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Encountering Art: Illuminating the invisible student and Language and Learning Adviser experience

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The role and professional identity of a Language and Learning Adviser (LLA) are often misunderstood within the university, especially within faculties, by academics and management. This paper reports on a multimodal project which sought to provide an avenue for expression of LLAs' frustration with this lack of recognition using art practice-led research (PLR) methodology. Although the LLA experience has been examined by the profession from numerous positions, there has not been a study using PLR methods that captures the subjective experience of LLAs' work experience and their perceptions of the student and LLA encounter. By employing PLR in a workplace where participants had not been trained as artists, unique visual and textual insights about individual LLAs' perceptions of these encounters were generated. Artworks were created which are material evidence, or mediating objects that represent new understandings, augment new ways to be visible and, through participant discussion and analysis, provide new opportunities to voice professional quandaries, values and possibilities. The aim was to make visible the constraints and possibilities under which LLAs work, so those outside the profession might come to a deeper understanding of the LLA role, including how LLAs can collaborate with academics to develop academic skills within curriculum design. This paper and visual artefact is a record and expression of the ways LLAs face the issue of invisibility in their practice and how an art project brought the group together in meaningful and affirming ways.

Key Words: Art practice-led research, art activism, participatory art project, collaborative networking, expansive learning communities, neoliberalism, Language and Learning Adviser (LLA), third space, LLA identity, professional development.

1. Introduction

The provision of academic language and learning support has been an established 'service' in Australian universities since the 1970s (Barthel et al., 2021; Harper, 2018; Percy, 2014). The Australian Government's Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency's, *Staffing, Learning Resources and Educational Support, Version 1.3, 2017* (TEQSA, 2021) outlines the university's institutional responsibilities in providing support to develop study skills, English language proficiency and support for international students who are unfamiliar with studying in Australia, noting

that this 'includes resources that are specific to a course of study as well as more general learning support' (Standard 3.3.4).

Despite this mandate, the academic support offered by Language and Learning Advisers (LLAs[1]) continues to go largely unnoticed in the university sector (Harper, 2018; Gurney & Grossi, 2019). The frustration felt by LLAs due to this marginalization and lack of visibility has been ongoing for many years (Evans, Henderson, & Ashton-Hay, 2019). It is surprising the LLA's contribution remains largely unacknowledged (Harper, 2018; Gurney & Grossi, 2019) given their profound contribution to student success (Ashton-Hay & Doncaster, 2021; Evans, Tindale, Cable, & Hamil Mead, 2009) and at a time of increasing diversity in student cohorts (Barber, 2020). Contributions include offering ongoing student support leading to success and retention, providing academic language and study guidance across all university faculties and levels covering both international and domestic cohorts, supporting academics with curriculum delivery by embedding academic language skills and frameworks, and assisting many 'at risk' students. Nonetheless, institutional perceptions of this work are underpinned by an idea that the LLA is an 'editor' whose work is 'bolted on' (Wingate, 2006), or considered a "remedial exercise designed to fix-up students' problems" (Hyland, 2002, p. 386). This belief obscures the complexity of the work and importance of academic communication and feedback as integral to the development of the students and their learner autonomy.

Given this limited understanding of their work, LLAs struggle to implement their aims and practice objectives against the backdrop of neoliberal approaches to the delivery of educational experiences. Such approaches place cost-cutting at the heart of success and in doing so result in values that support administrative and economic rationalism, a focus on education as a commodity, time and space constraints, increased class sizes, casualization of the workforce, workplace exploitation (Desierto & de Maio, 2020), transactional interactions and remedial expectations (Gurney & Grossi, 2019; Riivari et al, 2018; Manathunga & Bottrell, 2019). This can compound a sense of meaninglessness for practitioners who otherwise report a high level of job satisfaction and achievement (Cameron, 2018).

The gap between institutional expectations and the work of the LLA to positively affect student learning and facilitate deeper educational encounters is often the topic of our LLA unit's informal collegial staff discussions, sometimes referred to as 'kitchen conversations'. Over the years, our kitchen conversations have dissected these structural issues, giving rise to a sense of repetitive, dead-end ruminations. To address these professional quandaries, an art project was envisaged, using Practice-Led Research (PLR) methodology. By using PLR methodology, we hoped to become more visible by materializing our experiences as artworks and to later exhibit the works at the university gallery where they would be encountered by university staff and students.[2] Thus, the gap between 'good education' practices and the LLA's workplace issues framed this research question:

> How can we visualize the work of an LLA to become more visible to the academic and management community, and make evident the invisible neoliberal ideologies underpinning our work and teaching conditions?

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[1] LLAs are also referred to as Language and Learning Practitioners (LLPs). While the practice was established in the 1970s, formally agreed terminology was introduced only after the formation of the Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL) in 2005. In this paper, we refer to Language and Learning Advisers (LLAs), as that is the designation used at the institution our team is based in.

[2] Unfortunately, this goal was not realised due to restrictions arising from the Covid 19 pandemic, but the works have been displayed at three online conferences: Deakin's Teaching and Learning Conference in 2019; the 7th International Academics Identities Conference, Roskilde University, Denmark, in 2021, and the AALL conference in the same year.

This project created original artworks using photography, painting, drawing, 3D constructions, and written textual reflections to document and materialize the LLAs' quandaries, professional work experiences and student encounters.

Although the LLA teaching experience has been examined by the profession from numerous positions, there has not been a study using PLR that examines the subjective experience of LLAs. This project and paper acknowledge that many aspects of LLA work are positive and produce a constructive impact, with these successes being widely published and frequently evaluated (Malkin & Chanock, 2018; Economou, 2021; Maldoni, 2018; Charlton & Martin, 2018; Hamilton, Gao, Lynch, & Briggs, 2019). However, in this project, we chose to focus on those issues that challenged us and spoke to the marginal positions within the context we work in. We focused on using artistic expression to confront this experience.

This paper gives an account of the two-year art project experienced by twelve LLAs, envisaged in June 2019, and continued throughout the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020-21. The paper follows a narrative structure, whereby we seek to tell a story about our creative responses to the challenges facing our unit using art PLR methods. The background to PLR has also been included in the Methodology section. In using PLR, this study provides unique visual and textual insights into individual LLAs' professional work experience and their perceptions of the student and LLA encounter.

The organisation of the rest of this paper is as follows. First, a Background section (2) reviews firstly the literature contributing to the project's initial inspirations and secondly the primary sources on which the project's inaugural presentation was based for a staff professional development day in June 2019. This section also incorporates literature showing how PLR methods have been used in creative exchanges between artists and non-artists using participatory art-based practices. The Methodology section (3) then provides an overview of PLR, its inherent interdisciplinary nature and how our project was informed by this creative method. Drawing on PLR principles, the project engaged with a range of theories and art materials to support participants' different approaches and interpretation of their quandary. This approach involved identifying and adopting various frameworks as was needed. Frameworks are mentioned throughout the paper where relevant to an aspect or phase of the project being described, rather than presenting a framework section. This approach has been taken because, as participants' art practice evolved, they each chose different strategies – both materially and theoretically – to progress their ideas. Thus, the overall project was supported by PLR methods which incorporated participatory art-based practices (Bishop 2012; Johanson & Glow 2018), qualitative research methodologies such as phenomenology (van Manen, 1990), and thematic analysis (Saldana, 2009, 2011) to elucidate common themes from the LLAs textual responses. Consequently, a pragmatic, constructivist approach informed the project's ongoing development and evolving research design. Being open to change and collegial experimentation was important; we needed to be able to work with "'what works' using diverse approaches and valuing both objective and subjective knowledge" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 43). The Findings and Discussion sections (4) are presented together to avoid repetition of visual documentation. This section presents the themes elicited from the textual responses as sub-headings with participant's artworks and textual expression supporting the theme. The Conclusion (5) addresses the aims of the project while highlighting the ongoing importance of the art-based project to the LLA unit.

2. Background

2.1. Project inspiration

The roots of this project were inspired by Rowena Harper's Keynote Address, *Learning Advising: forces shaping our work, and the opportunities they offer*, delivered at the New Zealand AT-LAANZ conference in December 2018. Harper traced the emergence of the LLA profession

(Harper, 2018: Slides 15, 21, 27), suggesting the territory has always been 'in tension' but the future required an agency of 'responsiveness and disruption' (Harper, 2018: Slide 50).

Harper spoke to the heart of the LLA's marginalization issues and mirrored the same quandaries raised in our kitchen conversations. Harper put forward the following questions for reflection by the profession (Harper, 2018: Slide 51):

- What stories do you tell yourselves about where you came from?
- How do these stories shape your practice and your relationship to it?
- What lies ahead? What challenges do your students and institutions face?
- What values and approaches will best support your work in the future?

We drew on these questions and, in the spirit of 'disruption' an LLA working party proposed a staff professional development day that would draw on Harper's prompts. We asked the LLA team to prepare by reading set texts and devising a quandary about their work to share with the group. We used Harper's questions to provide a context and to initiate discussion.

The pre-planning was organised around 4 key themes:

1. Harper's keynote slide presentation, ATLAANZ, December 2018.
2. Re-examining our aims and philosophies.
3. Coming with a reflection to share: one that drew attention to a particular quandary or situation faced in an LLA's practice.
4. Theoretical readings.

Providing prompts and asking LLAs to prepare beforehand was key to eliciting well considered responses that could be vehicles for engaging in discussions, understanding quandaries, reflecting on practice, and beginning art-making processes.

2.2. Visualizing practitioner experience

Further background underpinning the project is represented in Figure 1, which represents an early attempt to visualize the complex network of encounters faced by an LLA in their professional work. This image was first created in 2018 while researching third space practitioners and the emergent space of writing about art practice in the creative arts exegesis. This image and process has been described in an earlier study (Fraser, 2019). The arrows in Figure 1 represent one line of communication between the LLA, each student and supervising academic. It was an attempt to visualize the interactions, the active yet hidden 'between' spaces of communication. This image became a touchstone for the art project that was just coming into being. It informed our early thinking on how the idea of visualizing our work might be possible. While questions about agency and being visible had begun to circulate in our kitchen conversations about how we could visualize the nature of our work, the art project built on this visual example and led to each LLA participant experimenting with ways to embody their quandary by creating an artwork or a 'mediating object' about their concerns. (Fraser, 2019; Bishop, 2012).
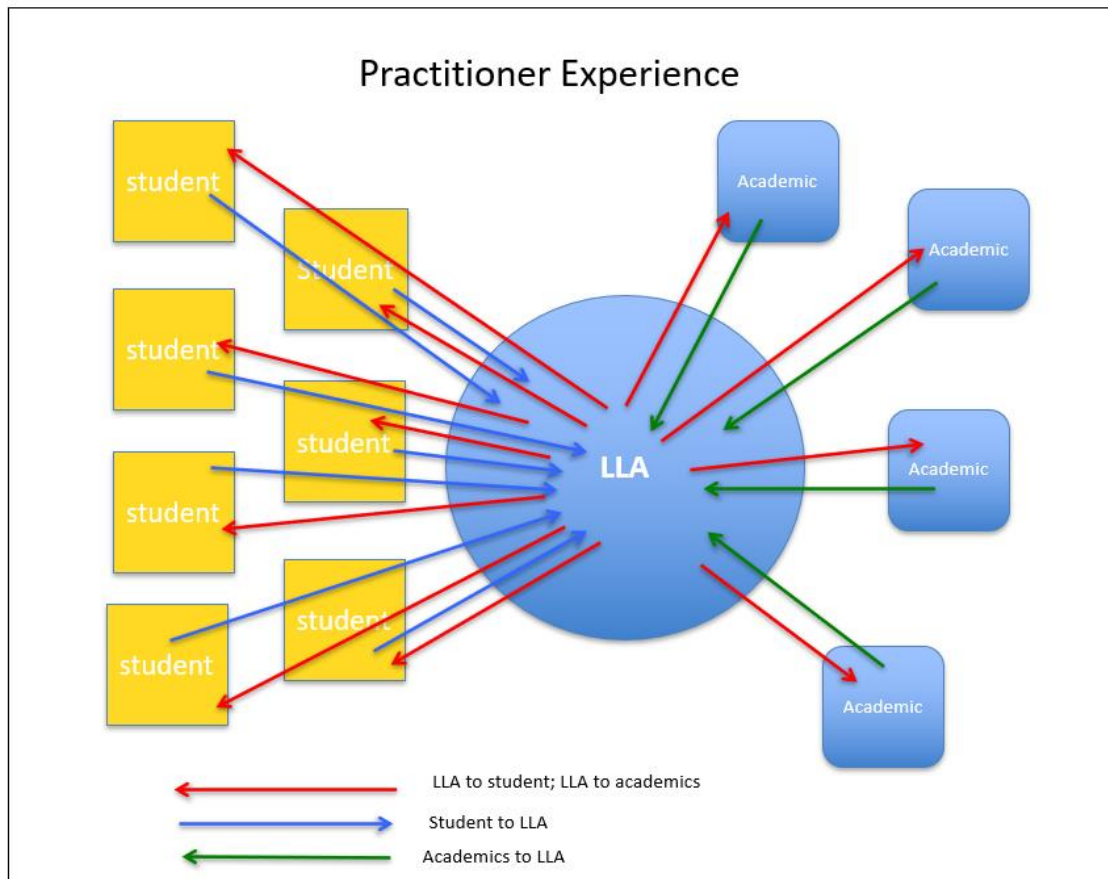
Figure 1. Practitioner Experience: Arrows represent the often unacknowledged, hidden or taken for granted complex lines of communication that occur between the LLA, students and academics. (Reproduced and adapted with permission from Fraser (2019).)

2.3. Background to practice-led research (PLR) and research-led practice (RLP)

Background knowledge that situates PLR methodology is essential to understanding why this method was chosen for the project and how it is different from qualitative, quantitative or conceptual methods of research. It is not within the scope of this paper to provide an in-depth explanation of PLR, but a brief overview of the method is presented. The application of PLR is further discussed in the Methodology section.

Practice-led research is still a relatively new form of research methodology. It is principally used in the creative arts, but has been adopted more widely, including being deployed in cross-disciplinary social research, art / science collaborations (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 10) and participatory art projects (Bishop, 2012; Johanson & Glow, 2018). In this project, we drew on PLR as it is the practice – the creation of artworks – that is leading our project inquiry, and the 'new' knowledge is emanating from the process of making and working with materials, while discussing, documenting, writing or theorizing about the work happened as the work was being made (for instance, notes kept, visual diary recording new ideas and collegial discussions) and/or reflected upon later as a textual summary.

In order to contextualize the use of PLR in this project, a brief overview of its evolution is presented. In 2009, (p. 2-3) Smith and Dean wrote,

> … in the last two to three decades, the idea that arts practice might be a form
> of research has been developing ascendency… At the basis of the relationship
> between creative practice and research is the problematic nature of

conventional definitions of 'research', which are underpinned by the fundamental philosophical quandary as to what constitutes 'knowledge'. Definitions of research used in higher education are almost always similar to the OECD definition:

> Creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humanity, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications.

Analysing this definition, Smith and Dean (2009, p. 3) argue,

> … there is also an unstated implication in this definition, or at least in most interpretations of it, that knowledge is normally verbal or numerical. Since it is clear that a sonic or visual artwork can sometimes transmit knowledge in non-verbal and non-numerical terms, we believe that any definition of knowledge needs to acknowledge these non-verbal forms of transmission. It also must include the idea that knowledge is itself often unstable, ambiguous and multidimensional, can be emotionally or affectively charged, and cannot necessarily be conveyed with the precision of a mathematical proof. This concept of knowledge as unstable is fundamental to a postmodernist view of the world.

Further …

> The term practice-led research and its affiliates (practice-based research, practice as research) are employed to make two arguments about practice which are often overlapping and interlinked: firstly, as just indicated, that creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs; secondly, to suggest that creative practice – the training and specialised knowledge that creative practitioners have and the processes they engage in when they are making art – can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research. The first argument emphasises creative practice in itself, while the second highlights the insights, conceptualisation and theorisation which can arise when artists reflect on and document their own creative practice. (p. 5)

Our project employs these two arguments whereby creative works have been produced in the form of tangible artefacts that embody the LLA practitioner's subjective experience, quandary and educational concerns. Secondly, the insights gleaned from the process of artmaking are written up in the form of reflective text which document how the artefact relates to the LLA's quandary and how the creative process may have contributed to further insights and /or new knowledge. These reflections were themed using thematic analysis (Saldana, 2009, 2011) as a way to report on the group's findings.

2.4. Participatory art practices

Two key texts describing ways of bringing artists and non-artists together informed planning for the LLA's professional development day in June 2019. Claire Bishop's (2012) perspectives on participatory art offered a context for the creative involvement of others, bringing together not only the creation of a visible object, but also a 'group dynamic, a social situation, a change of energy, a raised consciousness' (Bishop, 2012). We also drew on Katya Johanson and Hilary Glow's (2018) definition of participatory art as 'the creative participation of people who would not ordinarily or formally identify as artists in producing the art activity, alongside self-identified and professional artists' (2018, p. 4). These texts supported our early foray in bringing art practice methods to an academic university setting with LLAs who were non-artists. As a group, we participated in a collegial journey; we discussed each other's quandaries and witnessed how the

development of participants' artworks were supporting their ideas.[3] This enabled deep and rich habitation of participants' ideas and paved the way for a sense of trust and belonging to develop.

2.5. Project beginnings: Staff professional development day bringing together artists and non-artists

In June 2019, the LLA unit consisting of twenty participants met for a full day of talks, creative experimenting and discussion about our LLA work. As mentioned, pre-reading informed the group to expect something 'new', but they did not know the form it was going to take.

Two artists' talks opened the professional development day by presenting examples of artists' works to encourage ideas and sharing. The first presentation was an historical overview of 'disruptive' artworks (drawing on Harper's invitation) and artists' actions, showing how selected artists had pursued a revolutionary pathway through art activism to make the invisible visible. We drew on the history of Social Realism, defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art* (Chilvers & Glaves-Smith, 2015, p133) as,

> A very broad term for painting (or literature or other art) that comments on contemporary social, political, or economic conditions, usually from a left-wing viewpoint, in a realistic manner. Often the term carries with it the suggestion of protest or propaganda in the interest of social reform.

Artists' works depicting the social realism of their time and the crusade needed to make their work visible were selected and presented. The first speaker's initial focus was to show how artists have responded to unjustness in their time through their artworks. This presentation expanded to include approaches from a history of art activism to depictions of social realism in art both internationally and within Australia. Examples of such artists included past and present international and Australian artists such as Honoré Daumier, Gustave Courbet, Francisco Goya, Edouard Manet, August Sander, Grant Wood, Kara Walker, William Kentridge, Cindy Sherman, Gillian Wearing, Gordon Bennet, Fiona Hall and Brook Andrews, to name a few.

Secondly, artist Ross Coulter spoke about the development of his performance and photography practice, highlighting his specialist knowledge and approach to artmaking as being led by an idea and 'trusting' the materials to 'voice' one's concerns. While listening to the presentations, staff could play with a range of art materials arranged in front of them to begin to 'visualize their quandary'. Figure 2 represents how the art materials were set up: a large, wide scroll of paper that ran the length of the table to experiment on. Everyone had access to a variety of art materials in front of them. These included acrylic paint and brushes, pastels, charcoal, wax crayons, and collage materials such as threads, newspapers and magazines. Figure 3 captures the time given to the group to focus on the visual exploration. Figure 4 presents the group's overall collective response. The physical presence of an image enabled ideas, thoughts and quandaries to be discussed within the group. This approach follows Bishop's (2012) participatory art practice where the image functions as a 'mediating object', allowing ideas to be explored and discussed through the materialized image. It is interesting to note that everybody's representation is different. Research questions emerged providing further focus on issues that were important to everyone. These first images acted as a starting point for those participants who continued to stay with the project. Note that all planning day participants were given the option to continue or withdraw from the project. Those who agreed to proceed signed a consent form giving permission to name them as both the creators of the artworks included below, and as the authors of the associated reflections.

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[3] An account of this project was presented at the 7th International Academics Identities Conference: *The Meaningful University: Exploring Contemporary Complexities and Challenges - and working towards what matters,* Roskilde University, Denmark, 2021.
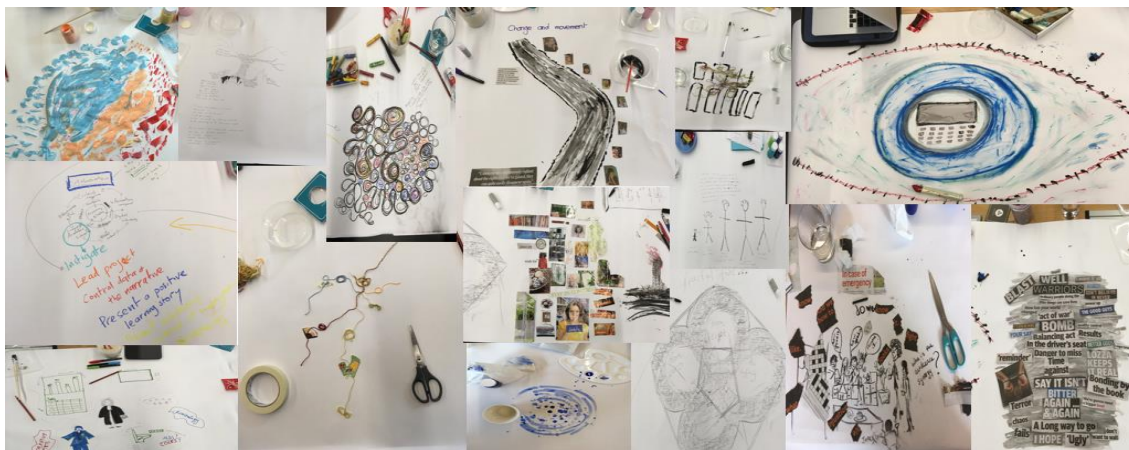
Figure 2. Professional development day, June 2019: Table setup for artmaking.

Figure 3. Professional development day, June 2019: LLAs working on their images.

Figure 4. Professional development day, June 2019: A collage of artworks produced on the day.

In the afternoon, a further collaborative experiment extended these ideas and discussions. Prepared scenarios exploring a range of complex individual consultation (IC) situations between an LLA and a student were story-boarded, performed and filmed in groups of four on our smart phones. These interviews were inspired by the work of artist Gillian Wearing (2012) and captured the muddled perceptions of our work and how it can be mis/understood by students and academics.

This professional development day led to an ongoing project that has endured for over two years. We were inspired to set up weekly discussions, intercampus art-making days, and a mini 'Works in Progress' exhibition where LLAs could hang their work and discuss ideas with each other across campuses via Zoom. This approach led to the exposure of each other's ideas and a growing trust as we began to verbalize and visualize our quandaries.

2.6. Ongoing development, textual reflections and analysis

In keeping with PLR methodology, the project continued to develop during Covid 19 lockdowns as we shared new readings, artworks and artists, ideas and philosophies with each other. Further participatory acts included presenting individual research interests with the group. This widened our theoretical scope, deepened our conversations and created space for art practices to grow. We delved into art and the Anthropocene and branches of philosophy that explored alternate ways of

being. Our conversations were dynamic, even rhizomatic in that there were no boundaries, ideas flowed freely, and we could discuss the quandary from multiple perspectives.

As the project developed, LLAs were asked to write a 500-word written reflection about their artwork and the issues underpinning their quandary. This was informed by Smith and Dean (2009, p. 2) who observe that '… practice can result in new research insights, such as those that arise out of making creative works and/or the documentation and theorization of that work.' Written reflections captured descriptions of each participant's experience and quandary, which ultimately enables a richer understanding of each participant's experience to be accessed by a wider audience. This written documentation enabled a thematic analysis to be undertaken to identify the key quandaries underpinning the artworks. The written reflections were interpreted by three researchers via two coding cycles. The approach drew on Saldana's (2011, p. 104) descriptive coding method to find key patterns that captured the essential insights of the participant's texts. This process identified seven core themes underpinning the LLA's creative works, which are presented in the Findings and Discussion sections.

3. Methodology and research design

3.1. Theoretical frameworks

In keeping with the epistemic diversity art PLR approaches must allow for, the following section outlines how PLR methodology acted as an umbrella for the diverse approaches taken in this project. Discussion of theoretical frameworks informing this paper is not covered here, but rather drawn upon as relevant throughout the paper. For instance, one participant drew upon theories by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) such as their rhizomatic and line of flight concepts, while another participant, was influenced by the educational, neoliberal and political principles of Paulo Freire (2016). However, limited space restricts in-depth explanation of how particular participants used these theories to create works of art, except to say the theories provided a means for the LLA to discuss their practice quandary with the group by thinking with different theories. As the distinction between theoretical frameworks and theoretical perspectives is not always clear, there will be further detail on theoretical perspectives in section 3.2.

3.2. Practice-led research (PLR)

PLR is the overarching organising principle behind the way this project was conceived, unfolded and developed. PLR has informed the totality of the project's nature from Rowena Harper's initial prompts, and the early Figure 1. Practitioner Experience (2019), that attempts to capture our third space workplaces, to designing a staff professional development day around disruption and art activism, to ongoing creating with art materials, weekly dialogues, artmaking intensives and collegial feedback sessions, while also guiding individual participants' artwork development. As mentioned in Section 2.3 Background, the popularity of PLR as a research method in an academic setting has grown in the twenty-first century. There are now many texts that theorize the complexities and nuances of this method. As such, this section describes how the method is being used in this project. We draw on Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt's (2010, p. 191) definition which states PLR may be understood through the term 'bricolage'[4] and advises:

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[4] Bricolage is derived from the French verb *bricoler* to 'tinker' and is a term that describes the way creative practitioners may work. Here it refers to research approaches that may use hybrid, eclectic and multiple methodologies. See Robyn Stewart, (2010) Creating new stories for praxis in Barrett, E., & Bolt, B. (Eds.), *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry,* pp 123-133, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. for an in depth understanding of the application of bricolage methodology in the creative arts. Stewart writes, "In creating a bricolage, the bricoleur appropriates available methods, strategies and empirical materials or invents or pieces together new tools as necessary… the bricoleur reads widely and become knowledgeable about the many interpretative paradigms that can be brought to a problem." (p127).

> the materials and methods used by the artist are not innocent – they are en-
> coded with historical knowledge and conventions and are therefore bound to
> conceptual and theoretical frameworks … Creative arts researchers can
> adapt … conventions … according to the particular nature of their studio en-
> quiry. The materials and methods used … form part of the enquiry itself…
> often the process involves inventing new methods and using new or uncon-
> ventional materials.

Thus, our practice-led approach adopted the power of bricolage to capture the complexity of the project, while also allowing for individual participants to follow their independent theoretical, conceptual and material pathways, in accordance with their quandary. As Smith and Dean (2009, p5) note, 'some commentators take the view that practice-led research is a new and distinctive form of research that is developing its own domain-specific methodologies.' This allowed scope within the project for participants to choose what best enabled the development of new forms of expression and documentation.

This paper has thus far identified historical and contemporary works of art and artistic frameworks (artist works and period styles as primary sources) that background ways artists have worked 'disruptively', so that the LLA group might have access to inspiring 'revolutionary' art examples. While, as explained earlier, discussion of theoretical frameworks is limited in this paper, it is nevertheless worth mentioning here that the practice-led approach taken in this project was influenced in a broad sense by a range of interpretative frameworks that transformed our kitchen conversations. For instance, participatory art practice underpinned our approach in bringing a group of non-artists together exploring the general and particular aspects of our LLA work (Bishop, 2012; Johanson & Glow, 2018). Material methodologies oriented the research towards thinking with and through materiality (Woodward, 2020; see also Rose 2016; Lehmann, Scholten & Chapman, 2013). The phenomenology of lived experience enabled deep reflection through conversations, and the development of images and text (van Manen, 1990). Supporting the development of creative thinking were expansive learning at work theories (Engeström, 2015), resistance in unjust times, (Scambler, 2012) multimodal and narrative inquiry approaches (Manathunga, Selkrig & Baker, 2017; Barkhuizen, et al., 2013). Art practice-led methods were also supported by Johnny Saldana (2011), who notes,

> The arts are not just products, they are epistemological processes … *ways of
> knowing through personal inquiry and aesthetic expression* (p. 15) … We of-
> ten forget that visual images are also texts…and can communicate at symbolic
> and subliminal levels, the meaning of participants' experiences (p. 132).

For instance, see Figures 15 and Participant 8's textual reflection concerning the black and white monoprint *Transformations* (2019), for an understanding of the way symbols are working for the participant in this image.

Thus, in deploying PLR methodology, a way was found to visualize the LLA's invisible, marginalized work practice and quandary. This also led to an appreciation of the effects of neoliberalism underpinning the workplace, identity and profession. As participants' ideas evolved, PLR offered a method that encouraged participants to practice handling materials and from that process, theorize about their work and emergent ideas via reflective text and ongoing documentation.

3.3. Project design

Four project leaders designed and focused the project. They included two trained artists: an artist/academic teaching in the Creative Arts faculty (Ross Coulter), and an artist/LLA (Terrie Fraser). Ross Coulter is a visual artist, working in photography, filmmaking, sculpture, painting and dance performance. At the time of undertaking the project, Coulter was working at Deakin University and Monash University. The artist/LLA had the privilege of being invited by Coulter to work collaboratively with students for several years before Covid 19, embedding writing and

language support in second year photography units. When the LLA art project was first conceived in 2019, the LLA invited Coulter to reciprocate and join us to share his art-making skills and expertise with our non-artist trained LLA group. As such, the project had two trained artists who could guide and steer the visualization of ideas and the making of art works. The project thus had rigorous conceptual and material investigations that underpinned the development of art works. Two further LLAs, Caroline Wright-Neville and Vittoria Grossi, acted as project coordinators. The final group included a further eight LLAs working across diverse faculties on four different campuses (city and regional) at Deakin University.

As mentioned in Section 2.4 Project Beginnings, as the project advanced, we held weekly online meetings with the group. This kept us focused, engaged with the process and keen to observe the development of colleagues' artworks and theoretical ideas supporting their work. We held two art making intensives on campus (before Covid), that taught new skills such as printmaking, silk-screening, clay sculpture, painting and drawing. The group also held a mini 'Works in Progress' exhibition, shown on campus and linked to participants on other campuses via zoom - so we could discuss works with each other. This event encouraged participants to exhibit their work and talk about how the visual aspects were operating in relation to their theoretical and conceptual ideas. We drew on a dialogic style of analysing each other's work, whereby the participant talked informally about their work after which, colleagues offered their response and interpretation. This style of collegial feedback is encouraged in the creative arts as a pedagogic way to strengthen criticality, gauge others' response to the work, and to 'see' if the work is effective in conveying the intended ideas. It is also a time and space to document an artwork, note feedback and reflect if further research needs to be done.

Originally the project was designed to continue for twelve months, but as Covid invaded our workspaces, we were able to continue online throughout the pandemic. In keeping with our first aim of being more visible, we were originally successful in a submission to exhibit our work in the university gallery during December 2020 to January 2021. However, Covid 19 thwarted our plans, and this did not take place. We did present our work at three conferences, one of which was international on Zoom, making our aim partially successful, but not achieving the long term visibility we would have liked.

3.4. Phenomenology

Phenomenology plays a part in understanding how the project might be understood in terms of what van Manen describes as "gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). After our professional development day in June 2019, the following questions arose from the group. They became a touchstone for participants to focus on what we were trying to capture:

1. What is the work of an LLA?
2. What is not visible about the work of an LLA and how can I make that visible?
3. How can I make the challenging work of an LLA visible?
4. How can I reveal the complexity of an LLA's workplace practices though art-based methodologies?
5. How can I reveal the complex issues that are important to me, yet hidden from view through art-based methodologies?

We felt at the heart of these prompts was a further question:

6. What does it mean to belong?

As a contributing theoretical framework, phenomenology enabled participants to consider their workplace phenomenon through another lens that dwelled in 'essences' or what is at the core and heart of a phenomenon.

3.5. Documenting, Writing and Textual Reflections

As mentioned in section 3.1 Methodology, most discourse theorizing practice-led research or re-search-led practice hold views with 'different degrees of emphasis' (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 5-9) as to how we might conceptualize what is going on.

The role of 'writing up' or documenting the knowledge found through working with materials (or artforms) and the research's contextual and /or theoretical underpinnings is essential for practice-led projects so that they are accessible to a wider audience. Smith and Dean (2009, p. 25) suggest that,

> … [c]reative practitioners traditionally had an ideological investment in … mystification because it shored up the idea of the creative genius. However, there have been numerous examples of influential creative pioneers who laid out their ideas, strategies and critical positions through essays or manifestos… such as Surrealist painters and writers … [or the Futurist's manifestos].

There are different approaches to generating commentary about the work dictated by the methods used, the materials, or the way the practice has evolved. Brad Haseman (2006) defines practice-led research as 'performative' and distinct from qualitative or quantitative research but argues that "various research strategies … can be employed in the making of an artwork, and the role of self-generated commentary about it". He points out that words and text "not only express the research, but in that expression become the research itself" (Haseman, 2006, p. 102).

Simultaneously, Haseman (2006, p. 104) observes that practitioners may implement strategies from the qualitative research tradition, but qualifies this approach stating,

> But these will typically be inflected differently from their qualitative application. Most commonly, performative researchers progress their studies by employing variations of: reflective practice, participant observation, performance ethnography, ethnodrama, biographical/ autobiographical/narrative inquiry, and the inquiry cycle from action research.

A slightly different perspective is theorized by Barbara Bolt who distinguishes between practice and 'praxical knowledge'. Bolt (2007, p. 30) draws on Heidegger's examination of

> the particular form of knowledge that arises from our handling of materials and processes [and that] we come to know the world theoretically only after we have come to understand it through handling.

Smith and Dean (2009, p.6-7) state Bolt argues similarly to Haseman in that,

> there can arise out of creative practice "a very specific sort of knowing, a knowing that arises through handling materials in practice" (Bolt 2007, p. 29).

The handling of materials and theorizing out of that practical experience (Bolt 2007, p. 33) is very different to applying a theory to the practice. In using PLR in this project, we are referring to the works of art as a form of research and to the creation of the work as generating insights which are 'performed' as we firstly discuss the ideas with each other, and secondly document ideas and theories emanating from the works by 'writing them up' as a textual reflection.

Thirdly, as a way of gathering an understanding of the group's knowledge elicited by the artworks, discussion and reflective text, a thematic analysis was conducted on the participants' written reflections. This qualitative strategy may seem to deviate from a practice-led approach, yet in the spirit of bricolage, a practice-led approach employs variations of research paradigms to dialogue with those paradigms, and this is another way to articulate findings and new knowledge in new ways.

3.6. Thematic Analysis

Participants wrote a 500-word reflection about their artwork and the quandary the artwork was trying to capture. We drew on thematic analysis, as theorised by Saldana (2009; 2011), as a way to interpret the written texts and understand the group's findings overall. Saldana (2009, p. 140) writes, 'a theme is a phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means.' Saldana (2009, p. 140-41) further clarifies the method using other theorists' points of view stating Boyatzis (1998, p. vii) explains that a theme

> at a minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon. A theme may be identified at the manifest level (directly observable in the information) or at the latent level (underlying the phenomenon).

DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000, p. 362) propose a theme is

> an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent [patterned] experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole.

To van Manen (1990, p. 87), a theme is "the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand".

The application of thematic analysis resonated with our attempt to understand the meaningful whole of our project's quandaries. Three of the paper's authors agreed to theme the data by looking for patterns or relationships and checking for commonalities, and /or differences. The three authors themed the texts individually after which we discussed our findings and cycled again separately, to come to the essence of the phenomenon in the text. We then agreed on the final seven themes that captured the artworks, quandaries and experience as a whole.

4. Findings and discussion

In order not to duplicate participants' artworks in the Findings and Discussion sections, these two sections have been combined. Section 4 is organised using the seven key themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the participant's written reflections. Participants' artworks and reflective text are included alongside the themes.

The seven themes are:
1. Capturing the impact of neoliberalism.
2. Neoliberalism, time, space and the Anthropocene.
3. Neoliberalism: Frameworks impacting LLA professional identity: 'Third Space', marginalization and hidden structures.
4. The role of the LLA is complex.
5. The student experience is complex.
6. Embodiment: The art process – artworks as metaphors – art as a mediating object.
7. Meaningful outcomes

### 4.1. Capturing the impact of neoliberalism

Neoliberal ideology impacts the very fabric of tertiary education, teaching and learning (Connell, 2013). The way students learn, the cultural capital they come with, the pressures on space, time and relationship building, the casualization of the workforce, and the need for continuous improvement to produce more with less – all impact the way students learn and how assistance can be offered and delivered. For instance, the power behind the dominant ideology can supress principles of engaging in genuine relationships, not only with students, but with academics, colleagues and management. In Figures 5 and 6, Participant 1, Steven Grivas, uses the 'eye' as a means to

convey the notion of being observed within a technological landscape. The textual reflection considers:

> *Due to the lack of time to delve deep, reflect and ponder, the neoliberal university promotes quick engagement and an administrative reliance on student evaluation that measure the success of a unit or course. For the student, the neoliberal university fosters a learning environment that … is focused on ticking boxes, jumping through hoops, and 'getting it done' rather than carefully developing, thinking through, and evaluating their learning approaches and processes, which ideally should actively engage in a reflective way with… how they learn.* (Participant 1)

Figure 5. *The reflective eye* [clay and computer assemblage] (Steven Grivas, 2019).
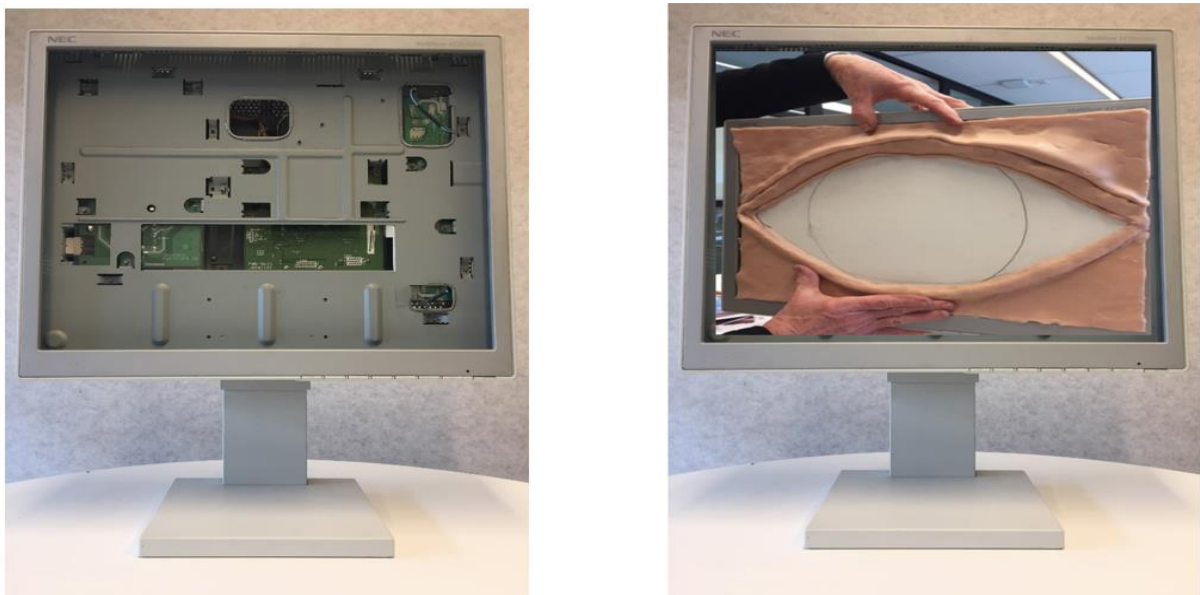
Figure 6. *The reflective eye* [clay and computer assemblage] (Steven Grivas, 2019).

4.1.1. Capturing neoliberal regimes in higher education institutions that call for closure and certainty

There have been many critiques of neoliberal regimes in universities (e.g. Desierto & De Maio, 2020; Gurney & Grossi, 2019; Bottrell & Manathunga, 2019; Manathunga & Bottrell, 2019; Giroux, 2017; Connell, 2013), but in this project, we limited ourselves mainly to reporting on our experiences and encounters with management structures and the flow-on effects in the work we

do. In this project, while a range of critiques are engaged with, coverage is limited to the particular quandaries that participants chose to focus on. Participant 2, Elaine Speight-Burton, acknowledges for example, that the university is a place of learning derived from the west / global north and that this is a time for "re-thinking different/ce/s'". Participant 2's work seen in Figure 7 plays with notions of:

> … ways of seeing and knowing that are pre-scribed and restricted ….
>
> The drawing of the tree is another way of exploring ideas and concepts that we tend to take for granted, or that seem 'natural', but are rather transplants, imports, from another time, another place and another culture. The 'tree' of western knowledge is contrasted with the 'actual' tree/s of knowing, our here and our now. 'Noojee', also known as The Ada tree, is a 300 year old mountain ash tree, a survivor of remnant forests which once covered Victoria, Australia. In these works, I want to explore different ways of knowing, teaching and learning.
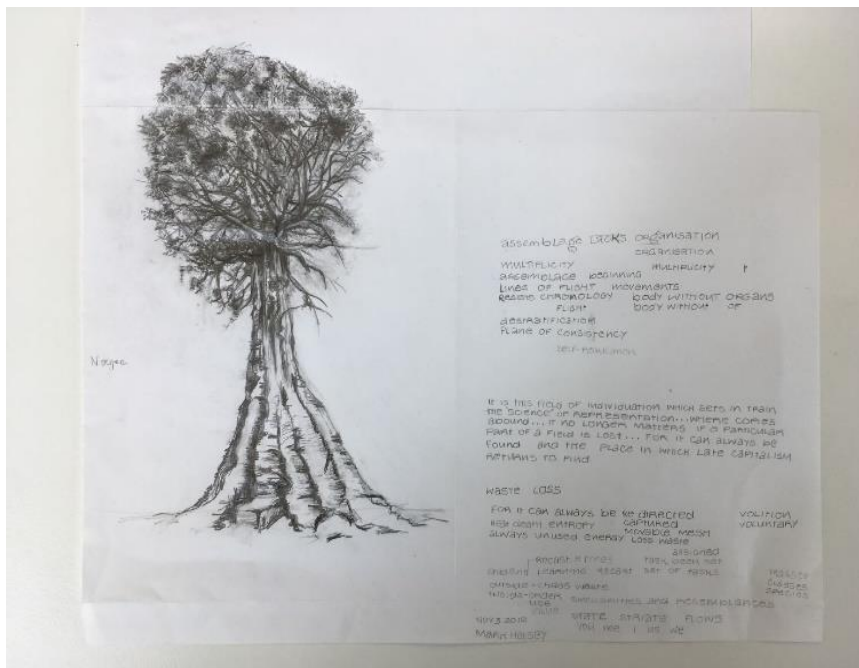
Figure 7. *Survivors* [pencil on paper, ongoing series of works] (Elaine Speight-Burton, 2019).

4.1.2. Capturing neoliberalism's contradictions

Through a photographic iPhone series, *Tent* 2019, seen in Figures 8 and 9, Participant 3, Tao Bak, sought to comment on the contrasting values between each type of building 'occupation'. The flexible yet robust tent denotes the participant's aspirations for noting the hidden, down to earth, 'slow education movement' which is here nestled alongside the corporate and very visible university buildings. The images seek to represent the dichotomy between the two structures of education and forms of learning, one which is fostered and nurtured slowly and the other driven by highflying neoliberal agendas. The symbol of the tent also has links with past and present art activist metaphors and actions. For instance, Participant 3 found particular inspiration in artistic uses of the tent by established artists such as French artist Gustav Courbet's defiant response when in 1855, Courbet erected a circus tent, 'The Pavilion of Realism', to exhibit his rejected painting, *The Painter's Studio: A real allegory summing up seven years of my artistic and moral life,* 1854-55 (https://smarthistory.org/courbet-the-artists-studio/). This challenging act sought to question the ideologies underpinning the French art critics, just as the *Tent series* seeks to expose and question the different educational forces operating today. Further tent 'actions' and images

continued to inspire metaphors that developed Participants 3's artwork. For example, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra, Australia, has been a permanent site of protest occupation since 1972. The Tent Embassy focuses on rights for Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination and land rights. Tents also depict early Australian settler living conditions as can be seen in paintings by Tom Roberts, *The Artists Camp, 1886* (https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/2888/), and Arthur Streeton's *Settler's Camp*, 1888 (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arthur_Streeton_-_Settler%27s_camp_(1888).jpg). The tent may also refer to popular 'back to nature' holiday accommodation or 'glamping' vacations. Other artists who draw on the tent in aspects of their work are Tracey Emin with *The Tent,* 1969-95 (https://bilderfahrzeuge.hypotheses.org/3437), and Fiona Foley with *Who are these strangers and where are they going?* 1991 (https://memoreview.net/blog/fiona-foley-at-ballarat-foto-biennale-by-maddee-clark/page:18). Participant 3's *Tent* images visually play with setting up a tent in a corporate landscape; here is where a soft, yet strong object meets the hard concrete environment. The tent images seek to capture a quandary and alert the viewer to contradictions: the way neoliberalism engulfs the time and space needed for slow education, deep thinking, learning and reflection.

Figure 8. *Tent #1* **[**iPhone photo**]** (Tao Bak, September 2019).

Figure 9. *Tent #2* [iPhone photo series] (Tao Bak, September 2019).

4.2. Neoliberalism, time, space and the Anthropocene

Neoliberal ideology further perpetuates 'surface' experiences and learning (Desierto & De Maio, 2020; Bottrell & Manathunga, 2019). Participant 4's work by Caroline Wright-Neville, seen in Figure 10, seeks to capture the paradox between the time required to teach and learn something new with the expectation that it will be done in a fast, convenient and expedient way. Inspired by student quotes posted in a chat box along with the use of copious emojis, Participant 4 wrote:

> *There was something about the phrasing, the emojis and the PowerPoint presentation I was delivering, that made me wonder about the distance between learning, nature and the process of exploration and discovery.*

Figure 10. *Feeling the Anthropocene* [colour photocopy] (Caroline Wright-Neville, 2019).

Participant 4 further noted that:

> *[In] a market driven education system, the processes that people undergo as they learn has become homogenised, prescriptive and discouraging of risk-taking. In an outcome driven assessment process, time is almost a nuisance especially when being 'transformed' through education. In this context, we push against the perception of our work as a quick fix to problems that are deep rooted and structurally unsound. When we push against this perception, we're met with others also pushing against the fraying of their own working experiences. In the twenty first century, being a Language and Learning Adviser has become SO functionary, that, at times it feels repetitive, surface deep and at times meaningless.*

In further work, Participant 4 also references the idea of time and space for 'slow learning'. To present a contrast to the emoji artwork, Participant 4 dwelled in the landscape to create Figures 11, 12 and 13, while writing:

> *I wanted to depict the idea of a gradual learning through landscapes. To do this I thought about the idea of 'geologically and archaeologically noticing' as a transformative learning experience. As a Learning Adviser, I want to tell*

the students to spend time outside looking at landscapes and think critically about where we're headed.

Figure 11. *Looking* [gouache on paper] (Caroline Wright-Neville, 2020).

Figure 12. *Feeling* [charcoal and gouache on paper] (Caroline Wright-Neville, 2020).

Figure 13. *All the flowers in my garden* [iPhone photo] (Caroline Wright-Neville, 2020).

4.3. Neoliberalism: Frameworks impacting LLA professional identity: Third space, marginalization and hidden structures

Language and Learning Advisers are often referred to as 'third space' professionals (Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Benzie, 2015; English, 2005), a position that is 'in-between' and often hidden or marginalized. Participant 5, Vittoria Grossi, commented on the implications of this position, stating:

> *As third space professionals located outside the traditional teaching space, advisers are expected to negotiate work within an established hierarchy and show impact of their work. Managerialism expects and rewards such personal traits but ignores the struggles experienced in the ongoing negotiation process and representation of advisers.*

In Figure 14, Participant 5 sought to capture this invisible terrain. Words and texts have been 'framed', thus encasing the experience of the adviser. These texts represent key concepts and struggles, often sitting behind the identity work that an LLA must do to understand the meaningful nature of their work. Participant 5 wrote:

> *I have chosen to highlight text and use these keywords that represent the adviser in their fluid and sometimes fraught working context. In doing so, I aim to tell the story of the context and highlight the experience of the adviser.*

Figure 14. *Royal Commission* [handmade and found wooden frames, monoprint] (Vittoria Grossi, 2019).

In Figure 15, *Shoutout,* Participant 5 pinpoints seven quandaries that need to be recognised as requiring further attention. These include:

- Home discipline – to emphasize that we are professionals from different fields but who work within a paradigm that requires collaboration but within which we are marginalized.
- 3rd space professionals
- Diversity
- Negotiate, embed, support
- Neoliberalism
- Power
- Disruption
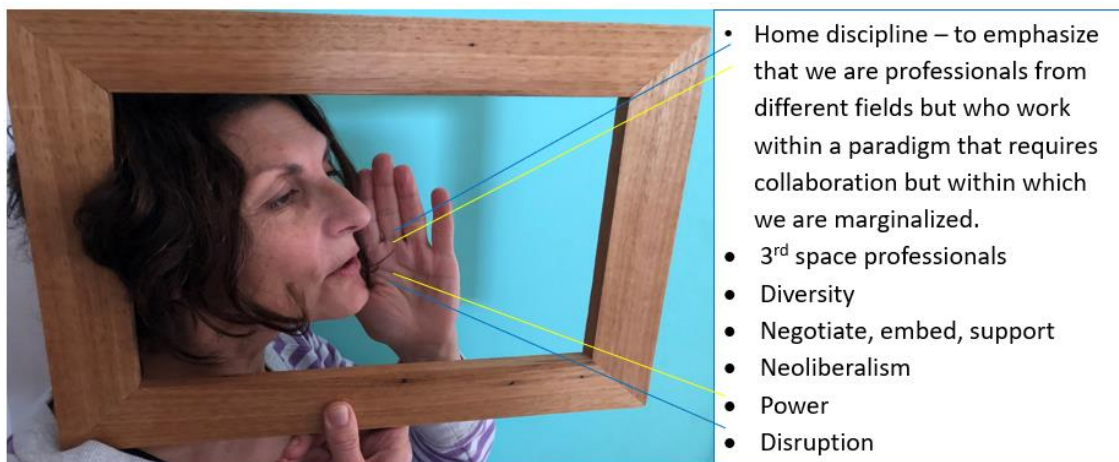
Figure 15. *Shoutout* [iPhone photo] (Vittoria Grossi, 2020).

4.4. The role of the LLA is complex

The LLA role supports all students across the university. The cohort is diverse: from undergraduates to postgraduates, international and local, those with disabilities, of mature age, first in family, and those from different cultural and language backgrounds (including visiting overseas students) where English is not their first language. The delivery of services is also diverse, including face-to-face, online, as a lecture or embedded within a unit site. As Participant 1, Steven Grivas noted:

> *[This] complex ROLE encompasses observing the student beyond the piece of writing ...[we] engage with many different kinds of learners of different ages, and from very diverse cultural and social backgrounds.*

In occupying a 'third space' position, the LLA's role inherently lacks visibility. As such, the meaningful work of the LLA is often invisible. Figure 16 is the initial sketch for a proposed montage using the symbolic world of alchemy. It seeks to communicate the transformational states that occur during the student and LLA consultation. Participant 6, Eileen Hanrahan, aspired to capture the magic in this process and wrote:

> *LLA professionals are largely invisible in the contemporary university; the meaningfulness of our work is largely hidden. This art object (a montage) refers to the disconnect between what we do and how we are perceived. The montage visually represents our roles as academic teachers, deftly providing a bridge between lecturers, assessments and university students. Our rich and meaningful work is represented as a kind of alchemy, occurring out of sight.*

However, meaningfulness *can* become visible (or felt) in individual consultations between LLAs and students when connections are bridged, relationships are built, and students grow in confidence, curiosity, knowledge and success within their disciplinary requirements. As Participant 6 wrote:

> *The alchemy* is *appreciated by students who dare to cross the threshold into LLA spaces and is expressed by such phrases as: 'I feel confident now'; 'I know what I am doing!' Yet our successes are not well known in the general university community. We are constantly being asked: 'What is it that you do exactly?'*

Figure 16. Initial sketch for montage, *Making the work of LLAs visible and meaningful,* [Text and image montage. Alchemic symbols chart from Roob (2005)] (Eileen Hanrahan, 2019-20).
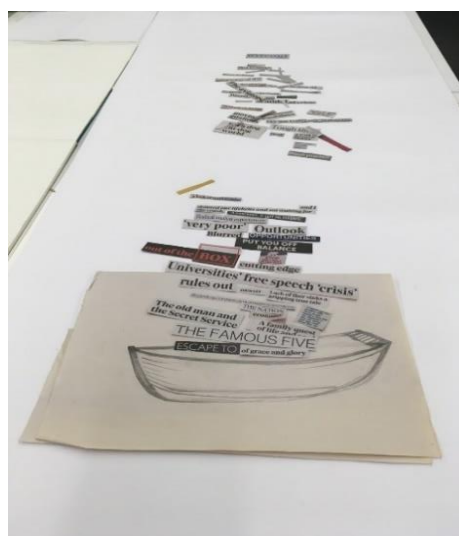
4.5. The student experience is complex

While students are required to demonstrate academic capability upon entering university, there are varying degrees of expertise in reading and writing. Often students struggle, particularly non-English speaking background (NESB) students or culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students, and can be overwhelmed by the texts they have to read. Figures 17 and 18 explore this sense of textual burden by using the image of a boat being swamped by text. Participant 7, Laura Dickinson wrote:

> *... for some students, reading and writing are not always easy. Therefore, initially the artwork endeavoured to show the inundation of the text that students are often faced with when they enter tertiary education and what it may feel like to some students who have difficulty when trying to engage with text.*

Figure 17. *Text collage* [word collage on paper] (Laura Dickinson, 2019).

Figure 18. *We're gonna need a bigger boat* [Text collage and pencil drawing] (Laura Dickinson, 2019).

4.5.1. The student experience is complex: Mature age entry

Participant 8, Gail Fluker, drew on her experience as an educator to capture the issues of a mature age woman returning to study and the complex emotional journey that entails. Reflecting on a collage she created which later inspired the monoprint in Figure 19, Participant 8 wrote:

> *Fears and pain are evident while the woman's goals are mixed with self-doubt accompanied by moments of growth … spiral shapes represent stress and a leaf indicates growth.*

Figure 19. *Transformations* [Monoprint] (Gail Fluker, 2019).

4.6. Embodiment – the art process – artworks as metaphors for the student experience

Artworks emerged not only from the LLAs reflections on their pedagogical practice and their encounters with a diverse range of students (whether they be linked to international, national, cultural differences or mature age experiences), but the artworks also explored personal journeys, values and issues they encountered. For Participant 9, Maja Gelov, the artworks took on an embodied meaning as the materials were carefully chosen to represent the LLA's lived experience and context. Participant 9 wrote about her work *Beneath* (2019) shown in Figures 20 and 21, noting:

> *Objects are used as metaphors, which are loaded with meaning for the artist but aim at eliciting an individual interpretation by the spectator… Some attached meanings are more obvious, whilst others hidden or inconspicuous… for instance, the included watch, medicine containers, empty battery case, cables and coins, can be linked to time, health, energy, motivational, technical or financial issues students may be facing; while the objects, textures or arrangements perceived as more aesthetically pleasing, are suggestive to student strengths, virtues, perseverance, development or success.*

Figure 20. *Beneath #1* [Mixed media] (Maja Gelov, 2019).

Figure 21. Maja Gelov [Mixed media] (Maja Gelov, 2019).

4.6.1. Embodiment: Discovering a family history through art

Using art as a vehicle to explore embodiment is described by Participant 8, Gail Fluker, who delved deeper into her family history and traced a remarkable story of an ancestor who at the age of 17, sailed from Ireland to Australia, due to the Irish Potato Famine in 1849. Participant 8 was 17 when she began university, and found upon reflection, her and her ancestor's educational opportunities could not have been more different. Participant 8 wrote:

> *I explored the story of a woman strongly suggesting to be my three times great grandmother (Cole 2005). She was shipped to Australia in 1849 (Cole 2005) through the Earl Grey scheme (McCloughlin 2018), where approximately 4000 young women were sent from Irish poorhouses to perform domestic duties (O'Neill, 2019). I reflected on a point where our stories intersected. According to Cole (2005) she was seventeen years of age when sent on her journey, which was also the age I began my university study. I wanted to explore her legacy within the focus of earlier themes examined and mature age education. I assumed elements of the narrative such as darkness and despair, images representing DNA and … the number 17 in some of the prints.*

Participant 8 traced her ancestral history in a second body of work as she continued to experiment with materials and emergent themes:

> *I am continuing the process of using monoprints to convey my ideas and use acrylic paint, usually in layers with different colours to create different effects… I experiment with different surfaces and textures such as bubble wrap and corrugated cardboard … I have even found rotating some of the prints on a different angle gives me another perspective on my work. Once I turned this print around, I saw a sun and moon and in this print I saw a ship emerge. I work intuitively and have no conscious theory influencing me.*

To develop her theme, Participant 8 also created a collage from various earlier prints by layering acrylic paint over the monoprints as seen in Figure 22. Further investigations included a string monoprint technique overlaid with polystyrene foam imprints (Figure 23).

Figure 22. *Transformations* [Monoprint] (Gail Fluker, 2019).
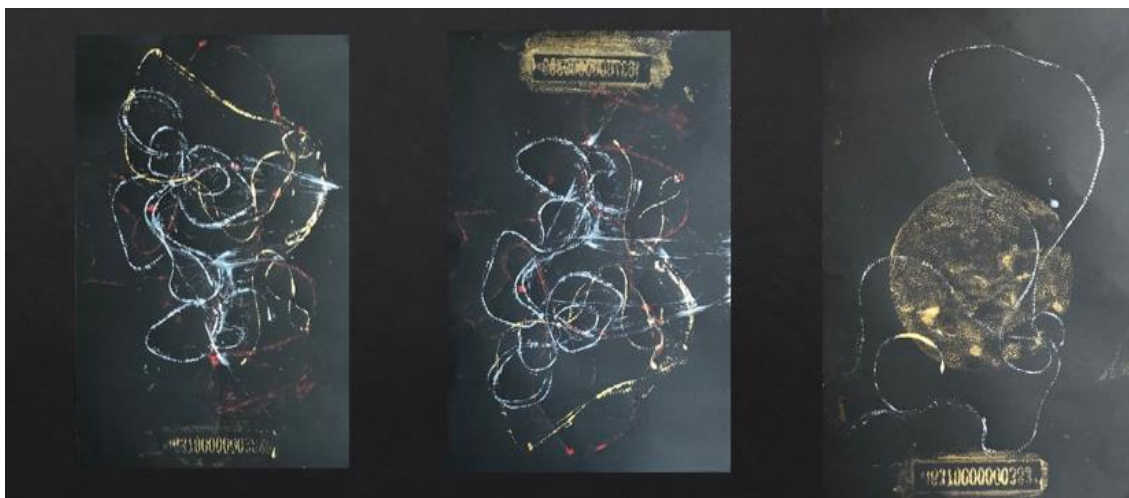
Figure 23. *Transformations* [String monoprint] (Gail Fluker, 2019).

The power of materials to make the invisible visible was at the heart of this project. This form of communication has enabled a victory of sorts. By creating *a mediating object*, an actual physical

work, the invisible has become visible and cannot be ignored. The artwork offers a point of reference to see and unpack the layered roles and identities we encounter. The works are complex, sophisticated, and developed.

### 4.6.2. Embodiment: Perceptual expressions of the student and LLA encounter

How can aesthetic expression mediate a message? The paintings by participant 10, Terrie Fraser, draw on the phenomenon of a *felt* experience of being an LLA. Figures 24 and 25 represent different intimate encounters with students in face-to-face or online consultations, sitting around a table pondering their quandaries, or as in Figure 26, capturing the energy delivered (pre-covid) in a public theatre presentation to large audiences at Orientation.

Figure 24. *Visualizing the 3rd Space* [Gouache on paper] (Terrie Fraser, 2019).

Figure 25. *Visualizing the 3rd Space* [Gouache on paper] (Terrie Fraser, 2019).
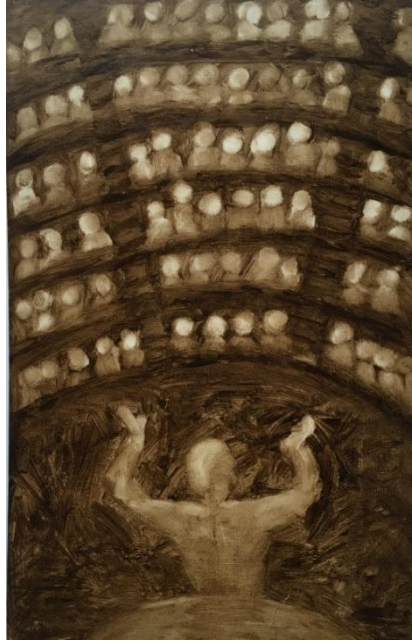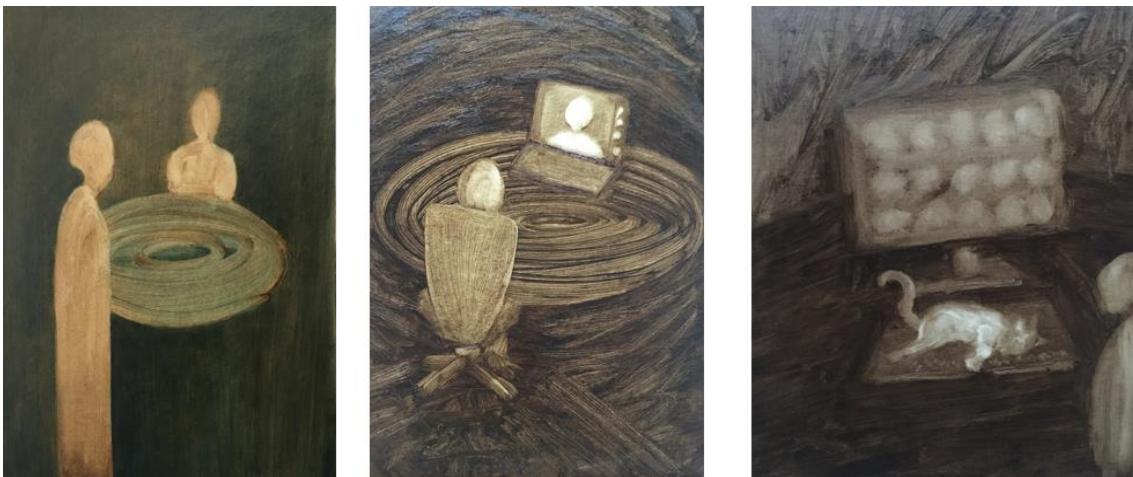
Figure 26. *Visualizing the 3rd Space* [Oil on paper] (Terrie Fraser, 2019).

Online zoom communication has also featured in our work, as the circumstances changed due to the impact of Covid 19. Participant 10 sought to make the space in which we work visible (Figure 27), writing:

> *It is difficult to articulate because it is usually represented via evaluations, figures, reports and ticks. So, instead, I've concentrated on the subjective, felt experience of being an LLA in different situations.*

> *These images are concerned with light, dark and shadow; memory, perception and sensation; theatrical components and intimate spaces in the composition. Subject matter reaches back into a felt experience or a memory of an individual consultation and the remembering of the compositional and transactional space. I try to capture the memory in an initial pencil sketch. I have to feel my way into the drawing, capturing the experience's 'impact', to be able to materialize the event in a drawing or painting.*

Figure 27. *Visualizing the 3rd Space* [Oil on paper] (Terrie Fraser, 2019).

4.7. Meaningful outcomes

Participant 8, Gail Fluker, continued to research her quandary and reflected on the meaningful outcomes:

> *In this art project I am continuing to explore my connection to the narrative of educational opportunity for women in recent generations. I am deeply moved by the difficult life journey of many generations of women and especially the young Famine Orphans sent to Australia, but also very grateful for their legacy which has enabled their descendants the opportunities arising from education.*

For those LLAs not familiar with making art or returning to creating art after many years' absence, this art-based encounter resonated with the student experience of 'not knowing' with some LLAs especially fearful of 'making art'. Participant 6, Eileen Hanrahan, empathetically commented on how the process could be seen to replicate the student experience of being in unfamiliar territory and not part of the inner circle of a discipline, especially when they didn't understand academic writing conventions:

> *As I conceptualise and try to actualise these notions, I ponder my 13-year-old artistic self as it tentatively re-emerges after a long period of dormancy. At first, as I lack formal training in art, I felt distinctly uncomfortable with my untrained artist self in comparison to my writing self. Now I reluctantly embrace the less formed self, sensing that my experience resonates with that of students who step out with us into the unfamiliar territories they encounter as they wrestle with new ways of doing, thinking and being required by academic skills development.*

5. Conclusion

Rowena Harper (2018) noted the strength of the LLA's position is in an agency of disruption, and perhaps because of their ability to move more easily between spaces, that they have the potential to be creative and progressive. As was noted in many LLA group discussions, this project allowed time and space for expansive conversations, artistic development, the building of trust and offered new ways to appreciate LLA work practices. As Participants 2 and 3 noted in a group discussion (October 2020):

> *… through this art project I found other ways of being … I have a space and a community in which to share … I don't feel despair, but move through it … creating a space for complex ideas that neoliberalism is not overtly part of … In this way, if neoliberalism is not part of that part of the project, this is in itself, a form a resistance … a safe space to ask and explore the bigger questions …*

The first aim of making visible the constraints and possibilities under which LLAs work, so that those outside the profession might come to a deeper understanding of the complexity of LLA work practices, was unable to be fully realized in this project. Although we had an exhibition scheduled in a university gallery from December 2020 to January 2021, the Covid 19 pandemic caused the cancellation of this public showing. This exhibition would have enabled greater visibility via showcasing artworks in a university gallery and the requisite promotion via invitations, a catalogue and artist talks. However, while widespread discourse was not possible, the fulfilment of our second aim to voice individual experiences and quandaries surpassed expectations.

Reflecting on Harper's provocation, the *forces shaping our work and the opportunities they offer*, this project uncovered opportunities to explore the history, socio-political structures and agency that inform our LLA work at the professional, group and individual levels. Furthermore, using PLR we found ways to visualize the forces through multimodal responses. This project resulted in meaningful and tangible outcomes such as the creation of artworks, new creative skills, and the

delivery of numerous conference papers that captured the forces shaping our work. Time spent discussing our quandaries, art works, different material approaches and philosophical theories resulted in rich collaborations fostering a deep sharing of participants' experiences. It was suggested, particularly by the participant inspired by the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, that if we cannot find meaning in the LLA work, we can find meaning/FULLness in coming together and working through the complexities of that work. This is the endeavour – becoming comfortable with NO ultimate answer but understanding that complexity can be generative. (Complexity is abhorrent to the neoliberal mindset – it costs money). As Haraway (2016) notes, 'staying with the trouble' is important, as is enacting a 'between' pedagogy (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), instead of performing binary ways of being.

Artmaking via PLR created the opportunity for emergence, reflection and capacity to voice the silent part of ourselves and our working lives in new ways with each other. This too has had benefits for students as we appreciate 'anew' the unfamiliar territory of learning something new or foreign. Some of us are now trying new ways of working with students using art. The project was also timely with the isolation that COVID 19 brought to Victoria with months of lockdowns. The project kept colleagues motivated, inspired and connected with each other, and that has to be a very meaningful and timely outcome.

Coda: Covid 19

While the impact of Covid 19 on LLA work was not part of this original project, the effects of the pandemic have had a profound effect on the academic community, including our professional LLA unit in 2020-23. As many casual academic staff have not been supported by government subsidies, jobs have been lost as student numbers plummeted and courses have been cancelled (Desierto & de Maio, 2020). A group exhibition showcasing the artworks and project was booked for December 2020–January 2021, but was 'postponed indefinitely'. Our LLA work, however, has increased, with many students reaching out for support and engaging more fully with our online services and resources. As the project was well underway before Covid 19 hit in 2020, we have easily been able to move online and continue the PLR approach, while extending discussions and connecting with colleagues.

Acknowledgements

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