The Digital Sabbath and the Digital Distraction: Arts-Based Research Methods for New Audiences

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Abstract

Despite the known affordances of Arts-Based Research Practice within the international education environment, its use remains relatively uncommon in Western Australia. The reasons for this are likely the contested nature of quality criteria by which Arts-Based Practice is evaluated as well as the challenges as well associated with the dissemination of research findings. Mixed-methods research is increasingly recognised as an appropriate and practical approach for education phenomena, and within this domain, inquiry that combines traditional qualitative and arts-based strategies offers the education researcher advantages that are not readily available through other approaches. As professional artists and researchers we share our experiences in employing our visual arts specialism within a qualitative approach. Our focus for inquiry was a "Digital Sabbath" intervention (a practice of regularly unplugging from all technology/devices with the aim of increasing social connectedness and mitigating stress) with seven early career visual arts teachers whose voices and experience of the digital disruption might otherwise have remained silenced. The importance of the study was both that we trialed a well-being intervention, but also that we innovated our methodological research repertoire by combining traditional and contemporary elements of the Qualitative paradigm.

Keywords

early career teachers, arts teacher/s stress, arts-based education research, arts-based research methods, mixed-methods inquiry

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Despite the known affordances of Arts-Based Research Practice within the international education environment, its use remains relatively uncommon in Western Australia. The reasons for this are likely the contested nature of quality criteria by which Arts-Based Practice is evaluated as well as the challenges associated with the dissemination of research findings. Mixed-methods research is increasingly recognised as an appropriate and practical approach for education phenomena, and within this domain, inquiry that combines traditional qualitative and arts-based strategies offers the education researcher advantages that are not readily available through other approaches. As professional artists and researchers we share our experiences in employing our visual arts specialism within a qualitative approach. Our focus for inquiry was a "Digital Sabbath" intervention (a practice of regularly unplugging from all technology/devices with the aim of increasing social connectedness and mitigating stress) with seven early career visual arts teachers whose voices and experience of the digital disruption might otherwise have remained silenced. The importance of the study was both that we trialed a well-being intervention, but also that we innovated our methodological research repertoire by combining traditional and contemporary elements of the Qualitative paradigm.

Keywords: early career teachers, arts teacher/s stress, arts-based education research, arts-based research methods, mixed-methods inquiry

Introduction

The Digital Disruption (DD) whilst a relatively recent phenomenon has reshaped the way teachers both in Australia and further afield undertake their work. Reimer et al. (2015, p. 4) suggest the "Digital Disruption refers to advancements in digital technologies that occur at a pace and magnitude that disrupt established ways of creating value within or across markets, social interactions and, more generally, our understanding and thinking." For teachers everywhere this transformation has meant that they are no longer merely the "keeper of content" and subject discipline/ pedagogical content knowledge; what was previously static is now dynamic, co-constructed with students and reflexive to community and culture (Morris et al., 2019). Within this changed education environment, the contemporary teacher acts as the facilitator of the learning process in a collaborative partnership with students; students who at times may appear to have superior technology skills albeit with questionable levels of digital literacy – thus requiring more flexibility of teachers (Murray, 2011). New identity constructs position students and teachers at various times as co-researchers, peer-tutors, online learning community participants, creators, and publishers of content (Odone, 2016). Despite the state of flux in relation to roles, the "constant" in good teaching and learning continues to be the importance of relationships (between teachers and students; and students and their peers),

however, even these have been reframed by the impacts of technology immersion, online engagement, and mobile devices (Dobinson & Bogachenko, 2018).

The transformative nature of the DD was clearly evidenced during the recent COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021 when face-to-face (F-2-F) teaching and classrooms were suspended almost overnight and rapidly replaced with a suite of digital learning tools and online applications. These included the likes of Zoom, Teams and Collaborates to support meetings, student-teacher engagement, and a sense of community for students who were now learning at home. Cross and Henschel (2020), while considering how technology helped during the pandemic, observed that online tools can be useful during periods of isolation and that shared (online) activities can support/sustain relationships. Despite the best efforts of schools and governments, however, the rapid transition to online learning was often overwhelming, confusing, and highly stressful for many students, parents, and their teachers (Lee, 2020). Covid impacts aside, the adverse impacts of "too much time online" for teachers include increasing social isolation, online fatigue and stress as working hours relentlessly intrude into personal/family life exposing and exacerbating established fault lines between personal and professional responsibilities (ReachOut, 2020). Unmitigated stress is strongly linked to teacher burnout and attrition (Beltman & Poulton, 2019) and the "post pandemic – new normal" presents as a high-risk context for vulnerable teachers. This is especially the case for those in the early career phase where attrition rates are reported to hover at around 30-40% in the first 5 years (Buchanan et al., 2013; Hong, 2010).

As teacher educators and academics with an interest in teacher longevity, an enduring focus for our work is stress-mediation and attrition-mitigation strategies. Here we report the outcomes of a wellbeing intervention we ran with seven early career visual arts teachers in Western Australia in 2019. In framing the intervention, we used a multi method approach in which traditional qualitative interviews/surveys were combined with more contemporary qualitative arts-based practices. Our participants' status as highly visually literate arts educators/artists allowed them to act as co-creators of the interview visualisations (research data in the form of small paintings, drawings, ceramics, sculptures) and consequently their voices resonated strongly across a longitudinal dialogue. The study was significant both because it targeted stress but also because the design allowed us to blend traditional and contemporary qualitative methods. We hope our endeavor makes a valuable contribution to advocacy for the use of arts-based and blended methods of this type in future (arts) education research in Australia and further afield.

Background

Teachers are able to access a wide range of online teaching tools, however many either do not know how to use them or are unsure which will be most appropriate or effective for their needs (The Graide Network, 2020). Ranging from Zoom and Google Classroom to Canvas and Microsoft Teams and beyond, the relentless infiltration of these and other mobile technologies into daily life, despite their obvious efficiencies and affordances, has also resulted in a deterioration in personal wellbeing for teachers (and other professionals) with reduced quality of work and home life balance, an increasing sense of isolation and "depersonalization" of relationships, increased workloads, and poor time management (The Graide Network, 2020). Rosen (2012) observed the negative impacts of online exposure are often the result of "time deepening" which is a phenomenon associated with the increasing online engagement in which the boundaries between personal and professional life dissolve with adverse effects for online users. She suggests that we are beginning to experience time differently because we are expected to work longer hours and be contactable after working hours, leading to an intrusion of work into our home-lives. Selwyn et al. (2017) echoed these observations noting that as

workloads intensified many teachers (especially those in the early years) felt pressure to be more available to students, parents and employers. Mobile devices facilitate this exposure and heighten expectations that teachers be contactable at all times and demonstrably accountable for their work. Others too, have cautioned that time deepening, work intensification and rapid transition to new and emerging technologies has amplified teacher stress (Burbules, 2016; Ugur & Koc, 2015).

Teacher Stress

Teachers in the early career phase (i.e., within the first five years) are particularly vulnerable to attrition both in Australia and further afield (Paris et al., 2015). Insecure work, work overload, professional isolation, rapidly evolving school policies/procedures and an increasingly performance-driven profession exacerbated by challenging student behaviours have been identified as contributors to stress and attrition (Watt et al., 2011). Stress is exerted by both workplace factors and constant exposure to others because of online immersion with email, social media (Ugur & Koc, 2015) and a belief that teachers need to be available to others 24/7.

Negative stress associated with the digital disruption and time deepening affects teachers in different ways however arts teachers in the early career teacher (ECT) phase may be especially vulnerable (Morris et al., 2019). This is because, in addition to other stressors, many visual arts teachers are already carrying heavy extracurricular responsibilities (art clubs and camps, exhibitions and rotating displays, external competitions for their students' work and a myriad of art related "favors" requested by colleagues such as murals, drama sets). Because art specialists are also often artists, they may additionally invest many hundreds of hours of "personal time" into online activity related to creative practice. This encompasses sourcing and reviewing art gallery and museum collections for ideas for projects; materials and fabrications websites for solutions to technical issues; as well as an array of sites such Instagram and Pinterest to keep abreast of creative trends and visual culture shifts. Moreover, as participants in their broader social community they routinely engage with email and social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Tumblr, Flickr, Skype, Twitter, and Google) in "scanning/scrolling" activities which are known to waste time and induce online fatigue (Sriwilai & Charoensukmongkol, 2015). When taken together these intersecting domains of online exposure can exacerbate the already high levels of stress early career visual arts teachers' experience.

The ability to self-regulate and turn off technology at the end of the working day to rest, recuperate and stave off online fatigue is challenging for ECTs because many never have known a time where the intrusion of the internet into daily life was not overtly present. Combined with the sense that the online environment functions as a quasi-relationship domain, Sriwilai and Charoensukmongkol (2015) note that unregulated or unhealthy online user habits engender stress, social isolation, and a decline in mental health. The normalization of these distractions has the capacity to induce a form of digital immersion anxiety. The antidote according to Jorge (2019) is likely to include regular offline periods configured as a "digital detox" (a few hours now and again) or Digital Sabbath practice (habitual disconnection for a specified period each week and over an extended time) leading to a reorientation of online behaviour patterns. A Digital Sabbath practice formalizes "time off-line" and there is good evidence that the cumulative effects of online abstinence can exert positive impacts on stress mitigation across a range of professional settings. Franks et al. (2018, p. 10) found that the benefits of a Facebook sabbatical "are immense and potentially even long term, if used as a self-reflection and behavior change tool to reassess the user relationship and habits with FB."

There is cause for concern about the long-term harm of internet addiction as well as smartphone addiction, since overuse or abuse of behavioral technologies may have a worse effect than opioid addiction (Anderson & Raine, 2018). For example, internet or smartphone addiction can lead to reduced social connections and emotional regulation, as well as increased attention deficit disorders and distractibility or decreased self-initiative (proactive versus reactive behavior) which may compromise health and well-being. Peper and Harvey (2018) caution: "Being plugged in and connected limits the time for reflection and regeneration. Un-programmed time … offers the pause that refreshes and allows time for neural regeneration" (p. 6).

Arts-Based Research

While qualitative and quantitative methods have traditionally been employed when investigating stress and attrition phenomena for teachers, the limitations of linguistic forms in conveying the intensely personal psychological experiences that the digital disruption and related stress exert are worthy of note - sometimes words are simply not enough, and a picture really is worth a thousand words. Images are different from words and whilst visual literacy (like digital literacy) is still far from adequately addressed in children's education, Barone and Eisner (2006) and Marin-Vidal and Roldan (2013) remind us that we engage with artworks at an existential level:

> Visual images say more than words. … Since images are not merely texts, images have the capacity to enable researchers to achieve a different level of understanding. … Often, researchers use visual representations of ideas to clarify their thoughts about research, which can evoke a-ha moments. (Marin-Vidal & Roldan, 2013, p. 24)

Barone and Eisner (2006) described the emergence of Arts-based research as relatively recent and highly transformative for contemporary research practice. Reflecting on the importance of Arts-based research, they observed "arts-based inquiry managed to disrupt the prevailing monolithic mindset, successfully challenging the taken-for-granted notion that the scientific method provided the only useful avenue for enhancing educational policy and practice" (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p. 4). Leavy (2015, p. 11) agreed that "arts-based research practices had posed serious challenges to research methods conventions, thus unsettling many assumptions about what constitutes valid research and knowledge." She noted that the well documented scientific processes of data collection, classification, thematic coding leading to results synthesis (especially those occurring in written form) were equivalencies for investigative tools used by arts practitioners engaged in social inquiry. Wang et al. (2017) state that both the research context and the form of art being used will impact on Arts-based research, but perhaps more significantly, suggest that it is the interactive nature of the process that is important. The researcher interacts with the participants in a very active "arts-related" way, such that the participants' lived-experiences inform the researcher's understandings and lead to the creation of scholarly art-based works.

Arts-based research practices have long been accepted and valued in international education settings. However, their use in the Australian context is modest because, among other obstacles, the quality criteria by which Arts-based research could be evaluated is a contested domain where there is little agreement; philosophical underpinnings are often perceived as obliging the artist-researcher to employ their arts specialism as the primary investigation form at each stage of the inquiry – from inception to exhibition, and creative outputs are required by the Australia Research Council (2015; which provides research oversight, support and funding

to Australian universities) to be exhibited through the public gallery network. For researchers who, if they are unable to access limited university funding or external grants, find themselves having to personally pay the fees associated with exhibition of non-traditional research outputs, these costs (including gallery fees, printing of invitations/catalogues, opening night expenses, sundry installation/ removal costs) can easily reach $5,000 AUD for a two-week show, which can be prohibitive. Education researchers engaged in traditional inquiry would not typically be expected to personally pay fees of this order and so a negative bias against Arts-based research in education can result. Moreover, universities in WA are often reluctant to have Arts-based research outputs included in "Excellence in Research for Australia" (ERA) reporting for Education (universities are ranked using this process), preferring rather to redirect arts outputs to strengthen claims for Fine Arts or other Humanities. In turn this can truncate opportunities for education researchers seeking to have Arts-based research approved as a valid part of their research practice as their endeavors may not attract research points within their own School (e.g., in the study reported here one of the researchers was afforded ERA reporting opportunity for their involvement, where the other was not).

Mixed-methods research employing arts activities within traditional paradigms (in this case, the intersection of two forms of qualitative practice – artworks and traditional surveys/interviews), are easier to enact because they allow the arts-trained education researcher flexibility and control over when and what arts activities are used, new forms of collaboration (where researchers/participants jointly create arts works), and alternative lenses through which to investigate education phenomena (which can be especially useful in the affective domain where visual rather than linguistic forms may be more impactful); as well as the opportunity (though not obligation) to exhibit creative outputs through the "public" gallery system, enhancing transmission of education research to new audiences; and a participatory process in which the language of the arts is used to amplify experiences, narratives and voices that might otherwise remain silenced (Bhattacharya, 2013). Despite many obvious advantages associated with Arts-based Research for arts education researchers desiring more authentic methodologies, the absence of agreed 'quality criteria' along with familiar bias from many quarters (reminiscent of the rebuttal qualitative inquiry advocates encountered as they initially sought to expand established boundaries of the positivist tradition) are vexatious matters.

Quality Criteria

In the five decades that have elapsed since Barone and Eisner first theorized the role of the arts in understanding human experience in the 1970s, vigorous debates about "quality criteria" in Arts-based Research/Arts-based Education Research have ensued (Cho & Trent, 2014; Hammersley, 2007; Leavy, 2015; Marin-Viadel & Roldan, 2013). Green (2015) observed: "Validity is a key concept in qualitative educational research … has the idea of validity itself become challenged with newer trends in arts education research? If so, how do we then assure that (arts-based) qualitative research is valid?" (p. 67). Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2014) argued in favor of the need for quality criteria but considered positivist concepts of reliability and validity irrelevant for dynamic reflexive Arts-based Research inquiry processes because images are "constructed" and "interpretive" rather than purely descriptive or literal. Engaging with ideas about the role of the image as "factive, formative or generative" (Siegusmund & Freedman, 2013) they assert "plausibility" measures combined with explanatory or interpretive statements by the artist-researcher to support viewer engagement are essential in legitimizing Arts-based Research. Bhattacharya (2013) went further, reflecting on quality criteria and the ways in which vulnerable or marginalized populations could have their voices amplified through the intersection of arts based and other research forms noting:

If qualitative researchers want to inform their work with arts-based approaches, fertile spaces of discussion need to be opened up for methodologies, data analysis, and representations of the intersections of these two disciplines. Furthermore, qualitative researchers need to be trained in arts-based research in order to use different genres of art in effective ways. (Bhattacharya, 2013, p. 615)

Chilton and Leavy (2014), similarly seeing little relevance in positivist criteria for Arts-based Research suggested six quality criteria for Arts-based Research outputs including "fit" (suitability of art practice form for the inquiry context); "aesthetic power" (visual impact and quality of arts practice); "usefulness" (the educative power and potential of knowledge generation); "participatory/transformative potential" (the capacity to amplify silenced voices); "authenticity" (a transparent and reflexive praxis by the researcher); and "canonical generativity" (the transferability of the research output for audiences beyond the research sample). Consequently, new quality criteria are proposed, debated, agreed, and replaced in an iterative cycle of disagreement. Despite the known challenges of Arts-based Research inquiry (e.g., contested quality criteria, costs, etc.), Lafrenière and Cox (2013) and Finley (2008) suggest that a strength of most approaches involving arts activities/praxis (meaning-making through creative practice) is the emphasis on translating knowledge for a broader audience through exhibition. We concur with these observations and so we adopted Chilton and Leavy's (2014) six quality criteria in the research reported here and elected to exhibit the arts output through the public gallery system.

Context

Before moving to describe the methods employed in this study, we next provide an overview of our context as academics based in the School of Education at two universities in Western Australia and elaborate our rationale for using a qualitative mixed methods approach. As senior lecturers and arts education researchers we have been each been involved in pre-service arts teacher education (K-12) in the university sector for more than 10 years. Each of us has personal experience working as visual arts educators in schools and firsthand knowledge of the stressors early career teachers faces. We are also professional practicing artists with an interest in the capacity of images to convey psychological and affective experiences that words alone may not. This interest aligns with the focus of this study because early career teacher stress is generally experienced as a psychological construct before it becomes manifest as attrition. Where previously we have generally employed traditional qualitative or quantitative approaches to investigate early career teacher retention, over time we have come to acknowledge that stress and attrition are often best understood through the medium of personal stories/narrative vignettes because the reason a teacher stays or leaves the profession often depends as much on their emotional and psychological resilience as their workplace circumstances. We hypothesized that a wellbeing intervention that targets the individual teacher's experiences, insight, and agency (i.e., awareness of the extent and nature of their digital entanglement and capacity to opt out to refresh their psychological and emotional stores) may provide a tangible pathway for stress remediation where the workplace or institutional environment may not.

Our training as artists, pre-service teacher educators and researchers who have previously used Arts-based Research methods gave us confidence that we could adopt a similar approach in the current investigation of the Digital Sabbath practice in education. Our agenda was to trial and appraise an intervention that might support teacher longevity and to describe the results of our study in a form which has currency and relevance for audiences. We found

the idea of collaborating with visual arts teachers in the study particularly attractive because of their high levels of visual literacy and well-developed visual communication skills, which allowed a confirmatory process to be applied to the data-reduction/synthesis. We hypothesized this specialist skillset would allow them to not only have input into the visualization of their individual experiences, but also to provide feedback about the relevance of the whole body of work we produced using Chilton and Leavy's (2014) quality criteria. Specifically, we posited that as research collaborators they could:

- Suggest iconography or compositional devices to represent their experiences and confirm or question the efficacy of the works we created as meaningful representations (fit)
- Use their understanding of visual communication devices such as elements and principles of art and design and codes-conventions of visual media to comment on whether the work was visually engaging (aesthetic power)
- Provide their impressions of the educative power of the visualisations as prompts for reflection for other (early career) teachers who may be feeling stressed and who have high levels of digital entanglement (usefulness)
- Share with us the extent to which the process of co-creating images for the research exhibition provided them a voice to authentically share their feelings and experiences of the Digital Distraction and the Digital Sabbath (participatory/transformative potential)
- Interrogate and provide feedback to us about the transparency of the process by which we synthesized their experiences and those of their group (authenticity)
- Reflect and comment on the power of the non-traditional research output to raise important universal questions about technology use for the public who would view the work once installed in a large public gallery (canonical generativity)

Our collaboration with participants as co-constructors of the non-traditional, arts-based research output evidenced the benefits sited by Ivankova and Wingo (2018) who observed that there are advantages associated with mixed method approaches of this type, namely enhanced triangulation of data sources, broader member checking strategies, greater authenticity, and accuracy of results as well as enhanced flexibility at various points in the inquiry process. In this study the researchers each had an established profile as a professional artist with recognizable stylistic and conceptual qualities in their practice; however, they relinquished their usual visual language/stylistic preferences opting rather to work in ways that accorded with Chilton and Leavy's (2014) quality criteria of best "method-fit."

Method

In early 2018, we obtained approval from our respective University Human Research Ethics Committees for a cross-institutional study that employed a Digital Sabbath intervention with early career visual arts teachers. We, as researchers, participated in the Digital Sabbath practice alongside the teachers to have an embodied experience of the practice and to develop an empathy with the experience. Our ethics approval encompassed the use of arts-based research practices (creative works) in concert with traditional qualitative practices (Interviews and demographic surveys), and our participants were aware that the use of visual representation could allow them to be recognized in some circumstances. However, we generally opted to

employ visual metaphors rather than realist portraiture to describe participant experience as a mitigation strategy.

Participants

Seven early career teachers were recruited via social media and the WA University graduate database for this study. Two groups were configured with Group One comprising four early career teachers and a participant artist-researcher; and Group Two comprising three early career teachers and a participant artist-researcher. For Group One (the group that is the focus of this paper), each early career teacher was employed full-time at their school, and all were teaching within visual arts in addition to other subjects; each reported high levels of professional and personal technology immersion; and all bar one was experiencing high levels of stress they associated with their technology use. The remaining participant identified that she was very interested in exploring the potential of regular time offline to see "what might happen" in the reclaimed hours. Her agenda for participation was therefore positioned within a personal inquiry framework rather than one aligned to stress-mitigation. All early career teacher participants in Group One were female and the majority were aged in their 20's.

The Digital Sabbath Intervention

The Digital Sabbath intervention encompassed spending 24 consecutive hours (typically sundown to sunset) offline each week over a three-month period. The Digital Sabbath day (Monday-Sunday) differed between participants according to their commitments and many changed their day as they went along. Participants were asked to nominate a safety person to check on their wellbeing at the end of each Digital Sabbath episode, in addition to advising family and friends they would be offline and out of contact on the Digital Sabbath day. Each maintained a paper-based record (a sketch book, diary, journal, or other hard copy record) noting key thoughts, experiences, and events. During the offline day they avoided interactive devices (e.g., laptops, computers, iPad, phones) as well as traditional screen-based technology (e.g., televisions) and many pre-arranged face-to-face social events with family and friends. Participants were advised that they could use technology in case of emergency or minimize the practice at any time should they so desire. They were aware they could withdraw completely from the study at any time.

Data Collection/Reduction

Interviews were conducted with each participant on a fortnightly basis and recorded using iPad technology before being transcribed and thematically coded. During the interview the researcher and participant jointly planned the visual iconography to convey the Digital Sabbath experiences being described. At times visual metaphors were employed as key signifiers of participant "affective" experience. For example, in one work a cat "poised to pounce" is employed as a motif for "imminent change" that engendered amplified stress for participant B; and non-realist colors were used as signifiers of heightened emotional and psychological experience (e.g., frustration and inconvenience caused by being offline) for participant C. Later in the studio, each artist-researcher refined the visual plans by referencing key words and phrases from the interviews. The final compositions were then shared with the interviewee for feedback and further refinement before being executed as oil on canvas paintings. As an illustration of the collaborative visualisation process, in the exemplar below (Figure 1), the participant spoke about feeling "stressed at work" and "drowning" in unrelenting online demands made by colleagues, students and parents. She observed that it felt

as if she was "watching," rather than "participating" in life. Getting offline was extremely difficult and reclaiming time to enact her Digital Sabbath practice was extremely challenging. Figure 1 shows the progression of ideas intended to convey a sense of being separated from life and cast into the role of a voyeur.

Figure 1
I*nterview Visualisation Process*

At the end of the three-month data collection period, we had generated a large body of work for each of the two groups (see Figure 7) and this raw visual data was the basis for generating results "synthesis paintings" which carried shared themes for each of the two groups. The "results" paintings are discussed a little later, but we first present a case exemplar framed around the methodological approach used with Participant B to illustrate the visual coding employed in the data reduction.

Case Exemplar

Ewing (2010, p. 15) reviewing the state of Arts and Education in Australia observed, "case study methodology is often the most appropriate (arts education) research approach, as it enables individual responses to be best reported." Participant B has been selected for this paper as a case exemplar to illustrate the kinds of experiences both she and our other participants described in respect of the Digital Distraction and their Digital Sabbath practice. Her story is a useful illustration of the challenges early career teachers everywhere face (see Watt et al., 2011) as they juggle the demands of work and the need to maintain personal wellbeing in a hyper-connected world. Furthermore, the "case" presented here gives an illustration of how arts-based methodology was applied in this study.

Participant B

Participant B (B) had high online exposure in daily life and used social media for creative practice, art teaching and to maintain social relationships. B viewed time online as essential in daily life but lamented the many hours she felt she wasted scrolling aimlessly across the online groups and sites to which she belonged. B wondered whether this "lost time" could be used more productively and hoped that by regularly taking time offline she might reactivate her own creative practice. Her heavy teaching workload included classes in Years 7-10 and Year 11 and 12 senior school visual arts in both the university entrance and general pathways, as well as other subjects in Years 7-10 (e.g., media studies) where she was required to employ technology software. These online teaching tools were in addition to the arts related technology (e.g., image manipulation software, etc.) used daily.

B considered herself to be "tech-savvy" but nonetheless felt worn out and on the verge of burnout, elaborating that whilst she loved her students there was often little joy in her teaching experience simply because there were not enough hours in the day to get everything done. Marking, feedback provision and forward planning for delivery consumed much of her evenings and weekends and like many art teachers, she carried heavy extra-curricular responsibilities (art club, camps, drama sets etc.). When not actively involved in programming and marking, B described using social media as a kind of escapism or relaxation noting many hours in the evening and weekends were used in aimless online scrolling. She explained that she enjoyed being a member of several art groups and valued the connection to other "creatives" this afforded whilst simultaneously lamenting the demise of her own creative practice. She explained that prior to entering her Master of Teaching studies she had operated a successful textiles design business which had provided an income over more than a decade. 'B' hoped that by participating in regular time offline she might be able to tidy her studio, which had fallen into disarray, and reactivate her print and textiles work.

At various times over the three-month DS intervention, B wavered between feeling empowered by the behavioural change she was enacting before alternatively feeling vulnerable and adversely impacted by technology disconnection. She described experiencing a kind of withdrawal anxiety followed by "inertia" as family/friends (and even she herself) regularly inserted other time-demands into the "virtual space" created by her day offline which she had hoped would be used to clear clutter in her studio and reinvigorate her abandoned creative practice. B observed that it had been very difficult to achieve even one full day offline and often used the term "addiction" to describe her relationship with technology. The visualisations of B's interview data along with verbatim quotes follow, each produced by Artist-Researcher #1 (Paris) as 40cm x 40cm oil on canvas paintings.

Figure 2
Visualisation #1: Making Space (2020)

"I'm hoping that by participating in a Digital Sabbath and clearing physical clutter around my home I might actually be able to clear some headspace and get back to being creative as well." The first work in B's series "Making Space" explores her desire to break long established patterns of working continuously, especially during weekends. She said she planned to tidy her studio during her time offline and hoped that by making "physical" space, she could also clear "psychological" clutter to create an environment more conducive to creative practice. This simple image is intended to convey a sense of being buried or trapped; of kicking and pushing; and breaking out to clear space.

Figure 3
Visualisation #2: Move One Thing – Things Move (2020)

"I'm actually thinking of moving. Sorting out my study, clearing clutter from my studio, has given me a push." The second work in this series reflects a "domino" experience; the act of tidying her studio prompted this participant to think about moving house. Here, the cat acts as a metaphor for the phenomenon of "change" itself – the smallest shift engenders a response; change affords further change. Possessions piled high teeter as "change" waits, poised to respond if anything moves – and move it does! The process of packing up her studio triggered a bigger move – the move to a new home.

Figure 4
Visualisation #3: Chilling with Cats and Driving in Cars (2020)

"I'm spending quite a bit of time driving. I need to be contactable… I need to use my phone … just for texts." The 3rd interview visualisation in this set represents the tension between the demands that others made on Participant B during her DS and her aspiration to stay at home offline. Despite her desire to use her day offline to be more creative, she felt she needed to communicate with family via text. This image overlays two "experiential universes" as desire (to "chill out" at home) and commitment (endlessly driving family around) intersected. A metaphorical black hole begins to open, and the reclaimed DS time is sucked into the void.

Figure 5
Interview Visualisation #4: Domicile (2020)

"I've put the move on hold for a while… it's a time issue… but I will move… it's really time." The fourth work in this series explores the concept of "home" as a physical embodiment of self and one's place in the world. Notions of leaving home engender internal conflict for B. Here red and green are imbued with oppositional meaning – a green self waits "ready to go" while another red self "holds ground"; movement and stillness compete in a psychological tug of war. Home is identity and relinquishing ones' sense of self can be difficult even when change will be good.

Figure 6
Interview Visualisation #4: Meditations on the Meaning of Things When Leaving One's Home (2020)

"I've been in this house for years, so much stuff, the place is dilapidated. I just need time to go through it all." The final interview visualisation for B explores objects as embodiments of identity and emotional connections. B's collections were expressions of herself, but their clutter limited her creative output. She felt weighed down and unable to use her studio. The Digital Sabbath practice necessitated willpower to break her online addiction and gave her "agency" – she could go offline and clear clutter without any negative consequence.

Figure 7
Interview Visualisations for Group A
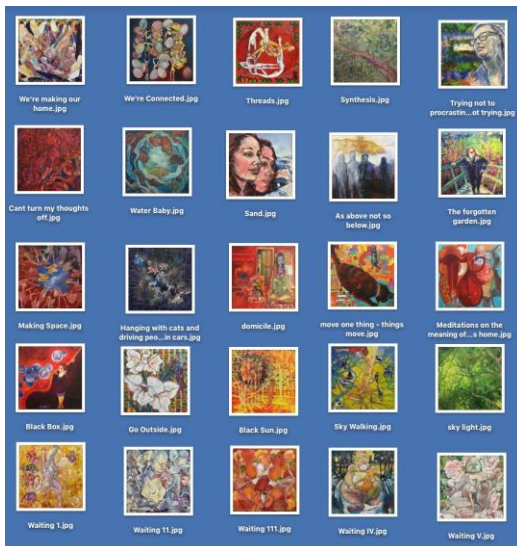
Participant B's interview visualisations (like those of the rest of her group) provided the raw data for the results. The process of interviewing each teacher every two weeks and jointly co-constructing (typically 3-6) representations of their experience culminated in the production of almost 50 visual vignettes across the two groups (small paintings, sculptures, ceramics) which were then coded for visual themes. Figure 7 (above) shows the interview visualisations created for Group One with each participant A-E having their five works pictured in a row, with Participant B appearing as the middle row.

Results: Synthesis Paintings and Dissemination of Research

The discussion of results is in two parts. First, the results of the study take the form of synthesis paintings, constructed from the composite of the participants' visualizations in Figure 7. Second, the act of disseminating Arts-based Research methods through exhibition is discussed to address the methodological contribution of the study.

The synthesis paintings were larger than the other works produced for the study. These larger paintings, each measuring 1m x 1m, combined elements of the earlier visualisations to convey dominant ideas and themes from each group. Although there were narrative (story)

dimensions to the synthesis works they lack the temporal (time passing) qualities typically evident in individual participants' series of works and are in fact intended to be perceived or "read" as being in the present moment or mindfulness statements to fend off distraction - a theme shared across the group. Chilton and Levy's quality criteria was used to guide the refinement of the synthesis paintings. Figure 8 presents the results for Group One, and these are discussed below.

Figure 8
The Digital Sabbath and the Digital Distraction (Paris, 2020)

Note. Diptych. Oils on linen.

Initially the participants reported mixed experiences associated with their Digital Sabbath. Many felt stressed and worried that some unknown catastrophe may ensue during the period they were offline from family and friends and those with children or elderly parents. They all had a heightened desire to reconnect with the online environment immediately at the end of the Digital Sabbath day to check social media and email contacts fearing they may have missed important news. Over time, however, this need to immediately reconnect with the online world waned and most participants described taking a more relaxed approach to reconnecting.

As the study progressed many participants relished getting outside into the fresh air and found leaving their phone at home both joyful (the deliberate act engendered a sense of freedom) and frustrating (the result of interrogation by others who repeatedly quizzed them about why they were offline). Some found their family and friends unsupportive of the "experiment" in which they were engaged, whereas others had friends who were inspired to begin their own Digital Sabbath journey. For those who shared a household there were issues around the use of communal spaces where televisions and computers were located, and some difficult conversations ensued. Many participants struggled to complete a full 24 hours offline in any week and observed it was difficult to participate in contemporary life whilst offline. One participant realized she had been using her online activities as a distraction from unresolved grief associated with tragedy in her past and intense feelings and sadness broke through during her time offline. She shared that whilst this had been uncomfortable, she felt the time offline had exerted a positive therapeutic impact allowing her to finally deal with her past.

Overall, our participants connected more "in person" with friends and family, went out into the fresh air and started walking, used their time off-line to tidy studio spaces and to resume

discontinued creative practice, and experienced increasing success in breaking their online addiction - reclaiming time for other more important things. All Group One participants reported positive experiences associated with their time offline and the majority envisaged continuing some aspect of the Digital Sabbath after the completion of the research. None were able to definitively say whether the Digital Sabbath practice impacted their management of stress at work, but some considered it might have (they felt less stressed) and all considered the intervention had heightened (or created) awareness of the extent of their online exposure, which they described as an addiction. Many felt this new awareness gave them confidence that they could now use the Digital Sabbath strategies to opt out of the online environment for a few hours at a time without any catastrophe ensuing. Accordingly, awareness of the extent of online exposure, agency in terms of capacity to disconnect, and insight about the importance and benefits of doing so, emerged as key wellbeing findings from the inquiry.

Exhibition Dissemination and Feedback

Keeping in mind Archibald and Gerber's (2018) and Barone and Eisner's (2006) observations that knowledge translation via creative works affords meaningful opportunities for dialogue between the researcher/artist and audience (i.e., the participants and public) we elected to place the Digital Sabbath Non-traditional Research Output in a public gallery in Fremantle Western Australia over 19 days in early 2020. Large A1 didactic panels (explanatory posters – see Figure 9) displayed beside the paintings on gallery walls provided verbatim quotes from the interviews and a synopsis of each participant's circumstances and personal journey as recommended by Bhattacharya (2013).

Figure 9
Didactic Panels and Exhibition Layout
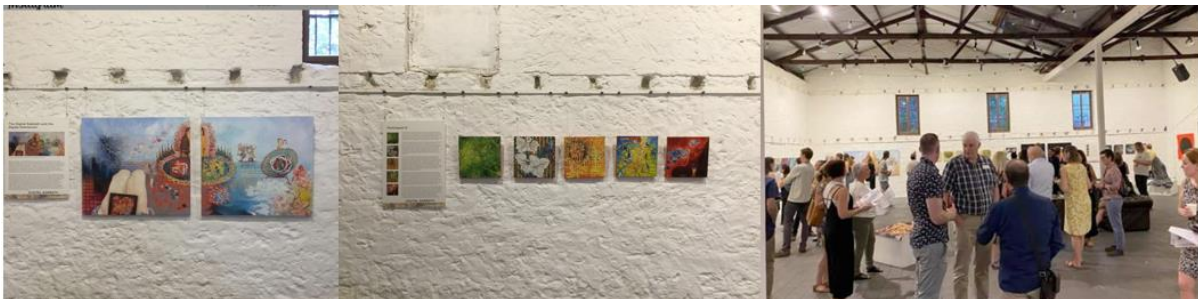
The A1 sized wall posters were intended to assist the viewer in understanding the works through the provision of a context and assistance in decoding/interpreting the work.

Based on ticket sales for the opening night event, several hundred people attended and (whilst it was difficult to accurately track the "walk-in" traffic as we were often chatting with other viewers) we estimate that 80-100 people viewed the show on each of the days it was open to the public. When time allowed during the 19-day exhibition of results, we interviewed/iPad recorded 15 of the walk-in guests and, after they had viewed the exhibition, asked for their feedback about the notion of a Digital Sabbath in contemporary life as well as their impressions of the exhibition as a vehicle for sharing knowledge. Some of these comments in response to these prompts are given below to show the impact of the study on the broader community:
Viewer A: Female mid 50s

> Yes, I think this is great … I'm on holidays and although I'm supposed to be
> taking a break, I still have my laptop under my arm and my phone is in my bag.

I can't seem to get away from it. It's really intrusive, but unfortunately, I use it for everything – in fact, I used it to find you …Yes, definitely, this is great. The process that these people have been through is fascinating - it's right. The world has changed, and you just can't get away from it … but maybe we should! It's interesting.

Viewer B: Male mid 40s

Yes, a good idea. I don't go online much but my wife does. She and the kids are missing out on the real stuff. I was listening to a football commentator recently and he said huge numbers of people don't even go to the football anymore – they just watch it on their phone. They're missing out on life. … Yes, I think doing it this way in pictures lets people read meaning into their own lives.

Viewer C: Male mid 20s

No, I'm not so sure. Going offline is an interesting idea but it's not something I'd do. No, it's not stressful for me being online. I like it that way. … Yes, the pictures are great, but no, not for me. I'm a bit young. I'm connected 'cause I want to be.

Viewer D: Female mid 20s

I think it's a cool concept, and the way you've been able to capture it … I have some experience of this … I try to minimize my time online … but I do get notifications all the time. I want to limit the filtering of life … it's very reduced to one view of the news and the world. … Yes, I think using pictures is a good way to show what's happening and share it with the public.

Viewer E: Female mid 30s

I think this is impressive … there's just so much technology these days. It's hard – we need it - you can't even go/drive somewhere without tech. No unfortunately I don't really do this, in fact when I lost my phone the other day, I was so stressed, not knowing how to get to where I was going, without my phone and maps. Just awful. … Yes, it's a visual representation, the story isn't on a page; you go more into your imagination, and it brings you to have your own response to it. It turns the brain a different way, you look at the picture, it's a different way of understanding.

We observed that younger viewers of the exhibition, those in their 20's and 30's (who had never known a time before the internet reached ubiquitous status) typically felt a Digital Sabbath practice had little to offer them in daily life because they felt that would significantly truncate their social interactions; whereas those in older age groups (who could remember a time before the digital revolution) saw regular time offline as being strongly associated with enhanced well-being potential. It is noteworthy that visitors who provided feedback felt the use of arts-based methods to share information and knowledge was interesting and valuable. Images were seen as an alternative and powerful language system that could say more than words alone.

Discussion

This paper had two objectives: namely to describe the methodological innovation we trialed in the form of a qualitative mixed methods (arts and traditional) inquiry framed around a Digital Sabbath intervention; and, to share our findings in respect of the affordances and challenges of the Digital Sabbath practice. Because there are no identifiable publications in which early career arts teachers enact a Digital Sabbath practice as a wellbeing intervention, we believe our research makes a valuable contribution to a gap in the early career teacher experience literature. The teachers who participated in this study all reported stress due to online immersion, consistent with Ugur and Koc (2015) and Sriwilai and Charoensukmongkol (2015); and reported an ability to reconnect and regenerate when offline (Peper & Harvey, 2018). The infiltration of the online environment into every sphere of contemporary life raises important universal questions about exposure to the Digital Distraction, making a study of this type relevant to audiences beyond our usual "education" readership (see Radtke et al., 2021; Schmuck, 2020). Importantly the translation of experiences into visual forms makes the results of this study more accessible to the viewing public – a key objective of our methodology. Based on the experiences of our participants it seems plausible to suggest that a Digital Sabbath practice may offer anyone who is open to the idea of disconnecting for short periods, the opportunity to refresh, reconnect and reinvigorate their emotional stores.

Clearly, there are limitations associated with the early career teacher wellbeing findings revealed here: our study involved only nine individuals involved in arts education practice in Western Australia. Consequently, it is difficult to generalize based on our findings alone. However, the alignment of our findings to recent research in respect of Digital Sabbath practice in other populations (see Radtke et al., 2021; Schmuck, 2020) suggests that the practice has merit. Moreover, the successful methodological approach we collaboratively enacted with participants and the positive feedback from the public who viewed the non-traditional research output offers us encouragement to continue using traditional qualitative/arts-based approaches as a medium though which to investigate and share early career teacher experience. The public's engagement with the exhibition is one example of how the interactive nature of arts-based presentation can expand the dissemination of research to a wider audience, providing different "entry points" into engaging with ideas (Morris & Paris, 2021; Wang et al., 2017).

In terms of addressing the "quality" of our approach, we believe we meet Chilton and Leavy's (2014) six quality criteria. The participants' and audience's response to the exhibition demonstrates arts-based methods were a "fit" for the inquiry, and there was "aesthetic power" in the 19-day exhibition output. While not a core component of this study, there appeared to be "usefulness" in terms of the educative power of this approach in terms of clarifying everyone's experience and generating knowledge about the intervention. "Authenticity" was supported by the researcher engaging in active, longitudinal dialogue with the participant throughout the intervention period and as works were produced. Lastly, "canonical generativity" was evidenced through the public's engagement with the exhibition, as they exist beyond the original research sample of early-career teachers.

We consider Arts-based research methods and traditional interviews/surveys as complementary tools that co-exist within the qualitative paradigm. A range benefits for us as researchers emanated from this study including:

- Opportunity to use our visual arts specialism in research endeavour where previously teaching, research and arts practice remained separate and distinct from one another
- Flexibility to decide when and what arts activities would be used and at which stage of the inquiry process

- Opportunity to move flexibly back and forth between data collection and analysis strategies drawing at various times from arts-based and qualitative paradigms, according to "fit" criteria
- Active collaboration with our participants as both subjects of study and arts practitioners tasked with visualising experience
- Flexibility in relation to the framing of the final synthesis works to enhance dissemination of results
- Flexibility in relation to which works would be exhibited (e.g., most of the drawings leading to the interview visualizations were excluded from the exhibition as they were deemed too experimental and potentially confusing for the audience)
- Opportunity to engage with new audiences beyond our usual academic readership to consider the implications of the digital distraction and the affordances of a Digital Sabbath in daily life. We were surprised by the openness of the public to engage with research in visual formats which relate to a discrete population (early career teachers) and encouraged by the interest the visual texts engendered in visitors to the non-traditional research output exhibition

Reflections

A university friend and colleague observed at the start of this journey that an important aspect of this research was the "gravitas" that visual language afforded what might otherwise be considered "small" things in early career teaching experience. His observations about the distinctive ways in which images/artworks vivify human experience and untold stories (in this case vignettes from the early years of teaching) provided important sustenance during the many periods in which we worried about "whether we were getting this right." We remain grateful for his counsel because it is still unusual in Western Australia for education researchers (where quantitative and traditional qualitative research is the mainstay) to crossover into the domain of the creative arts. By contrast, Arts-based research (and indeed Arts-based Education Research) has an accepted and familiar place within the international education research environment. To that extent, this experience has emboldened our desire and confidence to work further within mixed methods (traditional qualitative/creative works) research environments in the future. It is our hope that students in the future will benefit as the teacher-participants in this project model enhanced self-regulation, agency, and positive strategies for wellbeing within in a technology saturated cultural context. Ultimately, however, the importance we ascribe to the Digital Sabbath project is not so much the understanding that regular forays into life off-line are beneficial, but rather that the arts provide an invaluable vehicle through which new knowledge can and should be shared.

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