

“Digging deep”: Self-study as a reflexive approach to improving my practice as an artist, researcher and teacher

Lee Scott

In this article, I show how I enhanced my understanding of my practice as an artist, researcher and teacher using a self-study approach in my recently completed Master of Technology (M.Tech.) dissertation in Graphic Design. As part of my M.Tech. research, I conceptualised and developed a creative teaching tool that I named ‘PicTopics’. PicTopics are palm-sized cards with pictographic illustrations similar to street signage. I used these PicTopics in a variety of ways, but essentially as creative prompts to foster a variety of creative educational skills within the university, and personally as a tool to generate my own artistic expression at a deeper level. I demonstrate the re-storying of my learning through writing about these artworks as visual indicators of my values, personal and professional growth. I show how the paintings reflect my experiences and perceptions of my youth, their effect on my adult self, my individuality and ultimately my teaching self.

Keywords: Self-study, creative teaching tool, creative prompts, individualism, values, professional growth

*Adult crusade
I have an orange net bag of memories
I survived my laaitie-hood and an adult crusade
with the aid of a pen knife, matches and a pair of takkies
(just in case I had to escape).
I had my place where I would go to hide, if ...
If AK’s and FN’s decided to play adult games in our back yard
- after blood red sunsets, cicada solitariness and hot dusty bleached grasses
went pale - I thought I had a way out.
Silly really, since in childhood, there is no way out of grown up wars.
Author (2010)*

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Introduction

When I first decided to study for my M.Tech. degree in Graphic Design, I knew I wanted it to be about my practice, that it be practice-based and include my paintings and meaning-making through the use of a visual medium. I also knew that I could not separate my artist self from my researcher and teacher self and that they were indivisibly integrated, and that my research and new learning would affect all these aspects of self. Consequently, I realised that I was both the object and the subject of my study. It was also important that I emphasise my role as an “active learner” in this study “instead of an expert judging research participants” and that I was interested in writing in a “literary style” (Cresswell, 1998: 15). I interpret “literary style” to mean using a story-telling style in the crafting of my dissertation.

My research purpose

My study included the conceptualisation of the pictographic cards that I have named ‘PicTopics’– as in ‘pick a topic’ (see Figure 1). The PicTopics are a set of 120 cards, approximately seven by seven centimetres, with the type of graphic images one sees as signage on our roads and freeways. By testing the cards and gathering stories in various settings – from galleries to classrooms – I was able to recognise their potential as a creative educational tool.¹ My research questions included exploring the role of the PicTopics in communicating a story or message, and how they could be pertinent to my practice as an artist, researcher, and teacher.

I consciously wished to use simplified graphic images in my research to find ways to foster the concept and creation of a ‘visual voice’. My wish to ‘create a visual voice’ for others and myself was a major factor in my study. I asked myself why it was important that I find an alternative way for people to voice their thoughts and ideas and tell their stories. I questioned how, why and what led me to conceptualise the idea of the PicTopics. I believe that playful ways of eliciting the telling of stories are important. Not all human beings are spontaneously oral storytellers, or able to put pen to paper successfully, or paint a canvas in order to be heard. I realised that my interest in finding a way to create a ‘visual voice’ came from recognising that I have been an outsider and have felt inarticulate on many occasions. I saw my study as giving me a purpose. I realised that I needed to find out the ‘why’ behind my wanting to do this research and, in asking myself why I would want to create pictographic visual prompts, I was able to ‘tease out’ a sense of purposefulness that would benefit not only myself but also others.

Methods and methodology

My practice-based self-study approach adapted a variety of methodological tools to support my “methodological inventiveness” (Dadds & Hart, 2001: 166). I recognised that my methodological preferences could interrelate with each other. I found

Whitehead's (2008) "living theories" philosophies and methodologies,² McNiff's (2002) "action research",³ Schön's (1983) "critical reflection", as well as Irwin *et al.*'s (2006) "a/r/tography"⁴ intertwined with Chase's (2005)⁵ and Ellis's (2004) "narrative auto-ethnographic" approach to conducting research the most appropriate.



Figure 1: Two PicTopic cards (Author 2010)

The value of the methods used in this study

Self-study highlights the importance of the self and makes the experience of the teacher a source for research (Tucker, 2011: 4). Tucker cites Lyons and LaBoskey's (2004) five characteristics to be considered when using personal experience in self-study. Self-study should be self-initiated, aimed at improvement, interactive, use multiple qualitative methods, and use trustworthiness in order to establish validity. Samaras (2011) discusses a series of steps for conducting self-study research which, accordingly, ensures rigour, reflection and critical thinking. I authored my own questions, documented and continuously assessed my research process by sharing my learning with colleagues and friends, and continuously asked myself "What is the value of this research to others?"

Because I was using non-traditional ways of conveying my research, it was vital for my study that I continually reflect and act upon new interpretations or the analysis of past events in order that the narrative style in which I related various events not appear trite. Thus, I had to "negotiate a particularly sensitive balance between biography and history" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001: 15). Whitehead and McNiff (2007) also speak of the importance of critical feedback in evaluating the validity of one's research. Accordingly, I used peer review to strengthen the comprehensibility and explanations in my research.

My study was about my ontogenesis, my 'becoming to know myself' and thus highly subjective. I was "emphatically and subjectively immersed" in my research

(Maree, 2011: 33), and realised that my ontological assumptions are embodied in the values of my practice and the way in which I live my life. My subjectivity as an artist, researcher, teacher and social being involves noticing and recording how people perceive, think, and feel about things. Thus, I took into account how people interpreted my pictographic images on the cards from their own perspective in the creation of their own narratives, and then captured my subjective interpretation visually on canvas. My canvases are a subjective explanation of the stories I was told by the visitors at the artSpace Gallery, and the metamorphosis of my critical reflections and internal meanderings.

A sequence of events

The sequence of events unfolded very naturally during the course of this study. Apart from first designing and developing my PicTopics, other aspects of the study fell into place in a serendipitous manner.

The first occasion on which I tried out the PicTopics to establish whether they 'worked' and could be used by people to create or prompt stories was held at artSpace Gallery in April 2009. I invited the audience at the gallery to play with the cards and create narratives with them. With their permission, their stories were documented on video. I then selected certain stories to discuss, and interpreted or re-storied them as paintings. I did these paintings during a three-month Professional Practice Course (PP Course), from September to November 2009. The PP Course was a forum in which my paintings were critiqued by Brenton Maart, the then curator of the KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts (KZNSA), Durban, and peers who also attended the course. This experience was pivotal to my intellectual growth, learning and development of self and artistic practice.

I then facilitated a workshop in August 2009, with the Durban University of Technology (DUT) Drama students. Many of the students' performances contained comment about South African socio-economic realities. This workshop affirmed my belief in alternate ways to foster autonomous learning skills in a playful and compassionate way.

Thereafter, I started examining the stories I had painted for the PP Course and it was in examining my choices of stories I told on canvas, as well as analysing my choice of cards for a self-portrait (see Figures 8 and 9) that I started to understand the importance of memory on the un-conscious social self and its influence on me the artist, researcher and teacher.

The paintings

Youthful perceptions as influence

My childhood, in my mind's eye, is filled with contradictory beauty. I had the privilege of growing up in the bush as my Dad was farming for a large sugar concern. I found immense solace in the bush, in the dry hot dusty nostril-tickling, pale ochre, cicada-filled solitariness. It was over forty degrees in the summer months, and the dusty itchy colours of summer were coupled with the fiercest sunsets and sunrises.

I remember the intense joy of fishing for bream and barbel before the sun had lifted above the trees, escaping quietly (while Mum still slept), through the electric security fencing. The electric three meter high fencing that surrounded the house and garden was turned off at five-thirty in the morning to let the sheep out to go and graze and that was when I made my trips, a can of worms in hand and stick rod. I was about ten years old and an introverted child, not quite fitting in at school and bullied at times. I always felt like an outsider looking in, a peripheral person. Yet my solitariness, and my solitude, was partly what sustained me.

As I relate in the opening poem, *Adult crusade*, I had under my bed an old orange bag, and in it I had a knife, matches, my 'takkies' [sports shoes], and other items I no longer remember. It was crucial for me to be prepared if we ever came under attack and I had to 'escape'. I had my hiding places in the bush and orchard to go to. I had it all planned out. Looking back through adult eyes, I realise now that the fencing that was to keep the 'enemy' out also trapped me within.

I have included the poem and my childhood memory narrative in this article because, in the words of Malinowski (1948: 104), "[t]here is no text without context". I am an ex-Rhodesian, born in the then Rhodesia, in 1964, a year before Ian Smith's unilateral declaration of independence from Britain in 1965.⁶ I left Rhodesia with my family to live in South Africa at the age of 14, a year before Zimbabwean independence, in 1980, and the end of White minority rule. The Rhodesian childhood years I write of are between 1972 and 1979 – between the ages of 7 and 15 years – and boarding school, in South Africa, until 1981, until the age of 17 years.

The fact that I never 'fitted' in as a youngster in Rhodesia, I was mocked for being Rhodesian when I arrived in South Africa, and yet conversely was made welcome in boarding school, sharpened, I have realised, through the writing of my M.Tech. thesis, and my empathy as a teacher and social being. This awareness, coupled with recognising the privilege I have of being able to express myself through the act of painting and writing, was what prompted my awareness to explore, create and conceptualise an alternate and inclusional visual voice for others via the medium of the PicTopic cards.

The body of work

My early painterly influences in art stemmed from a Social Realist tradition (Heller & Williams, 1982: 18). I have always needed to reflect critically on my observations of life and make social comment. I believe that this basic humanism has prompted my practice over the years and is evident in the paintings I write about in this article.

I painted 15 paintings in all for the three-month-long PP Course at the KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts in 2009. The majority of these 15 paintings were re-storied versions of the documented stories from the artSpace Gallery. For this article, I write about four paintings done during the PP Course, and three others that were the consequence of insightful yet informal peer reviews. The first paintings I write about are those painted as a response to selected stories told at artSpace Gallery (see Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7). I selected these particular PicTopic narratives to translate into paintings because of the emotional connection I felt with the stories being told. In the fourth painting (see Figures 8 and 9), I show my choice of PicTopic cards as symbols of myself and representative of my values. Thereafter, I discuss two paintings that developed through critical reflection, much introspection, as mentioned, and my acknowledgement of the impact of immigration on my psyche and professional self (see Figures 10, 11, 12 and 13). These corresponding paintings reflect my experiences and perceptions of my childhood, their effect on my adult self and my individuation.

Title: Future

The painting is in oil paint with gold foil. The wording and blue pictographic figures in the background have been spray-painted using handmade stencils. The closely packed blue figures represent claustrophobia and monotony, while the gold foil represents the value of looking forward, of seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, so to speak.

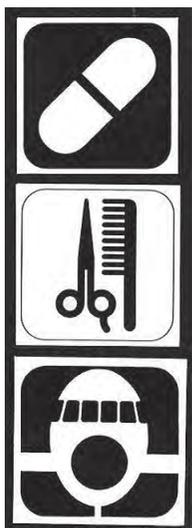


Figure 2: *PicTopic cards used to represent past, present and future*



Figure 3: *'Future' (Author 2009). Mixed media on canvas, 40cm x 55cm*

The storyteller, in this instance, was a young man who held up three PicTopics, that of a 'smiling mouth imbibing a pill', the next of 'a pair of scissors and comb' and, lastly, of 'a Boeing airplane'. Holding them up one by one, he said simply: "This is my past, this is my present and this is my future".

I responded strongly to his choice of PicTopics with my own feelings of claustrophobia, of wanting to escape the pressures of life and wishing to be somewhere else. This painting is about well-being, about recognising the necessity of finding balance and harmony in order to function effectively in society. I associate 'Future' with determination to change one's life, and experience new adventures, and the values I express in this painting are self-honesty and well-being.

Title: Looking at life

This painting is in oil paint on canvas board (see Figures 4 and 5). The storyteller chose three PicTopics, namely that of 'an atom and revolving electrons', 'a coat hanger' and the image of two figures to indicate 'male and female toilets'. This story was a strong statement, challenging societal definitions of self and how people relate to accepted norms. It is about the storyteller's acknowledgement and acceptance of his difference. The storyteller mentioned that he was a science teacher with a love of fashion, a combination which might have seemed odd. He suggested that opposites create balance in society: "yin and yang, black and white? Looking at life in terms of what it isn't instead of what it is". The 'opposites' for him are indicative of a barrier that conventional society puts in place to keep him 'an other', and he challenges the concept that what is conventional and the norm for one has to be applicable to all.



Figure 4 (above): PicTopics chosen to represent science, fashion and opposites in the painting 'Looking at life'



Figure 5 (right): 'Looking at life ...' (Author, 2009). Oil on canvas board, 95cm x 52cm

I have often felt that I am what I term a 'peripheral' person, always on the outside of the group, only looking in. Even when invited to be a part of the group, I have often still felt like an 'outsider', which someone defined as "a person not belonging to a particular group, set, party, etc.: Society often regards the artist as an outsider."⁷

This connection with the 'outsider' led me to create this piece, which reflects the value I attach to inclusion and my empathy towards others' feelings of being 'outside' of societal norms.

Title: Rarity – Heartbroken

'Rarity – Heartbroken' (see Figures 6 and 7) depicts what was told to me by a young girl who was unhappy about the slaughter of animals for food. The PicTopics she chose included pictographs of 'a sheep', 'a pig', 'a steak', 'a hamburger' and 'a figure with a broken heart'.

This painting is of mixed media, mostly in oil paint, with the floral images spray-painted onto the walls of a box room.

When re-telling this story in my painting, I chose to paint a beast with a fierce glint in its eye that the photographer had somehow captured. The beast seemed fierce, but I painted it roped, and 'boxed in' by floral walls, implying a deceit, a pretence of tameness in contradiction with my dearly held values of freedom, inclusion and self-worth. I also portrayed story cards being thrown away as a negation of their worth, implying the low worth of the small beast with the fierce glint in its eye.

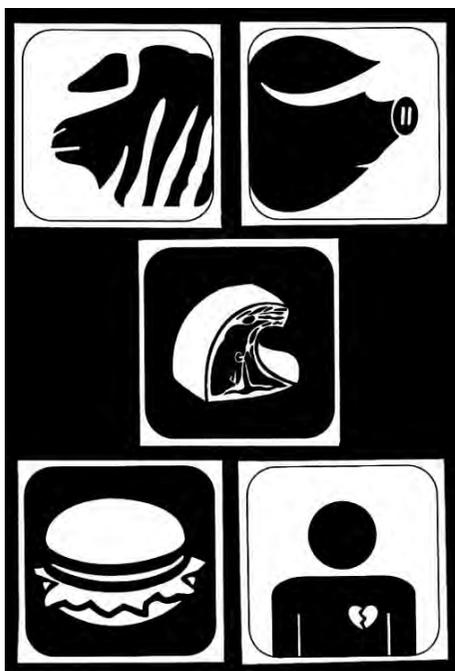


Figure 6 (above): *'Rarity – Heartbroken'* (Author 2009). Oil and spray paint on canvas, 100cm x 40cm



Figure 7 (right): *PicTopics chosen for 'Rarity – Heartbroken'*

Title: Self-portrait as storyteller – my cards

My fellow participants and facilitator, Brenton Maart of the PP Course, encouraged me to choose cards for myself and create a painting telling my own story. This painting, 'Self-portrait as storyteller – my cards' (see Figures 8 and 9), was the piece that prompted the start of reflection and analysis of my personal history and its link to my practice.

In this painting, I chose to tell something about myself by portraying images or symbols that represent elements of me. The PicTopics are floating just above the surface of the ground laid out in an unfinished circle. The cards I chose were of 'a woman', 'a suitcase', 'an atom and electrons', 'a house painting brush', 'a house with a person walking away from it', an image of 'a couple holding hands' and 'a pair of lungs'(inverted to represent a tree and the bush). The woman image or pictograph is at the fore of the circular layout of PicTopics. There is a suitcase on my right and a house on my left. They represent for me the fact that I can never 'go home', having emigrated from Rhodesia, and the desire to belong somewhere – to find hearth and home. The inverted lungs represent the bush and my animist philosophies.

This painting, and a colleague's critique thereof, really prompted me to engage deeply in thinking about myself as a person and to fully realise my values and belief systems and how integral they are to my practice as an artist, teacher, researcher and social being. I had my son take photographs of me outside in my small garden to find an image to go with the PicTopics I had chosen. The fire hose reel was incidental, but after I printed the photograph I liked the irony of its bloody red halo, so decided not to omit it. My stance is casually authoritative, implying I realise a guarded openness, implying: "Here I am, This is me and yes, I am wary and defensive".

This painting reflects my core values of creativity, playfulness, holism, a determined work ethic, freedom and intense love and passion for what I do as artist.

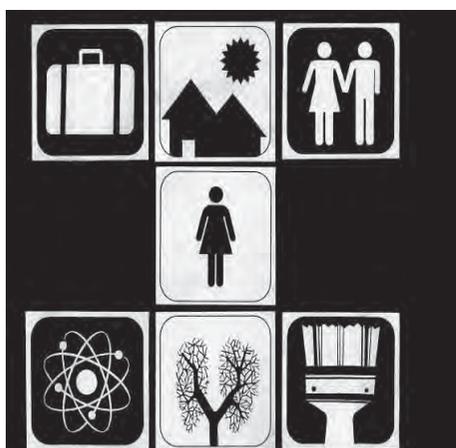


Figure 8 (above): *My PicTopics*



Figure 9 (right): *'Self-portrait as a storyteller – my cards'* (Author, 2009). Oil on canvas, spray paint, 150cm x 45cm

Title: I haven't unpacked yet

It was the work 'Self-portrait as a storyteller – my cards' that made me think deeply about the individual symbols I had chosen for myself, and one of the first symbols was the suitcase. I remember choosing the 'suitcase' PicTopic card to symbolise my wish for a spiritual hearth and home. It was only much later after deep reflection that I was able to realise the 'pull' of the suitcase because of its continual re-appearance in my paintings. I now see the suitcase as a metaphor for 'not belonging' and 'baggage' as in 'everyone has baggage', which, translated from the colloquial, means to me that

all people carry their fears and experiences with them. These experiences generally colour their expectations of, and outlook on life. In my paintings, the metaphor of the suitcase is both figuratively visual but also profoundly literal.

'I haven't unpacked yet' was painted after the PP Course (see Figure 10) and that 'damn' suitcase followed me from painting to painting. I could not escape it and I was compelled to paint it and repaint it as part of a cathartic technique to face old memories and understand my feelings of dislocation. It was quite a revelation to 'click' that I had been carrying these 'eina' [painful, yet beautiful] memories with me. These memories have weight. They are heavy, and I became conscious that I had been dragging them along with me for years. I realise, through introspection and a (kicking, screaming and protesting) determination, how they have shaped my life, as an artist, researcher, teacher, social being and the values and beliefs that (in)form me.



Figure 10: 'I haven't unpacked yet' (Author, 2011). Oil on canvas, spray paint, 55cm x 70cm

Title: 'Rhodesia is super'

The 'Rhodesia is super' painting took me the longest to paint. It is titled 'Rhodesia is super' after a logo that was very prominent in the 1970s, just prior to Zimbabwe being granted its post-colonial identity and independence in 1979. I remember seeing it on bags and T-shirts during those years.



Figure 11 (above): 'Rhodesia is super'.
Print design⁸



Figure 12 (right): 'Rhodesia is super' (Author,
2011). Oil on canvas, spray paint, 200cm x 60cm

In my painting, I depict the logo 'Rhodesia is super' on the vest I am wearing (see Figures 11 and 12). I shied away constantly from working into it after the initial stages of painting it up on the canvas, because I suspected/realised that I would be opening up myself to much criticism if I were to exhibit it. The 'Rhodesia is super' painting depicts an image of me in camo-army pants floating above a desolate, pre-dawn or dusk landscape. There is a long narrow dirt road stretching tautly beneath me and there is this plague of rifle silhouettes pushing me further above this landscape. This is not an easy painting for me to explain and I found it physically painful to paint. I had to wrestle with the ghosts that had settled in my inner child's memory.

I asked a friend to critique the painting. She exclaimed "Rhodesia? What? Excuse me! How dare you use that word?". She said that I was trying to atone for the 'White man's guilt', and expressing the ex-Rhodesian 'when-we' nostalgia. Yet she also spoke to me of how, through the act of painting, I was unpacking guilt and presenting the Rhodesian conflict within the larger palette of humanity caught up in the struggle for liberation. Her opinion was extremely useful, as she represents the dominant anti-colonial voice, with a personal background steeped in exile and 'other-ness' as a result of unjust oppressive rule and upheaval.

I am grateful for her fiery critique, although I disagree that I am trying to atone for 'White man's guilt'. In translating my fear of storying that painting and of revealing myself, I realised that I had resisted using the 'R' word because I have loathed being called a 'when-we'. My intense dislike of being labelled a 'when-we' reveals in me what Whitehead (1998:1) identifies in the self as a "living contradiction".⁹ The contradiction, in this instance, being the recognition of love enveloped in shame, being able to acknowledge an intense love of a country, dislike of its colonial history of oppression, and yet shy away from that acknowledgement of that love for fear of rejection and being labelled. The values this painting reflects are integrity, freedom and respect.

Title: Resolution

I write about this painting, because it symbolised a kind of closure to me. It was one of the last pieces I painted and has a printed background of rifles, dense and layered, which peter away to smaller and increasingly scattered images. In the centre of the composition sits an oval frame enclosing a portrait of my feet (see Figure 13). One of the toes has a ring with the face of the sun on it, and the feet have a luminescence that is offset by the fading red background. I have come to realise that mystical or religious connotations can be attached to the rendering of the feet, and that they could be read as the portrayal of martyrdom or crucifixion; however, the feet in my painting are from India. Let me explain.

I have been photographing my feet – always barefoot – for years in different places. So, I had many images to choose from for this painting. I like to see where my feet have walked and I realise that they represent, symbolically, my connection to

the earth. Yet I unconsciously chose that photograph taken in particularly dusky and pearlescent surroundings in India, where in that moment, I remember feeling a deep serenity. I understand now why I chose this image taken in a moment of profound peace and have used it to explain a symbolically harsh transformation interpreted as a peace offering and a form of resolution. The values this painting reflects are freedom and well-being.



Figure 13: *'Resolution'* (Author, 2011). *Mixed media, 112cm x 45cm*

Reflections

How are the painted stories visual indicators of my learning?

My living standards of practice (in)form and are (in)formed by my values. The ongoing critical conversations with my peers have been one of the ways that has helped me evaluate my artworks and their social and educational influence. I have been able to employ self-awareness, describe, critically analyse, evaluate and synthesise my processes, through the useful prompting of Brown's (1994) reflexive self-questioning, and my "living standards of judgement" (Whitehead, 2008:103), of integrity, empathy, passion, creativity and playfulness.

What did I learn from this self-study experience?

I learned and provided evidence of how the PicTopics are an invaluable tool for people to open up and share their thoughts – whether questioning, moral, spiritual, or for fun – and that these stories are a form of social commentary. The stories I was told at the artSpace gallery and at the Drama workshop showed me how people are connected through the commonality of experiences and just how intensely I related to those stories. In addition, my belief that the PicTopics can be used as a way to encourage a creative approach to teaching and learning, and that they can play a transformational role, was demonstrated by the stories documented at the artSpace Gallery, and by the storied performances of the DUT Drama students.¹⁰

What is the value of reflexivity in my practice?

Widdershoven (cited in Jousselson & Lieblich, 1993:7) writes of how we only become aware of the significance of experiences by telling stories about them and fusing them with other stories. In remembering/writing and painting my stories, I set out on a path of facing, challenging and interpreting/expressing my own painful conceptions of myself. I realise that I was negotiating the tricky path of "memory-work" (Mitchell & Webber, 1998; 1999, cited in Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell & Pillay, 2012: 2) as a tool for reflective analysis of self and its impact on my various practices. According to Pithouse-Morgan *et al.* (2012: 1), "memory work is aimed at revealing and gaining insight into the social meanings of and influences on memory". They further write that one can then intervene creatively through consciously working with memory. By reflecting on my choice of PicTopic stories to interpret as paintings, I was obliged to examine why I would choose to paint the symbols to tell the stories in the way I did. The insights I have gained from painting and storytelling have led me to acknowledge how these symbols are all linked to life experiences which have ultimately impacted upon my perceptions of self.

I learned that deliberate and conscious reflexivity "engages the self in critical exploration of experience, perceptions and positions" (Kirk, 2005: 239). I believe that acknowledging this train of thought has successively impacted on my teaching self.

How have self-study and reflexivity affected my teaching self?

I am aware now, post-masters, that in reflecting upon, remembering and “bringing forward the past, as painful as it might be” (Pithouse-Morgan *et al.*, 2012: 4), the re/remembering became an act for the future (Mitchell & Weber 1999, cited in Pithouse-Morgan *et al.*, 2012). I was able to unpack these memories through meta-reflection and understand how these memories have impacted on my practice as an artist and, in turn, as a teacher and social being. I was able to gain an understanding of how and why I taught the way I did and, in turn, consider ways to improve my practice(s).

Acknowledging that my own sociocultural background shapes how I construct, interpret and understand the world, and that I develop “subjective meanings of these experiences” (Cresswell, 2007: 20) led me to understand that this (in)forms many of my world views. I have the world view of the immigrant, the educationalist, the fine artist, the designer, and these all (in)form who I am and my practices as artist, teacher and researcher. I also acknowledge that these world views contain specific lenses, so that, for example, when I write of my experiences of growing up in the bush, I see through the eyes of the child. When I teach and notice a student struggling to understand me, I understand him/her through the lens of myself as a child because of my learning experiences, enabling me to empathise and find the patience to understand others.

Because I have become aware of the pertinence of engaging deeply with matters that are important to me and because I believe that by “embark(ing) on an inward journey as a part of the creative process of learning”, as De Beers (2009: 92) eloquently explains, I am far more aware of persuading my students to creatively, yet unconsciously, enjoy their learning. I have identified many ways that allow students to personally identify and connect with a brief or project, despite the prescriptive boundaries. To name a few: individual and group consultations with me; getting the students to review each other’s illustrations and design work (informal peer review), and allowing students to film on their cellular phones the technical painting demonstrations I give. In other words, finding ways to ‘strike a chord’ within the individual so that s/he quite simply enjoys what s/he is doing is, I believe, the key to his/her learning.

Conclusion

Overall, as Leavy (2009: 250) writes, I learned that

Integrating artistic processes into educational research is important because this generates unique ways of understanding and representing experiences. Through valuing different ways of perceiving, knowing, and making meaning, an artist-researcher can contribute holistic and intimate perspectives to research.

However, the greatest learning for me in my self-study has been connected to my identity. Using the PicTopic cards as prompts to tell my own stories, I was encouraged to ‘dig deep’ into my psyche. By reflecting on my choice of cards as symbols for self,

I really had to examine the 'who and why' of me, and realised that I had intuitively used the cards as a tool with which to make my values evident. In the creation of my own story/stories, I was able to unlock memories, and find new subject matter and creative routes to travel.

Through the concrete evidence of artefacts – the artwork and the PicTopics – I believe that I have developed a conduit that makes visually apparent the integration of artist, researcher and teacher. I also believe that it is the reflexive aspect of self-study that, while prompting the painful poem 'orange net bag of memories', also helped me develop a determined degree of consciousness; a determined consciousness where I now understand my wish to help others to be the best that they can be.

Endnotes

1. Brevity does not allow for in-depth detail on the value of the PicTopics as an educational tool and their pertinence as visual prompts, but my dissertation titled *Telling tales: Pictograms as a visual voice* can be accessed via the DUT library repository.
2. Retrieved on 25 September 2010 from <http://ejolts.net/node/80>.
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4. Retrieved on 3 April 2009 from www.ecuad.ca/~rbeer/text/pdf/STUDIES%20-%20RICHGATE.pdf.
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7. Retrieved on 19 October 2011 from Dictionary.com (Accessed 19/10/2011).
8. Retrieved on 7 February 2010 from www.lekkerwear.com/
9. Retrieved on 8 July 2009 from www.actionresearch.net/writings/livtheory.html
10. These stories can be read in my dissertation titled "Telling Tales: Pictograms as a Visual Voice".

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