



## Reimagining the ‘third space’: Writing strategies for research in the creative arts

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### Abstract

This paper examines the experience of a group of international master of creative art students writing an exegesis paper and the multi-focused writing support offered to them. Using the ‘third space’ (Bhabha, 1994) as a heuristic (Moustakas, 1990), this paper presents an understanding of the emergent writing process underpinning visual and performing arts practice-led research methods in academia. Drawing on Benzie’s (2015) different ‘third space’ interpretations, this paper examines the in-between experience of students, academics and language advisors immersed in practice-led research. The paper asks how can the ‘third space’ paradigm help frame our understandings of the multiple parties involved in the writing of a MCA exegesis? In addition to the work by Paltridge (2004) on exegesis writing and further research on doctoral theses in the visual and performing arts (Paltridge et al., 2012), this paper’s main aim is to further illuminate this less understood but evolving genre, as well as show how students’ emergent writing processes can be encouraged and supported.

**Key words:** third space, practice-led research, creative arts, exegesis writing, reflective writing

### Introduction

Studies examining the writing experience of international post-graduate creative art students are rare. Benzie (2015) notes that research on the experiences of international students often focus on identity and argues for further work examining how particular cohorts handle various transitions. This paper seeks to address this imbalance. As a language and learning advisor (LLA) and arts practitioner who has advised on writing

in the creative arts for many years, I began examining research that theorized how to best support this cohort of students. The 'third space' paradigm (Bhabha, 1990, 1994) draws on notions of 'becoming' and tacit ways of viewing the world. These descriptions aptly convey the experiences of international students as they transition throughout their courses, and similarly, underpin arts practice and writing in the arts.

As such, the third space seems to bridge these various liminal spaces and metaphorically offers a way to support and understand emergent experiences. This paper draws on my practitioner experience as an LLA working with a group of seven international creative art students, studying the post-graduate, coursework degree, the Master of Creative Arts, at Deakin University in 2018. The paper evaluates the writing support offered to this second year cohort and proposes that the 'third space' can be a framework that enables a way of understanding the tacit processes of art making and writing in the creative arts. As Benzie (2015, p. 17) notes, many international students may be in a "liminal space, where they engage in a complex process of becoming". Understanding the nature of 'becoming' while using this 'third space' has the potential to empower students by providing an understanding and framework through which to speak and write about their experiences and creative practice. Furthermore, by providing a common ground of understanding, the 'third space' has the potential to assist with communicating expectations among students, academics, supervisors and LLAs. The paper seeks to answer the research question: How can the 'third space' paradigm, help frame our understandings of the multiple parties involved in the experience of writing the MCA exegesis?

Four key themes structure this paper. Firstly, an overview of issues related to writing in the creative arts and the LLA's experience with this particular MCA cohort is explored. Secondly, a review of the 'third space' and how this concept has been applied in different research frameworks is examined. Having established a background, I then relate 'third space' qualities to five scenarios that make up this MCA writing experience. These include:

- a) The international student cohort
- b) Practice-led research methodology (PLR)

- c) The exegesis and writing in the creative arts
- d) Communication between relationships: the academics, supervisors students and language advisor
- e) The language advisor's practice that supports the transformative process across these domains

The fourth and final key area concludes with emergent themes and recommendations.

### **1. Overview: Writing in the creative arts and LLA practitioner observations.**

Postgraduate writing in the creative arts has been long established at the university level but there continues to be a lack of awareness and benighted ideas that surround the process, structure and strategies that this writing task requires. Writing and practicing in the creative arts requires reflective *and* reflexive thinking and writing strategies that enable the exploration of implicit and tacit processes. Jarvis (2007, p. 204) suggests higher education's accountability lies in an ability to "construct a dialogue between theory and practice," and that perhaps art practices' tacit qualities lie in the "binding together of theory and practice so that one cannot be distinguished from the other." Drawing on Carr (1986), who emphasizes the importance of self-reflection, Jarvis (2007, p. 204) calls for a return to self-reflection as a valid category of knowledge so that theory and practice can be viewed as "mutually constitutive and dialectically related." While these references are over ten years old, reflective and reflexive thinking and writing styles are still not explicitly taught as part of 'ways of knowing' in the arts curriculum. Thus, awareness about the relationship between art practice and writing continues to be pedestrian and problematic.

Deakin University's Art and Performance Research information site (2018, para 3) states researchers will:

... generate knowledge through creative, critical and theoretical inquiries, which are conceptualized through ideas about embodied cognition, material logics, curatorial rethinking, and by thinking through making.

This paper focuses on how learning advisors can support students' *thinking through making* and how to best capture this experience and knowledge *in writing*. Bringing one's art practice into writing can be daunting for the artist in training at university, especially when an artist's primary artistic 'language' is expressed through other senses, such as the hand, eye or ear - that is - perceiving through material such as paint, a camera, film, a musical instrument, or performance by using one's body, as in dance or drama. This issue is compounded for international students, for whom English may be their second or third language.

Given the wide range of art forms available to students in the MCA, writing may need to demonstrate an understanding of various media, depending the student's project.

These could be a combination of

- Performance, dance, drama, theatre, production
- Public and installation art
- Visual fine art: Painting, printmaking, sculpture, multimedia, photography
- Screen and design: Film, television, animation and design studies
- Music improvisation/classical / composition

Writing about one's creative project is somewhat different from writing about art, or structuring a classic visual analysis. These forms of art writing tend to have their own rules and methods. Writing about one's own practice in a university requires an integrated approach allowing the "artist to develop into a reflective practitioner in their chosen medium" (Cox 2015, p. 3).

There have been many studies and books written on research in the arts and practice-led research methods over the past 20 years, particularly as the fine arts have risen in prominence in the university's research culture. Paltridge et al. (2012, p.1) note that the visual and performing arts doctorate is a genre "still in the process of development", and "forces for change and the forces for stability play out ... [as] non-traditional fields of academic study negotiate its entry into the academy." As such, exegesis writing at the MCA level is still a little-known process and genre. Many 'how to' books outline strategies and templates that follow quantitative and qualitative frameworks. Literature identifying alternate methodologies such as

“messy” methods (Law, 2004, p.6), or experimental processes (Schwab, 2012) does exist, but research describing the reflective thinking and writing processes required to write between art practice and theory is scant. This is especially important if the writer is expected to adopt a subjective position, yet also move beyond examining the immediate self to capture the problem-solving process, as well as consider how the materiality of the art practice reconciles the process of *thinking through making*.

Deakin University’s MCA project guidelines state, “the project is the core focus of the practice-led research” - *not the writing* (my italics). Furthermore, the project ...may build on, contribute and or critique knowledge in the field, (or multiple fields) through the creation, process, production, or reflections related to one or more aspects of the technical, artistic or professional practice; it may take the form of an animation, an exhibition, a film, a dance production, sound work or software design; it may be individual, multiplatform, multidisciplinary, or collaborative (Deakin University, School of Communication and Creative Arts, 2018).

The guidelines also advise the purpose of the exegesis is to:

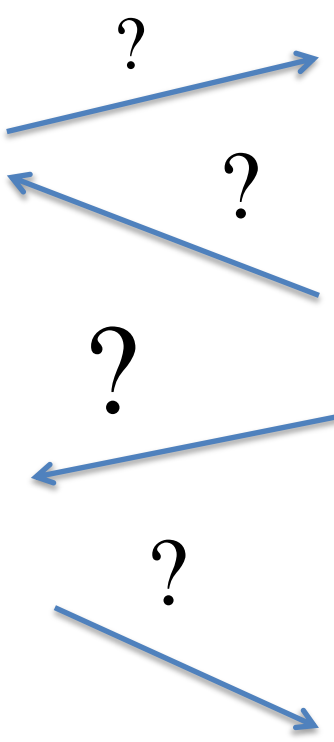
- Connect theory with practice
- Illuminate the practice through writing
- Provide evidence of the practice
- Make clear statements about the relationship between theoretical, technical, socio-political and /or cultural frameworks
- Identify methods that contribute to creating the project
- Reflexivity is part of the writing as a form of analysis
- Explain and explore the technical and or conceptual elements of the project thus grounding the project in the broader field of literature, art practitioners and art practices.

Therefore, the aim of the exegesis is to situate the creative project within a context and field of inquiry. However, often the relationship between project and exegesis is not stable, changing as the creative project develops. So how might the concept of the ‘third space’ with notions of ‘in-between’ represent the space and process between the

creative project and the writing? And how might the 'third space' be used to understand and visualize this relationship?

Table 1 presents the guidelines for the MCA tasks - the creative practice and the exegesis:

Table 1. *Deakin's guidelines for creative project and exegesis*

| Creative project  | Third Space  | Exegesis writing  |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project is the core focus of the Practice-Led Research.</li> <li>• May build on, contribute and or critique knowledge in the field, (or multiple fields) through the creation, process, production, reflections related to one or more aspects of the technical, artistic or professional practice.</li> <li>• The project may take the form of an animation, an exhibition, a film, a dance production, sound work or software design.</li> <li>• It may be multiplatform, multidisciplinary, and /or collaborative if relevant to the practice-led inquiry.</li> </ul> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect theory with practice.</li> <li>• Illuminate the practice through writing.</li> <li>• Provide evidence of the practice.</li> <li>• Make clear statements about the relationship between theoretical, technical, socio-political and /or cultural frameworks.</li> <li>• Methodological frameworks selected that contribute to creating the project.</li> <li>• Reflexivity is part of the writing as a form of analysis</li> <li>• Explain and explore the technical and or conceptual elements of the project thus grounding the project in the broader field of literature, art practitioners and art practices.</li> </ul> |

I propose the middle section - where there is a constant exchange and feedback loop between project and writing - constitutes a 'third space' - for it is here, in an in between, liminal space, that much of the *thinking through making and writing* is explored by students.

## 2. Third space: background literature

Background to the ‘third space’ is useful because “different interpretations of this cultural third space exist” (Benzie, 2015, p. 20). Later variations have strayed from its original meaning and applied in different research frameworks for different purposes. Initially, the concept seems to have been coined by post-colonial theorist, Homi Bhabha, around 1990. As English writes,

This practitioner en/acts hybridity, which is described by Bhabha (1990) as being “precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them.... the third space practitioner strategizes and shifts to meet the needs of the situation. (2005, p. 87)

As such, it can be a space that supports growth, change and empowerment. The ‘third space’ also recognizes the way we work as language advisors – strategizing and adapting, to meet the various needs of students. The provision of research and writing support has been important for this group of international students where English language skills - written and oral – were of various standards. English (2005, p. 86) notes that in a “field flooded with practitioners of every sort – intuitive, deliberative ... reflective practitioners, contemplative practitioners - there is a need to understand one of the more politically astute practitioners, the ‘third space’ practitioner, who pushes the existing boundaries ... and resists polarization, binaries and labels.” This paper extends this space to include spaces where the art practice meets writing, where student meets teacher, and where language adviser connects with curriculum, art form, student and academic.

Many theorists have used the concept of the ‘third space’ to expose and explore hidden power structures. While drawing on this strategy, I also use the ‘third space’ to expose the in-between state and /or different states of becoming for the MCA participants in this experience. The implicit spaces within each area are often spaces and positions from which it is difficult to speak, write, or voice what is occurring. I am proposing this concept might be a way for students, academics and LLAs to raise awareness about the tacit processes involved in all facets of the art-making, writing and communication processes. As my reflection on this case study deepened, I found

the third space paradigm a useful lens for understanding, verbalizing and visualizing the tacit nature of art practice and writing, the dialectic support between supervisor and LLA and further, a personal professional space where LLA practitioners can reflect on their practice.

### ***2.1 Defining third space***

From Bhabha's (1990, 1994) post-colonial theories expressing spaces of resistance, the concept has evolved and expanded, yet maintains a dynamic quality of transformation. Table 2 below represents a number of authors who have used 'third space' frameworks. It is by no means a complete 'literature review', but represents a snapshot of how the concept has been adapted over time. In this paper, I am principally drawing on Bhabha, Benzie, English and Bretag to establish the qualities that tease out how this theory applies to language advising. This underpins how the 'third space' might then be understood and applied in creative arts frameworks:



Table 2. Key Third space theorists

| Key Authors  | Situated in  | Key terms and strategies used to describe and enact third spaces  |
|--|--|---|
| Edward W. Soja (1980)  | Cultural geography   | "Spaces made up of physical and social dimensions, but are also potentially transformed through the actions of people who inhabit them." (Garraway (2017, describing Soja, 1980).   |
| Homi Bhabha (1990, 1994)   | Post-colonial theory   | "...a site of resistance to more dominant, often colonial, cultures" (Garraway, 2017, p. 73).<br>Emergent; identity; fluid and open ended by nature.  |
| Gayatri Spivak (1990, 1992, 1999)  | Post colonial writer (English, 2005, p.87);  | "...attention to power structures, essentialism and inequality; they (Spivak & Khan) bring to the table a specific interest in race, diaspora, colonization... interest in probing notions of the third space, hybridity, liminality and interstices; an attempt to engage in more dynamic conversations of paradoxical and contradictory ways that identity has too often been coded" (English, 2005, p. 87).  |
| Shahnaz Kahn (1998, 2000)  | Women and gender studies; immigrants   | Becoming: <i>To be in a space of always becoming</i> " (English, 2005, p. 91 citing Kahn, 2000, p. 129).  |
| A. Liddicoat, C. Crozet & J. Lo Bianco (1999);<br><br>Gutierrez 2008<br>Kramsch 2009 | Education<br><br>Intercultural interactions  | "Understanding cultural space in language education classroom and more generally in higher education" (Benzie, 2015, p. 20). "...a hybrid space" (Briguglio, 2014, p. 28 referring to Lo Bianco et al 1999).<br><br>"...refers to the 'third place or space as a point of merger of two or more realities, which create a third reality" (Briguglio, 2014). A dialectic exchange.   |
| Celia Whitchurch (2008)  | Professional staff identity; blended roles with academic domains.  | Blurring boundaries; fluidity of identity; moving laterally across boundaries to create new professional spaces, knowledge and relationships.   |
| Leona, M. English (2005)   | Social justice; power structures, essentialism; inequity; international adult education; identity, post colonialism; local and global contexts | Draws on Bhabha, Spivak and Khan;<br>Third space qualities - hybridity, liminality and interstices.<br>"... the third space practitioner subverts the old by using it in a particular way." (English, 2005, p. 90)<br>Positions "... radical third space position as a standpoint for social justice..." (English, 2005, p.86). "... the capacity to act and be as third-space practitioner who pushes the existing boundaries...and resists polarization, binaries and labels" (2005, p.86). |

| Key Authors              | Situated in  | Key terms and strategies used to describe and enact third spaces  |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Tracey Bretag (2006)     | International student education                    | “...possibility for a negotiated re-imagining of cultural identity” (2006). Transformation rather than transmission.  |
| Carmela Briguglio (2014) | Higher Education; interdisciplinary collaboration. | “...a space where academics can come together to explore teaching and learning ideas ... to create new ideas, strategies and activities that would be difficult, if not impossible for each to create in their own ‘space... refers to room for interdisciplinary (ID) collaboration and its concrete and positive results in terms of teaching and learning” (Briguglio, 2014, p. 28). |
| Helen Benzie (2015)      | International students; postgraduate coursework    | “...students may be in a third space, a liminal space where they engage in a complex process of becoming...required to negotiate a world shaped by different, and often conflicting discourses” (Benzie, 2015).   |

Table 2 above represents a review of ‘third space’ theorists and shows how this paradigm has been adapted for different purposes. For example, Benzie addresses transition pathways for international students seeing them “in an in-between space, having completed study in their home country and not yet fully inducted into an Australian higher education institution” (Benzie, 2015, p. 19). This process of ‘becoming’ is a useful way to think about the various transitions students are experiencing. This has implications for appreciating a student’s sense of identity, developing agency, and capacity to reflect, in writing, as a creative practitioner and practice-led researcher.

Benzie also traces the dissemination of Bhabha’s third space ideas from intercultural situations, most often with immigrants via Khan (1998), and intercultural workers via English (2005). In education, Benzie writes, the ‘third space’ has been deployed as a means of understanding the cultural space that learners inhabit, in both the language classroom and higher education more generally. Contradictions exist in the literature about the ‘third space’ and how it is interpreted. Benzie suggests these contradictions aid discussions and can be enriched by further examining the experiences of particular cohorts of students (Benzie, 2015, p. 20). Similarly, this paper builds on this suggestion, by examining an international creative arts cohort.

Bretag (2006, p. 981) draws on Bhabha (1994), citing the ‘third space’ as a way of reimagining the traditional teacher-student hierarchical relationship. In her study, linguistic features of “positive politeness” in email exchanges that “claim common ground” and share “intimate information” are characteristics that indicate movement towards a transcendent ‘third space’ relationship.

Bretag also draws on English (2002) who writes:

The construction and reconstruction of identity, to the fluidity of space, to the space where identity is not fixed... [It] is where we negotiate identity and become neither this nor that but our own. ‘Third’ is used to denote the place where negotiation takes place, where identity is constructed and reconstructed, where life in all its ambiguity is played out (English, 2002, cited in Bretag, 2006, p. 982).

Bretag insists on the *mutual development* that occurs in relationship or dialogue between teacher and student, emphasizing, “[I]t is a matter of mutual transformation rather than transmission...of knowledge” (2006, p. 982) that activates the power of the ‘third space.’

## 2.2 Key qualities of the third space

Key third space qualities emerging from the literature include:

- Tacit, liminal, ambiguous space, one that denotes becoming, in between, change, hybridity, power, emergence and dialectical exchange or processes.
- Transcendence and transformation rather than transmission.

Tacit and liminal are terms frequently referred to in art /writing literature. Tacit derives from Latin *tacere* meaning to be silent, and in art writing has come to mean something understood or implied without being stated (Jarvis 2007). Liminal comes from the Latin root, *limen*, which means ‘threshold.’ The liminal space is the ‘crossing over’ space – a space where you have left something behind, yet you are *not yet fully* in something else. Hence, the ‘third space’ acts as a bridge. A bridge connects, provides a link, spans distance, and can be a place to meet, move across or traverse. In this way, the ‘third space’ articulates the space between art practice and exegesis writing (See Table 3 below):

Table 3: *Third space as a bridging space in the creative arts.*


| Creative project  | <br>Bridging Practices  | Exegesis writing  |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project is the core focus of the Practice-Led Research.</li> <li>• May build on, contribute and or critique knowledge in the field, (or multiple fields) through the creation, process, production, reflections related to one or more aspects of the technical, artistic or professional practice.</li> <li>• The project may take the form of an animation, an exhibition, a film, a dance production, sound work or software design.</li> <li>• It may be multiplatform, multidisciplinary, and /or collaborative if relevant to the practice-led inquiry.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploration</li> <li>• Transformation</li> <li>• Developing a sense of agency and identity</li> <li>• Integrated reflection</li> <li>• Emergent</li> <li>• Becoming</li> <li>• In-between</li> <li>• Hybrid</li> <li>• Liminal</li> <li>• Tacit</li> <li>• Power</li> <li>• Mutual development</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect theory with practice.</li> <li>• Illuminate the practice through writing.</li> <li>• Provide evidence of the practice.</li> <li>• Make clear statements about the relationship between theoretical, technical, socio-political and /or cultural frameworks.</li> <li>• Methodological frameworks selected that contribute to creating the project.</li> <li>• Reflexivity is part of the writing as a form of analysis</li> <li>• Explain and explore the technical and or conceptual elements of the project thus grounding the project in the broader field of literature, art practitioners and art practices.</li> </ul> |

Table 3 illustrates the third space qualities that are positioned in-between *and* connect art practice, theory and writing. Identifying and explicitly naming the emergent qualities of this space have the potential to empower students, academics and LLAs, by unifying understanding about the processes they are all immersed in. This is particularly important when working with international students, and other artists who are in unfamiliar territory, as they develop their own autonomy, agency, language proficiency and identity.

### 3. Identifying ‘third space’ qualities in the MCA exegesis writing experience

This section presents five ‘third space’ scenarios that made up this MCA writing experience.

### ***3.1 International student cohort and demographics***

This group comprised seven international students studying the Master of Creative Arts in 2018:

- A comedian from China
- An animator from China
- A photographer and installation artist from Japan
- A visual drawing artist from China
- A multi-media artist from Thailand
- Two filmmakers from Turkey and Peru.

The students were in their second year before I became involved in assisting them with their research and writing skills development. They had received no targeted support prior to this and had limited understanding about writing in relation to practice-led research. In fact, many of them did not understand this term until much later.

Many of the students' project themes addressed social inequalities occurring in their home or host countries. For instance, one student explored the international student experience through drawings and installations and another through film. A number of students were engaged in confronting issues such as the capacity to be heard or silenced in their country. One visual artist focused on the poaching of endangered black panthers in Thailand. Another student was moved by the lack of compassion that fellow human beings were displaying towards each other. In this case, the student cited the experience of a young man who reached out to help an aged person after they had accidentally fallen to the ground. This elderly person alleged the young man had caused the accident and later took him to court, whereupon the young man was convicted. The student claimed this incident had stopped people in his country helping each other for fear that they too would be accused, fined and sent to jail. This student produced an animation, using a nostalgic steampunk aesthetic, as a way of harkening back to more thoughtful, charitable times, in the hope we can still care for fellow human beings in distress.

### **3.2 Identifying practice-led research (PLR) methods**

The second scenario explores the third space qualities of practice-led research (PLR) and how this approach differs from other research methodologies. As the term implies, PLR is *led by the practice*, by the questions thrown up in working with materials, ideas, theories, tools, and by the ways they are solved or resolved. These are liminal and tacit spaces, which can be tricky to pin down. However, one way of declaring attributes is by stating *what it is not*. This leads to making comparisons between different methodologies: quantitative, qualitative and practice-led research methods. The following Table 4 compares quantitative, qualitative and practice-led research methodology frameworks in order to make visible the various assumptions that accompany different methodological approaches:

Table 4. Comparison of qualitative, quantitative and practice-led research methods.

| Quantitative   | Qualitative   | Practice-Led Research  |
|--|---|--|
| <i>Assumptions</i>   |   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facts and data have objective reality.</li> <li>• Variables can be measured and identified.</li> <li>• Viewed from an outsider's perspective</li> <li>• Innovative, yet historically constructed.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reality is socially constructed.</li> <li>• Variables complex, interwoven and difficult to measure.</li> <li>• Events viewed from an informant's or other specified perspective.</li> <li>• Dynamic quality to life, often context dependent.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reality is personally and creatively constructed.</li> <li>• Variables complex, interwoven and difficult to measure.</li> <li>• Events viewed from an informant's perspective.</li> <li>• Dynamic, interactive and innovative quality to life.</li> </ul>   |
| <i>Outcomes</i>  |   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prediction</li> <li>• Generalization</li> <li>• Causal Explanation</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretation</li> <li>• Contextualization</li> <li>• Understanding the perspective of others.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A creative artifact, theorized practice.</li> <li>• Contextualization of practice.</li> <li>• Understanding the perspective of self and others.</li> </ul>  |
| <i>Methods</i>   |   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Testing &amp; measuring- numerical data.</li> <li>• Commences with a hypothesis and a theory.</li> <li>• Characterized by manipulation and control.</li> <li>•</li> <li>• Deductive and experimental (from the general to the particular).</li> <li>• Statistical analysis</li> <li>• Statistical reporting</li> <li>• Planned and predetermined method.</li> <li>• Objective representation and discussion of results</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are many qualitative methods.</li> <li>• Commences with a research situation.</li> <li>• Characterized by emergence and portrayal.</li> <li>•</li> <li>• Inductive and naturalistic (from the particular to the general).</li> <li>• Data emerging from the research process – theory arising from analysis of data or recognized as implicit in the data.</li> <li>• The method may also be emergent.</li> <li>• Interpretative discussion of results – hypothesizing.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arising from, and predetermined by creative practice.</li> <li>• Commences with a problem.</li> <li>• Characterized by emergence, construction and individual expression.</li> <li>• Inductive</li> <li>• Data emerging from the practice.</li> <li>• Theorizing of practice is emergent and often dependent on practice.</li> <li>• Method either determined by emerging practice or pre-planned.</li> </ul> |



| Quantitative   | Qualitative  | Practice-Led Research  |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Third person impersonal writing.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Third and first person writing.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflective discussion of practice within the context of theory – hypothesizing and foreshadowing of future practice or new propositions.</li> <li>• Third and first person writing – sometimes personal.</li> </ul> |
| <i>Role of the researcher</i>  |  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher applies designed and formal instruments.</li> <li>• Endeavors to be detached.</li> <li>• Objective approach</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher is engaged directly in the research process.</li> <li>• Researcher being part of the research process, that is, the data is collected using participant observation.</li> <li>• Acknowledges role on the research process.</li> <li>• Object and subjective elements in the approach.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher’s experience is relevant to the research process and acknowledged.</li> <li>• Researcher engages in reflection on own practice which is situated within the theories and practices of others.</li> </ul> |
| <i>Review of the literature</i>  |  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research situated in existing theory and practices before the research begins.</li> <li>• Methodology is situated within existing theory.</li> <li>• Emerging knowledge is situated within existing theory as research develops.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methodology is situated within existing theory.</li> <li>• Emerging knowledge is situated within existing theory as research develops.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice may be initially situated within personal and other existing practices.</li> <li>• Emergent knowledge situated within existing theory and practices as research develops.</li> </ul>                       |

(\*Adapted from practice-led writing resources initially developed by E. Colbert, 2010).

I used this representation as a way to explore and discuss with students the points of difference between PLR methods and other methods in the humanities and sciences. It enabled me to reveal how PLR departed from traditional structures. For example, QUAN methods typically used testing and measuring with the collection of numerical data, while QUAL research can use many different methods - from phenomenology to grounded theory, narrative to case study, action research to ethnography. In contrast, PLR arises from creative practice; it commences with a problem and is characterized by emergence, construction and individual or group expression. As such, it is with this in mind that PLR can be seen to connect with 'third space' qualities via themes of transformation and emergence.

### ***3.3 Exegesis writing in the creative arts***

MCA students are required to write a 4000 word exegesis, a document that situates the student's creative project within a context, reports on the practice-led methodology and reflects on the processes and problem solving encountered. It is a process that works from the unknown to the known; that is, it is often underpinned by a hunch or gut feeling, before the direction becomes clear. As such, the conceptual and the material inquiry is often said to be 'led by the practice'. An understanding of this approach often needs to be unraveled, particularly if students do not understand what is meant by 'practice-led' or even writing about *your practice*.

The exegesis is worth 20% of the student's final mark, and the material artefact or project makes up 80%. Therefore theoretically, if a student did exceptionally well in the practice component, he or she could pass their MCA without actually passing the written component. While I am not advocating for a change in the ratio, the low % does have implications for how the written component is valued, particularly if a student struggles with conceptualizing and articulating what they are doing and why, in English. Consequently, this lesser emphasis on the written component can result in student apathy, indifference, distress, or a vague comprehension about requirements.

A further issue is created for academics and supervisors as they wrestle with imparting conceptual ideas and theory, discipline language, exegesis structure, and the value of writing an exegesis in English - *alongside what is considered the more important focus - the art practice*. Supervisors often say to their students (who have repeated to me), that “the most important thing is the practice, the practice comes first...”. As a result, in instances such as this, students are given a clear message about the secondary nature of the written component, which is often coupled by another mixed message for the student - that writing the paper is an important and valuable experience. Working within this tension, I too can then feel slightly bewildered when advocating for the importance of writing the exegesis. This experience can be extremely valuable and lift not only the level of inquiry but also the overall quality of the exegesis. Presently, in many ways, it is a mixed field of competing concerns, with a format that is not set in stone. Might it be possible to consider *where* these edges meet, as a common, ‘third space’ – and hence make discussing the value of writing more visible? Perhaps in doing so, both learners and LLAs, alongside the academics, will gain a deeper understanding of how the exegesis contributes to understanding more transparent.

While students may be taught ‘research methods’, they are not taught how to write about what they are engaged in. My experience is that teaching students *how* to reflect on art practice and theory is rare. This has both benefits and drawbacks. The advantages are, it leaves the student artist / writer open to develop their own voice, language, style and structure. This can be empowering if the student has adequate skills and confidence, especially when experimental writing is encouraged. Drawbacks can be viewed from a number of angles. For example, if a student has little understanding of how to write about their work and has not researched how others have done this (not just academic examples, which are often difficult to source, but artists speaking and writing about their ways of making), it is especially difficult for them to know where to begin or what needs to be accounted for. If a writing framework or model is not offered to novice students, then the potential to learn from this valuable ‘third space’ experience is lost for both student and audience.

There is another misconception about writing in the arts. From an art history and artists' point of view, writing about one's methods, process and personal techniques has traditionally been steeped in a history of secrecy - "hermetically sealed" (Jarvis, 2007, p. 202). Often the art experience or object is spoken of in terms of reverence, awe or revelation. What is not often spoken about is the actualities of practice, which, as Jarvis notes, "are often mundane, monotonous and repetitive" (2007, p. 203). If the exegesis is to illuminate the practice, it needs to give a view from the inside. The literature argues for a recovery of self-reflection as a valid category of knowledge, so that theory and practice can be viewed as mutually related. Trying to identify how PLR departs from other research methods was, at times, difficult for this cohort but some contextualization occurred when listening to other well-known artists speak about their work. Doing so helped students to identify the artist's voice and the methods they employed.

#### ***3.4. Communication among participants: academics, supervisors, students & LLAs***

The fourth scenario refers to the cohort of participants involved in the language support offered and includes the communication and relationships developed between academics, supervisors, students and language advisors. As a study support service, we have previously run programs independent of faculty requests - offering skills and strategies for a 'perceived' student need. However, this experience was unique in that I, as a language and learning advisor, was invited by the Head of the MCA program to be involved. This academic was integrally engaged in discussing the cohort's issues, content to be covered, and the conceptual and language barriers that needed to be addressed. Joint planning developed into an ongoing collaboration, with some supervisors attending the introductory research methods sessions and subsequent group writing sessions in the students' final semester. These workshops were also complemented with 1-1 sessions as the need arose. Communication with academics was at times disjointed, with the usual misunderstandings about 'fixing up the paper'. However, many interactions with supervisors were constructive and productive and, as a result, effective connections have been set up for the future.

### 3.5. LLA practitioner's experience

The fifth and last scenario is my experience as the language and learning advisor. I too have critically reflected on the effectiveness of my processes and consultations. For me, the 'third space' has helped make the competing demands of multiple partners occupying this complex space explicit. If I was to try to visualize this experience, it might look something like this:

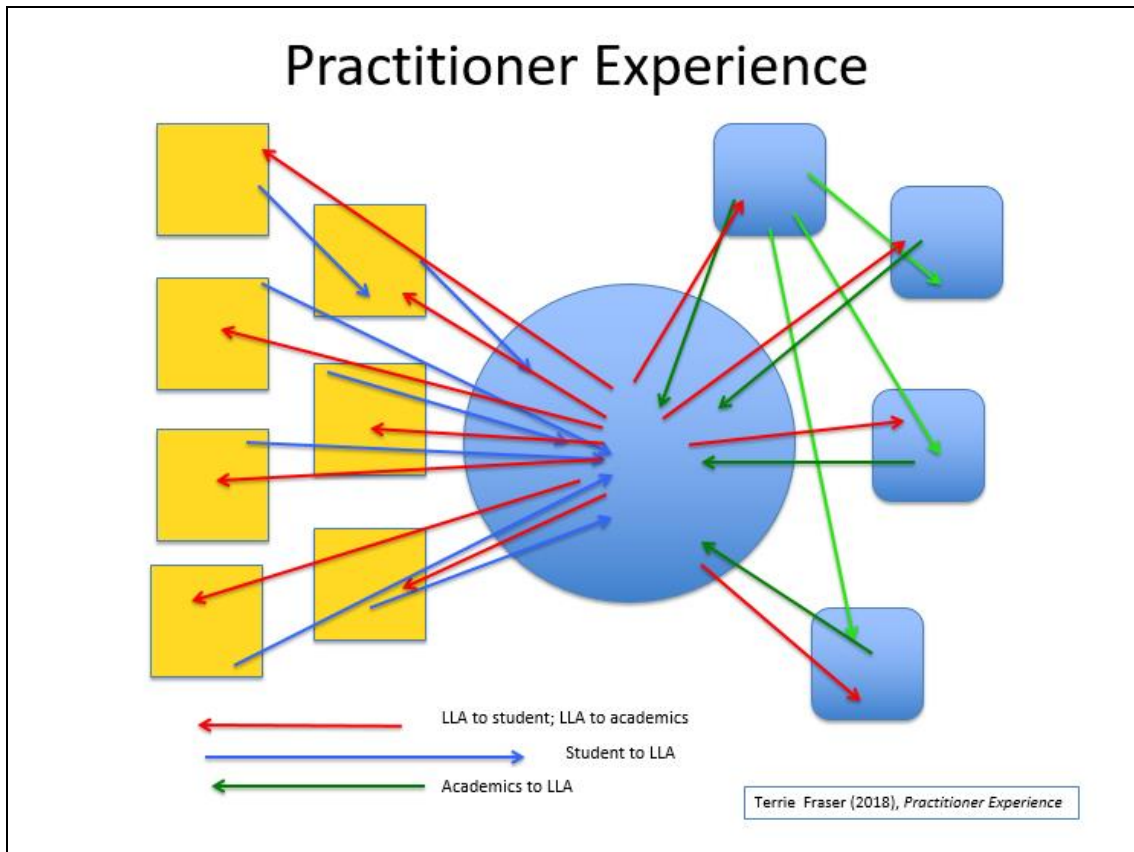


Figure 1. Visualizing LLA's practitioner experience and participant interaction (Fraser, 2018).

Figure 1 represents one layer of interactions between the LLA, students and academics, depicting the 'third space'. This figure makes explicit the microcosm of LLA interactions. To transform an experience into something new is to use third space thinking. Here, that is to materialize in the visual realm what we, as LLAs, experience within the domains and hierarchies - the flow of interactions embedded in our work.

Overall, my experience revealed that international students were variously able to adapt as they made sense of their experience. This took time, empathy, reliability, consistent reinforcement and presence to build rapport and trust. The language and learning support was highly regarded by the staff and students. I was invited to attend preliminary and final performances and visual art exhibitions, involving discussions about student work with academics and students. This has been a great example of embedding and working in a third space where boundaries between participants are more fluid and hybrid, and where the knowledge and skills language advisors bring to the table are more understood and respected. However, there is still much to be done in this area with respect to building relationships and developing resources for writing in the creative arts.

#### **4. Emergent themes**

As mentioned, the main focus of this study was to answer the research question:

*How can 'the third space' paradigm, help frame our understandings of the multiple parties involved in the experience of writing the MCA exegesis?*

To answer this question, a number of themes emerged from practitioner observations. Firstly, as a result of noticing and exercising 'third space' principles, many students became more engaged with their writing over time. This echoed Benzie's notion of hybridity, which "is precisely about the fact that, when a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them" (Benzie, 2015, p. 22 citing Bhabha, 1990, p. 216). My experience and observations revealed to me, that many students had become more assertive and articulate artists, who knew with greater clarity what they wanted to say and achieve through their work.

Secondly, the space of emergence – to be in a place of becoming (Kahn, 1998, 2000) was observed in each scenario. From the student immersed in practice-led research methods and exegesis writing, to the relationships formed between students,

academics and advisors, each informed the other in a complex process of becoming, as participants worked towards their own resolutions.

Another outcome was the need for a ‘third space’ strategy that advocated for critical self-reflection and reflexivity (English, 2005; Jarvis, 2007). Here, self-reflection is not a solipsistic monologue about the self, but may embrace different forms, such as a dialogue between the artist and medium or between the work and the viewer.

Teaching reflective writing strategies is paramount to capturing the experiential nature of the implicit and explicit dimensions of art making and how they inform each other.

Lastly, writing the exegesis using ‘third space’ strategies develops a sense of empowerment. This tool offers a safe space in which to write. Over time, the students’ ability to verbally articulate their research and personal concerns grew in confidence. Ultimately, creating a space for the ‘third space’ enabled students to personally situate their practice, and identify their place in the global field of practitioners and theorists.

## **5. Conclusion**

Understanding third space paradigms can contribute to communicating awareness about the ideological positions we inhabit as language advisors. There are a number of ways to extend this influence in the creative arts. One is to continue to develop early communication strategies with academics and students and disseminate findings with wider university audiences. Another way is to use the ‘third space’ as an educational tool to identify hidden structures such as power imbalances to create agency; a further use is to expose emergent processes, such as the developing practitioner identity whether it be artist, academic, educator or LLA. There is also a need to develop writing resources that target third space qualities in conjunction with reflective and reflexive writing strategies. Further resources could extend to writing in the creative arts and the emergent nature of PLR alongside other paradigms. This might include artists writing snapshots that target the artist’s voice and experience

Regardless of type, all such options foster experimenting with writing from personal, reflective and reflexive positions, and, as such, embrace multiple 'third spaces.'



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