Something from My Garden: An Arts-Based Enquiry into the Impacts of Expert Mentoring on Beginning Arts Teacher Experience

1 Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted school learning and saw a range of new online mentoring approaches coalesce around the emergence of online groups. Post COVID-19 early career teacher (ECT) attrition rates, however, remain high, with early career arts teachers (ECATs) in particular having their own, distinct, stressors. This includes carrying heavy extracurricular responsibilities, from art clubs and camps, exhibitions and rotating displays through to external competitions for their student's work and a myriad of art related 'favours' (often hundreds of hours of 'personal time' related to creative practice) (Davis & Phillips, 2020; Paris et al, 2022, 429). Collaborative non-hierarchical mentorships have been shown to reduce stress and attrition rates among ECATs. Unfortunately, many teachers do not receive effective mentoring or even mentors and there have been no formal collaborative non-hierarchical mentorships set up for ECATs post COVID-19 in Western Australia (WA). Nor has there been arts-based educational research (ABER) into post COVID-19 experiences in arts mentorships. Working within an arts-based, social constructivist, interpretivist framework, I will set up a peer support group including an online group, a mentoring training course, and mentees coupled with one-on-one expert mentoring partnerships over 6 months. The experiences of the group will be recorded through observation and interviews and interpreted through art praxis. The resulting creative practice research exhibition of drawings, photographs, and paintings will explore, conceptualise, and present new understandings of participant experiences within mentoring relationships.

2 Background

The Australian education system faces, including prolonged student absences, school refusal/reluctance, high rates of teacher stress and attrition, and the integration of digital learning platforms (AITSL, 2021, 2022; Heffernan et al., 2021; Longmuir, 2023; Davis & Phillips, 2020; Paris et al., 2022). UNESCO (2021) reported that the pandemic forced more than 1.6 billion learners out of school globally, necessitating a rapid adoption of distance-learning solutions to ensure educational continuity. Maintaining quality education and supporting children's well-being has been difficult both during COVID-19 and post-COVID (Bessell, 2022; Goudarzi, et al, 2023; O'Sullivan et al, 2020). Arts education, in particular, was severely impacted. The highly personalised nature of arts teaching practice and the shift to online teaching created challenges where there had been little or no formal training (Gabriel, 2021; Paris et al., 2023; Kaden, 2020). "Many teachers felt stressed, isolated and unsure about where to turn for help. As there are demonstrated links between stress and attrition, it is important to reflect upon the experiences of these teachers with the aim of developing future mitigation strategies" (Paris et al. 2023, p.429; Gabriel 2021; Kuster et al., 2010). This PhD proposal is designed to address this gap in knowledge about ECATs experiences within a mentorship in the post-COVID context by using art praxis itself together with social science methods.

2.1 COVID-19 Impact and Teacher Attrition

Research on COVID-19 and teaching has yielded important findings. Morris et al's (2020) study showed that a positive school culture was crucial in navigating through the global pandemic. Studies have explored the challenges and opportunities of online teaching for art educators during lockdowns, revealing the importance of pedagogical skills, adaptability, and the support network for effective online education (Bailey et al, 2024; Morris & Paris, 2022; Salti, 2023). High attrition rates among ECTs, however, remains one of the major strategic problems in Australian school education (Consultancy Paper 2023, p.26; Heffernan, 2022; Carroll et al., 2022). Ingersoll (2004) found high teacher attrition rates in the US had hovered at around 30-40% over an extended period. Twenty years later high attrition rates continue unabated in Australia. In 2023, Monash University found that nearly 70% of teachers were considering leaving their profession, mainly due to the high expectations and workload stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, the University of Sydney report suggests that nearly 40% of ECTs leave their jobs within five years (Anthony, 2022). Heffernan (2022) argues that only 41% of teachers in 2444 surveys plan to stay in their position. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's (AITSL) 2023 report indicate that the top three reasons affecting teachers' intentions to leave have not changed over time: high workload, well-being, and lack of recognition are the most often cited From 2019 to 2022, a majority of teachers, including 92% of classroom teachers, 91% of middle leaders and 92% of senior leaders consider leaving before retirement, primarily due to workload issues (AITSL, 2023).

The initial years are the most challenging for teachers; inadequate induction, poor mentor-mentee relationships, and professional isolation contribute significantly to attrition (Ellis et al. 2022; Aulia & Haerani, 2022; Hernandez et al., 2013; Izadinia, 2013). Gray et al. (2017) highlight the importance of systemic support and a more supportive entry into the profession for early career drama teachers, who often face heavy workloads and inadequate preparation. Similar issues are mirrored in WA (Department of Education Annual Report, 2022-2023). Incentives were given to attract and keep teachers, "paid to eligible teachers and school administrators at 59 education support centres and schools with a $5,000 payment in 2023" (p. 39). However, the incentives provided insufficient to stop teachers from leaving the system. Thompson (2023) suggests that more than half of WA teachers considered quitting in the past year due to increased workloads and burnout). All teachers (including ECTs) experience stressors, and arts teachers are no different; as a result, the report has indicated a 40% decrease in student enrolment in arts courses (Emery, 2023).

Negative stress associated with digital disruption and time deepening, doing more in less time, affects teachers differently. However, ECATs as novice educators are especially vulnerable to the intrusion of technology in their lives because of the heavy extracurricular responsibilities (Lumis, 2014; Paris et al, 2022, p. 429). This high exposure to technology coupled with the demands of the profession exerts significant stress on ECATs and renders them vulnerable to attrition (Carroll et al., 2022; Heffernan 2022; Thompson, 2023).

2.2 Art Education: Value and Challenges

While arts teachers are under stress, the arts remain central to the growing creative economy in Australia (McCutcheon and Cunningham, 2022). Arts education promotes creative thinking, innovation, and collaboration, essential skills in today's rapidly evolving world (Murphy et al 2022; Salti, 2023; Sternberg, 2017). The arts are especially pivotal for nurturing children's creativity, well-being, and adaptability, contributing significantly to their overall development (Carter & Pestana, 2018; Eisner, 2002). Salti (2023) and Murphy et al. (2022) highlight arts education's transformative potential through drama pedagogy and digital learning. Carter and Pestana (2018) demonstrate the integration of arts in children's education, highlighting the holistic benefits of arts education, including emotional expression, physical development, cultural understanding, and aesthetic appreciation. Saribas et al. (2023) and Gil-Glazer (2020) show how arts education can challenge societal norms, and promote cultural understanding, preparing children for a knowledge-based creative-industries based economy. The Australian Curriculum links visual literacy to the development of personal and social capability, focusing on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social management. These skills are fundamental for personal growth (ACARA, 2024). The ability to interpret and create meaning from visual content, has become especially important in arts education (Duncum, 2004; Flood, 2004). According to Fancourt and Finn (2019), participation in artistic activities overall can alleviate anxiety and depression, offering therapeutic benefits that support mental well-being. The World Health Organization (2019) reports that arts engagement enhances psychological resilience, self-esteem, and a sense of purpose, contributing significantly to overall well-being.

Arts teaching, art or drama, is challenging (Lummis et al., 2014). It needs teacher modelling and demonstration together with high engagement with technology to access image manipulation software, and teacher interaction with students in face-to-face learning environments. In order to deliver a successful art teaching environment, strong relationships are needed and safe environments to experiment with ideas and build a creative voice. Art education is a complex balance framed around creativity facilitation (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). Creativity results from a blend of personality, knowledge, motivation, environment, intellectual abilities and styles of thinking (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). The literature shows the high-quality mentoring has emerged as an important way of engaging teachers with new challenges, alleviating arts teacher stress, promoting professional identity and reducing attrition rates among ECATs.

2.3 Collaborative Mentoring and Teacher Identity Construction

2.3.1 Mentoring Support

It is only relatively recently that formal mentoring programs for teachers have been developed and are still evolving (Carmi, 2024). In the United States (U.S.) a survey of 3235 first-year teachers found that mentoring had a positive effect on teacher decisions to stay in the job (Palmer, 2010). ECTs that had mentors in their field were 30% less likely to leave their jobs at the end of the first year (Hanushek, Kain, &

Rivkin, 2003). However, mentoring was not positive when the mentor was not in the same field (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2003). "It seems that school districts in the United States invest a great deal of money recruiting teachers but invest almost nothing in terms of time and money to keep their teachers from leaving the schools or the profession" (Palmer, 2010, p. 28).

Various approaches to mentoring have become a part the education context and it is now widely agreed that mentoring is invaluable in supporting new teachers (Nahmad-Williams & Taylor, 2015; Nolan, 2017; Rinne et al, 2023). However, not all new teachers are able to access mentoring and the 'wrong' mentoring relationship can destroy careers. Bonfiglio-Pavisich (2021) in his recent PhD research, *The Mentoring Experiences of ECTs in Australia*, found that while there is wide advertising of the importance of mentoring for ECTs in Australia, the delivery and investment is uneven and that not all ECATs or EATs receive a mentor (approximately 37%).

The training of mentors also matters. Mentors (or those without adequate time to fulfil their role) have been shown to be unsupportive of their teacher mentees leading to poor outcomes for the new teacher (Bonfiglio-Pavisich, 2021). Moreover, internal mentors (those in the same school as the new teacher) may feel an obligation to share concerns they harbour based on disclosures the new teacher made to them as their mentor. Confidentiality and trust combined with training and time are essential pillars of the mentor profile (Certo, 2002; Certo & Fox, 2002). For these reasons external mentoring relationships (where the mentor is based in a different school from the new teacher, albeit in their same discipline e.g. visual arts education) have been shown to work well.

2.3.2 Self-Efficacy and Flourishing

Effective mentoring can assist ECATs self-efficacy and professional identity construction. Traditional mentoring models involve a one-directional knowledge transfer from mentor to mentee. However, mentoring has evolved to include various forms, such as Dyad, Peer, Group, Distance, and Constellation Mentorship Models (Nowell, 2022).

Traditional mentoring models position participants in a one directional knowledge transfer – from mentor to mentee. Here the mentor is the expert and the mentee is a vessel waiting to be filled. In the same way that schools have moved away from the 'Teacher as Expert-Students as Empty Vessel' concept of learning mentoring has evolved and now takes a range of forms (Ellis et al, 2020). These encompass Dyad, Peer, Group, Distance and Constellation models (Nowell, 2022). Variations on these approaches include learning a new skill (e.g. arts practice) and acquiring knowledge and capabilities that have relevance to their profession (Stanulis et al., 2019). Similarly, variations have emerged like reciprocal mentoring where the traditional dyad mentoring model reverses to allow bidirectional flow of benefit between participants (Nahmad-Williams & Taylor, 2015; Paris, 2013). Here each participant has knowledge and expertise that is different albeit equally valuable to the mentoring partner and knowledge exchange occurs as a quid quo pro mutually beneficial transfer of capability. Thorner (2017) in her PhD research work, following a collaborative mentoring approach, created a model, the 'Leadership in Action: Modeling and Balance (LAMB) model' which involved working with a school that invested in bringing *all relevant staff together on a mentoring program* and who were personally invested in its success. "All the educators in this study had a vested interest in sharing their experiences on participating in the teacher-mentor program" (p.111). Recent studies Dikilitaş and Wyatt (2018) continue to highlight the importance of psychological support and shared knowledge in successful mentoring. Paris et al. (2015) noted that communicating on digital platforms for peer mentoring can significantly impact teacher retention and professional development. Hoffman et al. (2015) explored collaborative mentors and mentee relationships, enhancing professional identity, autonomy and teaching practices.

The outcome of the various mentoring studies is clear, collaborative mentorships are the most effective in maintaining mentor-mentee relationships, sharing knowledge, and above all enhancing **professional identity construction**. Effective mentor-mentee relationships are indispensable for retaining ECATs because they include responsiveness, reciprocity and reflection (Nolan, 2017; Rinne et al. 2023)**.** Shvets et al. (2024) and Thornton (2024) introduced additionally sponsorship and psychological development to the reciprocal mentoring approach that can enhance ECTs' self-efficacy. Self-efficacious teachers have confidence in their abilities and approach problems as challenges to be met rather than as threats to avoid (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacious teachers quickly recover their sense of efficacy a failure,

approach threatening problems with a sense of control (Symes et al, 2023). An efficacious outlook leads to personal accomplishment, reduces stress and lowers exposure to depression (Bandura, 1994).

Not surprisingly, having teachers with self-efficacious thinking fits well with the contemporary arguments about the primary goal of education. Kristjansson (2019) proposed human flourishing as the primary goal of education. He defined it as the relatively "unencumbered, freely chosen and developmentally progressive activity of a meaningful (subjectively purposeful and objectively valuable) life that actualises satisfactorily an individual human being's natural capacities in areas of species-specific existential tasks at which human beings (as rational, social, moral and emotional agents) can most successfully excel" (Kristjansson, 2019, p. 1).

Carmi (2024) differentiated between transmissive and collaborative mentoring approaches that help building professional identity, identifying four distinct approaches outlined in Table 1. Nahmad-William and Taylor (2015), like Carmi (2023), emphasised that successful mentoring relies on compassion, commitment, and a dialogic relationship. Understanding these dynamics is vital for high-quality ECTs mentoring and professional visions (Carmi, 2024). Evans-Palmer (2010, p. 71) makes a similar point when arguing that arts-teachers have distinct stressors, different from other teachers, both in outside attitudes towards visual arts and drama and how courses fit within assessment regimes. Professional identity construction dynamics will be different from other ECTs.

Table 1: The Four Main Mentoring Styles (MS), Goals (MG) and Practices (MP)

MS	MGs	MPs	Main characteristics	Vision of teacher professionalism
Apprenticeship	Emotional support, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical-content knowledge	Providing behavioral guidance	The mentor provides the mentee with professional knowledge and guides him on how to perform	Teachers as craftspeople
Collaborative-experiential	Knowledge of context, development of self	Engaging in cooperative activity, welcoming change	The mentor and mentee engage in and experience a collaborative and creative teaching process	Teachers as artists
Personal-experiential	Knowledge of context, organizational knowledge and support, development of self	Sense-making	The mentor supports the mentee and creates the conditions that would allow him to experience teaching as a creative process	Teachers as artists
Cognitive	Content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical-content knowledge	Adjusting the challenge, remaining involved, sense-making	The mentor exposes the mentee to ever-growing challenges, and together they interpret them and create professional knowledge	Teachers as intellectuals

Source: Adapted from Carmi (2024)

Mentoring in teacher education for Carmi (2024) is intimately tied to identity construction and professionalism. Mentoring helps teachers to build their identity in terms of the mechanics of the relevant education system, their peers, and within their own professional context.

3 Research gaps and Objectives

Mentor programs are still evolving and as a consequence there is limited information on experiences of mentors and mentees in education and this, perhaps, because of the lack of effective programs. There is a distinct lack of evidence about experiences of arts teachers in mentor programs generally and in Western Australia (WA) in particular. This research proposal plans to create a mentoring support group in WA for ECATs that provides a collaborative non-hierarchical environment in order investigate, using an Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER) methodology within a social constructivism framework, the experiences of the mentors and mentees over a 6 month period.

3.1 Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are to:

- Identify and understand the challenges faced by ECATs in general and the impact of post-COVID.

- Investigate the role of mentor and mentee relationships in the construction of teacher professional identity among ECATs.

- Explore the ways in which effective mentoring supports the professional growth, self-efficacy and flourishing of ECATs. This resonates with my PhD topic - *Something from My Garden* is a metaphor that mentors are gardeners and the mentees are the plants. Metaphorically represent ECATs nurturing and growth process as they develop their perception of teacher identities and flourish within their careers. The researcher will use visual language to thematically understand the transformative phase of ECATs.

3.2 Research Questions

In accordance with the objectives of this proposed study, the following research questions will be explored:

RQ1. What challenges do early career arts teachers face?

RQ2. What value do the participants *perceive* the mentoring intervention affords ECATS in their "transitional" identity framing?

RQ3. In which ways does effective mentoring support early career arts teachers to flourish, enhance their self-efficacy?

Art-Based Educational Research (ABER) methodology with Non-Traditional Research Output (NTRO) is being used for this project in order to answer the research questions. **Art praxis is central to ABER, an innovative vehicle for the visualisation of ECATs and mentors' experiences.**

4 Research Methodology and Methods

4.1 Research Design

4.1.1 Arts-Based Education Research (ABER)

The theoretical and conceptual framing of research is important because it guides the methodology the researcher employs and ensure the "fit" of the analysis to the kind of data being collected and the research questions being considered (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods predominate in education settings and each has a number of sub-genres. Based on these insights, Cohen and Morrison (2018) discuss how Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER) has had less visibility but is increasing in prominence as a sub-genre of Qualitative Inquiry. I aim to use ABER (research methodology) with NTRO (art exhibition) to investigate the ECATs' experience, mentor and mentee relationships and post-COVID online art teaching in WA.

The arts (both visual and performative) have a long tradition of collecting, analysing and conceptualising information in tangible, visual or somatic forms (Boyd & Barry 2024; Eisner, 2002; Wang et al., 2017). ABER rose to prominence from the 1980s (University of British Columbia) and researchers like Chilton and Leavy (2014) have articulated criteria by which visual artifacts can be evaluated as research data and distinguished from other forms of creative practice. Arts-Based Research (ABR) takes many forms (e.g. materials-led; practice-led etc) and Arts-Based Educational Research is a sub-genre of the broader qualitative paradigm within which ABR exists. ABER often begins like other qualitative approaches e.g. collecting surveys and interviews but departs in respect of methodology for data analysis and results synthesis. ABR methodologies (Leavy, 2014; Culshaw, 2023; Falin et al., 2021) reveal a range of human responses. For example, Angus (2021) and Pentassuglia (2017) reported on the experiences of artists and educators in shaping arts education and creative practice. Researchers argue that ABR is particularly useful for this type of research, which aims to "describe, explore or discover social, emotional and other meta-cognitive experiences" (Chilton & Leavy, 2014, p.407). Furthermore, Chilton and Leavy (2014) encompass 6 measures of the credibility of visual artifacts: i) Question/method fit: a balanced rationale for using ABR methods to achieve the research objectives; ii) Aesthetic power: artworks convey meaning effectively; iii) Usefulness: the contribution of research output contains educational power and highlights the significance; iv) Participatory and transformative: actively draw attention to marginalised and silent voices through creative research output; v) Artful authenticity: praxis is transparent and reflective

conduct by the researcher; vi) Canonical generativity: creative outputs go beyond the initial sample and resonate with a wider audience.

ABER can give form to feelings and perspectives that it is hard to convey through words alone (Chilton & Leavy, 2014). As Appendix 4 shows, researchers use art practice subjectively to interpret a social phenomenon and eventually discourse educational research problems (Rolling, 2019). Eisner (2002) argued that engaging in artistic practices can enhance learning through doing and reflection, which are key components of praxis. Praxis is learning by doing (Sullivan, 2005). Sullivan's (2005) work provides a comprehensive overview of how art praxis can be used as a form of research. It aligns with the concept of praxis by showing how art-making and reflection, through the integration of discursive and visual data, can lead to deeper understanding and knowledge production (Leavy, 2020). In the case of this PhD proposal, the ABER approach allows deeper insight into (stress) that is complex and which is highly correlated with adverse negative feelings (anxiety) before inevitable action (attrition). By transforming discursive interview data into artworks, ABER is not just a mirror of experiences, but **generates new knowledge** and interpretations of those experiences (Eisner, 2002).

In this study the theoretical framing draws on each of threads (Arts-Based) to investigate the ways in which collaborative mentoring assists mentors and mentees in the post COVID-19 era. It is:

- Qualitative (aligned with narrative vignettes – paintings - small stories of experience which typify experiential contexts)

- Social Constructivist (allows mentees to work together in a group to support one another in building identity). Berger and Luckmann (1966, p.15) put social constructivist theory simply, "*the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality* "[emphasis in original]. What is 'real' for a culture or sub-culture is created by that culture in everyday interactions, everyday life, and studying what people say and do is at the core of understanding everyday life.

- Arts-Based Orientated (says more than words).

4.1.2 Methods and Observer Role

To understand the transition phase for ECATs, this PhD research will build up a support group with 20 participants, 10 mentors (5 visual art and 5 drama specialised teachers), 10 mentees (5 visual art and 5 drama ECRTs). A closed Facebook support group specifically for mentees will be established as an intervention, introducing scenarios for participants to consider and exchange ideas, art, drama, pedagogy content and feelings. The group will run for 6 months. I will coordinate with a professional coach to facilitate a mentoring training course at Curtin University. This coaching will allow mentors and mentees to meet initially and also act as an incentive. A focus group will follow the training session, allowing mentors and mentees to express their feelings. Focus groups, run once, moderated, will provide participants in a semi-structured interview environment to express their ideas and feelings (Kreuger & Casey, 2014). An initial survey will be sent to participants to collect demographic and attitudinal data. After the initial meeting, the mentors and mentees will meet three times across the 6 months, working collaboratively (with communication within the support group happening at any time). A correspondence reflection diary will be sent to me by the participants after each meeting. After 6 months, I will interview mentors and mentees.

The first survey will seek information about the participants themselves, including demographics, experiences during COVID and post-COVID, knowledge and specific experiences of problems and advantages of online teaching, The semi-structured interviews will explore similar topics, but with the opportunity to expand on them. Semi-structured interviews are "where an interview schedule (list of items, questions, prompts and probes) is prepared that is sufficiently open-ended to enable the contents to be re-ordered, digressions and expansions made, new avenues to be included and further probing to be undertaken" (Cohen et al., 2018, p.313). Participants will be interviewed on a one-to-one basis and their interviews will be audio-recorded.

I will be creating artworks that express ECATs feelings and perceptions. The art praxis is central in ABER and will allow the researcher to collect data, thematically coding, and visualisation through iconography. These artworks will be returned to participants for comment. This is a part of ensuring validity of the study. In ABER this also comes under the rubric of "authenticity". "Constructivist criteria have long included the principle of authenticity, which can be defined as evident through a deep reflexivity about our individual and collective selves that results in fair depictions." (Chilton & Leavy, 2014, p.417). Appendix 1

provides a graphical overview of the structure of the whole study. Appendix 2, shows the ABER sequence of data collection across the PhD research. A support group will be set up with a Facebook platform. The FB group will be a closed group and discoverable only by participants and posts will only be visible to members and the researcher. Composed of selected mentors and mentees in arts education in WA, the selection will be through Curtin University, Drama West, Art Education Association WA and schools.

As discussed above, collaborative and non-hierarchical mentoring groups have been found to be successful in promoting a teacher's professional identity and reducing stress. Peer support tends to be successful in most contexts, for young and old (Richard et al., 2022). The proposed support group is not a therapy group for stressed teachers. Initial coaching will establish for the teachers the purpose of the support group as a way for mentors and mentees to share the good and the bad, as a dyad, and within a group. For example, some mentor and mentee discussions might be private to the two alone and others not. Voluntary established support groups in an education context are known to have a good chance of success, both in terms of recruitment and retention (Richard et al., 2022).

I am an established artist with a Masters in Fine Art and a specialism in Traditional Chinese Painting and Calligraphy. The researcher has, therefore, a shared passion in the arts as a professional artist. I will be an observer, collecting data from my impressions and recording them in fieldnotes. This role, however, is not as a participant observer – the researcher will not be a teacher in a school or a mentor or a mentee. The researcher will be closer to observer as participant, clearly engaged with participants but not on a daily or within group role (Jorgensen, 2020).

4.2.1 Setting and Participants

The selection of teachers comes under purposive sampling. The recruitment criteria for this study include registered teachers who are early career art teachers (ECATs) (mentees) and experienced teachers (mentors) working at secondary schools. The recruitment criteria are: the ECATs are graduate secondary education within 12 months, both in drama and visual art areas. The mentors have at least 10 years of experience as secondary senior teachers both in visual art and drama area.

Sampling (representativeness), reliability (replicability) and validity (constructs and research design are clear and transparent) are key elements of research design and decisions are made on the basis of fitness for purpose (Cohen, et al, 2018). Purposive sampling “seeks only to represent a particular group” (Cohen, et al., 2018, p.214). A purposive sample, therefore, is appropriate as a sampling method for this study. A purposive sample is based on the judgement of the typicality or characteristics being sought (Cohen et al, 2018, p.214).

Interviews will be conducted at the most convenient place for participants, including at Curtin University. Focus groups will be at Curtin University integrated with the mentoring coaching session.

4.2.2 Data collection

Crouch (2007) claims that the artist plays an important role in the reflective studio practice. Hence, studio practice is a critical element in this proposal because art practitioners can reflect on the information and emotion during their art creation. The data from the research includes the drawing drafts, a visual diary, the exegesis and the final artworks themselves. Guest et al. (2013) show that conversational notes, videos, photographs, or artworks are critical when conducting data analysis. Data documentation will enable the researcher to analyse the study effectively.

This creative practice study, where visual artist teachers, drama teachers and the researcher, an established artist, will be creating works that express ideas and feelings generated by the mentor-mentee relationship and the support group itself. Types of data also include information gained from the Facebook forum, the frequency of interactions online, and emails between me and participants.

Participants’ real-life experiences and first-person narratives will be considered a priority in the analysis of the interviews. Field notes will be used to acknowledge self-awareness of the researcher's bias and role throughout the data analysis, collection and interpretation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

The methods encompass surveys, interviews, and online artefacts (posts and pictures) shared with the online group. Appendix 3, shows the configuration. In summary there is:

Pre-test Survey

- A demographic survey from each participant at the start (using Qualtrics - questions about their background and experience post-COVID)

Online training and focus group session (using WebEx or Teams recorded) - how the mentoring will work

- An online mentor-mentee training session/focus group at the beginning - all 20 participants explaining how the online support group will work and what the mentors and mentees need to do (i.e. I will be checking in with participants every week and ask participants to share something from their teaching and mentoring experiences).
- Moderation of the group by me; a closed group set up on Facebook with members by invitation only.

Semi-structured interviews

- At 6 months, interviewing mentors and the mentees

Post-test survey

- Final evaluation

Online material across the whole 6 months of the study

- Images they share.
- Post comments they share.
- Resources or links to resources they share.

4.2.3 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The studio practice side of this study continues across the whole of the data collection period. Creating appropriate art works and eliciting feedback is time consuming, but worthwhile given its richness. Thematic analysis will also be deployed. It is one of the most common means of analysis in qualitative research (Glense, 2016). It fits well with a social constructivist focus on constructs and patterns of constructs. NVivo assists in analysis by providing archival capabilities, transcription AI capability and coding for themes (as well as visualisation). Analysis will be done at the same time as collection because it assists with insights into the dynamics of the study over the six months period and instantiation, providing depth, to the constructs or themes involved (Cohen et al, 2018). Appendix 3 provides an example of a participant translating their feelings into painting.

All the participants, including me, are arts based and, in popular terms, “creatives”. The ability to express oneself or the feelings of others through art praxis is well established (Chilton and Leavy, 2014).

The study progressively collects and thematically codes the material and transposes it into visualisations that build to narrative vignettes (little stories of experience) conveyed though

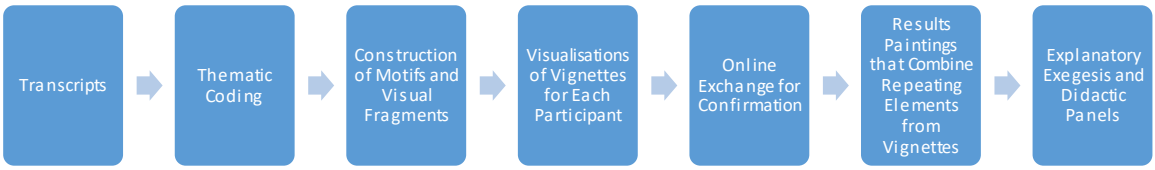
the use of visual metaphors of

- seeds, seedlings, mature plants (mentees)

- being tended by gardeners (mentors)

- in a potentially hostile or lush garden (the transition to the profession environment)

- impacted by the ecosystem/environment which encompasses resources needed to survive such as water, fertiliser, sunlight, temperature, (this is the broader education environment). Here is where the support group may be considered as part of the resources they need for survival.



4.2.4 Public Exhibition-Installation and Exegesis

The art exhibition and installation will be public and raise public attention towards early career art teacher attrition crisis (Beltman & Poulton, 2019; Buchanan et al., 2013; Paris, 2013; Hong, 2010) and importance of art education itself. Arts-based methods are being employed in the interpreting observations and interviews through art praxis (drawing, painting and photography) because artworks exhibited in the public gallery settings can amplify voices that are otherwise hard to hear (e.g. ECATS). In terms of the content of the study the exhibition will also highlight advantages and difficulties with digital disruption and new technologies. The visual artworks with align with the research proceeding. Iconography will echo with the early career art teacher's identity creation. For those participants who waive anonymity, each participant will have an image linked to their interview in the exhibition.

5 Significance Statement

The significance of this PhD research is in providing evidence about experiences and perceptions from mentors and mentees in a collaborative mentoring environment, post COVID-19. The methodology is also an innovative contribution to social science, art generating knowledge. There is a significant lack of research on ECATs in mentoring environments and this research can assist in program and policy planning. The Arts-Based Education Research Practice (ABER) and Non-Traditional Research Output (NTRO) adopted in this research proposal will use exhibitions to raise general public awareness of the challenges in arts education, and may assist in reinforcing the call for a robust support system for teacher well-being and creativity. As such, the ABER-NTRO exhibition of artworks in visual arts or performing research in drama work and exegetical writing resulting from the project, when taken together, will reveal important new knowledge that will be of value to scholars, industry stakeholders (employer schools) and pre-service teacher educators who are the envisaged end-user recipients of the findings of the inquiry. The outcome of this research will include participants and the researcher benefiting from a constructive, art-based educational inquiry into their experiences, providing a deeper understanding of the challenges facing ECTs involved in arts education, thus better supporting ECATs' needs and aspirations.

6 Ethics Statement

The Curtin Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). Ethics approval will be sought from the Committee after successful completion of Milestone 1. The codes and guidelines in the Curtin human research ethics application form will be strictly followed. Participants will be informed about the nature of the study, its objectives, process, potential risks and benefits. Information about how data and identity are managed will also be included, as required by HREC. Anonymity and confidentiality of participants is important. There will be de-identification of the participants in terms of the records of the research and in publication. These records will be held securely in an appropriate location and destroyed after a set time according to HREC requirements.

Participants will be asked to sign an informed consent form which acknowledges the objectives, process, potential risks and benefits. ABER ethics concerns also exist concerning copyright and attribution of created visual works based on participant co-creation. Informed consent regarding the use of the art work for research purposes and exhibition will be sought. Options to have the visual artworks for exhibition attributed to individual participants as well as the researcher, foregoing anonymity, will be provided. In maintaining COVID-19 provisions all communications associated with the Facebook support group will be private and the platform closed to the public.

The Curtin University Human Ethics site defines an intervention as “manipulation of the participants or the participants’ environment for the purpose of modifying one or more of the study outcomes. The intervention may be a drug, medical device, surgical procedure, diagnostic or screening procedure, a health service change, or a psychological, educational or behavioural strategy.” The study does involve providing information to the support group as a way of presenting problems that can be addressed. There are though no clinical interventions in the study.

7 Data Management Statement

Physical creative works and digital data will be collected in this study, including interviews. Following the Curtin University Research Data Management guidelines (Curtin University, 2021), physical data (illustrations and paintings) will be stored in locked cabinets in the researcher’s locked studio space, accessible only by the researcher and supervisors. Exhibition materials will be public, but the participant interviewed anonymous (except where participants waive anonymity). Interviews will be transcribed and all digital materials stored on a password protected files and computer. Data will also be uploaded on a secured Curtin R Drive. All participants will be deidentified. Curtin HREC guidelines require 7 years storage of materials before deletion.

8 Timeline

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2024												
Candidacy start - 1st February 2024												
Literature review and proposal writing												
Milestone 1 – Candidacy due 1st August 2024												
Application for ethics approval												
Pop-up research exhibition												
Selection and recruitment												
Mentoring training and schedule for correspondence												
Polit survey, support group and prepare interview												
Polit ABED visualisation												
2025												
Survey, support group and prepare interview												
Data collection and thematic coding												
Milestone 2- mid–candidacy due 1st August 2025												
Interview												
Transcription of interview recordings												
Development of the ABED iconography												
Visualisations through visual art thematically												
Synthesis artwork in art praxis												
Exegesis writing (creative practice thesis)												
2026												
Visualisations through visual art												
Finalise and synthesise artwork												
Exegesis writing (creative practice thesis)												
Exhibition preparation and installation												
2027												
Art exhibition (non-traditional creative output)												
Refining exegesis (creative practice thesis)												

9 Budget

Expense type	Item	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
Arts supplies	Pigment and medium Canvas Rice paper Pen and brush	450	350	200		1,000
Exhibition opening and installation	Installation material Refreshment and snacks	50			450	500
Mentoring training course incentives	Professional mentor coaching service Refreshment and snacks	1,000				1,000
Conference	Registration, travel and accommodation		700	300		1,000
Research equipment	Audio recording devices USB hard drive for storage etc.	100				100
	Nvivo or other transcription software	100				100
Research support	Administrative requirements (e.g. printing)	50	50	50	50	200
	Books, study materials		100	100		200
Thesis production	Thesis editing and proofreading				900	900
	Total	1,750	1,200	650	1,400	$5,000

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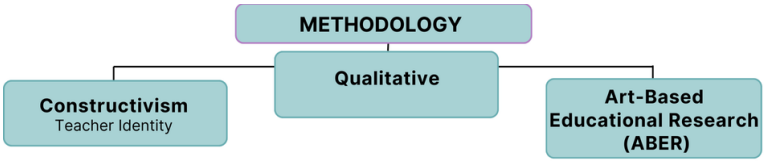
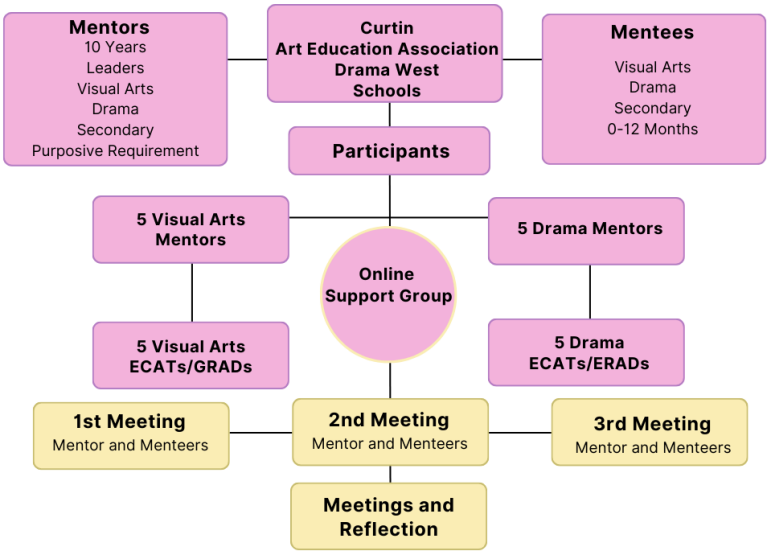
Appendix 1 - Structure of the Study

1 Methodology

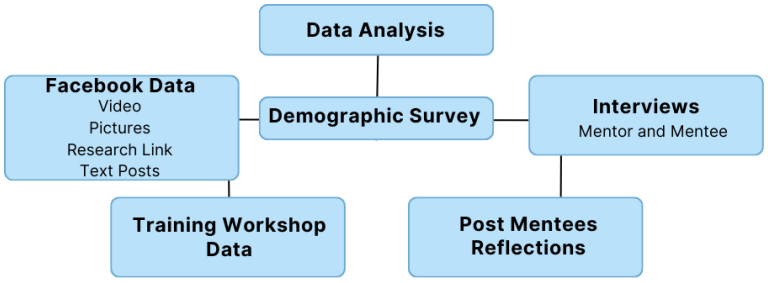


2 Participants

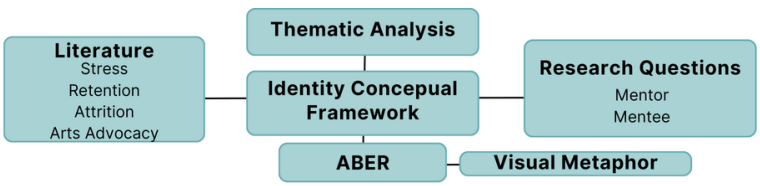


3 Methods

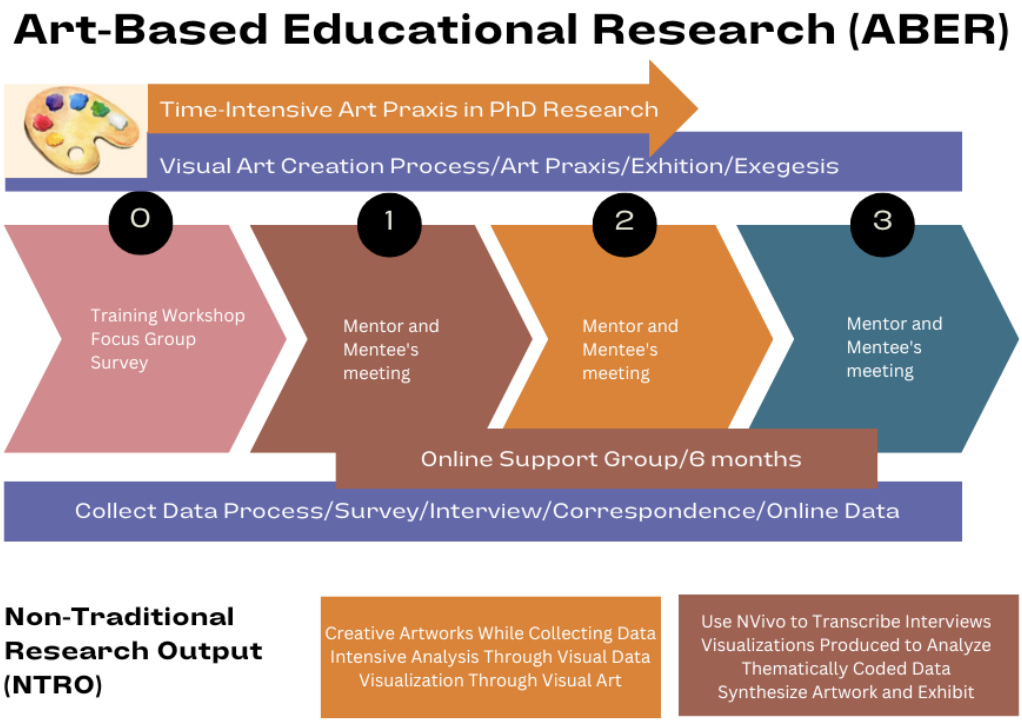
4 Data Analysis



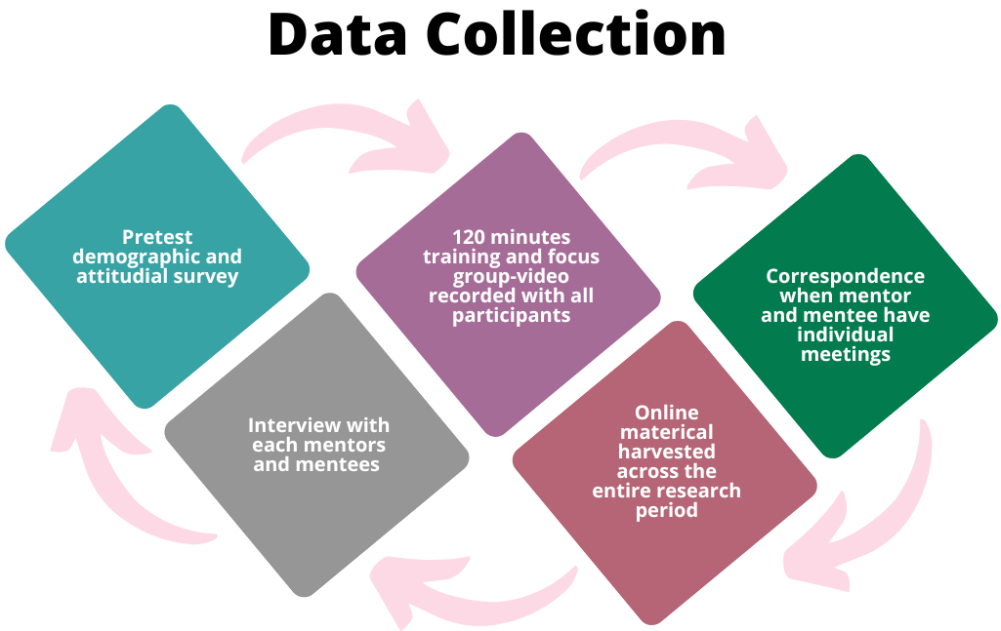
5 Thematic Analysis



Appendix 2 - ABER Sequence of Data Collection Across PhD Research



Appendix 3 – Data Collections Elements



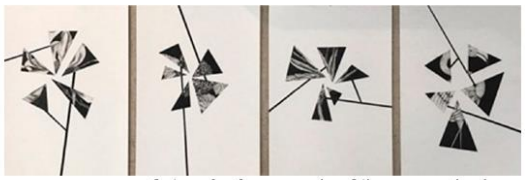
Appendix 4

Example of Expressing Feelings Visually

The paintings presented below are examples where researchers employ ABER to interpret and transform participants' interview data and feelings into visual data (artworks). Utilising visual and discursive elements in ABER will help understand, represent and disclose the research findings in an accessible and evocative form. In my research, I will be creating photographs, illustrations or paintings while collaborating with the teachers.

Artwork: Visual portrait for Lillian
Carolyn Jongeward
"I started the portraits by focusing on a participant whose passion and struggle to connect with her creativity made a very strong impression on me. Lillian's words and images filled my thoughts" (Leavy, 2020, p. 242) .

Artwork: concept sketch and final work
Julia Elizabeth Morris



Artwork: *An example of the researcher's personal artistic style*
Julia Elizabeth Morris

Artwork: Making Space
Lisa Paris
"I'm hoping that by participating in a Digital Sabbath and clearing physical clutter around my home I might actually be able to clear some headspace and get back to being creative as well" (Paris et al., 2022, p. 436).