



# Preparing Artists to Save the World: Community-Engaged Arts Practice as Critical Pedagogy

Sarah Peters & Tully Barnett

To cite this article: Sarah Peters & Tully Barnett (19 Apr 2024): Preparing Artists to Save the World: Community-Engaged Arts Practice as Critical Pedagogy , Critical Arts, DOI: [10.1080/02560046.2024.2338355](https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2024.2338355)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2024.2338355>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 19 Apr 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Preparing Artists to Save the World: Community-Engaged Arts Practice as Critical Pedagogy

Sarah Peters and Tully Barnett

College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia

## ABSTRACT

The sustained marginalisation of creative arts in higher education in Australia risks the delivery of superficial learning experiences that are disconnected from the relationality of place, people, and histories. The metrics used to assess a university's capacity to produce "job-ready graduates" does not adequately capture the success of students in the creative arts, leading to under resourcing in these disciplines and, ironically, limiting the capacity of these disciplines to train students adequately for their industry. In this paper, we examine the place of community-engaged creative practice and cultural policy learning in universities to ask how tertiary educators can support students to develop industry skills while also embodying a critically engaged pedagogy in order to work and create in the industry in ways that prioritise relationality, context and an ethic of care. Community-engaged arts practice can be understood as that which privileges collaborative processes, values people over institutions, is contextually grounded, and understands creative excellence as intricately entangled in social and relational outcomes. We argue that community-engaged arts practice is a form of critical pedagogy and, potentially, vice versa. We share two case studies of creative arts learning experiences in our university as examples of the powerful crossover between community-engaged arts practice and critical pedagogies in our endeavour to train effective, and impactful creative arts workers in sustainable and ethical practice via a critically engaged creative practice pedagogy.

## KEYWORDS

Arts practice; creative arts pedagogies; cultural policy studies; engaged practice; relationality; ethic of care

## Introduction

As higher education is increasingly tasked with emphasising vocational outcomes for students, the place of arts practice learning in the university sector becomes more complicated. The constant questioning of, and marginalisation of, creative arts in higher education in Australia (Meyrick 2021; Wilson 2018) risks pressuring institutions into delivering superficial learning experiences that are disconnected from the relationality of place, people, histories and purpose that are required for sustainable, effective, impactful

**CONTACT** Tully Barnett  tully.barnett@flinders.edu.au

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

creative arts workers and for the training in ethical arts practice. Arts practitioners pursue professional arts practice learning inside universities for myriad reasons, not all of which are about aiming at a high-profile career. Community-engaged creative practice can be a transformational experiential learning moment for students regardless of their intended career.

Community-engaged creative practice is a label used for a diverse set of approaches, but we understand it as incorporating “a genuine exchange between artist and community such that the one is changed by the other” (Jan Cohen-Cruz 2010, 3). It is a genuine two-way flow of collaboration resulting in rich learning and development on all sides. In Cohen-Cruz’s understanding, this relationship has an ethics, a responsibility, and an agency equal on both sides. It is, she argues, “characterised by paying attention to a social call and making a public, collaborative response” (2010, 16). Meanwhile, for Jade Lillie et al in their book *The Relationship is the Project*, “community-engaged practice” is “a deep collaboration between practitioners and communities to develop outcomes specific to that relationship, time and place” (2020, 9).

This kind of learning is sometimes pushed to the fringes of creative arts education despite some of the core skills in this practice—collaboration, creativity, connection to industry—being lauded as the goals of tertiary education. We argue that a pedagogy informed by community-engaged creative practice is what universities need to embrace, indeed to centre, to enable students to respond meaningfully to the challenges and issues of the future.

## Two reflective case studies

In this paper, we use a reflective practitioner case study approach to examine creative arts education—through a focus on theatre practice education and cultural policy and leadership topics—that uses an ethos of community-engagement, care and ethics in a university setting. We examine some of the concepts related to community-engaged teaching and learning in the creative arts and the intersections in this field with critical pedagogy to name and define a critically engaged creative practice pedagogy framework at the nexus of this intersection. This framework prioritises relationality (by which we mean connectedness, the act of being both in relation to others and aware of being in relation to others), contextualised and applied critical engagement, and ethical problem solving. Here we apply the framework to the analysis of two teaching case studies. A reflective practitioner case study values the embodied knowledge and experience of the practitioner (Stock 2000, 2) and their reflection in/on and for action (Taylor 1996, 28), alongside the collection of integral materials related to the case study context—in this case, our teaching plans and assessment tasks for each case study topic. Triangulation is a rigorous element of the Reflective Practitioner Case Study (Peters 2020). We critically reflect on a specific example of Peters’ topic<sup>1</sup> design and delivery in the form of community-engaged arts practice and finally we explore a specific example of Barnett’s topic design and delivery in the form of a topic on cultural leadership, drawing on our embodied knowledge as tertiary educators, critical reflections on our practice, and archived teaching materials. That is, we examine the critically engaged creative practice pedagogies both in the context of direct instruction of creative practice, intended to help students develop and refine the skills needed to be artists, as well as indirectly, to help

students consider how to apply those critical creative practices in their own projects and careers.

### ***Community-engaged teaching in creative arts topics***

There are many ways to practice or incorporate community engagement in creative arts education, and scholars and practitioner-researchers offer diverse approaches in theory and practice in the literature. Community-engaged arts practice can be understood as that which privileges collaborative processes, values people over institutions, is contextually grounded, and understands creative excellence as intricately embroiled in social and relational outcomes. Community-engaged arts practice has a strong connection to critical pedagogies. For commentators such as Burbules and Berk, the “primary preoccupation of critical pedagogy is with social injustice and how to transform inequitable, undemocratic or oppressive institutions and social relations” (1999, 47). Paulo Freire’s foundational work on critical pedagogies emphasises the role of reflection in social transformation.

reflection—true reflection—leads to action. ... when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection. ([1970] 2005, 66)

Meanwhile, Nora Sternfeld, who has come to critical pedagogies from curatorial studies and her work as professor of art education, sees

the educational as something that overcomes the function of reproducing knowledge and becomes something else—something unpredictable and open to the possibility of a knowledge production that, in tones strident or subtle, would work to challenge the apparatus of value-coding. (2010)

For both, critical pedagogues, like the arts, are spaces that, rather than transferring knowledge, create situations or environments in which knowledge might be collaboratively produced.

How then to support an environment of learning in the creative arts, which can be marginalised within universities, can be tilted towards vocational learning rather than values-based learning, can be riddled with inequalities in the workplace (Brook et al) but can also be a place for a form of collaborative and caring knowledge production that challenges and prepares students to be active and agentic thinkers in the cultural sector, in their practice and in their selves. We argue that this porosity of intentions and theories of practice means community-engaged arts practice can be a form of critical pedagogy and, potentially, vice versa. By extension, these parallels and intersections also hold space for the one to learn from the other. Critical pedagogy is, according to Wink, a process of learning, unlearning, and re-learning, a sometimes uncomfortable process of reconsidering what we think we know, broadening our horizons of understanding, and creating “a shift in philosophy, beliefs and assumptions” (2005, 19). How then might community-engaged arts practices embed this iterative and experiential cycle into their ways of working, and for what purpose? If community-engaged arts practice is a means to enable marginalised voices to “literally take centre stage” (Heddon 2008, 3), how might critical pedagogy’s search “for new voices that may have been excluded by the dominant

culture” (Kincheloe 2008, 24) be improved by sharing kinship with engaged arts practice? And how does this manifest in diverse classrooms and policy analysis? Below, we articulate a critically engaged creative practice pedagogy that can be embodied in higher education contexts as a means for preparing graduates to be cultural creators and advocates in a world that needs relationality, contextualised and applied critical engagement and ethical problem solving.

### **Relationality**

Relationality is a key principle of both community-engaged arts practice and critical pedagogy. In her article on relationality and Indigenous knowledges, Lauren Tynan argues that relationality is “premised on a truth that “all things exist in relatedness” and whilst this is a naturally occurring principle of many Indigenous worldviews, it is a principle that is sustained and strengthened through practice” (2021, 601). Tynan is discussing relationality in the context of research; however, the lessons can equally be applied to the educational context. She posits that discarding relationality risks knowledge becoming extractive and decontextualised, often for the purposes of perceived efficacy and productivity (2021, 605). Rather, the position that all things can only be known and understood through their relatedness means that the “researcher relies on the knowledge, stories and intellectual property of participants (humans and more-than-humans) to be seen as an expert” (2021, 606–607). Such relationality is about agency, kinship and responsibility, which can be embedded into the pedagogy, learning and assessment of our programmes. This is demonstrated in the case studies below.

In teaching, relationality is evident through an engaged pedagogy which “establishes a mutual relationship between teacher and students that nurtures the growth of both parties” (hooks 2009, 22). This echoes Cohen-Cruz’s description of engaged performance as being a genuine exchange of mutual benefit. bell hooks’ exploration of engaged pedagogy also prioritises the theme of vulnerability in the teaching process, which can benefit learning when all parties in the classroom can share, take risks and be vulnerable:

My willingness to share, to put my thoughts and ideas out there, attests to the importance of putting thoughts out there, of moving past fear or shame. When we all take risks, we participate mutually in the work of creating a learning community. We discover together that we can be vulnerable in the space of shared learning, that we can take risks. Engaged pedagogy emphasizes mutual participation because it is the movement of ideas, exchanged by everyone, that forges a meaningful working relationship between everyone in the classroom. This process helps establish the integrity of the teacher, while simultaneously encouraging students to work with integrity. (hooks 2009, 21)

Regional Arts Australia’s “Guidelines and tools for regional arts and cultural engagement” (2019) lists relationships as their first consideration. They state, “It takes time to build trust and a good working relationship, and the stronger and more enduring the relationship is before the start of the project, the more successful the project will be” (2009, 13). Similarly, Victoria Health have produced “Making Art with Communities: A Work Guide” (2013) which outlines strategies and practices for effectively engaging and relating with communities as part of a collaborative creative process. Both of these documents are the result of vigorous consultation with artists and communities. Scholarly case studies of community-engaged arts practice repeatedly prioritise, analyse, critique and make offers around the

process and practice of building trust, developing relationships and working collaboratively with a community (see Burton and McDonald 2021; Herrmann, Glenn, and Peters 2022; Lazaroo 2020). Relationality is a significant component of both pedagogy and arts practice, and by modelling relationality in our teaching we are striving to demonstrate the content of our creative arts curriculum in theory and in practice. We advocate for this understanding/framing of relationality as both pedagogy and knowledge as a way to push back against managerialism and the neoliberal machine which “can be nimble in their subterfuge of relationality” (Tynan 605) and which diminish the conditions (most often through the reduction in time allocated to teach) that enable relationality as part of a pedagogical approach.

Relationality, contextualised and applied critical engagement and creative problem solving grounded in an ethics of care are each core components of both a critically engaged creative practice pedagogy (how we teach) *and* critically engaged creative practice (what we teach). The following section defines and discusses each of these components.

### ***Contextualised and applied critical engagement***

Actively considering place, history, socioeconomic context, intersectional identities, and power relationships is a further thread which connects community-engaged arts practice to a critically engaged creative practice pedagogy. Engaging practically and contextually through learning activities—through field trips, embodied assessment tasks, hearing from and speaking to industry professionals—gives opportunities for students to put their critical thinking into practice.

The vital link between critical thinking and practical wisdom is the insistence on the interdependent nature of theory and fact coupled with the awareness that knowledge cannot be separated from experience ... knowledge rooted in experience shapes what we value and as a consequence how we know what we know as well as how we use what we know’.  
(hooks 2009, 185)

In the field of creative arts, this knowledge in experience primarily explores two pathways, one being practice as research where the case for creative practice as knowledge production is made and the other being community engagement in which knowledge through experience requires ethical embedding in communities to ensure the creative work aligns with the pressing challenges of all kinds facing communities locally and globally today. Critical arts pedagogies form one means of contributing to the capacity of graduates to contribute to solving social and environmental problems.

A critical arts pedagogy can enable young people to reimagine new possibilities for their selves, existences, and social classifications and arrangements. Engaging in creating art can change the artists through the process, allow artmakers to gain new perspectives on the injustices they face, and engender transformative agency. (Wright 2020, 43)

Similarly, Moen identifies “critical/engaged pedagogy ... as education grounded in a desire for a recognition of the status quo and how maintenance of the status quo primarily benefits those in positions of power in society as well as an engagement with alternative visions of what society can be” (2008, 139). When institutions diminish opportunities for students to learn via critically engaged creative practice pedagogies, particularly for

those students who are going to be active contributors in the arts landscape and be responsible for decision making which impacts intersectional and diverse communities, they risk maintaining imbalanced power relations and further widening disadvantage and disconnection.

### ***Ethical problem solving and an ethics of care***

How do we teach/train students to work in an industry where there are competing needs? How do we teach in classrooms where there are competing needs? A feminist ethics of care addresses this tension and is “a way of thinking about politics, social practices and the everyday-life considerations of people in diverse circumstances” which actively considers the relationship between values, actions and systems in order to critique and transform policy and practice (Barnes et al. 2015, 233). Further, Simola *et al* emphasise that an ethic of care means that rather than managing the needs of a group on a hierarchical basis, “a care orientation would focus on identifying creative ways of simultaneously fulfilling competing responsibilities to others” (2010, 181). This acknowledgement that often we can be drawn in multiple directions (or have competing responsibilities) and yet can still approach our practice with a mindfulness for others and ourselves, a mindfulness based on a caring consideration for the project/community/context as a whole, is one of the ways an ethics of care informs community-engaged arts practice.

Allan and Evans argue that the field of education would benefit from three new “R’s”: reason, relationality and rhythm. They suggest an approach to education which prioritises a complex mode of reasoning that is holistic and emphasises connection, a relationality that emphasises the importance of difference, and a complex understanding of the rhythmic character of reasoning and relatedness, one which “appreciates change, that emphasises the creative skills needed in a dynamic world” (2006, 3). The difference, diversity, and often competing needs of our communities, as well as a recognition that we can better teach students to reason, change and respond in the face of that difference, is central to their proposition. Their framing of “rhythm” in this context is a useful way to think through how ethical problem solving (and an ethics of care) might look in practice.

To live effectively in a rapidly changing world, we need to have a more complex grasp of the rhythmic character of how we reason and relate. Thinking in terms of patterns of connection is not enough. We also need to see these patterns as dynamic, always undergoing mutation ... Our empathizing, reconciling, reformulating skills need constantly to be revamped. (Allan and Evans 2006, 12)

This rhythmic character in an ethic of care sometimes looks like slowing down. Central to an ethics of care is the imperative to take the time needed for meaningful connection and thoughtful creation. Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber state that slowing down “is about allowing room for others and otherness” (2016, 59) and so the act of taking time, of prioritising connectedness and reflection, of making space across time for the messiness of life, is in their view an ethical choice. To Allan and Evans’ three Rs for education in a changing world (reason, relationality and rhythm), we add another two that are important keywords in the literature on critical pedagogies and community-engaged arts practice: reflection and reciprocity.

In *Slow Ethics and the Art of Care*, Ann Gallagher outlines the six elements of slow ethics as sensitivity, solidarity, space, sustainability, scholarship and stories, and outlines that these can be implemented by listening carefully and judging slowly, pausing to “balance, breathe, laugh and listen”, and to understand that slowness is “not just about pace but about giving other humans, other species, our environment and artefacts our full attention as far as possible” (2020, 12).

Relationality, contextual and applied critical engagement and ethical problem solving are three skills our students need to work effectively and sustainably in the arts industry. In the second part of this paper, we offer two case studies where we narrate how we have endeavoured to embed these skills into both the pedagogy and content of our teaching in topics delivered at a mid-sized university in the southern suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia with a long history of contributing world class teaching and research in the creative arts.

### ***Teaching community-engaged arts practice (Sarah’s case study)***

When I first started teaching community-engaged arts practice at university it was through a topic called “Theatre Collaborations and Community”. I am a playwright and a community-engaged theatre maker, and the topic was being delivered through a drama degree, so I positioned it in connection with the discipline of theatre. Essentially, this topic involved three pieces of assessment, students were asked to: research and write a short report on an example of community-engaged arts practice, design a community-engaged arts project in collaboration with a community (preferably a community the students already had a relationship with), deliver that project, and then write a reflection/evaluation of their practice. It was and remains an ambitious topic. Even in that first offering it became clear that the students taking this class were multidisciplinary artists who did not solely want to work in theatre. Further, if they were going to build on their existing community connections and relationships to design, deliver and evaluate an arts project that had both artistic/aesthetic and community driven goals, then they would need to be more flexible with the medium they chose to work in. I had thought I would be teaching more explicitly about theatre making with communities, but instead I was taking the lessons learned in that context and teaching about project design and management, community engagement (which sometimes included macro strategies for connecting with community organisations, and sometimes micro strategies by helping students draft a social media post calling for participants), ethically informed collaboration towards mutually agreed goals, documentation of creative practice and process, critical reflection based on co-designed criteria for success, and the vital importance of acknowledging and celebrating the work they’re doing and the communities they’re working with. I embrace hooks’ call for vulnerability and Winks’ assertion that critical pedagogy means learning, unlearning and re-learning by threading examples of my own practice into the teaching of this topic. By sharing stories and reflecting on my own moments of doubt when collaborating with communities, giving examples of how varied “celebration” might look in different contexts, sharing how and when I had to change my mind or was challenged to re-think an approach, I am not only being vulnerable but am also modelling reflection in action and inviting students to do the same. Telling stories and inviting shared reflections take time.



In its first iteration, there were students who collaborated with the after-school care organisations they worked for to run visual arts workshops with young people about what they imagine the future will look like, and curated their responses into a book. There were students who were part of online communities of interest and built their projects around this, one editing together a video promoting pole dancing and body confidence with submitted footage from their online (international) community. Another student interviewed people from their rural hometown and turned these interviews into short stories. Another collaborated with her local radio station to work with the volunteer community hosts to create introduction reels for each presenter. Since then, there have been zine-making workshops with the queer community on campus, a dance for mental health programme for teachers at a local high school (which continued after the topic concluded and at time of publication is now in its third year), a short film, a walking/photography group with a dedicated Instagram page, and poetry workshops at a queer nightclub resulting in short readings. Needless to say, the topic is now named “Community-Engaged Arts Practice” to better reflect both the diversity of art forms and the specificity of the skills and knowledge that this topic aims to develop in students: engaging with a community to co-create an arts-based project.

The reading list for this topic is balanced between industry “best practice” guides, such as the aforementioned Regional Arts Australia guidelines (2019) and Victoria Health workbook (2013), and academic articles analysing community-engaged projects. These readings introduce students to theory and practice, and through our classroom conversation and creative work we begin the task of exploring the nexus between the two. In their first assignment, students write a short report on a professional community-engaged arts project, and are encouraged to choose a project that aligns with an area of creative practice that they have experience in or are interested in pursuing in the future. Their research is often drawn from arts company websites, grant acquittals and evaluative reports which are publicly available, and “behind the scenes” videos and documentaries that companies and artists have released as part of their project promotion. In their reports, students write a short summary of the project, describing the context, audience, and participant group. They analyse the project’s intentions (creative and otherwise) and outcomes, and are asked to reflect on how the organising group will know if the project has been successful. Based on the knowledge drawn from their industry guidelines and critical scholarly engagement, students are tasked with reflecting on the projects strengths, benefits, weaknesses and obstacles.

The students can sometimes be quite severe in their judgments of other artists’ work in this report, and it is always an interesting exercise to revisit these after the students have designed, delivered and evaluated a project of their own. By the end of the topic the students’ relationship with the ways of working in community-engaged arts projects has shifted. It is more nuanced, they have lived through the rhythm that Allan and Evans (2006) described of reasoning and relatedness with their own communities, they have an embodied experience of caring about their project and their community (and their grades for the assignment) and have had to navigate these sometimes competing needs. Across the semester, students are put into groups of 3–4, and each week they check in with each other on their project. I scaffold these discussions by asking them to share what is going well, where are the challenges this week, what questions do they have, what would help the next phase of the project go well. Students share with

the same group each week, developing a deep understanding of each other's projects and the ebbs and flows of how the creative practice might "look" in different contexts. They are tasked with learning from their peers and being reciprocal in their reflections.

The second task asks students to design and co-create a community-engaged arts project. After they deliver this project, their final assignment is to reflect on their project using a similar set of questions from assignment one. The teaching each week is structured around the design of their projects—brainstorming potential creative outcomes, considering what they might like to do in balance with what a community might like from them as artists, learning about approaches to working with an established community or doing a "call out" to a community for volunteers, project management, professional practice, methods for documenting a practical project, ethics and permissions, and the inevitable—"life has happened and things aren't going to plan, what do I do?". This is when the vulnerable relationality which has informed the pedagogical approach from the outset becomes the most important and apparent.

Embracing Gallagher's slow ethics (2020), we take a moment to breathe, maybe have a bit of a laugh or a cry, and then think through possible options within a scale of achievability. This usually looks like asking questions about how we might adapt the scale of the project, how they might approach difficult conversations with the community collaborators, how we might be flexible with timelines to accommodate the stuff of life. If we genuinely want to embody critical pedagogies search "for new voices that may have been excluded by the dominant culture" (Kincheloe 2008, 24), then we need to make room and space for those voices on their own terms, and consider how our structures and scaffolds and timelines, while they are potentially helpful and useful, might also need to be flexible and changeable so as not to become gate keepers to experience. Outlined below is the scaffold provided for the students' second assignment—co-designing a community-engaged arts project and making a plan for how this project will be documented and organised.

### **Summary (max. 150 words)**

- What are you planning to do/make/create, with who.

### **Outcomes (categorised lists)**

- What will be an outcome of this project (both tangible and intangible)?
- Be as specific as possible and use categories if useful—for example there might be performance outcomes, professional development outcomes, networking outcomes, and publishing outcomes all from the one project.
- How were these outcomes mutually agreed?

### **Intentions**

- Why are you doing this project?
- Why is this a project that you and the community stakeholder want to pursue?
- What are you hoping to learn/achieve through this project beyond the specific creative outcomes? Clearly and succinctly state 1–2 intentions for yourself and 1–2 intentions for the community stakeholder.

**Timeline and milestones (Gantt chart)**

- What will happen when, have you considered time for planning, marketing, recruiting, delivering, rehearsing, acquitting the project?
- What are the key milestones in the project and when will they be achieved?

**Resources (categorised list)**

- What resources do you need to complete this project?
- What items, facilities, budget is required, and where will this be resourced from?

**Creative Process (description and example (min. 500 words))**

- What do you need to know how to do to lead/facilitate this project?
- What is the creative process and your role within that?
- Why are you the right person for this project? Do you have the required knowledge, do you need to upskill prior to the project, do you need to bring an expert in to deliver a part of the project?
- Include an example of your planning or creative practice here.

**Challenges**

- What might be a challenge in this project?
- What obstacles might emerge that prevent the project from progressing?
- How might you plan for these challenges in advance?

**Alignment with recommended practice (min. 500 words)**

- How does your proposed project consider or adhere to the recommended guidelines for best practice in community engaged arts projects and the academic sources we have been reading/discussing?

**Project Documentation (min. 500 words)**

- What will be documented in this project?
- How will you document this project? Include examples of templates or a timeline if appropriate.
- Why are you documenting these aspects of the project (what is the goal of documenting these components, and what do you want to remember in the future)?
- Who will do the documentation in this project?
- What permission is needed, and from who, for you to document this project?
- How will you share project documentation with the community stakeholders?

This topic is delivered via a critically engaged pedagogy while simultaneously teaching a critically informed community engaged arts practice. The creative arts disciplines are commonly under threat of having their resources cut and contact teaching hours

diminished in academia as institutions strive for “cost effective” approaches to teaching and research. Hands on, embodied, experiential learning such as that offered in this topic often involves working in smaller class sizes and for longer contact hours. This is at odds with the managerial approach often at work in the tertiary sector. Leitheiser *et al* argue that “the values and practices of managerialism embedded into universities place inherent constraints on those wishing to bring creativity—as in originality and imagination—into the academic process’ (2022, 46). Yet those same universities are also under pressure to deliver “job ready graduates” upon completion of their degrees. We argue that in the arts industry, sustainable, impactful and effective community arts workers—in effect, job ready graduates—are those with skills in relationality, applied critical thinking and an ethic of care.

### ***Providing pedagogical opportunities for learning about cultural leadership (Tully’s case study)***

Unlike Sarah’s example of delivering a course specifically teaching creative practice, this case study considers critical pedagogies for community-engaged learning in a course that is about situating creative practice, and the conditions that enable it, in relation to the concerns and challenges of the wider world. It is also being delivered by someone who is not a creative practitioner. After completing doctoral research and initial higher education teaching opportunities in the field of literary studies where I sought to help students learn and develop skills of close reading and textual analysis, and to understand how literary works function as cultural objects with a politics and a place, I moved towards research around the wicked problem that is the notion of value in the field of arts and culture (Meyrick, Phiddian, and Barnett 2018). In that project, the research has moved towards working with the arts and culture sector to develop better knowledge about the value, values and evaluation distinction, about the influence of cultural policy and its implementation on the capacity of the arts sector to do critical work, about arts and health projects and their contributions to society, and about the role that arts and culture can play in climate action. Now my teaching has followed suit. In being asked to create some topics for a Bachelor of Creative Industries which has numerous specialisations (Festivals and Arts Production, Theatre and Performance for example), I revised an existing topic called Cultural Policy and the Arts and designed a new topic called Cultural Leadership.

These two topics emerge from my collaboration with the cultural sector in South Australia as well as nationally and internationally, but in particular with peak bodies such as the Arts Industry Council of South Australia and Festival City Adelaide, the state government’s arts agency Arts South Australia, as well as key cultural institutions such as the Adelaide Festival Centre, the State Library of South Australia, State Theatre Company of South Australia, and the Adelaide Festival. Working with these organisations began because of their need to talk about the value of what they do in ways that are meaningful for them, ways that go beyond the narrow econometric designators of value and economic impact their government funders sought to collect data on, and ways that infused that economic data with more meaningful conceptions of value (Meyrick, Phiddian, and Barnett 2018).

After the initial period of COVID pandemic and lockdowns, which were revealed to be particularly harsh on the arts and cultural sector (Banks and O’Connor 2021; Barnett

2022; Pennington and Eltham 2021), this research began to consider how thinking from heterodox economics could be brought into the cultural policy space to help better understand the value of arts and culture organisations, workers, projects or the functioning of cultural policy around them (Whiting, Barnett, and O'Connor 2022).

How to bring this knowledge to the benefit of students? Cultural policy learning is important for all creative practitioners because it lifts the hood on how the sector works. It included formal policy (of which there has been relatively little in Australia until the 2023 release of the Revive policy) and informal policy, understood as any time a minister or funder at any level of government (national, state, local council) or an arts and culture leader makes a statement about the sector. These are examples of informal cultural policy: the way the sector works through decisions, approaches and values large and small. Over the years of delivering this topic, students would expect dry content and legalese and find instead a fierce story about how the arts and culture sector functions with and without support of different kinds.

But what was needed to complement this was a focus on making change in the arts and culture sector, and the world, through a better understanding of how change happens, and where leadership of any kind can have a positive influence. While students from Sarah's topic are pursuing active making in the creative arts with intentions of becoming perhaps a theatre practitioner, community arts worker or teacher, students enrolled in my Cultural Policy and Cultural Leadership topics come from a diversity of art forms and creative industries sector pursuits. They may be studying for degrees focussing on film, fashion, tourism, games design, virtual production, creative writing and publishing, music industry, and theatre. This therefore has an impact on how the topic is framed.

Curriculum content in Cultural Leadership includes governance models in the sector; leadership as a mindset rather than a formal role; First Nations leadership in and for the arts and cultural sector and issues of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property frameworks; cultural leadership for climate action and justice; international campaigns for new ways of funding and supporting the arts, including following the basic income for artists trial underway in Ireland; accessible and inclusive arts; the arts for wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of artists; and the role of peak bodies and researchers collaborating for knowledge and advocacy. That is, we create a base map of the local cultural sector's ecosystem as a means of orienting the interactions of the sector, then we create a layer on top of that showing the sector's key issues in a general or theoretical way, supported by scholarly literature and critical and conceptual frameworks. Finally, we develop a top layer that integrates the personal and career concerns of the students in the topic, their potential career pathways and their creative interests with those previously mapped critical concerns of the students and the social and physical infrastructure of the cultural sector.

Following Moen's provocation about learning about the status quo in order to disrupt it, we draw on students' and my knowledge of the cultural sector to map an interconnected ecosystem. We also map the important issues for the students in the room which leads to new materials and course content addressing the topics of concern most pertinent to them. Students were invited in the first workshop to communicate their artform and wicked problem interest through making a zine (or other

output) to share their standpoint, their background, their primary and ancillary art form interests, career aspirations and issues of social and environmental (or other) concern with me and the class. The challenge here is to develop community-engagement in cultural leadership to a deeper level relevant to a variety of creative industries vocational aspirations.

## Conclusion

In these examples from our teaching practice at a university in South Australia, we find ourselves continuously walking the line between competing interests, a familiar story for many educators. On the one hand, we are tasked with designing and delivering topics that fit the higher education sector's desire for vocationally-oriented, "innovative", large enrolment (meaning students can recognise the benefit of enrolling in them), resource-low (that is low staff to student ratio with minimal marking) topics. On the other hand, we are pulled towards offering topics that are aligned with our sector—and community-engaged knowledge of the challenges that will face early career artists and arts workers when they go to work as solo or collaborative artists or in arts organisations. We have witnessed the effects of community-engaged critical pedagogies in the classroom and the power of those pedagogies when our students step into the world as creative practitioners and arts workers, and see the next step in our research as building on the reflections articulated here with student-led reflections and data. We seek to provide courses that support our graduates to become members of the artist community that our colleagues in the sector will be proud to hire and to work with and who, ultimately, are supported with tools and ways of thinking to change the world.

We advocate for a rethink of "industry skills" and vocational approaches in the context of an ever-changing arts industry in order to redefine this term so that it becomes synonymous with an ethic of care and critical engagement. We ask what it would look like if industry readiness meant artists and arts workers who worked in critically engaged ways and with critically engaged processes, informed by the theory of critically-engaged pedagogies. In this paper, we have examined the place of community-engaged creative practice and cultural policy learning in universities to ask how tertiary educators can support students to develop industry skills while also embodying a critically engaged pedagogy in order to work and create in the industry in ways that prioritise relationality, context and an ethic of care.

The challenge that universities have charged themselves with is to connect with industries, develop "job ready" skills in graduates and prepare students vocationally for job markets. Vocational training, job ready graduates, industry skills are terms and approaches that often position education and pedagogy in a particular and, we argue, contested, way. This can create tensions, conflicts and potential harms unless it is done in ways that value the arts, and arts educators, in meaningful ways that go beyond the kind of box ticking exercises that are at the front of mind of university bureaucrats. We are arguing that when it comes to the arts sector, universities can do this productively only if they use critically engaged creative practice pedagogical approaches to embed the practitioner/community relationship in ways that are meaningful, open to the determinants of radical social transformation, and ways that are informed by the ethics of care.

Adopting these approaches is one way that we can prepare students for working in the arts and culture sector, armed with requisite industry skills, while also embodying a critically and community-engaged approach to teaching contemporary creative arts and creative industries. This is an approach that is embedded in the content of our topics, modelled to the students in our course design and in-class and out of class pedagogical approaches and demeanours and, indeed, is *taught* to the students as a way of being and working in the industry.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

**Dr Sarah Peters** is a playwright, theatre practitioner, and Senior Lecturer in Drama at Flinders University. Her verbatim plays engage with communities to tell the shared stories of experience such as women living with Alopecia in *bald heads and blue stars* (2014), young people navigating mental health and wellbeing in *twelve2twentyfive* (2015), growing up in rural communities in *Eternity* (2017), and pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago looking for belonging in *Blister* (2019). Sarah's most recent publications include the co-authored book 'Verbatim Theatre Methodologies for Community-Engaged Practice' (2023) and 'Closing a community-engaged project with care' (2024). Sarah's practice includes facilitating playwriting and collaborative theatre-making projects, most recently with *ExpressWay Arts (Carclew)* and *Prospect Theatre for Young People* in South Australia.

**Dr Tully Barnett** is an Associate Professor in Creative Industries in the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at Flinders University. Her research areas include cultural policy, cultural value and evaluation, and digital literary and digital cultural heritage studies. Her DECRA Fellowship was awarded for a project looking at digitisation as a cultural practice. She is a Chief Investigator for the Australian Research Council Linkage project Laboratory Adelaide: The Value of Culture examining the notion of value in the cultural sector. She is co-author of *What Matters?: Talking Value in Australian Culture* (2018) with Julian Meyrick and Robert Phiddian, and of the report *Telling the Story of Arts and Health in South Australia* (2022) with Alex Cothren and Joanne Arciuli. She serves as vice president of the Australasian Association for Digital Humanities (aaDH). She is a founding member of Reset Arts and Culture, researching and advocating for progressive cultural policy.

## References

- Allan, George, and Malcolm D. Evans. 2006. "Introduction: A Different Three Rs for Education in Context." In *A Different Three Rs for Education*, edited by G. Allan and M. Evans. 1–15. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Banks, Mark, and Justin O'Connor. 2021. "'A Plague upon Your Howling': Art and Culture in the Viral Emergency." *Cultural Trends* 30 (1): 3–18. doi:10.1080/09548963.2020.1827931.
- Barnes, M., T. Brannelly, L. Ward, and N. Ward. 2015. "Conclusion: Renewal and Transformation – the Importance of an Ethics of Care." In *Ethics of Care: Critical Advances in International Perspective*, edited by M. Barnes, T. Brannelly, L. Ward, and N. Ward, 3–20. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Barnett, Tully. 2022. "Covid-19." In *The Routledge Companion to Audiences and the Performing Arts*. New York: Routledge, 418–423.
- Berg, Maggie, and Barbara Seeber. 2016. *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Burbules, Nicholas, and Rupert Berk. 1999. "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences and Limits." In *Critical Theories in Education*, edited by T. Popkewitz and L. Fendler, 45–66. New York: Routledge.

- Burton, David, and Janet. McDonald. 2021. "Performance 'Training' in the Dirt: Facilitating Belonging in a Regional Community Musical Theatre Event." *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 12 (3): 425–439. doi:10.1080/19443927.2021.1943508.
- Cohen-Cruz, Jan. 2010. *Engaging Performance, Theatre as Call and Response*. New York: Routledge.
- Freire, Paulo. 2005. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed. 30th Anniversary Edition*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum.
- Gallagher, Ann. 2020. *Slow Ethics and The Art of Care*. Leeds: Emerald Publishing Ltd.
- Heddon, Deirdre. 2008. *Autobiography and Performance*. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Herrmann, A., C. Glenn, and S. Peters. 2022. "Making Space: A Community-Engaged Youth Theatre Practice Grounded in Care." In *Routledge Companion to Theatre and Young People*, edited by Selina Busby, Kelly Freebody, and Charlene Rajendran, 403–420. London: Routledge.
- hooks, bell. 2009. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. New York: Routledge.
- Jade, Lillie, Larsen Kate, Kirkwood Cara, and Brown Jax. 2020. *The Relationship is the Project: Working with Communities*. Melbourne: Brow Books. ISBN: 9781925704198.
- Kincheloe, Joe. 2008. *Critical Pedagogy*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.
- Lazaroo, Natalie. 2020. "There's Something in the Air: An Intergenerational Community Performance Exploring Issues of Health and Inequality in Singapore." *Youth Theatre Journal* 34 (2): 136–141. doi:10.1080/08929092.2020.1842830.
- Leitheiser, S., R. Vezzoni, and V. Hakkarainen. 2022. "Painting Outside the Lines: Transgressing the Managerial University, Avoiding Forced Creativity." In *Co-Creativity and Engaged Scholarship*, edited by A. Franklin. 43–72. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Meyrick, Julian. 2021. "Drama in Hell" The Monthly October <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2021/october/julian-meyrick/drama-hell>.
- Meyrick, Julian, Robert Phiddian, and Tully Barnett. 2018. *What Matters? Talking Value in Australian Culture*. Clayton: Monash University Publishing.
- Moen, Darrell. 2008. "Discussion-Based Critical/Engaged Pedagogy: Teaching to Question". *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies* 40 (2): 139–146.
- Pennington, Alison, and Ben Eltham. 2021. *Creativity in Crisis: Rebooting Australia's Arts and Entertainment Sector After COVID*. Canberra: The Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute.
- Peters, Sarah. 2020. "A Reflective Practitioner Case Study Approach to Researching Verbatim Theatre." *Qualitative Report* 25 (9): 3336–3349.
- Regional Arts Australia. 2019. Guidelines and Tools for Regional Arts and Cultural Engagement. <https://regionalarts.com.au/publications/collaborating-with-regional-communities-2>.
- Simola, S., J. Barling, and N. Turner. 2010. "Transformational Leadership and Leader Moral Orientation: Contrasting an Ethic of Justice and an Ethic of Care." *The Leadership Quarterly* 21: 179–188. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2009.10.013.
- Sternfeld, Nora. 2010. "Unglamorous Tasks: What Can Education Learn from Its Political Traditions?" *E-Flux Journal* 14 1–10. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/14/61302/unglamorous-tasks-what-can-education-learn-from-its-political-traditions/>.
- Stock, Cheryl. 2000. "The Reflective Practitioner: Choreography as Research in an Intercultural Context." In *World Dance 2000 - A Celebration of the Millennium: Choreography Today*, edited by H. Onuki, 209–225. Tokyo: World Dance Alliance.
- Taylor, P. 1996. *Researching Drama and Arts Education: Paradigms and Possibilities*. London: Routledge.
- Tynan, Lauren. 2021. "What is Relationality? Indigenous Knowledges, Practices and Responsibilities with kin." *Cultural Geographies* 28 (4): 597–610. doi:10.1177/14744740211029287.
- Victoria Health. 2013. Making Art with Communities: A Work Guide. <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/making-art-with-communities-a-work-guide>.
- Whiting, Samuel, Tully Barnett, and Justin O'Connor. 2022. "'Creative City' RIP?." *M/C Journal* 25 (3). <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.2901>
- Wilson, Jenny. 2018. *Artists in the University*. Singapore: Springer.
- Wink, Joan. 2005. *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World*. 3rd. Boston: Pearson Education Inc.
- Wright, Dana E. 2020. "Imagining a More Just World: Critical Arts Pedagogy and Youth Participatory Action Research." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 33 (1): 32–49. doi:10.1080/09518398.2019.1678784.