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Going Against the Grain:

EdD students' engagement with arts-based research in the United Kingdom

Timothy Clark
University of the West of England
tim.clark@uwe.ac.uk

Tom Dobson
York St John University
t.dobson@yorksj.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Despite growing interest in the potential value of arts-based research (ABR) for educational inquiry in the UK, limited consideration exists regarding its accessibility and relevance to practice-based professional doctoral researchers in this field. In response to this, this article reports on the first phase of a study which aimed to explore the contexts, perceptions, and experiences of professional Doctorate in Education (EdD) students' decisions to engage with aspects of ABR in their studies. Informed by narrative interviews with 9 EdD students in the UK, this article utilizes a series of short vignettes to illustrate the students' stories, capturing the potential tensions perceived and/or experienced in relation to engagement with ABR. The findings consider: how conflicting methodological expectations may be reflected through key audiences and structures, the tensions between methodological choices and sense of self and identify, and the potential role of ABR in terms of promoting action and agency.

KEYWORDS

arts-based research, professional doctorate in education, practice-based enquiry, creativity theory, resistance, methodology

Despite growing interest in the potential value of arts-based research (ABR) for educational inquiry in the United Kingdom (UK) (Culshaw, 2019; Everley, 2021), there has been very limited discussion regarding its accessibility and relevance for practice-based research on the professional doctorate in education (EdD) pathway. This is significant, given that the associated institutional regulations and structures, which were generally designed for traditional models of PhD research, have been positioned as limiting the creative potential of practice-based research (Vaughan, 2021). Whilst emerging international evidence suggests that ABR may have enhanced potential for EdD research, given the EdD's inherent relational, reflexive and contextual nature, and broad and diverse audiences (Dobson & Clark, 2024), this potential is premised on a model which carefully considers how design, practice, and regulations support students' identity-development and agency (Savva & Nygaard, 2021). In the context of this consideration, this article, which is informed by a wider project investigating the affordances of ABR for EdD research in the UK, considers the contexts, perspectives, and experiences of a group of EdD students who were seeking to engage with aspects of ABR in their doctoral research.

The article draws on narrative interviews with nine EdD students in the UK, enrolled across two separate universities, who were either actively engaging with, or currently considering, an aspect of ABR for their doctoral research. We seek to illustrate and provoke consideration of the institutional, professional, and social ecology framing the students' methodological decision-making in relation to their EdD studies. To do so, we draw on Glăveanu's (2013) 5A's of creativity as a theoretical framework to foreground these aspects by positioning creativity as "embedded in the field of social relations specific for any community and society" (p. 72). The article begins by providing understandings of the EdD in the UK and of the relevance of ABR; it then proceeds to outline the design of this part of the study, before utilizing a series of vignettes to illustrate and critically examine key ideas arising from the interviews. These ideas encompass understandings of audience and structure, identity and self, and action and agency.

By promoting consideration of the context of EdD students' engagement with ABR in the UK and by deliberately seeking to place this within an international journal alongside examples which draw on the use of ABR in the EdD in other countries (e.g. Borkoski & Roos, 2021; Kramer, 2022), this article is intended to be of value in supporting reflection on the impact and design of EdD programs internationally. It aims to investigate how micro factors including professional contexts, program design, and supervision practice may shape and inform students' decision-making, comfort, and confidence in relation to methodological creativity and to begin to provoke consideration of how this may be informed by wider macro factors in different social contexts. We were interested in understanding how conceptualisations of what counts as research (Quaye, 2007) manifested in students' experiences of undertaking an EdD in the UK.

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CONTEXT–THE EDD IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The EdD was first introduced in the UK in 1990s, quickly becoming the most popular professional doctoral degree route (Hawkes & Yerrabati, 2018). In common with other countries internationally, the rise of the EdD in the UK is associated with the perceived efforts of UK universities to respond to questions surrounding their political, economic, and social relevance (Wildy et al., 2015) and the growing relevance of the "knowledge economy" (Fink, 2006, p.35). The UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [QAA] (2020) characterises the EdD as a "post-experience" qualification intended to support practitioners "to situate professional knowledge developed over time in a theoretical academic framework" (p. 8) - thus, creating a need for consideration of the balance between the potentially competing priorities and expectations of the workplace and the academy (Tennant, 2004). The EdD in the UK is typically accessed by "mid-career professionals" (Boud & Lee, 2009, p.3) from a broad range of educational contexts, who usually study on a part-time basis. The most common model for EdD study involves a 2-year taught phase, which includes a focus on educational research methods and methodology, followed by a supervised practice-based research project which culminates in the submission of a written thesis with a pre-defined word count. Through a summative viva voce oral examination, there is an expectation that part of what is being assessed in an EdD is the role of the candidate's research in contributing to "professional and/or organisational change" (QAA, 2020, p.9).

At a programmatic level, the EdD in the UK is positioned as having a significant role in "activism, transformation and practice" (Saunders & Trotman, 2022, p.3), potentially offering opportunities for, often non-traditional (Hedges, 2022), doctoral students to engage creatively, critically, and reflexively with issues which are entangled within their own practice. However, at an institutional and national level, the EdD functions within wider regulations where governance requirements may be understood to create unhelpful "hierarchies of legitimacy" (Vaughan, 2021, p. 347) relating to format and practice. As a result, regardless of the context and needs of the research, it is argued that traditional forms have become canonized, and student decisions are often primarily driven by "apprehension of an academic audience," (Dobson, 2022, p. 997) potentially to the detriment of utilizing creativity to maximise professional relevance and impact.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As a result of our interest in how creativity as ABR is either facilitated or precluded in the context of EdD programs in the UK, we use Glăveanu's (2013) 5A's theory of creativity as our underpinning theoretical framework. This theory draws attention to "the underlying structure of how creativity is operationalized" (Kaufman & Glăveanu, 2019, p. 28) by taking an ecological approach where creativity is "embedded in the field of social relations specific for any community and society" (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 72). The 5A's theory, therefore, involves: actors, who have "personal attributes in relation to a societal context"; actions, which are "coordinated psychological and behavioural manifestations"; artifacts, which are produced by the actors and which include the "cultural context of artifact production and evaluation"; and audiences and affordances, which are "the interdependence between creators and a social and material world" (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 71).

As a theoretical lens, the use of the 5A's is appropriate as it allows us to acknowledge the potential complexity of EdD student's methodological decision making, by provoking questions relating to the dynamic interplay between the five key components. This includes facilitating questions and interpretations of the student as a central *actor*, including how personal background, identity, and experience may impact their decision making and subsequent research *actions*, which include the processes and methods they engage with. It also provokes consideration of their perspectives on the potential resulting products of this, conceptualised as research *artifacts*, most notably including the EdD thesis itself. Importantly, it then facilitates for an understanding of how these actions and artifacts may be mediated by the presence of key audiences, allowing for exploration of a key potential tension between academic and professional audiences (Tennant, 2004). These *audiences* may include, supervisors and examiners, but also, in an EdD, wider professional communities of practice, who may hold different or competing expectations or priorities. Alongside this, investigating *affordances,* involves acknowledgement of the perceived material possibilities and provocations within the environment, for example taught modules or research examples. In the context of the EdD, we are therefore interested in how EdD students as actors conceive of their EdD research actions and thesis artifacts in relation to ABR and why they conceive of their actions and artifacts in this way. Our work aims to acknowledge the potentially complex entanglement of all of these aspects, whilst seeking to generate learning regarding factors which EdD students may perceive to be most significant.

ABR AND THE EDD

To define ABR, we use Leavy's (2018) *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*. Leavy (2018) takes a broad view of ABR practices as "methodological tools … during any or all phases of research" (p. 4) and goes on to list ten key affordances for students using ABR over more traditional research methodologies and methods. In our previous research (Dobson & Clark, 2024), we have mapped the theorical underpinnings of these ABR affordances with the theoretical underpinnings of the EdD to include six key dimensions: researchers exploring their own *practice*, *knowledge* as produced within contexts of practice rather than the university, researchers foregrounding *relationality* between themselves and their participants, often through participatory methodologies, researchers being *reflexive*, developing a critical understanding of their relationship with power structures, researchers reaching diverse *audiences* outside of the university, and researchers reaching these audiences by producing hybrid research artifacts that use different *modes of expression*. This initial mapping exercise was significant in developing our rationale for the value and utility of further exploration of ABR within the EdD acting as a catalyst for the subsequent scoping review of existing research into this topic (Dobson & Clark, 2024).

Our scoping review identified only 6 peer-reviewed research articles (Ataby et al., 2017; Borkoski & Roos, 2021; Chan et al., 2014; Kiili, 2017; Kramer, 2022; McGregor et al., 2010), with McGregor et al. being the only example from the UK. McGregor et al. is also the only article which has a methodology section - the other articles do not make their methodologies explicit, comprising of student and supervisor reflections in the tradition of biographic and

autoethnographic research. Furthermore, the articles come from just four journals, two in a journal about the EdD program in Hawaii (Ataby, 2017; Kiili, 2017) and two in this journal (Borkoski & Roos, 2021; Kramer, 2022). In terms of ABR, this is limited in five articles to a focus on forms of creative writing (Ataby et al., 2017; Borkoski & Roos, 2021; Chan et al., 2014; Kramer, 2022; McGregor et al., 2010), with ABR the key focus in only two articles (Borkoski & Roos, 2021; Kramer, 2022).

Within the scoping review we introduced the 5A's (Glăveanu, 2013) to analyse how creativity in the form of ABR was operationalized in these six articles; we articulated three key themes. The first theme – *ABR as an affordance for reflexivity, identity alignment and relationality* - demonstrated how the use of ABR enabled EdD students as actors to align their academic, professional and personal identities in a process that facilitated a deeper understanding of their cultural heritages. For example, as a student on the UH Manoa EdD program in Hawaii, Kiili (2017) experienced the "alignment of both [her] personal and professional positionalities" (p. 49) as her previously held artist identity merged with her new academic identity to become an "artist practitioner researcher". This identity transformation is afforded by the program's explicit ethos and is reflexive in nature - through ABR, Kiili (2017) authentically reconnected and repositioned herself in relation to her culture and her past, understanding her native Hawaiian culture, the trauma of generational genocide, and her own dysfunctional family. This allowed Kiili (2017) to see her role as "an artist practitioner for the benefit of [her] community" (p.12).

Our second theme – *ABR as relational, affording participation to value alternative perspectives and move towards the co-creation of artifacts* - focused on how ABR promotes the involvement of others in research, leading to participatory approaches. Reflecting upon her experiences of the EdD program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Kramer (2022) aligned her new academic identity with her past identity as a writer to embrace "non-fiction fiction writing" (p. 20). Working alongside "marginalised" students in school, the use of non-fiction fiction provided "a break in the clouds", allowing these students "to speak" as they became actors who are "critical agents for change", analysing and responding to the research non-fiction fiction artifact Kramer (2022) created for them (pp. 21-22).

This leads directly to our third theme – *ABR as affording hybrid artifacts, which reach and impact wide and diverse audiences* – which identified how ABR helps produce hybrid thesis artifacts which can reach and impact diverse audiences. The concept of the hybrid thesis has gained traction in EdD research (Vaughan 2021; Wisker 2019; Wisker & Robinson, 2014), with the argument being that the thesis artifact should be shaped for and by both an academic and a practice-based audience. For Kramer (2022), the practice-based audience was key as she sought to "engage colleagues and administrators as we try to troubleshoot our current challenges with teaching") by using "non-fiction fiction" writing as a mode of expression (p.22).

Taken as a whole, our initial research identified a potential understanding that the use of ABR on EdD programs is not only theoretically appropriate but also presents affordances for EdD student actors as encapsulated in the three themes above. However, we acknowledge that this understanding and the generation of these initial themes, have several key limitations. These include the fact that these themes are based on a very small body of research into the use of ABR on the EdD, mainly undertaken outside of the UK, the tendency for this existing research to focus on creative writing, rather than a broader spectrum of ABR approaches, and its methodological approaches being largely limited to biographic approaches. We, therefore, concluded that future research into the use of ABR on EdD programs should use a participatory approach to further explore the affordances of a wider range of ABR approaches for EdD student actors (Dobson & Clark, 2024). This article is the beginning of that research.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Context and Participants

Our study explored the contexts and perspectives of nine EdD students, studying at two universities – University A and University B - in different areas of the UK. Both universities may be categorised as primarily teaching, rather than research intensive institutions. A call was issued at each university inviting EdD students who had an interest in engaging with ABR to be involved in a year-long action learning research project, with the present article focusing on the initial interview phase. Both universities offer a part-time EdD program, encompassing a 2-year taught stage followed by a 2–4-year research stage. As detailed in Table 1, most of the students who engaged in the project had completed stage 1 (the taught phase) and had recently begun stage 2 (the research phase), so they were in the process of making significant decisions about their research approaches.

Whilst neither program has an explicit focus on ABR methodologies, both do include some form of introduction to ABR within the final taught research methodologies module, which includes the contribution of taught content from both authors of this article. The final module on the taught stage also includes the development of an assessed research proposal, which determines students' abilities to progress to the research stage and has some influence on the allocation of a supervisory team for the project.

The study was granted ethical approval through both universities' respective ethics committees, which are in turn informed by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines (2024). For the purposes of this article, pseudonyms are used to refer to the doctoral researchers and written consent was prior to the interviews occurring. Potential limitations in anonymisation, due to the necessity to identify the students' unconventional methodologies, specific topics and professional roles, were explored with the students prior to submission and consent re-affirmed.

Table 1. Student Profiles

Name	Stage	Year	Professional Context	University
Anne	2	3	Music Therapist Primary/Elementary	B
Jenny	2	3	College Lecturer – Art and Design	B
Craig	2	3	Primary/Elementary Teacher	A
Wendy	2	4	Secondary/High School Teacher-English	A
Rachel	2	3	University Lecturer - Education	A
Philip	2	3	Secondary/High School Teacher - Science	A
Sarah	1	2	University Lecturer – Art and Design	A
James	2	4	University Lecturer - Design	A
Susan	2	3	University Lecturer – Business	A

Methodology

A narrative methodology was adopted for this phase of the study, reflecting the convergence of a series of key methodological and philosophical considerations (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012) which informed our "conceptual architecture" (Nichol et al., 2023, p. 364). The wider project sought to embody aspects of both ABR and action learning, with the purpose of this initial interview stage being to inform this by eliciting understandings of and reflections on the context and background of the students' methodological decision making. Our intention was for this stage to be informed by a project methodology which sought to embody aspects of the post-structuralist and arts-based positionality upon which the project was based (Dobson & Clark, 2024), enable exploration of the ecological understandings of creativity characterised in the theoretical framework (Glăveanu, 2013), and ensure consistency with the projects' value for actively supporting student learning, reflection, and collaboration. This methodological approach valued consideration of multiple understandings and interpretations (Roos, 2005) of the student stories and privileged consideration of and reflection on, their methodological decision making within a wider social context.

Narrative Interviews

In line with this methodology, initial narrative interviews were undertaken with all nine students. These focused on understanding the context of their research and their interest and motivations and experiences in relation to the adoption of aspects of ABR in their EdD studies. The interview format involved an open narrative structure, informed in part by Jovchelovitch and Bauer's (2000) model for eliciting narrative accounts. On this basis, the interviewer sought to initiate student accounts of their understanding within the frame of the topic and then to respond with immanent questioning as appropriate, using wording such as 'can you tell me more about?' or 'what happened before that?' rather than referring to a schedule of direct structured questions. This approach was consistent with the exploratory purpose of these initial interviews and with the methodological approach.

Following detailed discussion regarding intended approach and principles, each author conducted interviews with the students who were enrolled at their respective university. Interviews took place online using Microsoft Teams, supporting accessibility for professional doctoral students, some of whom were studying at distance. Interviews lasted up to 40 minutes and were recorded and transcribed.

Analysis

To analyse the interview data, we took a two-stage abductive approach. The full interview transcripts were first considered using narrative analysis (Riessman, 2003) with a focus on developing and representing a holistic understanding, which carefully considered key aspects including sequence (Silverman, 2005) and context for each student's story as a whole. Using writing as a form of analysis (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008), we worked collaboratively to revisit the transcribed accounts in the context of the broader research focus to develop a series of shorter vignettes to represent each student's narrative. The 5A's theoretical framework (Glăveanu, 2013) was then employed to support a process of identifying learning relating to the social ecology of students' decisions and experiences in relation to engagement with ABR. This collaborative and iterative process, which included co-reflection between the authors (Lyndon & Edwards, 2021), aimed to use the 5A's as a lens to interpret the vignettes and resulted in the identification and development of the three key themes and the selection of the vignettes utilized to illustrate these. The vignettes and the whole of the first draft of the research article were then shared with each of the students for comment, feedback, and potential revisions. This was in line with our overall participatory methodology and resulted in some revisions mainly focused on enhancing the clarity of some of the vignettes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section draws on a series of short vignettes to explore emerging ideas and significant experiences highlighted through analysis of the student interviews. These individual vignettes have been selected to illustrate aspects of commonality and difference in relation to the students' identities and use of ABR at this initial stage of the project. The findings of this first phase of the study highlight the students' consideration of the methodological expectations reflected through key audiences and structures, the relationships between their methodological choices and their sense of self and identify, and the potential role of ABR in terms of promoting action and agency. Many aspects of these perspectives are consistent with emerging understandings in existing literature (Dobson & Clark, 2024), however, the vignettes offer an original contribution through their nuanced illustrations of the myriad of tensions perceived and/or experienced by these students in relation to engagement with ABR. Importantly, as outlined in Table 1, this nuance is in part because, unlike our scoping review, this project includes students both with and without a priori artist identity. Their short accounts highlight the sense that the decision to adopt an art-based methodology in education inevitably involves elements of resistance, and potentially, either a deliberate, or more hesitant, decision to go against the grain.

Vignette 1: Jenny

Jenny is a college lecturer in art and design (Grade 11/12), her EdD study will explore the professional identities of artist-teachers. She is intending to achieve this by facilitating the creation and analysis of zines ('small, self-published, magazines which can be 100% visual') by a group of artist-teachers. She conceptualises this process as allowing 'like-minded communities of artist teachers to capture experiences and feelings through a visual method', suggesting that familiarity with this process, and with zines as artifacts, adds value and makes this experience less 'pressured' for contributors. She reflects on taught content within the EdD as 'sparking something within my head' leading her to feel strongly about engagement with, and the legitimacy of, ABR. However, she also cites tensions, indicating that having to complete 'standardised paperwork' designed for 'serious research' makes her feel 'a bit insecure' and 'junior' and highlighting comments from other students such as 'I wish my project could be 'nice' like yours' as contributing to 'internal conflict' and an ongoing 'battle' for 'justification' and 'rigour'.

Vignette 2: Philip

Philip is an experienced secondary science teacher planning to use narrative methods and pictorial representations in his study to investigate the retention of experienced teachers. Coming from a

science background, his EdD experiences represent a significant shift in methodological positioning: 'it took me a while to get away from the need to triangulate data and have numbers and graphs'. Philip is considering using storyboards and visual representations with teachers to support the elicitation of 'their stories and their narratives of their teaching careers'. Aiming at 'evocativeness', Philip positions his use of ABR as intentionally resisting the 'strict structure' of a doctoral thesis, based on a perception that this structure risks losing aspects of important context and subjectivity. Prioritising engaging a professional audience over an academic audience, Philip explains that his work is about responding to a dominant focus on teacher training and recruitment in the UK, by giving voice to more experienced teachers, whilst enhancing readability and interest in his work: 'it would be much better if it could intertwine the theoretical stuff with the stories... you know when you read a good book, the book flows, you want to keep going.'

AUDIENCE AND STRUCTURE(S)

Jenny's perspectives represent one of four examples (as highlighted in Table 1) where academic engagement with ABR is entangled with her role as an actor in an aspect of arts-related education practice. Her reflections capture her intended creative approach and decision making in her EdD research as clearly "embedded" in her interpretation of the social expectations (Glăveanu, 2013) of this as one of three different current and anticipated audiences. Considering her professional audience, she articulates a confident rationale for her intended use of ABR, positioning it as having the potential to maximise engagement and relevance for the audience her research is about, and ultimately for. She understands the creation of zines, as a research artifact, is likely to be valued and received positively by fellow artist-teachers. However, positioning her EdD peers as a second audience, consisting of fellow "researching professionals" (Butcher & Sieminski, 2006, p.62), she identifies her approach as also at risk of being misunderstood and devalued, potentially creating a need for increased justification. Meanwhile, the academic institution as a third audience is understood on a micro level (within the EdD program) as providing a catalyst for her confidence in her approach, whilst at the same time on a macro level (through regulations and processes) as potentially destabilising this. In relation to these audiences, Jenny's short vignette, therefore, succinctly illustrates perceptions and impact of a tension between a methodological argument that ABR has the potential to make research "more engaging" for certain audiences (Leavy, 2018, p. 192) and an understanding that academic traditions and regulations risk stifling the potential for innovation in doctoral study (Vaughan, 2021). What is particularly interesting here is that Jenny's perceptions of academic traditions and expectations held by other students – rather than those directly enacted by academic staff – was seen as a key part of the conflict experienced.

Jenny's sense of emerging anxiety or conflict regarding the academic audience's understanding of rigour and legitimacy in relation to ABR was also echoed by other students. For example, Rachel articulated that she was "really nervous" about meeting expectations if she opted to engage with creative writing in her thesis, whilst Anne shared a concern that her research would not be "taken as seriously" as other approaches, and even suggested that being an artist in an academic space led to assumptions that the work would be a bit "wacky".

Conversely, Philip's response to his perceived expectations of different audiences is seemingly characterised by the more deliberate 'action' of positioning ABR in terms of resistance, rather than by apprehension of its acceptance or accommodation. Philip is aware of the understandings of the nature of research artifacts in his professional discipline (science) and of the "strict structure" implied by academic expectations relating to doctoral theses, but appears to view the purpose of his EdD as prioritising "activism, transformation and practice" (Saunders & Trotman, 2022, p.3) over these. Like Jenny, Philip's story indicates an understanding that for some academic audiences, aspects of his work may be going against the grain, however, informed by a change in views influenced by his experiences of taught modules, for Philip this appears to have empowered the use of ABR as a new act. It is also noteworthy that in Philip's example, neither science teachers nor academics are positioned as the primary audience, instead the focus is on experienced teachers more broadly and on illustrating a perceived problem with policy. Drawing on the value of ABR as deliberately *provocative* and potentially highly accessible (Leavy, 2018), its adoption is marked by reflexive consideration and prioritisation of purpose and audience. Aspects of Philip's intention to "resist" a more traditional structure were also mirrored in parts of Sarah and Anne's story, where they spoke, respectively, of prioritising "celebrating" and "empowering" non-academic audiences.

Whilst Jenny and Philip's accounts reflect different characterisations of their responses to audience expectations, namely the extent to which they see their work as deliberately being an act of resistance, they illustrate a common perception of the potential for tensions here. This is consistent with previous conceptualisation of the challenging balance of power between the academy and the professional context in professional doctorates (Wildy et al., 2013) and the potential barriers to creating valuable hybrid research artifacts, which maximise professional impact (Wisker, 2019) and engage diverse audiences (Dobson & Clark, 2024).

Vignette 3: James

James worked for many years as a professional illustrator before training to be a teacher. He now works in a university teaching art and design. His EdD explores a problem he has identified in practice - how drawing is 'sidelined' in the curriculum in schools in England. He feels this is problematic not just because drawing is a useful skill but also because 'drawing supports learning in general … helps a child develop their intellectual curiosity, helps them develop knowledge.' As a result, James sees children as having different experiences of drawing: 'there's a patchwork quilt of experience. So, some children by the time they reach age 11 … will have abandoned any interest in drawing. And the reason for this is because there is a lack expertise in teaching drawing in schools.' In exploring the nature and status of drawing in schools in England, James is using neither drawing nor the visual arts as a methodology; instead he is undertaking a genealogy. He does, however, use his own drawings in 'presentations' to make 'the research more accessible' and is considering how he might use drawing as part of his thesis artifact – 'I'm trying to figure out how that's going to work'. James is acutely aware of his positionality as a 'trained illustrator' and how aligning this professional identity with his research has the potential to undermine the very purpose of his research by emphasising how some actors, like himself, can draw, and how others, like some children in schools, cannot: 'The problem I have is

because I'm professionally trained to draw in a certain way, I end up sort of just reinforcing the things that I'm really concerned about. What would interest me is how somebody else who can't draw explains some of these things I'm talking about.'

Vignette 4: Craig

Craig identifies his 'working class background' in a 'north-eastern coastal town' as a key motivation for undertaking an EdD. For his research, Craig returned to the school where he was once a pupil to explore this 'background' and what an 'effective curriculum for children from coastal towns' should look like. 'Passionate about' the school, Craig feels the EdD aligns with his 'obstructive identity', affording him the opportunity to 'push back' against the education system, to 'challenge' and have 'autonomy'. Craig is using ABR in the form of 'narrative inquiry' of three children and their experiences of the taught curriculum at transition from primary to secondary school. He has no prior experience of ABR but believes his interest stems from 'working in SEMH [Social, Emotional and Mental Health] schools'. Craig explains this by thinking about the resonances between ABR and 'the qualitative nature of assessing progress in an SEMH school … where we take photos and describe what we find'. In further alignment with his identity as an SEMH teacher, Craig feels the use of ABR methods within his narrative inquiry can engage children in school and provide them with an opportunity to 'express how they feel'. Following a 'pond making activity', one child did a painting about 'digging a pond'. This became a stimulus for a discussion with Craig about the way schooling was constructed and whether 'digging a pond' constituted 'enrichment' or 'learning'. Another child wrote some 'lyrics' about exam anxiety. As well as drawing upon his identity as an SEMH teacher, here the affordances of ABR were seen to be about giving this child a 'voice' – an action, therefore, which also draws upon Craig's self-defined 'obstructive identity'.

Identities and Self

Our scoping review (Dobson & Clark, 2024) outlined how ABR on EdD programs afforded students as actors the opportunity to align pre-existing artist identities with new academic identities (Kiili, 2017; Kramer, 2020). In this study, however, a more complex and nuanced picture of "identity development" (Savva & Nygaard, 2021, p.1) emerges. This includes: the negotiation of professional and artist identities, the perceived resonances between professional identities and ABR, the entanglement of personal and professional identities in the use of ABR, and how an activist identity can usurp a professional identity in the use of ABR.

As illustrated in the vignette above, the alignment of James' identity as a professional illustrator with his academic identity is highly problematic for him. "[T]rained to draw in a certain way," he realises that drawing upon his artistic identity could reinforce "the things that I'm really concerned about," namely how drawing in schools is not inclusive and has no place in terms of pupils' cognitive development. For James, therefore, his professional identity as an artist needs to be negated by his academic identity, with moments for alignment carefully negotiated. Whilst three of the other students - Jenny, Anne, and Sarah – attested to the "alignment" of pre-existing artist identities with new academic identities through ABR (Kiili, 2017, p. 49), James, and also Rachel, demonstrated more complex attitudes to ABR in relation to their non-academic identities. Whilst James and Rachel both hold pre-existing artistic identities, they were much more reticent than Anne, Jenny, and Sarah about the affordances of aligning these artist identities with their new academic identities. For Rachel, reticence relating to drawing upon her master's degree in theatre writing and drama was linked to feeling "really nervous" about bringing her creative writing identity into her thesis. There is a shadow of "hierarchies of legitimacy" (Vaughan, 2021, p.347) and the "apprehension of an academic audience" (Dobson, 2022, p.997) in the way Rachel feels about her artist identity. Aligning her artist identity with her academic identity could result in an artifact that does not address an academic audience, and Rachel defers to other actors in the context of her EdD study: "I would be leaning very heavily on my supervisors for guidance."

Unlike our scoping review, this study also includes EdD students – Craig, Wendy, Susan, and Philip - who have no prior experiences of ABR and who do not hold pre-existing artistic identities. Whilst not holding an artistic identity meant they were less certain than others about the position of ABR in their research, all students articulated the potential affordances of ABR in relation to resonances they perceived between ABR and specific aspects of their professional identities. Craig's use of ABR results from a more complex entanglement of his new academic identity, his professional identity as an SEMH teacher and his activist identity to allow children "to speak" (Kramer, 2022), which in turn is shaped by his own childhood and professional identity - a complex entanglement which seems to afford Craig the possibility of engaging with ABR in different ways. Whilst ABR resonates methodologically with Craig's identities as explored above, Craig also feels he can harness the affordances of ABR for analysis and presentational purposes. He has a "journal" where he does "these little drawings" to "elicit" what he "starts to write about". He is "using Sam Fender lyrics to relate to each individual subsection of a chapter, because it's a coastal town" [Sam Fender is a musician from a coastal town in England]. And he has also written a "prologue" with a fictionalised version of himself as the protagonist who has "experienced all the things from [his] background". Meanwhile for Wendy, there is a resonance of her English teacher identity in ABR, which includes a "liking of reading"; and for Susan, who worked in marketing, there are resonances with the artifact and audience in terms of "getting the messages across."

Unlike Craig, Wendy, and Susan, Philip does not identify resonances between his professional identity as a science teacher and ABR. Instead, his professional identity is antithetical to the methodological underpinnings of the EdD and ABR, where "context driven knowledge and subjectivity is actually very important in how people view the world." Philip's embracing of the affordances of ABR at methodological, analytical, and presentational levels, therefore, involve his identity as an activist usurping his professional identity as a science teacher. Like Craig, Philip seeks to harness the affordances of ABR to give voice to "experienced teachers who don't have a voice"; unlike Craig, Philip feels the need to negate his own professional identity to achieve this.

Vignette 5: Anne

Anne is a music therapist who supports children in mainstream primary (elementary) schools. A classically trained musician, she later retrained and worked as a teacher before completing a master's degree in music therapy. Her EdD research is focused on 'exploring children's views on their school-based music therapy'. Anne had originally planned to undertake a mixed methods study, but says that 'very quickly' her EdD studies changed her methodological perspective: 'as I thought about power and the various discourses…

I became deeply uncomfortable with the labelling... talking about people by diagnoses. Anne outlines that she wanted to focus on 'the child's voice and agency', using the mosaic approach (Clark, 2017) as an arts-based approach which could combine 'small pieces into a visual mosaic to build a bigger picture of a child's experience… [because] as a music therapist there's a recognition that communication isn't limited to spoken and written language.' She reflects that 'quite a few therapists were almost sleepwalking into talking and writing and thinking about children in a way that didn't fit with their basic values and principles'. Anne also explains that she's excited to be part of this project, because it feels 'validating, other people are thinking about this and it's being taken seriously… it's still research.'

Vignette 6: Sarah

Sarah is an experienced visual artist, who was previously employed as a designer, and is currently a lecturer at a college. One motivation for doing the EdD was based on informal research she had undertaken, where she highlighted how art and design students would ask her "What do you want me to do? How do I get a first [class degree]?" Sarah became aware how previous educational experiences were really impacting on them: 'they were kind of spoon fed.' Using 'participatory arts-based research', Sarah intends to work alongside the students in a way that is 'collaborative' to 'make artwork'. 'I don't yet know what they will be, because the project will determine what they will be, and then I'd like to have an exhibition with the students.' She aims to 'empower' her students through ABR to 'tease out what the barriers to creativity might be and theorise about them'. Her project is 'action based' in terms of 'how we can make a difference here' by helping 'these young people to come out the other side feeling better and having a really good understanding of what's actually the [education] system they've been through.'

Action and Agency

ABR was seen by Anne to afford her agency as a researcher within a university context. This researcher agency was in part due to Anne's EdD program, which gave Anne the agency to resist the actions of other university research actors. Rejecting more traditional research actions ("mixed methods study") in favour of the mosaic approach meant Anne had the agency to see her participants from a different perspective. Instead of "sleepwalking into talking and writing and thinking about children in a way that didn't fit with [her] basic values and principles", through the affordances of ABR, Anne gained agency and was, in turn, able to capture "a child's experience." This became emancipatory for her participants, promoting "the child's voice and agency" and indicating how Anne's use of ABR developed her own agency and her participants' agency in a way that was entangled and co-dependent.

For Sarah, the structure of the education system means that her students are actors with little agency. They are "spoon-fed," passively asking her "What do you want me to do?" Engaging her students in "participatory arts-based research" that is "action based" will, Sarah feels, enable her participants to become reflexive and agentic: "to come out the other side feeling better and having a really good understanding of what's actually the [education] system they've been through." Similarly, for Rachel, ABR can afford teacher educators the space to "reflect" upon their practice with struggling preservice teachers, affording them the agency to change their future practice and better support struggling preservice teachers in the future.

With the exception of James, who selected genealogy as a methodology due to a tension he felt existed in aligning his artistic identity with his researcher identity to engage participants through ABR, the EdD students emphasised the affordances of using ABR in relation to developing their participants' agency. This is in line with our own scoping review (Dobson & Clark, 2024), which found that research into the use of ABR by EdD students is "relational", affording participation and valuing "alternative perspectives". Three of the students also emphasised how ABR as an action affords agency to themselves as actors (Savva & Nygaard, 2021), either as researchers in a university context (Anne) or as practitioners in a work context (Craig and Philip).

For Craig and Philip, the affordances of ABR in relation to their own agency and the agency of their participants are also entangled and co-dependent. Their desire to afford agency to their respective participants, however, is entangled with their own professional identities more than their academic identities. For Craig, affording the children in his project a "voice" through ABR is part of an action that also affords him agency to "push back against" an education system that marginalises the "working class." For Philip, capturing the narratives of experienced teachers and giving them a voice is entwined with telling his own story as an experienced teacher to address a professional audience.

Sarah, Rachel, Jenny, and Wendy similarly emphasise how their participants can be afforded agency through ABR in contexts where their participants are otherwise marginalised. For Jenny and Wendy, similar to Craig, Philip, and Anne, this agency is potentially emancipatory with ABR affording participants the agency to resist the structures in which they are located. For Sarah and Rachel, however, the nature of the agency afforded to their participants by ABR is somewhat different. This is because both Sarah and Rachel identify problems not just as residing in structure but also in the way those structures shape the actions of actors. Accordingly, ABR as an affordance is not just about participants being able to express their voice within the contexts – rather, they also see the action of ABR as empowering participants as actors to change their actions.

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

In the context of limited empirical research regarding EdD students' engagement with ABR in the UK and existing concerns that creative practice may be stifled by academic regulations (Vaughan, 2021), this article utilizes narrative data to explore EdD student perspectives. Utilizing the 5A's framework (Glăveanu, 2013) to examine the socio-ecological context and tensions perceived and/or experienced in relation to engagement with ABR, it offers a novel contribution through its nuanced illustration of the experiences of students both with and without a priori artist identities. The article highlights that methodological decision making occurs in the context of potentially competing structures and audiences, that tensions exist in aligning personal, professional, and academic identities, but that the decision to 'go against the grain' is seen to hold potential for increasing agency and action.

This learning has implications at micro level, within individual EdD programs, where teaching and supervision have strong potential to offer spaces to explore, and reflect on, the potential value of ABR within EdD research and highlights the significance of

considering the needs of varying professional audiences. Alongside this, at a macro level, it contributes to debates regarding the need for institutions to carefully review regulations in the context of a growing focus on the social and professional relevance of doctoral research and the range of models, and methodologies, for doctoral study. Building on this specific work, there is also now an opportunity to maximise its potential by further embodying key features of ABR to work collaboratively with students to develop participatory, arts-based outputs relating to EdD research. As such, this is a primary aim of the next phase of the present project.

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