

Teaching Artists and Artists Teaching: How do you perceive the different perspectives of artists/teachers as artists in classrooms/schools?

ITAC THINK TANK: November 2019

Hosted by Victoria Ryle & Guests (Tasmania, Australia)

This is the transcript of one of ITAC Collaborative's monthly Think Tank sessions. Each session focuses on a new theme and is hosted by someone from a different country.

In November of 2019, Victoria Ryle led a panel discussion on the role of teaching artists in Tasmania, Australia with several of her colleagues. Guests from around the world also weighed in to provide their perspective on the nuances of existing as an artist and a teacher - working in and outside of traditional classrooms.

Instances in which the text is in [brackets] indicates when the transcriber was not certain of the speaker's original word choice. Ellipses in parentheses indicate when the sound was indecipherable for transcription.

Victoria 00:09

Yes, that was a great introduction. And, as a group of five of us hosting this morning, we talked last night our time - your this morning if you're in UK time - about the fact that we are bringing a very Tasmanian perspective, but we're five people with very different experiences both of being in Tasmania and also different expertise and experiences, as in the space of participatory arts, teaching artistry, etc.

Victoria 00:43

But we're brewing in common our habitation of a very special place Tasmania, an island, down the southern end of the world. And some of us carry generations of Tasmanian ancestors. And others, like myself and Simon, are very much blow-ins to this island. And what I would start by saying is that we do acknowledge that the traditional owners of this island play a very particular and special role in shaping what happens here and carry, for those of you who don't know, a

very, very rich, but also very tragic history. So the first Tasmanian Aboriginal people need to be very much acknowledged - that we think about them in anything we say, Sorry, that was a bit garbled, but hopefully you get it.

Victoria 01:42

So just introduce us: I'm Victoria. And we have as hosts - we have Simon, who's my partner, who's in another part of the house. So we're in separate spaces here. And I can see Selena up next. And I'm just going to move my arrow along to see Abby, and Sarah. And, and that's all of us, and we're going to introduce ourselves. So I'll kick off with me.

Victoria 02:10

And so, I am Victoria Ryle, and I bring to this conversation, and I think I instigated this conversation, partly because my experience and because beginning my career as a teacher, as a primary teacher, and really gradually over time moving into an art space, and finding myself very much in the pond that is a world of artists, and particularly participatory, socially engaged artists. And so those two things inform this conversation for me. And I feel that particularly in Tasmania, it's a really important conversation to be having: how the different perspectives you bring as primarily a teacher or primarily an artist to that engagement with children, the encounters that children have, and with the arts, with art, and with artists.

Victoria 03:12

And so just - just to finish that background. Back in 1996, I set up Kids Own Publishing in Ireland with Simon, and so it's been an arts education organization from the start, it continues in, in Ireland, and I put up actually a link to something relevant to the discussion already. And then set up another Kids Own Publishing, in 2003, in Melbourne, Australia. So there are two versions of this: an arts education organization that focuses on publishing the work of children, and working closely with artists. And now, Simon and I have run All That We Are, which is an artist residency space. And I should say the one - one other thing that we all have in common as a group of hosts is that we are all mapped somehow as coordinates onto that big, vast map, which is the world of academia, in that we are all of us either undertaking, just completed, or long ago completed a PhD, which was not intentional, but just happens to be the way it rolls - that we're all in that space. And I suppose that means that we're all deeply reflective and reflexive in how we think about our work and practice. I think that's enough for me. Can I hand over to - who's going next? Oh, Abby! Great.

Abbey 04:46

I thought I'll jump in just in case I have to leave a bit earlier. So my name's Abbey McDonald and I work at the University of Tasmania as a teacher-educator and I'm an artist, arts researcher. Primarily, I use (...) as my art methodology. I've taught Visual Art Media and in English in secondary schools for about 10 years before I moved into the university sector, but I really enjoyed that work and continue to be collaborating with teachers, through professional learning events, to support them in their teaching of visual arts and engagement with the community and artists to undertake that work. And I guess it's through my ongoing work in art education here in

(...) Tasmania, that I would also just like to acknowledge the original owners of the land upon which I learn, and teach and create alongside my students and pay my respects to those elders, past and present, particularly that, that support me and work alongside me to do a lot of that work in shared places of learning, teaching and creating. Do you want me to - That's just sort of to give you a bit of context of where I am. Do you want me to say anything else at this point, Vic, or shall we just keep moving through the introduce?

Victoria 06:15

Sorry, I just had to unmute. I think we'll continue with the introductions and then circle round. Selena, do you want to go next?

Selena 06:27

Yeah. Yeah, I (...) am Selena De Carvalho. I'm an interdisciplinary experimental artist. And primarily, I have a practice that is participatory. And from my own practice, I moved into that space of working with and amongst community, and in usually co-devised methods and site specific methods, and hopefully, (generative) and critical ways of thinking about our (...) this time of ecological precarity. So I'll move - I'll pass on to the next person. Cool.

Victoria 07:24

Sarah, would you like to go next?

Sarah 07:26

Yep. Okay. Um, firstly, I'd just like to apologize for my voice today. I'm sipping on a honey and lemon tea to try and get me through at the moment. So I do apologize for that. But I am a visual arts teacher on the northwest coast of Tasmania and have been for the past 10 years. I'm also a current PhD candidate conducting my research because basically, I found students were coming to grade seven Visual Arts with little or negative experiences of the visual art. So I wanted to focus my research on supporting generalist teachers, and (...) primary teachers to develop their pedagogical competence and confidence in Visual Arts so that those students coming through will have more positive experiences. So that's, that's where I am at the moment. And I'll pass over to Simon, right?

Simon 08:17

Sure. Yeah. Good morning. Good evening, everybody. I'm, as Victoria said, in a different room to her. But we're in the same house. And we've worked together next year, around 14 years in this area, really. So my background is as a visual artist. And I've just completed my PhD, which is around - I suppose it's really around the benefit of the arts to individuals and communities, particularly in terms of healing. I've worked in the UK and Ireland - done many, many artists and residences in schools over the years. And on the whole, they've been really good experiences, But I'm gonna be a little bit provocative later when I say. But also a key part of ITAC - ITAC, I think over the last few years. It's a fabulous sort of initiative across the world. And it's great to see everybody here. That will do from me. Back to you, Vic.

Victoria 09:26

I'm sorry, I'm slow to unmute. That seemed to go very quickly those introductions and now we're already on to the questions. I think at this point - I think I should just start by talking about why I provoked this conversation. And so for me, inhabiting both the world of the teacher and coming at it from a teacher angle, and then moving into the world of artists. I'm aware of the disconnected language of expectations. And as Abbey last night, when we were talking about it, she used the word binary - that there is a tendency towards binary thinking, and how this impacts on (...) the encounters and the children. And so I suppose I'm interested in just hearing what people made maybe something a bit descriptive about experiences. You know, what - what represents the positive and what represents the negative in that space. I don't want to be binary, but just just something around people's experience of that encounter. And actually, I might get back to Selena, because you were talking about your attendance of a conference in Bilbao. And that that brought in some very fresh new thinking for you.

Selena 11:08

I'm happy to talk to that notion of there being a binary, I think that the way art - I mean, obviously, it changes in the different countries that you are, and that that (...) is very much (...) People often ask me what my other job is, what is the other thing that I do so art is often seen, not as a profession per se, as something that you might do in your spare time. And I think that filters through and into all different modes of relating and thinking. And education is one of the spaces that it's perhaps denigrated. I know when I've worked in Queenstown, the art (... ..) saving a cent. So those negative connotations as well as those, I guess the binaries of (art making) being a dreaming activity and academia being a, you know, a more celebrated hierarchical kind of - I guess, reducing the world but also understanding it. Does anyone - does that?

Selena 12:36

Unmute! Unmute, conversers!

Victoria 12:39

I've unmuted just to say, I'm having slight problems hearing you. I don't know if other people are. But the sound was breaking up a bit. And I think I'm going to hand over to Abbey now because I'm aware that she may be on limited time.

Abbey 12:57

Thanks, Vic. Um, I was just to get some snippets of what you're talking about there, Selena. And I'm just interested, probably in a little bit to hear you talk more about your experiences of working, doing some things in schools, particularly on the - on the west coast of Tazi, which for the, which for the benefit of the recording, is, is quite a low SES, socio economic status area, that has, in terms of education, some real issues around outcomes. But in saying that, too, it has some incredible outcomes. So coming back into that notion of binary, isn't it interesting that it is so irresistible to so we can name it up to go, we want to try and avoid that. And yet we immediately going into what works and what doesn't. And using that as our kind of space to

start, which is great. And I think some of the things that I like to do with teacher educators and artists working in classrooms, and teachers during their professional learning is to go well, what happens in the space between the things that work and don't work? And how can we safeguard that space, and sit in that and work from that space? And every time we kind of wobble out of it where something doesn't work.

Abbey 14:26

And then - or even find something that does work and immediately that sets up some conversations that go will our will now that works we can no longer do this. And it's really interesting to - it is so prevalent, I think, in our in our discourse, in our - what happens in schools, and just trying to kind of steer people back into those in between things that happen between what works and what doesn't. I think that that is such a rich place for artists to drag us all into. And teachers are naturally resistant to it, not because they don't want to go there. But because their environment, their ecology, their system, completely inhibits that way of working. So it's really, I just think that's such a really special space, the thing between what works and what doesn't, and trying to kind of anchor ourselves in them. When we work with artists, teachers, in schools and in communities.

Victoria 15:38

I just like to add my - I love that in between space, too. And I think another way of looking at that is that sense of living with uncertainty, which is such a trademark of artists to work with uncertainty, but it's perhaps less of a trademark, or certainly not what schools like to do. And maybe there are issues around the language we use. And I'm very interested to hear other people's experiences and thoughts about that sense of the language that's used in the space of a school that bridges, and that perhaps encompasses that in between space. Would anybody like to jump in?

Sarah 16:27

I suppose I could come at it, just thinking from a school's perspective and say, I know that I very much encourage it and want over the unknown and things to happen in my classroom and in the school, but it is really hard trying to convince other members of the school that that's the path that we can go down. So you know, it's like, it's okay. And it's really exciting to start it but then trying to continue it on and and keep that going or even convincing some of our senior staff that that - that will be successful. And that will be okay, is sometimes really a challenge.

Simon 17:07

I could add in there as one of the hosts as well, just to add in, following up from that comment around. And, Abbey mentioned this, you know, I think there is a big difference between working within schools and working in communities. I think my thing is, schools are often very, as we talked about this, Abbey, they're very - they can be very restrictive spaces. And I mean, just in terms of the artists in schools movement, as far as I understand, it really began in back in the 70s, with the Gulbenkian Foundation in the UK, so at first, it did this, certainly in UK, Australia, America, and put artists in schools. And I think we've we've suffered a little bit from having too

many flying fly outs, and too many quick appearances, product-led projects that unlike Sarah, you know, are not embedded in schools. So I think kind of the best work that happens is those artists where they are literally embedded in that system, they're happy to, to be part of that system.

Simon 18:15

And it was interesting, I think I talked about it last night was we had (Maric) from Norway, present to us here. She's one of the ITAC people. And it really struck me at the end of it, how her education system is very good. It seems like a fabulous education system they have. And so the artists there seem to be working really in a complimentary way with the system. Whereas my experience and why I'm now feeling that often we shouldn't work in schools, is there's too much opposition between the way many of our systems here work and trying to squeeze the artists in in some way. I mean, we've all had those experiences, and what the value is of that happening, because often I think there's too much of a clash. And as you say, Sarah, not enough legacy, not enough sustainability or learning of those projects actually carrying through.

Guest 1 19:14

Can I ask a question?

Simon 19:16

Please.

Guest 1 19:18

First, I'll just say, Hi, my name is Liz. I'm in Toronto, and I work at Young People's Theatre. I'm the drama school director there. And we have drama classes for three month olds to 18 year olds. I'm joining this conversation obviously because I'm fascinated in teaching artistry. I'm an actor and a theatre maker by trade, by art - artistic practice. And then know, I'm an artist educator as well.

Guest 1 19:58

We have an interesting situation in Ontario, more broadly in Canada. And I'm curious to hear what seems to potentially to be a similar situation in Tasmania. The arts are increasingly being underfunded or decreasingly funded in schools. And our current government has cut back even more. It's a bit disastrous, and terrifying. Selena, you mentioned, feeling like the arts, being an artist would be perceived as a pastime and not necessarily a profession. I don't, I'm not sure we have the same sensibility. In Toronto at least. But, the arts - the place of the arts within the lives of children is being increasingly downgraded.

Guest 1 21:07

And, so I feel in my role, at Young People's Theatre, I'm increasingly having to argue for parents what the point is. And it is about outcomes. Although we are strictly process: all the work we do is devised work with the kids. So sorry, I went on a bit there. But really, I'm just interested to get a bit more perspective on ... on - you've mentioned a binary - reducing conversation to a

binary situation a couple of times. And, Simon, you know, you've mentioned that there's this opposition, in terms of school artists, being in schools, and just how hard that is, I'm curious to know, generally speaking, how, or where the arts sit or fit, culturally, in terms of education and child development.

Guest 2 22:17

Can I add something here?

Victoria 22:22

Go ahead.

Guest 2 22:25

I come from California, and in California, during the recession, the first thing that they cut, of course, was our art programs out of the schools. And so we're really having to struggle now to get them back in there. But I will tell you that professionally, I bring songwriting programs into the prisons, and into the jails and into youth detention centers. And what we found is that - what the arts give students is so much more than anything that you can concretely say, at the end of, well, "I've, I've produced this."

Guest 2 23:08

It really is the process, and it really is that that child experience going through life, in many cases, the traumas of life, that inform their work, and if they have that, and they have that ability to express that through an art form, and can understand how they can create something that helps them to navigate their emotions in a constructive way, that it can definitely contribute to the overall well being of that student, and, and filters out to all of those other areas. So I just - I don't know so much about the binary. That term kind of confuses me a bit, but in terms of just students and and their place in the world, and helping them to understand that and navigate it? There is nothing that elevates our spirit more than any of the arts, all of the arts. And I think that we have to take that holistic view about the arts, not so much as a product but as how can I create my life and utilizing what we learn in arts across the board? Sorry, that's, that's all I had to say.

Simon 24:40

I agree. I think everyone on this screen is going to agree with you and be okay. Yes, absolutely. I think that's completely true. I think one of the things that Selena mentioned last night that struck me was just the challenge we have here, I'd say of convincing politicians and those in power that artists who work in a socially engaged way are artists, and need to be funded in the same kind of way. And it's a value, we still have a very odd notion, an old fashioned notion in a way, of what artists are, I think in Australia. Of you know, that we probably go into studios and just paint or sculpt or something and actually don't engage. And I think one of our challenges is to reposition artists as being people who are social change agents, essentially. (...) threatening and they won't get the money even more now.

Guest 3 25:45

Hi, look, I'd love to make a comment on the binary situation that was discussed and ask a question. I'm sorry, it's very early. I'm in Canberra, in Australia. So I'm in my pajamas right now sorry to say. I'm a practicing teaching artist, I also oversee a program called Musica Viva education program, which is a very large, I guess, program where we develop programs and send musicians to schools across the country and develop resources for teachers around that. And for me, that binary has really been expressed. Not so much within schools, not so much within maybe executive teaching, but certainly in around who holds the keys the expert, the expertise of arts education.

Guest 3 26:42

In Australia, where we have moved to a national curriculum. And that has developed I guess, a language I guess, which many teaching artists or artists to unfamiliar with. And one of the results of that has been that arts educators, so arts-practicing teachers, as opposed to teaching others. So classroom teachers, art specialist in schools can become very quite protective about their own discipline and about their own expertise. And in some ways, I guess you can use the fact that they understand that curriculum knowledge, they know that context, not as a way of pushing teaching artists out, but but certainly feeling threatened by that. And I guess, maybe not recognizing the full value that that can have in terms of professional learning and professional development of classroom teachers. So I just wanted to ask a question around that. So I remember, the second speaker, I think, was just talking about professional learning that they were they were doing and connecting teaching artists to teachers. And we're just curious to hear the experiences that you have felt?

Abbey 28:07

I am that's - I think I can - Thanks for that, Michael. Well, that was really awesome. To hear your context there. I think one of the key things there - or just before I do that, I just wanted to touch back in to that (...) someone had just mentioned before about being a bit confused around that notion of binary thinking: you could break that down to being as simple as this or that thinking. It's not being able to kind of have multiple things on the stage at the same time and say that we're doing this or we're doing that, or this works, or that doesn't. And it could be around that thing of marginalizing the arts as well. So it's like, it's drama, or visual art, or there's - so there's all these kind of different "this or that"sthat play out in an art education context.

Abbey 28:52

And I think Michael, coming back to that professional learning kind of terrain, something with - learning is the key word there around it kind of breaks down... If everyone comes into a professional learning space via they're an artist running a workshop or participating in a workshop alongside a teacher, so almost everyone comes into that space knowing and kind of embracing that they are there to take something away and to contribute, that they're learning together, then that helps. There's those sort of power differentials and dynamics that can be set up between, you know, an artist coming into a teacher's classroom or a teacher taking their

students out into a gallery. Like there's just some different kind of power things that are diffused in those sort of professional learning you set up in that way.

Abbey 29:48

And just on Friday, Sarah participated as well and Victoria led a brilliant workshop, which I'm continuing to hear about where are we had school teachers. We had teaching artists working in higher education contexts. We had actual artists, we can cultural practitioners, all coming together to share practice. And that was kind of the (...). It was about making and sharing. What works? What are you wondering about? And that, from what we gather so far has been a really nice way of learning together. So I think that idea of, if it's about learning, everyone can have buy-in and take something meaningful away from it. I don't know, that's sort of anything speaks to anything you've said that that's

Guest 3 30:37

Yeah. Yeah. It's really interesting. I mean, it does. And I think it illuminates a really key question for me, is that where does that binary, or where do those barriers in allowing for a free exchange between teaching artists and artists, teachers - where do those barriers come from? Because I mean, this'll all be different around the world. But in Australia, I'd certainly say that at an individual teacher level, particularly generalist teachers who aren't art specialists, it definitely doesn't come there. I mean, I love those types of exchanges. Generally, school leadership teams, principals love those types of exchanges, because they recognize the value of experts coming in. But there's still something culturally - there's still a barrier there. And it's, and maybe it's, you know, from an association level, or from, you know, kind of a - Yeah, I'm not sure. Because it's still that culture of ... only teachers can talk to teachers, even in the moment that the value of free exchange is appreciated.

Simon 31:43

And I think one of the -

Victoria 31:44

I'd like to jump in there, can I jump in there? Michael, that's really interesting. I just want to share very briefly an experience that my - no longer my organization, but Kids' Own Publishing experienced recently through an evaluation. And the project was evaluating a project that was looking at the setting for an arts experience outside of the school that had some elements that happened inside school. And the evaluation pointed out that the experience would be much more successful for the children when they had come out of the school into a very different and quite rich arts setting. But that the same experience when it was undertaken in the school had not had the same level of success. And the comment of the evaluation was that therefore the arts organization should learn more about the systems of the school and adapt their processes more to the systems within the school rather than, as seemed obvious to me, the other way around, that may be that the school should look at why that particular activity could be more successful in a non school setting - in a setting that had other factors involved. I just share that with you as a little thinking point.

Simon 33:02

I was just gonna say around - sorry, are you finished? Yeah. - around - ... I don't think there are enough opportunities either for, and this is why ITAC is so good, I think, for us as artists, educators, to share our practice. And there isn't the cultural kind of expectation for that to happen. One of the things we run here is a program called ArTELIER where artists can come and share their practice. The key difference there is we've actually raised money to pay the artists to do this. So when they come along, for the day of sharing, we can actually pay them to come. Now, these are many, as we know, artists working independently in wherever, and usually artists would have to pay for, certainly here, their learning opportunities. So I think trying to set up more programs with - where artists are becoming more educated around these kind of discussions, what goes on in school, the language we use - those sort of things. I think the more of that we have the better. I don't know whether that happens in other places around the world, people are running? But in Australia, it's been pretty low on the priority list, I would say, of actually offering real professional development for artists simply to come together and talk about these experiences like we are now.

Victoria 34:21

Can I just jump in and just back up what Abby said that the professional learning session that we - that I was part of on Friday was very successful at breaking down those barriers. And I think the key to that was that we were all active makers. It wasn't a talk fest. It was very much invested in making and having creative experiences directly firsthand and how it just was a reminder of how powerful that is for enriching the conversation. So I think that's worth noting.

Abbey 34:57

Can I just add one thing to that, too. This is a great, great conversation. But I just want to come back to just a word that Michael had just mentioned when he was sort of speaking out. It's the word expert. And I think that that is - that can be a really dangerous word, in many ways, and looking at it from that sense that we need to be able to give, acknowledge the expertise of people. But in looking at it, you know, in a power context, it was interesting.

Abbey 35:29

We had generalist primary teachers, who were sharing practice and leading conversations at this workshop. And when we asked them, they were very apprehensive - so that they are naturally inclined to work in that way and sharing across disciplines. But when we said, you know, we want you to lead a workshop, and they're like, "Oh, you know, but I'm not a, I'm not a specialist art teacher, or I'm", you know, they were very, very nervous. And I think it's - but they led incredible workshops, and they are incredibly expert in their practice. And I wondered what happens to when, you know, we give that term to someone, or we deny that label, or we are to say someone is or isn't an expert. Yeah, that that can be so inhibiting for people who can be incredibly generous, kind, and clever sharers. So I just thought it was really it's an interesting word that I think gets in the way of some of the really good things that we could do. That was all!

Guest 1 36:39

Can I jump in here?

Selena 36:43

Yeah.

Guest 1 36:52

Shall I go? I find that fascinating. Something, just this idea of the expert, and how you engage teachers in your world, and make them feel safe and happy. We do a lot of work at Young People's Theatre with bringing classes and kids to the school or to the theater. And then we send a lot of artist-educators out to different schools. And we have what we call a member schools program, where we connect with a particular school, over a series of plays. And those kids come before and after each play for workshops, and we develop a relationship. And it's - we work really hard to talk about that - Abbey, the word you use - learning. And that we're all - Oh, there's your daughter, hi, daughter! - that we're all always learning. And sort of in the act of demonstrating that we know this stuff. But we are also still learning. And we hope to learn from you. You know, whatever we do together, everybody's going to learn something, including me. We try to really include the teachers. And I mean, sometimes you get just the teachers who just want to sit and grade while you're running a workshop and that - there's nothing you can do about it. But more often, we try to include teachers. Like we've even had principals do our land acknowledgments before shows - like we've actually asked the schools to (...) lead with us basically, in an effort to break down that sense of, "we are going to parachute in, and then we're going to leave". And I just - I think that's a really interesting, like, I've never really thought about the word expert as being a dangerous word. But, but I think it's a really interesting and fine point to make, in terms of bringing the two worlds of teaching artists or artists educators - Now I'm getting confused: artist-educators and teachers together.

Abbey 39:33

That's really interesting, isn't it? That whole - because you don't want to deny someone their expertise that they've worked really hard for - that they're invested in. I just started wondering - I wonder if there's a different word that still lets people feel empowered, that they, you know, can share and you know, drive conversations. Maybe that's a different - that's another one (...) that just - that is a loaded word. So it's trying to - it's a word that wants to pull us into a binary, I think. It's one of those interesting power words that, you know, it's like, you will be denying all the things that I've worked really hard for. But also, you'll be setting a person up to be othered from the people they are working with, in some way. So it's, it's a really fascinating one in this context, I think.

Simon 40:27

But Abbey, I think that's why as we know, public participatory kind of art practice is so powerful, because in many cases, you know, every everybody becomes an expert, when you're co creating a piece of work. Everybody can contribute, as well. And equal respect is there. I think, when you have, you know, that's the artist-led things. Well, you know, you have the leader, but

the artist needs to be somebody who is open enough and has enough skills to be open and share. And, I mean, I think that's an interesting one: when artists also are prepared to let go of their vision to public.

Simon 41:06

You know, artists can go into school with a very definite idea of what they want to make, play, perform whatever it might be. But we have to be skilled as well in actually saying, "okay, we'll let that go. That doesn't fit into my vision, but it is much more, but it is in allowing an empowerment of, I'm not keen on that word, but it allows everybody in the room to become part of this project." Because in a way, I think, you know, what, what's the intention of this work? Why are we doing it? Why are we going (into this school)? Well, for me, it is a social justice issue. Really, it is around allowing, enabling and empowering communities, particularly young people and children who are not empowered to feel that they have something powerful to contribute to society and to the world. And, you know, that's the end game. So it's not about making the objects, playing the piece of music or whatever. For me, you know, this is instrumentalisation of the arts to use this to, as Kat said, you know, whether it might be a general empowerment in the world become - this is very corny - become a better person, you know, but that's really what we're what I would say we're doing this for.

Victoria 42:20

I'm aware that we're into probably the last 10 minutes. And I wanted to just bring it back a little bit to something that came up in our planning discussion that we had last night this morning for some of you, which was around, there was a phrase Selena used about how we can develop arts literacy from the start. And looking also at the local global issues, and how most of us are probably working in a context where education is being, as it's been pointed out, controlled and very much at a national level in a way that seems to be systematically making sure that there isn't an arts literacy from the start.

Victoria 43:13

And I suppose, you know, ending on a note of maybe sharing some different global perspectives on what might be a productive way forward, you know. How can that power balance be shifted? How can we find more competence and strengthen the language of the arts - of arts education of teaching artistry, participatory practices? That's always been an issue for me around strengthening my language and having more confidence in what I feel intuitively, in the space when it does, perhaps, you know, when it is that very much in between space and the uncertainty. But somehow giving strength to the uncertainty through language, any thoughts on that?

Abbey 44:03

Vic, can I suggest that we hear from Sarah because that - those words confidence and competence are a really rich throughline in her PhD work, which is really awesome. So it might be great to hear you have as a beautiful little end note.

Sarah 44:23

Um, yeah, I suppose. Thanks, Abbey! Um, I suppose - I don't know I was... I had a different thing that I was thinking about talking about. So that's okay. But I was more thinking about myself when I came to this space today and how I began as an artist and then became a teacher and sort of felt that I lost myself as an artist through the process and what that looked like for a while, and then trying to you know, navigate my way as a teacher and come back to that space. And so I suppose, even myself as I was becoming a teacher, I felt myself might probably - my confidence and competence in my own visual art making was sort of going away as I was learning about becoming a teacher.

Sarah 45:10

And so when I've also been working with generalist primary teachers and finding how they feel about visual arts education, they particularly don't feel very competent. What I've found on the northwest coast, about their abilities in the visual arts. So having the opportunity to work with another artist is a fantastic opportunity for not only myself, but for generalists, primary teachers, because we can work together and we can learn off each other and talk with each other as artists to learn and that will help to develop our confidence and competence. So I hope that offers a little snapshot of where I am at the moment with that.

Simon 45:56

Can I add one more little thing?

Victoria 45:58

Yeah. Okay.

Simon 46:00

Well, I was just gonna say in doing some work last year, the year before with, with some teaching artists at the Tate. It was quite interesting: we were trying to rethink language for a creative encounters, for a workshop, and what other words could we use. And what I found interesting was the most interesting word that came up, it seems some of what we were doing was actually a Welsh word, rather than an English word. And I just came away from that wondering whether English as a language of colonization actually has the words, whether it does have the words for the kind of work that we do, or whether we should look to other languages or other people to come up with phrases and words to - or make up words for what we do, because I think we are actually often contained by that language. I can see user down on the bottom left hand side here nodding away. If you want to make any comments from that?

Guest 4 46:57

Yeah, sorry. I don't know if this gives anybody any hope. But I'm studying my Masters just now at Shetland UHI and it's in art and social practice. So there's going to be a few of us just hitting the big wide world soon, hopefully. But yeah, we've been doing a big thing on colonization just lately and language and how that's used. And we've looked at things sort of all over.

Guest 4 47:05

And I've just finished doing an international conversation between (...) and Malta. And so yeah, and that was one of these things that - We did stick weaving, and made postcards, because both islands have English in common, but they also have their own languages. They have Gaelic and Maltese. So it was to say what do you want to tell other people on the other island? What do you want to tell them about your island? Never mind what the tourist information has to say or anything like that. It's what you want. And obviously being islands they both islands have beaches. And the interesting thing from it, although one's obviously, a cold water Island, one's a warm water Island. All the beaches had sunshine on them, regardless of where they were from. Yes, I think that - Yeah, the language that people use. We've looked at the - Oh, the big Indian blanket... And yeah, we've been looking at all these things about language and - well, obviously, being Scottish. We're having wee issues at the moment about colonization. So just to say that.

Victoria 48:49

thank you that that's, that's fascinating. And I love that connection to some other islands. The island of Tasmania also has a lot of sunshine. And I think that's a whole nother conversation around Island culture. but certainly it's a very rich source here of many, many interesting issues to be discussed. I love the focus on language. Part of me feels that we should be strategic and pragmatic and perhaps identify a few key terms that we think are really important to support some of these understandings around the value of in between spaces, the value of uncertainty and so on in our practice, and then we should market the ruthlessly across the world, or the English speaking world. So I leave that as a suggestion.

Victoria 49:45

We're close to our hour. Would anybody like to add to the conversation? Selena, we haven't heard from you for a while. Have you got anything you would like to add? I know we've switched off your video to help your connectivity.

Selena 50:04

Thanks, Vic. Sure, that was - that's been a really juicy conversation. So thank you everybody for the contributions. Um, I think that listening, of course, is such an important and vital (...) of language and that exchange, but then beyond that language is also the action. And so while it is really important, I think, to have terminologies that are spoken and received and understood. I think it'll go - also comes back to living and doing the work. So, maybe that's enough for me. Does anybody else have anything to round out and add in?

Guest 5 50:56

I'm wondering if maybe I can pose a question? Sorry, I'm Brienne. I'm from the Stratford Festival of Canada. We have a lot of programs where we send teaching artists into schools. And this is a big challenge for me, especially with our local schools. As Liz mentioned, our government here in Ontario has cut budgets to the point where programs that have existed for 15-20 years are slashed. They can't happen. And you know, a company like mine, we can afford to float

programs now and then - send a teaching artist in but then it's much more parachuting in and out than what we would like it to be. So I wonder if we can maybe pick your brains?

Guest 5 51:35

We were talking today, how do you perceive the different perspectives of artists and of - teaching artists and artists? But I wonder what the main goal is? What do these two types of people - teaching artists and in classroom teachers, what do they have in common? I mean, we all can nod our heads at each other about how great arts is for, you know, the impact of a child's growth. But in the classroom, or in a theater setting, or in an art gallery setting: when classroom artists and teaching artists work together? What is their common goal? And maybe that's a way that we can focus on success - whatever that success looks like. When there isn't, you know, people having a bunch of money to spend on it, or when there isn't even a lot of interest clamoring out the door for it to happen.

Simon 52:28

I would say - I would answer that and say, I think the education systems around the world, I guess, are also very different. But I'm not sure there is a shared intention.

Guest 5 52:39

Yeah, fair enough.

Madeleine 52:40

I can maybe weigh in a little bit on the education systems around the world. We're having a lot of these conversations at the moment about artists and skills and full time teachers and how they coexist in different educational systems. And I would say one common thread that I found - I mean, everyone I speak to at the moment seems to be going through something similar, I mean, to varying extents. But it seems to me that, that what really the issue is, is a sort of failure of an overall ecosystem being in place. So, we have the teaching artists and we have the teachers and then we have policymakers and all of the decision making, and just a wildly different understanding of what these two things exist to achieve. And what seems to me is, from a teaching perspective and a teaching artists perspective, a sort of common fear of sharing your practice because identity is so linked to that practice.

Madeleine 53:47

And in that is your livelihood, if that's how you're paying your bills, and if you share this one model that you've been using for a while, and someone else takes it, where do you fit in then? And I think it's the struggle of sharing versus being valued - that seems to be kind of common. And I think what we all probably share is an interest in shifting the ecosystem to appreciate both in their place, not necessarily one for a binary reason or another for another reason, but more the shared give and take, and why it's so essential that you know, your grammar be good, but also you have critical thinking skills and problem solving and those kind of things. And that's what we seem to be being steered away from - almost universally.

Madeleine 54:43

I have to say here in Scotland, it's actually not so bad. We have a new curriculum in place over the last 10 years and it's it's valuing - it's starting to value those things a little more. But certainly internationally, the colleagues that I'm speaking to, are reporting a bit of a either, or a push and pull, and are being pointed at each other as the reason that exists rather than upwards or outwards at the overall ecosystem in place. Does that make sense?

Guest 5 55:14

I really appreciate what you said about, you know, a specific tactic or strategy or learning style being taken away from you if you share it. It's such a strange way to look at it. But I guess I do understand that.

Madeleine 55:26

Right.

Victoria 55:27

And I just wanted to mention before we finish, I'm picking up on the point that it is in action that we need to just keep doing this. Something we mentioned in our preliminary discussion last night, in preparation for this session, was the issue around time. So we've touched on it today, but the "parachute in-parachute out" versus extended, long opportunities. And I just mentioned to people last night about the "Virtually There" program that's run by Kids Own Publishing in Ireland, but it's funded in Northern Ireland. And just to point out, I put a link right at the top of the chat before we started to do the Virutally There program, which is a way of, I suppose, you know - it's the budget version of partnering up an artist with a school over a long period of time, where they have virtual video link to share an exchange practice. And I think it is a lovely model and worth having a look at. And that's maybe I suppose what I'm saying there is there's another project here in Australia called "The Relationship Is The Project". And I suppose what I'm saying is that perhaps it's through developing long term relationships, deep relationships, that maybe we can start to break down some of these divides and actually through the doing and the action, and make our point of value of arts from birth upwards.