This is Not an Article: A reflection on creative research dialogues (This is Not a Seminar, or TINAS)

Abstract

This is Not a Seminar (TINAS) is a multidisciplinary forum established in 2012 at Edith Cowan University in Australia to support practice-led and -based Higher Degree by Research students. The Faculty of Education and Arts at ECU include cohorts of postgraduate research students in, for example, performance, design, writing, and visual arts. We established the TINAS program to assist postgraduate research students in connecting their creative practices to methodological, theoretical and conceptual approaches while fostering an atmosphere of rapport across creative disciplines. The pilot program conducted for six months in 2012 comprised dialogues with experienced creative researchers; critical reading sessions on practice-led theory; and workshops in journaling, ethics and copyright. This article is a reflection on the strengths and limitations of TINAS and future projections. More than an additional teaching and learning service, the program has become a vital forum for creative dialogue.

Keywords: practice-led research; higher degree research support; dialogic leadership

Introduction

This article examines a way of facilitating the development of practice-led postgraduate research through a dialogic, multidisciplinary forum at an Australian university. While we established this particular framework to address the needs of researchers in our university faculty and, in particular, two schools within in it, the example we present in this article is broadly applicable and potentially valuable to practice-led research supervision in higher education institutions elsewhere. We analyse the TINAS (This Is Not a Seminar) program in relation to narrative, standpoint and feminist pedagogical theories, as well as insider ethnographic and case study methodologies. This article will detail the early stages of TINAS, specifically limited to the first semester we offered the program. No empirical conclusions about its efficacy, other than our anecdotal commentaries as facilitators, will be presented. However, the TINAS narrative we

sketch offers a pedagogical tool for practice-led supervisors, consultants and advocates to cultivate creative research through an informal, supportive and conversation-based model.

As 'creative knowledge' becomes a core value across numerous disciplines within higher education, the effective teaching and supervising of practice-led postgraduate research is increasingly a subject of debate (Grierson, 2007, 2009; MacDowall, 2012; McNamara, 2012; Peters, 2014; Webb, 2012). While the broad significance of creativity is often clearly articulated within institutions, academic staff in art, performance, writing, design and other creative fields might grapple with the most effective and efficient ways to support postgraduate research students, many of whom are already highly accomplished practitioners. Grierson (2009, p. 340) observes that fostering creative research practices 'might be beneficial for the individual or communal human subject, but in pedagogical terms it can be time consuming, and in institutional terms, costly'. Alongside Grierson's concern over the time and costs of postgraduate creativity is the notion of the creative university itself, involving the broader transformation of the institution through user-centredness, innovation, collaboration, collective intelligence and open development (Peters, 2014, p. 715). The presenting problem is that the institutional value of creativity often contrasts to and, at times, conflicts with the more obdurate realities of understaffing, fixed-term contracts and unmanageable workloads in university faculties. How should we facilitate postgraduate creativity in academic settings in light of these concerns?

In response to the question of supporting practice-led postgraduate research in the broader context of the creative university, we established the TINAS forum in 2012 at Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Australia. The Faculty of Education and Arts at ECU consists of three schools, two of which contain predominantly practice-led and -based postgraduate research students. The School of Communication and Arts and the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) include numerous postgraduate research students engaged in creative projects. Between 2001 and 2007, there was an 80% increase in enrolments in creative arts doctoral programs Australia-

wide (Baker & Buckley, 2009). At a local level, WAAPA has seen an almost seven-fold increase in the number of creative research degree candidates, from 8 in 2008 to 53 in 2013. The number of practice-led researchers enrolled in doctoral programs in the Faculty of Education and Arts has also increased dramatically in recent years. Alongside these developments, the Faculty decided on the use of the term "creative" as opposed to "artistic" to promote inclusive cross-/inter-/transdisciplinary research across the performative and material arts (Edith Cowan University, 2013a). Provocatively this has led to a celebration of sorts, with the adoption of the terms "creative" and "non-creative" to refer to research endeavours and outputs in ECU's Acknowledging Successful Performance in Research Excellence system (Edith Cowan University, 2013b). Furthermore, within the Faculty, several reading and writing groups exist to support postgraduate and research staff in its many forms. The Graduate Research School, Library and individual Schools also offer a diversity of seminars on writing, referencing, qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, data management and interviewing skills. In addition, the Faculty also has a highly skilled writing consultant dedicated to postgraduate research students and, through the support of the Faculty and the Office of Research and Innovation, several writing retreats are hosted per year for researchers. The focus of these groups is on exegetical writing with little specifically tailored to creative practice. Moreover, there is an ongoing debate surrounding the placement of creative research in the academy (Burr, 2010; Sullivan, 2010) and the push for timely completions (Bourke, Holbrook, & Farley, 2004; Jiranek, 2010). In response to this context and to the enormous jump in postgraduate practice-led degrees in the Faculty, it was determined that a support network was needed to specifically address the complexities of creative research.

The perceived gaps were numerous and related to the perception that creative practice is not a valid form of rigorous or thorough academic research (Little, 2011). In our experience, many creative researchers felt that qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research excluded them from locating a suitable methodology for their processes and practices. They felt it necessary to either fit into these approaches or somehow abandon their practices temporarily so that they might pursue traditional

academic research. Yet, without a creative methodological grounding, it is nearly impossible for practitioners to develop a means for articulating their practice as research. It is also impossible to reflect on the "what" and the "why" without developing and extending the "how." While there was a growing awareness and acceptance of practice-led and -based methods, the confidence level of creative researchers at ECU appeared low.

It was in this spirit of collegial cross-disciplinary support that contemporary artist Lyndall Adams, design strategist Chris Kueh, performance maker Renee Newman-Storen and environmental writer John Ryan came together to discuss the possibilities for a forum to explore the relationship between theory and practice across creative disciplines. Each facilitator is a highly skilled researcher in his or her own discipline and, collectively, they have an excellent overview of what students need to become competent, passionate and creative researchers. The weekly creative research forum, "This is Not a Seminar:" Creative Research Dialogues (TINAS), emerged out of this conversation.

This article will draw from philosophical and practical discussions on knowledge making and innovation through creative practices and the dialogues about these practices that emerged during the program. The analyses will allow reflection on the structure and progress of TINAS. This article maps the principles, questions and themes of TINAS, our personal and anecdotal reflections on the strengths and limitations of the first program conducted over six months in 2012 and future projections for the seminar series. While proud of the initial outcomes of TINAS, reflecting on the program has enabled us to see the need to establish an ongoing forum that not only provokes debate, motivates the students and extends their knowledge base, but also acts as an advocacy body for creative researchers.

Methodology

The TINAS methodology, which informs our approach both to the project and to this article, combines standpoint theory, feminist pedagogy and case study-based insider

ethnography, specifically through participant observation. To begin with, our narrative of the TINAS pilot program presented here employs the first-person plural pronoun (or nominative case) "we" throughout in order to indicate our embedded and invested speaking position(s) as facilitators The use of this particular epistemological perspective reflects the value of "standpoint" in educational research as a postmodern feminist pedagogy asserting that individual positions in the world are continually shaped through one's experiences in social contexts. As a principle of "emancipatory research" (Sleeter, 2001), the standpoint (or place) from which one perceives the world affects one's values, approaches and choices. Standpoint theory potentially accounts for some of the differences between individuals (i.e. facilitators, students and attendees alike) who have otherwise had similar experiences as part of a group, including, as our case study demonstrates, an educational group such as TINAS or, more broadly, a Faculty within an Australian university. As a response to objectivist approaches to epistemology, standpoint theory offers a shifting and non-deterministic basis for understanding knowledge-production in educational settings, particularly, for our case study, in a dialogue-based postgraduate practice-led research forum (Au, 2012, p. 58). The emphasis within feminist pedagogy on narratives, especially those of women and underserved groups (Harding, 2004), is the basis for our contextual and events-based focus, involving chronological description and response to the specific TINAS offerings during the early stages of the project. Our extensive analysis of TINAS further reflects a case study method, allowing us to elucidate the particularities of the sessions descriptively through narrative understanding, in-depth experiences and direct observations rather than second-hand or "derived" data (Yin, 2006, p. 112).

As researcher-participants, we encouraged all TINAS attendees, including ourselves, to initiate and affect the dialogue. We observed and reflected on each session with the aim of exploring and improving future possibilities in subsequent years. Hence, we describe the third component of our methodology as "insider ethnography," a reflexive ethnographic mode involving informal observation of the group (and documentation through practices such as note-taking, photography, videography, etc.) in which the researcher is engaged as a contributing and invested member. Ethnography is defined

as "the study of people in everyday settings, with particular attention to culture—that is, how people make meaning of their lives" (Anderson-Levitt, 2006, p. 279). As entwined ethnographic research strategies, observation and listening involve the processes of evaluating, first-hand, experiences of places, activities and events; and attempting to understand how participants (including the researchers) make meaning within and through their group (Mathison, 2005; Anderson-Levitt, 2006). Based on the embedded observation of the researcher, insider ethnography or "ethnography at home" tends to be distinguished from traditional ethnography undertaken at unfamiliar, exotic or distant locations where the subjects being researched are not part of the ethnographer's "home" groups (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 98). As an insider ethnographer, a researcher is a "full participant" in the cohort being studied, giving the ethnographer a deeper experiential appreciation of the ways in which knowledge is constructed (Anderson-Levitt, 2006, p. 286). However, we recognise the ethical and practical challenges surrounding an insider position in educational contexts, requiring that the ethnographer's values and assumptions are reflexively considered throughout the research process (Ouyang 2000). We (as ethnographer-participants) are also practice-led researchers. Therefore we needed to reflect throughout the TINAS program on the strengths and limitations of our common methodology; and on the ethos of the conversations and skill development workshops we initiated and facilitated. We should also note that, at the time of writing, much of our data collection and analysis is reliant on anecdotal feedback and our own accounting of scenarios and situations. This is part of the narrative ethos of TINAS; we all have stories to tell and to share with equanimity and a healthy dose of equivocality.

Principles, Questions and Themes: An Alternative Literature Review

The overriding ethos of TINAS has been to dissolve the silos of disciplinary thought and practice, and to equip creative postgraduate students with a range of research skills related to creative practice within the academy regardless of discipline (Catts & Zurr, 2013; Reichelt-Brushett & Smith, 2012). Invoking the René Magritte painting *The Treachery of Images* (1928–29), including the provocation "This is not a pipe" (taken up later by philosopher Michel Foucault (1983)) that invites questions about the nature

and notion of the representation of reality, TINAS asked its participants to challenge their understandings of research itself. Foucault's analysis of the painting calls into question the equivalency between representations (in words and images) and things (the pipe), and the discourses surrounding such representations. This challenge to the conception and representation of truth and reality were, of course, central concerns for twentieth-century art, particularly conceptual art. However, in this example, Foucault (1983, p. 49) identifies "seven discourses" of the pipe, namely, that "none of these is a pipe, but rather a text that simulates a pipe; a drawing of a pipe that simulates a drawing of a pipe; a pipe (drawn other than as a drawing) that is the simulacrum of a pipe (drawn after a pipe that itself would be other than a drawing)." Through this discourse-based mode of thinking, Foucault reveals the possibilities for what a thing might or might not be in relation to our perception of it, while also inviting us to confront our assumptions about the being-ness of a thing. In the following case study of TINAS, the "thing" in question is a "seminar," a word derived from the Latin *seminarium* for "breeding ground, plant nursery" and from the German *Seminar* for "group of students working with a professor" (Harper, 2014). In naming the forum *This Is Not A Seminar*, we set out to foster an environment of egalitarianism, dialogue, exchange and questioning between facilitators, guest practitioners and participants, rather than a traditional learning structure of "students working with a professor," as in the latter connotation of the term. We sought to avoid any sense of hierarchical power relations between "students" and "teachers," while acknowledging the expertise of all participants— whether new or experienced artists and researchers. As a "breeding ground" (the botanical connotation of "seminar" and indeed our preferred one), TINAS conversations were often unscripted and rhizomatic, leading to unforeseen realisations about the nature of creative research through a synergy of ideas.

The philosophy of TINAS is to encourage students to embrace creative research beyond their principal practice in order to develop and extend their knowledge base both conceptually and methodologically, while in a supportive environment. As a team of facilitators, we value the conversations and non-conventional dialogue platforms as the means to promote and cultivate creative research. We encourage the participants to ask

the questions that bridge the gaps in their knowledge bases. Wilkie, Gaver, Hemment and Giannachi (2010) describe this as "creative assemblage" in which a dynamic and rigorous research approach becomes the basis for sharing disciplinary knowledge. They also refer to this process as "open" dialogue. The program was designed to offer an attractive and dynamic approach to supporting creative researchers in an environment that already had support for traditional research outcomes. Borgdorff (2009) argues that "the performative, world-constituting and world-revealing power of art lies in its ability to disclose to us new vistas, experiences and insights that bear upon our relationship with the world and with ourselves" (p. 14). TINAS was initiated as a platform to disclose how our art and research reflect our diverse approaches to the world, as practitioners and members of academic institutions.

Held on a weekly basis since 2012, TINAS has continued to explore the diverse relationships between practice and research Practice-led research, or creative research, is the predominant methodology used by creative research degree candidates in the Faculty. Practice-led research refers to research developed and captured in and through the researcher's chosen form of creative practice (Gray, 1998, p. 3).

ECU encourages researchers to conduct and contribute to knowledge via three streams: research *for*, *into* and *through* practice (Frayling,1993). Research *for* practice involves generating data that will provide knowledge about the content of, and the context for, the creative project, which may incorporate conventional methods, such as archival research (e.g., reading, observing, collecting) and field research (e.g., participant observation; case studies; interviews, surveys and focus groups; ethnographies). Second, research *into* practice is concerned with generating knowledge about techniques, approaches and thinking to do with how practice is carried out in the discipline/s. This draws on methods of practice (e.g., sketching; note-taking; photography; drafting and editing; simulations; self-reflection; reflexivity, bricolage, concept mapping; story boards; flow charts; etc.) as well as the conventional methods suggested above. Within the category of research *into* practice, Christopher Frayling (1993, p. 5) includes historical, aesthetic, perceptual and theoretical research that illuminates ethical, iconographic, material and other dimensions of practice. In contrast,

research *through* practice comprises, for example, developmental work (such as customising technology for practice and reflecting on the results) and action research (involving documentation and communication of studio experiments). In general, research *through* practice involves creative techniques, often along with more conventional methodologies, to generate knowledge (Frayling, 1993; Webb, 2008).

A creative research methodology is characterised by the use, within the research process, of practice conventions, artistic actions, creation and performance. Experimentations in arts practice are integral to the research, just as active involvement of the artist is an essential component of the research strategy, which we refer to as a reflexive approach (Borgdorff, 2010). The exploration of these methods to develop and communicate research needs to balance rigorous and methodical findings with innovations in practice. TINAS provides a space and opportunity for creative researchers to find a voice and reflect on their research as a rigorous form of academic enquiry.

Extending from the practice-led creative research methodology endorsed by the University, the forum's initial questions included:

- What is research and what are the limits to what might be considered research?
- How can we develop creative research skills across a range of disciplines?
- How can practice-led research students benefit from a transdisciplinary and dialogic learning environment?
- What are the problems that practice-led creative researchers often experience and do these issues related to feelings of isolation and inadequacy in relation to the academy?

In response to these provocations, we developed a weekly one-hour session that included:

- The *In Conversation* series
- The *This is Not Theory* series
- And *This is Not Rocket Science* workshops

As facilitators, we were aware of the potential benefits that students and staff in attendance might gain from the series. However, we—as creative researchers, teachers

and supervisors—also felt privileged to observe first-hand, through the progress of TINAS, the development of strategies for future creative research manifestations.

The In Conversation Series

The provocation for this series was to commence a conversation with researchers across creative disciplinary fields in order to reflect on intersections or fissures—a form of reflection that became a sharing of knowledge/s. Bozeman, Fay and Slade (2013) define this process as "social processes whereby human beings pool their human capital for the objective of producing knowledge" (p. 3). Three experienced creative practitioners from different disciplines were invited to speak for 5 minutes (most went over the suggest time) on their methods, methodologies and processes in order to begin a conversation with the group (usually around 20 staff and postgraduate students). We encouraged guest conversationalists to leave their PowerPoints at home (as this is not a seminar) and merely begin with who they were and how their life and work experiences influenced their practices. Our aim was to create an optimum level of interaction or dialogue through these conversations rather than "talking at" the participants. Six such conversations took place in the second semester of 2012. Fields of research included visual arts, music, theatre, performance, dance, creative writing and design. In every session, the chair ensured that equal opportunity was afforded for everyone to contribute to the conversation. It was the aim of the conversation series to encourage the audience to leave with more questions than answers.

Dialogue is at the heart of the TINAS model and the broader context of educational leadership in which it sits. Creating spaces of respect, trust and inclusion, the concepts of dialogue and voice underpin collaborative, interactive and democratic processes (Bakhtin, 1981; Hirschkop, 1986, 1999; Otteson 2013). A Baktinian model of meaning-making posits the value of dialogism as different voices or "double-voicedness." Indeed, the TINAS program aims to foster "voicedness" amongst research students in a multitude of ways. Extending the dialogism of Bakhtin, we suggest that to live is to be in voice with one another and in open-ended conversation, defined as a "relationship of utterance and response through which social order is developed and maintained" (Ottesen, 2013, p. 123). In addition, we draw from theories of dialogic leadership, which assert that traditional top down leadership is limiting (Isaacs, 2001). Education,

including creative practice postgraduate supervision, must attend to and support dialogue as its guiding ethos. Through the TINAS conversations, participants were regularly provided dynamic opportunities to make sense of creative research in the academy through ongoing observation and discussion with other researchers and guest practitioners from within and outside of the University setting. Indeed, in many ways, the TINAS program augmented the one-on-one nature of most postgraduate supervision in which a student works intensively with a Principal Supervisor. Otteson (2013) maintains that dialogues in educational settings involve attentive listening to the positions of others, thereby enhancing one's own thinking and learning through respectful exploration of another's ideas. The enunciation of difference, rather than a focus on achieving consensus, is pivotal to creating dialogue and to fostering diverse practices in higher education. Importantly, dialogue points to the role of tension as a creative agent leading to longer-term transformation. For TINAS, this tension manifested through the open-ended nature of the sessions.

In Conversation I

The first conversation established the groundwork for the entire TINAS program. We hoped for a relaxed yet engaging open dialogue format, involving us (as facilitators of the program) and our participants (mostly postgraduates). To do this, we discussed our own approaches to practice-led research in the context of our diverse disciplinary backgrounds. [Author 3] is inspired by the intersection between aesthetics and social inquiry. [Author 3] spoke of how [Author 3's] doctoral research analysed a creative engagement with media-induced moral panics considered as forms of social performance (Author 3, 2010). The dissertation drew upon two distinct performance paradigms – one theoretical and the other practical – to inform a critical reading of three significant "social events" of the last decade. [Author 3] also spoke of how [Author 3] felt that a practice-led methodology would have helped her in developing her research in a more thorough and timely way if that had been an option at the time.

[Author 2] works in both practice and research in applying the ways designers/creative practitioners think to solve organisational and social challenges. [Author 2] spoke of Design Thinking. According to Curedale (2013), Design Thinking is a people-focused innovation strategy that applies design methods as catalysts to help organisations to

grow. In line with Design Thinking, [Author 2] applies the philosophies of social constructivism and ethnographical methods in his practice of co-creating social-based services and understanding the ways communities function.

[Author 4] discussed the intersection of theory and practice as a place where methodology emerges. In his work, [Author 4] uses three methods: poetic practice, walking and ethnographies (Author 4, 2012). Each method amplifies the others. For instance, the outcomes of an interview will be different if the interview is mobile or sedentary; formal or informal; morning or evening; winter or spring. This led into a discussion about [Author 4] interests in practice-led research (particularly across disciplines) as a vibrant vehicle for the extension of the researcher.

Lyndall Adams spoke of how she defines herself as contemporary artist and arts-practice-led researcher interested in the role of complex narrative structures in positioning visual images of the body. Post-structuralist and feminist thinking principally influence her. Arts-practice-led research, for her, involves a process of information gathering; including various visual and multi-media methods of selection, analysis, synthesis, presentation and communication. Journals, digital photographs, proofs and drafts are part of her process. These adaptive methods reflect both *in* and *on* action and the needs of the artistic practice, while being driven by the critical and contextual demands of the research inquiry (Adams, 2008).

The participants were encouraged to interrupt/disrupt our reflections, leading to a conversation about the relationship between our different theoretical frameworks, methodologies and methods. Anecdotal comments from participants indicated that our individual perceptions of practice as research had helped them to realise the value of their works as practitioners and researchers. As facilitators, we were off to a good start.

In Conversation II

The second conversation series gathered a writer, a painter and a jazz musician to discuss their practices and research. This session focussed on the synergy of a "question" as a starting point and the need to find space within practice and process in order to create the reflexive whole. The writer spoke of immersion in research and how, for her, key images are held in a pattern and that this leads to an intertwined

investigation with her creative practice. The painter (and university lecturer) discussed the misconception held by undergraduates that articulation will kill an idea. He also explained what he called "decoy research," (Gregory Pryor, pers. comm., August 29, 2012) in which he conducts sub and parallel investigations that can provide breathing spaces for the main project that he works on. This concept resonated with the participants who agreed that this was a useful tool for approaching blocks to practice. It was also noted that "parallel investigations" can quite easily become an avoidance tactic when the researcher is struggling for direction or focus. The jazz musician spoke of how his work contains conceptual underpinnings that led to change and synthesis. As spontaneity is vital to jazz, he noted that improvisation is a mode of research. As an interesting aside, the writer, who came to the session very well prepared, was the manifestation of immersion in research yet left little for discussion, while the painter gave us adequate breathing space to think about how to articulate research through the decoy metaphor. The jazz musician, unsure of what was required of him in the session, improvised beautifully. This proved to be one of the most successful conversations sessions predominantly because of the unorthodox approach to the subject, as well as the flow and synergy between conversationalists across creative disciplinary fields.

In Conversation III

The third conversation involved a choreographer/dancer, a designer and a contemporary visual artist. The choreographer spoke of his interests in collaborative creation and how he uses sets of questions as a thematic and choreographic starting point. The designer spoke of how his work is influenced by his personal interests, including the role design can play for communities and in pursuing social justice through the principles of functional design. He argued the need for design to consider purpose, functionality, content, visual aspects, implementation and testing. The contemporary visual artist works transdisciplinarily and collaboratively across environmental science and visual arts. She spoke of how her practice is led by a set of ideas, and raised the question of confronting complex problems through utilising different sets of research logic. Reflecting on this session, we noted with fascination that, whether it be a conceptual or personal value statement, each researcher's journey was marked by a similar drive to allow his or her art form to question. We found this

to be a great strength and something the higher degree by research candidates in particular could grasp. The notorious pursuit of knowledge in postgraduate education need not entirely be about solving a problem or filling a gap. It might be enough to pursue a deeply felt question or questions *for*, *through* and *in* their practice (Frayling, 1993).

In Conversation IV

A single conversationalist; a visiting writer in residence at ECU specialising in collective biography presented the fourth conversation. The session questioned the advantages and challenges of fusing objective/subjective modes of writing to produce lively, engaging and scholarly narratives and the use of "I-witnessing" in writing (Geertz, 1988). Although informative and relaxed, the seminar was attended by only a small number of participants from creative writing. TINAS is not compulsory and, despite our best intentions, it did seem that disciplinarity had prevailed in this session. For us, this was the beginning of a process of rethinking. We knew that we had to provide an informal forum that engaged a bricolage of interdisciplinary methods and theories (Law, 2004; Stewart, 2007; Yeates, 2009), yet could still be detailed, focused and rigorous.

In Conversation V

The fifth conversation was a meeting point of hybrid art form practitioners. Through discussions of their work, questions emerged: can process be exhibited, and is process a legitimate research outcome? On the whole, although there was enormous potential in unpacking these questions, this seminar in particular was too seminar-based, in the traditional connotation of the term explored earlier. We felt that speakers were overly structured and, therefore, the participants were positioned as a silent audience, rather than contributors to an ongoing dialogue. As all TINAS participants are practice-led or -based researchers, emphasis is on the intertwined notion of action-based process with less expectation on the success or failure of the outcome. Surprisingly, in this session, the individual process was largely left untouched, and the argument, instead, centred on whether an outcome was necessary to research. We attributed this to a disempowerment of voice: the approach of conversationalists disallowed a dialogic engagement.

In Conversation VI

The sixth and final conversation for 2012 involved an environmental writer, designer and visual artist. Through a discussion of their individual interests and processes, a theme surrounding the representation of nature, history, and stories through various media emerged. Conversationalists spoke of these processes as practice-led research. The writer, in particular, discussed in detail the collision of the discourses of cultural and natural history in writing on place and landscape. We observed that the participants were interested in how the research was conducted (the writing process), rather than the finished product (the written work). The designer spoke about the work of others in the design field. In contrast, the artist outlined her personal connection to certain research ideas and subjects, and how this connection was instrumental to her creative process. The presenters were so insightful that everyone went away with questions regarding their own belief systems. We were beginning to understand that what worked most effectively in this setting was a mix of self-reflection based in practice and research. Relating the individual conversationalist's work to the two other conversationalists and the TINAS participants themselves proved especially useful.

The *This is Not Theory* Series

Interspersed between the *In Conversation* sessions was *This is Not Theory*. During this series of critical reading exercises, the four of us brought in a paragraph, or a few short and theoretically dense paragraphs of text, relevant to our practices and research. The sessions aimed to encourage dialogue about the kinds of concepts and philosophies deeply embedded in practice-led research that cross between various fields of practice. We hoped to offer a means for unravelling complex notions for those not steeped in philosophical debate. Following Grierson (2007, p. 539) we sought to establish the centrality of a 'robust inter-textual relationship' between theory and practice as a demand of practice-led research.

Two such sessions were conducted over the semester with quite surprising outcomes. These sessions were fun, engaging and, best of all, noisy debates about meaning. Everyone dug in to unpack the dense material—to get to the heart of challenging concepts. The secretary took notes at these sessions, producing a summary of the

concepts and a glossary, both later emailed to TINAS participants (see Figure 1). This led to a useful compilation of terms relevant to practice-led research. At the end of 2012, a completed glossary of terms raised during the year and notes from the conversations were sent out to all the participants. This had an additional and unexpected outcome for us as facilitators; we were able to identify areas that our students (and staff) had difficulty in articulating.

[Insert Figure 1]

This is Not Rocket Science Workshops

The proposition behind the workshop series was to offer purpose-built training sessions that helped to demystify the things that we, as supervisors, strongly encourage our students to do. The first was a workshop on journaling, a necessary practice-led and -based technique for documentation and reflection of and on process. We discussed how journaling assists with exegetical writing through the revisioning of research ideas and practice (Barrett, 2007), and how it can often reveal an internal dialogue. We also discussed the scope of what constitutes a journal. Journals range from paper-based written and drawn journals, to smart phones, digital and video technology and social media, such as blogging, Tumblr and WordPress. These journal forms allow hands on, visual and interactive documentation devices. The purpose of creating a diversity of journaling forms is to help in the construction of a rigorous practice review and a problem-solving "thinking-board," whilst forming an archive of the project's process and outcomes. Ultimately journaling is a personal thing, and how and what form the journal will take will be determined by the researcher's discipline and process. There is no right or wrong way to journal but nevertheless journaling is a critical tool in the immersive and action-centred reflexive process of practice-led research. We ended this workshop with a sensory exploration of word association and journaling with a walk in the university garden led by [Author 4]. Detailing how he likes to work, [Author 4] spoke of how he uses field notebooks filled with "spontaneous scrawling" conducted during his walking and writing sessions. With this material, he collates photographs, video, rudimentary sketches and digital recordings of soundscapes and interviews with others. From this integrative journal, he forms poems into living things either to be performed or, in a textual form, retaining a trace of the very living thing it depicts.

Workshop II: Presenting Your Research HDR Session

The second workshop focused on public speaking as critical to the articulation and communication of your research, as well as forging audience and peer/networks. Each participant in the workshop contributed through talking about their experiences, fears and strategies for presentation, including the use of gestures, planning, conversation techniques and eye contact, sign posting information, variety, repetition of key points, mind map into fishbone list and football coaching session, strong beginning and end, memory tricks and plan or be prepared. This then led to useful information given by several former participants in the Three Minute Thesis competition (The University of Queensland, 2013). Overall the participants were encouraged, when formulating their research for public presentation, to focus on communicating content clearly rather than covering a large amount of content. Public presentation involves genuine respect for your audience to encourage empathy with whom one is speaking.

Workshop III: SoundWalk

The third workshop led seamlessly from the sensory journaling session with a sound walk through the university grounds. Conducted as a group and entirely in silence, a sound walk encourages one to discover unfamiliar things in familiar environments. This practice encourages a mindfulness of the acoustic ecology that surrounds us. The conductor of the session had performed many sound walks in the past and introduced the notion of recognising sound as part of a larger ecosystem. Some of the participants commented that, in their silence, sound became voluminous, resulting in a desire to walk more softly (with the grace and delicacy of an elephant). Participants also noticed that the natural world fought to be heard against the built environment. They noted the acoustic vibrations of clothes against bodies and the percussive beats of walking intermixed with the soundscape of a stranger's conversation. Overwhelmingly the responses involved an appreciation for how useful (and delightful) it was to take the time to be mindful of our senses.

Workshop IV: Copyright

The fourth workshop centred on the basics of copyright and was conducted by [Author 1] and [Author 3] and was an introduction to copyright protection, rights of reproduction and exceptions to copyright particularly in relation to education purposes.

As many of our practice-led researchers will go on to publish in some form (as photographers, musicians, and so on) this session was as confusing as it was necessary and enlightening. Copyright law is forever changing so it is important that our students respect other people's rights just as much as they protect their work outside the relative openness of educational institutions with the advent of digital repositories for thesis submission. It is without a doubt that this session will be repeated in the future.

Workshop V: Word basics and How to Add Film to Word and PDF

The final workshop investigated the ways in which we could manipulate Microsoft Word so that we could include film in both a Word document and a PDF. This directly relates to the forms in which our students can present their dissertations, including insertion of their creative practice journal, no matter what form it came in. For many practice-led researchers, the current presentation of exegesis favours the traditional written form separated from the practice outcome. This does little for the argument that this should be an integrated process and so we are continuing to find ways where the practice is firmly integrated into the reflective document so that examiners and fellow researchers will be able to engage with a well integrated whole.

Reflections, Insights and Additions

The TINAS series has received positive responses from attendants and further research will include more specific analysis of the program through interviews with participants. The Faculty was pleased with the increased conversations about practice-led research and the support we provided to the postgraduate students.

TINAS is being offered in 2015 with the following amendments and inclusions. We ask conversationalists to avoid a formal academic presentation and focus more on telling the audience about who they are in relation to their practices. We have also extended into industry for conversationalists, in response to requests from participants. This has helped to promote dialogue between institutional research and industry driven practice. We have repeated the most popular sessions, which included the critical reading sessions and the word processing workshops. We have also added a new session on ethics, *This is not ethics, this is emancipatory practice*. These sessions moved beyond discussion of compliance to university ethics processes to reflection on what ethics means to each of us, what it means to be an ethical researcher and how the

question at the heart of our research can be opened up if we ask how our topic confronts the nature of ethics. In addition we are developing a new series titled *Philosophers and metaphors*. Subsequent TINAS sessions were held at art galleries and design labs to stimulate various discussions and to further the conversation about the limits and scope of creative research.

Furthermore we have initiated what will hopefully be a regular event, a cross-disciplinary, cross-art form exhibition held in 2014 and titled *inConversation.* A call for participation was released in August 2013. The exhibition was held over three weeks in Spectrum Project Space at ECU in October 2014. It involved fifty-four researchers in fourteen teams representing ECU and other Western Australian universities, as well as other national and international researchers. The exhibition drew from the fields of photography, architecture, performance, visual arts, teaching, politics, music, writing, science, geology and other disciplines. We feel that the i*nConversation* project has high potential to offer another useful strategy for supporting and developing creative researchers. In addition, we—as facilitators, creative researchers and supervisors of postgraduates—understand the challenges in documenting the processes of creative research. This is something we encourage our students to do, in order to produce exegetical writing that better reflects their experiential and material processes. Yet we are aware of the work that is yet to be done in order to facilitate this properly. This will be part of a larger research project we plan to develop.

Initial findings, based on conversations and feedback from participants, indicate TINAS has enabled a heightened rapport and a greater sense of community amongst researchers across creative disciplines; a broader acknowledgement of the range of work that constitutes practice-led and -based research; confidence in the development of documentation, communication and methodological skills; an appreciation for the modes through which creative practices can be theorised and contextualised in academic terms; and a stronger representation of practice-led and -based researchers in academic environments. The emergence of multi-faceted, collective understandings of creative research in the TINAS forum has encouraged respect and inclusion and has enhanced postgraduate learning in the Faculty. Future assessment of the contribution of TINAS to practice-led research will be informed by formal scholarly evaluations by

participants and peers, as well as our impressions as project facilitators. While firm conclusions and findings are not possible to derive from this initial phase of the program, there is value in the narrative descriptions presented here. They form a basis for further initiatives by tertiary institutions with creative research courses.

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