making research

About **KNOWHOW**
Studio approaches to
teaching and learning

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This book is designed for reflection. Space has been created for the reader to add scribbles of notes and sketches of ideas. Through use, the book becomes both text-book and journal. Enjoy.

Above
An iconic image for KNOWHOW: the hands of the teacher perform the knowledge of an artist. Almost hidden are the hands of the student also performing their growing knowledge of an artist.

The Leonardo da Vinci Programme is an EU education programme that encourages the development and sharing of innovative learning and teaching.

The Leonardo da Vinci programme plays an important role in preparing European citizens for entering the labour market, thereby reducing unemployment. Taking companies' needs into consideration, the programme helps build a skilled European workforce in an increasingly competitive world.

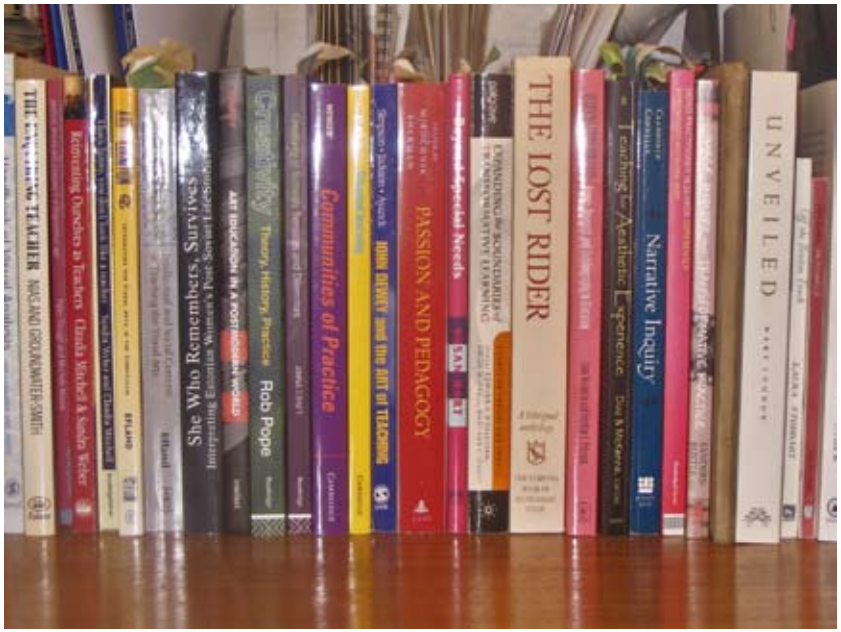
Within this framework, it promotes mobility, innovation and quality of training through transnational partnership—co-operation between various players in vocational training, such as training bodies, vocational schools, universities, businesses and chambers of commerce.

http://ec.europa.eu

Above
Altered book collage
MK Michael

Introduction

Creative practice is woven through every aspect of KNOWHOW: from the project focus on studio teaching and the artistic practice of each participant, to the way the inquiry was carried out. Conventional fieldwork techniques of observation and interview were supported and underpinned by visual techniques—drawing, illustration, photography. These artistic methods reflect the value that KNOWHOW places on aesthetic and experiential ways of coming to understand the world—the values of the studio. This book explores ideas and issues of the aesthetic in educational inquiry, through the reflections of the KNOWHOW research.



Above
Literature review

Methods

The methods adopted for Project KNOWHOW exist within the broad methodology of qualitative inquiry. This is an approach to research that privileges knowing-through-understanding over knowing-through-testing. Our aim is to illuminate a shared understanding of the experiences of others within a given context. Within the art education context of Project KNOWHOW, as Arthur Efland reminds us: "[Qualitative inquiry] has had the effect of reminding evaluators of instruction that classroom life is complex and that the evaluation of art instruction is complicated by the inherently ambiguous nature of its subject matter, where right or wrong answers are not readily forthcoming." (Efland, 1990: 251)

Through the experiences of the artist–teacher, Project KNOWHOW seeks to understand something of the ambiguous nature of the creative learning environment of the ceramic studio. Guiding the choice of research methods are three principles important to KNOWHOW—

- The voice of the teacher is at the heart of the research process and content.
- The context of creative practice is reflected in the research process.
- The research outcomes are presented in an accessible and inspirational manner foregrounding the voice of the teacher and creative practices.

In order to incorporate the principles outlined above, KNOWHOW has looked at two fields of research: those of arts-based inquiry and narrative inquiry.

Arts-based inquiry (sometimes referred to as 'practitioner research in the arts') is a relatively new context for educational research. However, for KNOWHOW it offers inspiring approaches to educational inquiry, allowing the combined interests of creative practice, teaching and research to generate an insightful dialogue that can be represented through visual formats.

"Other forms of inquiry and reflection are necessary if we are to have a comprehensive view of the teacher as an artist and a professional who has the knowledge, understanding, skills, and imagination that are required for developing an artistically exciting, intellectually stimulating, and aesthetically satisfying learning environment."

(Simpson et al., 2005: 10)

Opposite page
Grounded thinking—images that make you think

Art practice as research and inquiry

The research of KNOWHOW is not generated as a single piece of artwork, though there is artistry in the methods, interpretation and outcomes. Rather, for KNOWHOW, art practice is acknowledged as a valid means of visualising and interpreting ideas, and is evidenced as such throughout the project. KNOWHOW acts as advocacy for a particular form of educational experience that supports the construction of meaning and understanding in visual form. It follows that this advocacy is evident in its research process (Sullivan, 2005).

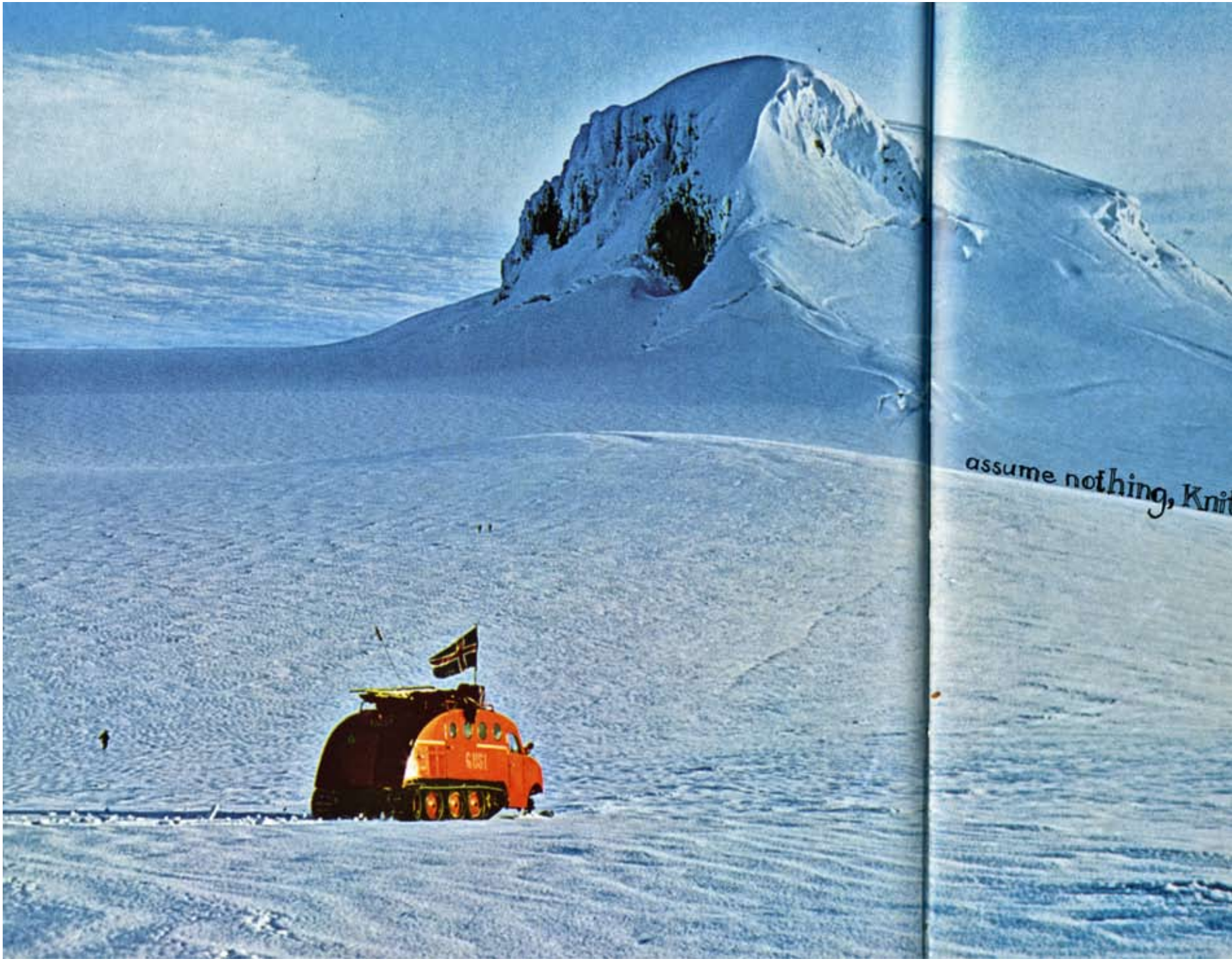
The researcher has used drawing and collage as a means both of generating data and of making sense of data. The drawings and collages move beyond simple illustration of data, because integral to the production of the artworks is a particular way of thinking not possible with other methods. Within the processes of creating a drawing lies reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983, 1987) and the use of tacit, intuitive knowledge that comes from a level of skill and expertise with visual vocabulary. Use of the visual language underpins the everyday practices of the tutors observed in KNOWHOW. Reflection-in-action is one of the foundations of studio teaching, studio learning and, for KNOWHOW, studio research.

Opposite page
Using photography to document, to reflect and to remember

"How are we to translate the richness and promise of our visual discoveries into the deceptive world of words? Words that have often become tired and abused through time and with which we must struggle to let our readers see what we have seen but may not show them. The answer is not clear, but as we await the development of a visual language of intellectual discourse, we can use our images, our visual analysis, to breathe a bit of new life into our translations."

(Malcolm Collier, in van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001: 59)

Above
Using photographs to look for connections, categorise and organise ideas



Above
Altered book
MK Michael

An art-based inquiry

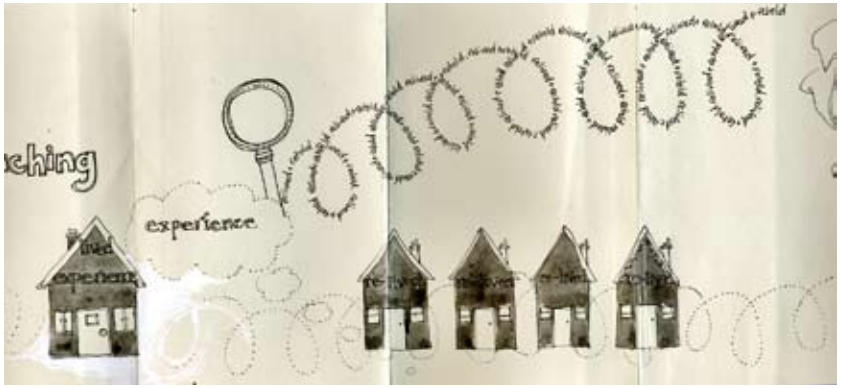
The following is a reflection on the act of creating a particular set of drawings with the purpose of understanding a specific episode of the researcher experience. This episode took place during the first six months of the 32-month project, a critical time when the researcher and the participants were trying to establish positive working relationships. At the end of the first phase of studio observations, the researcher reported back to each of the partner–participants with a written description of what had been observed …

… The tears and emotions continued throughout the feedback session and I was faced with a dilemma: what to do with the text? I did not want to distress these partners any further, but I was cautious about agreeing to abandon the text. I needed time to consider what had happened. I had to keep working within the frame of the research, but, since it was words that seemed to be causing the distress, it was distressing to continue working with words. The issue was something to do with my understanding (or lack of it) of another cultural frame and history. I needed a way of thinking about the culture without using words. I defaulted to drawing in order to recover meaning and understanding.

Above
Line drawings in zigzag book
MK Michael

"A drawing is an autobiographical record of one's discovery of an event—seen, remembered or imagined. A 'finished' work is an attempt to construct an event in itself."

(Berger, 2005: 3)



The process of drawing becomes a metaphor for the process of research: where and how to start; connections to be made and then checked with other previous data; concentrating on small parts for a while, but then standing back and seeing the relationship with the ongoing whole. This writing is a description of my thinking while drawing two costume dolls in my zigzag sketchbook. It is a memory of a drawing process, because I do not recall thinking in words as I drew.

Drawing with a very fine-nibbed pen is a relief from the keyboard of the laptop. Here there are no words to interrupt the flow of concentration between eye, hand and paper. The release from words motivates sustained observation, forcing a critical line and freeing my brain from the thoughts associated with the image.

Above and opposite page
Illustrations from zigzag book
MK Michael

Where to begin on the page …?

The zigzag format of my sketchbook presents a panorama of blank pages. I have only an idea of a drawing, not the beginning of an idea. I cannot start at the beginning of the book, so I start in the middle. This is a deliberate strategy that overcomes my first-blank-page syndrome—that paralysing moment when you look at the fresh, clean, pure piece of paper, pencil poised, pencil paralysed … There are ideas and thoughts that precede this drawing and I may want to record them chronologically in the sketchbook, but later. Perhaps this is what I find attractive in art-based research methods: another way of representing data—of giving concepts a form in order that they might be analysed and interpreted with insight.

I begin with the eyes whilst considering if the drawing should look two- or three-dimensional. I cannot decide, but I draw the eyes anyway. The pen is needle-thin, the ink hard black and the texture of the paper hardly noticeable as the ink smoothes over the page. It is a flat drawing. The lines are of importance: there should be no breaks—the line should go from start to finish just exactly where the finish should be. Long lines with gentle curves suggest the contours of cloth, but dots suffice for detail within the cloth. Already I know that areas of dense black will be needed later and actually some white somewhere—the tone of the paper is everywhere, but I am looking at the doll and I am following the lines that I have not yet drawn. I am looking for markers—my eyes making connections between the shoulder, the hip and the bottom of the dress—but actually I want to put a word in here, so I stop the drawing and imagine the page with the word drawn carefully in the same line. I need to open the page out flat and now the drawing begins to command a presence on the page. I look for detail I can fill in without acute observation: the lines that will make up the hair … I know how I want this part to look and I have drawn similar before—I can focus on the lines on the page for the moment …

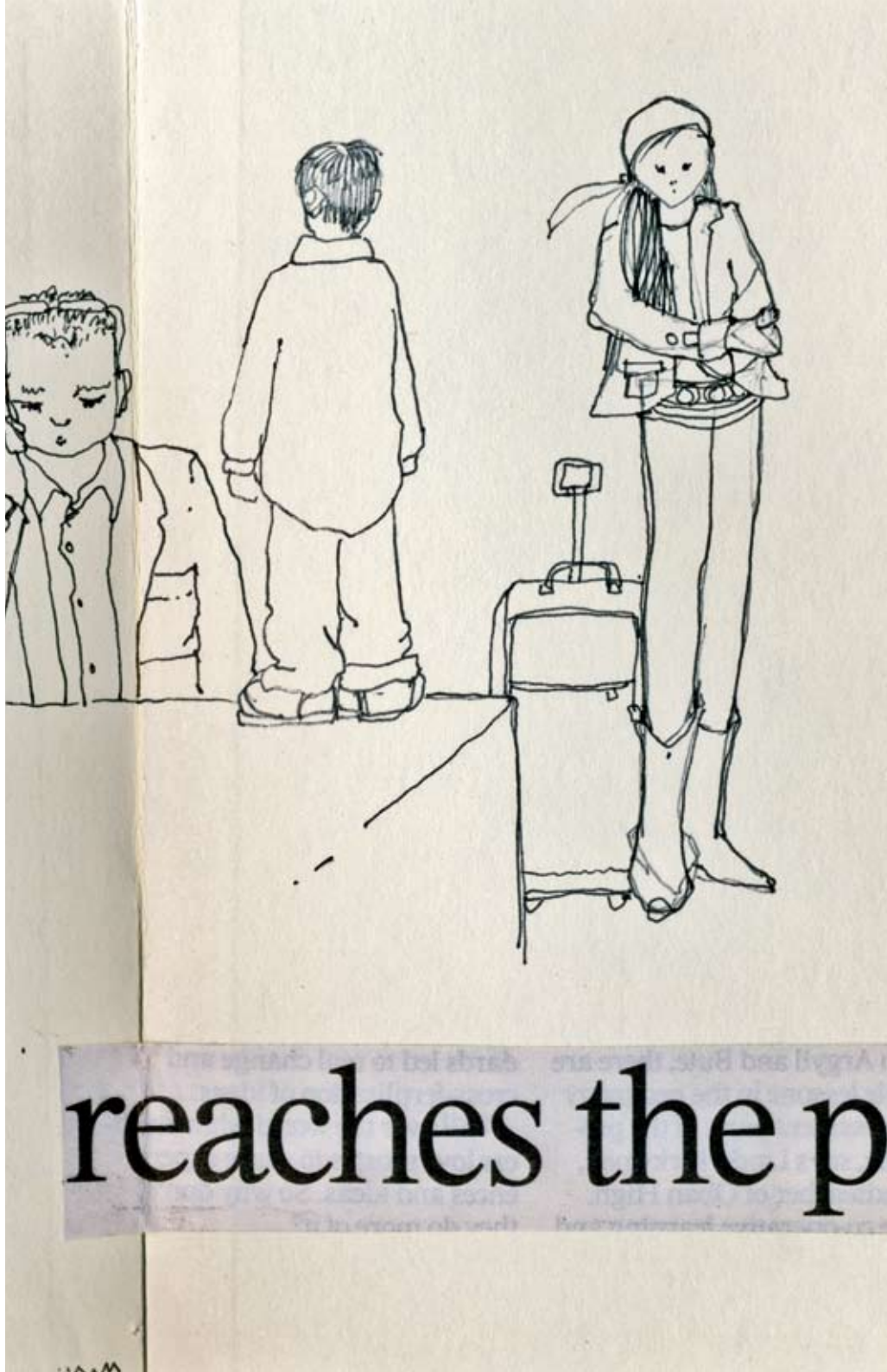
But then enough of that has been drawn—not finished, but just enough for the moment. I am thinking of how I will draw the tassel because it has to look different to the hair—part of the cap, but different to the hair. I consciously press down a tiny bit harder with the pen as I decide that the lines of the tassel should be firmer than those of the hair. And what joy—this tiny bit of tassel that could be black—should I use this pen to shade in an area of dense black or should I wait? It is too strong a temptation to resist and I see the pen carefully block in the colour. Now a tiny bit of jet-black brings future areas of black to light. Yes, this will make sense. In observing the doll I look for more connections. The checked pattern on the skirt annoys me. How will my pen translate the gingham to the paper? I have used dots already to describe the lace, but more lines will be confusing. I procrastinate looking for some other detail that I can distract myself with, but there are none. The eyes are already overworked and the braid at the waist is enough. The skirt remains unresolved. I begin with dots tracing the direction of the patterned lines. Fine, I think—this will work. I use the dots to tell the form of the skirt—how the tight gathers at the waist billow out towards the floor and how the fabric is folded into a pleat that fans out to a curve. But still the dots do not look right—they are confused between pattern and form, but I have committed to this plan and it is not yet resolved. I persist with the dots and begin the horizontal directions of the pattern, all the time concentrating on the size and density of the dots lest they begin to look like shadow and shade. Frustration builds: this is not satisfying the image I have now formed in my head for this drawing. I begin another doll …

Left
Line drawing as a tool for reflection—costume doll from zigzag book
MK Michael

The dolls are in national costumes representative of two of our project partners. The act of the drawing is a deliberated attempt to construct a relationship with each of the cultures, acknowledging that this is ridiculous: the costume dolls are tourist artefacts and the intention appears to be that I can make a relationship with a culture through making a drawing of a souvenir. But then I feel very much a tourist within each country and within the research; and the relationship I have with each culture is very much that of a tourist.

As a research method, these drawings are dangerously near to "decorative research" rather than arts-based inquiry (Sullivan 2005: 61), but the intention in the act of drawing was to create a distance and gain a different perspective to a very specific tension. The act of making these drawings did not resolve the tensions of their inspiration. The act of making the drawings gave respite from the tension. These floating images were later embellished with inks and background flirtations. And then I was no longer hiding in the aesthetic connections and decisions of the drawing; rather these images were looking back at me. I had become a third doll—another souvenir in the culture of Project KNOWHOW.

Left and opposite page
Line drawing illustrations
from zigzag book
MK Michael



Opposite page
Data collection photograph
MK Michael

Research in the visual arts

Visual arts inquiry and visual arts research methods are located mostly within the field of visual arts practice and the polemic around visual arts practice as research. What is helpful to KNOWHOW is the idea of theorising art practice as transformative research (Sullivan, 2005: 93–7). As the notion of transformation is central to the aesthetic learning facilitated by the artist–teachers of Project KNOWHOW, it is appropriate that the research process may be a transformative experience for the participants and beneficiaries of the research. Sullivan (2005) proposes a framework for theorising visual arts practice within three traditional paradigms of inquiry—interpretivist, empiricist and critical—arguing that the explanatory and transformative theories of human learning can be found in the educative experience of the art-making studio. He goes on:

> "This [book] posits the view that art practice can be claimed to be a legitimate form of research and that approaches to inquiry can be located within the studio experience." (Sullivan 2005: 29)

Gray and Malins (2004) are also proponents of visual art practice as research and they provide useful ways of understanding how the visual nature of art practice can lead to research insights. Indeed, it is the ability to embrace the nature and value of the visual that is important to KNOWHOW methods and methodology. Capturing episodes of studio practice in digital photography is a key method of collecting KNOWHOW data. The use of images in research can be fraught with difficulty. Images, even more than text, can be open to ambiguity and misinterpretation. All images, and especially photographs, are constructed within particular contexts for specific purposes. We need to understand the contexts and purposes, to understand the content of the images.

Narrative inquiry

Like art-based inquiry, narrative inquiry has some roots in the work of John Dewey and the notion of experience. In their book, *Narrative inquiry: experience and story in qualitative research*, two Canadian scholars, Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly give a concise outline of the development of narrative inquiry from Dewey through the influences of the anthropologists Clifford Geertz and Mary Catherine Bateson, and the psychiatrist Robert Coles, among others. Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 19) argue that a narrative form of inquiry is the most appropriate form for studying educational experience because experience happens narratively.

Narrative inquiry is also a process of research that allows for ambiguity and positions the story of the participant's experience at the core of the research. The combination of fictional narratives derived from true accounts, with visual (re)structuring of text on the page, offers possibilities for the methods and outcomes of Project KNOWHOW.

Above
Researcher footprint photograph
MK Michael

Rising from the sandy southern coastline is Hjörleifshöfdi, always an important bearing for those approaching by sea. Crowned with the first snow of autumn, it stands out in sharp relief against the black sand.

soil could have given the strength to prevail. Patriotism is hardly an adequate term for describing the sentiment.

Thingvellir (Parliament Plains), the site of the early Legislature is a national shrine today — a hallowed ground where the founders charted a course, a millennium ago. Few words bespeak their vision better than the oft-quoted motto: *A land must be built with laws.* The place of that Assembly combines the stark and gentle in Iceland's nature — an apt symbol for this nation, its emotional pulse — today as in the past.

A related settlement in Greenland came to grief; the try for the North American continent was abortive, but the European roots transplanted to Iceland bore new fruit.

5

Above
Altered book collage
MK Michael

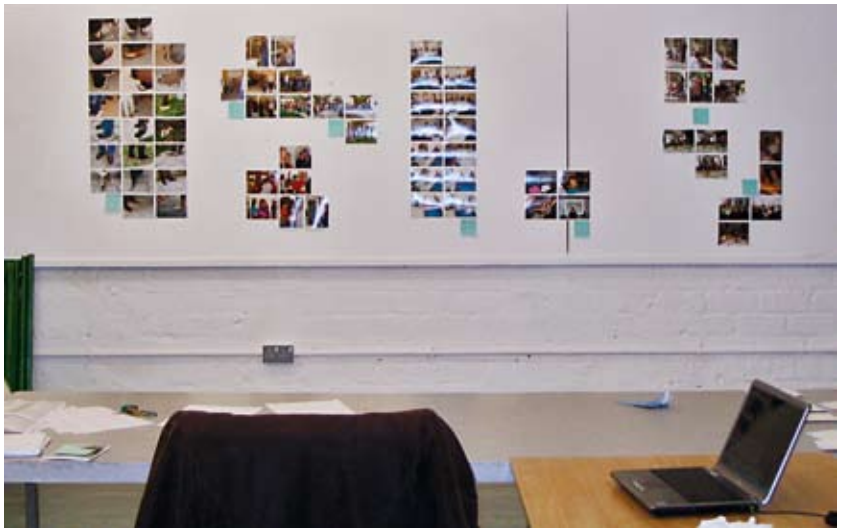
Photographs as data

Photographs have been taken throughout the KNOWHOW Project for various purposes: as documentary records of events, people and places, as field observations or tourist snapshots. From the beginning of the research process there was an awareness of the strengths and limitations of photographs as data. The researcher is not a professional photographer, but is experienced in basic digital photography. The images were taken with a digital camera and stored as digital JPEG files. Prints were made of selected images at various points in the project. The context in which a photograph was made varied from place to place, but the intention behind taking the photograph remained consistent within each research phase. Those in phase 1 and 2 were meant as a general record or impression of what was seen at each place; those in phase 3 were intended as a sequence of images recording tutor interaction with material and students.

Opposite page
Categorising photographs

"The images generated within this paradigm are acknowledged to be the unique result of the interaction of a certain researcher with a specific population using a particular medium at a precise moment in space and time."

(Prosser and Schwartz, 1998: 123, quoted in Newberry, 2001)



Above
Categorising photographs

Above
Collage as thinking
MK Michael

In the early phases of observation, the researcher took the photographs as a general aide-memoire to the handwritten field notes. The resulting images reflect the myriad of people, objects and surroundings encountered by the researcher in various locations on the field visits. As data these first photographs provide an eclectic record of what was seen, with a certain physical and emotional distance between the viewer and the subjects. In these first observation sessions the researcher was careful not to obstruct the regular work of the studio nor intrude on the work of an individual. Thus a significant proportion of these images depict groups of people. Photographs taken in later observation sessions are more intimate and physically closer to the subjects.

In the later phases the photographs are more deliberate constructions, with a greater awareness of documenting tutor interaction with student and materials, and providing information about the physical environment of the studio. This focused approach encouraged a series of images tightly contextualised within the timeframe of that particular studio episode. The digital nature of the photographs meant they could be presented immediately to the observed tutor and form the starting point for interview.

Certain images were used for different purposes during the research. A select few became significant in describing general themes pertinent across different institutions. These images were used again and again in different contexts, becoming synonymous with KNOWHOW and thus iconic.

Photo-elicitation

Semi-structured interviews using photo-elicitation (van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001: 46) were successfully conducted with two tutors during the third research phase. The interviews used digital images taken in the observed session as a starting point for conversation. Photo-elicitation triggered conversations that had little to do with the actual images, but were rich in material relevant to the study. The tutor being interviewed moved quickly into speaking about their past teaching and learning experiences, while viewing images of themselves teaching in the present day.

A group session with all the tutor participants used photo-elicitation as a focus in the fifth phase of fieldwork. This group session allowed the researcher to verify previous interpretations of the image in question and provided a form of triangulating the data found in the written field notes and interview transcripts. A further two interviews were conducted using workshop diaries as a starting point for discussion and one other interview was recorded as video during a studio session.

"These new meanings are tentative, representing moments of clarity but also blurred with unfinished or incomplete thoughts."

(Margaret Macintyre Latta, in Diaz and McKenna, 2004: 187)

Above and opposite page
Researcher photographs of studio teaching—used as a trigger for reflection

A World of Clashing Elements

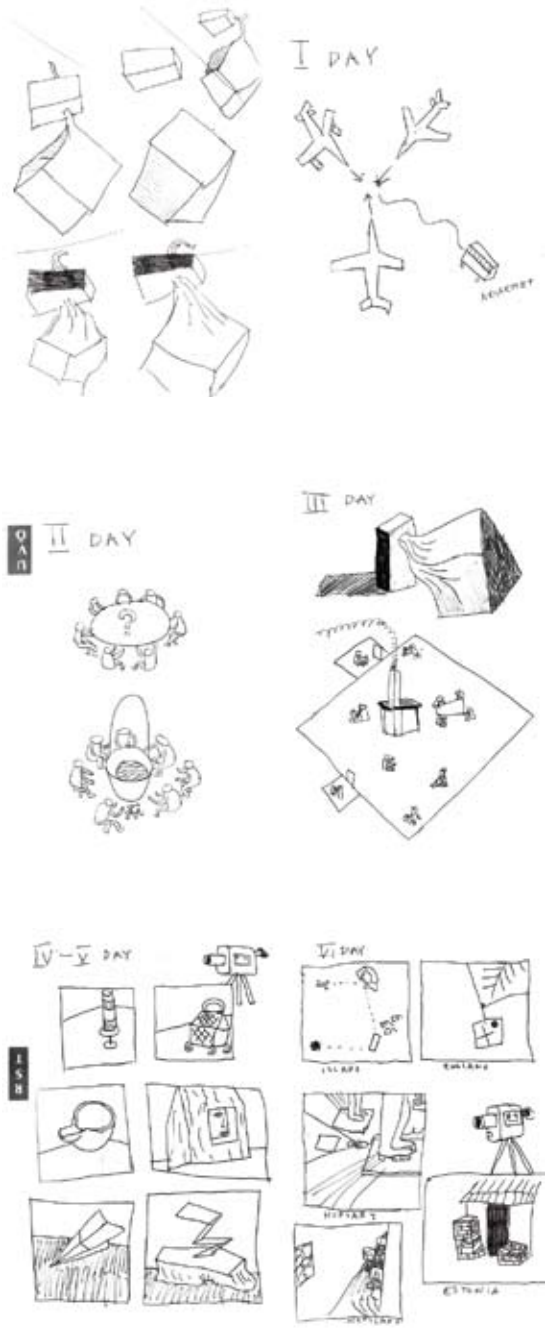
Research Education

[redacted] a winding [redacted] beaten track [redacted] ubiquitous [redacted] features [redacted] contrasts, clashing elements. [redacted] in plain view [redacted]

[redacted] speaking, [redacted] making [redacted] simplicity, [redacted] and [redacted] immediacy [redacted] profound [redacted] effects. [redacted] end.

13

Above
Altered book
MK Michael



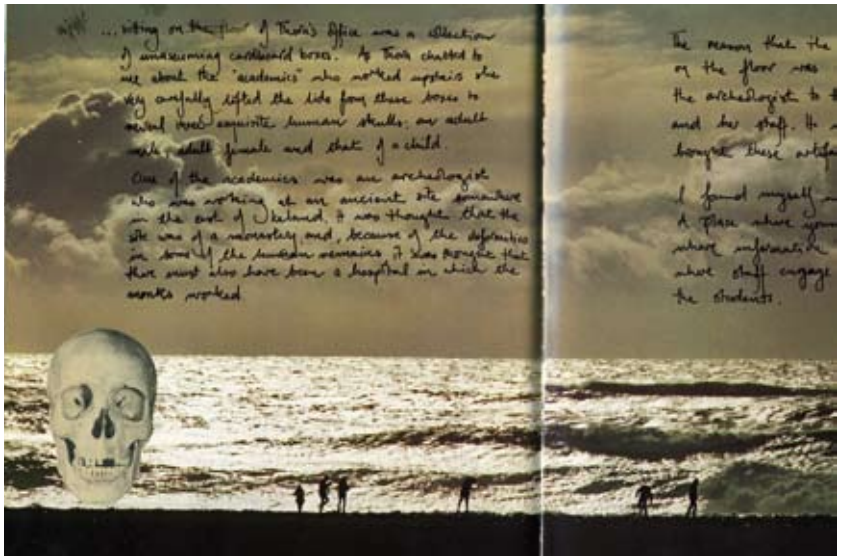
Opposite page
Visual diary, Urmas Puhkan,
Estonian Academy of the Arts

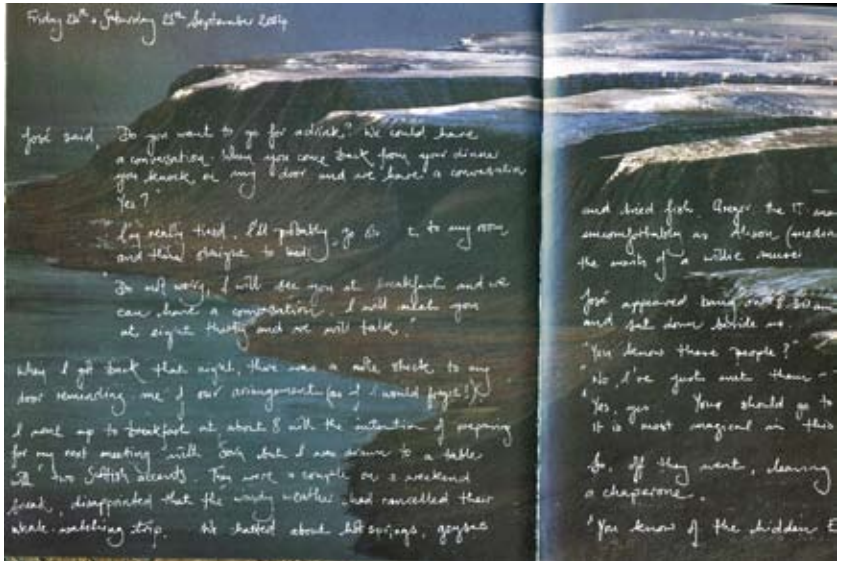
Diaries as data—reflective journals

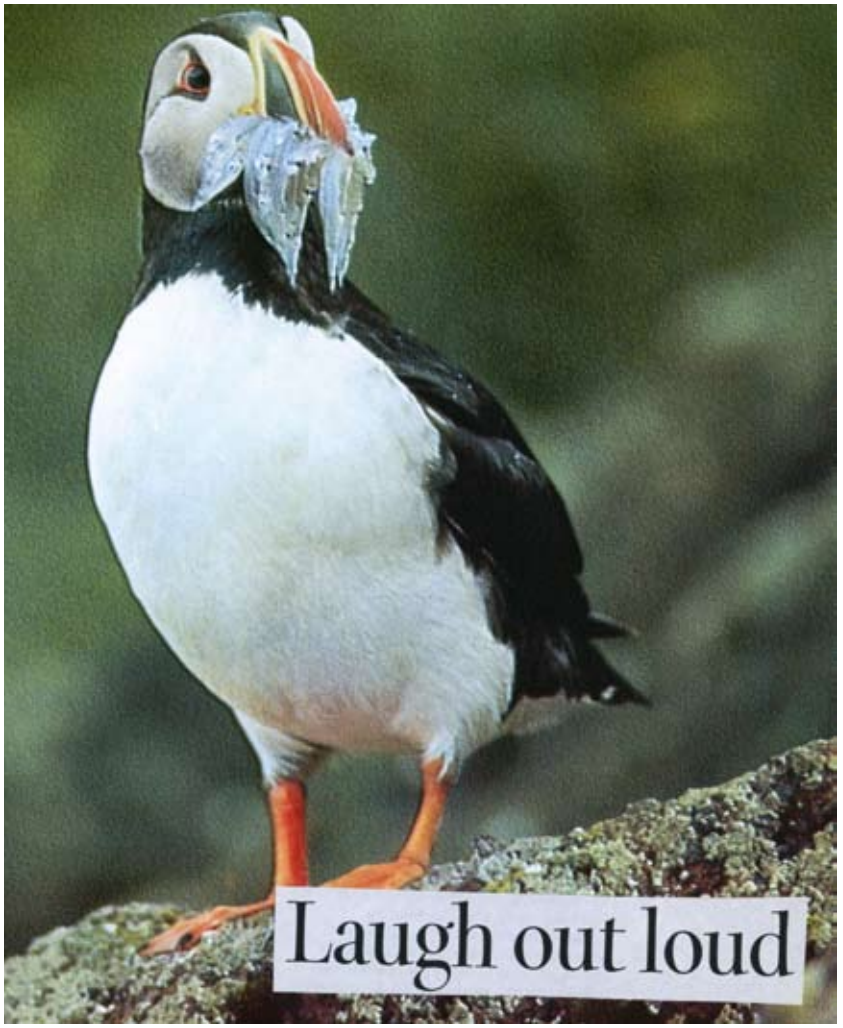
At different points of the project, tutors and the researcher kept a reflective journal recording their thinking. They could use any format with words and/or images helping to overcome the language barrier created.

Not all who kept a diary relinquished it to the researcher. This was an option open to all the tutor participants, but it means that conclusions drawn from the diaries cannot be said to representative of the group—only insightful into the thinking of individuals. However, the activity of recording thoughts and feelings for the research process was an important experience for all, regardless of whether that information became formal research data. Creating the journals can be an act of reflective practice—as creative and frustrating as any moment of teaching or art-making practice.

The researcher's diary was maintained meticulously in the first two phases and then more sporadically in the later phases. The researcher's diary is a tool to encourage objectivity: it is a place where subjective thoughts and feelings can be placed and reflected on, creating a physical and emotional distance from observations made in the field. The researcher's need for such a mediating tool seems to have waned as the project progressed and the research situations become more familiar.







Above and opposite page
Altered books as reflective journals
MK Michael

Collaborative events as fieldwork sites

The two KNOWHOW workshops, phases 2 and 5, were events in which the researcher was more participant than observer. For the first workshop in ICS, the researcher directed some of the tutor activities and then observed what happened. The structure of this first workshop was deliberately ill-defined, allowing tutors perhaps to assume responsibilities and roles different from their institutional remits.

All tutors participating in the workshop, with the exception of the host tutors at ICS, reported a deliberate change in their studio teaching as a consequence of their experiences in the workshop. These changes ranged from a reconsideration of studio space to make it more open (GSA) and a different approach to introducing plaster mould-making to students (CIA) to a critical re-evaluation on the role of the educator in the ceramic studio (RSVA & LHI) and the integration of animation into ceramic processes (EAA). These developments in studio teaching practice are all the more meaningful because they were not explicitly prompted by KNOWHOW. Each tutor or department independently incorporated an aspect of change as a direct result of the workshop event. The significance of this unexpected outcome contributed to the decision to create a second workshop that focused explicitly on theorising the studio practice of the tutors amongst the supportive ethos of their KNOWHOW peers.

In the second workshop at EAA, the researcher was involved in all the tutor activities, directing tutors to a line of thinking rather than observing their practice. The purpose of each workshop for the researcher was different. In the first, the purpose was to continue observation of studio practice, but in a different physical and cultural context—a form of research test-bed for the themes emerging out of phase 1. In the second workshop, the purpose was to create an environment where the group of tutors could reflect on and challenge their ways of thinking about studio teaching and so direct the final stage of the research. This second workshop also began the process of "leaving the field": drawing conclusions with the tutors and preparing for the closing events.

Opposite page
Researcher field notebooks

Glacier expeditions can be hazardous and are undertaken only in summer. There are the ever-present crevasses on the moving parts of the glaciers – and icy mist can block visibility.

Above
Altered book line drawing
MK Michael

Leaving the field

Within the EAA workshop was the timely but deliberate use of expressions like 'evaluation', 'feedback' and 'final outcomes'. The repeated use of these words made the ending of the data collection stage explicit. The conclusion of this stage means that there will be no more formal visits to the institutions and so the period of tutor studio input is ended. The EAA workshop served to openly recognise this ending and to thank people as a group while looking forward to the closing events of the last partner meeting and the concluding symposium in April 2007.

A formal, explicit withdrawal from the field, and eventually from the project, was necessary to bring the project to an end, physically and emotionally, for all involved.

"The interpretation of works of art not only enables one to construct understandings about them, but enables individuals to interpret other situations where life's circumstances are uncertain or unclear."
(Efland, 2002: 161)

Opposite page
Collage from altered book
MK Michael

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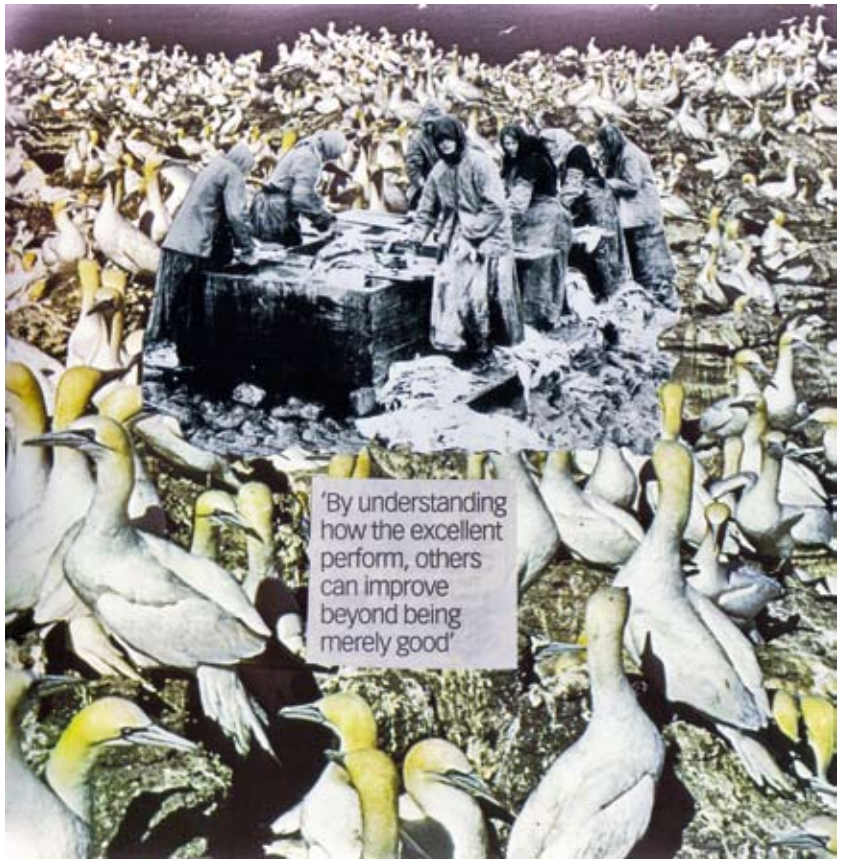
(Efland, 2002: 161)



This small book has offered a snapshot of an approach to educational inquiry that places a value on the aesthetic experience and outcome as legitimate modes of inquiry. These are not perfect methods and they are partnered with other qualitative techniques, but they are designed to bring about a particular understanding of the researcher experience and that of the partner–participants in their journey towards making and sharing research in teaching and learning.

Above
Researched line drawings as an aide-memoire

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KNOWHOW Partners

Reykjavik School of Visual Art, Reykjavik, Iceland
www. myndlistaskolinn.is

Iceland Academy of the Arts, Reykjavik, Iceland
www. lhi.is

Estonian Academy of the Arts, Tallinn, Estonia
www. artun.ee

International Ceramic Studio, Kecskemét, Hungary
www.icshu.org

Cumbria Institute of the Arts, Carlisle, United Kingdom
(University of Cumbria from September 2007)
www. cumbria.ac.uk

Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, United Kingdom
www. gsa.ac.uk

EU Leonardo da Vinci Programme
http:// ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/leonardo/index_en.html