study also highlighted the narrow view of creativity which sees it as an event or a detached high-level processing skill that can only be taught and then practised. This view of creativity, such as that put forward by Owens (2011), presents an image of creativity as a skill disconnected from innate human potential, which can be “turned on and off” on need, and for specific situations and events. Moreover, this narrow view of creativity presents an incomplete view of the phenomenon by separating it from all things which, as Robinson (2009) and Piirto (1998) posit, reflect its existence as a life-fulfilling holistic human experience.

Especially indicative of the humanness of creativity were findings from my study which illuminated the paradoxical and unique ways in which participants described how creative experiences may be fostered, enhanced or hindered. The following comment by one participant in the study illustrates the humanness of creativity. It sheds light on how catalysts for creativity are interconnected with the needs unique to each individual. In the comment below, Isabella highlighted that joy is a catalyst for her creativity, while depression is the trigger for creativity for her brother:

*When I feel the joy on my cheeks and in my face and inside me – that is when I can be creative. But for my brother, creativity only happens when he is depressed – when he is depressed his art is unbelievable – but he cannot do it, be creative, unless he is feeling down. (May 2019)*

While these findings (illustrated by the example above) emphasised the individuality of human experiences arising from unique beliefs and lived experiences, they also shed light on shared human perceptions for enhancing human experiences. These perceptions involved personal and environmental conditions.

Careful examination of the co-researchers' stories illuminated that all participants in the study viewed environmental ambiance, respect and presence as being vital for creating optimal conditions for experiences of creativity and learning. This confirmed De Nobile et al.'s (2021) view that the physical environment has a significant role in creating positive attitudes and a sense of security and identity.

Also highlighted in the participants' stories was how balanced attention to feelings, senses and intuition, as well as rational knowledge, opens the way for enriched creative experiences. My analysis of these findings made it clear that engaging with less dominant and rational ways of knowing, and giving attention to feelings, senses and intuitive knowledge, engenders rich creative experiences, and generates fresh practices and new ways of understanding creativity. The value of drawing on non-rational and less dominant ways of knowing to see phenomena in a new light, and with a fresh perspective, is redolent of Jung's (1959/1968) notion that our most underdeveloped and unused functions (intuition, feelings and senses) may contain the most potential.

In addition, further scrutiny of the findings from this study which highlighted how creative experiences are enhanced through seeing

phenomena in a new light confirmed Langer's (2005) view that openness and active perspective taking increase the authenticity of creative experiences. Langer (2005) states that to be mindfully or authentically creative individuals should feel free to "write their own scripts", and "make changes" to their experiences (p. 20). By contrast, Langer (2005) highlights how "mindless creativity" arises from "mindlessly" *following* a script based on assumptions and fear of making mistakes (p. 20). Langer (2005) states: "Armed with the awareness of how different things look depending on perspective, we open up many more choices for ourselves. Openness to different points of view is an important aspect of being mindfully creative" (p. 188).

Langer's (2005) description of barriers that prevent creative pursuits and experiences, and that detract from mindful creativity, are also confirmed by findings from this study which highlight that inflexibility and lack of purpose, interest, trust and motivation stultify creative experiences. Biased expectations and assumptions from teachers and learners were also illuminated as being responsible for hindering both the ignition and generation of experiences of creativity. This insight aligns with research by Copley and Patston (2018), who argue that biases about creativity are responsible for impeding or blocking the phenomenon.

I therefore propose that understanding creative experiences as human phenomena sheds light on how these generative and potentially life-fulfilling experiences can be fostered and enhanced. Further, this

study has illuminated that creative experiences are transmutations of ignited creative potential (as described in phase one). In the following section (on the third phase) I draw on my interpretation of the findings to discuss how understanding creative experiences in the context of their humanness also shed lights on the fact that creative experiences are realised in unique and personal ways.

### **The third phase: Creative experiences are realised**

The third culminating and iterative phase in the organic process of creativity, as highlighted by my interpretation and meaning making of the findings from this study, is the realisation of creativity. I argue that this phase is the last, as well as first, phase in a creative process which is cyclic. I also argue that the realisation of creativity is both the *outcome of* generative experiences, and *inspiration for* ongoing and self-regenerative creativity.

As the *outcome* of generative experiences, this third phase is characterised by the realisation of creativity as comprising diverse and personally relevant creative products. Synchronously, my research findings revealed that this third phase in the creative process is a source of inspiration and catalyst for the *ignition* of latent creative potential and re-initiation of the creative process.

My vision of the realisation of creativity as an outcome and source of continuing inspiration sheds a different perspective on the conceptualisation and classification of levels of creative expression



underpinning Kaufman and Beghetto's (2009) Four C Model of Creativity. Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) highlight that creative expression is an indication of "potential paths of creative maturation" (p. 6). By distinction, my findings illuminate that the products and expressions of creativity (either as products of or catalysts for creativity) are inextricably interconnected with the unique identity of an individual including his, her or their context, purpose and motivation at any one time. Therefore, in contrast to seeing the realisation of creativity as a reflection of the maturation of individuals' creative experiences, my findings highlight the connection of this phenomenon with its implicit humanness.

In accord with Kaufman and Beghetto's (2009) research, which describes the diverse ways in which creativity can be expressed, my analysis and interpretation of stories from this study shed light on the fact that products of creativity can take many forms and can be of personal significance to the individual or have a broader impact on society. Further scrutiny of participants' stories revealed both physical and non-physical products, which included changes to classroom environments, shifts in teaching practices, new ideas, enhanced and transformed ways of thinking, and for me, a shifted state of being as a facilitator of professional learning.

The diversity of ways that creativity may be realised and the fact that these creative expressions or products were personally significant realisations of the experiences of each participant in this study also

confirmed Montuori and Donnelly's (2013) view of creativity. According to Montuori and Donnelly (2013):

Creativity is no longer limited to a few clearly defined areas, such as the development of new products, and exceptional individuals. It can be brought to bear on simple human interactions, work processes, interpersonal conflicts, and other areas where it was formerly not valorised or even recognized. (p. 8)

My discussion about the three phases in the organic process of creativity illuminates how my understanding of the phenomenon and process of creativity deepened and expanded through my initial interpretation of the findings from my study. In the following section of this chapter, I discuss insights about the connection between creativity and learning. The discussion in this following section was both inspired and informed by my heightened understanding about creativity as a phenomenon and process, and through deepened examination of my research findings.

### **The connection between creativity and learning**

New insights about the connection between creativity and learning were revealed through my closer examination of the findings from this study and by re-engaging with research literature in relation to adult learning and teacher professional learning. The following subheadings are used to discuss emergent insights about the connection between creativity and learning. I describe these insights as emergent to convey how, through

deepened exploration and reflection, they evolved over an extended period of time (eighteen months).

- Relatedness
- Interconnected and synchronous
- Co-existence, interdependence and harmony.

### **Relatedness**

My re-examination of the findings from this study after a period of deep reflection illuminated the similarity between creativity and learning as generative, productive and value-adding experiences. Furthermore, my deepened analysis of the participants' comments and reflections revealed the closeness in the way these experiences were fostered and enhanced, and how they were similarly described as giving rise to new knowledge, ideas, creations and learning.

Inspired by my enhanced awareness of the relatedness between creativity and learning, I re-considered research about creativity by Montuori and Donnelly (2013), and about teacher professional learning by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), and Netolicky (2016).

Reconnecting with this research further highlighted the relatedness of these human phenomena in connection to their generative nature. This is exemplified by the synergy between Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin's (1995) and Netolicky's (2016) views of learning and Montuori and

Donnelly's (2013) definition of creativity in which both these phenomena are connected with the production of something new.

Specifically, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) and Netolicky (2016) posit that the experience of learning provides opportunities for fashioning new knowledge and beliefs, and for personal transformation. Referencing Barron (1988), Montuori and Donnelly (2013) describe creativity as "the ability to respond adaptively to the needs for new approaches and new products, or as the ability to bring something new and valuable into existence purposefully" (p. 1).

### **Interconnected and synchronous**

Further exploration and deepened analysis of the findings highlighted the complex interplay and interconnection between divergent human experiences, inclusive of yet beyond creativity and learning. Especially highlighted was the interconnection and synchronous interplay between creative and critical reasoning processes and experiences and their inherent interconnection with fulfilled human experiences, including learning.

Craft (2001, 2010, n.d.) and Perkins (1999) view creativity as the essential life-giving and fulfilling component within the process of learning. My re-examination of the participants' stories about creative experiences confirmed this view and showed that creativity is the vitalising element within deep and fulfilled learning. Furthermore, my re-examination of the participants' comments also highlighted the equally

vital contribution of reasoning and discernment for fulfilled learning experiences. As one participant stated:

*Creativity lifts your spirit! It helps you to see differently; it brings joy. But you do need both – kids need to be able to set and work towards goals as well as dream of these goals. We need both divergent and convergent ways of thinking. But kids do need help to focus on generating options; they find this hard. (Sophia)*

The natural and instinctive interplay between creative and critical reasoning experiences was also illuminated through my deep contemplation of the participants' stories and dialogue about creativity. These findings support Csikszentmihalyi's (2008) notion of flow, and Dirkx et al.'s (2006) perception of transformative learning as a complex experience which takes place within and outside of awareness.

This insight shifted my preconception of a direct connection between learning and creativity to a re-imagining of human phenomena (inclusive of creativity and critical reasoning) as interconnected experiences. I also imagined how these experiences can work in synchronicity as a dynamic force for deep learning and are therefore of equal value for enhancing learning experiences for learners of all ages.

Illumination of the equal value of creativity and critical reasoning for fulfilled learning confirmed my intuitive sense of their interconnectivity. Moreover, it confirmed the importance of providing balanced time for engagement in and development of skills and competencies for these divergent human experiences and processes within learning events. Understanding the equal value of creativity and critical reasoning for

fulfilled learning also provided clarification for my state of disorientation (and the key impetus for this study) as described in Chapter One. In particular, it provided illumination in place of my frustration in response to reading research, including that of Greene and Yu (2016), whereby critical processes are named as being directly connected to successful learning, but no or little mention is made of creativity.

These findings confirmed my sense that omitting to reference creativity directly in connection to successful learning is neglectful and misleading (although I am not suggesting there is deception or a lack of scholarship). Omission of this human phenomenon and focussing on the value of cognitive process for successful learning creates an incomplete picture of the complex and synchronous interplay of the divergent processes and experiences inherent in deep learning experiences.

In relation to teacher professional learning, I propose therefore that understanding the interconnection between learning and the synchronous interplay between creativity and critical reasoning sheds light on the process of learning and, therefore, on how deep learning experiences for teachers can be fostered and enhanced. This insight extends Webster-Wright's (2009, 2010) call to reframe professional learning with a greater focus on "how professionals learn" (2009, pp. 705–706). As revealed through my findings, understanding how teachers learn involves valuing both creativity and critical reasoning equally in learning contexts. Additionally, it reveals the importance of providing time and space within

these contexts for teachers to engage with creative and critical reasoning experiences *for* learning, and *as* learning.

*For* learning, creating time and space for the interplay between experiences provides dynamic opportunities for new ideas and knowledge to be synchronously generated, considered, evaluated and integrated as tangible or intangible products of new learning. *As* learning, embedding opportunities for individuals to experience the interplay between creativity and critical reasoning processes invites inner learning, purpose and motivation, and creates the potential for fulfilled learning experiences.

As a response to my expanded knowledge and deepened understanding about creativity and learning through this research, I suggest that learning experiences need to be re-imagined so that there is a purposeful focus on heightening opportunities for learner agency, and on providing equal attention for creativity and critical reasoning. This supports Korthagen's (2017) and Mitchell et al.'s (2010) call to action to professional learning providers whereby they challenge educators to rethink learning experiences for teachers so that learning is agentic and linked with individual personal needs and motivation. Also corroborated are adult learning theories by Bélanger (2011) and Merriam and Bierema (2014) in which adult learning is described respectively as being generated through the actualisation of inner potential, and is fostered and enhanced through connection with the life experiences of the adult learner.

To deepen my understanding of the interconnection between these human phenomena, I sought out additional research including that by Fritjof Capra (1992). In his research in which he explores the connection between modern physics (quantum theory) and Eastern mysticism/philosophy, Capra (1992) describes “all phenomena in the universe” as being “harmoniously interrelated” (pp. 324–325). Moreover, he states:

The most important characteristic of the Eastern world view – one could almost say the essence of it – is the awareness of the unity and mutual interrelation of all things and events, the experience of all phenomena in the world as manifestations of a basic oneness. All things are seen as interdependent and inseparable parts of this cosmic whole; as different manifestations of the same ultimate reality. (1992, p. 141)

Drawing inspiration from Capra’s (1992) research, my perception of the interconnection between these phenomena further extended and evolved. I discuss this emergent image of the connection between creativity and learning in the following section.

### **Co-existence, interdependence and harmony**

Ongoing contemplation of the findings from this study and continued exploration of research including that by Capra (1992) brought forth new insights about the connection between creativity and learning. This deepened scrutiny revealed that creativity and critical reasoning are interdependent and inseparable parts of the holistic experience of learning.



This extended my view of creativity and critical reasoning as interconnected, synchronous experiences fostered and enhanced through personal, social and environmental interactions and by inner motivation, inspiration and purpose. Furthermore, perceiving creativity and critical reasoning as interdependent and inseparable:

- heightened my awareness of the need to create equal opportunities for creativity and critical reasoning as a means to enhance teachers' experiences of learning in professional learning contexts;
- confirmed my sense that giving weight to either creativity or critical reasoning creates an inauthentic context for learning and potentially hinders the experience of the learner and limits transformative possibilities; and
- further illuminated how imbalanced attention to one of these divergent human experiences over the other disregards their interdependence and intimate interconnection.

I sought out additional research by Li (2008) and Fang (2012) to help me deepen my understanding of the interdependent and inseparable relationship between creativity and critical reasoning. This research, inspired by the Chinese philosophical principle of yin and yang, highlighted that a phenomenon such as learning cannot be complete unless it has two contrasting elements. It also shed light on the dynamic nature of the co-existence of these contrasting elements and how their

harmonious unity creates movement and change. In relation to my study, I interpreted these contrasting elements as being creativity and critical reasoning.

This new perspective offered by Li (2008) and Fang (2012) affirmed my hunch that there needs to be balanced time and space for both creativity and critical reasoning to foster fulfilled learning experiences. Likewise, it confirmed Clements' (2004) perception that experiences are fulfilled when creativity and integration (characterised by reasoned discernment) have been enacted in equilibrium.

Further contemplation of Li's (2008, 2015) and Fang's (2012) research in connection to my study also brought to light how enhancing the experience of learning for teachers rests upon the re-imagining of learning experiences whereby opportunities are provided for the harmonious interplay between creativity and critical reasoning. Moreover, my findings in relation to perceiving learning, creativity and critical reasoning as human and personal experiences highlighted that the balance of these co-existing experiences should not be interpreted in terms of discrete measurements of time.

By distinction, balance is offered through carefully and purposefully created opportunities for learners to engage in and to develop skills and capacity for creativity and critical reasoning. In addition, these opportunities should be designed and facilitated in accordance with learners' needs, not by the allocation of timed events and scheduled activities. This finding is illustrated in the following comment made by one

participant as she reflected upon how she would like to create optimal learning conditions for her students. She also reflected on her experience in one-on-one meetings:

*Freedom is definitely important to experience the joy of creativity — we all need opportunity to engage with this joyous experience — but we also need to time to interact with our analytical skills as well. I don't think it works to measure the time, we need to listen and look and respond to our students and where they are in their learning. This is how you have facilitated these meetings as well. I have had time to be creative and think of new ideas, but I have also had time to reflect on these ideas and make sense of them. I don't think you timed these experiences, it felt very natural and responsive to what I needed at the time. (Grace)*

### **Reflection is at the heart of enhanced human experiences**

Additional insights centred on reflection, reflective practice and critical reflection emerged in synchrony with my deepening understanding of creativity and the connection between creativity and learning. These insights reveal that reflection is central to fostering and enhancing learning processes; is a conduit for communicating with inner and outer worlds; is a personal resource *as* and *for* learning in adult learning contexts; and is a metaphorical mirror for seeing, understanding and re-imagining.

## **Reflection is central to fostering and enhancing learning processes**

Deepened analysis of the findings from this study, including re-looking at participants' responses to the Creativity Reflection Protocol (Appendix H), revealed that reflection is central to fostering and enhancing learning processes. This includes experiences involving creativity and critical reasoning. In particular, reflection:

- provides invaluable time for engaging with non-rational ways of knowing. This was described by one participant as the "opportunity to connect with her feelings and intuition";
- provides time and "uncluttered space" for "play and exploration"; for inspiration; and for the ignition of creative potential and generation of new ideas;
- enhances opportunities for new ideas to be interpreted and evaluated with openness and discernment. As one participant stated, reflection gave them space and "freedom from the distraction of things we already know and think"; and
- provides time and space for the purposeful integration of new ideas into current ways of being.

These findings support Webster-Wright's (2013) view that contemplation (or deep reflection) and critical inquiry (involving creative and critical processes) "influence and strengthen each other" (p. 557). They also support Rogers' (2001) view that "learning and enhanced

personal and professional effectiveness” (p. 55) are outcomes of reflection.

### **Reflection as a conduit for communicating with inner and outer domains**

My further analysis of the findings highlighted the significance of reflection as a conduit for communicating with the inner potential, needs and unconscious knowledge of individuals. This made clear to me that reflection provides a means (conduit) to connect with inner (unconscious) and outer (conscious) domains and with non-rational and rational sources of knowledge residing within these domains.

Contemplation of my findings and of my own experiences of reflection in this study also illuminated that openness and sensitivity are implicit and quintessential states of being for heightened reflection. I realised that, for reflection to act as a conduit for communicating with inner and outer worlds, thereby enhancing experiences *as* and *for* learning, individuals need to be open to this idea. In other words, they need to be willing to suspend assumptions and rational knowledge and to imagine the future potential of ideas generated through unconscious and non-rational sources of knowledge. Moreover, I suggest that, to enhance the experience of reflection *as* and *for* learning, individuals need to be sensitive to the changing nature of their personal and environmental conditions, and how these influence their experiences of creativity and learning.

This insight on how openness and sensitivity heighten reflective experiences *as* and *for* learning corresponds with Clements' (2004) view of transformative change and also Langer's (2016) view of mindful learning. According to Clements (2004), transformative change (through deep learning) is enhanced through sensitivity to *unconscious* knowledge and liminal experiences. In contrast to Clements (2004), Langer (2016) and Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) relate mindful learning to heightened *consciousness*, a greater sensitivity to one's environment and more openness to new information. According to Langer (2016), mindful learning "enables us to be sensitive to context and to notice the present" (p. 85).

Clements (2004), Langer (2016) and Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) offer different perspectives in relation to how learning is enhanced. However, in spite of these differences, they concur on the significance of openness and sensitivity for accessing new perspectives, ideas and knowledge. In relation to this study, my interpretation of participants' feedback and my reflections about their engagement in this study in light of research, including that by Clements (2004) and Langer (2016), opened me to see how the participants' openness, willingness and sensitivity to conscious, unconscious and liminal communication (knowledge) heightened their engagement in reflection. Contemplation of this insight also made clear to me that the participants' openness, willingness and sensitivity to conscious, unconscious and liminal

communication (knowledge) also enhanced their experiences of creativity and deep learning.

### **Reflection as and for learning in adult learning contexts**

My re-examination of the findings from this study and re-engagement with creativity and learning-oriented research, including that by Clements (2004) and Langer (2016), recalled and re-emphasised the diversity of perspectives related to understanding these phenomena. This made apparent the importance of reflection for openly and sensitively critiquing these different perspectives and for challenging personal assumptions and creating new perspectives. Contemplation on, and critical reflection upon, my current facilitation of teacher professional learning assisted me to shift my predisposed ways of working, and to re-envision my practice.

My intentional focus on providing protected and dedicated time for reflection in this study also played a role in enhancing the learning experiences of the participants and inspired transformative change in their classroom practices. This confirms Fook's (2015) view that critical reflection is central to improving professional practice. According to Fook (2015), critical reflection involves the examination of "fundamental assumptions" for "fundamental change" (p. 441). It also confirms Jefferson and Anderson's (2017, 2021) positioning of critical reflection as an innate human capacity for engaging with thoughts, feelings and experiences, in order to explore and challenge assumptions, explore new opportunities and transform practice.

The importance of embedding time for reflection into learning contexts for challenging assumptions and critically reflecting on practice also connects to adult learning theories such as that by Mezirow (2003). Highlighting the importance of critical reflection for adult learning and for transforming meaning structures, Mezirow (1994) states:

Our meaning structures are transformed through reflection, defined here as attending to the grounds (justification) for one's beliefs. We reflect on the unexamined assumptions of our beliefs when the beliefs are not working well for us, or where old ways of thinking are no longer functional. We are confronted with a disorienting dilemma which serves as a trigger for reflection. Reflection involves a critique of assumptions to determine whether the belief, often acquired through cultural assimilation in childhood, remains functional for us as adults. We do this by critically examining its origins, nature, and consequences. (p. 223)

While Mezirow (2003) describes critical reflection as the "essence" of adult education, Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002), Korthagen and Nuijten (2017), and Netolicky (2016) position reflection as one of the core qualities that enable transformative professional learning for teachers.

Providing unique perspectives, Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) describe reflection as a characteristic of the change process; Korthagen and Nuijten (2017) perceive reflection as a means to think expansively and flexibly; and Netolicky (2016) posits that reflection is a means to actuate intrinsic motivation and to stimulate learning from within. In different ways, these perspectives on reflection for adult learning were either confirmed by my own encounters with reflection in this study, or by my co-researchers' experiences. The following selection of comments



taken from the participants' reflective journalling between creativity hubs illustrate how opportunity for reflection and critical reflection in this study expanded their thinking. These comments also illustrate how reflection stimulated and actuated change and transformative learning. While these comments have been referenced in Chapter Six in the presentation of the findings, it is necessary to recall them in this chapter to highlight the significance of reflection, and critical reflection, for adult learning.

*I hadn't thought about creativity like this before,*

*It [reflection] made me think differently ...*

*I am looking at creativity differently now ...*

*I am now thinking differently ...*

*I have been thinking back ... since we last met I have a renewed perspective. (Participants' journals, March–August 2019)*

*Deep reflection provided a space for "uncertainty". This further aroused my curiosity and inspired me to "dig deeper". (My journal, August 2019)*

## **Reflection as a metaphorical mirror for seeing, understanding and re-imagining**

Deepened scrutiny of research data gathered from conscious and unconscious sources also illuminated that reflection is a metaphorical mirror for seeing, understanding and critiquing processes for, and experiences of, creativity and learning. This finding supports Fook's

(2015) view of reflection as reflective practice. According to Fook (2015), reflective practice helps professionals to look at their own teaching practice with improvement in mind.

Like Hunt's (2021) view of reflection as an opportunity for "stillness" (p. 39) and "looking inwardly" (p. 42), reflection in this study provided time to understand myself, my practice and my "internalised knowing better" (Hunt, 2021, p. 45). Moreover, reflection provided time for critical reflection about creativity and its connection to teacher professional learning, and created space for new possibilities for re-imagining teacher professional learning to surface.

In support of Eschenbacher and Fleming's (2020) view of reflection as the essential "ingredient" for adult learning (p. 657), reflection in this study enhanced experiences of creativity and learning. It also provided a conduit for communicating new knowledge through connection with unconscious and conscious sources, and enabled opportunities for critical reflection and reflective practice.

### **The imaginal as a "field of possibilities"**

As described in Chapter Six, a disorienting "tickle" emerged during the writing of this discussion chapter. As I started to communicate and discuss my ideas and insights, I became aware that, although I had uncovered a wealth of new knowledge about human phenomena including creativity and learning, and had revealed previously unseen insights about these phenomena and their interrelatedness, that there was "something"

still to be seen. This feeling was unsettling, but moreover it was exciting. The “tickle” I experienced was imbued with a feeling of anticipation. It was inspirational and drove me to re-immense myself in my earlier interpretation of the findings from this study, and to engage and re-engage with other sources of data that I had not previously examined deeply. In particular, as I described in Chapter Six, the “tickle” motivated me to look beyond conscious sources of data and to seek new possibilities and perspectives from the unconscious and liminal domains.

Therefore, new and inspiring insights for this research were yielded through deep reflection and connection with liminal sources, through deepened examination of earlier findings from this study, and from re-engaging with creativity and learning-oriented research. In response to the disorienting “tickle” that emerged during my study, and after a discussion with my supervisor about the concept of the imaginal as a liminal domain containing limitless possibilities for seeing phenomena in a new light, I also accessed new research. This new research, which was focussed on the imaginal, provided new perspectives about learning and creativity in connection with the imaginal as a field of possibilities for seeing anew.

While all the findings unearthed through this study provide illumination for my research focus, insights about the imaginal are the most innovative and enlightening for my own practice as a facilitator of teacher professional learning, and for educational research. In particular, these new insights illuminated the value of the imaginal as an inner and

liminal source of creative potential and imaginative ideas. This led me to understand that, when tapped into through deep reflection, the imaginal has the potential to bring internal images to light. These images offer possibilities for transformational change and, in this study, for re-imagining phenomena, including creativity and teacher professional learning. In addition, new insights revealed how connection with the imaginal enhances experiences and processes of creativity, learning and re-imagining.

Findings about the imaginal emerged through my interaction with the creative and organic inquiry processes adopted in the course of this study. They were brought to light over time, and through balanced and iterative opportunities for creativity, critical reasoning and reflection. As such, it makes sense that this insight about the imaginal did not appear until later in the study. While the creative approach to research revealed new ideas in relation to creativity and learning early in this study, I needed time and space to perceive the significance of the imaginal.

As this finding was unexpected, I did not access research which contributed to my understanding of the imaginal at the commencement of this study and, therefore, it was not included in my exploration of the research literature in Chapter Two. Inspired and motivated by this gap in my literature review, and in keeping with the organic inquiry approach to research, I located and explored new imaginal-oriented research. In so doing, I prepared myself once again for exploration, analysis and meaning making, this time in light of my discovery about the imaginal, and

knowledge gained through imaginal-oriented research. Therefore, in the following subsections I provide an overview of this additional research and highlight how it expanded my knowledge of the imaginal. A discussion follows this overview of research. In this discussion I highlight my key insights about the imaginal for this study.

### **The concept of the imaginal as illuminated in research**

Bottici (2015), Shariat (1991) and Slavin (2017) describe the imaginal as an intermediary world which connects the rational and intuitive domains. According to Shariat (1991), the imaginal also mediates the interactions between the rational and intuitive dimensions and, in so doing, creates images that are perceptible and that entail change (p. 93). Slavin (2017) draws on Hillman's research focussed on the imagination or "imaginative phenomena" to highlight the "potency" of ideas and images that emerge from the imaginal to revalue "the limits of any fixed idea" (p. 142) and for the "re-visioning of fixed values" (p. 144).

Similarly, Bottici (2015) describes the imaginal as an "intermediate world" that is neither "material", "nor immaterial", and explains that it is within this world that the "acting imagination operates" (p. 55). In her research focussed on the imaginal, Bottici (2015) makes clear the difference between the imaginal, the imaginary and being imaginative. Simply stated, Bottici (2015) refers to the imaginal as beyond imagination and the imaginary, with the latter being strictly associated with fantasy and the unreal.

Furthermore, Bottici (2015) describes how the imaginal is made of images that are not necessarily representations of anything real, but “are presences in themselves, independently of their being real or unreal, mental or extramental” (p. 58). According to Bottici (2015), the images which comprise the imaginal are connected to radical imagination; are expressions of radical creativity; and are therefore independent of the “faculty that produces them” (p. 71). Bottici’s (2015) use of the word “radical” highlights that these images present brand-new possibilities and perceptions. She also posits that the imaginal and imaginal images provide a “field of possibilities” for seeing differently and for enabling us to break free from restrictions imposed by social contexts.

From an art therapy perspective, Netzer (2009) posits that creating images through “imaginal resonance” activates “a process of change” (p. 38). This process of change involves connecting to and revealing intuitive understanding through the transformation of internal images. According to Netzer (2009), this enables individuals (clients) to “imaginally resonate” (p. 38) with lived experiences and, rather than “discussing” and “explaining” the causes of these experiences, allows “their experiences to speak to them through the images, feelings, and bodily sensations they elicit” (p. 38). Also according to Netzer (2009), inner images are not preconceived but are expressions of knowledge that have “existed all along, yet were previously unrecognized” (p. 38).

Recent research by Smitsman et al. (2021) describes the importance of imaginal learning for educational transformation and

especially for sustainability, regeneration and thriving. According to Smitsman et al. (2021), imaginal learning involves enhanced opportunities for creativity and innovation and heightened attention to imaginative states of consciousness. It also involves “letting go of trying to force the path ahead, and allowing our minds to shift out of the habitual and conditioned modes of thinking” (p. 42).

In addition, Smitsman et al. (2021) argue that imaginal learning is vital for developing imaginal capacities (including dreaming, sensing, envisioning, intuiting, imagining and inquiring) and that these capacities are central to educational (and systemic) transformation. As Smitsman et al. (2021) state:

Our brightest thinkers, inventors, and philosophers used imaginal processes for developing their capacities and breakthrough ideas. For those working in educational transformation, we highly recommend including collective imaginal learning processes and practices as a key strategy for systemic transformation. We cannot build new systems from old states of consciousness. (p. 42)

### **Seeing my research findings in a new light**

Inspired by my new knowledge about “imaginal learning” (Smitsman et al., 2021), “imaginal resonance” (Netzer, 2009) and the imaginal as a “field of possibilities” (Bottici, 2015, p. 61) for generating new ideas, I re-immersed myself in my research data and findings. Re-examination of this data revealed that the learning processes in this study, which centred on non-rational and rational ways of knowing, perspective taking,

dialogue, storytelling and reflection, had enabled imaginal learning and thereby awakened the participants to imaginative possibilities and creative insights.

Furthermore, re-examination of the research data and previous findings also revealed how engaging in creativity hubs and in a balance of creative and critical reasoning processes provided access to and developed the participants' imaginal capacities. This led me to understand anew how access to and enhancement of these capacities through imaginal learning experiences in this study inspired and empowered the participants to re-create their personal images of creativity.

Of interest is that, while it had been my intention to create optimal learning experiences for the participants in this study, I was not aware at the outset of this study that I was creating imaginal learning experiences. As stated previously, awareness of the imaginal as a source of creative potential and resource for enhancing experiences of creativity and learning emerged later, quite unexpectedly, through the lived experience of this study. Creating these imaginal learning experiences for my co-researchers was therefore intuitive and centred on my own experiences of deep and satisfying learning.

The following comments made by two participants in this study illustrate the significance of the imaginal learning experiences generated through the creativity hubs in this study. In particular, these comments highlight the importance of having time, space and "structures" to engage in learning about creativity from *without* and from *within*. Structures, or



ways of working, in this study which supported learning from *without* included collective inquiry, dialogue, perspective sharing and storytelling, while structures for learning from *within* included opportunities for reflection. Both of the following comments make reference to how ways of working (structures) in this study empowered the participants to see differently and to create new images of their teaching and learning. These images were independent of their lived experiences and assumptions.

*Talking with like-minded colleagues has been so helpful. I see creativity in a new way now. Not completely differently, I still have lots of the same beliefs, but I have so many new insights, it is really liberating – and exciting! Listening to stories and each other and talking has helped me to see what I could do differently in my teaching. (Isabella)*

*It is so interesting; it really makes you wonder and think. I have a different image of creativity now. The dialogue in these hubs has done that for me. It has enhanced the way I think about creativity in relation to teaching and learning. I haven't got any answers, but I think that is okay – my image of creativity is still a bit unclear, but it is no longer restricted by my own lived experiences and assumptions. (Claire)*

These comments illuminate the importance of establishing conditions for learning which motivate and inspire learning from *within* and *without*. They also highlight the significance of forming and transforming mental images to bring possibilities for change to light. In these examples, the creativity hubs provided space for the participants to connect with the imaginal and, in accord with Bottici's (2015) view of the imaginal, to see differently.

In addition, agentic learning experiences in this study, with heightened attention to non-rational and rational ways of knowing, created space for the participants to connect with, and activate, imaginal ideas for their possible transformation. This finding is redolent of Netzer's (2009) research findings in which the process of "imaginal resonance" was seen to inspire transpersonal awareness and provide opportunities for changing "self-limiting, habitual patterns" (p. 40). According to Netzer (2009), "imaginal resonance", whereby meaning is made of lived experiences by allowing individuals' "experiences to speak to them through the images, feelings, and bodily sensations they elicit" (p. 38), activates a process of change through the "transformation of internal images" (p. 38).

### *Imaginal learning ignited creativity and inspired flow*

My understanding of the imaginal as a source of creativity that can be accessed through deep reflection, and through openness and sensitivity, sheds light on how opportunities for creativity, and therefore learning, may be enhanced. In this study, tapping into the imaginal and being open to imaginal possibilities and new images of creativity, ignited, re-ignited and fostered and enriched the participants' creative and learning experiences. The following excerpt from a creativity hub dialogue highlights the imaginal as a source of creative potential (Bottici, 2015) which, when ignited or activated, enhances creative (generative and

productive) experiences and generates images of possibilities for the transformation of thinking and practice:

*Isabella: Every time I come to these hubs, I learn something new – not because you tell me but because I listen to others and all the different ideas about creativity. This stirs my creative juices and I feel like I need to go away and think about all of these ideas.*

*Claire: Yes, I know what you mean. I keep coming up with new ideas! Quite different ones too ... well at least different to what I thought creativity looked like. And it has given me a different picture of what creativity can look like in my lessons – and how I am actually quite creative. I didn't think I was before.*

*Isabella: Yes, I have some new ideas about how I can embed creativity in my lessons. I can see how this would be so beneficial to my boys.*

*Olivia: I don't think I have a clear picture of creativity and what it is really about, but I certainly have learned so much from coming to hubs. I definitely have an enhanced view of the experience of creativity and all of its different facets.*  
(2019)

Increased opportunities for contemplation of my new understanding of the imaginal heightened my awareness of how my creativity hubs had engendered imaginal learning experiences. I realised that these hubs had also provided optimal conditions for the participants to experience flow. As posited by Csikszentmihalyi (2014), flow experiences are enabled when situational challenges balance personal skills to create a “state of optimal interaction” (p. 8). In this productive and enhanced situation, a learner feels “fully alive and in control, because he or she can direct the flow of reciprocal information” (p. 8). This invites peak performance and a

feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction, as indicated in one participant's final reflection related to their involvement in this study as a co-researcher:

*This study has really helped to open me to new ideas and ways of thinking about creativity. Every time I come to these hubs I see something in a slightly new light. Every time I leave, I feel like there is still so much to know but at the same time I feel like I have grown so much in my knowledge. It has really been inspiring. (Isabella)*

### *Adult learning and the imaginal*

With relevance to this study, understanding the imaginal as a source of creativity and a means to translate sensory (unconscious) knowledge into images and possibilities for change provides illumination and inspiration for attending to the unique needs of adult learners. Openness to the imaginal and its inner images enables learning from within. It also engenders personal connection to the learning context and content, and confirms research by Bélanger (2011), Burrows (2014, 2015), Braud (2006), Dirkx et al. (2006), Keisler (2017), Merriam and Bierema (2014), and Rogers (2012). Their research stresses that connection to the life experiences and personal strengths, needs and motivations of adult learners is foundational to transformative learning.

In relation to teacher professional learning, understanding the imaginal as an intimate "field of possibilities" (Bottici, 2015, p. 61) for personal transformative change connects with Netolicky's (2016) premise that effective learning needs to take into account the unique life

experiences of learners. The notion of “imaginal resonance” (Netzer, 2009, p. 38) as a process for connecting with holistic human experiences also supports Netolicky’s (2016) view of the importance of connecting to the “lifeworld” of teachers for learning to be purposeful and transformative.

The success of the creativity hubs and one-on-one meetings for the three participants who engaged in all meetings illuminates the potential of ongoing imaginal experiences and processes for creating connected and purposeful learning experiences. For these teacher co-researchers, the design and facilitation of these meetings, along with carefully chosen ways of working (including perspective taking, storytelling, dialogue and reflection) activated “imaginal resonance” (Netzer, 2009) and created personally significant and connected learning experiences.

This insight about the imaginal is significant for this study. It shifts the focus of teacher professional learning, and how this adult learning experience can be re-imagined, onto the experiences of the teachers as learners, rather than on the learning content or on the event itself. This confirms research by Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) and Webster-Wright (2009, 2013), who uphold that professional learning should be transformed by centring on reframing the personal experience of learners, rather than on improving events.

The focus on the creation of learning experiences which provide time, space and structure for teachers to connect with their imaginal and imaginal ideas is supportive of Mezirow’s (1996, 2003) and Dirkx et al.’s

(2006) research in connection to transformative learning. In their research, learning is connected to the critiquing of personal assumptions and the related restructuring of personal meaning structures.

In light of adult learning theories and my new finding about the imaginal, I suggest that creating professional learning experiences whereby teachers are open to imagination, and imaginal possibilities, through mediating interaction between inner and outer worlds can engender critical reflection, creativity and discernment. In relation to Mezirow's (1996, 2003) and Dirkx et al.'s (2006) research, this would enhance opportunities for adult learners to construe new meaning and transform their acquired frames of reference.

In addition, understanding the imaginal as a "field of possibilities" (Bottici, 2015) for new ways of thinking and seeing extends research by Clark (1974), Kizel (2012, 2022), Korthagen and Nuijten (2017), and Mitchell et al. (2010) in which self-reflection and self-understanding are described as being foundational for enhancing teachers' learning experiences in professional learning. While the findings from this study affirm the significance of reflection for deep learning, they also shed new light on reflection as a conduit or instrument for connecting to the imaginal, and consequently for surfacing imaginative possibilities and new learning.

### *The imaginal and transformative learning*

Like the findings from my study which highlight the life-giving and energising impact of creativity on the participants' learning experiences, Smitsman et al. (2021) describe the crucial role of imagination and imaginal capacities in actualising potential and enabling transformative learning. According to Smitsman et al. (2021), imaginal capacities are the qualities that make us uniquely human and that differentiate us from machines. They extend beyond our imaginative capacities and internal mental processes and are states of consciousness that enhance awareness of future possibilities. This raises an interesting perspective for re-imagining teacher professional learning whereby a focus for enhancing teachers' experiences of learning is placed on creating experiences that foster and develop these imaginal capacities.

Also in accord with findings from my study, new research by van Meer (2022) posits that creating space for "imaginal knowing" in connection with learning supports individuals to cultivate their senses, feelings and imagination, and therefore to become reflexive practitioners. This confirms research by Stolz (2015) and Jefferson and Anderson (2021) which highlights the importance of embodied learning for experiences of deep learning for learners of all ages.

Understanding the imaginal and the generation of imaginal images (as possibilities for change) in connection to enhancing experiences of creativity and learning provides illumination for this study and for re-imagining teacher professional learning. Specifically, it illuminates how re-

imagining teacher professional learning needs to be centred upon enhancing teachers' experiences of learning. In addition, it highlights the importance of sculpting and facilitating these experiences in light of, and with attention to, developing human (and imaginal) capacities.

Understanding the imaginal provides valuable and inspirational insight for education research. In essence, I propose that the imaginal exists as a means to connect learners with the experience of learning in a way that engenders agency, growth and possible transformation. Understanding the imaginal as a field of possibilities for critiquing assumptions and seeing phenomena in a new light also illuminates the wellspring of possibilities and creative ideas that dwell in readiness in each and every human.

### **A summary of key insights**

In this section I summarise my discussion of my findings in concise but illustrative statements to highlight key insights for educational research. This summary is also offered to designers, leaders and facilitators of professional learning as a source of inspiration to provoke and invite further exploration and possible re-imagining of these adult learning experiences. How these findings might provide opportunity for further study is discussed later in this chapter.

- Creativity is a multifaceted, innate human disposition that is ignited, fostered and enhanced through the interaction between and within



unique personal and environmental conditions, and through motivation and purpose.

- There are three interconnected and naturally occurring phases in the process of creativity: creativity is ignited; creative potential transmutes into creative experiences; and creativity is realised.
- While there is synergy between creativity and learning as generative and productive experiences, the connection between these human phenomena is more complex than this – they are synchronous and interconnected.
- To understand the complexity of the relationship or interconnection between human phenomena, creativity and critical reasoning need to be understood as complementary and co-existing human experiences.
- Fulfilled learning is a creative product of the healthy tension provided by the co-existence of, and organic and synchronous interaction between, creativity and critical reasoning.
- Deep reflection is at the heart of satisfying and fulfilled human experiences. As a conduit to liminal sources, reflection enhances learning. It provides access to new knowledge and imaginal ideas. Reflection also creates opportunity for critical reflection and reflective practice whereby assumptions are challenged and practice is re-imagined.
- At the heart of re-imagining teacher professional learning is the necessity to explore possibilities in which learners (teachers) are

inspired and empowered to immerse themselves in the holistic experience of learning. Awareness of the interconnection between synchronous and co-existing experiences of creativity, critical reasoning and reflection is fundamental to re-imagining these experiences.

- The mindset, presence, behaviour and practice of facilitators of teacher professional learning are central to creating optimal conditions and interactions for learning. Therefore, re-imagining oneself as a facilitator and catalyst *for* learning, by developing and activating one's imaginal capacities, is central to re-imagining teacher professional learning and teachers' enhanced experiences of learning.
- The imaginal is a locus for creativity and, as a "field of possibilities" (Bottici, 2015, p. 70) is a source for radical creativity and fulfilled learning. Imaginal learning engenders "a state of possibility" (Smitsman et al., 2021, p. 42) whereby teachers (as learners) access imaginal ideas beyond their rational experiences to envision transformed images for teaching practice.
- To *re-imagine* professional learning so as to enhance teachers' experiences of learning necessitates looking beyond traditional models and parameters defined by social contexts, lived experiences and learned knowledge. Connecting with our imaginal and creating space for imagining and imagination helps us to break

free from limitations posed by fixed ideas. It helps us to see differently.

- Expanding my understanding of creativity and its connection to learning through an organic research approach opened me to see and understand the processes of creativity and deep learning differently (beyond traditional models). In synchronicity, this study illuminated the significance of imagination, the imaginal and imaginal learning as sources for creativity and deep learning, and for re-imagining teacher professional learning.

### **Limitations and opportunities for further research**

#### **Limitations**

In this section I highlight the limitations of my study and discuss them to provide transparency for the context in which I explored my research topic, gathered and analysed data, and interpreted findings. I also describe how bringing these limitations to light raises interesting possibilities for further research and illuminates new questions for exploration.

In the following paragraphs, I discuss how returning to critically reflect upon this study at the end of the research process, highlighted limitations in relation to the scope of my research topic and approach, and specifically in connection to my participation process. In Chapter Eight, an extended reflection about my personal experience of engaging

with the organic inquiry methodology in this study, expands upon this discussion about research limitations by highlighting the strengths and challenges of my approach to research.

The parameters that I intentionally established at the start of the research process enabled me to explore creativity and its connection to learning within a context that was relevant to my purposes for study, and to my workplace role as an educational consultant in the independent school sector in SA. In addition, my judicious choice and use of specific creative approaches for exploration, together with honed techniques for discernment and critical reflection, also provided support for the distinct purposes for this study while honouring the organic inquiry methodology.

These purposes involved expanding my knowledge and understanding about creativity and its connection to learning, and generating new possibilities for re-imagining professional learning so that teachers' learning experiences are enhanced. Under subheadings, I discuss how my intentional research parameters, and the demographics of my choice of participants, were intentional delimits for my study and my research context. In addition, I highlight how these parameters should also be viewed and perceived as limitations. As limitations, they have implications for my findings and reveal new gaps for further research. The subheadings are: Limitations created by the scope of my research topic and approach; and Limitations provided by the demographics of my choice of participants.

*Limitations: The scope of my research topic and approach*

I commenced this study with an understanding that an organic inquiry approach requires a researcher to have “a level of self-awareness, flexibility, and inspiration ... a degree of emotional and spiritual maturity” (Bardsley, 2020, p. 2006) and a willingness to let go of egoic control. Therefore, while the organic inquiry approach was an inspiring and liberating choice of methodology for me in this study, I am aware that it could be an uncomfortable and inappropriate research approach for others. As Braud (2004) states, an organic inquiry approach is “not recommended for any and every researcher, but for those who are sufficiently mature, self-aware, and prepared” (Braud, 2004, p.21).

I also anticipated at the start of this study that the qualitative organic inquiry chosen as a research methodology, with its inherent subjective nature, and its focus on personal transformative change (Clements, 2011), may establish certain limitations with respect to the generalisability of findings. Specifically, I anticipated that my unique context for research as an educational consultant within the SA independent school sector would reduce the generalisability and replicability of this study for others interested in exploring creativity, or in seeking ways to re-envision teacher professional learning.

In particular, my choice to limit the invitation for participation to teachers within the SA independent school sector provided a distinct and intentional parameter for gathering data, and for providing illumination for my research question: *How can expanding my understanding of*

*creativity and its connection to learning assist me to re-imagine professional learning for teachers so that their learning experiences are enhanced?* This underpinning participation criteria made sense for my unique context for research. It also enabled efficient communication through existing contact lists. Furthermore, it supported my core responsibility as a designer and facilitator of teacher professional learning for educational leaders and teachers in SA independent schools, to explore and investigate new ways to inspire professional growth, and to enhance these adult experiences of learning.

My intentional choice not to extend the invitation for participation in this study to a broader and larger cohort of educators and schools outside the SA independent sector was also supported by being confident that the diversity within the SA independent school sector would provide an authentic context for collective inquiry and data gathering. The SA independent school sector is comprised of schools that have a range of low to high fee structures, resources and facilities; are underpinned by diverse secular and religious beliefs and educational philosophies; and that provide education for students from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

However, critical reflection of my participation sample at the end of the research period highlighted how schools that responded to my EoI for participation (Appendix A) were not representative of the diversity of the sector. While responses were from teachers who taught in a range of mid to low fee schools underpinned by non-secular and four different religious

philosophies, the socio-cultural demographics of schools and teachers, were similar.

With sight to the future, extending my invitation for participation to educators working within other sectors, educational organisations and beyond South Australia, provides interesting potential for further exploration of my research question. In particular, it highlights how insights and findings in relation to my research topic and question may be further expanded through broadened participation. In essence, extending the invitation for participation generates the potential for interesting new perspectives in relation to creativity and its connection to learning, and for re-imagining teacher professional learning, to be brought to light.

*Limitations: The demographics and sample size of participants*

My choice to work with a small group (ten or under) of participants as co-researchers was also deliberate. As a specific technique and approach to support the organic inquiry approach adopted for this study, it was chosen to create safe and collegial space for respectful relationships to be developed and for collective inquiry, storytelling and open dialogue. The feeling of safety and trust engendered through the small group approach also created opportunity to collectively explore unique perceptions of creativity through all ways of knowing (rational, sensory, emotional and intuitive) and therefore beyond, but inclusive of rational knowing.

In addition, working in partnership with a small group of teachers created opportunity for all participants to share diverse perspectives and provided time for open and rigorous exploration, analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, this small group approach provided space for new ideas to be generated and discussed, and enhanced discernment and insightful meaning making. In essence, it provided optimal conditions to engage with my research purpose to deepen my understanding of creativity and its connection to learning.

However, critical reflection at the end of the research process revealed that although the small group approach supported ways of working in this study, it did limit the opportunity for diversity in relation to participation. In essence, the small sample size limited the potential for gathering data from a broader representation of teachers.

As an outcome of the participation process in this study, the identified group of participants were all Caucasian women over the age of thirty. Furthermore, while participants all had different life stories and personal backgrounds, there was complete agreement about the importance and positive value of creativity in connection to teaching and learning. Although two male teachers did contact me to indicate their interest in my study, they were adamant that personal and school based commitments made it impossible for them to engage in this research as participants.

Awareness of this limitation, unintentionally created by my decision related to sample size, and also to the participation process, highlights



intriguing possibilities for further research. While I would not increase the size of participation groups (as this would compromise the integrity of my ways of working and the principles of the organic inquiry methodology), seeking participation and therefore viewpoints from teachers from different age groups, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, work (school) contexts, and of different gender, would provide interesting new insights.

In particular, it would be interesting to explore if dialogue, collective inquiry, storytelling and findings are influenced by the inclusion of participants from diverse cultural backgrounds. Likewise, inviting individuals who do not value or have minimal awareness about creativity in relation to learning to share their perspectives, could shed new light on my research question. In addition, the inclusion of participants of different gender and with a broader age range could potentially provide interesting new perceptions and insights in relation to creativity and teacher professional learning. Broadening participation parameters to include sectors and educational organisations beyond the SA independent schools, and therefore opening this study to participants from more diverse demographic groups, would support this new focus for further research.

Also of interest for further research would be to investigate if higher fee, well-resourced and larger independent schools engender more opportunities for teachers to explore the potential and value of creativity for, and as learning. This new question for research was highlighted by

my observation (post study) that the three participants who engaged in all four creativity hubs, and who have continued to contact me to discuss creativity beyond this study's participation parameters, were all from higher fee, well-resourced and larger independent schools. In addition, although these schools are in three distinct locations in metropolitan SA, and one is co-educational, while the other two are single sex, all three schools offer education from early learning to Year 12. Other participants in this study, who withdrew after attending one or two hubs were, from less well-resourced schools and lower fees schools and were situated in more challenging demographic areas in metropolitan SA.

The discussion of limitations in this section provides further context for making meaning of research findings in this study, and for highlighting new possibilities for research. In the following section, I discuss additional avenues for further study.

### **Opportunities for further research**

The exploratory nature of this study centred on expanding knowledge, and on being open to new ways of perceiving the phenomena (creativity and learning), which characteristically invites ongoing study. One avenue for further study has already been highlighted in the previous paragraph. This is the continued expansion of perspectives about creativity and learning by engaging with a broader and more diverse group of participants.

In this subsection I discuss two further avenues for research that emerged in concert with my interpretation of the findings from this study. While I was tempted to explore these avenues during this study, I refrained, and stayed focussed on my guiding question and my context for research. Therefore, these further avenues for research were not explored in the course of this study and provide ideas for further exploration.

These avenues for future research are: In what ways might teacher professional learning create space for and engender experiences whereby teachers feel prepared and able to engage in deep reflection?; and What possibilities might be presented by creating learning spaces whereby learners and teachers develop and activate imaginal capacities?

*In what ways might teacher professional learning create space for, and engender experiences whereby teachers feel prepared and able to engage in deep reflection?*

During my interpretation and discussion of the findings, further questions about reflection presented themselves as opportunities for continued exploration. These opportunities include an open investigation into, as Fleck and Fitzpatrick (2010) highlight, the structured support or guidance that some individuals may need for reflective practice; and extended exploration into how individuals prepare for, and engage in, potentially transformative reflection.

This latter avenue for continued research was inspired through heightened awareness that my own experiences of reflection in this study were enhanced through the use of personally significant practices (or resources), including painting and drawing. The following questions provide guidance for further exploration:

- How might learning conditions be created whereby teachers have a choice to draw upon their unique practices and resources for reflection? How might this enable and engender deep reflection and better prepare teachers for satisfying and transformative learning experiences?
- How might professional learning facilitators help teachers to increase and deepen opportunities for reflection? What skills, capacities and dispositions need to be developed and what ways of working would best facilitate deep reflection?

*What possibilities might be presented by creating learning spaces whereby learners and teachers develop and activate imaginal capacities?*

Findings that reveal the significance of developing and activating imaginal capacities for seeing differently, and for re-imagining learning experiences, have been discussed in this chapter. However, the potential provided by enhancing these capacities, including intuiting, sensing and inquiring beyond the context of teacher professional learning, was not explored in this study. The following questions are offered as a catalyst

for further exploration and research in connection to the development and activation of imaginal capacities:

- How might students' imaginal capacities be developed and activated in school contexts and across learning areas? How might this enhance students' learning experiences and equip them for life beyond school?
- How are imaginal capacities currently being fostered, developed and enhanced in educational contexts? To enhance these capacities, what needs to stay the same, change or be re-imagined?



In this chapter I have discussed how findings and insights revealed through this study have provided illumination for my research question: *How can expanding my understanding of creativity and its connection to learning assist me to re-imagine professional learning for teachers so that their learning experiences are enhanced?*

A key insight discussed in this chapter is how this study unintentionally engendered an imaginal learning experience for myself and the participants. This inspired and empowered us to re-imagine and see the phenomena (creativity and learning) in a new light. In particular, this study shed light on creativity and critical reasoning as complementary

forces for deep learning, and made apparent the significance of the imaginal for enhancing these experiences.

Also in this chapter I have drawn attention to the strengths and limitations of this study and have highlighted opportunities for further research. In the next chapter, I critically reflect upon the value and significance of the organic inquiry research approach adopted for this study.

## Chapter Eight: A reflection and conclusion



The purpose of this chapter is twofold. In the first instance I reflect upon the organic inquiry (OI) approach adopted for this study with the purpose of sharing its value for expanding my knowledge about creativity and learning, and for illuminating possibilities for re-imagining teacher professional learning. Moreover, I also reflect upon how this research methodology was intricately interwoven into all aspects of this study, inclusive of and beyond its purpose as a means to engage in research. While my reflections relate specifically to the context of re-imagining teacher professional learning, they also provide inspiration for re-envisioning the experience of learning for learners of all age groups.

Secondly, in this chapter, I draw together my key insights about creativity and learning generated from this study to bring this thesis to a close. In this conclusion I highlight the collective significance of these new insights for my personal and professional growth and transformation.

### **A reflection on the OI approach to research in this study**

To prepare for this study, I explored and investigated different research methodologies. I knew instinctively that I needed a method that would help me to explore creativity and learning openly, and that would support my purpose for this study to uncover previously unseen knowledge and understanding about the connection between creativity and learning. I

also hoped that this method would help me to shed new light on how teacher professional learning might be re-imagined. In contrast to seeking ways to *improve* teacher professional learning, whereby existing structures and conditions are modified, enhanced and sometimes changed, I wanted a means to engage in research that would empower me to see and *re-imagine* the phenomenon of teacher professional learning in previously unseen ways.

Therefore, my choice of an OI focus for research felt right for my study with its unique rationale, motivations and purposes. In comparison to other qualitative methods for research, it offered a more flexible, spontaneous, creative and sensitive means to engage in the exploration, analysis and interpretation of insights and discoveries as they surfaced. Moreover, the approach supported my holistic and relational epistemological premise for this study, which recognised that deep knowledge that shifts understandings and creates opportunities for transformation is generated through balanced attention to all ways of knowing.

However, it was not until I was *in* the research and fully immersed in the ways of working and approaches for exploration, analysis and meaning making, that I fully appreciated the value and significance of the OI methodology for my study, and also for educational research in relation to teacher professional learning. *In* the research, I became deeply aware of the creative and dynamic qualities and characteristics of the



methodology, and how embedding them into ways of working in this study enabled *more* than an effective means to engage in research.

In essence, it engendered a way of being whereby I felt empowered and inspired to learn. This feeling was enhanced by my expanded knowledge about creativity and its connection to learning, and through my increased attention to imaginal dispositions. This included my focus on using dreaming, sensing, envisioning, intuiting, imagining and inquiring as means to connect with and illuminate previously unseen knowledge from the unconscious and liminal domains.

In particular, the OI approach to research, with its three-step process of *preparation*, *inspiration* and *integration*, offered a method to explore my topic and research question with openness and enhanced discernment. In each recursive loop of these phases, the three-step process reminded me to make time to prepare and open myself to “see phenomena differently”. In my role as a facilitator of professional learning, I now embed the organic and iterative steps of *preparation*, *inspiration* and *integration* throughout my workshops and projects in order to invite, and make possible, connected and potentially transformative learning. This supports Netolicky’s (2016) notion that transformative growth is engendered through connection to learners’ epiphanic life experiences.

Similar to Soja’s (1996) notion of a thirdspace, the OI approach created a “place of extraordinary openness” (p. 5) for reflective practice, critical reflection and deep learning. Rather than rigidly following a

predetermined course of investigation, the methods in this approach often led me down unexpected and winding pathways of discovery. Sometimes these pathways affirmed my knowledge about the phenomena of creativity and learning, and at other times they led me to see previously unseen connections between these phenomena. On a number of occasions these pathways of discovery revealed new insights about creativity and teacher professional learning.

Therefore, the nature of the OI methodology, which focuses on bringing new and diverse perspectives to light in order to expand knowledge, was both disruptive and energising. In particular, I used storytelling, dialogue and collective inquiry in this study to prompt perspective taking and sharing and to challenge assumptions. Furthermore, these same ways of working triggered and set in motion waves of disorientation as we (myself and the participants in this study), analysed, interpreted and made meaning of new insights in connection to our own unique contexts.

Like Mezirow's (1994) notion of transformative learning, whereby disorientation is the first phase in, and trigger for, transformation, the waves of disorientation in my study triggered experiences of deep learning from *within* (through unconscious ways of knowing) and from *without* (through conscious ways of knowing). I also realised that my experience of deep learning from *within* and *without* stemmed from my feeling of being connected to the learning. This idea resonated with adult and teacher professional learning-oriented research, including that by

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), Eschenbacher and Fleming (2020), Mezirow (1994) and Netolicky (2016) in which quality learning is related to the adult learner feeling connected to the content, topic and purpose of the learning context.

However, while the disruptive context created by this methodology was exciting and inspirational, and was instrumental for my personal transformation in this study, it was also, at times, unsettling and confusing. As Clements (2004) states in her OI-oriented study, "Confusion and judgment are typical responses to experiences one has not had since one has no basis for understanding" (p. 27).

Therefore, in light of Clements' (2004) words, I realised that my confusion was a natural response to the wealth of diverse and sometimes completely new perspectives brought to light through the unexpected pathways of discovery in this study. I also realised that the feeling of confusion was implicitly connected to my feeling of disorientation.

My increased attention to reflective practice and to my feelings, senses and intuition, to support the OI focus on gathering knowledge from the unconscious and liminal domains, also helped me to re-position my ways of being as an educational consultant and facilitator of professional learning. I felt confident to connect with the unconscious and liminal domains in order to expand my knowledge and understanding. Moreover, I realised that this was quintessential to being able to re-imagine, grow and transform my view of, and practices related to, teacher professional learning, beyond improvement.

A particularly pivotal moment in this study emerged from a series of deeply reflective and creative experiences, interwoven throughout the OI phases of exploration, analysis and meaning making. During these experiences, my connection with unconscious and liminal knowledge was heightened through my use of creative and deeply personal ways of connecting with knowledge beyond that of the conscious (rational) domain. Referred to by Braud (2004) as “transpersonally-relevant resources” (p. 18), these creative approaches helped me to relax my mind, and to feel free and open to new ideas from the unconscious domain without judgement.

This pivotal moment, engendered through deep reflection and creativity, involved my full realisation of the deep interrelationship that exists between creativity and critical reasoning as co-existing and complementary processes for deep learning. It also provided me with enhanced awareness and understanding of why these human phenomena need to be equally valued, present and visible for re-imagining teacher professional learning experiences.

My increased use of “transpersonally-relevant resources” (Braud, 2004, p. 18), including drawing, painting, and creative and reflective writing, to honour the OI approach to research, created an agentic and motivational space for my learning. In this space, these creative pursuits helped to relax my mind, deepened my experience of reflection, and opened a channel for me to connect to my imaginal as a source of creative potential and inspiration. Increased opportunities for creativity

also assisted me to get into “flow” whereby I felt “fully alive” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 8). In this state of flow, I was not distracted by time, competing ideas or by my assumptions and expectations. Rather, I felt focussed, energised, fully immersed in the moment and open to see new possibilities for re-imagining teacher professional learning.

While engaging in creative pastimes was rewarding and enjoyable, on some occasions using these creative means to connect with my unconscious knowledge was challenging. For example, during the course of this study, my preconceived ideas about higher degree studies and how a thesis should be written hindered my experiences of creativity. The dominance of my acquired knowledge “got in the way” of my intuitive and sensory knowledge and imagination. At these times, a feeling of disharmony hampered my experience of creativity and closed me to new learning opportunities. Moreover, as I recorded in an earlier journal (2020), it “took all the joy and inspiration out of my learning experience”.

In a deeply reflective moment after dialogue with my supervisors, I also wondered if my projection of “blame” on external and environmental conditions for not attending to my unconscious knowledge was the intervention of my rational mind once again “taking charge” of the situation. It was possible my rational mind was providing me with an excuse not to disrupt my current ways of being.

The OI approach was well suited to my creative and reflective predispositions as a learner and researcher and made this approach to research conceivable, inspirational and intriguing. However, while it suited

me, I am conscious that this approach may not suit others. As Braud (2004) highlights:

whether Organic Inquiry is an appropriate approach for you depends on the nature of your research project and upon your own characteristics as a researcher. This approach is best suited for topics that have a transpersonal or spiritual dimension, for exploring experiences identical or similar to those that you yourself have had, and for studying topics that have passionate meaning for you. (p. 22)

As a key consideration for educational research in relation to the OI methodology, Braud's (2004) words highlight the unique nature of this approach to research, and how its suitability needs to be carefully considered in connection to the characteristics of the researcher, and to the topic being explored. With my predilection for creativity and reflection, I found the OI approach for research illuminating and inspirational. It helped to expand my knowledge about creativity and its connection to learning, and created an imaginal experience where I felt empowered to re-imagine teacher professional learning.



### **A conclusion to this thesis**

This study engaged me in a deep exploration of human phenomena, specifically creativity and teacher professional learning. Throughout this

study, I was guided by my research question: *How can expanding my understanding of creativity and its connection to learning assist me to re-imagine professional learning for teachers so that their learning experiences are enhanced?*

In Chapters Seven and Eight of this thesis, I have aimed to respond to this question by illuminating how the wealth of insights and new perspectives generated from this study have brought possibilities for re-imagining teacher professional learning to light. Also in these chapters, I have endeavoured to share how the OI approach to this research, along with my insights revealed through this study, have inspired and empowered me to transform my practice as a facilitator of teacher professional learning.

Iterative opportunities for exploration, analysis and meaning making embedded in this study expanded my knowledge and understanding about creativity and its connection to learning. From the holistic experience of this learning (research) I felt inspired and empowered to re-envision and re-imagine teacher professional learning whereby the qualities and principles of the OI approach provide a new framing for this adult learning context.

In particular, my re-envisioned image of teacher professional learning positions each learner's (teacher's) experiences, needs, purpose and motivation at the heart of professional learning events. In the design and facilitation of these experiences, the facilitator should be committed to providing a context for learning whereby teacher-learners have

opportunities to engage in balanced and iterative experiences of creativity, reflection and critical reasoning as they connect with, explore, analyse and make meaning of content in ways that are unique to their context for learning.

Like the OI approach to research, these experiences are underpinned by respect, trust and relationship. I also propose that space and time are needed for teacher learners to prepare themselves for their participation in learning, and to develop imaginal capacities for attending to unconscious and liminal knowledge and insights with openness and sensitivity.

Without question, the research process and deep learning provided through this study was implicit in helping me to clarify and extend my understanding about creativity and its connection to learning, and to see beyond my preconceived ideas and practices in relation to teacher professional learning. While this study affirmed my understanding of the generative and life-fulfilling nature of creativity, as described by Piirto (1998, 2011) and Robinson (2009), and also the importance of the interaction between environmental and unique personal conditions as a source of motivation for creativity and deep learning, it also opened me to new perspectives.

In particular, collective inquiry and personal reflection helped to shed new light on the organic process of creativity; on the interrelationship between creativity and critical reasoning as co-existing and complementary processes for transformative learning; and on the



imaginal as a source for creative potential and unlimited possibilities. Also highlighted through this study and through the OI approach to research was the insight that learning should not be *controlled* by knowledge building or by an imbalanced focus on either creative *or* critical reasoning processes and experiences. Rather, learning that invites transformation needs to be understood as a temporal, flowing and organic experience whereby creative and critical reasoning processes are equally valued experiences *for*, and *as*, learning.

These findings affirmed my earlier feeling of disorientation in response to research, including that by Greene and Yu (2016), that omits to mention the equal importance of creativity and critical reasoning processes for learning. This strengthened my conviction that to re-imagine teacher professional learning, and to enhance teachers' experiences of learning, necessitates an intentional and visible focus on providing balanced and responsive opportunities for creative and critical reasoning processes.

My enhanced realisation about the vital role of imagination for re-envisioning the phenomena of creativity and learning occurred in synchrony with my own learning experience within this study. Although I had not anticipated it at the outset of this study, the OI approach to research led me to an imaginal and transformative learning experience. While it provided me with approaches *for* research and learning, it also generated insights *about* learning. In so doing it illuminated the importance of creativity as a life-giving and generative process within

learning, and as a process that is equally valuable as and complementary to analysis, reasoning and discernment. The OI approach to research also highlighted the significance of its own qualities, principles and ways of working for deep and transformative learning.

In keeping with Smitsman et al.'s (2021) explanation of imaginal learning as a means to shift conditioned modes of thinking, this study supported the "call to action" by researchers such as Beghetto and Karwowski (2019), Netolicky (2016) and Webster-Wright (2009) to focus on re-envisioning and reframing teachers' experiences of learning rather than on seeking to improve the event itself. The potential of imaginal learning for enhancing learning is best summarised by Smitsman et al. (2021):

Even by spending a few minutes a day in an imaginal state of consciousness you can significantly enhance your learning capacities and creative agency. Furthermore, imaginal states of consciousness, by being coherently open and flowing, can help reduce stress and transform rigid thinking patterns and behaviours. (pp. 42–43)

Therefore, in relation to my study and as a contribution to educational research, I propose that re-imagining teacher professional learning should be centred on re-envisioning teachers' experiences of learning. According to the findings and insights revealed through this study, this involves creating respectful space whereby learners' imaginal capacities are developed and fostered. It also involves creating space for learners to engage in learning experiences as unique beings, and with

respectful attention to their unique needs, motivation and purposes for learning.

Re-envisioned learning experiences which draw on the qualities and principles of an OI approach also provide the learner with opportunities to engage recursively and organically in harmonious experiences of creativity, reflection, critical analysis and reasoning as they prepare for and connect with knowledge from the conscious, unconscious and liminal domains. Creativity, as the generative and life-giving catalyst for transformation, is implicit and explicit in my re-envisioned learning experience for teachers.



### **Coda**

My encounter with the lotus in Vietnam inspired me to look at creativity differently. It was the initial catalyst for a flow of experiences which led me to this study. Throughout this research, the image of the lotus as a metaphor for creativity has been vivid in my memory and has been a constant provocation for this study. With my new insights regarding creativity and critical reasoning as co-existing forces for deep learning, and of the imaginal for enhancing these learning experiences, my image

of the lotus has not changed. For me, it will always stay as an inspirational and imaginal image for the potential of creativity.



***Figure 2: The lotus flower in Hoi An, Vietnam***

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## Appendices



## **Appendix A: Email re introduction and expression of interest**

Dear colleagues,

### **Re: opportunity to engage in a study involving creativity and learning**

My name is Desiree Gilbert, and I am an Educational Consultant at the Association of Independent Schools, SA. I know I will be familiar to many of you if you have engaged in Numeracy professional learning, Moderation for learning and Learning Design projects, ChallenGE, STEM projects and NAPLAN, over the last eight years.

I am contacting you to let you know about my higher degree studies and self-inquiry research project.

My studies are focussing on how an expanded understanding of our own experiences of creativity can activate learner self-agency where the learner uses initiative and self-regulation to actively create knowledge, understanding and new ideas. I want to use my expanded understanding to improve the way I design and implement professional learning sessions for teachers.

I am hoping to find some teachers, either primary or secondary, who would be willing to work with me early next year to engage in a relaxed professional dialogue about experiences and understanding of creativity and relating stories about developing and enhancing creativity in our learning environments with students. This would involve three 2-hour focus group sessions early next year, in an informal setting. These would be scheduled after school hours and at a central location (with coffee, tea and cake!). Some between session personal reflection will also be required.

Participating teachers would be invited to apply the insights gained from discussions into their own learning environments and so foster and enhance creativity with their own students. No teacher names or names of schools will be mentioned in the final publication.

Please contact me via return email if you are interested in finding out more about this study by the end of term. I will then send you an information sheet and consent form. Please contact me by telephone or email if you have any questions.

There is no obligation of course to participate.

Regards

Desiree Gilbert

M: XXX E:XXX

## Appendix B: Communication to participants

**Leigh Burrows (PhD)Author**  
**Post Nominals**  
Senior Author Position  
Flinders University  
Location Address  
GPO Box2100  
Adelaide SA 5001  
Telephone  
+61 8201  
3022

To Whom it May Concern

This letter is to introduce you to Desiree Gilbert, a student of mine who is currently undertaking a Master of Arts by Research which involves the creation of a research project and resulting thesis. Her research is focusing on how an expanded understanding of creativity can activate learner self-agency where the learner uses initiative and self-regulation to actively create knowledge, understanding and new ideas.

Desiree aims to use her expanded understanding of creativity to improve the way she designs and implements professional learning sessions for teachers.

Desiree is seeking participation from teachers, either primary or secondary, early next year to engage in professional dialogue with her and a maximum of six other teachers from independent schools, SA, about experiences of creativity. This would involve three 2-hour focus group sessions early next year. These would be scheduled after school hours and at a central location. Some between session reflection would also be required.

Participating teachers would be invited to apply the insights gained from discussions into their own learning environments and so foster and enhance creativity with their own students. No teacher names or names of schools will be mentioned in the final publication.

For more information about this please contact either Desiree Gilbert or myself via [gilb0077@flinders.edu.au](mailto:gilb0077@flinders.edu.au) or [leigh.burrows@flinders.edu.au](mailto:leigh.burrows@flinders.edu.au) or telephone XXX

Yours sincerely

*Leigh Burrows*

Leigh Burrows (PhD)

5 December 2018

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 8132). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au).*

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## **INFORMATION SHEET**

*(For focus groups)*

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**Title: Re-Imagining Professional Learning: How an Organic Exploration of Creativity and its Connection to Learning Illuminates New Possibilities.**

### **Researcher(s)**

Mrs Desiree Gilbert

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work Flinders University

E: gilb0077@flinders.edu.au

### **Supervisor(s)**

Dr Leigh Burrows

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work Flinders University

Tel: 82013022

Dr Michael Bell

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Tel: 82012266

### **Description of the study**

This study is part of the project titled *An organic study of creativity: exploring how an expanded awareness of the phenomenon impacts teacher professional learning*.

The project is an exploration of the phenomenon of creativity and its role as a catalyst for learner agency and sustained transformative learning in the context of professional learning. Educational literature by theorists including Cropley (2011), Kaufman and Sternberg (2007), Piirto (1998, 2011) and Robinson (2009) provides a foundation for this study.

This project is supported by the College of Education, Psychology and Social Work, Flinders University.

## **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the proposed study is to engage in an open exploration of the phenomenon of creativity through personal reflection, dialogue and storytelling with colleagues as co-researchers from a selection of Independent Schools in South Australia. The formal study will use reflective practices to reflect on how raised personal awareness of creativity might foster and catalyse the phenomenon in others. These reflections will be used to inform and improve the way I engage teachers in professional learning, improve my teaching practice and therefore model and inspire others to do likewise.

## **What will I be asked to do?**

You are invited to attend 3 focus group sessions and engage in between-session reflection and activity. Participation is entirely voluntary.

**Venue:** at a neutral and central location outside of work hours (4.00 pm–6.00 pm). This information will be communicated as soon as teachers as participants are identified by the researcher and asap.

**When:** Semester 1, 2019 tba

## **Focus group 1**

The first focus group will be focused on developing relationship and an environment of trust, honesty and commitment to personal and collaborative exploration of the phenomenon. The aims and outcomes of the study will be shared by the researcher (me), and teachers will be invited to reflect on their personal or professional purpose for participation.

## **Between focus group 1 and 2 task – individual**

Between focus group one and two (over a period of three weeks) each co-researcher will be asked to record his or her story/lived personal and/or professional experience of creativity. Teachers will be asked to send these via email to the researcher at least three days before the second focus group and to bring a copy to share at the session.

## **Focus group 2**

The purpose of this session will be for the researcher to facilitate collaborative dialogue where all teachers will be invited to share their lived experiences by sharing excerpts from their individual narratives to the group. Time will also be provided in this session for each co-researcher to identify a project involving the identification, re-imagining and implementation of a learning experience that has been enhanced to provide time and space for creativity (see details below).

### **Between focus groups 2 and 3**

Teachers will be asked to implement their bespoke projects. The co-researchers will be asked to journal their experiences (see details below).

### **Focus group 3**

Teachers will be asked to reflect upon their projects in relation to their knowledge, understanding and experience of creativity.

### **In-school project details**

This project will involve the identification, re-imagining and implementation of a learning experience that has been enhanced to provide time and space for creativity.

- The project should not make extra work for the teacher.
- The learning focus should be part of the current program for learning.
- The project need not involve more than one learning experience.
- A creative product is not required.

Teachers will be:

- Supported in focus group session two to plan this learning experience.
- Asked to implement their bespoke projects between focus groups sessions two and three (period of four weeks).
- Asked to journal their experiences and reflections based on this project. This will involve: explaining their project; how they re-imagined their learning experience to foster and cultivate creativity.
- Asked to reflect upon their projects in a focus group session in relation to their knowledge, understanding and experience of creativity.

The focus group sessions may be audio recorded using a digital voice recorder. Once recorded, the recording will be transcribed (typed up) and stored as a computer file. Audio tapes will be kept for 5 years.

### **What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?**

As part of the study, you will be invited to engage in a parallel exploration of the phenomenon and may choose to use insights gained during dialogue in focus groups and self-reflection to foster and enhance creativity in your own learning contexts.

By planning the bespoke project, you will have the opportunity to use insights gained through collaborative dialogue in your own context and explore the impact of creativity on your students' learning.

### **Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?**

The collaborative nature of the focus group sessions will mean that your identity will be known to me, as the researcher, and other teachers engaging in these sessions. However, as participation is voluntary, you will have full control of what you choose to share and reflect upon in these sessions and in what is included in the final publication.

No names of schools or teachers will be used in the publication (thesis) and I will only use first names in my note taking. These will not be used in the final publication where teachers will be provided with a pseudonym. Schools will not be named. The information provided will state that teachers are from an Independent School in SA.

On completion of the research, the notes taken during sessions will be stored securely for a period of five years, after which all files, electronic and hard copy, will be destroyed.

*NB: As the sample size of teachers participating as co-researchers in the study is very small, it may be impossible to guarantee participant anonymity and confidentiality, although every attempt to do so will be made.*

### **Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?**

I anticipate that there will be few or minimal risks or discomforts from your involvement in this study. You may find my note taking intrusive but although I apologise for this, I do need to focus my research on gathering your reflections and stories. I will always respect and respond to your concerns and hope that we can work together to make the study a positive experience.

*NB: As participation in the project is voluntary, you may withdraw from the study at any time.*

### **How do I agree to participate?**

- Reading this information sheet carefully.
- Clarify any questions you may have by return email.
- Signing the Consent for participation in research form.
- Providing name and email contact details.
- Completing the attached questionnaire.



I have attached a Consent for participation in research form with this information sheet and a brief questionnaire. If you agree to participate, please read and sign the form and return it to me by email:  
[gilb0077@flinders.edu.au](mailto:gilb0077@flinders.edu.au)

### **What happens next?**

If you have agreed to participate, I will be in contact via email asap.

If you have decided not to participate, no further communication will be made.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and I hope you will accept my invitation to be involved.**

**Regards**

**Desiree Gilbert**

**E: [gilb0077@flinders.edu.au](mailto:gilb0077@flinders.edu.au)**

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet, and I hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number: 8132).*

Mrs Desiree Gilbert

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Sturt Road

Bedford Park SA 5042

GPO Box 2100

Adelaide SA 5001

[gilb0077@flinders.edu.au](mailto:gilb0077@flinders.edu.au)

CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

*For more information regarding ethical approval of the project only, the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on (08) 8201 3116, by fax on (08) 8201 2035, or by email to [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)*



## CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

(Focus Group)

**Re-Imagining Professional Learning: How an Organic  
Exploration of Creativity and its Connection to Learning  
Illuminates New Possibilities**

I

.....

...

being over the age of 18 years, hereby consent to participate as requested in the focus group for the research project with the title listed above.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. I understand that:
  - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
  - Participation is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw from the project at any time; and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
  - While no identifying information will be published, due to the nature of focus groups anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

- Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on any treatment or service that is being provided to me.
6. I understand that only the researchers on this project will have access to my research data and raw results; unless I explicitly provide consent for it to be shared with other parties

**Participant's name**.....

**Participant's signature**.....**Date**.....

I, the researcher certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

**Researcher's name**.....

**Researcher's signature**.....**Date**.....

*NB: Two signed copies should be obtained.*

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project 8132). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project please contact the Executive Officer on (08) 8201 3116 or [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)*



**College of  
Education,  
Psychology and  
Social Work**

GPO Box 2100  
Adelaide SA 5001

**Re-Imagining Professional Learning: How an  
Organic Exploration of Creativity and its  
Connection to Learning Illuminates New Possibilities**

**Please respond to the below questions:**

What interests you about the experience of creativity?

Where has a personal experience of creativity impacted on your life (e.g., learning, teaching, enjoyment)?

How have you intentionally tried to enhance student's creativity in your classroom?

Participants name: .....

Participants signature: .....

Date: .....

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number:8132). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au)

## Appendix C: List of participants

Pseudonym	Educational context	Participation in the study	Initial "view" or understanding of creativity	Creative "outlet"
Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High fees.</li> <li>• Well-resourced.</li> <li>• Metropolitan (Northeast).</li> <li>• All-girls Early Learning to Year 12 school: supporting students requiring an extended curriculum.</li> </ul>	Participation through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four face-to-face creativity hubs.</li> <li>• One hub to share and discuss findings.</li> <li>• Between-hub reflection and classroom activity.</li> </ul>	Interested in the possibilities that creativity holds and in the need for creative minds in the future.	Gardening
Isabella	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High fees.</li> <li>• Well-resourced.</li> <li>• Metropolitan (CBD)</li> <li>• All-boys Early Learning to Year 12 school: junior primary teacher.</li> </ul>	Participation through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three face-to-face creativity hubs.</li> <li>• One individual meeting at the end of the data-gathering phase.</li> <li>• Informal discussion about findings.</li> <li>• Between-hub reflection and classroom activity.</li> </ul>	Exploration, the use of imagination, a feeling of freedom, individualism and seeing the beauty in things. She described creativity as a source of energy, positivity and happiness.	Photography
Claire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High fees.</li> <li>• Well-resourced.</li> <li>• Metropolitan (Southwest)</li> <li>• Co-educational Early Learning Centre to Year 12 school: works with highly able primary students.</li> </ul>	Participation through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three face-to-face creativity hubs.</li> <li>• One individual meeting at the end of the data-gathering phase.</li> <li>• Face-to-face discussion about findings.</li> <li>• Between-hub reflection and</li> </ul>	In awe about the level of creativity some highly-able students produce – especially the twice-exceptional students.  Does the mindset of students who find flexibility and fluency of thinking difficult	Teaching and learning

		classroom activity.	block their creativity?	
Andrea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid fees</li> <li>• Mid-resourcing.</li> <li>• Metropolitan (Northeast)</li> <li>• Foundation to Year 12 faith-based school: Year 12 teacher and mentor (0.2). Christian educational organisation: senior position supporting professional learning for teachers (0.8).</li> </ul>	Participation through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One face-to-face creativity hub.</li> <li>• One virtual creativity hub (Zoom).</li> <li>• Between-hub reflection.</li> </ul>	Interested in the phenomenon of creativity and a personal commitment to support ongoing learning and research.	Walking
Sophia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid fees</li> <li>• Mid-resourcing</li> <li>• Metropolitan (South)</li> <li>• Co-educational Foundation to Year 12 school: secondary English teacher.</li> </ul>	Participation through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One face-to-face creativity hub.</li> </ul>	Creativity is connected to complex solution finding and brings joy to a situation. It liberates.	Travel, photography, free expression and choice
Grace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid fees</li> <li>• Well-resourced.</li> <li>• Metropolitan (East)</li> <li>• Co-educational middle school (Years 6–12) context: teacher of English and Christian Education.</li> </ul>	Participation through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two face-to-face individual meetings.</li> <li>• Between-hub reflection and classroom activity.</li> </ul>	Creativity involves the development of analytical skills and having the ability to switch these off so that creativity can come to the foreground.  Creativity is the magic within us that is waiting to come out.	Needlework and knitting

Alicia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low fees</li> <li>• Mid-resourcing</li> <li>• Adelaide Hills</li> <li>• Primary school context: art, music and drama teacher.</li> </ul>	Participation through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email correspondence</li> </ul>	Passion for all things creative.	Art, music and drama
Me	Association of Independent Schools of South Australia: Senior Educational Consultant	Participation through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four face-to-face creativity hubs.</li> <li>• Five individual meetings.</li> <li>• One informal and one arranged discussion about findings.</li> <li>• One virtual creativity hub (Zoom).</li> <li>• One hub to share and discuss findings.</li> <li>• Email correspondence.</li> <li>• Between-hub reflection and workplace activity (designing and implementing professional learning).</li> </ul>	Creativity is a human disposition and a way of being.	Watercolour painting

## Appendix D: Creativity hub emails

### Creativity hub 2



#### **Re-Imagining Professional Learning: How an Organic Exploration of Creativity and its Connection to Learning Illuminates New Possibilities**

Desiree Gilbert

School of Education, Flinders University

**The second focus group** will be focused on sharing journal stories.

Time will also be provided in this session for each co-researcher (participant) to identify a project involving the identification, re-imagining and implementation of a learning experience that has been enhanced to provide time and space for creativity (see details below).

Date: Thursday 9 May 2019, 4.00 pm – 6.00 pm

Venue: XXX

E:

#### **Between focus groups 2 and 3**

Teachers will be asked to implement their bespoke projects. The co-researchers will be asked to journal their experiences (see details below).

#### **Looking ahead: Focus group 3**

Teachers will be asked to reflect upon their projects in relation to their knowledge, understanding and experience of creativity.

#### **In-school project details**

This project will involve the identification, re-imagining and implementation of a learning experience that has been enhanced to provide time and space for creativity.

- The project should not make extra work for the teacher.
- The learning focus should be part of the current program for learning.



- The project need not involve more than one learning experience.
- A creative product is not required.

*I will send an email reminder ten days before the third focus group and may contact you in between sessions to see how your action research is going.*

*Please email or ring me any time if you have any questions or ideas that you want to share!*

**Key interest areas that arose in focus group 1 – these could be used as a focus for your in-school action research/project:**

- How can I engage students in a liminal space where they can engage creatively? What does this look like and if we get them there what do we do? What do they do?
- How can I integrate creative play into what we do? How do I fit this into my classroom timetable?
- How can I give students a sense of freedom – for creative engagement/problem solving?
- How can I shift students to have an option focus rather than an answer focus – value creativity?
- How can I incorporate more time and space for creativity in my lessons?
- Does divergent thinking engage students in creativity?
- How can I focus on creating a spark or hook that engages students in creativity?
- If school/classroom agendas and timetables block creativity – how can I work around this or within this?
- How can I create learning experiences where students are engaged using senses, feelings, intuition and rational thinking to enhance and foster creativity?
- ... or whatever you are interested in ...

### **Creativity hub 3**



**An organic study of creativity: exploring how an expanded awareness of the phenomenon may influence teacher professional learning**

Desiree Gilbert

School of Education, Flinders University

**The third focus group** will be focused on sharing journal stories and reflecting upon:

- a learning experience that has been re-imagined or enhanced to provide time and space for creativity.

#### **Questions for reflection:**

- How did it feel for you?
- What did you notice?

**Date:** Creativity Hub 3: Tuesday 25 June 2019, 4.00 pm – 6.00 pm

Venue

E:

#### **Key reflections from Focus group 1 and 2 for your interest:**

- How can I engage students in a liminal space where they can engage creatively? What does this look like and if we get them there what do we do? What do they do?
- How can I integrate creative play into what we do? How do I fit this into my classroom timetable?
- How can I give students a sense of freedom – for creative engagement/problem solving?
- How can I shift students to have an option focus rather than an answer focus – value creativity?
- How can I incorporate more time and space for creativity in my lessons?
- Does divergent thinking engage students in creativity?
- How can I focus on creating a spark or hook that engages students in creativity?

- If school/classroom agendas and timetables block creativity – how can I work around this or within this?
- How can I create learning experiences where students are engaged using senses, feelings, intuition and rational thinking to enhance and foster creativity?
- Does boredom spark creativity?
- How does clutter get in the way of creativity? Or doesn't it ...?
- How can I work within boundaries and structures to create the time and space for creativity?
- ... or whatever you are interested in ...

D. Gilbert June 2019

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number: 8132).

## **Appendix E: Meaning seeking/guiding questions for focus group sessions**

### ***Focus group 1: Guiding questions:***

1. How do you feel about this narrative? What parts of it make you curious?
2. What does this narrative make you think about?
3. How might this narrative connect with your own experiences?

### ***Focus group 2: Guiding questions:***

1. If you 'step back' from your previous story, does this new narrative look/sound/feel different/same? In what ways?
2. Are there alternative interpretations to consider?
3. What connections can I make between the new narrative and insights gained from being a co-researcher in the study?
4. How would I do things differently?

## Appendix F: Creativity Reflection Protocol

*Think of an occasion where you were experiencing creativity -*

<i>In this situation I was ...</i>	<i>Making a difference</i>	<i>Deeply engaged</i>	<i>Organised</i>
<i>Acting autonomously</i>	<i>Playing with ideas</i>	<i>Thinking of ways to support others</i>	<i>Aware of time constraints</i>
<i>Problem solving</i>	<i>Under pressure</i>	<i>Making a difference</i>	<i>Had purpose</i>
<i>Bored</i>	<i>Being true to myself</i>	<i>Making my own decisions</i>	<i>Was intrigued</i>
<i>With like-minded people</i>	<i>Looking for ways forward</i>	<i>Had choice</i>	<i>Contributing to success</i>
<i>Under pressure</i>	<i>Opening up possibilities</i>	<i>Felt free</i>	<i>Alone</i>

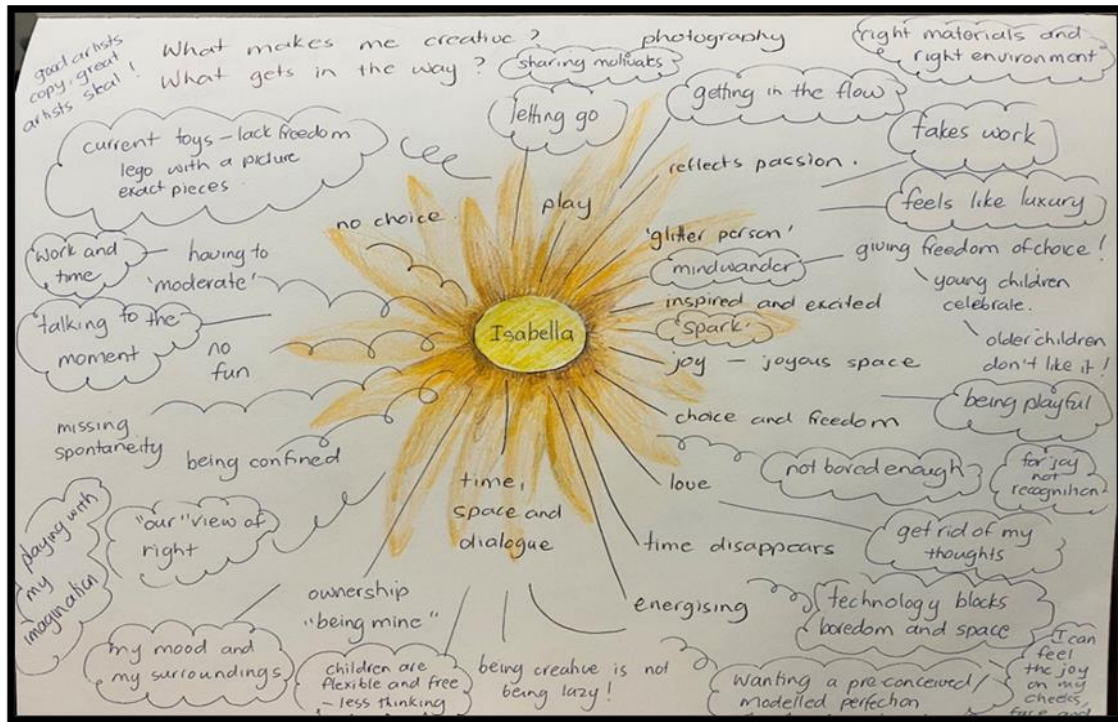
<i>In this situation others ...</i>	<i>Were problem solving with me</i>	<i>Were deeply engaged in their own work/ play</i>	<i>Asked questions</i>
<i>Gave me space</i>	<i>Were "firing off" ideas with me</i>	<i><u>Were</u> playing with ideas</i>	<i>Of a like -mind</i>
<i>Acknowledged my contribution/s</i>	<i>Were connected with me</i>	<i>Offered feedback</i>	<i>Encouraged my passion</i>
<i>Respectful of my ideas and choices</i>	<i><u>Were</u> collaborating</i>	<i>Kept me on track</i>	<i>Hindered distractions</i>
<i>Patient</i>	<i><u>Were</u> being clear</i>	<i>Were positive and encouraging</i>	
<i><u>Were</u> contributing</i>	<i>Were open to new ideas</i>	<i>Were quiet</i>	

<i>In this situation, what was important about the situation / context</i>	<i>Exploration was encouraged</i>	<i>Processes allowed for new ways forward</i>	<i>It encouraged curiosity and exploration</i>
<i>It provided space</i>	<i>Ideas were valued</i>	<i>There was good structure</i>	<i>It had timelines</i>
<i>It provided time</i>	<i>Individual voice was valued</i>	<i>The purpose was shared and understood</i>	<i>It was collaborative</i>
<i>I had opportunity to work alone</i>	<i>A diversity of views was important</i>	<i>It was uncluttered</i>	<i>Encouraged dialogue</i>
<i>I had opportunity to work with others</i>	<i>There were options open to me</i>	<i>Not too many resources</i>	<i>Scaffolded success</i>

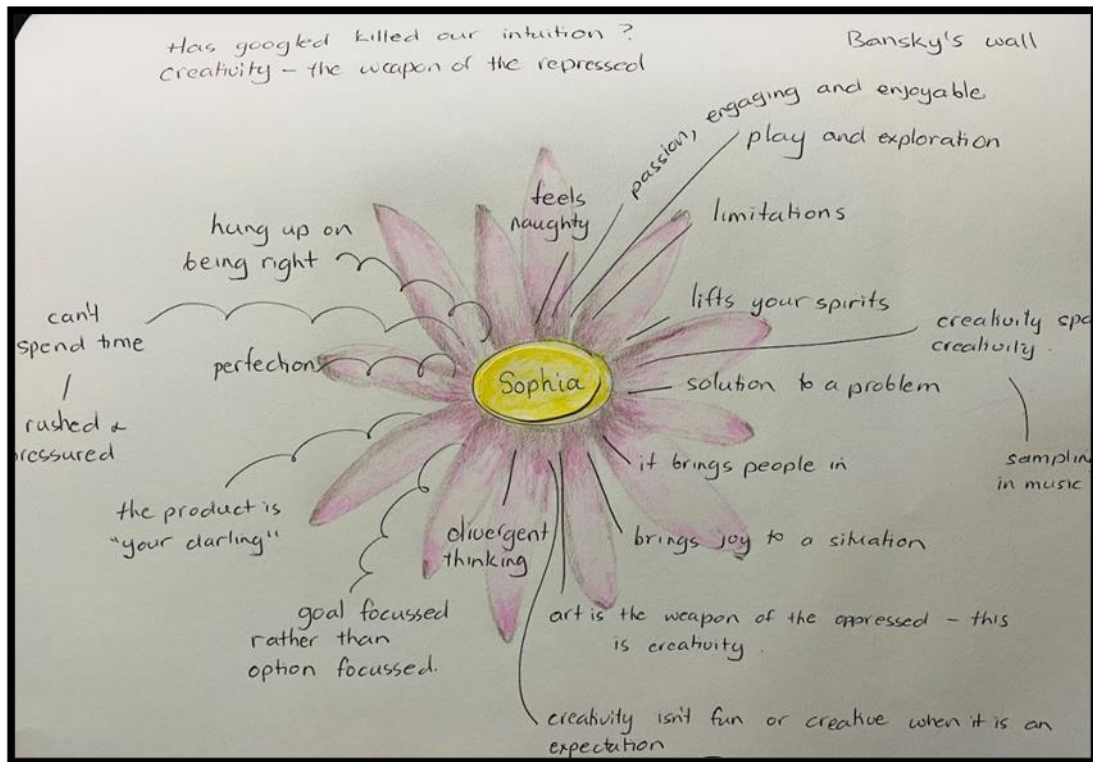
D. Gilbert

Adapted from Habel, S., & Bell, M. (2015). Generative Leadership Strengths. Unpublished

## Appendix G: Analysis of data – Images and tables



**Figure 3: Data from Isabella**



**Figure 4: Data from Sophia**









Figure 7: Data from Olivia

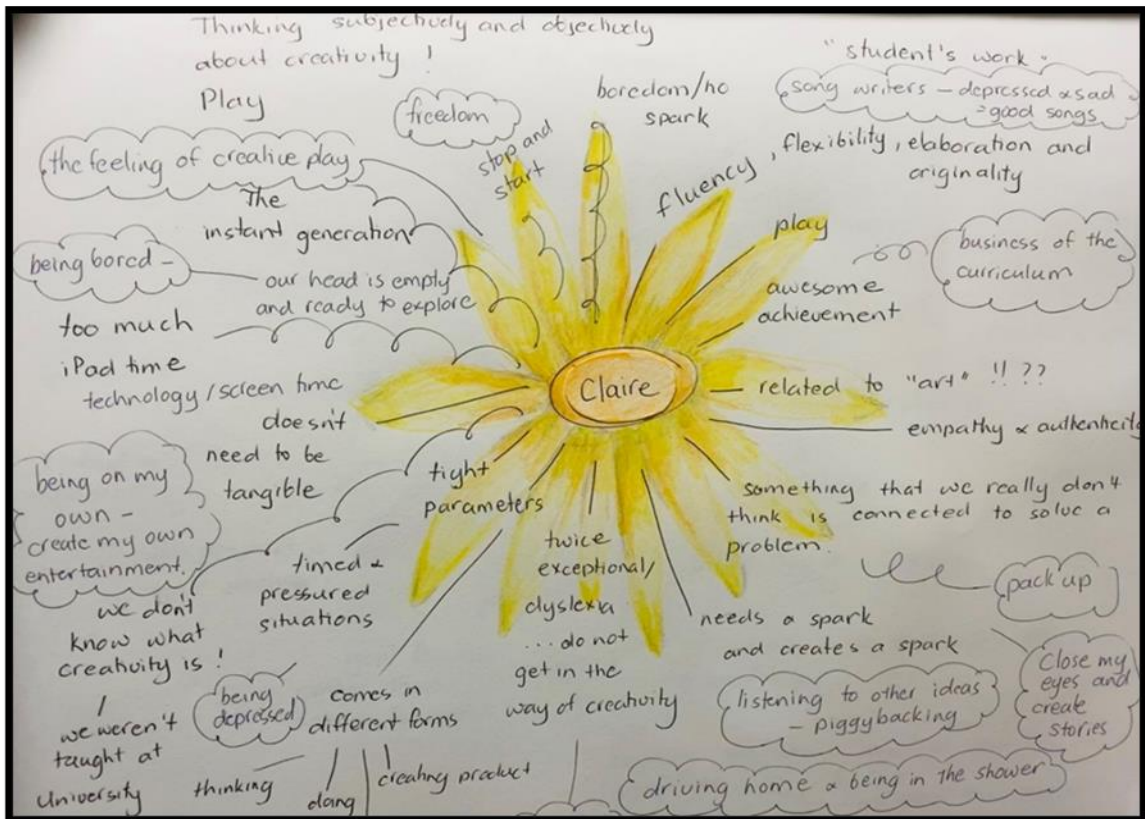
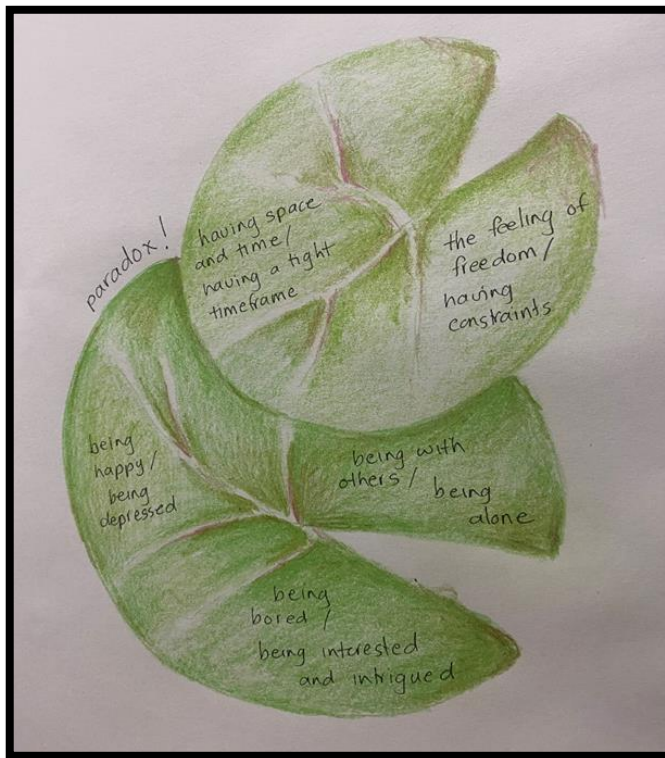


Figure 8: Data from Claire



**Figure 9: Data analysis 1**



**Figure 10: Data analysis 2**

What fosters and enhances creativity	What hinders creativity?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I felt bored</li> <li>• I had space</li> <li>• I was deeply engaged</li> <li>• I had time</li> <li>• I felt free</li> <li>• I was alone</li> <li>• I was with others</li> <li>• I felt I was making a difference</li> <li>• I felt pressured</li> <li>• I felt challenged and energised</li> <li>• I had purpose</li> <li>• I was trusted</li> <li>• I was able to play with ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too much control and feeling confined</li> <li>• Too busy / no time between</li> <li>• Being tired</li> <li>• Over planning and thinking</li> <li>• Too much "stuff"</li> <li>• No room or space to imagine</li> <li>• Boxing creativity</li> <li>• Interruptions</li> <li>• No room for spontaneity</li> <li>• Too many resources</li> <li>• Not valuing wait time</li> <li>• Being judged</li> <li>• Pressured space</li> </ul>

What can foster, enhances and hinder creativity? (Depending on the individual, the time, the context ...)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ the feeling of freedom / having constraints</li> <li>❖ having space and time / having a tight timeframe</li> <li>❖ being with others / being alone</li> <li>❖ being bored / being interested and intrigued</li> <li>❖ being happy / being depressed</li> </ul>



## Appendix H: Participants' responses to the Creativity Reflection

### Protocol

Think of an occasion where you were experiencing creativity ...			
	In this situation I was ...	In this situation others ...	In this situation, what was important about the situation/ context?
Claire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Problem solving</li> <li>○ Had purpose</li> <li>○ Making my own decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Gave me space</li> <li>○ Encouraged my passion</li> <li>○ Were respectful of my ideas and choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ideas were valued</li> <li>○ There was good structure</li> <li>○ It provided space</li> </ul>
Isabella	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Felt free</li> <li>○ Playing with ideas</li> <li>○ Had choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Encouraged my passion</li> <li>○ Gave me space</li> <li>○ Acknowledged my contribution/s</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It was uncluttered</li> <li>○ I had opportunity to work alone</li> <li>○ I had opportunity to work with others</li> </ul>
Grace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Being true to myself</li> <li>○ Making a difference</li> <li>○ Thinking of ways to support others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Of a like mind</li> <li>○ Respectful of my ideas and choices</li> <li>○ Were positive and encouraging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ideas were valued</li> <li>○ There were options open to me</li> <li>○ Not too many resources</li> </ul>
Olivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Felt free</li> <li>○ Playing with ideas</li> <li>○ Opening up possibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Respectful of my ideas and choices</li> <li>○ Gave me space</li> <li>○ Were "firing off" ideas with me</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ There were options open to me</li> <li>○ It encouraged curiosity and exploration</li> <li>○ Ideas were valued</li> </ul>

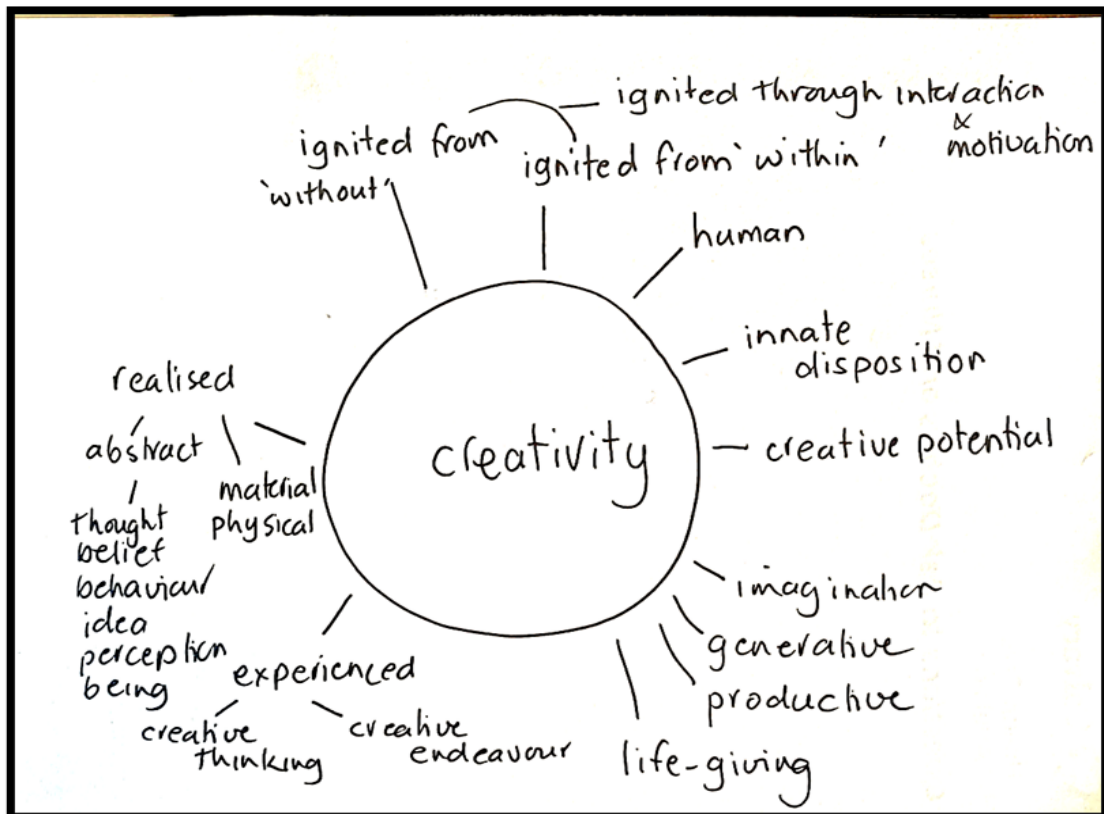
## Appendix I: Environmental and personal conditions

Environmental conditions that foster and enhance creativity	Personal conditions that foster and enhance creativity
Time constraints	Had purpose
Free time	Was invested
Space	Felt organised
Ambiance	Had choice
Invites cognitive engagement and problem solving	Felt pressured
Not too many resources	Had choice
Interesting	Intrinsically motivated
Strong culture of risk taking	Bored
Allow for being alone	Belief in oneself – ideas are valued
Allow for collective inquiry	Felt free
Encourage sharing and perspective taking	Confident to be different
Respectful	Feel the spark igniting
Relational	Confident to play
Makes time for reflection	Feel acknowledged
Collaborative	Feel connected
Value space for creativity	Feel passion
Value space and time for reflection	Depressed
Value play	Openness
Values questions	Unsettled
Provides clarity	Disoriented/disrupted
Safe	Excited/stimulated

Provides positive/encouraging feedback	
Exploration was encouraged	
Encouraged curiosity and exploration	
Ideas are valued	
It had timelines	
There was good structure	
Individual voice was valued	
Opportunity to work alone	
It was uncluttered	
Encourages dialogue	
Pause time	

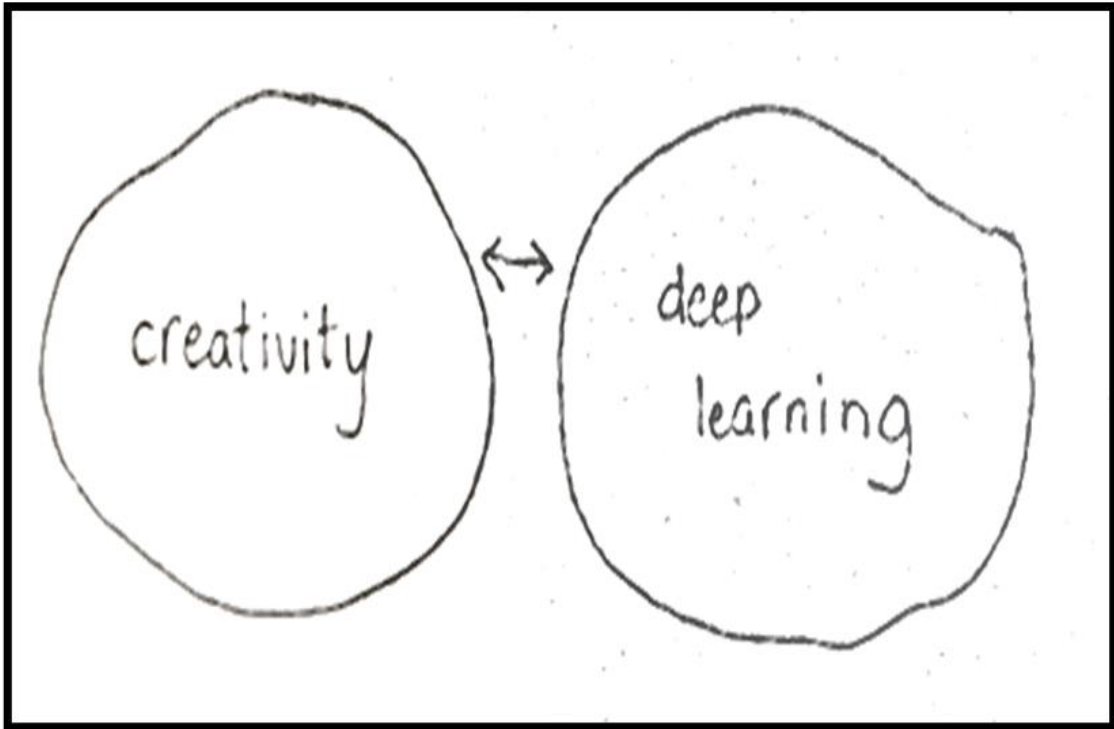
## Appendix J: Drawings to assist meaning making

Drawing, as a strategy for reflection and contemplation, helped me to make meaning of my findings. Figure 11 represents my expanded knowledge about creativity after analysing and interpreting research data gathered during and between creativity hubs and one-on-one meetings with participants.



**Figure 11: Creativity – Expanded knowledge through exploration**

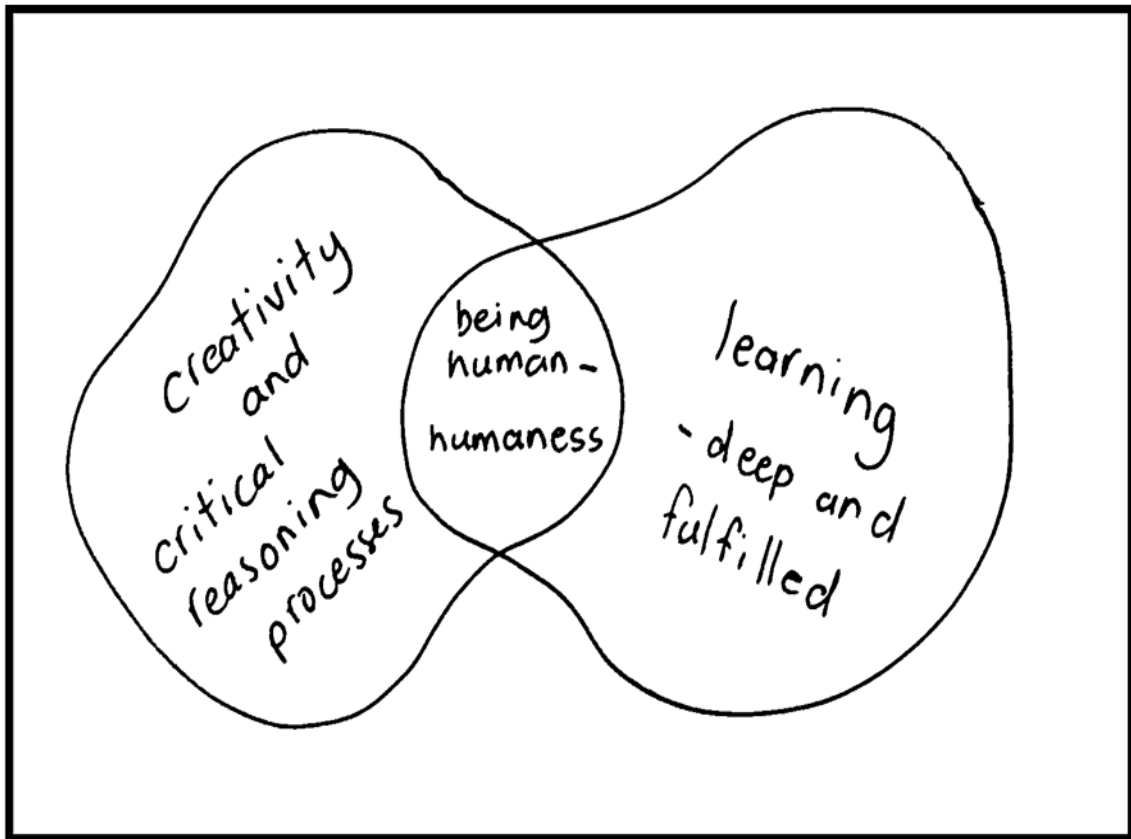
Figure 12 depicts how my increased knowledge about creativity as a generative and productive experience and process enhanced my perception of the synonymity between creativity and learning.



***Figure 12: The synonymity between creativity and learning***

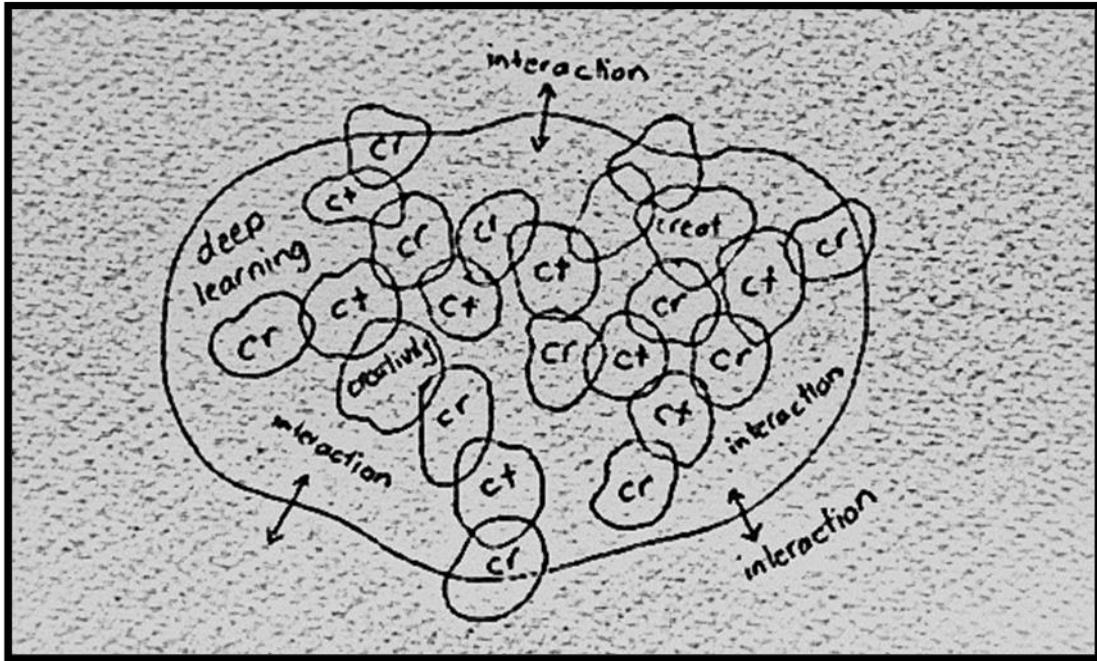
To help me make sense of my re-envisioned image of the interconnection between divergent human phenomena including creativity and critical reasoning processes, and learning, I experimented with different drawings. Initially I represented my understanding of the connection between creativity and critical reasoning processes as interlocking forms (Figure 13) connected by the humanness of the experiences.





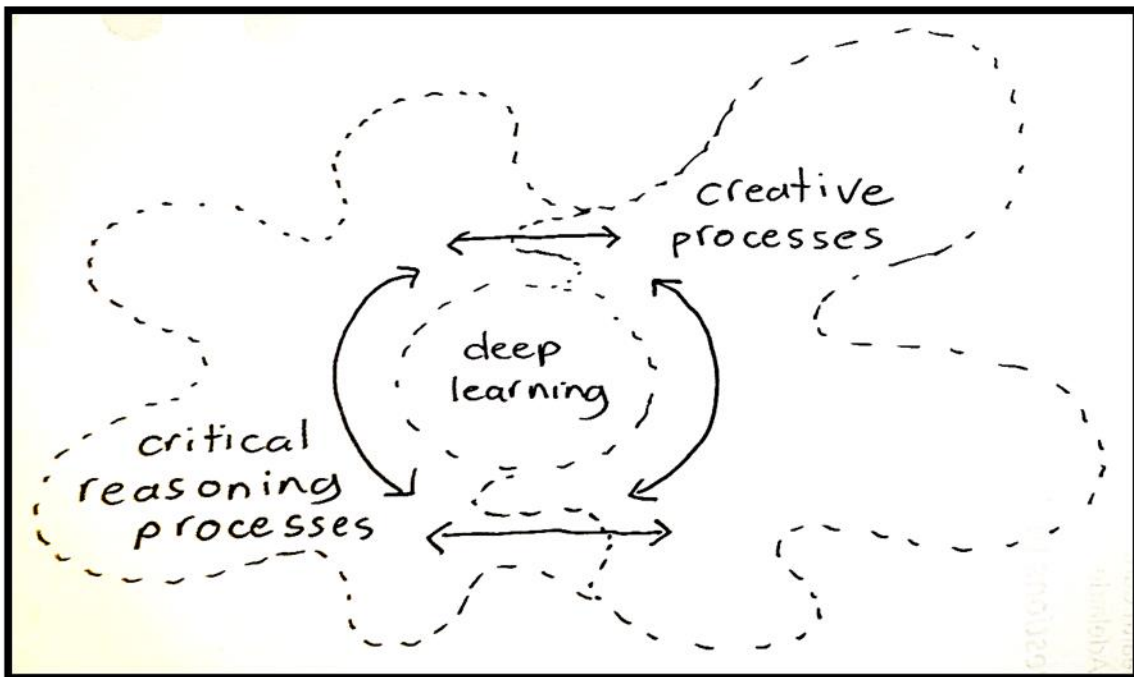
**Figure 13: The interconnection between creativity and deep learning**

Over time, I re-created this image and created Image 4 to better depict my sense of the harmonious interconnection between human phenomena. Drawing Figure 14 helped me to visualise the interconnection between synchronous experiences of creativity (CR) and critical thinking (CT) in relation to the optimal experience of learning.



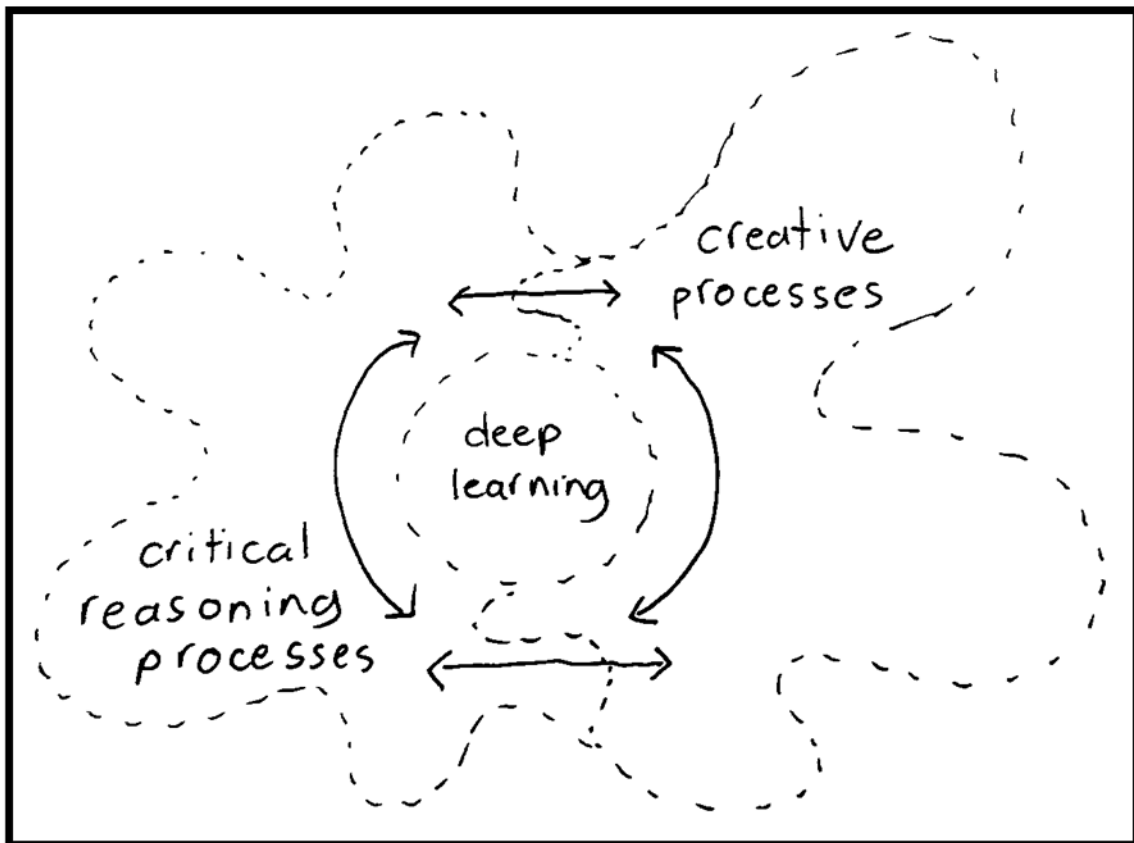
**Figure 14: Creativity (CR) and critical thinking (CT) as synchronous experiences**

In drawing Figure 15 I intuitively used broken lines as a way to illustrate my sharpened awareness of the organic and fluid interplay between creativity and critical reasoning as generative experiences.



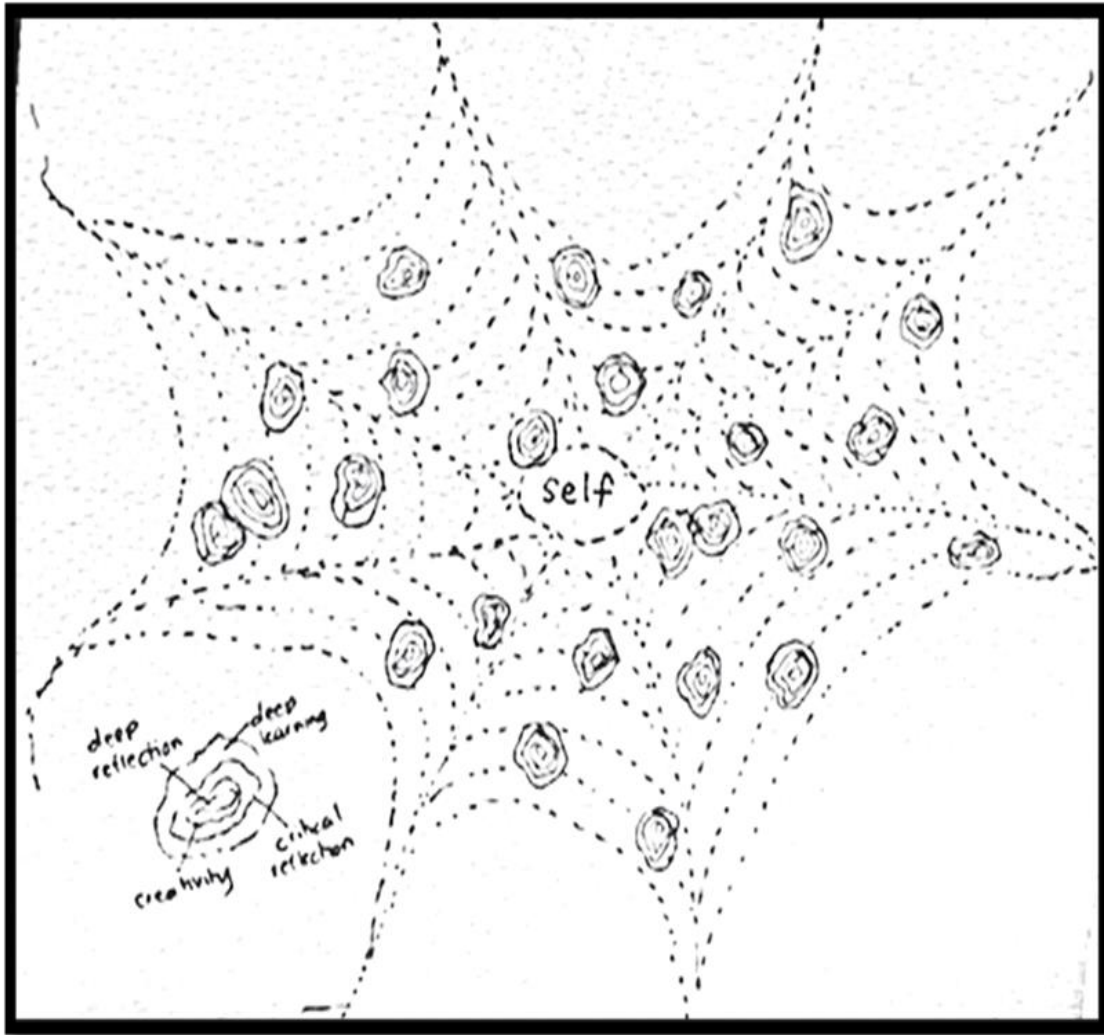
**Figure 15: Enhancing the experience of learning for teachers through the harmonious union between opposite forces (creativity and critical reasoning)**

Playing with, tweaking and reworking previous images resulted in Figure 16. This image illuminates the vital role of reflection as being at the heart of satisfying and potentially transformative experiences of creativity, critical reflection and learning.



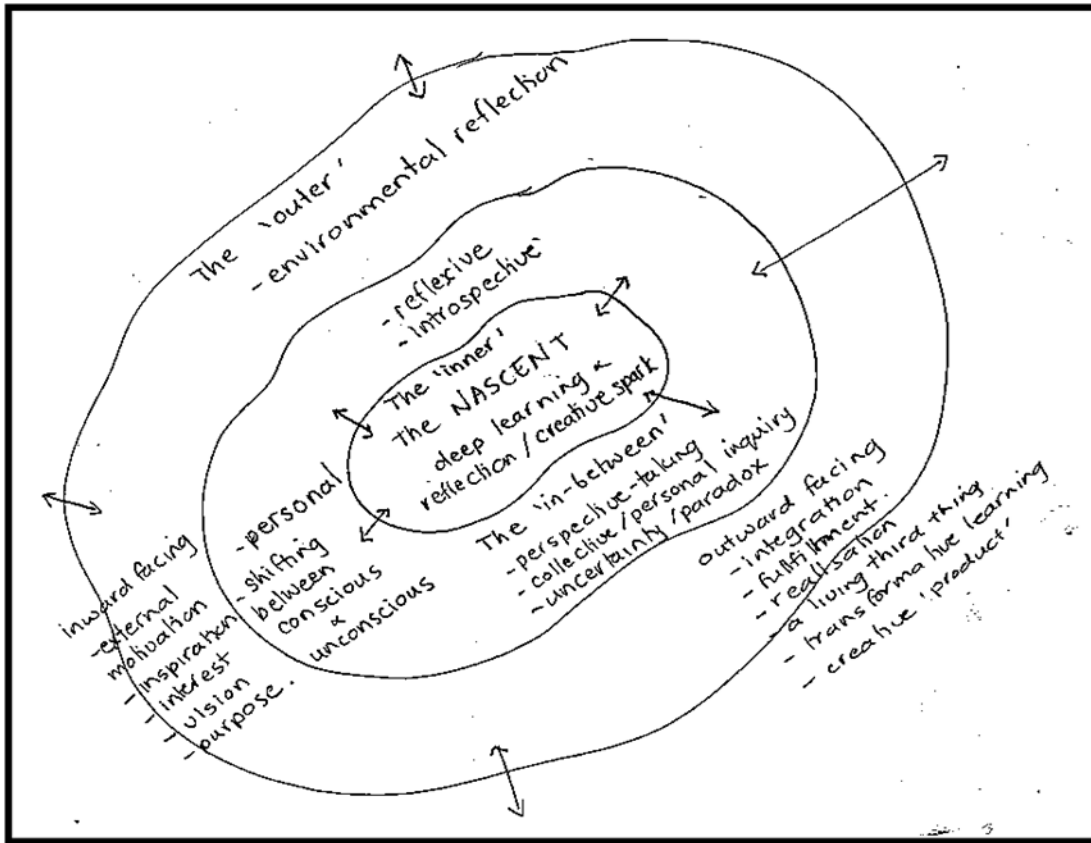
**Figure 16: Reflection as being at the heart of satisfying and potentially transformative experiences of creativity, critical reflection and learning**

I continued to draw – and created Figure 17. This image represents my view of learning as an interconnected web. In this web deep reflection, creativity and critical reasoning interact. At the centre of this web, I saw myself. I realised that to re-imagine teacher professional learning I also needed to re-imagine myself.

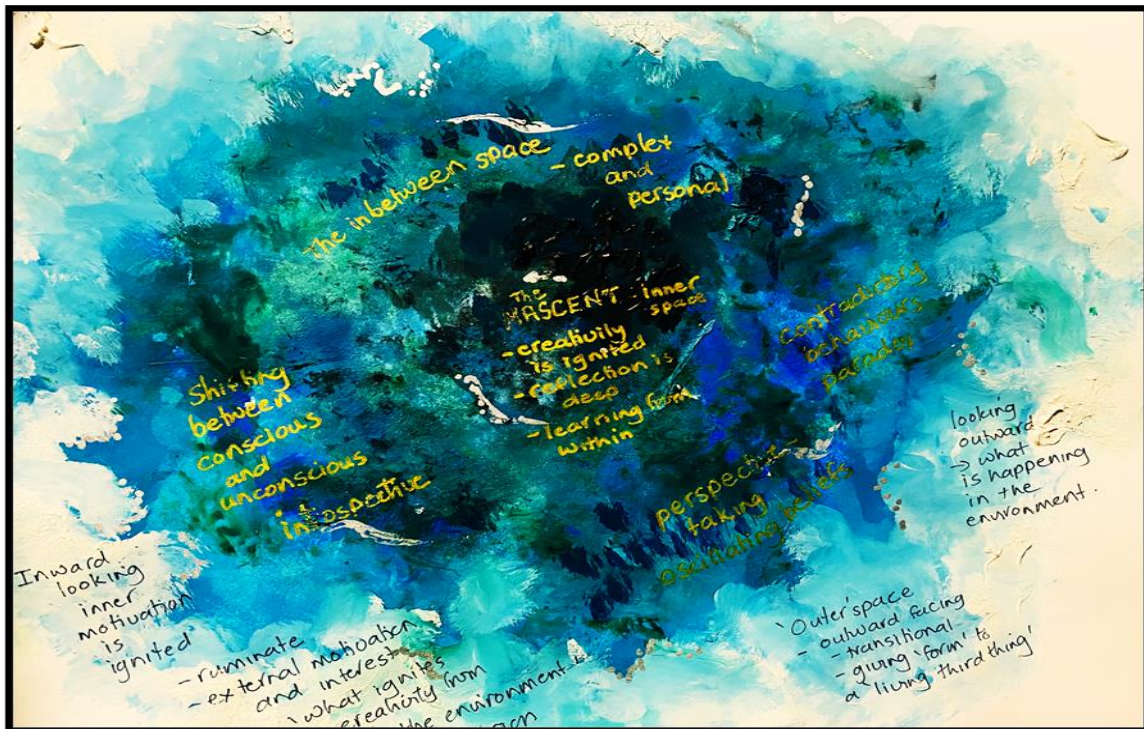


**Figure 17: Self at the core of an interconnected web of human experiences**

Further drawing (Figure 18) helped me to become aware of a deeper insight emerging from my research. This insight was centred on my apperception of the imaginal as a “field of possibilities” (Bottici, 2015, p. 70) and as an untapped but nascent source for creativity, learning and re-imagining. I drew this an outline at first, then I recreated it using colours. The colours helped me to see the synchrony between the deepening of my awareness about the imaginal and my experience of deep reflection.



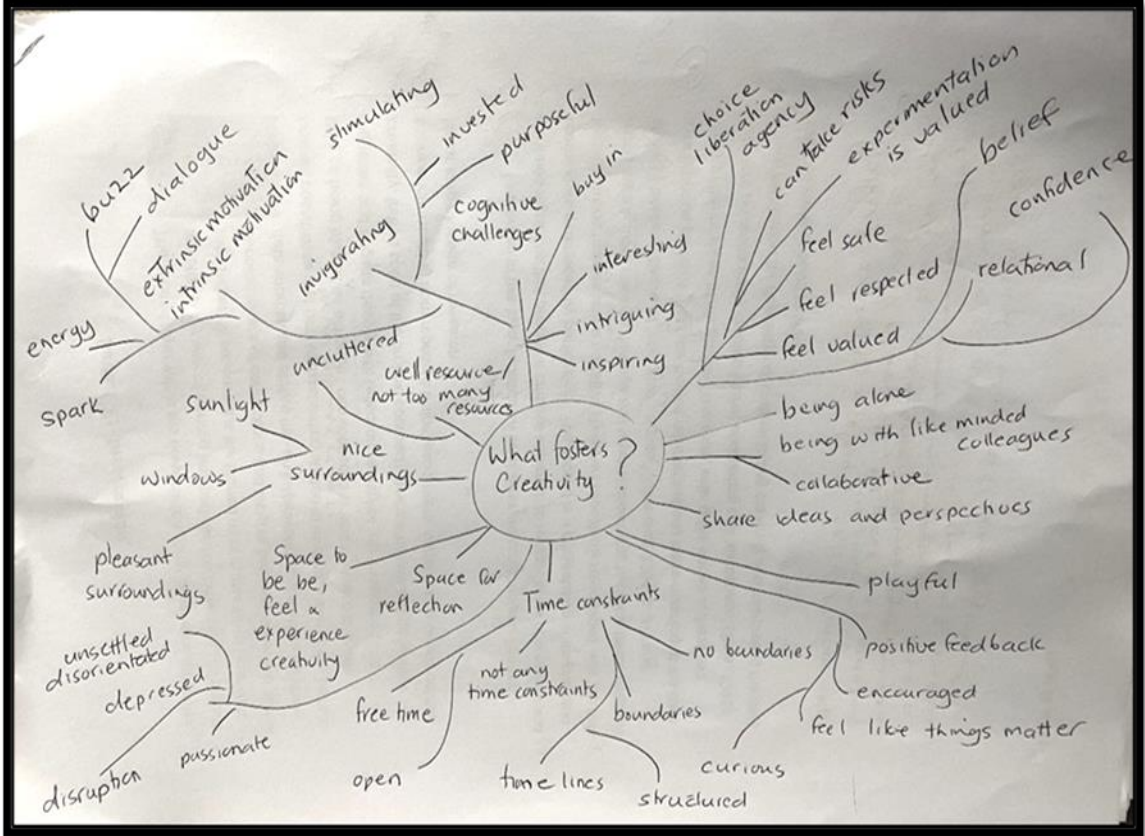
**Figure 18: The imaginal as an untapped but nascent source for creativity and deep learning (a diagrammatic representation)**



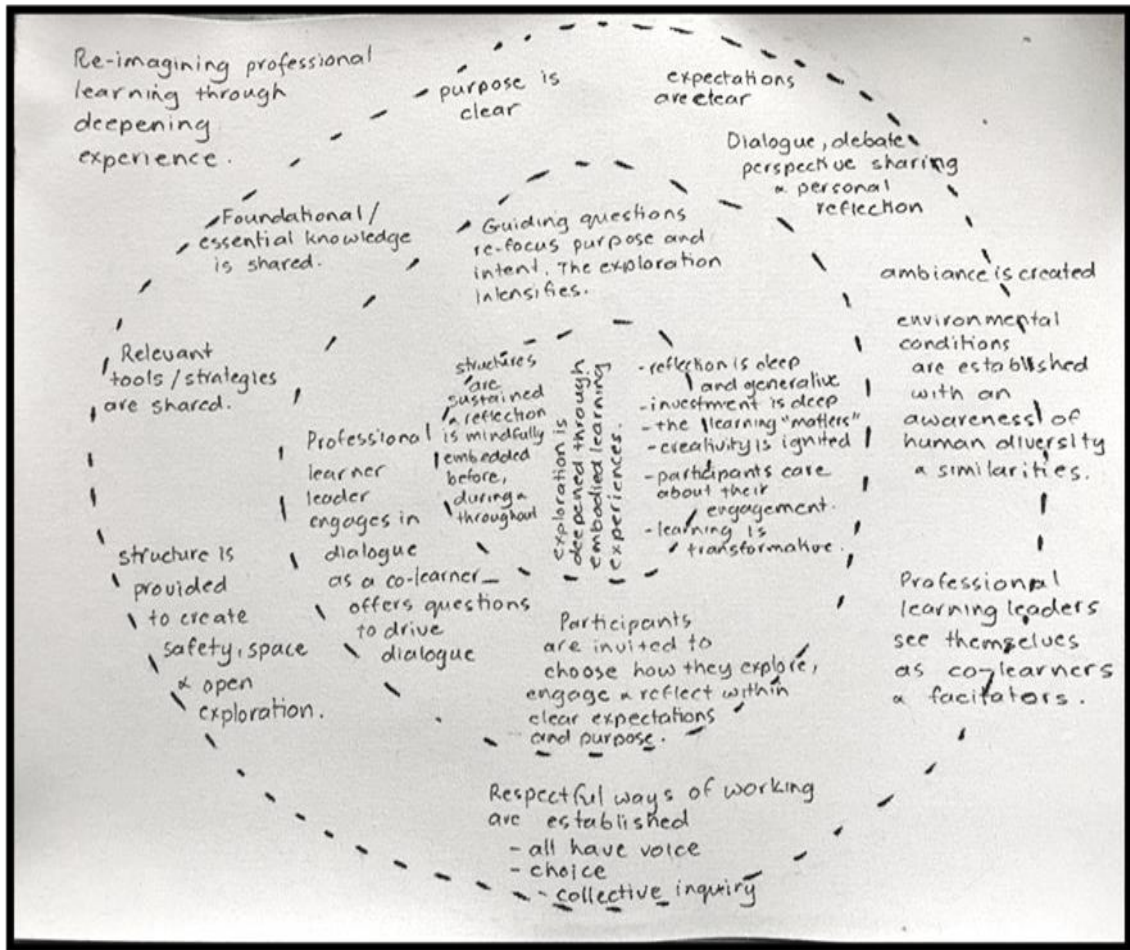
**Figure 19: The imaginal as an untapped but nascent source for creativity and deep learning**



These last two images helped me to pull my ideas and thoughts about re-imagining teacher learning together. Figure 20 summarises my findings about “what fosters creativity” while Figure 21 illustrates my reflection about ways of working in creativity hubs and how learning was fostered.



**Figure 20: What fosters creativity?**



**Figure 21: A reflection of ways of working in creativity hubs and how learning was fostered**