"The Art of Inquiry: Using Quilting as a Metaphor for Piecing Together Teachers' Conversations and Narratives in Art Education Research."

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Abstract: A dilemma exists in the presentation of qualitative conversational data within a critical framework that allows the voices of the participants to be heard alongside the evaluative and critical reflections of the researcher. Using the metaphor of quilts, a narrative was constructed around taking swatches from the conversations and stories of accomplished art teachers. Notions of patterns and over-stitching the samples of conversations were used to fashion a meaningful quilted narrative that could be interpreted in a range of contexts. The results indicate that notions of narrative quilting can be applied as a method of interpretation and presentation of conversational qualitative data that enables patterns and issues to be evident. It is furthermore contended that this style of presentation of qualitative data makes it more accessible to teachers and offers greater possibilities for multiple readings and a sense of vicariousness.

Introduction
The metaphor of quilting can be used to describe the way a critical narrative can be pieced together by combining the comments of research participants, in this case accomplished art teachers, with reflections from the researcher, adopting the role of a critic. It is argued that the quilting metaphor provides an effective tool for organising the patterns that result from qualitative research. It seemed to be particularly effective in allowing dominant ideas to emerge, while permitting the ownership of each block to be clearly identified to the participants and researcher.

The premise behind the adoption of a quilting metaphor to describe the particular form of narrative presentation used was based on the idea that quilting is an effective process for both creating and discovering meaning. In a quilted narrative, conversations and other data are woven together in a way that supports the existence of multiples realities and allows for the intertwining of illuminative and personal interpretation. As this particular study was based with art teachers, the notion of a quilt implied a creative expression of the presentation of data. It was particularly germane that the method of presentation of data should be in concurrence with the artistic nature and subject matter of the study being undertaken. Reason (1988) contends that "creative expression is often relegated to the production of the beautiful or the entertaining." Yet it is significant in art-based research methodologies that researchers also see creative expression "as a mode of inquiry, a form of meaning-making, and a way of knowing" (Reason and Hawkins 1988: 81). As a particular way of presenting the conversations of a group of accomplished art teachers, quilting provided a sensory metaphor for finding and situating the ingrained knowledge, ideas and practices of the teachers. Furthermore, the quilting approach to narrative allowed the research to be presented in a way that encapsulated postmodernist and feminist ideals in research, allowing for shared negotiations of power and promoted participatory conversational exchanges. Geelan (1997: 2) indicates support for a quilted type of presentation of data within a democratic approach to educational inquiry, claiming that:
Each tale on its own is powerful, and tells us something new, or affirms something we already knew, about life in schools. But it is the rich and complex braid made of a hundred individual stories and incidents that becomes a far more powerful tool for understanding school life.

To understand how the quilting metaphor was used to describe the particular form of narrative presentation of data, it is important to understand the context of the study being conducted.

**Context**
The word *context* originates from the Latin verb meaning "to weave together" (Jalongo, Isenberg et al. 1995: 28). In this way, it is significant to understand the context in which the quilted narrative was applied and how the context combined with the teachers' stories and the researcher's views to form a weaving together of ideas, that exist ultimately as an inseparably single unit, known as the quilt. The quilted narrative was used to present the findings of a study aimed at determining the qualities of beliefs and practices apparent in a group of accomplished primary art teachers to ascertain if these may be used to inform and improve design and practice in preservice primary art teacher education programs within Australia.

The participants in the study were twenty-two accomplished primary art teachers who possessed a recognised ability to successfully teach primary visual arts. The accomplished art teachers met for four group discussion sessions termed 'critical friends groups. These were facilitated by the researcher who then visited schools to observe the teachers in practice. Informal, reflective discussions involving the participants followed. The teachers' conversations were transcribed and interpreted using a critical appreciative framework that used themes to highlight qualities of practice and beliefs. These were presented as a collaged narrative including the voices of the accomplished teachers and my reflections as critic. The analogy of quilting represented the piecing together of teachers' conversations to form blocks and the analysis of these blocks in larger patterns of analysis. This research was underpinned by the belief that teaching is an art, and that accomplished teachers are artists. Models of criticism were applied to emphasise appreciation of the art teachers and their teaching. Observations, interpretation and presentation were viewed through the eyes of a critic who values the sensitivity and intuition of the creative mind. This study was grounded in recent research on art education, teacher education, teaching, methods of art instruction and preservice art teacher development. It used a qualitative method based in the paradigm of art-based methodologies, in particular, critical appreciation. The study was conceived on the idea that the researchers and participants exist as a community who together make meaning.

The presentation of data encapsulated through quilted narrative the salient observations, inferences and feelings resulting from the research. Meaning was constructed through different forms of textual representation. Representation was the process through which the contents of consciousness resulting from the research process were transformed into a public and accessible. The writing provided insight into visions and instincts elicited within the research. The form of language chosen was grounded in the practices of art critics and art appreciation, and as such, the symbolic devices used included description, interpretation, themes, narrative, persuasion, imagination and judgement. This research used an analogy of quilting to describe the way conversations were patterned and pieced to create single layers of fabric that carries the ideas and meanings derived from the accomplished teachers. The sewing devices used in the construction
of the quilted narrative include framing, positioning, perspective, collage, spaces in text, socially constructed meaning, discourse and context, openness and reconstruction, voice and identification of self as being a significant part of research. This approach presented interpretation in a collaged fashion, where each story remained clear and distinct, while at the same time, working artistically with the other narratives to create a meaningful assemblage. Meaning resulted from that integrated ensemble of connections among ideas. The quilted narrative operated as a complex interaction of several levels of abstraction, awareness and control. These existed in what Polkinghorne (1988: 8) describes as a "complex organisational patterns that fold back on one another and link elements through condensation and displacement make the realm of meaning difficult to investigate."

The narrative in this study was presented as a collaged quilt. Gooding-Brown (1999: 5) describes the interpretation of collaged narrative as an act of "palimpsest" as the narrative is not broken down, analysed and discussed until it no longer holds any of its original artistic or aesthetic value. Interpretation of collaged narrative establishes links and makes personal connections between various parts of the collage and montage of words. Gooding-Brown (1999: 5) describes her personal approach to collaged narrative:

Basically all I did was to make notes on it (the phenomenon) … tear it down the middle… segmented. I was going to use scissors but I thought that would be too definite while the separation was ambiguous.

While the narrative in this research was not constructed from tearing up the accomplished teachers' stories, the stories were quilted together to form patterns, themes and organised meaning structures. This form of organisation enabled the individuality of the voices to be strong within a framework of combined stories chorusing to produce an aesthetic response.

The nature purpose of educational narrative within critical appreciation.

Diamond (1999: 241) suggests that the etymology of narrative can be traced back to the Latin narrare meaning to relate or connect, which in turn derives from gnarrare, which is related to gnarus, meaning knowing or skilled. In this way creating a narrative is an act of making informed meaning and connecting ideas in a knowing and skilled way. Beyond their research applications, narratives have been used throughout time to share experiences and pass on current and past experiences to future generations. Keeves (1999: 135) argues that "stories are pervasive in human and social experience." The purpose of narrative as used in research is to produce an accurate description of the interpretative accounts individual use to make order and meaning in their existence. Narrative as a way of presenting an educational story should open up visions for the reader. Richardson (1990: 65) contends that the aim of narratives are to permit, "individuals, the society, or the group to explain its experiences of temporality, because narrative grows out of temporality." She claims that narrative is, "the best way to understand human experience, because it is the way humans understand their own lives. It is the closest to human experience and hence the least falsifying." Good quality narratives are characterised by an aesthetic coherence that is formed by allowing the individual parts of the collage or quilting process to show their source and identity, while at the same time combining collectively to form a vision that is greater than the sum of all the parts. While the critic speaks as a narrator, in critical appreciation there is awareness that the voice of the narrator externalises the voices of all research participants. Davis and Harre (1992: 45) argue that narratives are always constructed of
multiple conversations. Associated with this idea, narratives are subjective and positioned by the inclusion and exclusion of certain conversations. Narratives present a lived story, which is composed of multiple perspectives. To this extent, narrative is a form of culturally-based text. Denzin (1998: 7) describes this as "lived textuality" a process where multiple voices comingle. Denzin (1998: 11) argues that narratives, no matter how well constructed can never fully capture felt relationships and conversations. He contends that narratives come alive only through social-cultural interpretation, "In discourse cultural values are enacted and social structures come alive." The strength of a narrative therefore lies in its ability to explore possibilities and potential. Lincoln (1989: 180) argues that it is through narrative that, "futures can be imagined and partially experienced and savoured."

The particular type of narrative used in this study was a quilted aesthetic critical narrative. Aesthetic critical narrative generally uses language that demonstrates passion, commitment and a democratic political stance. It is subjective and personal; honest and open; and employing sense, configuration, connotation and intention to communicate. Critical appreciation relies on a narrative that is context sensitive and informed. Critical appreciative narrative writing is characterised by a level of intellectual wrestling. The critic should accurately and democratically represent the stories of others. To achieve this, it is likely that the critic becomes personally engaged with the narrative, and yet at the same time remains able to think outside the constructions that are inherently socialised into the narrative. As le Compte (1993: 18) argues, the critic should be aware that:

The text created within the study, whether by the researcher alone or in collaboration with participants, and the sense of reality it conveys, is mediated by and situated not just within itself, but within constraining networks of time, place, beliefs and historical context.

A good narrative in critical writing should be crafted with awareness to aesthetic form and beauty. Eisner (1993: 54) suggests that "aesthetically crafted writing has the capacity to foster empathetic experience, thus making possible a form of understanding that would otherwise be unlikely". The story told should be beautiful and captivating. If these elements are present, it is likely that the narrative has the power to transform the understandings of the researcher into a form that helps the reader to notice what they have learned not to notice. Eisner (1995: 3) believes that artistically presented narratives, "provide an image fresh to behold, and in so doing provide a complement to the colorless abstraction of theory with renderings that are palpable". Barone (1990: 309) describes effective narrative as being a "good marriage of aesthetic form and substance". The narrative becomes a tool for fostering change. Finlay (1995: 134) argues that if a narrative is to be judged as a work of art it must, "generate an emotional experience and, at some level, it grabs your gut and you say "Yes, it turns me on". The quality of a narrative becomes largely determined by its ability to evoke a vicarious response.

Traditionally, critically appreciative narratives are conceived by the critic. Under postmodern views of narratives, the authorship of the narrative is extended to include many voices. The assumption behind a multi-vocal approach to narrative is that no single story has authority (Cydney 1995). Mouffe (Nadesan and Elenes 1998: 253) argues that a critical appreciative approach stresses that narratives exist within a pluralist framework that allows for different forms of individuality. This approach assumes that a critic cannot speak for others, but rather makes interpretations of what is said. Thus the narrative for this research was comprised of the
actual voices of the accomplished teachers. They told their stories and these were interpreted collectively by both the accomplished teachers, as educators and artists, and me as critic and researcher. Initially, the accomplished teachers needed to be convinced of their expertise and the importance of their stories. By asking the accomplished teachers to speak and recording and replaying this narrative to form the story, the teachers were given voice. I, as researcher and critic, also had voice in the story.

The influence of postmodernism on critical appreciative narratives as a form of inquiry.

Diamond (1999: 240) argues that following the influence of postmodernism, inquiry is not so much a search for truth, as a "reconstruction of the telling." This may involve re-constructing language and image, content and context, and sparking new ways of perceiving relationships. A postmodern approach involves the critic reflecting on her writing and building layers of conversation, where the critic not only comments about the artwork, but also comments about the comments about the artwork. In this way, a postmodern model of critical narrative is premised on the idea that language creates meaning, and so is not tied to discussing only the artwork, but instead analyses the conversations surrounding the artwork. Gooding-Brown (1999) argues that the focus is on the social and historical constructions within the conversations surrounding the artwork. In relation to this study, the focus was not on the accomplished teaching per se, but rather what the teachers say about their lives and teaching. The quilted narrative was drawn from an interpretation of these conversations and from what was partial, subjective and intuitive within the accomplished teachers’ conversations.

Postmodern narrative is framed around critics putting themselves in the text, and engaging in writing "as a creative act of discovery and inquiry" (Denzin 1994: 504). In this way meaning is neither wholly objective nor subjective, but rather exists as a transaction between both these ideas (Eisner 1991). Anderson (1993) argues that critical appreciative narratives are indicative of sensibility, informed sense and intuition that result from a combination of the writer's perception, interpretation and evaluation. The critic's aim is to develop patterns of plausibility that might engender future actions, enhanced perceptions or instigate imaginings of possibilities.

Under a postmodern approach to criticism, authoritative stances were challenged and the accomplished teachers spoke in their own voice. Their ideas were recorded and shared. Verification was in terms of the teachers' ideas and not an imposed dominant philosophical model. This approach was sensitive to the importance of voice and multiple visions, and challenged ideas that good criticism is based on unity, totality and closure. As Denzin (1994: 511) notes, a postmodern view of critique celebrates, "uncertainty and attempts to create texts that do not impose theoretical frameworks on the world". Postmodern critique is concerned with telling small stories that exist within contexts and recognises the constitutive force of discourse and endorses people as active constructors of meaning capable of making choices in relation to the way they gain meaning and apply that meaning to their beliefs and practices.

Quilted narrative

In a general way, narratives communicate meaning, explore underlying values and are the basis for reflection, discussion and debate. Stories illuminate life experiences and are capable of presenting paradoxes and rendering chaotic and seemingly shapeless events into coherent wholes. Jalongo (1995: 5) contends that "narrative is a basic way of responding to the avalanche
of information that we encounter in our daily life." Personal stories may include experiences, concepts, and themes. Experiences are the 'facts' that happen to us. They are the people, places, and events that become part of our history. Concepts are beliefs or ideas and themes are general, abstract principles that summarise and consolidate experiences and concepts. The accomplished teachers' stories in this research centred on art experiences, significant visual moments, autobiographies and teaching and learning. Although most of these stories were recalled experiences from childhood and teaching, they had a very 'here and now' quality to them. They were as Jalongo (1995) describes, "stories of practice" taken from direct experience. The teachers spoke of a strong affinity to stories, especially those of a visual nature. They each said they frequently run "videos in their minds" before and after actual experiences. The research process appeared to evoke these stories. Similarly, while the stories were constructed by individuals, they presented a more universal view that would allow others within the profession and those that have experienced art teaching to respond to the experiences and feelings described. This universal quality was largely achieved through the quilting process.

The quilted narrative served to capture the individual stories of the teachers and the reflections of the researcher as critic and turn these into something profound. The patterned formation of the quilted narrative tended to foreground the mediated status of text. As Jalongo (1995: 5) stresses "perhaps the most important attribute of the human brain is its ability to perceive patterns and organise otherwise fleeting images and perplexing experiences, usually in the form of a narrative".

Quilted narrative, when compared to traditional research narratives, include devices such as collage, accumulation, patterns and framing. Spaces, text changes, size, spacing and font and the use of borders are used to create the quilted narrative. These features are evident in the following example of the quilted narrative representing the findings of the research on accomplished teachers. In this sample, italics has been used to show the teachers' voices: non-italicised text represents the critic (or researcher's) voice; the spaces indicate the joining of different voices; while the use of the border give prominence to what are described as feature blocks which stand out as distinct 'owned' narratives within the overall quilt. The sample below could be considered as representing a single block within the overall quilted pattern. The larger quilt was comprised of many blocks, organised into themes and then joined and overstitched to create patterns within patterns.

**Sample of quilted narrative**

For the majority of the accomplished teachers it was a family member or adult friend of the family. Positive reinforcement could be in the form of words of praise or compliments, but buying art books or art materials, or taking the child to see an exhibition were also attributed as being positive reinforcement to continue the young critical friend's involvement in art. *As a child I was always encouraged to sew, to paint, to make and create and I would prepare exhibitions and things. There were always lots of compliments and no criticism.*

*My sister told me that my paintings were good and she bought me the paints and I remember going off painting. And I was only about 10 years old and she said, “My year 10 students couldn’t do that and I suddenly thought I was an artist and I think probably everybody can relate to that.”*
I had an Aunt who was an art teacher who was very encouraging and bought me art books and materials for my birthday. And Mum was very artistic. She used to draw and play the violin and so by the time year 5 came I was sort of set on my artistic way.iii

I achieved. I remember someone in year 8 told me I was good at art and I thought I achieved something. I can do it. I think it started with a piece of crappy pottery, and the teacher liked it and said it was good... and that was so positive... so after that I thought I can really do art and so from then on I loved art and it was incorporated into everything.iv

I had a wonderful art teacher at high school. She was really off the planet but she was really positive. And I wasn’t great at art... but I really enjoyed it ... but with everyone...she was really positive and always encouraging you.v

Tim said he was considered tough and 'one of the boys' and he had won this acclaim through misbehaviour and fighting. But he recalled at this time, lying in bed at night and thinking that there must be more to life than this and longing for some creative outlet to take him away for the harshness of the environment in which he grew up. At this stage, he did not realise that thing would be art. It was only after meeting his future wife that he went to a gallery and described this experience as finding the thing that had been missing all his life.

Tim's story:
Art wasn’t available to me at the school. It just wasn’t an option to experience it because my family weren’t interested so in a way that is a negative experience. Someone saying you can’t do it. It made me think I couldn’t do art because I thought well it is not available to me so I couldn’t do it. When I was at school there wasn't any art. I went to Blacktown Boys High and as you know it has quite a reputation for producing tough blokes. I wasn't woosy or anything. I was playing rugby and sport and rumbling and all that. I didn't really try at school. My family lived in a housing commission place. It was pretty rough. But it is strange, even then I felt a sense of spirituality... I always felt different from the kids around me ... I thought there has got to be more to this life than hanging around Blackville. I then started getting into art and I thought this is so good. All the creative stuff. Now I don't know whether it is that art attracts people who think differently... who want to set themselves apart... do they feel differently... or is it that some people recognise that to get the best from kids with their art you have to isolate and celebrate difference and so they develop that persona... chicken and egg. vi

This structure used pastiche, montage and collage to create the blocks and then to join these blocks. Diamond (1999) describes this process as being allied to notions of palimpsest where a free-flowing crazy quilt is created through the collage and hodge podge of ideas and views to present data where contradiction is important and there is lack of finality. While the method of quilting certainly contained aspects of palimpsest, particularly in the way it exemplifies simulacrum, providing the identical copy for which no original ever existed and allowing the uniqueness of each to show through while producing a coherent combined voice, the method of quilting and collage was more ordered and thoughtful than may be implied through ideas of palimpsest. Decisions about that patterns to be formed and the arrangement of ideas was made in direct consultation with, and response to the ideas and inputs of the accomplished teachers,
Quilting and critical appreciation.

Educational criticism is about achieving an appreciation and evaluation of something already made. When using quilting as an approach to presenting qualitative data, it is about struggling to create something new and more artful. A quilted view of narrative involved the compilation of small swatches of stories together to form a quilt that holds meaning. It was an artistic narrative based on assemblages of the original to form something new. The critic aims for robustness, inconsistencies and patterns as a way to reveal a full, complex and deep semblance. The critical writing device apparent in this research was narrative. Through the presentation of narrative, the voices of the accomplished teachers and the researcher, and the inner voices of the readers, could be heard and reflected upon. Description included contextual and historical considerations, comparisons and positioning, and an awareness of cultural and emotional underpinnings to the work. Critical writing combines description, interpretation and evaluation in a way that is narrative, informative and enlightening. These three elements are not isolated in the critique, but rather coupled to create a holistic visioning of the artwork.

Langer (1957: 21) believes that written language is the means by which we "conceive the intangible, incorporeal things we call our ideas, and the equally inostensible elements of our perceptual world that we call facts". Writing is a highly developed form of symbolic representation that combines the conceptual and the emotional aspects of human communication. Through critical appreciative writing, the critic aims to give the viewer vicarious experience of the artwork, and lift perception beyond the mundane. Critical writing is directed to both the inner voice of the critic and an outer voice that presents a transactional conversation about a work of art between the critic, the work and the reader.

The aesthetic act of quilting is not simply about making connections between the viewer and the work, but allows the presentation of the heard and seen; the perceptual, emotional and intellectual; and is about the creation of a communicative work. In this way criticism exists as unified whole, that is encountered aesthetically. Critics produce a substantial work by vividly describing both what is there and what is not there, drawing description and interpretation from external, contextual sources and internal, intuitive states. Passion and feeling are as much a part of this process as is clarity and literacy. Finlay and Knolwes (1995: 139) use an analogy to signify the holistic vision of the experiences of the critic. They write:
Yes, you can produce some "like" images. Drawing a horse! It looks like a horse, but if it does not (capture) … the energy, the power of a horse, it is not good art. If that happens in research, if in the process of interpretation you lose the energy and the emotion, the humanness, then the research is not good research.

Quilting is a process of constructing an aesthetic whole. It is a delicate and complicated process as both aesthetic and empirical concerns determine both the inclusion and exclusion of patterns and swatches. In this way, the patterns are constructed in an impressionistic way, where the search is for "rightness of fit" and the positioning of elements in such a way as to present a pleasing sense of order. A quilted narrative should be rhythmic and ordered. An aesthetic quilt
it implies a level of complexity, sensitivity and a personal response. To achieve this the researcher needs to possess an overarching vision. This is often difficult as the data presents itself as seemingly scattered, chaotic and incoherent samples of 'cloth'. In the process of quilting, the researcher may start with a single scrap of fabric or story and this becomes the point from which the quilt is constructed. Conversely, several blocks may need to be constructed before a clear pattern emerges. In this way, a quilted narrative does not have a definite start, middle or end and the process of coding and forming patterns needs to be adaptive and malleable. At this stage, it may be that the overall structure of the quilt is not obvious. It may exist only as irregularly disposed units or blocks. These may appear somewhat quirky, but their irregularity helps to preserve the nuances and complexities of the participants' stories. The quilt also has to leave spaces for intricate associations to be made. These might otherwise be lost, if the researcher attempted to create a quilted narrative that tried to be too perfect and ordered. The complexities and artistic nature of forming a quilting narrative are effectively summarised by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997: 254) who states, in reference to the work of a narrative quilter:

"Form is the texture of intellect, emotion, and aesthetics that supports, illuminates, and animates the structural elements. Standing alone, the scaffold is stark, bare, unwelcoming-unconvincing in its abstraction. But form -expressed in stories, examples, illustrations, illusions, ironies- gives life and movement to the narrative, providing complexity, subtlety, and nuance to the text, and offering the reader the opportunities for feelings identified and drawn into the piece."

The narrative quilter must choose where to apply the scissors. In balancing the themes to create an aesthetic whole, the narrative quilter must use a sense of 'eye'. While this is ultimately the responsibility of the educational critic and researcher, under democratic approaches to research, notions of a 'friendship quilt' maybe adopted, where all the participants in the research work collaboratively to make decisions about the aesthetic impact of the overall narrative. In an aesthetic quilt, all the elements of the narrative should be interrelated and as Read (Read 1946) contends in relation to works of art, must cohere to form a unity which has value greater than the mere sum of these elements. Inkeeping to this coherent whole, the narrative quilter blends narrative and analysis, description and interpretation, and structure and texture. The whole fabric of the narrative must be stitched together so the quilt presented is greater than the sum of all its parts. In a quilt, the borders should be strong, the seams invisible, and the over-sewing skilful. When the quilter is able to achieve such unity of interpretation and aesthetics of presentation, the reader will view and comprehend the work as being an aesthetic whole.

"In achieving this rendering of an intelligible whole, the portraitist must thoughtfully delineate and organize the separate parts and then weave them together into a pattern so carefully unified that the seams are invisible."

The aesthetic dimension of narrative quilting is the way the researcher and participants together create a 'whole' that is believable, while at the same time balancing authenticity and ownership of the parts. In this way, effective critical appreciation allows the reader to experience a vicarious 'knowing' of the experiences of the critic and read into these experiences personal feelings, contexts and intuitions. Text is aesthetically shaped into a form that expressively communicates. Barrett likens this process to reading. He states (Barrett 1991: 90):
It is like reading a sentence: The sentence makes sense depending on the meaning of each word, but the words only make meaning according to the meaning of the sentence.

The quilt is embroidered through convergence, values, reflection and dissonance. A well-crafted quilted narrative should inform and inspire, document and transform, speak to the head and to the heart. It is about finding and representing resonance that will be discovered and valued by the viewer. If a quilt has this sense of completeness, it will shimmer with the voices of all the participants and in turn, will provide a degree of response in the people who view or read it.

The process of quilting

The data collection in the study of the accomplished teachers produced a set of oral stories. These stories were accompanied by a number of photographs and samples of children's artwork that the teachers had kept. These tended to act as visual 'triggers' allowing teachers to recall past lessons and experiences and promoting the sharing of certain teaching experiences. The goal in the analysis and presentation phase of the research was to produce an accurate description of these stories and interpretative accounts of the individuals and to group these in order to make meaning. The analysis worked to uncover common themes and plots in the data and to reveal underlying patterns across the stories. Polkinghorne (1988: 166) describes this investigative process as the researcher being able to "penetrate behind the fragmented information and a variety of sources" to locate the stories that "inform the practices and interpretations of the community." This involves examining the teachers' stories, that existed in a fluid, oral form and piecing them together in a way that promotes sustained consideration and the comparison and contrasts both within the stories and with other similar educational stories. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997: 185) describes this as being a "disciplined, empirical process of description, interpretation, analysis and synthesis - and an aesthetic process of narrative development."

To overcome the complexities of this process and to allow the democratic portrayal of all the voices in research, a process of quilting was adopted to analyse and present the findings of the study. Quilting as a form of narrative construction is an iterative and generative process. It involved creating a layered narrative by cutting samples of data and organising and reorganising these into patterns. The themes and 'blocks' within the themes emerged from the data, and then these in turn, acted as organisational structures giving shape and form to subsequent data. The teachers were actively involved in this process, and the patterns were recycled back through the participants to gain feedback and ideas. It has to be noted though, that selection and elimination of certain narratives and parts of narratives, ultimately resided with the researcher as critic. To this extent, quilting is ultimately an act of power. Similarly, particular narrative were excluded for more aesthetic or pragmatic reasons. For example, a piece may be removed if it over emphasised a point leading to aesthetic imbalance in the text block. Equally, many wonderful stories had to be omitted simply because their inclusion would have made the whole quilt too large and cumbersome.

The quilting process itself could be described as a form of pentimento, whereby different layers were painted on one another. In this layering process, insights were added and subtracted, rubbed out and put in creating the patterns of the quilt. In this way the process of quilting implied the careful selection and rejection of elements that work together providing both harmony and contrast. This involved the selective collaging of both the descriptive and
explanatory narrative, rendering a quilted account continuing both what already exists, and also constructing an underpinning 'why' narrative. Quilting therefore exists as a struggle to make an aesthetically complete narrative within the different patterns and framings that compete with one another for prominence.

Within the process of quilting there are two aspects that were particularly important. These were the use of framing (both actual and implied) and the importance of spacing.

**Framing**

Frames acted as the stretcher holding the quilt in position and enabling the creation and reworking of the patterned blocks. These frames are amorphous and dynamic. The notion of frames comes from the Greek *cathereal*. This terms is useful in considering the rationale for selecting certain themes and frames as the word implies "that which warrants framing" (Pearsall 1998). In this way, it assumes that those aspects of the broader conversations that are framed and presented in the quilted narrative have been selected as offering greatest potential to the purposes of the study. Discourses within a narrative shift with the application of different frames. Frames act like the movement of a lens on a camera bringing in and out of focus various aspects of the writing. By moving the camera, or altering the framing of the lens, different conversations come to the foreground while others recede. Mouffe (Nadesan and Elenes 1998: 265) describes these frames as being, "possibilities for choice and action". The strength of effective critical appreciation is that accord is not desirable. Differences are as important as similarities and multiple perspectives occur in a montaged manner, rather than being collapsed into the production of a single-layered picture. Mouffe (Nadesan and Elenes 1998: 251) states, "It is the tension between consensus- on the values- and disensus- on their interpretation- that makes possible the agonistic dynamics of pluralistic democracy."

Framing requires selective perception that is responsive to both the subtle and the distinctive. It is a form of aesthetic and empathetic knowing that isolates aspects of a phenomenon. Eisner (1995: 5) argues that the framing of narrative, with its concern for the particular can help, "us to recognise what individual teachers do when they teach." Lincoln (1988) describes framing as a process of determining "what kinds of knowledge (the critic) thinks is important, meaningful, powerful, persuasive and socially acceptable". Framing operates reciprocally with the critic and the reader as decisions are made not only by the critic as to what is significant, but also as to what is likely to be noticed and valued by the reader. Framing is a form of transformation of the data. In critical appreciation the critic begins the framing process by assessing the data and making interpretations and determining the likely value and impact of what to include and omit. The narrative is constructed as a result of these transformations. Framing largely determines the nature and structure of the narrative and as such, any given point of view holds multiple points of focus, that ultimately determine the meaning and reading of the data and its interpretation. This view as it relates to the work of the critic is summarised by Anderson (1995: 198), when he states:

No one view, no individual perception can encompass or apprehend its multiplicity of views, layers and meanings. Yet each view is valuable in and of itself. And each is complete and satisfying, and whole unto itself. Insight and meaning result not only from perception, but also from the application of intellect and emotion to an interpretation of what is seen. Different minds and different hearts create different meanings from the same physical perception.
The frames within a quilted interpretive approach to narrative are dynamic and interactive in nature. The quilt exists as a developing arrangement of blocks and patterns, constantly worn with time and modified by our ongoing experiences. Framing is not something that is done alone by the researchers and/or the participants. Framing is an act of communication that involves an agent or agencies and so is therefore more provisional and negotiated than may be at first considered. While the researcher and participants may create the intertextual framing within the quilted narrative, it is the viewer who ultimately frames the quilt. Intertextual framing includes the way the quilt is patched internally, but also includes other writing in the field, and the 'quilts' of other researchers. In art, intertextual framing is determined in the light of previous works, historical movements and work in other medium.

Frames can also suggest the material border that shapes and surrounds a work of art. In this view of borders, a quilted narrative uses frames to help organise the perception of the viewer. Frames thus act as an enclosure, which demarcates a particular semiotic field, or separates smaller stories from the rest of the plane against which they are viewed. These frames add 'specialness' to text and thereby tell the reader how to regard these. It should however be noted, that the framing approach used in this study, was very much concerned with the overlapping and layering of framing devices. In this way, frames exist within frames, patterns within patterns and blocks within blocks. Furthermore, attention was given to so-called out of frame actions, such as when an art teacher was washing-up in the staff room, as these out of frame moments added richness and humanness to the overall quilt.

Allied with ideas of framing, is the way space is used in a quilted narrative to allow the reader to see the patterns and blocks and interweave themselves into the fabric of the quilt.

**Spacing**

Spicing is very important. The quilter needs to leave just enough separation among each block to provide sufficient room for readers to make their own meanings from the reorganised material. In this way the reader becomes active in the way to construct meaning from the text.

The 'meeting place' Denzin (1998: 13) describes is not always a comfortable place. The spaces provided by quilted narrative can be problematic, as meaning is synthesised in these spaces. Often perceptual information gathered in an initial response might be revisited and challenged as a result of different interpretations of the narrative. This requires "synthetic intuitive projection" (Anderson 1993: 206), a form of reading that is beyond analytic intake and places a greater demand on the reader. To encourage this step to be more easily made, critics frequently use themes in their narrative. The thematic approach was adopted in this study and involved linking key ideas through the analogy of quilting blocks. A block in quilting is one complete pattern of fabric. It could be one cut piece of material postage stamp size to a piece of material large enough to cover a bed. It may be any number of pieces of fabric sewed together as long as it forms one complete pattern. (Hinson 1966: 28). When the blocks are set together, patterns emerges which are not obvious from looking at a single block (Walker 1983: 13). The greater the richness of these connecting themes, the easier it is for the reader to construct meaning from the text. A key strategy in constructing understanding is by organising interpretation round central ideas. Hake (1937: 8) contends in relation to quilting:
So that this filling shall be orderly and effective the principle of subordination must be applied. This involves a dominant idea to which all else is subordinate. If patterns were applied indiscriminately to the quilt, the result would be chaos: a muddle.

These result as emergent themes, such as the ones in this study that included, the accomplished teachers' backgrounds, personal qualities, beliefs, assumptions about art, what they consider children need to know in art and other issues. The formation of categories enabled ideas to be sorted and perceptions to be communicated clearly. Dominant motifs were given prominence by their spacing and size relation to the rest of the quilt.

Thematic critique is about looking for recurring messages and qualities, isolating features and then presenting these in a quilted narrative form as salient images and patterns that exemplify and fit the purpose of the critic and the description of the phenomenon. The themes should ideally form a "summary of the essential features" (Eisner 1998: 104). The themes emerged naturally from the research process. Eisner (1998: 104) states that: The formulation of themes within educational criticism means identifying the recurring messages that pervade the situation about which the critic writes. Themes are dominant features of a situation or person, those qualities of place, person, or object that define or describe identity.

However, there are an almost limitless number of themes that could be explored from a work. In the quilting analogy, "quilting inherently provides infinite scope for truly creative pleasure in design and execution." (Hake 1937: 19). The skill of the critic as quilter is in foregrounding the most significant issues. A number of critics writing about a single work may come up with a multitude of different themes as conceptual organisers for the information observed and experienced. To this end, the quilted narrative in this study represented one way of framing the information gained. This is inevitable, but it also meant that readers needed to be aware of the possibility of different interpretations that may have been possible.

The nature of quilting as a form of narrative presentation of data in qualitative study has been discussed. In particular, the connection has been drawn between quilting as a way of presenting narratives within the axioms of critical appreciative, art-based research methodologies. Furthermore, it has been suggested that quilting was a successful method of presenting the stories of the accomplished art teachers in a way that captured the essence of their stories and presented these in a way that was both aesthetic and carried a level of resonance with the wider educational community. Within this, it was suggested that quilting was inherently an aesthetic act, that relies on creative and critical processes to produce a quilt that has a sense of completeness and wholeness in an aesthetic manner. While a number of processes were discussed, particular focus was given to the importance of framing and spacing in the construction of a quilted critical appreciative narrative. To conclude, the following two sections present the advantages and disadvantages of the quilted narrative in the presentation of quilted narratives within educational research.

**The advantages of quilted narratives.**

Through engagement in the quilting narrative process, I have been able to strengthen and deepen and elaborate my understanding of the processes and antecedents of art education. The teachers' stories appeared to be a powerful way of communicating the qualities of accomplished art
teachers to a broader educational audience. The quilted narrative connected thought and feeling; simplicity and complexity; and the obvious and the obscure. The quilted narrative also provided a very accessible way for teachers to access the findings of the study. As Jalongo (Jalongo, Isenberg et al. 1995: 13) notes, "outstanding teachers tend to favour aesthetic truth and mistrust objective truth when it resorts to measuring and fragmenting information." The quilted stories allowed me to communicate my newly developed understanding to teachers and educators in a way that was more accessible than traditional research reports, or critiques or narratives. Much research in art education is couched in a form of language that makes it inaccessible and irrelevant to most primary teachers. By contrast, the teachers found the quilted narratives to be genuine, powerful and evocative. As they participated in the construction of the quilted narrative, the quilt itself became a site for both the researcher and participants to reflect and enter further conversations. In this way, the quilt was interpreted and reinterpreted in its construction. As Reason (Reason and Hawkins 1988:100) notes, "The outcome of a cooperative inquiry is often deeply personal and practical, as well as theoretical." The theory and the practice were well grounded and expressed in the personal or collective stories presented in the quilted narrative.

The quilted narrative was about communication and meaning. Barone (1990) argues that when readers recreate a vision, new meanings are constructed and old values and outlooks are challenged. A quilted narrative presented ideas in way where there was cohesion, relevance and understandability. The narratives allowed the teachers to sense the importance of their voices and gave them the confidence to become more reflective about their practice and ideas and to enact positive changes within their teaching practice and more broadly within the educational community. The quilted narrative served to respect teachers' knowledge. Art teachers, particularly those working in the primary school, frequently feel their views are not valued. As Jalongo (1995: 13) cautions "Unfortunately in the world of education, personal perspectives on what it means to teach and to learn often take second place to hard data, facts and figures. Stories are soft, subjective and value-laden- or so the argument goes." The quilted narrative allowed teachers' voices to be illuminated and maintained. The strength of voice apparent in the narrative swatches combines to produce an expressiveness and meaning that would be lessened without the patterning of a number of voices. In this way it is possible to create conversations through the quilt, as women may talk as they are stitching, to open up conversations about self.

**Limitations of the quilting process**

Quilting relies on the recollection of stories and significant moments. For the accomplished art teachers, this process was triggered through lively discussion, questions and classroom objects and experiences. The skill in which memories are gathered ultimately impacts on the success of the quilt as memory and perceptions were inextricably linked. Lyotard (1999) writes of small narratives as being 'invented allusions to the conceivable'. This conception encompasses the way narratives are language and context dependent and contain multiple and different readings of meaning. Donmoyer (1990:119) argues that, "meanings selected will influence the researcher's findings at least as much as the experienced reality described". To make meanings is a struggle between different and often competing 'realities'. Similarly, Phillips (1990) notes that is now recognised that there is no absolutely secure starting point for knowledge; nothing is known with such certainty that all possibility of future revision is removed. All knowledge is tentative. Interpretation gains strength and richness through perspectival subjectivity.
Eisner (1998: 56) contends that researchers "strive to make their conclusions and interpretations as credible as possible within the framework they choose to use." Credibility in postmodern inquiry is linked to the way people might look at an art exhibition. A 'room full of pretty pictures' might please everyone who attends, but fail to move anyone. A 'good' exhibition is often characterised by challenging, disturbing and provoking images that confront people and make them think. People's reaction to such an exhibition is likely to vary, so consensus is not a sign of quality in relation to art.

Critical appreciation is a responsive art, reliant upon the manner in which the critique finds familiar echoes in the hearts and minds of the reader. Reading is not passive transferral. Peterson (1978) argues that to successfully read critical writing, the reader needs to have a critical appreciation of the ways in which aesthetic practice enable the individual to gain understanding of the universe, society and ourselves. Finlay and Knowles (1995:134) propose that, "there is a necessity for the audience of artistic qualitative research to be aesthetically literate in order to appreciate its qualities." While, a quilted narrative should be more accessible and democratically available than such a view would indicate, I concur with the idea that "No matter how compelling the art object, there can be no aesthetic experience without a willing and able beholder" (Finlay and Knowles 1995: 134). Quilted narratives must be crafted to allow a level of openendedness that encourages the reader to create figurative relations with the text. Spaces in the text permit the reader to recognise him or herself in the narrative and provide a point of connectiveness between the writing and the reader, giving an opportunity for reflection which may inspire the will to act or it may open up the criticism to evaluation and analysis.

**Conclusion**

Quilting offers one possibility for organising and presenting narrative data in a qualitative study. It is particularly suited to art-based inquiries because of the aesthetic and critical dimensions of the quilting process. Furthermore, it allows for the democratic presentation of data giving voice to all the participants in the study. For educational research, quilting offers and form of data presentation that is accessible and coherent. It may assist to bridge the perceived gap between the voice of practitioners and the voice of academic research. While the frames and spaces within a quilt allow for the focusing of reader's perceptions, it could also be argued that these allow for too greater variance in readings. Quilting is also a process that is extremely dependent upon the skill and perception of the researcher. It is important that the blocks are constructed of authentic data presented in patterns that are coherent and resonate with the voices of the participant. The process of narrative quilting can be likened to the production of a friendship quilt, where the people all contribute to the quilt and the quilt carries in its patterns the ideas, creativity and souls of the people who contribute to it. In this way, the quilt that is created becomes substantially greater than the sum of the individual blocks or the skill of a quilter. Pellman (1984: 6) comments in relation to fabric quilting, "An encounter with a quilt is incomplete if it does not include some understanding of the people who made it." Researchers should give primacy to this idea in the construction of quilted narratives to present the findings of educational research.
References
The importance of positioning in establishing frames for research.


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2. Melinda, critical friends meeting two
3. Ann, critical friends meeting one
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