



# Investigating approaches to teaching artwork interpretation in culturally and linguistically diverse senior school visual arts classrooms

TANYA CARCIONE

Doctor of Philosophy (Education)

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MILESTONE 1 PRESENTATION 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Supervisors: Dr. Lisa Paris & Dr. Carol Carter

Thesis Chairperson: Dr. Paul Brown

# Background

## M.Phil course conversion to PhD

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- This study focuses on the challenges Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) students encounter in the written components of senior school Visual Arts courses
- M.Phil study approved in mid-year 2022 MS1 presentation and HREC approval late 2022
- Data collection through three semi-structured interviews with five ATAR Visual Arts educators occurred in 2023
- 15 interviews and data sets have been transcribed, thematically coded and converted in arts-based visualisations and initial participant case studies
- Analysis has identified a skewed data set that needs balancing through broadening and reframing the study to include 5x General Visual Arts educators' perspectives.



[reflecting on past CaLD ATAR students] *“but as I said, if they don't get it once, you know, there's a certain point in Semester One Year 11 if that if that doesn't click over, if their English speaking isn't at the point where you can just like, get by then they go to General.”*

PARTICIPANT C (Interview 1, Page 8)

Year 12 ATAR	Year 12 General
Arts Responding 50% <i>15% of this grade comes from the WACE examination</i>	Arts Responding 35% <i>15% of this grade comes from the Externally Set Task</i>
Arts Making 50%	Arts Making 65%

# CaLD students in Senior School Visual Arts

- Visual analysis –critical analysis of aesthetic and conceptual qualities in ‘unseen’ artworks:
  - “...concerns as well contextual factors relating to time, place, race, culture, gender...in order to make informed judgments about how meanings are communicated” (School Curriculum and Standards Authority, 2014, p.5).
- 2016 ABS census data found that 49% of Australians were either first or second-generation immigrants with over 300 languages spoken (ABS, 2017).
- Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) in English is often achieved within a couple of years, whereas Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) can take between five to seven years to develop (Cummins, 2013).
- CaLD learners are more likely to perform poorly on standardised written tasks (Creagh, 2014)

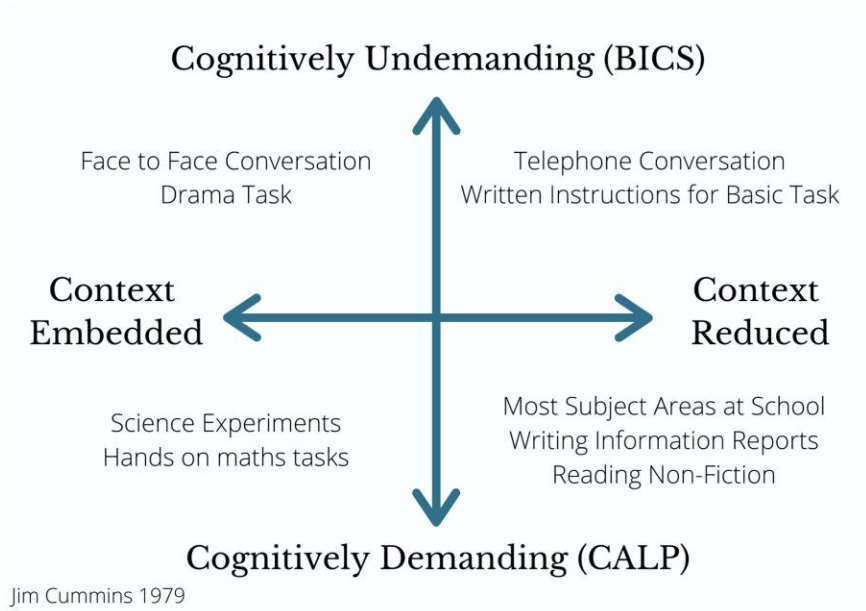
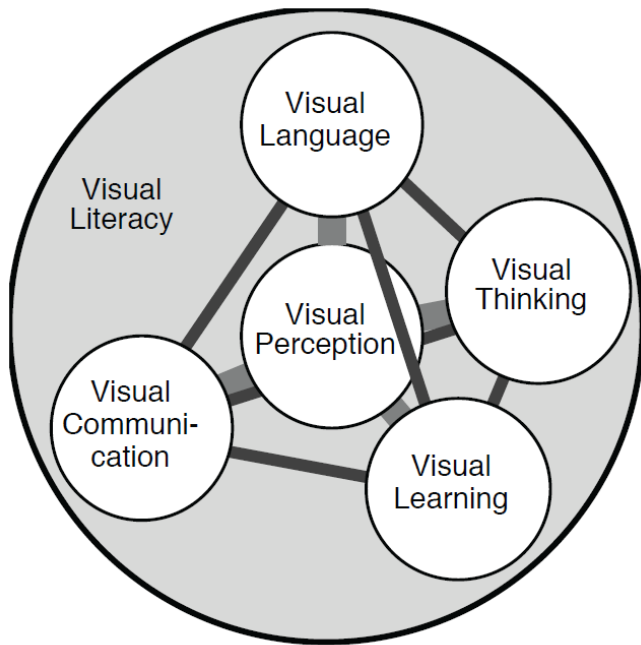


Figure 1: BICS/ CALP distinction  
Adapted from Cummins (1979) as cited by Seamer (2024)

# Teaching Arts Responding

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Components of visual literacy (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2011)

- Images are socially, culturally, and historically bound (Duncum 2001, 2002a; Kuttner 2015, Keifer-Boyd, 2018) and contextual knowledge is fundamental to accurate interpretation (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2011; Newman & Ogle, 2019).
- Complementary pairings of Modern History or English Literature with Visual Arts results in higher reported self-efficacy in ATAR Visual Arts Responding (Morris, 2015).
- VCAE offers interdisciplinary and transcultural (Duncum 2002; Kuttner, 2015), examination of everyday cultural objects to uncover latent societal assumptions, values, and stereotypes (Duncum 2002; Freedman 2003; Tavin, 2003; Kuttner, 2015).
- Little evidence of meaningful VCAE implementation in classrooms (Goble, 2013; Gil-Glazer, 2020).

# Research Gap

Existing literature on this educational issue does not address the specific needs of CaLD senior school Visual Arts students in both the General and ATAR courses and highlights the need to identify support strategies used by experienced educators.

Smilan's (2017) autoethnographic study of cultural inclusivity situated in an Elementary setting and suggests visual expression/format for responding to artworks.

Knight's (2015) qualitative study examines teacher preparation courses and suggests improved professional development in cultural awareness.

Graduate and early career arts educators often lack a repertoire of effective skills required to teach this component (Paris, 2008).

Early career educators in Australia are not equipped to meet the needs of EAL/D learners (Gilmour, et al., 2018).



Recognise, investigate, and understand the complexities of teaching art analysis to CaLD learners in senior school.



Investigate educator perceptions and teaching of visual literacy and visual culture to support student interpretations of artworks.



Synthesise effective support strategies for both ATAR and General students from the responses of experienced visual arts educators.



Provide effective teaching strategies for early career and pre-service visual arts educators teaching CaLD learners in the senior school context.

# Research Aims and Objectives

# Research Questions

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1

What do experienced visual arts educators understand about the additional needs of CaLD learners and how do they support CaLD learners to address these needs?

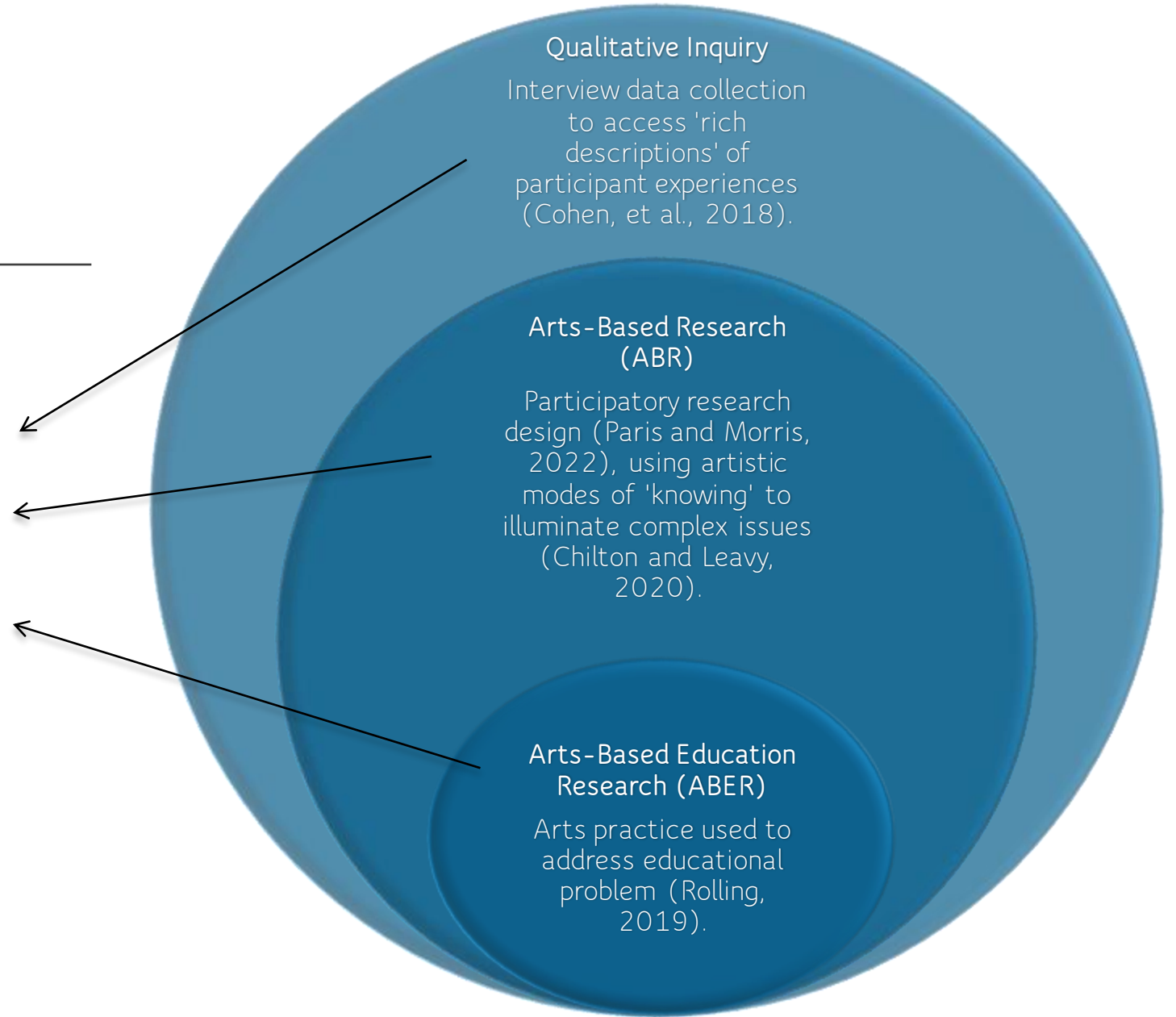
2

How do experienced visual arts educators navigate the acquisition of visual literacy, and what factors shape the types of artworks selected for study?

# Methodology

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Examining the rich, subjective experiences of highly-visually literate artist/educator participants in a visual arts education context wherein an educational problem exists.





Phase One – ATAR (Five participants)	Phase Two – General (Five participants)
Demographic surveys	Demographic surveys
Cycle of three interviews	Cycle of three interviews
Creation of <i>Phase One ATAR</i> visualisations	Creation of <i>Phase Two General</i> visualisations
Individual <i>Phase One ATAR</i> case studies	Individual <i>Phase Two General</i> case studies
Synthesis of research findings in written Exegesis	
Exhibition of <i>Phase One</i> and <i>Two</i> visualisations and final synthesis painting	

# Methodology

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- Phase One – Five ATAR participants complete three interviews
- Phase Two – Five General participants complete three interviews

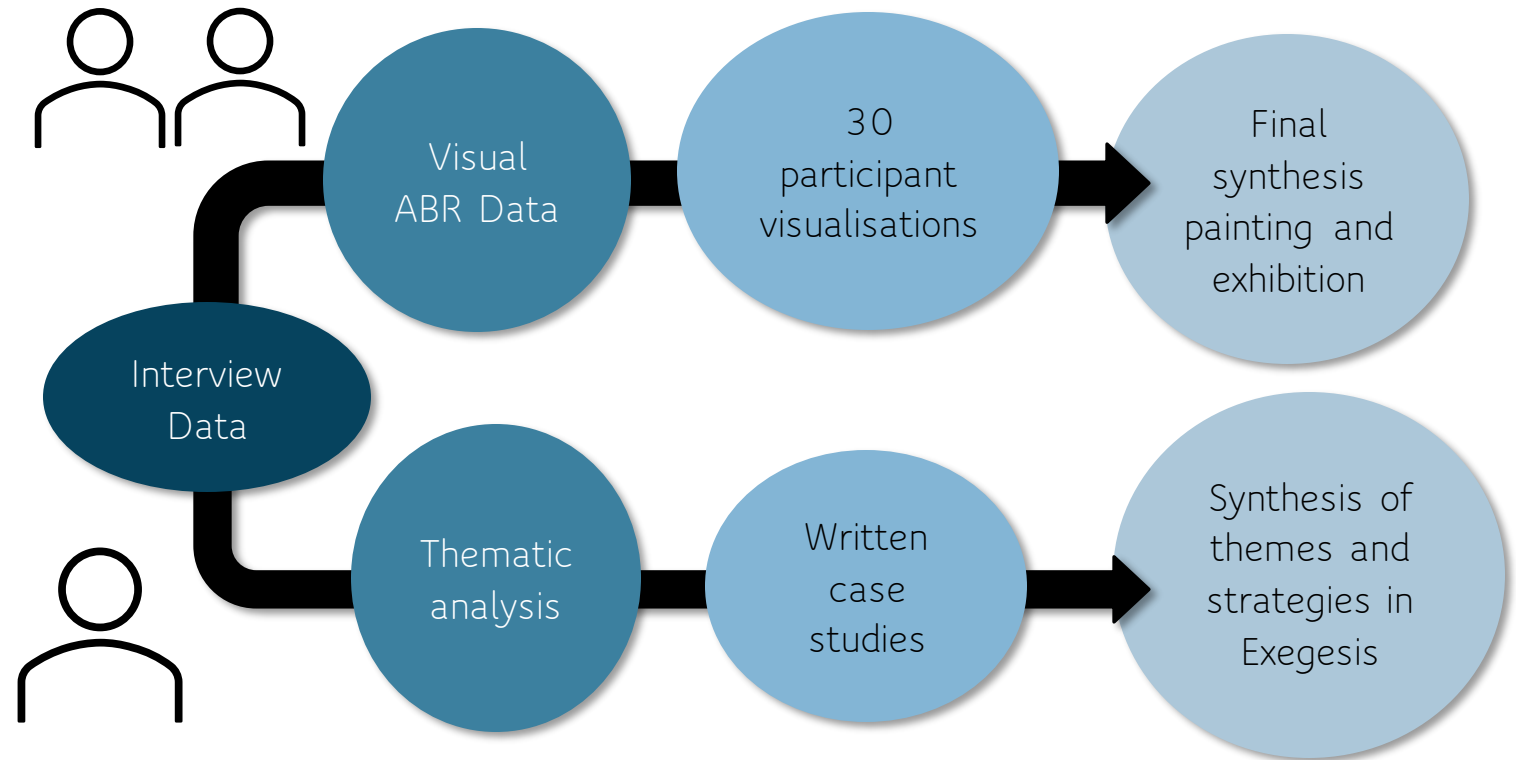
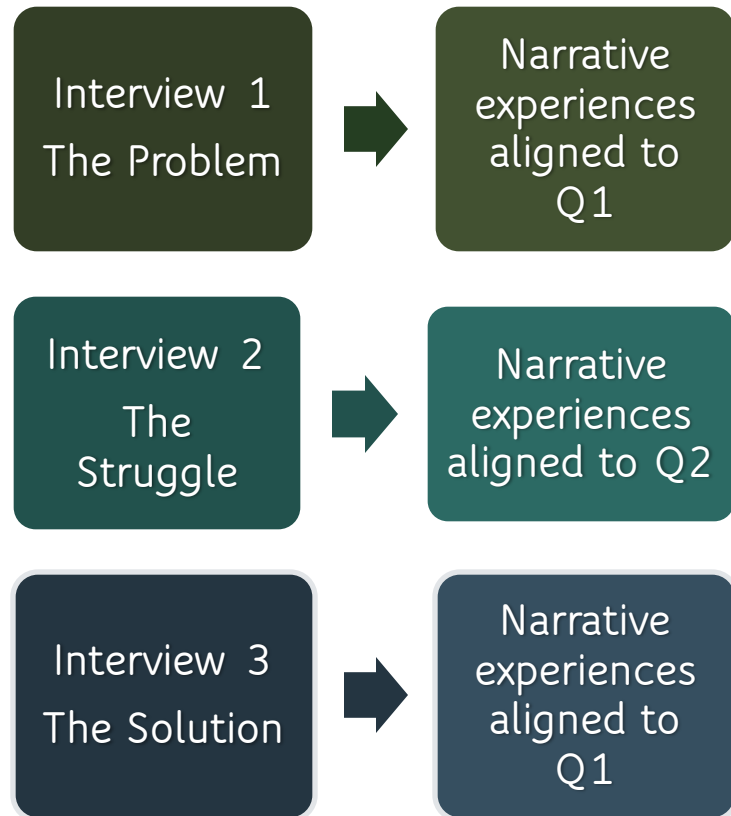
## INTERVIEW DATA

Three semi-structured interviews with each participant allowing scope for nuanced responses whilst aligning with research questions (Cohen et al., 2018).

## ABR DATA

Participant and researcher jointly create iconography (paintings) of dominant themes revealed in each interview. Artworks created here serve as an analysis of the interview data and representation of the participant's voice and experiences (Leavy, 2019).

# Written and Visual Data Collection



Participant checking throughout each stage of data collection, analysis and creation to develop authentic synthesis artworks

# ABER Data Visualisation

## 1. Interview

**05:03** CALD are different

Well, the additional needs, it really depends. It's, it's an individual thing. It depends on them. It's not it's not a one stop, you know, solution, there's not, there's not this one thing that you can say, "Oh, it worked with this student so it'll work with this student", because everybody's at a different level. So it's really identifying the level that they're at, and then helping them from there. So I found in the past, giving students example answers really helped, because it was just them not being able to understand what the question was asking them. But once they could see an example of an answer, it was kind of like, oh, that's what, that's what it wants. Because sometimes these questions, you know, they're written for students that have spoken English their entire life. And they're tricky. They're designed to trick them and to say, "Are you reading the question?" Are you, you know, "what's the difference between analyze and describe?" So that's what we're expecting me to your twelves. To do, but then an EALD student is, is just thrown by those kinds of things.

fricky Qs

**06:19**

Yeah, perfect. Thank you. And yeah, I do think that absolutely, just from my experience, as well, those questions, the wording of them can be quite tricky. And if they're not careful, it can trip them up really quickly. Have you ever experienced any challenges in meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners in the Responding component of the ATAR Visual Arts course?

**06:45**

Yeah, definitely. I think that there, I had a, I had a Year 11 student who had come from the Philippines, and was enrolled into ATAR and her parents really wanted her in ATAR. And she was doing really well in maths, not in English, and Art. And so it got to the point where she was she was, you know, her paintings were nice. But she had, she had done art over there, but their curriculum is different. And so she ended up having to be taken out of ATAR, she, when she went into General, she changed pathways. Because yeah, it was, it was very stressful for her, she was very academic, she was a hard worker, she was leaving in art lunch doing her painting and that kind of thing. But it got to the point where it was too much to bear, uh, in that time period, because, you know, ATAR is, you know, Year 11, and 12. Year 11 is three and a half terms, Year 12 is three terms. And it's such a crunch time and to get them over the line. And that's the students that are native English speakers, it's hard enough. And so for her, success, she ended up getting put into, into General and finished graduated and everything was great. But yeah, that, that was basically, there's basically a point where a lot of our, you know, career counselors and heads of the year, they look at the grades, and they just say, it

→ counselling out of ATAR example

## 2. Thematic analysis

**PARTICIPANT C - INTERVIEW 1**

COMMUNICATION → Nodding, smiling → Blind teaching → Sky, insular → SSI theory/SSI making → Joy of seeing CALD find 'voice' → 'universal language' → 'channel' through art making

Radio Silence → Students do not ask for help → Teacher stress → Finding their 'channel' to communicate → English competency not always known when entering ATAR → Superficial personal responses → Hang Kong/Singapore apartment → Aussie 4x2 → unfamiliar → Avoidance

INITIAL THEMES → Themes/Questions → Bushfires + the Aussie Dream of home ownership → what is accessible to CALD students

Back of Perth → Quieting content but not sure if it is coming in → "It's not until there's a problem" → "distress call" → All CALD/EALD are different, one strategy doesn't fit all → Very intelligent students but do not want to be seen as needing help/being slow to pick up content

Concluded out of ATAR → More about pathways than about 'suppering' through the journey → Teacher guilt → ATAR becomes a 'gated community'

Group 1 - ATAR Participants			
Shared themes across participants (3 or more shared)	RQ1 - The Problem	RQ2 - The Struggle	RQ3 - The Solution
	What do experienced visual arts educators understand about the additional needs of CALD learners?	How do experienced visual arts educators navigate the acquisition of visual literacy, and what factors shape the types of artworks selected for study?	How do experienced secondary visual arts educators support CALD learners in the Responding component of the ATAR Visual Arts course?
Participant A	RQ1.1. The range of abilities in one classroom can make accommodating the unique needs of CALD learners difficult. RQ1.2. A lack of cultural or contextual background knowledge creates further barriers to student interpretation of unseen artworks in exams. RQ1.3. Teaching subject specific terminology and visual language. RQ1.4. Language barriers hindering expression of understanding. RQ1.5. Demanding curriculum and time constraints make teaching relevant art history (background knowledge) difficult.	RQ2.1. Teachers can select artworks that are familiar to students, thereby creating a bridge to assist CALD learners in engaging with unfamiliar artworks or themes. RQ2.2. A lack of cultural or contextual background knowledge creates further barriers to student interpretation of unseen artworks in exams.	RQ3.1. Build student confidence and sense of success of expression through their own art-making. RQ3.2. Know your CALD students and cohort as individuals and build positive relationships and rapport with them to help them feel valued and safe. RQ3.3. Build student confidence and sense of success of expression through their own art-making.
Participant B	RQ1.1. The range of abilities in one classroom can make accommodating the unique needs of CALD learners difficult. RQ1.2. A lack of cultural or contextual background knowledge creates further barriers to student interpretation of unseen artworks in exams.	RQ2.1. Teachers can select artworks that are familiar to students, thereby creating a bridge to assist CALD learners in engaging with unfamiliar artworks or themes.	RQ3.1. Build student confidence and sense of success of expression through their own art-making.

## 3. Initial iconography

**PARTICIPANT C - INTERVIEW 1**

ARTWORK VISUALISATION - Radio Silence

Scrambled lines of communication. Themes/Questions may be inaccessible to CALD students, thereby making attempts to 'tap into their channels' difficult.

Bushfire → Participant shared feeling stressed & guilty when CALD students have been taken out of ATAR art due to the theory/written component. They also shared examples of using artworks about bushfires in past CrC essays, where this theme is very Australian & could elicit strong personal responses, but left some CALD students with surface level responses.

aphasic expression of interview aligns w/ participant response that CALD students can find their 'channel' of expression through art-making

Too late to scaffold or support

Cut off → Participant shared that often CALD students are counselled into General pathways due to language barriers, it is less of an option to support them through 11/12 ATAR if they are redirected in 11, making ATAR a 'gated community'.

Satellite dishes send radio waves out to space, space can be a quiet place, the radio signal is not often returned. Participant shared that it can feel like a one-way communication when students are quiet & compliant but do not reach out for help.

## 4. Final painting for interview



Radio Silence - Artwork 1 Participant C  
Oil on artist paper  
36 x 36cm

# Sample Selection

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Purposive, homogenous selection of participants to fulfill the research questions (Cohen et al., 2018). Two phases of participant recruitment will occur as per *Phase One ATAR* and *Phase Two General* data collection periods.

Ten participants will be selected against the following criteria:



**Visual Arts Specialists** – currently, or have delivered the Year 11 or 12 ATAR (Phase One) and General (Phase Two) Visual Arts course in the last three years.



**Experience** – Level 3 (Dept. Ed), or Heads of Arts, or at least ten years of experience delivering senior school Visual Arts courses.



**Context** – Teach in a school with a moderate to high CALD student population.



# Why ABER?

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- Synergistic textual and visual forms promote deep understanding (Leavy, 2020).
- Illuminates subtle and complex issues (Barone & Eisner, 2012).
- Evocative representation of data allows the viewer to engage empathically with participants (Barone & Eisner, 2012).
- Public scholarship in the dissemination of research findings and elevation of practitioner voices (Chilton & Leavy, 2020).
- Accessibility of findings to beneficiaries outside academia (Leavy, 2018).
- Hyper-visualisation of society makes innovative, image-based ABR increasingly relevant (Holm, et al. 2018).

See Appendix 4 – Validity and Reliability of ABR

# Significance

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No research has yet examined educator approaches to support this cohort's interpretation of imagery situated in unfamiliar, dominant cultural contexts.

Strategies expected to be revealed in this study could have implications for:

- Australia visual arts educators
- Early-career or graduate educators
- English, Media, and Humanities educators
- CALD learners in senior school visual arts courses

Contributes to methodological innovation in visual art education research in WA.

ABR is common internationally and in the Eastern states but is still emergent in WA (Paris et al., 2022).

# Ethics and Data Management

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Aligned under NHMRC Statement on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans.

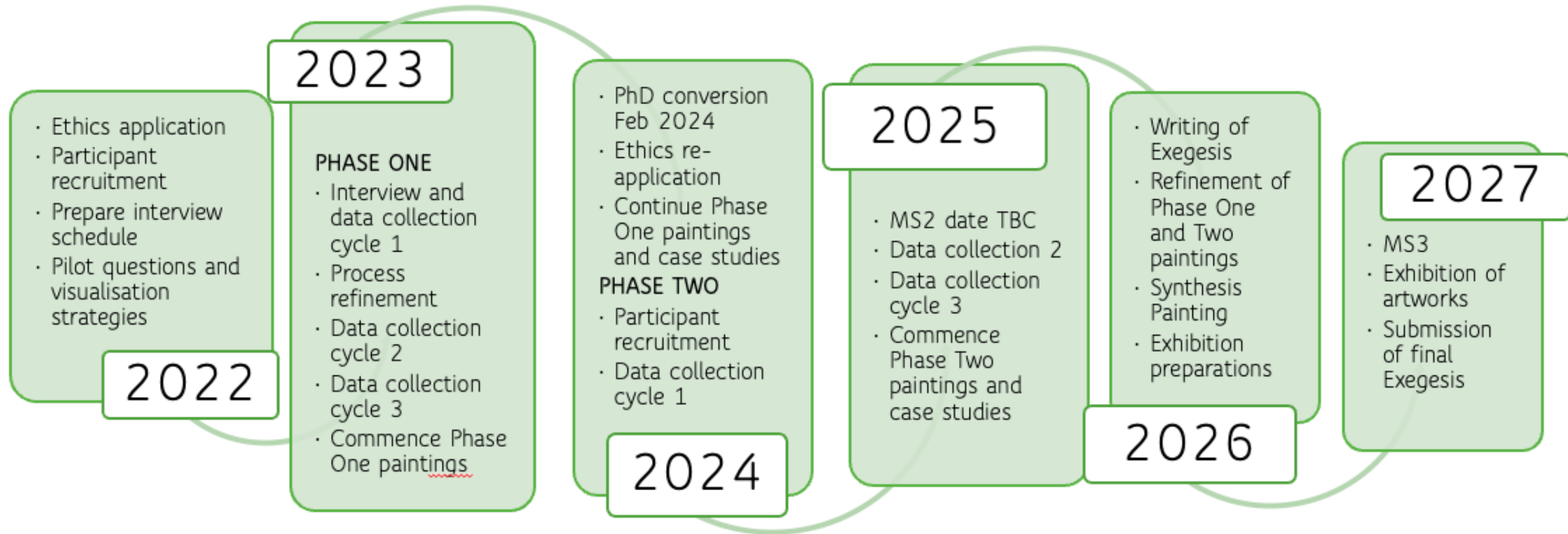
- Informed consent.
- Covid-19 provisions.
- Anonymity of the participants and confidentiality.
- Copyright and use of artworks for research purposes.

Data management aligned with Curtin Research Data Management Guidelines.

- Physical data kept in a locked studio space.
- Digital data to be stored on a password protected files and device, then uploaded to the R Drive pending approval.

# Timeline

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# Budget

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Items	Cost
Arts supplies (canvas, oil paints, turpentines)	\$1,000
Transcription software (Otter.A.I subscription)	\$50
Conference attendance fees	\$500
Exhibition opening and installation of works	\$350

The researcher's home studio facilities will satisfy the practical facility requirements for this ABER research design, with home office equipment available for additional research writing and analysis processes.

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# Questions

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# Appendix 1 – ATAR Visual Arts 2019

## WACE Exam

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**Artwork One:**

Richard Lewer

*He is remembered by his family with love and affection, as a quiet, gentle and unassuming man (2016)*

Oil on epoxy coated steel

110 x 110 cm

<https://www.sullivanstrumpf.com/assets/Uploads/exhibition-assets/the-best-thing-about-being-a-way-is-coming-home-2/richard-lewer-He-is-remembered-by-his-family-with-love-and-affection-as-a-quiet-gentle-and-unassuming-man-oil-on-epoxy-coated-steel-110-x-110-cm.jpg>



**Artwork Two:**

Fabio Bucciarelli

*The reflection of a rebel fighter is seen on a mirror used to spot Syrian government forces' position in an Old City district of Aleppo. (2012)*

Digital photograph

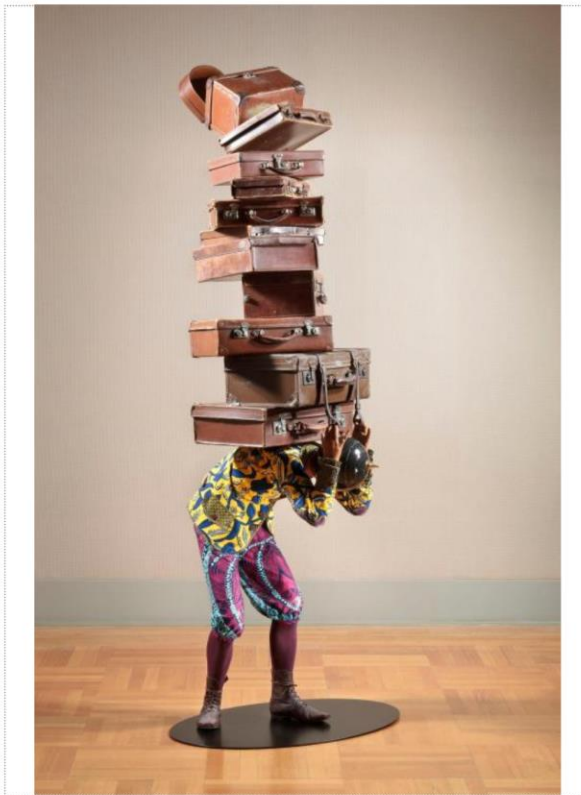
<http://www.fabiobucciarelli.com/portfolioitem/syria-battle-to-death/>

# Appendix 2 – General Visual Arts 2022

## Externally Set Task

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Source 1



### Question 3

(5 marks)

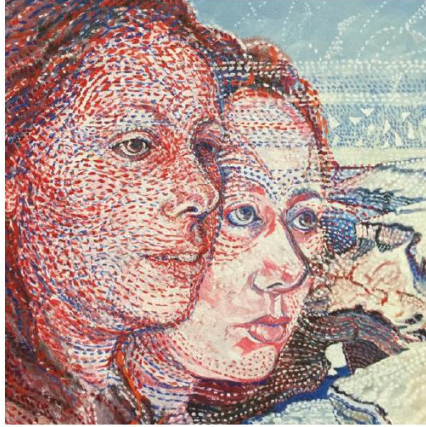
Refer to **Source 1**, view 2 of 2 (Detail), *Homeless Child 3* (2012) by Yinka Shonibare.

“Bleak, dark, and piercing cold, it was a night for the well-housed and fed to draw round the bright fire and thank God they were at home; and for the homeless starving wretch to lay him down and die.”

Oliver Twist, Charles Dickens

With reference to the title and the quotation above, which is inscribed on the glass globe, explain how Shonibare has created meaning through his use of one technique.

# Appendix 3 – ABR Synthesis Paintings



Individual participant paintings  
Paris (2022) in Paris et al., (2022)



Researcher synthesis painting  
*The digital sabbath and the digital distraction*, 1x2m (dyptych), oil on canvas.  
Paris (2022) in Paris et al., (2022)

# Appendix 4 - Validity and Reliability

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- Frequent participant checking of research output to ensure the authenticity of artistic output (Leavy, 2020).
- Alignment of research design to Chilton & Leavy's (2020) criteria for evaluation of ABR:



Usefulness



Aesthetic  
Power



Participatory



Artful  
Authenticity



Fit



# Appendix 5 – Preliminary Anecdotes

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- *“So I had to change my entire program that I wrote at the end of last year for this unit to cater to them [General course], and they are more culturally diverse than my ATAR students. Yeah, really culturally diverse. I've got all sorts of different nationalities. And yeah, they're a challenge.”*  
PARTICIPANT A (Interview 3 Transcript, Page 7)
- [reflecting on the diverse learners she had taught in senior school] *“And so looking at ways to modify the course offerings that we had for those students, because I considered after a number of years of experiencing that externally set tasks in the General course that that wasn't really accessible.”*  
PARTICIPANT B (Interview 1, Page 2)
- [reflecting on past CaLD ATAR students] *“but as I said, if they don't get it once, you know, there's a certain point in Semester One Year 11 if that if that doesn't click over, if their English speaking isn't at the point where you can just like, get by then they go to General.”*  
PARTICIPANT C (Interview 1, Page 8)