

**THE DREAMSCAPE AND MEANING OF WORK IN  
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

By

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## **Abstract**

Human activity is commonly associated with its contribution to purpose in life and life experiences as learning milieus that tend to be dynamic as well as influenced by context and time. Personal traits tend to be defined in such situations, and through the same processes individuals realise their personal contributions towards the self and the other. This study's scholarly roots are grounded in personal experiences as a student, artist, teacher, and pedagogist (pedagogue) within the vocational education sector. Work is a social activity through which individuals exercise their true potential and define personal attributes and values. From a sociological perspective, work is considered a process that engages them in both hands-on and cognitive participation, although it still remains a complex and contested concept with varying definitions. Marx and Engels as classical sociologists served as foundations for other social theorists (Weber, Turner, Wexler, Foucault, Dewey, Durkheim, and Harpaz) who informed this study.

The core contribution of this research is the exploration of the dreamscape and meaning of work in vocational education and training. Four students who were pursuing higher education in vocation-oriented courses submitted artefacts and contributed to discussions that the author analysed. The inner self, unity with others, service to others, and the expression of full potential through a defined pedagogy are key aspects considered in establishing meaning within a given context and time.

Understanding what constitutes work helps to comprehend art as work, as a social process, and a pedagogical act that engages a person in establishing self-worth. Within the context of this study, ontological understandings and educational thoughts on the dreamscape and meaning of work guided the discussion. More than one theoretical thought informs this study, and it is an amalgamation of various sociological and educational philosophical underpinnings. Art movements express the purpose of art beyond beauty. Gogh, Chagall (1887-1985), Picasso (1881-1973), and Van Gogh (1853-1890) as artists continue to frame my critical consciousness of the personal artefacts in this thesis.

Embracing art-based research and using a mixed-media technique and keeping in mind Weber's (2008) notion on art that "images can be used to capture the indescribable; . . . some things just need to be shown, not merely stated" (p. 41), the author has produced visual interpretations from the participants' contributions. The truth of the artefacts is established through an African philosophical aesthetic lens that views art as intuitive and symbolic as well as Rancière and Benjamin's theoretical understanding of works of art; that uphold the expression of an idea in a configuration of material detail rather than the discursive expression of the content. Educational theorists' contributions within the context of this study affirm the arts as an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge creation, sharing, and retention.

## **Preface**

This thesis is an original work of Justine Nabaggala. The research project received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board. The project's name is "The Dreamscape and Meaning of Work in Vocational Education and Training," No. Pro00037535, May 22, 2014.

### **Dedication**

To my parents, academic mentors, and family who have been a support system throughout my career endeavours.

To my dad, whose mentoring helped me to venture into the unknown. He rested in peace on July 25, 2004, but his memories still keep me close to the core values of life that he always shared with me. I am grateful that he enrolled me in a school whose motto I still hold dear: “NEVER GIVE UP.” This continues to be my salient weapon in my dad’s physical absence.

To my mom, who is a role model for all of her children. It is because of her hard work and determination that I am who I am. Not having received a university degree did not affect her desire for higher education. Thank you for spending sleepless nights on a sewing machine to pay my tuition fees. Your advocacy for professional development continues to frame my identity as a vocational pedagogist.

To my spouse and daughter, who have stood by my side since the beginning of this academic journey. Thank you for the support and sacrifices that you have both made to see me through.

To my siblings, thank you for upholding dad’s “*OGUTATEGANYA*” philosophy. Your personal inspiration and hard work have motivated me and demonstrate the value of education. I am grateful for your support, and may Dora Nalubwama, my deceased sibling, celebrate with me upon the completion of this academic journey; the courage that she exhibited during her battle with cancer has had a tremendous impact on my actions.

To my professional mentors, Dr. Bonnie Watt, Dr. Liv Mjelde, Dr. Catherine Gombe, Dr. Richard Daly and Dr. Kizito Kasule Maria, who have always been my points of reference for this academic journey of a girl child. I would not be where I am today if not for your endless motivation and encouragement; I am humbled.

The above experiences are inspirations that have had an impact on who I am as a scholar. In seeking an understanding of the career options that people choose to establish their personal worth, the dreamscape and meaning of the work of the participants have reminded me that this meaning is not entirely isolated; we define the self in relation to others.



Justine Nabaggala: *Work as Dynamic*

(acrylic on canvas, 2015)

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guidance, I continue to appreciate that the power of image lies within its ability to communicate to an audience from various perspectives.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

#### **Professional Journey**

I was born in Uganda and raised in a polygamous family; I am one of 13 children. My parents did not receive postsecondary qualifications but always looked to education as a pathway toward success in life. It is interesting that as siblings we have all followed different professional careers. My teacher asked me when I was a child to write an essay in English studies on what I wanted to become in the future. A lawyer was my first choice, and teaching was the third of three choices. A person might wonder why teaching was not my first choice, given that it is my field of work today. Teaching as a professional career is a marginalised profession in Uganda. The current public-service salary scales in Uganda show that teachers receive a low rate of pay compared to other professionals. My argument is, why are these professionals offered low monthly salaries when education is the foundation for all other fields and professions? All professionals acquire and further develop their skills and knowledge through the guidance of a teacher. I cannot fail to mention that I was inspired by my art teacher in secondary school. He further broadened my scope of understanding that we did not produce artworks only for assessment purposes in school or as a venture to generate additional income, but that it was also an engaging activity as visual self-expression and the making of sense in our surroundings in time and space. If sometimes one is not able to speak, he/she can act in various ways to put across personal thoughts to various audiences. Many of this particular teacher's

themes were linked to his emotional and value attachment to his experiences. In this case, hands-on experience is very relevant for a practical oriented career and how practical knowledge is linked to the world of work.

Individuals might realise that as much as they use art to communicate and share individual understandings of simple and complex situations, personal self-consciousness reflects power within the self. Moreover, people engaged in the production process consider art a vehicle for economic sustainability and social heritage. Part of my aim in this study was to examine the work involved in art production to gain further understanding of the individual practitioner's self-worth in society and how it affects his or her life. My personal experience with my art teacher inspired me to become an art teacher. He awakened a consciousness in me and became a role model for my own working life.

Early in 1993, when the high school results for secondary education were announced, my family looked forward to a lawyer in the making. To my disappointment and theirs, I was not admitted to the law school but, instead, to the Faculty of Arts in the only public university at that time. I was to pursue a nonprofessional programme that was subject oriented (e.g., religious studies, philosophy, and psychology) for three years, and, if I was interested, I would enrol in a postgraduate diploma course in education thereafter. The programme never made sense to me. My desire to become a professional in a profession that society highly respected was at this point dashed. My primary school motto stated "Never give up," and this is exactly what I did by identifying a second professional career option. I reflected on my secondary school English

composition exercise and the art teacher who had inspired me to become an artist. Without the consent of my parents, I chose teaching art as my next professional career. The reaction from my parents to such an independent decision was rather negative, but when I justified my decision, my parents became more compassionate.<sup>1</sup>

I consider myself fortunate to have been exposed to epistemological concepts and pedagogical landscapes outside my country. These academic transitions have facilitated the continuous development of my critical thinking on and understanding of some complexities and contradictions within education systems. They have given me access to new knowledge as an art teacher and led me to further appreciate my origins. I had previously shared knowledge with learners in two different learning environments. I was an art educator at an undergraduate level and a vocational-pedagogy instructor at a graduate level in Uganda. I have been a doctoral student in Canada, in a diversified class of professionals, and experienced a completely different climate, both physically and intellectually. I believe that my classmates' wide experiences are based on their various backgrounds, a variety of contexts from the different places from which we have come. For my part, because I come from a developing country in the "South," as defined by the developed countries, both the domestic and foreign

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<sup>1</sup> It is unfortunate that I have not been able to continuously share the joy of success with my father, who passed away in 2004, and my young sister, who passed away in May 2010, before I came to Canada in August. The experience of two deaths in my family left me wondering why mankind struggles in life, whether we are destined to face death. It is interesting that, regardless of such existential questioning, I proceeded to come to Canada and pursue further studies. Should I explain that my decision of coming to Canada was partly to please the souls of my father and sister, who were passionate about the value of education? I sometimes want to believe that, wherever they are, they still follow my actions and the decisions that I make in life and continue to share my joys and sorrows.

policies being implemented in my country seem to be framed in ways that are based on the interests of the “North.” This leaves me with the question of how effective, realistic, valuable, and humanistic the education system and strategies are in my country. I am pursuing this doctoral programme to keep my university teaching position. The system in my country, introduced during the colonial era, requires that I do so. If this were not a prerequisite, would I have enrolled in this programme? And why did I choose to come to Canada, of all places? Part of the reason for coming to North America was a suggestion from my previous graduate supervisor in Norway, who felt that I would grow further professionally in the field of education if I pursued graduate studies at the University of Alberta.

The relationship that I developed with my previous graduate supervisor while I was in Norway and afterwards has helped me embrace new academic approaches that are different from those to which I had previously been exposed. My learning processes while I was in Norway were based on the concept of learning by doing. I remember the day that I was asked to prepare a two-year study plan in answer to why I had enrolled in the Master of Vocational Pedagogy programme at Akershus University College. The experience was a bombshell for a person such as me, who was coming from an education system that based its modes of instruction on ‘top-down’ course outlines centrally designed and implemented for approximately five years without reviews. What I also found fascinating during my stay in Norway as a graduate student was the use of group work and mentoring to facilitate the development of my critical-thinking abilities, research skills, and a platform from which to gain insights into the practices



followed in Norwegian vocational institutions, schools, and workplaces. This experience was contrary to the individualistic learning that I knew during my training in Uganda.

I should note that my enrolling at Akershus University College was a result of the existing collaboration between the college and my home university, Kyambogo. I was required to study the pedagogical dynamics and content development of the same academic programme in which I was enrolled. As a Kyambogo University employee, it was my responsibility to investigate how the university could build the capacity of its vocational pedagogy within its Faculty of Vocational Studies. The aim was to understand and participate in the development of an academic programme related to labour-market developments in both Uganda and Southern Sudan. I was to share my learnings with colleagues in the faculty, which they would then convey to the enrollees in the graduate programme. Ideally, the students would acquire pedagogical skills to be able to build sustainable living conditions and increase economic growth for the populations in their respective vocational specialities as well as in the regions from which they all came as educators.

The empirical findings from my involvement in the implementation processes for the master's programme in vocational pedagogy brought to light the gaps, similarities, contradictions, and complexities within the Ugandan, Southern Sudan, and Norwegian vocational education systems. Uganda's vocational education, according to the findings, required new moral and cognitive spaces wherein constructive dialogue between stakeholders and knowledge systems

could occur. A feature common to both Uganda and Norway was that society had little regard for vocationally oriented careers; one great difference was the enrolment qualifications for academic programmes at Norwegian and Ugandan institutions. The Norwegian University had the option of accepting equivalencies in the form of practical professional experience, or ‘real competence’ in the vocational area of speciality, whereas my university did not accept equivalencies based on work experience. In my master’s thesis I made recommendations and pointed to the way forward for an effective VET system, and my home university has recently implemented some of them (Nabaggala, 2009).

With enthusiasm, and embracing my responsibilities at my Ugandan place of work, I have been challenged to critically reflect on issues linked to education. My professional engagement has opened doors for me to meet academicians with empowering souls with whom I have shared my thoughts, and they have further encouraged me to pursue doctoral studies. I realise that as individuals we might not see our potential to initiate positive change. However, with good mentoring and self-appreciation, the power to voice our thoughts develops gradually, and we are able to define our standpoint on knowing within the specified contexts; but we always carry with us our social backgrounds. My family has encouraged me in all my efforts. I use the word *catalyst* as a metaphor for my mother’s support, which has to a certain extent determined where I am at this point in life. She is a self-taught tailor who mastered a vocational trade and with these skills educated her 13 children. John Dewey (1934/1958) considered education a tool to expedite learners’ acquisition of knowledge in a way that makes it more readily viable in

problem solving. By unconsciously using Dewey's (1915) concept of "learning by doing", my mother mastered her sewing skills to pay for our school tuition. Her working late into the night reflects her fortitude and her parental conscientiousness about educating my siblings and me. What could be the best reward for such a woman, other than aiming higher in my profession? I sometimes wonder whether she found contentment in the academic achievements of her children that she never had a chance to attain herself. Such complex questions make me reflect on my mother's moral and financial support while I was pursuing my master's degree in fine art in 2008. Towards the end of the graduate programme I did not have enough funds to pay my tuition fees and to produce and present my artworks at the final exhibition. With my mother's help and the help of a childhood friend, I completed the course; this experience has made me appreciate and value both my mother's and my childhood friend's amity. Without their support, I would not be where I am in my career today.

My decision to come to North America might be considered a move toward rediscovering the self in the scholarly community. Currently, it seems a rather complex undertaking for me to share the knowledge that I will have acquired by the end of my programme with students in my country whose minds are still subjected to 'invisible colonialism' and an education system that faces many urgent problems. Lagos (2012) defines invisible colonialism through Eduardo Galeano scholarly understandings and states:

Invisible colonialism however, convinces you that serfdom is your destiny and impotence your nature: it convinces you *that it's not possible* to speak

*not possible to act, not possible to exist* which reminds us again that the present should never forget either the less dissimulated colonialism of the past or the no less obvious colonialism of the present. And at the same time we should continue to unmask-no matter if through the study of writing, the oral, the pictorial or other media-the not so invisible “invisibilities” of the multiple mechanisms of oppression of the past and present. (p.92)

By invisible colonialism in this context, I mean that the country’s educational system is framed on the donor states’ perceptions and interests. The donors offer funding to the country even though it lacks sufficient infrastructure and manpower to address the interests that the donors have enunciated. From personal experience, I know that what the donor states require of the country’s educational system is more idealistic than practical. The needs of the education sector might be the same for both Uganda and the donor states, but the level and availability of the means to implement change are radically different in each.

With reference to my previous experience as an educator, the pedagogical approaches in North America are to a great extent different from those in my home institution. While I was in my Canadian classes, I realised that educators act more as facilitators during the learning process and that students are fully engaged in expressing their thinking and arguments, which is the opposite of what occurred in my educational experiences at home. My previous experience at the graduate level in Uganda was that the educators acted as the origins of knowledge but did not take into consideration the knowledge and experience that students

brought to the learning situation. This experience makes me think about students' adapting to new ways of learning that require them to participate in collective discovery and understanding of knowledge.

### **Professional Identity Formation**

I have come to accept that I have multiple identities. Identity is at once individual and social; it is the affective interaction of the life experiences that are variably salient in any given circumstance (Kroger, 2007). Furthermore, identity consists of what we know best about our relations to self, others, and the world; yet it is often constituted of the things about which we are least able to talk (Carlsen, 2008; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). I acknowledge that I come from a cultural group—the kingdom of Buganda—within the central part of my country that was influential during the colonial rule of the British government in Africa. This is not something of which I am proud, because my ancestors served as the connection to divert people from the knowledge systems and wisdom traditions that governed them and orient learners to the colonial system and its modernity. These actions have prevented several generations from knowing who they actually are and how they could view life as a whole. I was trained as a teacher educator and an artist at the same time. I have taught in secondary and postsecondary institutions and worked on academic programme development and evaluation committees. My experiences during my academic and professional transitions have contributed to my current status as a doctoral student in curriculum studies at the University of Alberta.

My home university is the only one in Uganda with a full-fledged Faculty of Vocational Studies that offers bachelor's degrees in food-processing technology, art and design, human nutrition and dietetics, agriculture, business management, mechanics, electronics, construction, and information and communication technology. James Lutalo-Bosa (2006) and the Ugandan Poverty Eradication Action Plan (2004/5-2007/08) emphasised the need to strengthen vocational education in relationship to the economy's need for skills.<sup>2</sup> The experiences of graduate training outside my home university and visits to international universities that offer vocational studies have made me appreciate and at the same time critique my years of training in both diploma and undergraduate teacher-training programmes and as a teacher trainer at Kyambogo University. I realised that the courses emphasised the knowledge content more than the ontological aspects. The courses outlined ways to define what instructors wanted students to learn, how to tell whether they have learned it, how to measure what they have learned, and how to show the university administration that the students could systematically demonstrate individual skills or behaviours. As an instructor, I received a course outline that called for performance objectives within my vocational speciality. I was required to plan a course session that specified what the students would be able to do at the end of the lecture and the end of the course. Moreover, regardless of my identification of contradictions within the course outlines, making flexible and efficient changes was cumbersome because of the bureaucracy within academic institutions. The course

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<sup>2</sup> James Lutalu Bosa was the Chancellor of Kyambogo University, 2003-2007.

outlines that I used in teaching were the same as those that I had as a student in the same department.

With critical consciousness, I wonder what educational strategies in learning environments promote as a viable education to realise a personal purpose. Having to train students in what the world of work wants indicates that what they know how to do is separated from what it means to be doing it. Should work be linked to skills and knowledge acquisition alone, as it is in vocational education today? Why should we view work from only this narrow point of view and let that influence the way that we share knowledge with learners? Where is the emotional or individual interest in what is considered of worth embraced in making choices and during the learning process? In orienting pedagogical practice toward the business of doing, I presume that we are customising the learning process and suppressing other kinds of knowing and understanding because of the way we train students. Are we as vocational educators indoctrinating our learners and encouraging them to understand only the capitalistic approach to work? The situation is full of contradictions. The hands-on learning of VET are also meaningful for students from the point of view of practical or workshop learning. Considering the experience as an ongoing, purposeful activity, it is a 'form of life' that orients itself through learners' self-consciousness, because in the course of their activities, learners produce not only goods or services, but also personal and social meaning.

I have been motivated to undertake research on what I call the dreamscape and the meaning of work for students who are involved in vocational education.

The word *dreamscape* as a noun is a landscape or scene with the strangeness or mystery characteristic of dreams; but in the context of this study, dreamscape refers to the participants' visual insights into the work of producing artefacts. I should note that in the participants' production of these artefacts that represent their meaning of work, I presumed that potentially conscious and unconscious minds were engaged in interplay, and therefore what might have appeared ambiguous to one person might have been significant to another.

As a dual practitioner (artist and teacher trainer), I often express and communicate my reflective thoughts and feelings on situations through visual art. The personal painting in Figure 1 represents my interpretation of the processes that I am undergoing to understand why I am where I am today. The dark



*Figure 1.* Enlightenment (acrylic on canvas, 2011).



foreground and background colours reflect the assumed common understanding of the meaning of work amongst people with whom I have interacted. The tinted colours in the middle of the painting represent my standpoint, which I affirmed by relating work to a certain form of enlightenment. However, questions still remain: What influences that meaning? What are the parameters that society or individuals consider as they construct the meaning of work? I reflect on the sapiential literature of the Bible, which states:

Then I thought, why do people work so hard? I saw people try to succeed and be better than other people. They do this because they are jealous. They don't want other people to have more than they have. . . . It is foolish to fold your hands and do nothing. If you don't work, you will starve to death. . . . In some countries you will see poor people who are forced to work very hard. You will see that this is not fair to them. It is against their rights. But don't be surprised! The ruler who forces them to work has another ruler who forces him. And there is still another ruler who forces both of these rulers. Even the king is a slave—his country owns him. (Ecclesiastes 10, 5:4, Good News Version)

We encourage work and wealth, but not at the expense of another person. Work should not mean slaving for economic reasons; rather, work should involve fruitful endeavours for the individual and common good. I have come to realise that I am already socialised into a culture that exploits human labour to maximise the accumulation of surplus value. A question I ask is, Is it possible to transcend this reality? I have worked with this in my art.

### **Research Problem Area**

In a broader context of educational research, my study problem area falls under curriculum studies, with a focus on the dreamscape and meaning of work within Vocational Education and Training (VET); in the Alberta context it is commonly known as Career and Technology Studies (CTS). The *dreamscape of work* in this study refers to visual insights into the meaning of work in arts and crafts. In VET, learning and working are interdependent; we learn constantly by engaging in conscious, goal-directed, everyday activities; indeed, as we think and act, we learn. The quality of this learning is likely to depend on certain factors. Billett (2001) identified these factors as “a) the kinds of activities that individuals engage in, b) their access to the contribution of situational factors, including support and guidance, and c) how individuals engage, interact and interpretatively construct knowledge from these situations” (p. 21). Together, these factors influence the process of learning and what we learn.

### **Research Question**

The main research question is, what are the dreamscape and the meaning of work in vocational education and training (VET) for CTS/VET students? Work is an activity in which humankind engages at any time in life. Because we share knowledge in skills-oriented careers, both educators and students attempt to achieve self-worth and execute given tasks to their utmost potential. This study describes the visual expressions and interpretations of what CTS/VET students consider of worth and demonstrate the relevance of art as an act of participation and a pedagogical tool in defining the meaning of work.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Personal life experiences during my academic and professional transitions are the reasons for my interest in and passion for this study area. I would metaphorically describe the process of coming to my topic as a rosebud that gradually opens its petals. Historically, within African communities as elsewhere, people used their homes as learning arenas and considered elders teachers. Families transferred folk-wisdom traditions and approaches to sustainable livelihood from generation to generation. Such an approach to life gave rise to various forms of awareness of the meaning of knowledge and skills in the eyes of both society and the individual person. Step by step, through in-depth reflections on the problematics, my study interest has been in how we frame what we do as skills-oriented persons. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (2004) stated one of the many definitions of *vocational education and training* that has kept me thinking about our values for the activities in which we engage:

These are more or less organized or structured activities that aim to provide people with the knowledge, skills and competences necessary to perform a job or a set of jobs, whether or not they led to a formal qualification. VET is independent of venue, age or other characteristics of participants and previous level of qualifications. VET may be job-specific or directed at a broader range of occupations. It may also include elements of general education. The major importance of VET for

individual, enterprises and society is widely acknowledged and is perceived as a key element of lifelong learning. (p. 13)

This definition acknowledges the importance of skills development to perfect assigned work, but to what extent does it reflect the inner voice of the self? One should keep in mind that the way an individual teaches and learns predetermines the ideologies that he/she instils in learners and, at the same time, carry on with in the world. Schools, workplaces, and even small communities idealistically have several things in common: They all promote the transfer and acquisition of skills and knowledge; they are concerned with culture and with transferring values, actions, and processes between generations; and, at the same time, they are all pedagogical landscapes. The underlying questions are how and why the knowledge is transferred and the impact on understanding and giving meaning to life. Considering the existing rationale that influences the education sector under the globalisation umbrella, I continue to wonder whether during the transfer of knowledge and skills within vocational education programs, the humanistic values of work are initiated by instructors and students are subjected to accept their fate in life all in the name of freedom and democracy.

### **Significance**

This study reflects how I have confronted ambitions and fear, confusion and loss, and praise and blame within my profession as an educator. I have a sense of dissatisfaction (lack of freedom of the mind), and I have used my doctoral studies as a process to analyse personal actions as well as the actions of those who participate in VET. Furthermore, the study's visual approach

(production of the artefacts) has reaffirmed that work is an activity that embraces emotional attachment and physical involvement to create self-satisfaction with what a person has accomplished in life and within different work-related landscapes. The study leaves the impression that there is no marginal line between arts and work. Whether they are fine artists, poets, dramatists, or musicians, their act of participation is a form of work that embraces both their emotional and their physical engagement. I used a theoretical framework that links key constructs. First, defining the key concepts that constitute the study's title has made the content of this thesis flow clearly to gain a coherent understanding of the theoretical processes that I have embraced. *Work, meaning, vocation, education, training, and vocational education and training* are the key concepts in this study.

## **Work**

As various scholars explained in the literature that I reviewed, work is a complex concept to define. Conducting a literature review on work as a concept resulted in a broader understanding of how scholars defined and understood work. It is imperative to understand work as a generic way of being or to define work as a social metabolism of nature: work as labour and work as labour power. Viewing work in the form of labour and labour power, Marx and Engels (1968/2004) considered all human existence and history as rotating around the needs of humankind. They looked upon work/labour as the basic material activity in human existence: what human beings eat and drink, where they live in terms of shelter, how they provide themselves with clothing. For Marx and Engels, the

production of the means to meet human needs and the actual production of material life itself happens to be the first historical act to sustain human life.

Mjelde (2006) affirmed this when she referred to a slogan used in Norway during the 1960s: the “progressive pedagogical circles” (p. 195) who advocated students’ learning for life rather than considering the labour market.

Humankind and nature concurrently participate in labour/work, and this partnership helps people, of their own accord, to begin to regulate and control their material experiences with nature. Presumably, if humankind is to live, then labour is a human and living phenomenon. With this assumption of labour, what would I consider labour power? It is a personal commodity and at the same time a person’s capacity, as Marx (1932/1959) suggested, to combine the mental and physical capabilities of human beings while producing a use-value of any description. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I have defined work as the mental, physical, emotional, and social capacity of humankind to interact with nature to provide the material necessities of existence while achieving a sense of self-esteem and identity to find meaning, purpose, and satisfaction in life.

### **Vocation**

Conceptualising the meaning of VET within the context of this research inquiry required that I define *vocation*, *education*, and *training* as three different concepts that frame the education taught in schools and institutions of higher learning. I am prompted to question how a vocation develops in human beings through their education and training. Who determines, facilitates, and impedes a vocation? Moreover, how does a vocation reveal itself? What effect does time

have on being recognised for a vocation? How is being gifted to do something considered in defining vocation? When and how a vocation is considered a mission? Is vocation a theological concept? Buechner (1993) referred to a vocation as the “place where your deep gladness meets the world’s deep hunger” (p. 119). In other words, a vocation is a bond between the world around us and ourselves. What we as human beings desire and consider our deepest longings, connected to our needs in life actualises a vocation and therefore becomes personal. In this case a vocation would facilitate the creation of the self within a given context whether or not it is linked to monetary benefits.

Dewey (1916/1966) defined vocation “nothing but such a direction of life activities as renders them perceptibly significant to a person, because of the consequences they accomplish and also useful to his [*sic*] associates” (p. 4). What I find so interesting is that activities in a vocation involve the use of the mind (soul), heart, and hand, regardless of the working plans that are either documented, translated into educational policy, or merely concealed in the mind. I am uncomfortable with *vocation* when it is solely referred to as an activity that engages us only in earning a living. As we earn our living, there is ideally at a certain point a feeling of satisfaction when we accomplish a task.

The process through which we realise performance indicators to be able to earn a living empowers the interactions between the worker, tools, and materials. Obtaining a product at the end of a task shows the worker’s worth in the production process, although there is a question to what extent the employer realistically considers the worker’s input in determining his or her rate of earning

to justify that person's essence of working. When we master the use of tools or machinery within a workplace and our input is truly appreciated in relation to the output, the happiness we attain gives us the will to continue working. Through such activities we attain hands-on education. Reflecting critically on what vocation is has led me to the realisation of its interplay with education and understanding of its use to people.

### **Education**

Education is a concept that different scholars have defined various ways. The word *education*, according to Ducasse (1958), is derived from *educere*, “bring out,” “bring forth what is within,” or “bring out potential”; and *ducere*, “to lead” (p. 1). On the other hand, another school of thought, according to Scholfield (1972), says that education is derived from *educare*, which means to “form” or “train” (p. 32). Therefore, education is an act or experience that impacts the mind, character, and ability to perform. Lucas and Bernstein (2004) defined education as “the learning of knowledge, information and skills during the course of life” (p. 36). The experience involves a generic transmission of knowledge, skills, and values. Fafunwa (1982) considered education “the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he [*sic*] lives” (p. 17). This definition resonates with me because it encompasses people's mental, physical, and vocational abilities within their given contexts. Therefore, the ultimate goal of education should be to be motivating, goal-oriented, meaningful, student-teacher oriented, and guided by both positive



and negative emotions. Furthermore, Flinders and Thornton (2004), with reference to Dewey's understanding of education, stated that

all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race. This process begins unconsciously almost at birth, and is continually shaping the individual's powers, saturating his [*sic*] consciousness, forming his habits, training his ideas, and arousing his feelings and emotions. Through this unconscious education the individual gradually comes to share in the intellectual and moral resources which humanity has succeeded in getting together. He becomes an inheritor of the funded capital of civilisation. The most formal and technical education in the world cannot safely depart from this general process. It can only organise it or differentiate it in some particular direction. (p. 17)

I concur with this quotation with regard to hands-on education. As a foundation of formal and technical education, situations that encompass knowledge from social conditions play a big role in determining students' intellectual powers within different learning contexts. The bond between the social conditions and formal learning encounters help to acquire true education that unites students with the context of the welfare of the community to which they belong. In doing so, the educational process embeds both psychological and sociological structures to enhance learning. Dewey (1916/1966) considered the psychological structure the basis from which a child's own instincts and powers furnish the material and provide the starting point for all education. The psychological structure is controlled when it is applied to students' activities.

All in all, understanding what education is centres on an individual as social; and, through society, an organic union of individuals' forms. By *organic union*, I mean that people tend to adhere to the same work culture, values, norms, and beliefs that brand them and identify them as unique from others.

### **Training**

I defined *training* for the purposes of this study as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies during the teaching of vocational or practically oriented skills and knowledge. Deilami (2003) believed that training involves knowing how to employ and develop internal abilities and potential that establish and expand ethically approved qualities and behaviours and achieving higher moral virtues. Wayne Cascio (2012) further defined training as planned programmes that improve employees' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and social behaviours so that the performance of the organisation improves considerably. In vocational education, training can be on the job, off the job, or both.

On-the-job training takes place on the workplace premises with actual tools, equipment, documents, or materials. Hands-on experience is effective in vocational work. Off-the-job training takes place away from the premises. From personal perspective and experience, I believe that demonstrations in workshops at training institutions or the use of replicas for the processes could enhance this type of training. In planning to train a group of people in any vocational speciality, it is imperative to consider the training needs, how the trainers are prepared for the training, and the availability of appropriate training packages, the expected performance, as well as presentation and follow-up. Therefore, the

definition of training for this study is the planned and unplanned set of activities to which a trainee is exposed within a given context to become acquainted with the execution processes and perhaps develop an in-depth connection with and appreciation for the experiences therein. Having explained the three concepts of vocation, education, and training, I now discuss what I understand by the term *vocational education and training*.

### **Vocational Education**

Young (1992) defined vocational education as “any form of instruction, the purpose of which is to prepare a person for gainful employment in any primary or secondary industry or in any service occupation or to increase his or her skill or proficiency therein” (p. 6). In this case the core meaning of vocational education is a field of knowledge oriented towards trades, occupations, and professions, which I still question and find restrictive. I postulate that the type of education and training that students receive goes beyond achieving the epistemological aspect that the above definition emphasises. Mjelde (2006) referred to vocational education as learning from practice to theory and back again and considered it the concept of “learning by doing” (p. 79), which she explained as a pedagogical relationship between the work of the mind and hand during the learning process as learners move from action to thought. We learn from the practice and practical knowledge of others, as well as from our own hand and mind. The former is the social aspect of learning, and the latter is more local, immediate, and personal. The existing literature elucidated that hands-on experience can build professional competence within the vocational fields/trades

and the workforce (Aarkrog & Jørgensen, 2008; Billett, 2001; Heikkinen, Tove, & Mjelde, 1999; Winch, 2000).

John Dewey (1916/1966) argued that making occupations the centre of the learning process will result in a qualitative change in atmosphere and motivation in the classroom. According to Dewey, a proper educational use of vocational education should aim at giving those who engage in vocational callings the desire and ability to share in social control and to experience a great difference in motivation, spirit, and atmosphere in learning milieus so that occupations become the distinct centre of school life (Mjelde, 2006, p. 96). Gregson and Gregson (1991) referred to Dewey's (1916/1966) argument that education should take a critical democratic approach to raising students' consciousness of values, attitudes, and workers' responsibilities. Dewey's standpoint on the aim of VET was that schools or institutions should not be used as agencies to transfer the older division between aspects of life such as labour and leisure, culture and science, mind and body, and directed and directive class into a society that is nominally democratic. Dewey pointed out that such training could potentially disconnect both the scientific and the historic human connection of the materials and processes with which we deal. Although scholars such as Prosser and Quigley (1949) promoted an approach that advocates the use of indoctrination as a form of pedagogy within areas of occupational speciality, the type of learning limits the critical understanding and ethical standards of the dominant culture within a capitalistic environment. Learners do not have an opportunity to discover alternative ways of knowing and doing things within their areas of interest.

With regard to critical consciousness, Prosser and Quigley's (1949) perspective on vocational education narrows the scope of intellectual creativity compared to Dewey's (1916/1966) concept of self-motivated education. Facilitation of personal choices during the learning processes promotes self-discipline, knowledge acquisition and applicability, moral standards, and a sense of service if we are to agree with Dewey's perspective on vocational education. I further presume that people trained from the two different perspectives of knowing have meanings of work that are centrally different from each other. This is because, from one perspective, the individual is part of the whole process; whereas from the other perspective, the individual is a recipient of what has already been planned.

Kraus, Gonon, Oelkers, and Stolz (2008) acknowledged that vocational education is a means of providing skills and competencies for economic growth and status. The skills and processes influence the organisation and structure of society. Considering what constitutes societal structures, vocational education leans more toward a lifelong-learning form of education that not only offers learning opportunities for skills development, but also improves employees' feelings of satisfaction, self-esteem, and happiness to give them purpose in life.

In view of other scholars' perceptions of vocational education and training (VET), I must acknowledge that a conclusive definition is still complex and challenging in the academic world because all definitions are based on the interests of particular social, economic, and political interactions within various contexts. I therefore define VET as the conscious and unconscious adaptability

within specified environments of people to use skills and knowledge to frame an identity. The ultimate goal of VET is, through mind, hands, and body experiences, to give them a sense of happiness and satisfaction.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework that links core constructs helps to break down the study into an amalgamation of sociological and educational thoughts on the establishment of a dreamscape and the meaning of work in vocational education-oriented trades. The contributions of this study are not allied with one scholarly theory, but with a combination of many that trace their influence to some of the classical sociologists. Marx and Engels have been fundamental influences on current social theorists who have contributed to the dreamscape and meaning of work that I discuss in this thesis. Marx and Engels contended that human existence and history rotate around human needs, and Turner (1991) concurred:

Sociological theory thus seeks to explain how humans behave, interact and organise themselves in certain ways. . . . Most sociological theory constitutes a verbal “image of society” rather than a rigorously constructed set of theoretical statements organised into a logically coherent format.

(pp. 29-30)

In relation to sociological theory, what I present in this thesis encompasses both scientific and visualisation approaches to the attributes, values, and concepts of society’s underpinnings. My research interest is in establishing a visual understanding of work as a concept of VET, which is one way of making meaning of social processes. Wexler (2009) explained that in his research he

acknowledged that the power of social theories conceived during the modern era still contribute to the sensibility of establishing meaningful interpretations of the life experiences that we continue to encounter in different milieus; educational milieus are inclusive and considered historical social contexts. Wexler also asserted that, through the sociology-of-knowledge approach, we obtain clues beyond the history of the conceptual tools. Through such approaches, appreciation for and understanding of personal contexts cause people to question how their own times influence their personal thinking.

Regardless of Durkheim and Marx being the pillars of theoretical durability and fountainheads of traditions of social theory in education (Wexler, 2009, p. 39), for this study I was drawn to Weber's (1947) social theory model, which emphasises more the importance of beliefs and ideas embodied in people's lives. In this model the cultural factor focuses attention on the meanings that people hold in relation to others. Through interactions with others, we begin to appreciate the world ideas that have given meaning to why we live. These interactions enable us to define and justify personal participation or behaviour. Wexler (2009) cited Weber's research principle:

Study social action only by understanding what it means to the participants. . . . We are trying to make sense of the world to develop a system of meanings, a "theodicy." . . . We want to justify or "rationalise" our existential situation, and we also try to enhance our experience. (p. 92)

### **Work as a Social Process**

With reference to the literature that I reviewed, the understandings of Durkheim (1897/1966), Weiss and Morse (1955), Weiss and Kahn (1960), and Hudson and Sullivan (2008) reflect Marx's capitalistic perspective on work, contrary to that of Morin (2004), Bell and Taylor (2003), Ashmos and Duchon (2000), Fairholm (1996), Dehler and Welsh (1994), and Foucault (1981), which was influenced by Weber's (1958, 1963) perspective on spirituality and inner life as core to an understanding of life and work. Harpaz's (1998) propositions on the meaning of work encompass both capitalistic and spiritual perspectives. Harpaz's five concepts of work (centrality of work, societal norms, work goals, valued outcomes, and work-role identification) have enriched my perception of work and my decision on how best to deal with the empirical data from this study.

### **Meaning as a Social Process**

Voloshinov's (1973) and Wittgenstein's (1958) philosophical contributions promote the sociological understanding that meaning is never abstract or generalised or separated from its place and time. Postmodernists such as Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard have reminded us of the impact of constructing meaning based on how we question what is of concern. Sölle and Cloyes (1984) identified emotional satisfaction as an element of individual character and personality. Scholars such as Humeniuk (1989), McConaghy (1990), Priebe (1993), and Ueno (2002) advocated for the embracement of the ontological aspect of approaching human work, to which I have adhered in my activities with the participants in this study.



The amalgamation of educational theory and social theory in relation to the concept of work draws us back to Dewey's (1934) influence on education, and scholars such as Ducasse (1958), Scholfield (1972), Lucas and Bernstein (2004), Fafunwa (1982), Flinders and Thornton (2004), Deilami (2003), and Cascio (2012) have broadened our understanding of the purpose of education. The artefacts in my research exhibit that work as a concept and its influence on pedagogy through theoretical thought are linked to Dewey's concept of learning by doing. Some of the theorists whom I mention in this research and who concurred with Dewey's educational philosophy include Young (1992); Mjelde (2006); Aarkrog and Jorgensen (2008); Billett (2001); Heikkinen, Tove, and Mjelde (1999); Winch (2000), and Gregson and Gregson (1991).

### **Art as a Social Process**

Understanding art history within the research context establishes the development of art as an act of participation beyond its principles and elements. Rancière's (2004) philosophy on aesthetics, which traces its origins to Schiller (1967) and Benjamin (1968), guided the involvement of the participants in producing artefacts that visually express their meaning of work within their respective vocational trades. To the two scholars, art does not exist in abstraction or focus on how well skills and practice are applied, but concentrates on how art is contextualised in defining its relevance or bringing out the personal truth. In his *aesthetics and its discontents* Rancière (2009) explains what he means by the phrase *the aesthetic regime of art* with reference to what art is:

The property of being art refers back not to distinction between modes of doing, but to a distinction between modes of being. This is what ‘aesthetics’ means: in the aesthetic regime of art, the property of being art is no longer given by the criteria of technical perfection but is ascribed to a specific form of sensory apprehension. (p. 29)

Initially before the emergence of the *aesthetic regime of art*, works of art are believed to have been judged based on their conformity with pre-established design principles and elements of artistic production and representation. With the change of the wind, this gave art the opportunity to be viewed as “sensory form...heterogeneous to the ordinary forms of sensory experience” (Rancière, p. 30). The emergence of the aesthetic regime of art is further explained in Rancière’s *the aesthetic unconscious* in which he critiques Kant and Baumgarten’s contributions on aesthetics. The *aesthetic regime of art* is in line with Foucault’s (1982) contribution about the inward significance of art to individuals or life. Artists Van Gogh (1853-1890) and Picasso (1881-1973) (as cited in Geoff & Karene, 2012) believed that having the courage to attempt something defines its meaning. Their thoughts conform to those of Eisner (2002), Gamst (1995), Berger (1972), and Perkins (2003) on work as a form of art as well as art as a form of work.

Art’s purpose to people and in relation to others draws my attention to the attributes and values of my participants. Art is an interdisciplinary approach to meaning making and an act of participation or a form of pedagogy. Through a pedagogical lens, art ceases to stand in isolation as curriculum content and

positions itself as a visual way of life that individuals live through art, with no emphasis on teacher-centered art skills that as individuals we understand personal potential. Individuals act and speak through unique forms of art through a creative process. As Shusterman (2010) argued, “Art is an embodied, expressively refined excretion of natural energies” (p. 28). Furthermore, this is in agreement with John Dewey’s notion as quoted by Shusterman “the work of art operates to deeper and to raise to great clarity the sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience” (pp. 36-37). Within the context of this study art has played a role in defining explicitly the dynamics of the participants’ career interests.

What I still find fascinating is that we make various aesthetics judgements to appreciate art as a product and process, but what links all viewers is the visual connection. The relationship between the artist and the artefacts might differ from that of the viewer. The truth in this sense holds, based on the context in which the artefact is created and for what purpose, as Rancière (2004) and Benjamin (1968) affirmed in their theories of aesthetics. We do not view art in the sense of beauty, which is relative, but in the sense that we are able to communicate visually through various media to establish the meaning of contextualised experiences.

### **Overview**

Two main areas of this thesis guide its flow: the subsidiary questions that I derived from the main question and the chapter descriptions. One of the sub-

questions has been allocated to a specific chapter and the answers to all of the remaining questions contribute to my discussion of the study findings.

### **Research Questions**

The main research question being what the dreamscape and meaning of work in vocational education and training is for the students could best be answered by asking various questions whose answers would lead to a holistic understanding. The four subsidiary questions are as follows:

1. Question 1: What are the potential insights of the students as they visually represent their ideas or feelings about what their artwork means?
2. Question 2: How do the students see their lives in relation to the role of their skills and education in understanding the individual practitioner's self-worth?
3. Question 3: What are the personal inner voices or values that students cherish and nurture while they frame their meaning of work? How do they meet? What inner processes are created in these learning sessions?
4. Question 4: What happens when students strive to develop their creativity within their specific vocational career?

### **Chapter Descriptions**

The 'what' question of the research has to do with what work means to vocational education students and why this is important to me as an educator in the VET sector? What makes sense through art to an individual in a given

vocational milieu? What is the interconnectedness between art and the experience of work in vocational careers? More important, is art a form of emancipation process that results in awareness of an individual's identity in a vocational career?

**Chapter 2.** I conceptualise the meaning of work by reflecting on existing contemporary understandings of the meaning of work: work as a form of art and work and its material relationship to the social life of individuals. I further reflect on how meaning is constructed and established in the interconnectedness of art, work, and aesthetics; and I relate two philosophical understandings of aesthetics in relation to the truth content of a work of art to my research. In this chapter I also give examples and discuss artists' works of art that represent the work situations of their time and place.

**Chapter 3.** I discuss arts-based methodology as it relates to my research design. I also address the ethical considerations of the study and the procedure that I used to recruit the research participants. Then I explain how I collected the data and present them in this thesis.

**Chapter 4.** I present the dreamscape for and the meaning of work through the visual insights and interpretations of the four participants in this study from the Environmental Design Technology School at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) in Edmonton. The sub questions of this study guided the production of the artefacts as well as the discussions with each participant. The participants (a) visually represented their feelings on what their artefact means, (b) explained their self-worth as practitioners in relation to the current pedagogy,

and (c) shared their experiences as they developed their creativity within their specific vocational careers.

**Chapter 5.** I present personal visual interpretations of the participants' contributions to this study.

**Chapter 6.** My thematic discussion is guided by the subsidiary research questions with reference to the participants' contributions. I incorporate scholarly contributions into the discussions to strengthen the validity of the study's findings.

**Chapter 7.** I reflect on the research processes, limitations, and future possibilities.

### **Audience**

I conducted this study particularly to encourage educators, curriculum developers, students in postsecondary education, and researchers not to underestimate the power of imagery in the context in which they are positioned. Art ceases to be curriculum, but rather is a process that defines who, what, and why we are within our various contexts. My aim was to further establish an awareness of art as a form of participation linked to various curriculum processes to create and define meaning. An understanding of the inner voice in constructing the meaning of work by creating arts and crafts artefacts enhances personal conceptual ways of thinking about knowledge creation and retention.

The inner voice considered as a dreamscape is a product of personal interactions with social, political, and economic forces, which I envisioned through the creation of various artefacts with the usual understanding of the word

*work* in VET. The research did not focus on the technical competence or vocational skills of the participants in producing the artefacts, but explored what they thought about their attachment to the artefacts, their emotional attachment to the skill that they practice, and how these emotions are reflected in the materials that they used to produce the artefacts.

This study has broadened the participants' capability for creativity and knowing. Becoming aware of the ties between their materials and their personal understandings of the work enables them to enhance society's appreciation for our surrounding artefacts, their uses, and their meanings, and their participation has contributed to the existing works that define the broader meaning of work.

My study contributes to the existing knowledge that continues to advance understanding and bridge a connection between the academic world and the world of work. By redefining research in the form of representation and the creation of new understandings of process, spirit, purpose, emotions, responsiveness, and the ethical dimensions of inquiry, I anticipated that exposing the imaginative qualities of the participants through their artefacts would acknowledge the power and insights of the human condition, and I succeeded based on the contributions to this thesis.

This study opens doors to students and researchers and gives them an opportunity to grow through thoughtful assessment of their learning experiences, interactions, and reflection and makes them more aware of how the broader society connects or limits their lives. By exploring the participants' values for

their career choices, I aimed to understand the choices that different people make in creating a meaningful life through art making.

My research has yielded scholarly information on the relationship between the pedagogical strategies that teachers use to teach vocational education and the personal experiences of students that determine what they consider of value in training in their vocational choices. I hope that in their future work, the participating learners will act as ambassadors for VET, hands-on experience, and the building of real competence in the various vocational trades.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter serves as a point of entry for my career and identity evolution. The contexts in which I have been and continue to be placed influence the life decisions that I make. The sociocultural, economic, political, and academic experiences have opened up a critical window through which to address key aspects linked to the meaning that I and others within vocational education oriented careers hold of work. I have defined the key concepts that frame the research question and explained the rationale for the study, the significance, as well as the theoretical framework that guided the empirical thoughts of this study. The next chapter reviews contemporary understandings of the meaning of work, how meaning is constructed, and scholarly understandings of art, work, and aesthetics within the context of this study.



## CHAPTER 2

### WORK AS CONTEXTUALISED

Vocational education teachers come from a background of double praxis in that we as educators are trained in a craft and in the art of teaching. The field of VET is connected to practical work, in which the concept of *praxis* is central; in this sense the connection between practical hands-on learning and conceptual learning is at the core. Polytechnical education and the development of independent thinkers by combining the work of the hand and the mind are connected to the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1968/2004). They formulated ideas by considering human activity a point of departure to understand the human condition and by combining theory and practice in everyday life and in scientific work. Their aim was to transcend the social division of knowledge that penetrates society generally and the educational system specifically and the gulf that it creates between general and vocational knowledge. The specific trait of hands-on learning is work with the hands, in which are tools. They might be a brush for both a house painter and an artist, clay and a wheel for a potter, a hammer and saw for a carpenter or machinery for a mechanic. Coordinating the brain, the hands, tools, and materials creates artefacts—objects—whether they be paintings, bookcases, or tools for the oil industry.

Arts and crafts have their ancient roots in the evolution of human history, from the famous pictographs in Drakensburg, South Africa, and many places in Uganda; to the cave paintings in Altamira, Spain, and Lascaux, France; to the works of such famous artists as Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Marc Chagall

(1887-1985; Malouf & White, 1953; see also York, Daly, & Arnett, 1993). The remnants of pottery and household utensils in many parts of the world are evidence of human creativity over thousands of years. Art in itself has been created in the interplay between people. Human beings live in interactions with each other and have done so since the dawn of time. Specifically with regard to my profession, in our work as artists we expose not only our technical skills, but also our inner feelings, our pleasures, and our anxieties. As an arts and crafts teacher, I meet the students with my whole self. My subconscious, dreams, and personal experiences are part of the teaching processes. In this study I was concerned with exploring these processes. What happens when an arts and crafts teacher strives to develop students' own creativity within their vocational career? What personal inner voices or values do students cherish and nurture while they frame their meaning of work? How do they meet? Furthermore, what inner processes do they create in these learning sessions? This was a qualitatively oriented research project, and I would say that it is interpretive and ontological insofar as it focused on the nature of becoming an established practitioner within a given vocational milieu.

### **A Contemporary Understanding of the Meaning of Work**

According to Nolan (2002) in Blackwell's *Dictionary of Modern Social Thought*, "work as a concept is ambiguous and contested. It is a purposeful human endeavour that involves the transformation of nature through the expenditure of mental and physical capacities" (p. 741). Based on the concept of alienation, this definition does not agree with the more limited meaning and experience of work.

A capitalistic society considers work synonymous with labour and activities that a person experiences as non-work leisure pursuit, so work should not only be considered as a mental and physical activity alone. The definition of labour in industrial sociology is quite different in that it is historically specific and reflects society's dominant values, assumptions, and power relationships. Remunerated employment occupies a special place within the facet of labour under capitalism because of the nature and structure of production. Therefore, a capitalistic perspective on work results in the production of commodities for exchange in the market rather than satisfaction of the immediate needs of the direct producers and their families. With such a definition, as a scholar who pursued an inquiry, I was prompted to question its importance and to what extent work determines the choice of a vocational occupation.

Weiss and Morse (1955) defined work in an industrialised society that becomes increasingly complex simply as the “means to earn a living” (p. 191). Their definition reflects more of a capitalistic perspective than a perception of work as part of entertainment, reunion, and involvement to better the living conditions of a particular society (Morin, 2004). According to Davidson and David (1994), with reference to Weber's (1904/1930) thesis, work is a “calling” (p. 135) or a doctrine of predestination attributed to Calvinism that prompted people to seek evidence that they were among the chosen. Work and accumulated capital provided this evidence (Giddens, 1976). Referring to work as a calling connects faith and our role in society. Within the context of a “calling” as a

definition for work, makes work dynamic and at the same time influenced by macro factors or environments that are usually beyond an individual's control.

Weber (1904/1930) questioned whether spiritually active people attach any more importance to their work than do people who are less active, which queries people's religious beliefs and attitudes toward work. I created one of my research questions to establish the extent to which the consciousness of spirituality defines work. Bell and Taylor (2003) referred to Dehler and Welsh's (1994) description of work as "an instinctive feeling that energizes individual action in relation to a specific task" (p. 19). On the other hand, Fairholm (1996) suggested that work is a relationship with something beyond self. Could work be more reflexive than intended, according to the above researchers? Do human beings unconsciously or consciously become involved in work? Should I consider having a bath, saying a prayer, sleeping, and even dreaming as work? These definitions of work tend to give more prominence to the involvement of the mind and soul than that of the rest of the body; however, I believe that in vocational education the mind, heart, hand, and body are interconnected. I would not refer to work as a form independent of spirituality. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) stated that spirituality has three main components: (a) It recognises that employees have an inner life related to their soul that they access in practices such as meditation, self-reflection, and prayer; (b) it assumes that employees need to find work meaningful; and (c) it suggests that an organisation is the context or community in which spiritual expression can take place. I agree but consider the

components sovereign and cutting across organisations. In my research I explored these components and affirmed their existence in vocational education.

Weber (1904/1930) and Foucault (1981, 1982) acknowledged religion and spirituality as central to an understanding of the structures and disciplinary procedures of modern life and work. Would I then presume that work is a means of gaining salvation and that workers are expected to act selflessly for a greater good? If this is true, then work is defined as a positive action for the glory of God and the preservation of the soul, regardless of the suffering that one undergoes. Should I refer to work as a form of enlightenment that individuals experience to justify their existence? Weber's central thesis was that the values of Protestantism have a significant impact on the development of the capitalist mode of production and, in particular, on the distinctive industrial type found in Western Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, machines and wage discipline were perceived as insufficient on their own as methods of ensuring continuity and the maximisation of production. Integration and industrial harmony in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century achieved a connection between religious ideologies and the managerial construction of subjective identity (Rose, 1990). This statement affirms the meaning of work as a calling and the obligation of a person in a workplace to perform and be able to receive salvation.

Weiss and Kahn (1960) referred to work as an activity that we perform but do not enjoy. They viewed work as a required rather than freely chosen task and as incompatible with a view of work as important to our well-being. Work continues to be an activity that requires physical or mental exertion. The

definition suggests the imposition of tasks on someone; if the tasks are not required, exertion is not necessary. Does this imply that all kinds of work require a certain degree of exertion? When we view work as a productive activity determined by its utilitarian purpose, then it is something that individuals schedule if the meaning is appropriate in their occupations. The meanings prompt me to assume that some people offer training in the different vocational trades not out of interest, but because the current economic and education system does predetermine career decisions regardless of whether the activities are enjoyable at some point.

In contrast to the other definitions of work that I have discussed in this section, Hudson and Sullivan (2008) referred to work as a salvation and a curse. Work creates prosperity and meaning in life, but it can also contribute to poverty and alienation. This affirms that the division of labour is the most fundamental transformation in the nature of work over time, an increasingly important phenomenon (Durkheim, 1897/1966) within the current capitalistic economy. I therefore consider work not only as providing the material necessities of existence, but also as contributing to workers' self-esteem, identity, and sense of order, which are important to finding meaning and satisfaction in life.

Harpaz (1998) explained that the meaning of work has generally included three propositions: work as economic (instrumental), commitment to work as part of human nature and needs, and work as social-psychological. The Judeo-Protestant work ethic views work as a positive and rewarding activity that can be cross-cultural regardless of the predominant religion of a given region (Harpaz,

1998). The majority of spiritual beliefs interconnect with individual choices and experiences and the organisational and environmental context in which people work and live determine the meaning of work.

Conclusively, considering all that the literature that I reviewed said about the meaning of work, I consciously continue to question a personal definition of work that refers to it as both an invisible and a visible activity framed by an individual's inner consciousness that defines who that individual is. I believe that it should be an activity that embraces emotional attachment and physical involvement and results in self-satisfaction with what a person has accomplished in life within different work-related landscapes. I designed this study to confirm the above through a visual approach to interpretation.

I consider Harpaz's (1998) five concepts in further expounding on how we derive the meaning of work. I perceive work as part of what we are, and my perception includes Harpaz's five concepts. The "Social norms", "work outcomes", "the role in which we are positioned", "social and individual relevance", and "work-role identification" as Harpaz's concepts give meaning to the work in which individuals are engaged. Work exists within the parameters of these concepts, and it is therefore imperative to point out that their interconnectedness in a way justifies an activity as work if an individual considers all of the factors equally in determining what is worthwhile in life.

The centrality of work in a life role refers to the degree of general importance of that work to an individual's life at any time. The importance of work varies with the occupation (Dubin et al, 1976), age (Loscocco & Kalleberg,

1988), and sex (MOW International Research Team, 1987). High work centrality is positively related to important personal variables such as job satisfaction and organisational participation in decision making (Kanungo, 1982).

Societal norms regarding work are normative statements about what to expect from work and working (opportunities or entitlements) and what to expect to contribute through working (obligations). The concept has to do with the internalisation of personal responsibility and social or institutional commitment to work. Personal attitudes toward societal norms can be established or changed based on personal work experiences (Harpaz, 1998). Would this be the case with VET? And if so, do prevailing conditions affect its efficacy? What continues to inspire me is that the research participants visually represented their thoughts about what frames the meaning of work.

Valued work outcomes include status and prestige, income, time absorption, interesting contacts, service to society, interest, and satisfaction (Harpaz, 1998). Within the vocational occupations and professions, how does the individual negotiate the self under such circumstances? Harpaz's statement seems to be more of a generalisation of the outcomes that whoever seeks employment anticipates.

Contemplating the importance of work goals, Harpaz (1998) stated that "there is a relative importance for individual goals and values sought through work" (p. 221). Goals and values shed light on the fundamental question of why people work. Expressive goals, instrumental and comfort goals, and learning goals can prove their importance in various cultures. I anticipate that work goals



will be applicable in an environment that has little influence from the dominant culture on what we should share and when, why, and how.

Work-role identification considers the extent to which people define and identify working in terms of roles (i.e., money, occupation, profession); (Harpaz, 1998). Role theory (Turner, 1956) and attribution theory (Kelly, 1967) offer the conceptual rationale for the development of work-role identification notions. We perceive roles within vocation-oriented jobs, sometimes by understanding the causes of human behaviour while we practise the job speciality, because we want to know the reasons for the actions that we and others take. To attribute causes to behaviours, we see rather than assume that these behaviours are random, which allows us to assume some feeling of control over our own behaviours and situations.

I presume that the meaning of work and how people perceive life continue to remain open, complex, and contradictory. Various interpretations are upheld based on what influences who, why, and how we are from individual to individual and from society to society.

### **Construction of Meaning**

This study's aim to establish the dreamscape and meaning of work for CTS/VET students intrigued me to further pursue an understanding of how meaning is constructed. Considering that consciousness plays a role in constructing meaning, what factors facilitate that consciousness to construct the meaning of work? Can meaning of work be constructed within or outside the social context? How best can individuals establish truth to justify their reasons

for living? Philosophers such as Voloshinov (1973) and Wittgenstein (1958) referred to *real-life understanding* and argued that in ordinary social life, meaning is never abstract or generalised when it is separated from its real context; it is always particular and concrete (Wittgenstein, 1958). My understanding is that we always arrive at meaning through the process of social interaction and that meaning in speech is not separate from, but is an integral part of, that social process. For example, when I speak and also express myself in visual format, I am oriented to something within and outside myself, and the person who listens or views my expression either understands me or not to make meaning. I should note that in such circumstances what constitutes meaning becomes relative and varies from individual to individual. Through a postmodern lens, Smith (1999) critiqued the concept of meaning for postmodernists such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean-Francois Lyotard and made two points:

One has to do with the *meaning of meaning*, involving reconsideration of the way meaning is achieved in the texts and of how claims to understanding what a text means are possible. A second has to do with the consequences of a cultural self-consciousness becoming decentred. What happens to the way one “reads the world” (to use Freirean language again) when one realises that one’s personal and collective position in the world has been radically relativized? (p. 66)

In this case we derive the meaning of something only referentially and cannot define it. In any stated meaning of something, it is imperative that we not always involve an act of suppression to avoid inevitable loss of information. The way

that we question what is of concern affects the way that we construct meaning. It is imperative that we not silence the “Other” voices during the interplay of generating meaning.

As an educator in vocational education, I continue to question the extent to which I have been conditioned by a culture to elaborate the importance of that which is tangible and measurable and further dismiss the importance of that which is hidden and ill-defined. Kincheloe (1999) asserted that “an educator caught in the cult of the practical, unable to perceive the relationship between tacit and overt, [is] condemned to a repetition of the failings of the status quo” (p. 149). Furthermore,

when contemporary men and women are asked what they do for a living, most will describe their everyday chores. Rarely do they discuss the larger purpose of their job or its relation to the purpose of the bigger enterprise of which they are a part. (p. 150)

This quotation reveals that we often distance ourselves from the ontological rewards of work as an activity and either think about what the system requires that we do or consider what the public perceives to allow us to participate. In view of the above, history shapes and therefore contextualizes our consciousness.

Kincheloe considered meaning as made of questions linked to both social and individual purposes. The interconnectedness justifies what, when, why, and how certain things happen the way that they do. Mills (1973) referred to the details of daily work as meaningful because they are not detached in the worker’s mind from the product of work. The interplay between the act and the product frames

the meaning of work. However, to what extent do we sacrifice emotional satisfaction? Sölle and Cloyes (1984) suggested that

work should be a joy in our lives and it is crucial for our attainment of full personhood. . . . It is through our most humane activities, in work and in love, that we become co-creators of the new earth, the place where we may finally call home. (p. 84)

The way that we relate to nature frames the meaning that we attach to work; therefore, work undoubtedly is one of the most seminal activities in an individual's character and personality. A consideration of previous research on the meaning of work and work education (Humeniuk, 1989; McConaghy, 1990; Priebe, 1993; Ueno, 2002) calls for change in the ways that we approach human work to embrace the ontological aspect of being. I therefore found it imperative to engage the participants in the research by asking them to produce artefacts that would frame their meaning of work to capture what we cannot verbally communicate.

### **Art, Work, and Aesthetics**

The relationship between art, work, and aesthetics that the existing body of literature identified was the basis for this study to help me to understand the interplay among the three concepts. Art history stretches from the paleolithic period, also known as the early Stone Age era, to the period around the fall of Rome. The type of art then encompassed prehistoric human culture in which the people used stone tools to do the work. Their fashioning of stone tools depicted an aspect of work as a form of art, and such activities help to distinguish

distinctive stone-tool industries as well as communities from each other. Such experiences affirm the personal presumption about human nature that what an individual decides to get engaged in frames and defines an identity of the self.

The production of pottery, spinning, weaving, and ceremonial rituals during the Mesolithic period (Middle Stone Age) and Neolithic period (New Stone Age) potentially contributed to the visual culture of specific community groups. The process of production as well as the final products depicted the interplay between work and art to determine their relevance in creating meaning while considering the use of the mind, body, and hands. Architectural developments during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries depicted the timeless accomplishment of that period.

Through a critical eye to appreciate what still exists, I continue to consider the physical in terms of the hands-on, emotional, and aesthetic inputs of the persons who were involved in the planning and construction of the then architectural buildings. This leads me to Rancière's (2004) philosophy of aesthetics, whose origins trace back to Schiller's (1967) philosophy of aesthetics, which emphasises the sensible over the intellectual in art. Rancière's contention that "aesthetics is not a discipline as it is usually defined but rather a particular 'regime of identification of art,' that is a particular way in which, in a given historical or social context, art is identified as art" (p. 1). In this case how do we consider art of its purpose? The answer is, by accepting the fact that social values change over time and that the way we perceive things varies or is influenced not only by nature, but also by historical circumstances. The unique existence at the

place and time at which the artwork is produced and happens to be substantiates its purpose. This is in view of Walter Benjamin's (1968) aesthetic contributions to art. He considered works of art are as received and valued and referred to their aura-unique value and location or exhibition value. Furthermore,

the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. . . . In other words, the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. (p. 5)

With regard to Benjamin's (1968) statement, by using art to visually translate their meaning of work, students in the vocational sector consider that "art does not exist in isolation, or on how well the skills and practice are applied, but [is] a tribute to the way art is perceived within a given context" (Ranci re, 2009, p. 29). As a painter or user of any material to produce a work of art, I maintain a natural distance from the reality more than a photographer would. But what frames the "truth content of my work of art," as Benjamin Walter (1968, p. 5) called it, is the "material content" (p. 5) at the beginning of the work's production history. In this case we do not seek the truth content in the conspicuous features of the production technique, but rather in the unity of the work of art's distinct form. Art's essential aim is to distinguish itself from the semblance of nature and instead to demonstrate a representational capacity for what we consider the truth within its own inner criteria.

Aristotle referred to art not as a means of representing the outward appearance of things, but as its inward significance. In affirmation, Michel Foucault (1982), in *On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress*, commented that in society art is becoming something that relates only to objects rather than to individuals or life. Referring to art as an area of specialisation or as work that experts do does not promote the theory that everyone's life is a work of art. A mixture of conscious and unconscious feelings blends the meaning of the experiences that we encounter in life. With this mixture, artists such as Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) questioned what life would be if human beings did not have the courage to attempt anything. Finding meaning in everything and everyone, Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) considered work a disease of our age that is none other than anything practical which believes itself to be more practical than other periods. This is equally true of our age.

Eisner (2002) considered work in the arts not only a way of creating performances and products, but also a way of creating our lives by expanding personal consciousness, shaping dispositions, satisfying individual quests for meaning, establishing contacts with others, and sharing the differences or commonalities within a culture. Not only is work itself a form of art, but art is also a form of work. In support of this notion, Berger (1972) and Perkins (2003) viewed art as a way of seeing that establishes our places in a particular landscape. I believe that whatever humankind is directly in contact with externally takes an individual to a practical activity to recognise the worthiness of the self.

When we become engaged in creating a work of art, the conditions and feelings of success are linked to those in other kinds of work as well. The reason for equating the two different processes that lead to an end product is that both processes have a relationship with purpose and act as a means of experiencing. Art encompasses various kinds of work and has certain value features that we prize. Art is more than a description and brings something into existence; it often makes aspects of the world vivid and generates a sense of responsiveness. I believe that work does the same with regard to these aspects of art.

Considering art as work is also linked to Gamst's (1995) dimensions of work. He asserted that "work supports all other aspects of humans' life-ways of which art is part" (p. 1). Self-satisfaction with the process of production contributes to the way that we view ourselves as individuals within a given context. Having the ability to negotiate the tensions between what we can and cannot control when we work, we unconsciously try to justify what we want to and have become, where we fit in society, what we can add and have added to people's lives, and how successful we want to or have become. Through works of art individuals negotiate such tensions by using different means of expression to relate to the world around them.

Art movements express the world in which we live; for example, modern art (the 1880s or the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and contemporary art (the 1960s to today) demonstrate the purpose of art as beyond the pursuit of beauty and aesthetics. Artists in these times aspire to involve art in creating a new society and the persons therein. Subjects of concern in art contrast good and evil, serious and



ironic, and rational and absurd; according to the art produced during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a personal reflection art offers narrative experiences to further substantiate its purpose. Harris et al. (1994) reflected on the art of the renaissance and also presented works of art for various artists mentioned below during that period.

Artists such as Chagall (1887-1985), Picasso (1881-1973), and Van Gogh (1853-1890) produced works of art that were linked to the consciousness at that time of the meaning of work. Why have I mentioned these three artists when many others have made contributions to the concept of work? Their works represent an analytical consciousness that I embrace. Chagall considered his hands soft and therefore had to find a special occupation or kind of work that would allow him to reach to the sky and stars to discover the meaning of life.

Chagall (1887-1985) in Harris (1996) was committed to figurative and narrative art that involved multiple media. For example, one of his paintings, “The Soldier Drinks,” depicts memories of the soldiers billeted in a family’s house during the Russo-Japanese War of 1911-1912. The artwork opens the door to multiple interpretations that the artist might or might not have consciously intended. The colours, images, and brush strokes contribute tremendously to observers’ meanings because of the various social interactions that they have. From a personal perspective, Chagall’s painting depicts victory for the soldier and possibly a celebration of his success, as well as the frustrations of always having to be at the warfront. I interpret the soldier’s flying hat as symbolically representing either defection from service or a sign of victory. When we

accomplish something, the means to success encompasses both the good and the bad. It is therefore important to consider that the inner consciousness contributes to individuals' flexibility to perform and render services at different workplaces.

Van Gogh (1853-1890), another artist whose works are shared by Anderson (1994), piqued my consciousness of what holds value for me in the work that a person does. His "The Starry Night, 1889" helps me to understand who I am, given the kind of work that frames the values I attach to the work itself. By expressing his personal feelings and referring to himself as an instrument in the creative process of the universe, Van Gogh showed how artists reveal that it is not what they see that tells it all, but the process through which they go that defines them and their connection to the yet-to-be-known. Van Gogh's "The Potato Eaters, 1885" depicts the artist's inner self and his feelings about the poor and unprivileged miners and agricultural workers of that time. I perceive his use of dark colours in his painting as an expression of the emotional and physical realities of the workers. His deep religious compassion for the workers and recognition that their toil was not in vain has prompted further reflection on the body language in the painting, which seems to expose the emotional dissatisfaction of the workers.

Art as work and work as art, considering the literature that I have read, helps me to understand that art can be viewed as a process towards professionalism as well as an end product to justify personal actions and the meaning of existence. The brain is stimulated to make connections in sufficient time to allow an individual to respond in a manner that defines the specific life

experiences or imaginations to which I refer as a *dreamscape* in this research.

Within such contexts art is a moral agent that promotes a rapport between aesthetics and personal values. As long as the mind, hands, and body are at work, a visual representation or inner recording of thoughts creates an artefact. This contributes to the realisation that intentions are conceived as psychologically real, with no duplications in the moral mind. In the next chapter I explain how the arts-based research tradition adds to existing works of art that consciously and unconsciously express the meaning of work.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Arts-Based Research Approach

The concept of arts-based research as a methodology, according to Bresler (2007), gained momentum in the early 1990s, and inquiry is based on the notion that the processes and products of art can contribute to research. Strategies of inquiry include narrative writing, autobiography, dance and movement, readers' theatre, multimedia, hypertext, visual arts, photography, music, poetry, and creative nonfiction. By using such strategies of inquiry, arts-based researchers inform and shape social science research by adopting multiple creative methods to conduct educational research, although tensions are still evident with regard to the methodology's quality and authenticity in the scholarly world.

According to Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, and Grauer (2006), arts-based research methodologies developed from the work of Canadian and American scholars such as Thomas Barone, Cynthia Chambers, Ardra Cole, John Dewey, Rishma Dunlop, Elliot Eisner, Susan Finley, Maxine Greene, Gary Knowles, Claudia Mitchell, Lorin Neilson, Joe Norris, Jane Piirto, Celeste Snowber, and Sandra Weber (p. 1226). As an alternative research methodology, arts-based research is a "hybrid, practiced-based form of methodology that is about the self and social" (p. 1224). Arts-based methodologies at times take the form of visual methodologies—the most pertinent to my study—which are part of a trend in social sciences and humanities research that focuses on the experiential, the sensory, and ways of knowing, being, and remembering that cannot

necessarily be articulated in words. Theron et al (2011) recognised that “working with the visual is far from simple and that competing theories of practice on how best to use visual texts in social research exist” (p.19). Weber (2008) observed that “images can be used to capture the indescribable. . . . Some things just need to be shown, not merely stated. Artistic images can help us access those elusive hard-to-put-into-words aspects of knowledge that might otherwise remain hidden or ignored” (p. 44). Weber’s contribution explains the power of visual work in understanding and making meaning. McNiff (1998) considered art-based research as growing from “a trust in the intelligence of the creative process and a desire for relationships with the art works that emerge from it” (p. 37).

Furthermore, Greene (2001) argued that

involvement in creative practice can bring multiple domains of meaning to an idea or concept, and as such allow for the creation of new perspectives. New experiential connections and patterns of thought may be formed and new vistas opened through nurturing particular kinds of reflectivity and expressiveness that reach out for meaning. (p. 28)

In view of Greene’s (2001) statement, I found it important to engage the participants in my study by requesting that they create artefacts that frame their meaning of work as a means of obtaining empirical data. This creative approach is particularly relevant to my study in that the participants expressed their dreamscape for the meaning of work. The notion of dreamscape is that which might not be fully captured in oral communication or writing or not easily articulated in words, but can be shared visually. I presume that being open-

mindful and flexible in the way that we view and value life makes us appreciate our experiences and visualise them as learning milieus. In this sense my participants, who were involved in vocational education, used art to describe and interpret the complexities of their experiences, dreamscapes, and meaning of work.

Within the context of my study, I have not considered art an entity separate from work or life. Neither have I viewed work in isolation of our acts and feelings in life. Why is this so? I believe that viewing work as a form of art defines humanity and the life experiences that we encounter in different contexts. Kenny (1998) explained the interrelationship between art and work or life: “The arts help us to reveal ourselves to one another and to society at large. Through the arts we create our unique identities and participate in creating our destiny” (p. 78). Shusterman (2010) and Hanna (1958) concurred that work is a form of joy linked to the individual’s mind that leads to co-creation and influences personal character as well as personality.

The participants’ production of artefacts that represented their consciousness of what frames their meaning of work served as a platform for them to express their feelings; at the same time, the act of production was also a form of work that consolidated a visual interpretation of the participants’ vocational career experiences. The more we interact with the arts, the more that our senses and abilities help us to understand the world around us. The interconnectedness of all of our experiences helps us to visualise art as a staple of humanity. For this reason Kenny (1998), speaking from an Indigenous

perspective, considered art as urgent and linked to the individual pulse of feeling that is considered a sign of life.

Goodman (1968) asserted that “art can free us from entrenched, commonsensical ways of viewing the world. By calling for and yet resisting a usual kind of picture, . . . it may bring out neglected likenesses and differences and in some measure, remake our world” (p. 33). Through the use of art-based ways of knowing, I presume that the participants visually gained a more critical rather than habitual understanding of their meaning of work.

According to Leavy (2009), “Arts-based research does not only re-evaluate the ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ but also considers the ‘beauty’ of the artefact” (p. 215). In the context of this research, the beauty of the artefacts is of less significance in establishing the meaning of work; the value is more in relation to the significance of the creative processes, the materials that the participants selected, and their arrangement to conveying meaning, rather than the visual appeal of the end product per se. For this reason I concur with Sinner et al. (2006), Piirto (2002), Leggo (2008), and Percer (2002), who argued that artworks should be evaluated to determine their worth by affirming what the artists themselves are most interested in accomplishing.

Although I should note that, as much as the participants’ artworks depict some relevant content, art making is considered a moment of ontological uncertainty, and the production process is potentially liberating. Pink (2012) explained that the process of making an artwork not only brings out the inner self that is sometimes considered static, but also promotes an understanding of the

inner self as being in progress rather than static. In visual art research the artist is involved in a reflective and critical-inquiry process, which is significant to the advancement or extension of knowledge, new discourses, conceptual progress, and solutions to a problem. By participating in research activities that engaged the mind, hands, and body, the participants potentially transformed their ways of knowing and their personal career realities in the research process.

Leavy (2009) contended that “the power of the image, and its role in society, cannot be underestimated; according to a popular expression, a picture is worth a thousand words” (p. 215). This saying consolidates the notion that I personally espouse as an artist: I do not speak; the work speaks for me, and as long as it speaks to the viewer, then we are unconsciously connected regardless of the viewer’s interpretation of the work. Likewise, my participants’ artefacts have spoken to me, and I have visually reinterpreted them, as the upcoming chapters of this thesis show although I have given detailed narratives about them. I have respected the sensibilities of those whose work I have reinterpreted (Sinding et al., 2008, p. 466). bell hooks’ (1995) framework of representation, recognition of the familiar, suggests that art can “depict aspects of how people differentially located in the social order experience social life or how they image life” (p. 203).

Figure 2 includes plates of the personal work that I produced in 2008 that symbolically represents my understanding of and responses to some contemporary issues within the Ugandan context. I created these images to depict the social issues in Uganda at that time that were linked to the values that the people held and their influence on others in various communities. I discuss them



here as an example of how artworks can speak to an individual's dreamscape and meaning of work. These examples of my creative work also offered the participants and offer my readers some of my understandings that I have elicited through art.



Theme: Prosperity



Theme: Corruption



Theme: Democracy

*Figure 2.* Plates of personal work (2008).

Using coffee beans,<sup>3</sup> footsteps in big and small sizes, and arrows in a heroic movement as an artist helped me to envision work and relate its meaning in my artwork to a form of collective responsibility to fulfil individual and community aspects of life. These artworks depict work as a form of togetherness, identity formation, skills transformation, an influence of good or bad actions, and a means of establishing value with regard to what is worthwhile. Our moral consciousness of work has a great deal to do with the actions in which we engage as we define our identities. My interpretations in Figure 2 suggest that our visual representations can hold meanings about our understandings of work.

The works of art in Figure 2 further relate to what Henri (1923/1984) considered moments in our lives, such as moments in a day when we seem to see beyond the usual, which becomes telepathic and reaches into reality. For this reason I believe that, as individuals, we at times understand or envision certain aspects of life differently; such situations I refer to as *meditation* or a form of *enlightenment*. Kornfield (2001) stated:

There are certain truths we can learn only by descent, truths that bring wholeness and humility in surrender. In the times of our heart's greatest vulnerability, we come close to the selfless mystery of life. We need periods of fecund time, fallow time, of being drawn closer to the humus of the earth. It is as though something in us slows down, calls us back. And out of that time a deepened knowledge and beauty can emerge. . . . Life

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<sup>3</sup> For example, a coffee bean within the Bugandan context is considered more of a social item that brings community members together. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, coffee was transformed into a widely cultivated and traded commodity that once led to Uganda's position as one of the top 10 Robusta coffee-growing countries.

offers us just what it offers, and our task is to bow to it, to meet it with understanding and compassion. (pp. 131-134)

I presume that during such times one is engaged in a subconscious form of thinking, and the brain reconfigures a person's thoughts. Henri further postulated that such are the moments of our greatest happiness and wisdom. Interpreting my thoughts through visual art helps me to portray what is of importance to me, and I feel a sense of satisfaction that my audience might or not think about and understand the purpose of my artworks. My interpretation of the artworks involves hidden understandings of the contemporary issues within my context in relation to certain meanings of the cultural artefacts that I have depicted.

I believe that visual research can generate meanings of actions that might not be explicit in writing. I also believe that, as much as the artwork is in a position to speak for itself, a narrative on it can be equally important, considering the diversified participants who engaged in the work; and they exemplified this in their one-on-one conversations with me. Leavy (2009) maintained that the process of conducting research is always a meaning-making activity. Whether research is conducted within a paradigm based on "discovering" and "revealing" meaning or within one that posits the "creation" and "construction" of meaning(s) (p. 231), social research involves generating meaning from data.

Therefore, the process of analysis and interpretation, according to Leavy (2009), is vital to the research endeavour. Thus the use of visual artefacts opened up space for multiple interpretations and perspectives in my research from a researcher's perspective. Evaluating and interpreting the visual data that I

collected from the participants are therefore based on their connection with the materials that they selected to produce the artefacts, their emotional attachment in their interpretation of their creative products, and their production processes. I have not concerned myself with how skilled or knowledgeable they were (or were not) about adherence to the principles and elements of art making in executing a piece of work.

### **Research Design**

In this research on the dreamscape for the meaning of work, the participants guided their own creative and interpretation processes. Their artefacts demonstrate inventive acts of art making and links between art as an act of living and art that makes up a shared world of the creation of meaning. To these ends, I used an interpretive arts-based research design for the data collection and analysis. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010) and McNiff (2008) advocated for research rooted within human experiences that make sense to people. In this case, the individual as well as the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics of the participants are core during the research process, although the researcher also considers his or her own words, thoughts, and feelings. Schwandt (1994) mentioned that an “interpretive research design yields deep insight into the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (p. 118). Therefore, the reality is socially constructed, and the researcher becomes the vehicle through which this reality is revealed. Creswell (2009) and Denzin (1997) suggested that participants have an opportunity to grow during the research process when they thoughtfully assess their experiences. I anticipated

that the research design and interpretation process would ideally broaden the participants' capabilities for creativity and knowing regarding their understandings of work. This occurred, as the presentations and interpretations in this thesis demonstrate. It should be noted that participants did not engage in a discussion about the artworks produced from discussions describing their interpretations of work in vocational education but were invited to attend an exhibition of the same.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I sought an ethics review and approval from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board via Human Ethics Research Online, and before I commenced the research activities (Appendix A); I received notice of approval from the board to recruit participants. The Ethics Board requires that the university, investigator, and participants observe and adhere to the ethical standards that govern human-related research.

This study required that the participants produce artefacts that would demonstrate their meaning of work. I e-mailed an information letter to the participants (Appendix B) and a recruitment cover letter to the chair of Environmental Design Technology at the identified technology institution to request permission to conduct the study there in July 2014 (Appendix C). I also obtained consent from the participants to interview them and conduct a focus group, to display their artwork to the public, and to depict their artwork in the dissemination of my findings (Appendix D). On June 9, 2014, I received a positive response through email, and on September 9, 2014, we set a date for a

meeting to explain in detail my expectations of the participants in the study. After the meeting I sent a general e-mail to the school's student database requesting volunteers for participation in the study. Students who were interested responded to the school authorities, and they sent me an e-mail on September 13, 2014, to inform me of the names of potential participants.

After I consulted with the students who expressed interest in participating, on September 19, 2014, the chair of the school informed me of a convenient date and time for a meeting to formally introduce the participants to the study and my expectations. After the briefing and a discussion of flexible times for the one-on-one discussions,<sup>4</sup> the presentation of their artefacts, and a focus-group discussion,<sup>5</sup> I asked the participants to sign their consent forms, and they agreed to contact me when they had done so. After I received e-mails from two participants who asked for more clarification on how to produce the artefact, I sent a reply to clarify what I expected of them during the research process (Appendix E).

I informed the participants that the artefacts that they were to produce would form part of the data for analysis and that I wanted to use them in the dissemination of the findings. I obtained their voluntary consent to do so. The participants selected their tools and materials for the artefacts to allow them to work with a medium with which they felt comfortable.

The participants continue to have the right of ownership of the artefacts, and I obtained their consent to document and display their artwork for public viewing (Appendix D), as well as to reinterpret, represent, and display their

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<sup>4</sup> I conducted the interviews between October 19 and 21, 2014, depending on each participant's availability.

<sup>5</sup> Held on October 30, 2014.

artefacts concurrently with artwork that I produce (Appendix D). I gave the participants the option of either identifying themselves with their artefacts or not during the exhibition and in the final thesis document. They also consented to my use of codes in identifying their research input and interpreting the data. Furthermore, I informed them that when I display the works in public, they will have no control over how they are interpreted. In case of future use, I also obtained their consent (Appendix D) to use two-dimensional representations of their work (e.g., in photographs).

### **Research Participants**

I purposefully selected research participants from the field of VET/CTS. Six students enrolled, but within the two-week deadline for withdrawal, two opted out. Thus four students from the architecture, interior design, and landscape architectural technology programmes at NAIT in Edmonton participated in this study. My selection of students from the same setting was important to establish how they saw their lives in relation to the roles of their skills and education in understanding their self-worth as individual practitioners. They presented and I interpreted each artefact independently, although common themes guide the discussion chapter of this thesis. I did not use ethnicity, social class, religion, language, or years of service as criteria to select participants for this research inquiry.

Prior to their production of artefacts, I invited the participants to a workshop and inform them of the research questions. I outlined participatory expectations such as commitment to participate, teamwork, originality, readiness

to share personal understandings, and flexibility, as well as a timeframe for the completion of the artefacts, to guide the students' progress through the research activities. In addition, I clearly affirmed their right to respect for their confidentiality and consent to create a safe space for the production and possible exhibition of their artefacts.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Participants' Visual and Textual Creations: Products and Processes**

I chose my research design to solicit visual and textual information and asked the research participants to produce visual artefacts in either two- or three-dimensional formats to represent their interpretation of their dreamscape of the meaning of work and their engagement in the field of VET/CTS. Based on each participant's availability, I scheduled 60-minutes conversations on the meanings that they attached to their creative product and process. I did not limit them to specific materials and tools to produce their artefacts; rather, they chose a visual medium (e.g., photography, painting, drawing, sculpture, film), which thus allowed their imaginations to be free and creative. The participants worked well with the media that they selected for their artefacts without any influence from me.

#### **Interviews**

Following the production of the artefacts, I conducted qualitative interviews with the participants to gather their personal interpretations of the artefacts that they created; I audio-recorded the interviews after obtaining permission from the participants. Creswell (2009) considers "the use of



unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from participants” (p. 181). Appendix F includes some of the questions that I asked to prompt discussion in the interviews, which were both informal conversations and open-ended interviews.

To establish the meanings of the visual artefacts, in the interviews I asked the participants what had influenced their selection of materials and production processes. As a researcher, I also considered their experiences in the field, as well as their opinions, feelings, knowledge, and sensory understandings to make the interviews more meaningful. The way that the participants constructed, shaped, or reshaped their artefacts revealed areas of individual conflict and ambivalence when I explored the extent to which they had embodied their emotions during the production process. In relation to the above experience, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) assert that “interviews are the favourite methodological tools of qualitative research that produce situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes” (p. 353).

### **Focus Group Discussion**

Following my initial analysis of the data, I invited all four participants to attend a focus-group discussion of the research findings and offer concluding remarks on their research experiences. I conducted the focus group at a location convenient to all of the participants, I took notes during the discussion, and the session lasted 60 minutes. According to Eliot and Associates (2005):

Focus groups can reveal a wealth of detailed information and deep insight when well executed, a focus group creates an accepting environment that

puts participants at ease allowing them to thoughtfully answer questions in their own words and add meaning to their answers. (p. 1)

The purpose of the focus group was to verify my findings, appreciate others' way of thinking, and identify the similarities, divergences, and complexities involved in creating meaning through a common activity in which students from various vocational trades participated. I encouraged the participants to share their views on their creative products and processes with each other. In support of focus group discussions as a form of research tool, Morgan (1997/2013) asserts:

Focus groups are conducted with purposively selected samples (often only one)...Group discussions provide direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences as opposed to reaching such conclusions from post hoc analyses of separate statements from each interviewee. (p. 10)

### **Data Interpretation and Visual Analysis**

The data sources for this study included photographs of the participants' artefacts, the transcribed audio recordings of the one-on-one conversations, and the focus-group contributions. The organisation and preparation of data for interpretation and analysis involved transcribing the interviews and sorting and arranging the data into thematic categories (Creswell, 2009, pp. 183-190).

Reading the data gave me a general sense of the information and helped me to reflect on its overall meaning. Identifying general commonalities within the data enhanced the credibility of the information that I collected, and coding the data

and sorting them into themes resulted in interrelated themes and an interpretation of the meaning of the themes to define work in a vocational education career.

Interpretation of the data was guided by the African philosophy of aesthetics whereby a cross-examination of the artefacts themselves, the production process, and the participants' narratives was done. While using the above, I did put into consideration what influenced the participants choice of materials, the relationship between the artefacts and the narratives for each participant, and how the truth for the participants' meaning of work was depicted using the available technology. Throughout the whole process, the participants' inner selves, unity with others, service to others, and expression of their full potential were put into consideration. I correlated each participant's interpretation with the other participants' interpretations to establish key common themes.

Different forms of artefacts have revealed the hidden connectedness between different materials and conceptual worlds. The variety of the participants' expressions of the meaning of work linked their understanding of the vocational careers that they are pursuing. I found it fascinating that my interpretation of the participants' artefacts resulted in a common definition of the meaning of work regardless of the different modes of execution within their respective careers

Art is viewed as a way of being and meaning making, which is consistent with perspectives on arts-based research (Eisner, 2002; Rose, 2001; Gadsden, 2008 & Leavy, 2009). In this sense it is imperative that I acknowledge the world in which each individual is positioned and to understand that everything has

meaning to the degree to which it is voiced. The participants' discussions on the meaning of their artefacts have contributed to the validity of the research data. Intentionally evoking emotional responses from participants serves as a validity check, according to Leavy (2009). Exploring multiple meanings and integrating diverse perspectives often help to build a platform for dialogue and add a dimension of validity to the data. This is evident in the information that I collected for this study.

Furthermore, Lather (1986) encouraged researchers to use a "self-reflexive human science to guard against their biases distorting the evidence" (p. 67). To avoid such situations in my research, I triangulated the visual and the text data to identify counter-patterns and convergences and affirm the data's credibility, transferability, and conformability. The verisimilitude of the research is based on how the participants understand the world of work and ultimately communicate to readers through the produced artefacts.

### **Final Exhibition of Artefacts**

Exhibiting the participants' artefacts alongside the researcher's art works concurs with Groys's (2008) relevance of art exhibitions. To Groys it is through art exhibitions that certain projects or actions are narrated. And in this case, the dreamscape and meaning of work within vocational education was considered a research project for this exhibition. Groys further defined exhibitions as "installations curated by artists, in which objects made by others may be-and are-represented as well as objects made by the artist" (p. 93).

As the archivist of the participants' works, I used the participants' interpretations of the artefacts as the primary sources of data to identify common themes and create visual analytical art works that share highlights on the meaning of work based on the participants' values for work, art, education, and training in skills-oriented careers. The art works visually represent the interview data of the common themes that the participants identified and acknowledged in the focus group. I considered the connections and disconnections amongst the participants in my interpretation of their work in my art works and critically assessed the data. This yielded alternative interpretations based on my "outsider" point of view while I considered my personal space, experience, and the time that I have been practising as a vocational teacher, teacher educator, and artist. I did produce four different artefacts representing my interpretation of work for each participant and one unifying artefact for their meaning of work. The importance and possible usefulness of considering the participants' viewpoints together with my interpretations is the resulting diverse understanding of the concepts that they presented.

### **Delimitations**

The study was delimited to students associated with vocation-oriented programmes at NAIT. Their participation was voluntary. I did not limit their use of materials to those that are commonly known in the academic environment—for example, paper, boards, canvas, and cloth—but extended their choices to metal surfaces, photographs, multimedia crafts, perishable items, treated surfaces or objects, found items, and reassembled items, to mention but a few. I also did not

limit the participants to either tangible or intangible objects as long as they could explicitly give me their detailed understanding of the choice of items that they used. Avoiding restrictions and allowing them an appropriate level of flexibility in selecting media for their artefacts promoted individual creativity and an intellectual understanding of what I required of them at that time and place. Ethnicity, gender, age or nationality status was not a criterion for participation in the research and my analysis of the meaning of work.

In this chapter I have explored the power of the visuals in informing social research and explained the research design that I used to ensure a cohesive flow of events during the study. I discussed the enrolment of the participants in this study in any of the vocation-oriented programs offered at their institution. As a core prerequisite for conducting research with humans, I have adhered to ethical considerations with regard to the participants' confidentiality, property and participation rights and to the measures that I used to establish the validity of the findings. In addition, I have addressed the procedures for producing the artefacts and conducting the interviews and for the focus group discussion, keeping in mind the time and place in which I undertook the research. The next chapter includes the participants' interpretations of work from their points of view regarding the visual artefacts that they produced and the narratives that I availed for the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### INTERPRETATION

#### **Interpretation of Work Through Visual Artefacts**

As I mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis, I did not consider the artefacts that the participants produced for this study based on their ability to produce artworks in accordance with the elements and principles of art and design or the aesthetic value attached to the work of art. Rather, I considered them appropriate based on Rancière's (2004) and Walter Benjamin's (1968) philosophical considerations of aesthetics. Both scholars viewed the notion of art for its purpose, 'aura'-unique value, and location or contribution value.

The perception of art as an act of participation continues to make meaning within a social context while, at the same time, influencing individual behaviour. This study supports the personal view that the meaning or relevance of knowledge is derived in a process of social interaction and that there is a strong correlation between what we see and speak or hear. However, I should note that the experiences that constitute meaning continue to be relative and vary from individual to individual. Rancière (2009) believed that we are all equal in meaning-making processes:

What our performances—be they teaching or playing, speaking, writing, making art or looking at it—verify is not our participation in a power embodied in the community. It is the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else. The capacity is exercised through irreducible distances; it is exercised by unpredictable interplay of associations and dissociations.

It is in the power of associating and dissociating that the emancipation of the spectator consists—that is to say, the emancipation of each of us as a spectator. . . . We also learn and teach, act and know as spectators, what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed. . . . Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story. (p. 17)

As learners and educators, we are all agents in our learning and meaning-making processes just as the readers and spectators of the outcomes. Performance, learning, and spectating have equal responsibility in meaning-making processes. To create a systematic flow and presentation of the findings, I present each participant's contribution independently and use letter codes alongside their two-dimensional artefacts to identify them. It is important to note that English is a second language for some of the participants; therefore, for the purpose of clarification, I e-mailed their transcripts to them to verify that the transcriptions truly represent what they said.

### **JD's Visual Contribution and Discussion**

JD proudly mentioned her strong ties to her country of origin, and in her artefact (Figure 3) she incorporated a copy of the map with the other materials that she used. She expressed her love for her country of origin even though she had migrated to Canada: *"I love the country, but I have to go here for a better future."* JD had had background training in architectural technology. When she applied for work in the Canadian job market, a prerequisite was always a



Canadian education certificate, which she did not have. This experience prompted her to enrol at NAIT to continue her life dream.



*Figure 3. JD's artefact (October 2014).*

Parental guidance and support contributed to JD's career choice to a certain extent: *"My father told me, 'Why don't you go in architecture?'"* Her interest in working with detail prompted her to enrol in architecture and venture into the unknown as a child. JD explained that the learning culture in her current context is different from her previous experience in her country of origin. The use of black and white boards in her artefact reflects this experience. However, the black and white colours also have other meanings. To JD, black represents a strong personality, an unknown skill, an overpowering, and good while at the

same time tension (job pressures). White represents purity, weakness, enlightenment (a known skill through training), peacefulness, and fragility:

*Black is like strong person and white is like purity, and sometimes it shows weakness because it is just plain for me. . . . White is just regular day, and then you have black; you have, oh my God, I have a very big problem!*

JD used different sizes of triangular shapes in the artefact to represent her progress in her career choice and the stability of life in general:

*I can't imagine if there is no architecture, everything will be plain; everything will be boxed. . . . So if you want to reach your goal, you have to do it step by step; and of course you will encounter some trials or problems. . . . Triangle is the most stable shape, so I use it. If you have already reached the goal, you are stable; you are good.*

JD's perception of the triangle is that it portrays the scope of competence. The more that it increases in size horizontally, the more that a person progresses; the flatness at the top is the extent to which a person is stable. JD commented that "you are stable if you have a good job, your dream job." The smaller, colourful triangles represent emotional moments of happiness and the not-so-good times in JD's life with regard to her expectation of achieving good grades: "The colourful ones are the happy moments; the bad ones, . . . the dark ones are not so good, . . . so that's some disappointments for me. And the happy ones are my family, my friends, the new things that I learned."

JD used potpourri commonly known as dried flowers to represent her relationships with her instructors. She stated that the relationships contribute to

her worthiness in her choice of career. With regard to her relationship with the support system, she commented:

*I just used this one; this vanilla scent is like the people I met that teach me a lot, the experiences, . . . studying in general. You will learn a lot. Just even talking to people, you will know them; you are not in your world; you have to expand. You don't think just for yourself; you have to think for others too.*

JD explained her use of the stone as a symbolic object that reflects her life journey. She faces difficult situations, and as she continues to learn, explore, and share with the people she meets, life improves:

*I have a polished stone, a shiny one, because, starting from the rough one, you have all your experience. It has all the people that you meet. You become polished. You are more mature, you become a better person, and you become stronger.*

JD discussed the differences between Canada's and her country of origin's architectural technology. She has oriented herself to new design principles; for example, the windows in a blue print building design faces south to let in natural light, whereas in her country of origin the windows face west. JD appreciated the fact that design technology fits the context in which it is being used. She further explained her interactions with one of her instructors that have helped her to understand why she does what she is currently doing:

*I remember one of my instructors told us, "An architect is like God, and you made nothing into something." Therefore, . . . it is just a plain area,*

*and then you develop something. . . . That is what I like; . . . that sticks in my mind: We are like God that we do something—nothing to something.*

JD's contribution as an architect is through co-creation, and her participation allows her to relate and realise her capabilities or potential in various aspects of life. Attributes and attitudes push individuals to where they want to be. One of her instructor's words always reminded JD that "*sometimes it is the attitude that would let you stay in the companies that they work for.*" JD shared her feelings about this:

*Even if you are good but your attitude is bad, or you are not following the instructions, or you are late, or you are lazy, then they have to let you go. It is more attitude than if you are the smartest person; it doesn't mean they will keep you.*

The notion of craftsmanship continuously resonated throughout my discussion with JD. She said that instructors try to understand the applicability of what they learn to the real world of work. Commitment to work and detailing of facts are paramount in their practice:

*You have to really understand what you are doing so that you can apply it when you are already in the real world. . . . Just copying it and, "Oh, what is that?" You really have to understand it. Every detail you do, every line you put there, you should know and understand why it is there.*

Work seems to be a form of collaboration in JD's career; in that the client's interests and ideas contribute to the final product. Her responsibility is to provide technical support and advice. JD acknowledged that both internal—

personal preferences—and external—environmental factors—significantly contribute to her decisions in her work.

### **SM's Visual Contribution and Discussion**

SM decided on a vocational career before she migrated to Canada. I discovered that she had initially enrolled in a similar course while she was still in her country of origin. However, because she had to travel before she had completed it, she dropped out, hoping to enrol in the same academic programme immediately after landing in Canada. SM's artefact (Figure 4) depicts her dreamscape and meaning of work within VET.



*Figure 4.* SM's artefact (October 2014).

SM described the challenges that she encountered before she enrolled in the architectural programme in various Canadian universities and institutions. She struggled with fitting in and becoming who she wanted to be within a new milieu:

*Then I started struggling with getting into universities and stuff like that. So it was really tough for me, especially [because] I love school. I love learning every single day, and so that affected me. I had to stay home for one full year without going to school.*

The challenge of her lack of fluency in English posed a strong threat to SM's achievement of her educational goal. However, through perseverance and determination, and remembering her support system, she passed her English test and was able to communicate in English. She felt a sense of accomplishment and pride that she could now speak and write in English, her second language:

*I came with no spoken English two years ago, and I worked really hard on my English, and I improved it. . . . I had very helpful staff and co-workers. I worked as a customer service [representative], so it's the hardest thing when you don't have the English to speak. . . . They were always there to help me. My manager would always remind me, "Oh, so you didn't recognise the word? Okay, give me your notebook; let's write that word and learn it today."*

She further demonstrated her enthusiasm and will to learn in our discussion:

*For me, nothing is impossible, in my opinion, because if you put a border in front of you, it's mentality; you can get through it. However, if you say, "I can do it," . . . even if you had to do it more than once, you can do it. And I have done it, and I have done that [points at the artefact]. Especially when I had to sit for the English test several times until I passed it.*

After she passed the English test, SM enrolled in an academic course of her choice at NAIT. SM understood the combination of chance and hard work in getting where she wanted to be, although hard work for her was more significant than chance. She considered hard work the *"base for your life. So don't just say, 'Oh, I'm sitting here; it will happen later.' It's not going to work."*

SM related her experiences to the artefact that she designed in a box form: *"So if you think out of the box, leave that box away. Even if you had to think inside the box, like what I have here, think out of the box too."* In other words, it is important not to limit her scope of thinking, to broaden rather than narrow it. SM considered conducting research to complete an assignment vital and a *"satisfied idea in the mind."* In her artefact she used a set of mirrors to represent who she is:

*I need the reflection, something that reflects me as a person, reflects me as an architect, [and] reflects the architecture itself, the field I am choosing. . . . Architecture is not only a career for me; it is life. You eat the rice; you see the design of the rice going around the tray. You are like, "Oh,*

*here; I can do a building from that. Oh, I can design something out of that.”*

SM equated her career choice with a story: *“You’re telling a story when you are walking. . . . I am looking for architecture that is memorable, iconic to everybody.”* She further related the colours in the artefact to her personality as energetic, happy, talkative, and social. The marble is the focal point that represents the beginning of everything: *“So you get born somewhere, you die somewhere, and you live through different areas. . . . So you are not only doing architectural designing, but also thinking about what people think when they are inside this place itself.”*

SM chose a yellow base because she related her inspirational energy to fire: *“It starts shallow, low, easy assembly. Then start burning up, so moving to orange, then dark orange, then vibrant red.”* The reflections in the mirrors depict the various identities that she develops as she continues to become engaged. She commented on the effect: *“My reflection is not copy and pasting, because if you look, each copy is different from each other because of the angle at which you are viewing it.”* SM defined her career as infinite, but at times she might have no control over its dimensions. She further considered her career iconic and identifiable to the producers. She used the art gallery in Edmonton as an example of an icon of identity.

During the production of her artefact, SM kept in mind the safe use of equipment, the stability of the artefact, and other aspects of craftsmanship:



*I love the time that I submit everything and see my efforts coming out. I love the moment that I produce this thing. Okay, I did a lot of work on it, but I'm happy, satisfied. I accomplished something, so that's me. I like to see the end result even after the pressure is gone.*

SM identified culture and life's uncertainties as other influences that encourage her to practice her skill. She likened an educational certificate to a weapon for a girl child:

*Girls need to have their certificates as a weapon in their life, because you can't rely on the man. You don't know; sometimes you get divorced or something happens to him; he dies. Or you don't know what the future holds. So you always need to have that weapon that you will proceed with in this life.*

SM emphasised that the pedagogy in her country of origin is more theoretical than that in Canada. She expressed her happiness and serenity for her decision to join the institution in which she is currently enrolled:

*So I'm really happy that I did make that choice. . . . In my country of origin it's more theoretical; here you do more practical. . . . I like to know every single thing, how it works. . . . I don't like the feeling of being lost or darkness or stuff like that. . . . I know they don't want to spoon-feed us, or sometimes I need this little information that I can't get easily to step up. If I don't have it, I'll be struggling and be frustrated everywhere. So that's me. If I last without asking, that would be weird.*

SM's instructors exposed the students to the software and tools that they require in their areas of specialty. It is therefore their responsibility as students to become acquainted with all of the resources and prepare themselves for the world of work. She discussed her feelings about financial benefits, and I realised that, to SM, money was not the ultimate goal for her in her choice of career:

*To be honest, as my mum always says, money doesn't make a person; the person is the one making the money. So you can't judge the person if they have money or they don't. You will judge them on their personality, their life, how they deal with other people, relationship, respect, stuff like that. . . . Money is nothing; it comes and goes; and every time you're generous, God will give you some money back. . . . So you need to be connected to others.*

SM used the coloured strips of papers shaped into the form of a bowl to express her personal energy and vibrancy within the self for her passion. She viewed black as being lonely and sad and not representing who she is:

*Black is like being lonely, sad, stuff like that; and it's the opposite of me. I'm always happy, smiling, running, jumping. So if I stay by myself in the dark, I don't feel happy at all, because I will be thinking about negative stuff.*

SM feared that she would not accomplish the right thing or not reach the point that she had hoped to attain. She affirmed to me that the different ways that we as spectators view reflections depict the identity of the self. Her thoughts on

how she interacts with peers, family, and work engagements continue to groom the person she hoped to be in future:

*Always my share will be my classmates here and my family. So I really tell them what that means so they know. They will be curious about what you are presenting. My dad will stand and say more of this, more of that. So yeah, I always share with my family.*

SM ensured that her artefact is stable because that is the kind of life she wants to live: *“In your life you need to make good steps, so where you are going, stuff like that. It’s the future. That’s why I like corners: They connect stuff together, and it’s a focus point.”* She avoided the colour white in her artefact because she did not want to feel that something was fading: *“For me, white background doesn’t reflect the right thing.”* SM believed that the contrast against the black surface better presents facts than a tinted surface would. She contended that the viewer would concentrate more on the coloured surfaces against the black. She equated black with a body that requires ornamentation to be easily identified.

### **MS’s Visual Contribution and Discussion**

MS also migrated to Canada, like some of the other participants, but at an earlier age than the rest. Unique and interesting, MS was pursuing architectural technology at NAIT as his second academic course. He holds a bachelor’s degree in theatre, and at a later stage in the discussion he shares some of his experiences from practising theatre and their influence on his decision to begin his second

career course. Figure 5 depicts MS's artefact, which describes his dreamscape and meaning of work within VET.

MS considered work multitasking, which is why he chose to enrol in his current professional course: *"Being able to implement that into my work, which I could potentially apply to theatre, or I could also go into the industry and work just primarily in theatre; . . . I wanted to keep my options open."* MS explained how he could apply his knowledge in architectural design to theatre and clarified



*Figure 5. MS's artefact (October 2014).*

what is involved in theatre design and its connection to architectural technology. Referring to his artefact, he linked his two areas of expertise making and explained that he used play as the basis of his interpretation:

*I chose play because it also spans out to exploration. It expands out to the idea of a reaction and production. There is growth within that. There is a sense of achievement. . . . Play is work for me. I have to be enjoying work, and it's not just about aesthetics anymore. It is not just about, "Can I build this?" Now it is about, "What do I want to portray, and in which way?" And that is how I came to the solid idea. This is the form that I further developed, and, ultimately, I don't know if it is finished yet; but that's how I came to it.*

In choosing to use spheres in varying sizes, MS expressed the notion that creating anything out of something has many possibilities. He used the materials that he chose to depict sports as an activity that he also related to play. In considering height when he assembled the spheres, MS related work to having a sense of entry and growth. In addition, the spheres represent his different skills and the influences in his life that helped him to complete his assignments:

*The different sizes are the different influences in life. And how did I come up with this? How does that come together to make me? And that is also how work is for me. How does the teacher influence my work? How do my friends influence my work? How does my background influence my work?*

MS explained how his instructors influenced his work. He described the impact as *linear* at this particular time. He was learning the necessary knowledge, skills, and drills to become who he wanted to be: *"There is a goal to strive for now. With AutoCAD, I had no idea; I came in blank. I had no background in*

*AutoCAD, and they have given me the tools, and it is up to me to practise them.”*

The rough exterior finish, with some sheen, depicts to viewers the idea of the perfection versus the imperfection of work:

*That fun feeling in the way I created it, the form itself, it gives that sense of gravitation pull, that sense of levelling, something reacting, happening; and that's also very exciting to me. . . . I gave it a rough exterior finish with some sheen to give that idea that perfection isn't a thing, but with that sheen, there is always that sense of beauty within that imperfection. . . . I don't believe in perfection. . . . I found that our generation says to always strive for perfection, and you can, but I don't think it will ever be achieved to its fullest.*

MS equated work with life and explained the indicators. The sense of fulfilment and other attributes reminded MS of his earlier notion of work as play:

*There has to be a sense of fulfilment; you cannot just go through life just plain, just always a straight route. And I think my friends give me a different perspective. They give me different ways to go through it. There has got to be joy; there has got to be a give and take, acceptance. There has to be a sense of support within friends; . . . there has to be a sense of communication, openness within that play. . . . There is also that sense of money. If I ever need money . . . I want to also be there to support; . . . there is that trust. There is that honour system within as well.*

MS acknowledged that the issue of finances is significant and partially influences the decisions that we make in life. He gave an example of the

affordability of materials and goals that he wanted to use or achieve, respectively. He considered options and compromise factors that influence his decisions. Even more important to MS is the factor of a financial reward for those who practise their vocations. He gave an example:

*If I had a client, I would have to see what we can afford, what we can compromise, where we can meet in the middle, I guess, in terms of pay. I mean, as an architect I wouldn't be asking much right now because I am new. But I guess, as time progresses, my skills get better, my work experience gets better, and I would probably be more competitive with money then.*

The feeling of stress and having to meet deadlines arose in the discussion. MS reported the feeling of sometimes being overwhelmed with what he has to do, but he knew that it is part of life:

*I don't want the stress to be there so I can be freer in my creative process. But, ultimately, there is always going to be a sense of stress, and you are just going to have to embrace it almost. Use it as a drive to get work done in a way.*

MS's instructors shared their thoughts with him on issues related to job postings, craftsmanship, the application process, the provision of in-service training on the job as part of professional development, and the best milieu, such as city locations with a high chance that he could practise. The course included professional attributes (ethics), but not as an independent course. MS suggested

that networking with instructors has boosted his maturity and integrity with the use of his skills.

### **OA's Visual Contribution and Discussion**

OA shared her personal background and applauded the social support system that continues to help her to discover who she is within her career choice. Previous experiences with creativity greatly contributed to her current career path. She commented on her experiences with family and their impact on her current status:

*We always did crafts; we always would love building stuff; we would. And so both my sister and I have adapted that from my mom. . . . My sister is older than me, and I have always seen what she has been doing. . . . So I have kind of grown up seeing what she has been doing, and it has influenced me. But I have also taken my own different route.*

OA discussed her artefact (Figure 6), which depicts her dreamscape and meaning of work within VET. All of the materials that she used significantly interpreted her previous and current life experiences.

OA contended that pursuing studies in design would not have been the right direction for a specific job description, and for that reason she enrolled in architectural technology. She discussed her decision:

*I would come out with a degree that I wouldn't really know where to go with; I don't know what job I would get with that out there. I would rather go to NAIT, where I know what job I am going to get; I know what I am going to be learning. It is more for me.*



Furthermore, OA believed that her career choice has impacted people; they live and experience the contributions that result from her decision to engage in something particular within her career choice. She compared her sister's career to her own current pursuit:

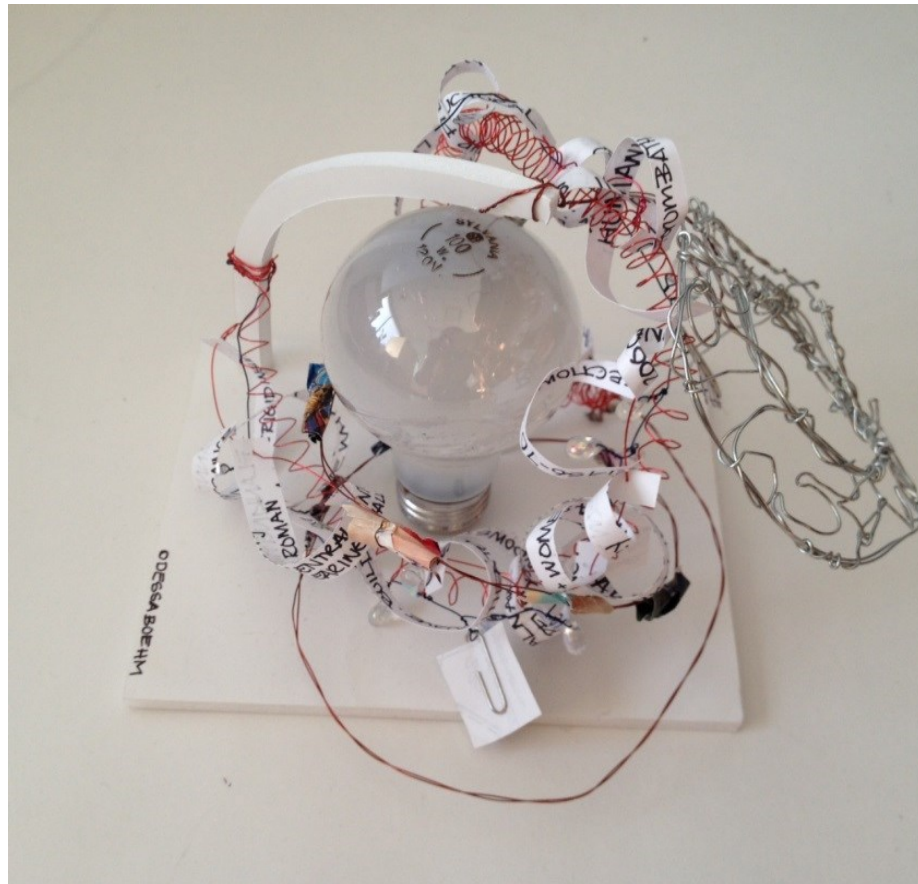


Figure 6. OA's artefact (October 2014).

*My sister is more like into painting and pretty... And great; so what? They are there, and. . . It's the environment; they live in it. Yeah, I think just the fact that people live in it and experience it is the coolest thing, instead of something that you look at for two seconds,. . . which is a lot like [what] my sister is in.*

OA's recent experience of visiting Europe has had a big influence on her current designs and styles in her work. Her career choice has meaning to her: the culture behind it as well as history in every milieu in which she practises. She explained how Europe influenced her:

*Europe they have completely like walking cities. . . . The architecture is so beautiful. They have history, and . . . it is very cultural architecture, and it is human oriented. So I have tried to influence that in some of my designs currently, where it is human oriented. And I love the fact that it has the human influence. And that it is not like you don't really know where it is going to go. It's not like it is not defined to one style. . . . You just can't design something pretty and then not think about how people are going to go through it or how people are going to work and integrate into it. . . . It is just not something to be looked at; it is something to be experienced. It is what I am really getting at.*

OA described her artefact as “more of my life, I think, is what I tried to portray in it because, me as a person, I am kind of all over the place.” She is passionate about establishing as well as defining her position and worth in the world of work, although she did not want to be identified by how much she earns or her social status. Comfortability and stability in life matter to her:

*I just want to be comfortable; I want to be stable; I want to be doing something I like. I do not need to be that architect of that kind of thing. . . . And I get to be paid a stable amount to support myself, and I can. . . .*

*I don't want to be overwhelmed with work. . . . [I want to] have time for my friends or have time for my family and have time for loved ones.*

OA's artefact consists of papers rolled around a wire; these strips of paper represent her many thoughts as she produced the work. The large and smaller light bulbs depict the relationship between their functionality and that of the human brain. When the bulbs are connected, electric current flows and causes the bulbs to give off light; similarly, the brain is active in that the nervous system is active and engaged in thoughts about accomplishing a given task. OA described her creative process:

*I wanted to do the light bulb kind of like my brain, or like what I am, because it kind of looks like a head of a person. And then I did these pieces of assignment hanging from a paperclip with light bulbs and shiny—because it does bring me a sense of fulfilment.*

The wires on the artefact represent a form of flexibility and the various dimensions that a task can easily take. The wire depicts her relationships with people, and incorporating colour into the artefact indicates that her life is more than just work. OA explained her choice of materials to produce the artefact:

*I really like the form of the wire, because it can go anywhere, and . . . it is not solid. It shows the connection in my brain or the technical aspect to it where it is constantly a buzz or constantly hearing ideas or constantly carrying thoughts. . . . It is always something going on, . . . bits and pieces of magazines crumpled around the wire. It is because this is probably my play. This is probably my life; it isn't just my work. My life*

*is my friends, my life is my family, and they all play major parts in it, and they bring colour to my life.*

The image of a clock on the artefact implies that work has a timeframe, and it is her responsibility to make sure that all of the activities in her life are balanced and considered to be able to enjoy a meaningful life:

*I have to fit everything in, to get everything done. I have to balance my family; I have to balance work and school. So it is a lot of balancing; . . . life is a mess. You have got the mess, and everyone has to figure it out. No one has life figured out, and that's what I have come to realise, so you have got to embrace the mess.*

In conclusion therefore, four participants willingly shared their interpretations of their artefacts with the researcher. Although there is diversity in their specific interpretations, all of the participants embedded the meaning of work into life experiences. They mentioned society's systems (political, sociocultural, and economical) in one way or the other as key influences in their life decisions. The uniqueness of their pedagogical experiences demonstrates the extent to which an economy within a given context potentially frames the skills-oriented educational system. Social networking, role modelling, and hands-on training in workplaces as well as workshops continue to be core learning strategies within vocation-oriented programs. One of the participants revealed the importance of multitasking as a form of pedagogy that enhances multiple vocational skills; it also illustrates the alternative modes of learning in the arts (music, drama, dance, poetry, and fine arts). The relationship between personality traits and the

selection of the colour, shape, and texture of surfaces as well as their size is not revealed based on the principles and elements of design, but based on the unique emotional attachments of participants to their experiences. However, I must also mention that the participants' previous technical competence within their areas of expertise could have consciously or unconsciously influenced their creativity processes. Based on the emotional conversations with the participants, I realised that there is still a capitalistic influence in choosing and performing a career. Decisions continue to be made based on one's position and its impact within a given timeframe. In the next chapter, my interpretations as a researcher extend my understandings of the four participants' artefacts.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **VISUAL INTERPRETATIONS FROM A RESEARCHER'S POINT OF VIEW**

#### **Tensions Within the Self as an Academician**

Entering graduate school, I faced ambition and fear, confusion and loss, and praise and blame within my profession as an educator. Past experiences resulted in a sense of dissatisfaction (a lack of freedom of the mind) and contributed to my desire to find truth within my actions as an individual while I pursued graduate studies. Coming from a different educational context, at the beginning of my doctoral studies I experienced academic culture shock over the sharing of knowledge in a class comprised of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. The pedagogy throughout my academic progress has been relatively unique in its own way; it has been more inclusive than I had formerly experienced. The curriculum content has seemed new to me and a worthwhile academic process during which I developed personal critical perspectives on matters pertaining to education. From personal experience, I believe that critical reflection is an academic skill that is still developing in institutions of higher learning in my home country.

As a scholar, I continue to voice my thoughts through visual arts and research, appreciate every moment that I share with others, and continue to learn to recognise my self-worth first and then concede that not all that I say or do will be fully accepted. My decision to pursue graduate studies in a new milieu depicts my willingness to take a risk, move out of my personal comfort zone, and venture

into the unknown. With this study I have affirmed that visual arts have the potential to empower and give a voice to individual or group inner selves, which is beneficial within a given context. Using the participants' contributions, I have been able to produce artefacts based on my personal contextualised experiences as a student, artist, and teacher-educator.<sup>6</sup> Correlating the materials that the participants used for their artefacts with their contributions in the one-on-one interviews and focus-group discussion grounded my interpretations of each participant's work. My participants did not share with me their views about my visual interpretations of their meaning of work. In this case, I recognise a possibility of having received varying and unique interpretations of the artefacts if the timeframe for the study was extended to include further discussions between the participants and me.

Within the African context, art is “intuitive and symbolic” (Coetzee et al., 2001, p. 398). A relationship is established between the artist and the unconscious world of thoughts (unknown forces). My interpretations of the participants' artefacts embrace the African aesthetics system that considers the practicality and meaningfulness of the artefact and also regards its beauty as secondary. In this case, beauty is achieved in an artefact as long as it serves its purpose within a given context. Onyewuenyi's (1976/1977, p. 513) contribution

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<sup>6</sup> I trained to become an arts and crafts teacher and defended my Masters of Fine Arts degree at Makerere University in 2010 and a master's degree in vocational pedagogy at Akershus University College in Norway in 2009. I worked as an arts and crafts teacher in secondary schools and in the Department of Art and Industrial Design at Kyambogo University in Kampala, Uganda. I was also part of a team of Norwegian and Ugandan colleagues who designed a master's degree program in vocational pedagogy at Kyambogo University between 2007 and 2010.

to the understanding of African philosophy reaffirms the unity between work and art as phenomena within the surrounding world. Therefore, through social, economic, political, and cultural contexts everything around us becomes meaningful.

### **Interpretation of JD's Artefact**

As we grow, we anticipate what our contributions will be in life. This is usually referred to as a dream. Individuals persevere and try to live a dream influenced by both internal and external factors that frame humankind. JD's interpretation of colour, texture, and the sociological factors that comprise her artefact that illustrates the meaning of work consciously guided my selection of materials to visually express the connectivity between the attributes and act of doing with regard to the meaning of work to her in her vocational career. Figure 7 depicts my interpretation of the artefact that JD created to depict her dreamscape and meaning of work in VET.





*Figure 7. Interpretation of JD's contribution (2014).*

Creating the artefact involved a consideration of JD's moving from one place to another, all in anticipation of a better life or future for her family and herself. Fear of the unknown is expressed in the tinted golden yellow—being trained in a career of her choice regardless of her expectations. The circular sphere illustrates that, as human beings, we all have a point of beginning, whether it is already defined or not, and that we are passionate about the ventures we hope to explore in life. There happens to be a responsibility of establishing the good and bad within the chosen entry point/venture. The irregular shape of the tinted golden yellow depicts the uncertainties, weaknesses, and insubstantiality of our career choices. I used a dark shade of a colour on a textured background to bring

out the uniqueness of the personality defined in the craftsmanship that one demonstrates when he/she explores unknown technical skills. As unique individuals one faces challenges and envisages how to deal with them, which links us to various support networks.

The rough and pale stones glued onto the canvas depict JD's pathway, or the drifting of life's events, to reach her current position in her vocational career. To JD, work is challenging, detailed, and specific about that to which she is expected to become acclimatised. The uniqueness conveys a sense of who each person is and how best to use the existing pedagogy within a given context to engage the hands (body), heart, and mind. Such experiences help to establish each person's contribution (worthiness) to co-creation in relation to others. The pennies on the artefact express JD's sense of recognition, financial satisfaction, and stability in life.<sup>7</sup>

The artefact portrays the act of participation within a vocational career as a form of art expressed visually and made purposeful to broaden one's understanding. As JD assembled the artefact, she appreciated the self as well as what was around her. The extent to which what is viewed as meaningful varies, and what is determined meaningful is through engagement in work as well as the interactions or relationships that one builds along the way in life, which I believe are depicted by the triangular spheres that JD incorporated into her artefact.

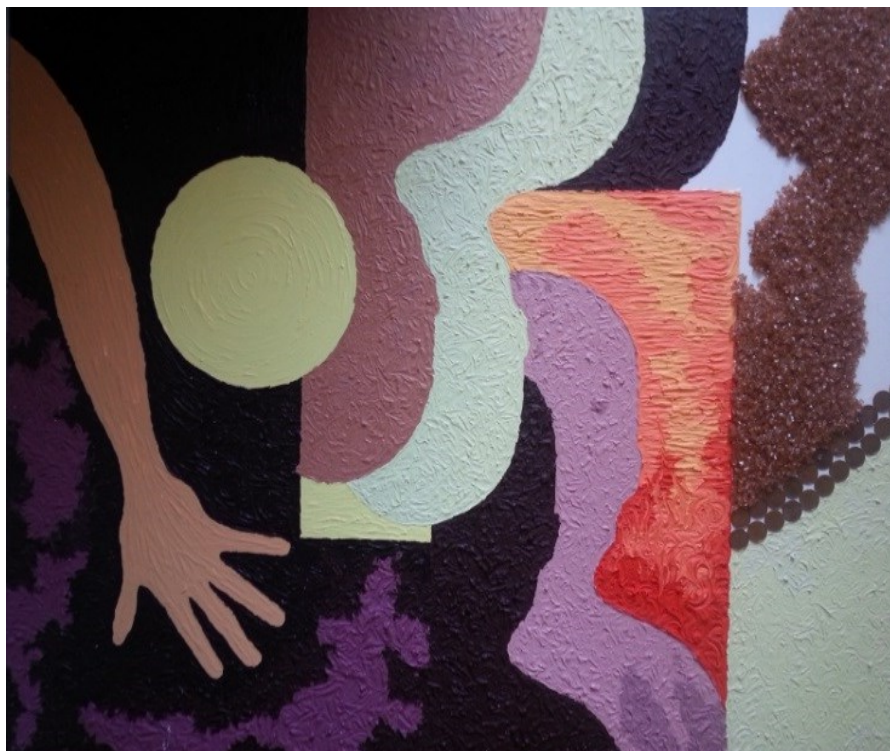
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<sup>7</sup> The circle that the pennies create does not depict the degree to which JD considered the financial benefits with regard to her meaning of work. She expressed the need for financial satisfaction to ensure that her family has the necessities of life: shelter, food, and clothing. This has to do with the capitalistic world, in which we live, as well as our mentality as well as the fear of not being able to provide for self and others without work.

### Interpretation of SM's Artefact

SM created an artefact that speaks more of her ability to adapt socially and economically within a given context than of work as a form of engagement. The challenges that she encountered as an immigrant in Canada make me think of a bumpy road that requires navigation with caution. SM was on such a road, but the challenges helped her to develop the sociological and psychological aspects of her identity. Figure 8 depicts my interpretation of SM's artefact that represents her dreamscape and the meaning of work within VET.

The light yellow circle in the artefact portrays SM's entry point into her current pursuit. Within that entry point are social, economic, and psychological factors that play a large role in the bold decisions that she has considered and made. Accepting vulnerability is one aspect and having the courage to explore



*Figure 8.* Interpretation of SM's contribution (2014).

the unknown is another aspect of SM's context as an immigrant child in a new social and educational milieu. Her support system continues to help her to face challenges and share the joys, success, and excitement of pursuing a course about which she is passionate. The wavy, glittering gravel in the artefact portrays her challenges. The challenges are not always bad; rather, they help to attain life goals. Although the journey or process might be rough, the outcomes will keep a smile on our faces.

The textured tonal variations of orange in the artefact represent the energy that motivates SM to participate to the best of her ability in work and training. I also believe that this section of the artefact represents the pedagogical strategies behind SM's high professional morale and endeavours. She described herself as happy (vibrant), determined, talkative, engaging, and interactive. All of these attributes employ the hands (body), mind, and heart. She appreciated the current pedagogy compared to her previous mode of training.

SM referred to black in her artefact as a life opportunity that she has not explored but that requires some form of recognition. I used the darkest shade of a colour to portray unexplored, potential skills, the fear within self of venturing into unknown. Given the opportunity and support, the hand is engaged in work and, as the artefact shows, strategically positioned in the dark area. The variations in colour in the dark area also indicate the progress within self and in relation to others as individuals continue to explore their potential. The dark section on the artefact further illustrates SM's pedagogical experiences in her pursuit of the same course at two different institutions. One pedagogical approach limited her

hands-on training, whereas the current pedagogy accentuates the use of the hand (body), mind, and heart.

As people explore their potential, they tend to develop unique personalities that define them within a specific milieu. SM stated that work defines who she is, and the reflection in the mirrors expresses personal attributes of the self in relation to others. In my interpretation of the artefact I used different colour tones to define the partially reflected body shapes to express my belief that, as we define who we are within our vocational careers, the social and pedagogical interactions in the lifecycle potentially influence the uniqueness of the self. We then understand the meaningfulness of life that the contextualised identities convey.

SM asserted that money is not the ultimate entity that defines work and related its lack of importance to her cultural value of not using money to buy social status, but to help others and to co-create. I used the pennies in the artefact as a visual depiction of her thought. Financial benefits did not influence her current career choice, but she affirmed that as long as we continue to live in a capitalistic environment, we need money to provide the necessities of life.

### **Interpretation of MS's Artefact**

MS's unique personal background has enhanced his current life goal. He migrated to Canada as a child and pursued training that continues to frame his multiple identities as well as his meaning of work. He has a professional background in theatre and is currently taking a course in architectural technology, which has created a synergy between the two vocational careers and affirmed the

co-existence of skills. MS described how the two vocational skills mould his individuality, and he hoped to continue to benefit from the inter-career connection. MS used multitasking to further explain the benefits of what he considered his life goal.

MS's use of linked spheres at different heights explains the influences on individuals and their growth while they establish a meaningful life in relation to the self and others. Work linked to a form of play, full of genuine experiences, encompasses life situations such as exploration, performance, growth, a sense of achievement, fun, and production. The sheen on the rough exterior of MS's artefact and the red colour on one of the spheres influenced my choice of materials and colours for my artefact. Figure 9 displays the artefact that I created to interpret MS's dreamscape and meaning of work within VET.

I used both warm and cool colours to interpret MS's two vocational careers. The tonal variations of the red colour convey a vibrant feeling of engagement in a theatrical production, whereas the tonal variations of the blue and yellow express an architectural-technology sense of dealing with nature. The tonal variations of both the warm and the cool colours suggest the connections that MS has established between his two professions that continue to define him. With regard to the aspect of nature, my interpretation depicts MS's belief that work always has a point of entry that culminates in growth or specific outcomes:



*Figure 9. Interpretation of MS's contribution (2014).*

a process and life. Training builds competence. The artefact's amalgamation of the two colour palettes points out that the two skills can be applied concurrently or individually to maintain a purposeful life. The skills might seem different in principle but yet aligned in the sense that they are acts of the art and pedagogy used to master both skills, which involves the use of instructions and hands-on training.

The glittering gravel is an interpretation of imperfection and its contribution to defining experiences that we might consider unsuccessful but that can be successful in another aspect. MS suggested that there is good in not being perfect, and art pedagogy considers these experiences accidental or semiconscious effects that become meaningful within a given context. As human beings, our aim is to be perfect in all of our endeavours, but imperfection continues to be a

necessary evil that helps us to appreciate and understand the world around us.

The gravel interprets the stress of work with timelines that must be met.

Although MS explained that realising positive results requires a component of stress to drive production in the work environment.

I incorporated different coins into the artefact based on MS's acknowledgement that work is a form of financial fulfilment and stability. Furthermore, experience is a determinant of the payment for work.<sup>8</sup> With the influence of capitalistic ideology, we cannot pretend that money does not define the worthiness of most individuals' or groups' engagements. The level top line of the coins portrays the financial quotation attached to any form of work activity in the economic sector; but as time progresses, the quotations vary from individual to individual and context to context. For this reason the coins do not form a defined straight line towards the edge of the artefact.

My personal perspective on work is that it is dynamic in the sense that it is an individual's responsibility to make a choice, as MS did, to engage in an activity that is meaningful to the self as well as others. Human beings do not live in isolation, and with various skills, whether exploited or not, one learns to appreciate the potential of self. A chain of events distinguishes the individual growth.

### **Interpretation of OA's Artefact**

OA's experiences in her interactions with her nuclear family and her social support systems influenced my interpretation of her artefact. Observations

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<sup>8</sup> The area covered by the coins and glittering gravel on the artefact does not reflect the degree of influence on the participant's meaning.



from our discussion show that she has rarely worked in isolation and shared her thoughts with others. OA considered work a human-oriented activity that creates balance between a trained skill and life outside the same. In other words, life events are interconnected with personal career skills and the experiences encountered.

Relating work to networking to achieve skill competence prompted me to select materials that would explicitly evoke the feeling of coordination in various aspects of life. OA is passionate about recognition and accomplishment to justify her career choice made. Figure 10 depicts my interpretation of the artefact that OA created from her dreamscape and the meaning of work within VET.



*Figure 10.* Interpretation of OA's contribution (2014).

My interpretation of the bulb in OA's artefact is that it plays a central role in controlling human engagement physically, intellectually, or emotionally. If there is no electric circuit within the bulb, it will not give off light; this applies to the human brain, which becomes engaged in thoughts, ideas, the mastering of a skill, and relation to others within various contexts. In the artefact I painted a semi-perceptible shape of a human head, using brush strokes that suggest movement. The tonal variations of the yellow colour relate to what OA called *success in work*, which I would link to career enlightenment. This means a continuous process of rediscovering the individual capabilities in our social and psychological identity.

I used sewing pins to reflect both the social networks and the individual thoughts/ideas that make all aspects of life meaningful to OA. She described her nuclear family's contribution to her career choice, and for this reason I positioned a sewing pin within the shape of the head. I consider it a central point of entry to identify who OA is. The defined point of entry has resulted in her interactions with friends, workmates, classmates, and different forms of work. Moreover, it has created a sense of balance within the mess of life's events.

I placed sewing pins in a circular shape and linked them to the central sewing pin and the pins at the edges of the canvas by using multi-coloured thread to depict the mess in life that various influences create, while at the same time relate in order to validate and make work decisions and thoughts flexible. I believe that a form of process impacts our actions. I used the multi-coloured

thread to affirm OA's depiction of work as networking; this process increases skill competency in a given milieu.

A person gains a sense of fulfilment when he/she engages in work and receives accolades for a job well done, whether in the workplace or in school. They could be either tangible or intangible, according to OA. She considered credit given when it is deserved a form of career motivation and self-worth. This reminds me of the pedagogy that promotes equal participation and rewards for learners to build their self-esteem. OA contended that a financial reward should be used to meet basic human needs rather than to achieve status within society. I too used pennies in my artefact within a circular shape, with a bigger penny in the centre on top of the smaller ones, to express the influence of capital on human activities. The circular shape created by the coins depicts how capital moves from one point to another through different possibilities, and somehow the same capital comes back to you in a form of a service or product. This creates a cycle of events within a capitalist environment with which we are familiar, in that acquiring a recognised skill requires funds for training, and the act of participation (which in this case is considered a form of art pedagogy) enhances the use of the hands (body), heart, and mind—a realisation of individual potential and self-worth that links us to others.

### **The Position of Art in Meaning-Making**

Coming from African descent, my scholarly thoughts tend to embrace the unique philosophical dimensions within the specific African community that I come from. I have been born, raised and continue to live within the post-colonial

discourse; but this has not detached me from Afrocentric ideologies and perception on what is considered of value within the specific space and time. It should be noted, that African philosophy is grounded on universal philosophical principles although dimensions vary from community to community. In concurrence with the above Lajul (2013) asserts

Although we have philosophical principles that could be universal to African philosophy in general, this does not eliminate differences relating to different African ethnic or cultural communities. African philosophy definitely has dimensions that are universal to Africa or to philosophy in general, while other dimensions are unique to particular African communities. (p. 9)

One of the universal philosophical principles that cut across all African communities is the intuitive and symbolic contribution of art towards establishing what is meaningful in life. As a Ugandan coming from the Ganda community, I acknowledge the fact that every society recognizes its uniqueness through a framework of artistic activities; be it through social, political, cultural and economic structures. In this case, within the Ugandan context work is an artistic activity that engages the hand, heart, mind and body. Art is not being used as a “political convenience or for wealthy customers,” as Luhmann (1995, as cited in Shanken, 2015, p. 216) questioned in this study but for acknowledging the fact that ethnic and cultural differences within communities contribute to the meaning and unique work identities in vocational education and training (VET). Putting into consideration the above-mentioned structures establishing the dreamscape

and meaning of work within vocational education oriented careers in the study links art to a form of culture. Bruner (1990) states, “our culturally adapted way of life depends on shared differences in meaning and interpretation” (p. 13). As long as there is an amalgamation of communal values with personal commitments to particular ways of life this frames one’s unique identity and contribution. I presume any dynamic knowledge system has to include traditional ways of knowing together with present-day outlooks and innovations; moreover, dynamic learning systems are best pursued by both individuals and whole communities. At all times I have been introduced to new knowledge through various ways of learning—my ‘Afrocentric pedagogies.’

Being the product of a kind of hybrid education, I am obliged to always apply in my own role as teacher, mentor and a researcher both the Afrocentric and Western learning methods. This is a realisation of a pertinent connection between two ways of knowing; a co-existence of traditionality and modernity. The use of metaphors, poems, songs, plays, storytelling and artifacts as arts-based methods within a particular place and time while executing the western formal education system embraces Frantz Fanon’s “Local in the Global and the Global in the Local”. The interconnectedness of experiences enriches one’s critical consciousness and helps a person appreciate the space in which he/she is positioned. For example, whether it is for utilitarian or aesthetic purposes, art as a form of pedagogy, work and a curriculum subject within the Ugandan context is a means to knowledge acquisition and retention. Vocational education and training in Uganda draws its roots from the historical, socio-cultural, economic and

political orientations of different ethnic communities (Lutalo-Bosa, 2007, p. 4; see also Ssekamwa, 1997, p. 3). It is through the highlighted Afrocentric pedagogies mentioned above that meaning making is achieved while connecting to the existing milieu. I have been encouraged during this study to use art as one of the Afrocentric pedagogies to further reclaim its status as valid way of understanding and establishing meaning of the career choices people make in life. To Henri (1923/1984) art is integral to everyday life in that we live it and when one engages in work, in one way or another a form of art is at play.

Art, when really understood, is the province of every human being. It is simply a question of doing things, anything, well. It is not an outside, extra thing. When the artist is alive in any person, whatever his [sic] kind of work maybe, he becomes an inventive, searching, daring, self-expressing creature...He [sic] does not have to be a painter or sculptor to be an artist. He [sic] can work in any medium. He [sic] simply has to find the gain in the work itself, not outside it. (p. 157)

According to Haraway (1998) and Eisner (2001), imagery of vision positions all human beings to understand and see through their “personal mind’s eye” (p. 8). More so, it is through how, where and what an individual sees that his/her very being and social set up as well as establishment of the truth that one questions less about what or who he/she is (Freedman, 2001). Within the context of this study, art is viewed beyond being a curriculum subject that identifies one’s potential in executing the objective educational domain; of the basic principles and elements to one that frees an individual’s mind through interacting with

materials, surfaces within reach to address issues passionate to him/her. This is one research strategy that encourages the use of multi-model approaches towards knowledge building and transformation within vocational education. The visual culture within the context of this study presents us with a complete meaning making system (Venturelli, 2004). Establishing an understanding for the meaning of work through the arts leads to the creation of a 'third space' referred to by Bhabha (1990) as a form of hybridity.

...hybridity is not to be to trace two original moments from which the third emerges; rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.  
(p. 211)

The participants and I have learned more during the production of the artefacts about our socially constructed selves. Realising personal connections, values, attributes and relevance of work have been some of the achievements for this study. Maxine Green's contribution in support of the arts in education provides a platform for the fine arts to be viewed as a meaning making that occurs during a dialogic engagement. Greene (1995) asserts

We do not engage with art works to find copies of an objectively existent world but to experience the art works' capacity to enable us to see more, to discover nuance and shapes and sounds inaccessible to us without them.  
(p. 102)

Knowledge and meaning making through the fine arts is beyond one just looking at the artwork. The experience should be construed to what John Dewey refers to as a *uniquely distinguishing feature of aesthetic experience*. Dewey (1934) defines aesthetic experience as “exactly the fact that no such distinction between self and the object, since it is aesthetic in the degree in which the two are so fully integrated that each disappears” (p. 259). This is in concurrence with Bhabha’s (1990) notion on hybridity as being necessary for knowledge understanding of what one is engaged in and in this case the vocational skills practiced or trained in. Furthermore, Greene’s (1995) thoughts on education that

We should think of education as opening public spaces in which students, speaking in their own voices and acting on their own initiative, can identify and choose themselves in relation to such principles as freedom, equality, justice and concern for others. We can hope to communicate the recognition that persons become more fully themselves and open to the world so they can be aware of themselves appearing before others, speaking in their own voices, and trying as they do so to bring into being a common world. (p. 68)

The findings in the study reveal that it is through the production of the artefacts that individuals’ social conscience and self-reflection referred to by Lovat (2005) as ‘communicative capacity and self-reflection’ was developed. Students were given the opportunity to develop personal values as well as citizenship within their own contexts through art. McCarthy et al. (2004) questioned the extent to which intrinsic value of art inquiry has been examined in



current research towards the development of ethical and civil behavior. The current study provides answers to the above by presenting individuals' life realities through which personal potentials, identities and social inclusions were established. More so, multiple subjectivities of individuals and their unique capacities to invent personal meaning making systems through active negotiation via visual means were realised. In the artefacts produced, a reflection process between imagination and realities of form depicts the emotional attachments of individuals that they hold for their experiences. There is evidence of interaction with nature that expresses one's relationship between the body and material existence (Foucault, 1988, pp. 50-51; Navarro, 2003).

Visible and invisible values obtained through the arts embrace the inclusion of experiences that are deeply felt. Tavin and Hausman (2004) encourage art teachers to organise the content within learning milieus that involves students' personal experiences in order to help them establish their potentials in decision-making, social, educational and work engagements. This cuts across all instructors in learning institutions. They have this to share

...the subjects and themes for classroom study should be expanded to encompass the scope and scale of our students' experiences. This can include deeply felt and personal experiences, political and social issues, environmental decision making, and images in mass media, as well as works of art, architecture, and design. On the other hand, art teachers can begin to unpack the social and cultural roots and consequences of globalization and, with their students, imagine new opportunities. (p. 49)

Thinking cognitively in images as a means towards understanding knowledge is becoming common within the education sector (Kalantzis & Cope, 2001; Lankshear, et al., 1997). This is helping individuals define their identities (Szerszynski & Urry, 2006). People see the self and other through the visual contact (Habermas, 1976). Foucault (1977) relates to this as ‘watchers’, or ‘observers’ of others. The amalgamation of the Afrocentric pedagogy (fine art making) within the Western context referred to as arts-based methods and the formal vocational education oriented skills is an educational hybridity that results in co-creating knowledge that helps individuals understand the concepts of their vocational skills and also visually appreciate themselves within those specific milieus in which they are situated.

The artefacts depict challenges encountered by persons migrating from one place to another and having to adjust to the therein social, economic and political systems. In this way the individuals have moved out of their comfort zones seeking for stability, knowledge and social cohesion under the globalization umbrella. Although it should be noted that according to Crossley and Watson, 2003; Law, 2004; Ninnes and Hellsten, 2005, it is through globalization that an economic and technical flow of power and knowledge has been witnessed. Learning has been geared towards technology, economic strategies within specific contexts although even the less industrialized are conditioned to the use and learning of technology that is on trend internationally without putting into consideration its sustainability, applicability and relevance. I therefore find it imperative for a person to get inspired to enroll in vocational oriented courses

from experiences justifiable to his/her purpose of engagement. As individuals in one way or another we are subjected to taking life risks and weighing options. During the decision making process the social, political and economic factors are in interplay with one's thoughts. The issue of a support system (educators, peers, workmates, family and physical environment) at this point in time tends to influence the decisions one makes and this varies from individual to individual. From all perspectives, relevance of the decision made becomes a key point at that time and place.

Values and attributes of work expressed through the use of objects and colour in my artworks is a symbolic approach within the Afrocentric philosophy. Different situations have been associated with a type of color, shape, texture and line although not in accordance to the formal basic principles and elements of design. For example in painting black and white are not considered as colors unless when used in graphic design. Within most African communities from a cultural perspective black is associated with good omen, braveness, long life, wisdom, connote the unknown, age, listening, harmony and solidarity, while white is a sign of weakness, bad omen, sharing and sorrow or spiritual world. It should be noted that the color meanings vary from cultural group to another although they may frequently appear during ceremonies or on artefacts associated with a particular culture. Sundermeier (1998) gives examples of symbolic interpretations of color within an African context.

...white is also the colour of ancestors...black can stand for strength and power...Colours also have an emotional side. They indicate heat and cold.

The heat in the human body indicates anger, whether the latter is justified or not... White indicates the coolness of water. To be cool means to act thoughtfully, level-headedly and wisely. Coolness symbolizes self-control. Coolness stands for healing and new birth (pp. 46-47).

Therefore with such an Afrocentric aesthetics background this has to a greater extent influenced the choice of colours used in my art works.

My appreciation to this study is that it has reflected a continued effort of female inclusion in commonly known as male careers. Within most African communities, skills were trained based on gender specification and as of now through western education, there are no limitations to the choice of skills one might obtain. It should be noted that there being change in skills specifications, the pedagogical strategies within the formal education system have continued to be similar in one way or another to those within the African communities. This has contributed to the “personality traits” formation through institutionalized frameworks.

In conclusion therefore, there has been a realization of engagement and surfacing of the self-reflective, relational and metaphysical (spiritual) dimensions in which individuals have been linked to the “totality of being” during the production of the artworks. It is through art that the confluence of work, leisure, and worship is realized and this further encapsulates as well as transcends, Bhabha’s (1990) ‘third space’. Experiences will continue to play a key role as point of references in defining and influencing personal career pathways, understanding and expressing of issues within given contexts. And it is during

such times that as individuals we adapt to others as well as understanding our environments.

Based on my visual and textual interpretation from the perspective of a researcher, in the next chapter I address the key attributes and thoughts that helped the participants to determine the meaning of work in VET. I identify common themes and categorize them according to the sub questions for this study to present my discussion systematically.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONTEXTUALISED THEMATIC MEANINGS OF WORK

#### The Perception of Art Within the Context of This Study

Within the context of this study, in which I aimed to establish the dreamscape and meaning of work in VET, art as a form of pedagogy does not entirely espouse the principles and elements of art, but concentrates more on the act of participation and the visualisation of knowledge in any hands-on oriented career. I focus on the participants' abilities to link meaning to any object that they used in their artefacts without having pursued a course in the arts. This perspective of art concurs with Rancière's (2004) notion of truth:

Truth exists by itself; it is that which is and not that which is said. Saying depends on man, but the truth does not. . . . Each one of us describes our own parabola around the truth. No two orbits are alike. (pp. 58-59)

Rancière's language does not entirely constitute or capture the truth because truth lies beyond language. Truth is eternal, and we never attain truth in itself but constantly develop or frame our local relations towards what we consider as truth. Furthermore, the act of participation links the theory within vocation-oriented courses to the practical work involved. Thus it links the truth of the art process to the concept of praxis, which Marx and Engels (1968/2004) considered a route vital to human activity to establish what is meaningful.

The verification of objects of knowledge (in this case, the participants' and my artefacts) is possible, although it is impossible to determine whether they are true of what they represent. As we reflect on the scholarly contributions of the

artefacts, it is imperative to keep in mind Rancière's (2004) notion of the "distribution of the sensible" (p. 1) and Benjamin's "sensory experience of perception" in Gregory (1994, p. 245). Rancière's perception is that individuals are not in a clear knowhow of what others may be in the know of what they are trying to share. The way that we perceive things in the arts world, whether in the technique used to produce them or in their destination, is magnificently diverse. It is therefore imperative not to presume that any assertion of mastery is entirely a claim of knowledge; individuals must always consider the sensible fabric of experience within which one produces the artefacts. The approach that I take to accepting the artefacts as the truth as the participants expressed it further conforms with Voloshinov's (1973) and Wittgenstein's (1958) notions of constructing meaning. As these philosophers pointed out, meaning is never separate from its real context, and it is always particular as well as concrete.

The above discussion resonates with MS statement about the perfection versus the imperfection of work, because, to him, perfection as a kind of human endeavour cannot be achieved entirely. Within imperfection are the underlying truth and the sense of beauty with regard to the personal experiences that influenced the creation of the artefacts. It is not the technical teacher-centered activities based only on developing art skills for the production of visual artworks that should validate the artefacts' scholarly contributions, but rather the artists' experiences that define the body of knowledge that they are sharing. Mills (1973) would concur; he linked an activity, the personal mind, and the product that results from the task to the establishment of the meaning of someone's work.

Social interaction as a key element in this study influenced how the participants established meaning and attached truth to their experiences. In accordance with Smith's (1999) concept of meaning to the postmodernists, neither I nor the school administration interfered professionally. I encouraged the participants to determine the processes that they would use to create their artefacts. The findings of this study show that the meaning of work is connected to individual experiences and defines moments of interaction. Throughout the process the participants linked their meaning of work through the ontological perspective that current vocational educators have embraced and Kincheloe's (1999) view of establishing the purpose of a job beyond the day-to-day responsibilities (the social and individual purposes in life).

### **The Personal Inner Voices or Values That Students Cherish and Nurture to Frame Their Meaning of Work**

#### **Inner Voices**

When an individual sets out to accomplish a task, the question of how best to appreciate the self within a given context can potentially arise. I have asked myself several times whether it is possible to find the thing of 'true value' in this world. As a skilled person, I have come to appreciate the fact that work interconnects the hands, mind, and heart; this interconnection validates one's vulnerability to life's true value. Misra and Gangrade (2005) articulated Gandhiji's philosophy on education:

To develop the spirit is to build character and to work towards knowledge of God and self-realisation. And I hold that this was an essential part of



training of the young, and all training without culture of the spirit was no use, and might even be harmful. (p. 119)

The participants' experiences of frustration and perseverance during their efforts to become integrated into the world of work expose human vulnerability and lead to system or workplace resentment. Listening to our inner voices and connecting to the meditative world consciously or unconsciously helps to reconnect to the inner self and find meaning in ourselves. Kornfield (2001) commented that

being receptive to the voices of our hearts in prayer, meditation, in visualisation, fasting, or song requires one to step out of the usual roles and through finding forgiveness, awakens freedom that helps us face life within a realistic perspective. (p. 25)

Making decisions sincerely guides us in answering questions related to why we are where we are and for whom we are doing it. In this case, individuals make decisions and act through a process that engages the soul with the reality at hand. I believe that place and time, considering the cultural patterns therein, contribute to an individual's instinctive feelings.

One of participants discussed spirituality in the form of meditation as an alternative pathway in her career endeavours to researching an issue or seeking support from friends and family in situations that often seem impossible to overcome. This act is related to whether human beings unconsciously or consciously become involved in work. In contextualising meditation from a personal perspective, I believe that it is a form of work that engages the mind and

body passively. In the literature that I reviewed, Fairholm (1996) referred to such a situation as a relationship with something beyond self. Meditation as a life experience helps improve an individual's stress level, creativity abilities and crisis management (Tischler et al., 2002). This verifies that work is not independent of spirituality and that our verbal and physical individual responses in work are related to what Dehler and Welsh (1994) called the instinctive feeling that energises individual action in relation to a specific task. Therefore, it is through embracing spirituality at work that an individual will experience skills development, learning abilities, humanity and establish underlying purpose for his/her engagement in life (Petchsawang & Duchon, 2012).

Vocational education and training uses the hand, mind and body thus there a strong relationship exists between the type of education and meditation. As a pedagogist, the hands and body do not perform in isolation of the mind (spiritual consciousness). It is through such processes that an individual achieves professional as well as physical growth and integration. Miller (2014) recognises that when one engages in meditation, his/her level of concentration improves as does being present in the moment, referred to as "*positive attention*". When individuals are mindful of others and feel comfortable within a given context, it is possible that that a spiritual connection exists therein.

The participation in the production of artefacts to visually express the meaning of work is an indication that participants were involved in a meditation process (Miller, 2014). The participants used their spiritual consciousness to generate knowledge and develop a visual understanding of the world around

them. In this case, expressing their realities in form of shapes, color and involvement in the production of the artefacts portrayed the participants' "*altered state of consciousness*" (Andrews, 2005, p. 27). Furthermore, Andrews (2005) identifies this type of consciousness as "*creative imagination or imaginative cognition*" and highlights that

Creative imagination, or imaginative cognition, is the key to opening the doors to true spiritual awareness, energies, and beings. Energy from the more ethereal realms must take the form of images for us to recognize them and work within them. The imagination should not be confused with unreality. Through imagination we create a new awareness of realities in form, color, sound etc., that surround us. (pp. 27-28)

In view of the above, one's engagement in the production of an artefact reflects on a critical question of 'art as for what purpose'. This observation draws my understanding back to Rancière's (2004) and Walter Benjamin's (1968) philosophical considerations of aesthetics. Both scholars recognize 'truth' as existing by itself and in this depiction, its uniqueness of being is eternal and shared through multiple forms of communication. In this case, mastery in artistic skills seizes to justify an individual's visual competence but uphold the relevance and creativity of expressing one's experience. When one engages in meditation, he/she is listening to the inner self and seeking to understand the life journey that is ahead. Suzuki Roshi (as cited in Kornfield, 2001) explained that the power of listening helps us to determine our human actions and the journey that we take to perform a "general house cleaning of the mind" (p. 27), which is usually painful

and full of challenges. I relate this to an individual's realisation of personal life potential and appreciation for the shortfalls that that individual encounters.

During such processes, as I mentioned above, individuals avoid using the pattern of tensions in the body and feelings of restlessness and resistance, grasping and wanting, as defensive mental structures in professional careers to understand where they are.

Taking up a profession and being initiated into a particular society, which results in a shift in identity through which "we transcend our sense of self, awakens an undying wisdom, love, and fearlessness" (Kornfield, 2001, p. 39). Listening to the inner self helps to continuously deepen the level of knowing, being compassionate and trusting in the actions or interactions in which one gets involved. My study's findings challenge Weiss and Khan's (1960) definition of work in that the tasks within a form of work are not applied but are considered a process, and the existing education or economic situation did not influence the participants' enrolment in their vocational career options; moreover, monetary implications and societal status minimally influenced their choice of vocational career.

The participants have not derived happiness from the worldly wealth that they have accumulated, which might contradict the capitalist's way of thinking, but rather from releasing the past by reconciling everything that is incomplete in their hearts by speaking out and participating. This experience concurs with Harpaz's (1998) valued work outcomes in that the trust that we build within the self and our interactions with others when we use our vocational skills help to

realise our values and goals. When we open our hearts to the process of expressing our outrage, sorrow, and grief, the pain and hatred, this should help us to let go of the past and look to the future to seek truth and value in life.

This is related to one of my core concerns in the research process: to find the truth and help the participants to realise the value that they have acquired in facing challenges that have caused them at times to question; yet have the courage to recognise their deepest inner purpose, at the same time, to awaken their emotional tasks on Earth.

The above discussion resonates with Hudson and Sullivan's (2008) notion of work as a form of salvation, curse, and prosperity at certain times in life. This confirms Durkheim's (1897/1966) notion that work is interfaced (prosperity/poverty) and acts as a fundamental transformation activity over time. Realising that work is part of a human obligation regardless of the experiences therein helps to understand work as individually internalised. Moreover, the above continues to question the extent to which individuals achieve sovereignty. This further relates to Foucault (1981, 1982) and Weber's (1904/1930) positions on the structures and disciplinary procedures of modern life and work. The themes that I have identified and discussed in this study are life strategies that people use to establish personal worthiness and truth in various contexts.

Humankind creates the pain as well as the beauty of life on Earth. As complex human beings, individuals act based on personal interests. Suffering reveals the inner self and opens us to spiritual and physical healing. Suffering also helps us to learn to appreciate ourselves and endure the pain. Although one

might think that individuals entirely control life events, this is not necessarily so, because what frames one as human determines personal individuality and uniqueness in life and the actions that one takes to create an impact (positively or negatively, consciously or unconsciously). Kornfield (2001) further affirmed this notion in his statement that “the emptiness of self opens us to the experience of void, the dynamic emptiness out of which all things are born” (p. 76).

### **Identity**

A professional career is associated with a form of identity. Individuals grow up desiring a particular profession, partly influenced by role models and society’s perception of prestige. However, life experiences compel someone to take a particular professional pathway. I began my investigation by explaining to the participants what their contribution to the study would be. To express their dreamscape of work, they created artefacts from different materials or sources that reflected their inner values or the attributes of the meaning of work. The discussions with the participants on their artefacts revealed that the attributes and values that they identified align more with their identity than a perceptible form of work. Identity as a concept is complex, personal, and diverse in various contexts (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011). This conforms with Harpaz’s (1998) perception of work that roles are perceived through practising various careers and understanding why people act the way that they do in certain situations.

Within the context of this study, according to the participants’ narratives, their meanings of work constitute an identity derived from the past, present, and future. These attributes or interactions with others have developed over time

(Carlsen, 2008; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). This is in concurrence with the notion that identity is not static and that students should be encouraged not to set their personal work values in form of a defined structure (Bauman, 2005). Life in the world of work results in the evolution of personal identities. The participants mentioned their flexibility in defining and establishing their work values with regard to place (context), time, and expertise. The participants' identification of attributes such as integrity, the ability to meet deadlines, and general work ethics is linked to their professionalism. This affirms Kroger's (2007) assertion that one identifies the self, based mainly on the salience of our multiple identities. Lawler (2014) perceived identity from a sociological perspective: Identity formation is an accomplishment, which the participants identified as the meaning of work to them. Lawler contended that "there is no silent, untroubled, normal, or natural identity; identity itself is a social and collective process rather than a unique and individual possession" (p. 2). The research findings cannot be generalised to all vocational education careers because work is both individual (from a psychological perspective) and social (from a sociological perspective).

Because people are aware that "their humanity is simultaneously shared and singular in work" (Jackson, 2002, p. 142), identities from the findings of this study continue to be ongoing processes as well as achievements, rather than a sort of sociological filing system. One of the participants described work as a form of play in which one is genuine, reacts, grows, explores, and makes a contribution to something that is meaningful. As a researcher I too view the development of an identity as an ongoing process in which individuals accept the shortfalls (which

one of the participants considered imperfection) and achievements (a feeling of accomplishment) in their career choices. The attributes that I have discussed are linked to the importance of work goals and value outcomes in defining work within a given context (Harpaz, 1998). Acknowledging that those around an individual accept him/her for who he/she is builds competence over time.

Skorikov and Vondracek (2011) defined identity as a core domain that impacts people; in this study, this refers to the participants' personal well-being. I understand that the participants consider their well-being as having the hands-on competence to participate in co-creation rather than accumulating wealth for societal recognition. To them, earning reasonable income for the purposes of survival is more relevant than working towards social status in that balance between work and life outside the workplace keeps them linked to their various support systems. Bowling, Eschleman, and Wang (2010) asserted that during such situations each person perceives the self as a worker in a specific and contextualised occupation; at the same time, that person identifies the self as part of a social group. Marx (as cited in Marx & Engels, 1968/2004) argued that "it is not the consciousness of individuals that determines their existence; rather, their social existence determines their consciousness" (p. 181). According to Marx, the context in which an individual is positioned in relation to others shapes his or her identity. With reference to Marx and Engels' argument, one of the participants commented:

*An example of this for me is [name] being an actor, works as an actor, and identifies me as a performer, an entertainer, an artist, an explorer of*



*the types of people around me, someone who needs to understand humanity and the society around me. Work as an actor identifies me as all these things and ultimately gives me fulfilment in what I do.*

The participants related to the sociological perspective on identity when they talked about work as a form of activity that encompasses various skills that contribute to the output, and as an influence in instruction and hands-on training. The participants have developed their professional images through work encounters and have experienced changes through the process of professionalization. One participant explained:

*Especially in design you can see people's different styles and representations come through. Being in a programme with these people for a year and a half now, you get to know everyone, bits and pieces, pretty well through their work. For example, [name] is very functional, rational, and thinks through everything; and you can see that in his design decisions. I also know that [name] likes being stable in his life, and therefore his designs are very sturdy and supportive.*

With regard to “what are we,” Foucault (1976/1992) demonstrated that particular kinds of identity develop within relations of power and knowledge and the technologies of the self. Foucault believed that knowledge is not power and argued that one of the ways in which power works is by producing ‘truth’ about the world that help to make the social world coherent, as well as the place of the people within it.

On the one hand, the participants reported that their works speak to them and that the way that others view them results in the psychological-identity perspective associated with the self-concept as a generalised perception of the self; self-esteem, which is a generalised evaluation of the self; and beliefs that are generalised perceived personal controls (Hausser, 1995). Considering the set objectives of this study, I did not explore a psychological-identity perspective in depth, but it is worthwhile to mention. It is therefore imperative to note that work-related interactions as well as friendships result in identity and the construction of the self (Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Roberts & Dutton, 2009). On the other hand, however, identities can be ambiguous (Bartel & Dutton, 2001) or stigmatised (Kreiner, Ashforth, & Sluss, 2006). One participant noted that

*whatever you do or design, it speaks all about you. When people look at your work, they already know it is you who designed it. If I design a building for myself, I will design a modern building because that's how I feel about the building to be designed today.*

In relation to the above, an individual will form, transform, and modify definitions of the self and others in the context of work-based situations and activities (Dutton et al., 2010, p. 265). Engaging in any kind of work helps to develop a sense of value and meaning of self. Previous research has identified the factors that contribute to identity; they are the various quality relationships that one encounters in practising a particular skill (Baker, 2000; Burt, 2000; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Ragins & Kram, 2007). More exposure to social resources strengthens people and helps to endure stress, face challenges, and learn to cope

with more complex challenges. Through career, occupation, profession, or organization, people construct their unique identities (Carlsen, 2008; Heaphy & Quinn, 2005; Kreiner & Sheep, 2009; Maitlis, 2009).

Furthermore, the unique identities and environment contribute significantly to a more consistent identity formation; this relates to Ibarra's (2003) statement that

once our possible selves are in play, what ensues can be likened to a fierce Darwinian competition taking place within ourselves. . . . The time comes to reduce variety, to discard some possibilities, and to select among them a new favourite. (p. 61)

As skills oriented persons we engage the self in the construction of whom we want to be and tend to experiment with various attributes that come to mind. During this time we begin to develop and adapt to the current identities that define the prevailing workplace settings. By appreciating and understanding our experiences within the discarding and adaptation stages, we achieve a sense of truthfulness, rationality, significance, uniqueness, maturity, absorption, or any other attributes.

Role models continue to define others' identities (Turner, 1956). In role transitions we determine an appropriate fit for the self within external and internal perceptions and standards. Parents, instructors, workmates, and schoolmates, as I found in this study, play a large role in skills-oriented courses. As a vocational pedagogist role models are vital for vocational education programs because of their contribution to defining human behaviour within a sociological context. An

individual's career pride and the practicability and applicability of any skill continue to be core for vocation-oriented programs. It is imperative to note changes in the context to develop a new identity or personal self. The participants expressed theoretical ideas of identity in the focus-group discussion that I have classified into three concepts from the work of Giddens (1991), Habermas (1987, 2004) and Bauman (2005): the conscious self at the centre of professional-identity development, the power of social relations, and the power of language and discourse.

With regard to *the conscious self at the centre of professional-identity development*, the participants related to and reflected on experiences from the past and present and anticipated what the future holds for them. They realised that they do not completely control their experiences and that embracing imperfection as a component of identity is acceptable. They shared their thoughts on work as a journey on which we start out fresh, new, and not knowing what the future holds. The participants suggested that our thoughts, imaginations, and aided methods help us to develop ideas. Work is not only an economic venture; rather, it is a learning milieu that improves the self and helps people to make contributions to other people. There must be a beginning and an end that encompass growth as well as hardship. On this journey of the self, an individual cannot predict personal successes and failures without having experienced the unfolding transformation.

Williams, Bradley, Devadason, and Erickson (2013) advised, "Let your work talk about you. When you design, your design should speak your language,

your thoughts, your ideas and about you” (p. 35). Considering the above comment of letting the work talk about an individual as also mentioned by one participant, in certain circumstances a person potentially suppresses self-identity in favour of the organisational identity. This does not refute the fact that an individual can nurture self-identity, but conforms to Pestalozzi’s in Bruhlmeier (2010) conviction that “human nature is such that we cannot realise our true potential as human beings without the influence of other people” (p. 18). It is therefore imperative to appreciate our experiences through work because they are linked to the unique individual qualities that human beings develop with time. This discussion is further related to Kincheloe’s (1999) description of the broader purpose of a job: that it entails examining one’s purposes in the bigger context in which he/she is positioned.

As for the power of social relations, professional relationships decentre the self and place it within a cultural and collective sphere (Habermas, 2004). Kincheloe (1999) suggested that this is connected to the social and individual purposes that define why, what, when, and how experiences unfold in life. The self does not exist in isolation, but in relation to others. Clouder (2005) explained that “we construct our identities around caring for others” (p. 506). Some of the participants concurred in that they perceived work as helping others and as purposeful. They contended that the self in relation to others, recognition of their contributions, relationships, the sense of belonging or being connected to others, respect, cultural influence, and team building describe work. As a social construct, I understand identity through external experiences that influence the

self. This increases the awareness of the need to belong to a group. The type of identity can be defined as professional identity, which involves doing and being in practice. As workers we have a dynamic portfolio of selves that involve continuous negotiation of our roles and memberships or affiliations (Pettifer & Clouder, 2008). The amalgamation of technical skills, interpersonal skills, professional judgement, reasoning, critical self-evaluation, and self-directed learning culminates in “a mix of professional identities” (Paterson, Higgs, Wilcox, & Villeneuve, 2002, p. 6).

### **Language**

The power of language and discourse, according to Habermas (1987), is that they make us aware of the power of dialogue between the self and the other. The use of visual arts as a form of language is one way of expressing an individual's ability to communicate what cannot be put into words. At times an image is used to convey a message to specific audiences, and even at times alongside text to address an issue. From a personal perspective, it is not a mandate to always receive validation of an artefact from an authority for it to be considered a form of artwork. An artwork's worth is better appreciated when it is linked to who produced it and why rather than to its price. The arts as a form of language in general continue to develop our identities, make us become aware of how people relate and talk about themselves and others and how they position themselves within a given context. Furthermore, within the context of this study art functions as an interview or conversation prompt to establish the dreamscape and meaning of work for these select participants.

The power of language also points to a pedagogy that articulates awareness raising and engagement with others (Brookfield, 2012). For the participants, the connectivity between pedagogy and identity concentrated mainly on knowing the skill; that is, competence and worthiness in work. Collectively, the participants viewed work as

*competence building; always having a point of entry that culminates in growth or specific outcomes; an influence of instructions and hands-on training; venturing into the unknown in order to acquire the necessary skills to accomplish a task; a form of multitasking [in this case, the use of architectural technology and theatre concurrently]; a form of play full of genuine experiences, new life, and [that] spans out as exploration, performance [engagement], and growth; being opinionated; technical innovation/craftsmanship; realising your technical worth in a profession; being productive while considering functionality; an interaction/engagement of the hands, body, and mind; as having no limitations and an innovation process.*

Skills-oriented careers and art pedagogy emphasize the interactions among the hands, body, and mind. It is also imperative to consider the heart, which contributes to the establishment of the whole self (Galvin & Todres, 2007). The emotional and rational ways of knowing that the participants identified include *work as a feeling of satisfaction, determination [the perseverance to achieve something], a sense of fulfilment instead of the realisation of power [authority], an attitude, and a passion. They also described work as memorable, unique and*

*fun, requiring neatness, being happy, having fun, feeling contented, stressful and frustrating, and stressful because of timelines [expectations].* These emotional attributes and ways of knowing have helped the participants to develop critical-thinking skills in a context in which they are professionals. This discussion is related to Gandhiji's (as cited in Misra & Gangrade, 2005) definition of true education:

True education of the intellect can only come through proper exercise and training of the bodily organs, hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose etc. . . . Unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove a poor lopsided affair. By spiritual training, I mean the education of the heart. A proper and all round development of the fore can take place only when it proceeds *pari passu* with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole. It would be a gross fallacy to suppose that they can be developed piece-meal or independent of one another. (p. 97)

The education process becomes effective with the interplay of children's physical and natural milieus. Weber (1904/1930) and Foucault (1981, 1982) embraced an education process that defines the procedures of modern life and work. This affirms what Mjelde (2006) called *progressive pedagogical circles*, in which students learn for life to achieve human sustainability, and to a certain extent to what Marx (1932/1959) considered a combination of the mental and physical capabilities that exist in human life. This further reaffirms the



participants' comparisons between the pedagogical strategies from their past with those in their current learning milieus. Identification of the existing complexities and gaps therein between theoretical and practical knowledge orientations justifies the call for multidimensional modes of instruction within practical oriented skills. Such a situation calls for vocational instructors who have the ability to handle both objective and subjective knowledge within the various vocational programs. The experiences of some of the participants reveal that the previous form of pedagogy promoted more of the universal rules and laws of the professional program and that the current one has tended to embrace both the above and the subjective knowledge that includes the context, perspective, and situational interpretation of strategies and judgments. This approach takes into consideration what best works at the time that a task is assigned.

From an objective knowledge perspective, the interplay between communities of practice, lessons administered, peer assists, and the use of collaborative working technologies continues to define the professionalism within vocation-oriented careers and personal endeavours. Moreover, the contexts in which individuals continue to practice act as platforms for reviewing the knowledge and maintaining quality standards. When vocational students engage in face-to-face lessons, problem-solving strategies are defined, and mentors act as credibility checks to provide students with a clear set of steps to complete a task and avoid appearing ignorant. In this case, information and knowledge sources help to maintain the quality of the content that students learn.

Although participants gained objective knowledge, it is evident from the study findings that their subjective knowledge was embedded within the academic programs that they were pursuing. The participants' self-motivation enhanced their ability to deal with challenges within their personal career interests because career competencies are always a work in progress.

The emotional attributes that I have identified in this study position the participants' vocational careers as places where their "deep gladness meets their world's deep hunger" (Buechner, 1993, pp. 118-19). The emotional feeling of satisfaction, and joy that the participants expressed during the study concur with Shusterman's (2010) and Sölle and Cloyes' (1984) discussions of emotional satisfaction. They considered joy a major component of work for one to attain full personhood, as a co-creator, through the activities humankind engages and becomes attached to a place. Acceptance means support and openness in communication, which influences the end result. These concepts broaden my scope of understanding of who we are, how we integrate, how we relate with others, and the processes that help us to fit with others as individuals. The more individuals continue to discover themselves, the more they learn to appreciate the differences between self and others.

On the other hand, when the needs of others (financial and social) potentially influence the way that people execute their duties, it depicts a relationship with others that I consider of high quality. Grant, Dutton, and Rosso (2008), Worline et al. (2009), and Barnett (2010) referred to this as *social engineering*. Social engineering entails a person's position or location, past

experience (e.g., in a culture in which windows are designed to face west as expressed by one of the participants), and acquaintanceship with a new experience such as an architectural tradition that requires that windows face east. With regard to social consciousness, Dewey's (1915) perception of the foundation of education as the relationship between social considerations and work-related learning helps us to become united with the context in which we are positioned (Flinders & Thornton, 2004).

In the next section I further examine the participants' lives in relation to their career roles and the contribution of education to an understanding of self-worth.

### **How Students See Their Lives in Relation to Their Skills and Education to Understand Self-Worth**

Work is fundamental to all forms of human life because we must convert elements in nature into items of utility to human beings (Nolan, 2002). Under capitalism, labour is contracted for the purpose of profitable commodity production rather than to find meaningfulness in humanity. Within the context of this research, the participants defined the role of work as a form of networking, survival, and being human and as a process, a journey, and, ultimately, a form of life. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, such situations and relationships help people to construct their own identities and social worth. Such roles culminate ideally in what Bradford (2012) called the "social recognition and affirmation of young people" (p. 72). This also resonates with Deilami's (2003) definition of

training as being in a position to employ and develop internal abilities as well as expand on ethically approved qualities within a given context.

### **Networking**

Networking, according to the participants, involves community, employers, professionals, family, partners, friends, and peers (age mates, schoolmates, workmates); and it is composed of prevailing economic, social, and cultural factors. Staying in contact and on good terms can potentially expose people to new opportunities and workplace potentials. The relevance of these connections to the participants is that they were able to appreciate that work is a form of environment with various avenues and connections, and people are part of the system. They connected networking with a web or a net and suggested that such connections help people to learn new things that potentially frame their future. Bradford (2012) stated that we choose friendships, and they have value in and of themselves. Such experiences avail us of the opportunity to share in social control and motivate us to learn (Gregson & Gregson, 1991; Mjelde, 2006). With this approach, our interactions in life have both scientific and historic human connections. Giddens (2000) described

a relationship of equals, where each party has equal rights and obligations.

In such a relationship, each person has respect and wants the best for the other. . . . [It] is based upon communication, so that understanding the other person's point of view is essential. Talk, or dialogue, is the basis of making the relationship work. Relationships function best if people don't hide too much from each other—there has to be mutual trust. . . . Finally,

a good relationship is one free from arbitrary power, coercion or violence.  
(p. 80)

As long as individuals have self-regard, they are likely to build or form relationships with colleagues at work (Scott & Judge, 2009) and to become more motivated to engage in prosocial behaviours at work (Grant, 2008). Networking can also be viewed as social capital if one considers its capacity to support learning and personal development. Within an educational setting one may talk of capacity building in relation to social capital. A community can be constructed from the perspective of interpersonal networks that uphold or generate trust, reciprocity, social solidarity, and emotional support (Coleman, 1989; Field, 2003). Bourdieu (1986) considered networking a resource to obtain and retain a position and authority within society. To an extent from a capitalistic perspective, I concur with Bourdieu that through networking as a system of social relations, those in control constantly revolutionise the production processes. Within the current form of society, the economic system controlled by a few determines the relations of production with the people within the society. According to Sayer (1991), the impact of the controlling group in creating change is “wholesale, leaving no walk of life and no corner of the globe untouched” (p. 10). In the context of this study, networking reflects the existence of a work-role identity, and Harpaz (1998) considered it a societal norm that broadens the opportunity for work. Through a pedagogical lens, the study also re-affirms Berger’s (2003) description of networking as an approach that, for vocation-oriented students, promotes craftsmanship and helps them to recognise that accomplishments are a

means of acquiring self-esteem. Through a humanistic lens I believe that networking achieves a sense of social belonging not in the sense of acknowledging one's economic worth or control, but appreciating one's ability to perform a given task.

### **Work as Life**

Work referred to as life draws attention to what life entails within a wisdom tradition philosophical thinking. One of the participants viewed work as something for which to live. This is connected to Gamst's (1995) dimensions of work, which consider work a support for all other aspects of human lifeways. An individual may live for happiness and fulfilment of the self and others. At the same time, the painful truths of life will open one to the "great heart" of compassion (Kornfield, 2001). Experiences of joy or sorrow create an entry point to rediscover one's inner self (spiritual consciousness). Within the context of this study I borrow Roof's (2015) definition of spirituality:

Spirituality is the personal relationship or experience with God or the divine that informs an individual's existence and shapes their meaning, purpose and mission in daily life. It does not need to encompass religion nor does it by nature exclude religion. (p. 588)

The emotional rewards and attributes mentioned by the participants in this study expose interconnectedness between spirituality and work in today's workplaces (Saks, 2011). This happens because individuals are searching for personal values, not dwelling so much on financial rewards and more into life's meaning and purpose (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Marques, 2010; Fry, 2003; Karakas, 2010).

Individuals expressing hope and self-drive to attain a skill as well as perform it to the best of their abilities defines them as spiritual beings.

Furthermore, the desire for a work life full of self-satisfaction, trust and placing material needs as secondary (Marques, 2010) defines participants as “willing servants, rather than conscripted slaves, of the organisation” (Quatro; 2004, p. 235). They identify with their career choices. During the search for meaning of work one recognises the existence of the supernatural power beyond humankind and begins to appreciate and connect to the mystical world for comfort and guidance. Yet, the literature that I reviewed and the findings from this study partially show that work as life is a societal norm in the form of an obligation that defines humankind (Harpaz, 1998). Moreover, Marx’s and Weber’s views of work as a mode of life and, in a sense, capitalism brings to my attention that, consciously or unconsciously an individual is subjected to a social group that defines his/her actions as well as ends.

The connections between spirituality and work suggest that as long as individuals continue to participate in spiritual activities, strive for emotional satisfaction, give back to the community through non-profit projects, avoid irrelevant career paths and establish self-worth in relation to others within a given context, employees will have direction and meaning thus providing a foundation for their existence. Although economic gain continues to be part of humankind, it will be prudent that it is not given the highest preference when committing oneself to work and establishing its meaning. Cullen (2013) refers to such life

processes as vocational ideation: “the process of identifying, and reflexively developing an understanding of one’s personal work vocation or calling” (p. 935).

### **Survival**

The participants expressed their humanity by referring to work as serving them and helping them to earn money to buy food to survive and pay bills. If they have to spend one third of their lives working, they prefer that it be something that they want to do. Work is their life, and one third of it is a great deal and constitutes part of their lives just as family and friends do. It is therefore imperative that they love their work. Marx (1932/1959) opposed the idea that human beings have a fixed nature that exists independently of the society in which they live. Marx asserted that the need to labour on nature to satisfy human needs is the only consistent feature of all human societies—the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, according to Benton (1989). Fischer (1996) argued that human beings must work to survive. He explained that “the uniqueness about human labour is that we act on nature consciously, build on our successes and also develop new ways of producing the things we need. Therefore, as human beings we have got history animals do not have” (p. 51).

As Fischer (1996) noted, the population is in the position of having to work for capital to survive. My research on the dreamscape and meaning of work in VET prompted me to think about the intellectual authority of the education system when neoliberalistic systems control the world. The quality of labour supply and policies is affected by the geographical segmentation of labour markets as a result of immigration and labour laws, as well as social



infrastructure. If this is the case, what are the strategies for VET beyond capitalistic interests? One of the participants commented on professional growth:

*You do what is best in everything you do to stay in the company and get promoted; if you love your work, you will enjoy it. That will make your soul happy and alive. You will survive! If it is something you cannot live without, that is survival. You need it for fulfilment. "Eat or be eaten." Be the best you can be; strive to be better. Work fulfils you, and I think that people that aren't working have nothing to work towards or grow for; it's kind of a survival to not be stuck as the same person.*

This resonates with what both Marx and Hegel considered alienation (as cited in Cox, 1998). Marx believed that such a situation involves loss of control; specifically, the loss of control over labour. In *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx (1932/1959) described work as a person's vital activity, a spiritual activity as well as a human essence. He therefore considered work a fundamental and central activity in human life and, potentially at least, a fulfilling and liberating activity. Marx contended that work reduces humans to a machine and that to be deprived of work means a living death. There is no choice; work is a matter of survival. Living within a capitalistic environment requires one to engage in an economically rewarding activity otherwise individuals will not be in position to provide themselves with life's basic needs.

With regard to Harvey's (2010) discussion of capitalism, in the world in which we live people act based on their expectations, beliefs, and understanding of the world. Social systems depend more on trust in experts, adequate

knowledge and information on the part of those who make decisions, acceptance of reasonable social arrangements, and the construction of ethical and moral standards. “Cultural norms and belief systems powerfully present but do not exist independently of social relations, production and consumption possibilities, and dominant technologies” (Harvey, p. 122). This perspective portrays the world in which we live as complex, competitive, compromising, challenging, and contradictory at certain times as we face changes in our environments.

Hegel (1977), in *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, explained that human consciousness influences work, and plays an essential role in distinguishing humans from other animals: “The animal has a purely immediate relation to nature, both to the objects around it in its natural environment and to its nature, its appetites and its instincts” (p. 105). Hegel further referred to the immediate relationship of nature as a form of human desire. Sayers (2003) affirmed the notion of “the animal. . . [as] driven by its desires and appetites to consume objects which are directly present to it in its natural environment” (p. 109). In contrast, the human being is not a purely natural being, but rather a conscious, self-conscious being with being-for-self.

Two aspects of the process that Marx (1932/1959) and Hegel (1977) identified are that an individual will come to recognise the powers and capacities as real and objective and that, by humanising the world; one ceases to feel that he/she is confronted by a foreign and hostile world. Therefore as individuals overcome their alienation from the natural world and gradually, through a process of social and economic development, begin to feel at peace in the world and live

in harmony with it. A point to consider is that both Hegel and Marx agreed that work has social and material aspects. Workers relate not only to the object of work, but also to the natural world and, through it, to other human beings.

One of the participant's referral to the slogan "Eat or be eaten" implies that the participant has undergone challenges; her sense of individual resilience as an immigrant is susceptible to the situation currently being experienced. Establishing a sense of belonging in a new context contrary to the previous one questions the idea of seeking a "better life or future for family", according to some of the participants. Williams et al. (2013) wondered why there are highly skilled immigrants in Canada, for example, when access to professional jobs is still a challenge, regardless of whether the immigrants are here legally through the points-based immigration system. Partially this study affirms the complexity and contradictions of the highly-skilled migration route based on the experiences of one of the participants. The above resonates with what both Weber and Marx considered elements of a capitalistic culture (Sayer, 1991, p. 96). Individuals who try to fit into a given context by acquiring the desired skills and qualifications are being disciplined and therefore conforming to the demands of a capitalistic economy. Weber (as cited in Sayers, 1991, p. 97) explained how the current capitalistic economy of the world operates:

The capitalistic economy of the present day is an immense cosmos into which the individual is born. . . . It forces the individual in so far as he [sic] is involved in the system of market relationships to conform to capitalistic rules of action. The manufacturer who in the long run acts

counter to these norms will just inevitably be eliminated from the economic scene as the worker who cannot or will not adapt himself [sic] to them will be thrown into the streets without a job. (p. 97)

This study to a certain extent exposes the silent voices of those who are affected by the current bureaucracy within workplaces and the commodification of education when Canadian certificates are required of people who have already been vetted during the immigration processes. Devadason and Fenton (2013) referred to First World education in their discussion of the fact that non-European or American immigrants are subjected to further education to consolidate or obtain employment. The participants' desire to acquire the required qualifications in their chosen vocational careers justifies the premise that capitalistic ideologies continue to frame the way that people view and position themselves in different parts of the world. This further resonates with Marx's (1932/1959) notion of social classification, which, in this case, is a regional economic taxonomy that has influenced and will continue to influence human vulnerability to life situations. Regardless of the status quo, as a humanistic attribute, the aspiration to attain and practice a vocational skill cannot completely be surpassed by capitalistic interests, but continues to be part of an individual's life actions.

### **Humanity**

Humanity is the window through which an individual realises ultimate reality (Russell, 2009). This is considered a societal norm to establish the meaning of work, as I discussed in the literature chapter. One is unable to relate to others in terms of mutuality and freedom. One of the participants considered

being human as work, which demonstrates honesty with the self: being able to appreciate and know your capabilities with regard to a given skill. *The Humanist Manifesto III* (American Humanist Association, 2003) explains that when a person tries to establish personal self-worth, he/she is being humanistic. Work presents opportunities to improve, as well as to judge the status quo to either uphold or let go of whatever a person can or cannot use to the best of his/her capabilities. When a person openly acknowledges human needs and emotions, she/he finds a certain ease in the former and latter although one must be aware of potential problems. What fascinates me is the reality of recognising that both an individual's suffering and awakening serves a higher good. When a person serves the Divine, the unfulfilled needs become entangled in one's quest, and the spiritual experiences create a more expanded form of ego (Kornfield, 2001, p. 152). In the context of art, humanity links a person to others and inter-relates art and life (Kenny, 1998).

Being able to recognise the truth within individual practice (that is, that a person does not have the ability to execute something in a given context) reflects one's wisdom and ability to embrace change in life. The participants acknowledged that as students they have to try to understand the requirements of their courses or study English as a second language to build competence and embrace acceptance and adaptability within a new milieu. Recognising the ways that as individuals have betrayed ourselves brings us back to reality. Personal failures help us to understand that being human is linked to betrayal and the misuse of power. Humanity is always vulnerable, depending on how one's

thoughts change. Work grounds most of us; we need money, and to receive money, we need to work. Everyone needs to work at some point in life. Being human, a person wants to work toward something; most people want to achieve. Work keeps a person humble because everyone works; each individual is just like another person in the world. At the end of an assignment one expects humanity as a value outcome of work.

I understand that humanity as a value outcome of work depends on economic, technical, and political conditions of life, which establishes an organised, trained workforce. In this case an individual does not live in isolation from the social functions of everyday life. Weber (1974) shared his thoughts on how society is controlled by a system that defines each person's potential in life: "The most important functions of everyday life of society have come to be in the hands of technically, commercially and above all legally trained government officials" (pp. 15-16). Although the above indicates that systems within a given context compel people to be identified within a specified category of the workforce to survive and build networks, what matters most, from my perspective, is the spirit in which an individual performs and accomplishes a given task.

### **How do Students Develop Their Creativity**

#### **Within Their Vocational Careers?**

#### **Creativity**

With regard to the aspect of creativity in this study, as a researcher my concern was not to dictate to the participants how they should conduct their

creative processes but, rather, to nurture creativity. To humanistic scholars (Maslow, 1996; Rogers, 1954), creativity is the natural urge to develop, extend, express, and activate their capabilities. From the perspective of Harpaz's (1998) sociological lens, creativity is a work goal. As a researcher I maintained an open mind towards creative ideas, and I did not limit the participants' choices of materials or modes of execution. By avoiding authoritarianism during the research process, I exhibited a humanistic participant control aspect of flexibility and value for independent thinking.

John Dewey (1934/1958) argued that all of humankind has creative potential and an opportunity and support system to participate in the Arts throughout their lives. Dewey had a pragmatic view of truth in education, or what he called "warranted assertability" (p. 9) as a contingent process of individually constructed knowledge based on prior experience. My approach to creativity in the context of this study, as Crafts (2005) suggested, had a unique focus, including the relationship between knowledge, the curriculum in vocational education careers, and appropriate pedagogical strategies to foster creativity in a learning environment. As is evident in this study, the participants' creativity resulted in multiple domains of the meaning of work as a concept, and reflectivity and expressiveness contributed to their meaning-making processes (Greene, 2001).

When I conducted my research, I clung to the notion that all individuals have the potential to be creative or use possibility thinking (Crafts, 2001; Esquivel, 1995; Feldman & Benjamin, 2006) rather than adhering to the notion

that they can develop creativity (Fryer, 1996; Parnes, 1970; Torrance, 1963; Torrance & Myers, 1970). In accordance with this notion, I embrace creativity as a multidimensional and developmental construct; in this case, as a developmental shift and a lifelong process. This concurs with Eisner's (2002) perception of art. Through art, an individual expands personal consciousness, meaning making, and contacts within given milieus. The participants identified various surfaces that they interpreted emotionally and knowledge related towards the attributes and values that defined the meaning of their work. Dewey's theory of practical reasoning in Garrison (1999), says that respecting people's self-esteem encourages inventiveness (pp. 291-314). He contended that creative fulfilment results in satisfaction and the realisation of self-worth and the influence of others in a particular situation. Garrison (1999) further reflected on Dewey's theory of practical reasoning:

For John Dewey the pattern of practical reasoning is central to all inquiry. . . . The philosophy fallacy involves failing to understand that we cannot have cognitive products without the artistic process. . . . Inquiry, reasoning, feelings, imagining and creating are moments and continuations of action. (pp. 291-293)

In view of the above, Garrison embraced people's attitudes to self-knowledge, which involves emotional and intellectual engagement, with a commitment to creative values and holistic modes of embodied action in education. I relate the participants' engagement in the creation of their artefacts to a form of metaphorical thinking, an expression of flexibility and visualization of knowledge



within a creative process (Starko, 2005). Using metaphorical thinking, the participants were able to distinguish between dissimilar objects and apply them within different contexts to establish meaning. Their flexibility helped them to appreciate that they could consider a concept or situation (the meaning of work) from multiple points of view (Starko, 2005; Sternberg & Williams, 1996). Further, through some form of visualization as individuals in relation to others, we conceive life around us that we cannot visually ascertain (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Gardner, 1993a; Starko, 2005). The participants' personal experiences support Berger (1972) and Perkins' (2003) views on art as a form of seeing that defines a person's positioning within a specific context.

Establishing the relationship between what is tactile and what is nontactile potentially leads to critical thoughts on the magnitude of the effectiveness of sharing what the participants intended. Having held one-on-one open discussions linked to the participants' artefacts, I gained insight into a social-interaction process that defined their individual self-satisfaction in a way that supported other aspects of their lifeways (Gamst, 1995). The participants established and exhibited personal uniqueness in the use of colour and textural surfaces and shapes (Kenny 1998). In the context of this study, it is imperative to mention that the participants' cultural dimensions played a role in their creative process; this experience agrees with Greene's (2008) idea of the need to understand one's involvement in creative practice (p. 28). As Pink (2012) explained, the inner self of the participants ceased to be static per se, and instead became a process. The

participants gained an understanding of what their lives offer and the personal experiences that they have encountered.

Linking art, pedagogy, and work as interdisciplinary concepts supports the proposition that creativity is not a rare, idiosyncratic, indeterminate, undisciplined, unitary, or linear consideration that is educationally irrelevant, inaccessible, or unreliable (Tudor, 2008). From a pedagogical perspective, the findings of this study affirm that one may understand creativity as a holistic physical, emotional, and cognitive human proficiency. The interconnectedness of the mind, hands, heart, and body conforms to the educational concept of learning by doing, which Pestalozzi explains in one of his books *Schwanengesang* (Swansong, 1825) as stated by Bruhlmeier (2010):

the nature of these faculties within each person drives him [sic] to use them. The eye wants to see, the ear to hear, the foot wants to walk and the hand to grasp. And, equally, the heart wants to believe and love, the mind wants to think. There is in every faculty of human nature an urge to rise from its inert, unskilled state to become a trained power. (p. 20)

Therefore, the pedagogical proposition of this study is to foster the understanding that creative learning and thinking primarily involve people's need to find and devise holistic ways of coming to terms with their world through their felt experiences and intuition.

### **Interdisciplinary Learning Approach**

The participants' production of the artefacts was an interdisciplinary learning approach to defining their meaning of work in that they developed an

understanding of architectural technology as a career domain, their individual social experiences, and art as pedagogy (the act of participation in and visualization of experiences). Weber (2008) observed that images could potentially capture indescribable experiences. I am in secondment with Weber's observation and encourage pedagogists to acclimatise to learning strategies that engage learners in visual knowledge retention and understanding. This research encompassed both learning in the arts and learning through the arts. The fact that expertise was not a criterion for participation implies that art is part of daily activity and helps to understand the self in relation to others. This is in line with Dewey's (1916/1966; 1933; 1938/1968) theory of experience in learning and the international recognition of the need to integrate creativity into curriculum frameworks (Le Metais, 2003).

Klein (2004) defined *interdisciplinary study* as a "process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession" (p. 2). According to Goodman's (1968) assertion that art is a means to freedom, within the context of this research the participants came from a more technology oriented career than a fine arts as a domain career and explored their meaning of work, a complex concept that involved engagement in visual production. They established truth through their artefacts (Leggo, 2008; Percer, 2002; Piirto, 2002; Sinner et al., 2006). The experience gave them an opportunity to visually express their self-worth and what they could not verbally communicate. This experience enhanced the participants' contributions to the discourse of interdisciplinary work, which

involves the ideal of the creation of more holistic knowledge (Ivanitskaya, Clark, Montgomery, & Primeau, 2002; Klein, 2004). It further contributed to the ontological uncertainties of the process.

Past and current experiences influenced the participants' visualisations and definitions of the meaning of work to them, and Gardner's (1993b) theory of multiple intelligences supports their contributions to this study. Pink's (2012) understanding of inner self as a process—in this case, a conceptual rather than static process—further validates the experiences of the participants in this study. The theory offers the means to explore and express individual thought processes; the types of intelligences that the theory comprises include linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist and spiritual, and existential. Gardner's theory conforms with that of Handy (1993) in the discipline of organisational psychology, although spiritual and existential intelligence is not considered an important aspect of the development of cognitive skills. For a deeper understanding of Gardner's interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, I relate to Goleman's (1996) theory of emotional intelligence, which considers it a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or integrating them (p. 80). The experience of artwork speaking for a person exhibits what Leavy (2009) described as the *power of image*.

### **Art as Pedagogy**

One of my data-collection strategies was to engage my participants in a visual production of artefacts rather than in writing their narrative understanding

of the meaning of work in vocational education. I believe that art is an amalgamated skill that is salient to humankind, which dismisses the notion that art as a discipline is in isolation of other major disciplines in the curricula of institutions of higher learning. Art is not isolated from other areas of the curriculum. Art pedagogy for knowledge transformation and an understanding of the self in a given context as an educational approach affirms the arts as powerful instruments of pedagogy that can augment, illuminate, and unify the entire curriculum (Bamford, 2006; Deasy, 2002; Brown et. al, 2009). Art pedagogy involves the examination of the multidimensional relevance and operational roles of human creativity in education, while respecting the sensibilities of those involved in the creative processes (Sinding et al, 2008).

Arts (music, visual art, and performance) have portended opportunities to enhance learning and improve pedagogy and practice (Bresler, 2001; Bresler & Ardichivili, 2002). The arts prompt a critical examination of how they support patterns of practice in areas outside the arts (Gadsden, 2008). Gadsden asserted:

they urge us to take up questions about the role the arts play in linking students' knowledge outside the classroom with knowledge gained through the official curriculum and, in turn, about how such knowledge contribute to the formation of student and teacher identities. (p. 29)

Art pedagogy in the context of this study reveals the shifts in the arts over the past 20 years; Gardner (1989) described this as the “renaissance of interest in education in the arts” (p. 71). The perception is that process sets a tone that encourages learners to co-construct dynamic education and become the recipients

of schooling and shapers of knowledge rather than the recipients of knowledge shaped primarily by forces external to them (Gee & Green, 1998). I link the experiences of the participants to Leavy's (2009) processes of meaning making, which contribute to multiple interpretations of and perspectives on issues about which humans are passionate.

The participants' research experiences illustrate a multilayered way of thinking about cultural and social practices that diversify visual texts and forms. With regard to self-representation, Bruner (1993) commented on the relevance of the other and the places in which experiences unfold:

One cannot reflect on self (radically or otherwise) without an accompanying reflection on the nature of the world in which one exists. And one's reflection on both one's self and one's world cannot be one's own alone: you and your version of your world must be public, recognisable enough to be negotiable in the "conversation of lines."  
(p. 43)

In view of Bruner's perspective, we are not in a position to reflect on self without considering the world around us. Alim and Baugh (2007); Dartnall (2002); Flood, Heath, and Lapp (2005); Greene (2000), and Hull and Nelson (2005) all challenged the simplistic notion of process and product. They contended that individuals study and understand the varied substances or enactments of the arts in relationship to where and how they are situated in the human and individual experiences as members of cultural and social collectives.

Through education an individual becomes engaged with personal life gifts, and art as pedagogy or a form of expression is one of the life gifts. Pestalozzi (as cited in Bruhlmeier, 2010) affirmed that education is rooted in human nature and is a matter of the head, hand, and heart. Furthermore, connections in the communities in which one lives and practices, in nature or the natural world, and in spiritual values (attributes) such as compassion and peace help him/her find numerous identities, meanings and purposes in life (Miller, 2000).

In the participants' sharing of their meanings of work, emotions, attributes, and self-worth were important to the visual outputs. Their visual contributions correlate with the emotional theory that says that we are in the know of the emotions, recognise feelings as they occur, and can potentially distinguish the impact on us; Goleman (1996) called this *self-awareness*: the ability to manage our feelings in a particular context; to have the moral authority to react appropriately; to be self-motivated while we manage our feelings and direct the self towards a goal; to be empathetic, recognise the feelings of others, and tune into their verbal and nonverbal cues; to manage relationships in interpersonal interactions; and to resolve conflict and negotiate skills.

Art pedagogy refutes what Paulo Freire (1972) famously called *banking*: making deposits of knowledge. Art intentionally rejects the consideration of learners as objects or items that need to be catered to and instead promotes them as related to all aspects of life. Learners are part of the knowledge creation process and can therefore discover their abilities intentionally, an act that John Dewey (1938/1963) called *a social process*. Interactions between the community

and the learner as well as what they learn are experiences that Dewey described within education as a social process. As long as there are continuity and interaction, which are considered key factors in establishing one's experience, mutual agreements will continue to contribute to a collective social organisation. Through art pedagogy as a social process, growth will be realised, and skills and knowledge acquisition will not be viewed as a means of preparing for life, but as life itself. Such educational experiences present an opportunity to contribute and become part of society. Establishing desire and purpose and exercising freedom of thought in an activity that involves art pedagogy enables one to avoid separating the inner self (internal) from the physical aspects of human interaction.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have discussed my understanding and interpretation of work and art through the participants' contributions to this study. Appreciation for the inner voice contributes to the uniqueness of human behaviour and character. I appreciate the interplay between human consciousness and unconsciousness during the performance of an activity. Political, social, and economic systems continue to define our understanding of work, although the spiritual (ontological) is also amalgamated with the other systems that frame human behaviour and identity. Social networking is an important attribute to establish work ability and applicability within a given context. All in all, morality shapes individual conduct, and this process leads to an appreciation for work as humanity and life as lived. Moreover, within the frame of visual arts and based on the experiences that the participants shared in this study, I consider creativity to be a deliberating process. Art as a form of pedagogy and an interdisciplinary



learning approach serves as a life gift through which a person realises meaning in life.

In the next chapter I present a personal overview of the research processes and how I came to embrace the social dynamics within a context with which I was initially unfamiliar as an upcoming scholar, a summary of the key attributes that define the meaning of work from the study's findings, the limitations, and future possibilities.

## CHAPTER 7

### SUMMARY

#### **An Overview of the Research Processes**

As I discussed in the first chapters of this thesis, I questioned the essence of my enrolment in a doctoral programme based on previous personal experiences. I somehow felt that a capitalistic-oriented and dogmatic learning system controlled my actions in life. However, both my academic and my social interactions with persons from diverse backgrounds have taught me to appreciate that educational practices are dynamic and unique. By accepting who I am in a given context and embracing vulnerability, I have become aware that I will continue to be an ambassador for innovative pedagogical and curriculum strategies within VET. Regardless of the existing invisible academic colonialism as described in the early chapters of this thesis, as the norm within my home country, I continue to think positively that change will happen gradually within the vocational education sector, initiated by educators who think beyond knowing and applying vocational skills. I believe that change will happen through collaborations among educators from various milieus although applicability of strategies may be different, but hold common outcomes. The more exposure we as educators continue to experience, let it be national or international, the more we shall uphold the good and discard the inappropriate within the vocational learning milieu.

I entered this research project with an open mind but wondered whether participants with no training in the visual arts would be able to visually define the

meaning of work in their vocational areas. Work as a concept in the context of VET has been defined by amalgamating various theoretical orientations. From the perspective of a researcher, I believe that the experience from the study affirms previous scholarly contributions on work as a dynamic and complex concept that cannot be defined through a singular scholarly lens. The uniqueness of this study is that the participants created artefacts that they developed from the orientation of personal social experiences and skills competence. The visual contributions to this study have been shared and added to existing artefacts that have stood the test of time. As artefacts they stand the test of time and place in which the participants are positioned and justify their relevance to the participants' meaning of work. The interconnectedness of work and identities, creativity, humanity, survival, and pedagogy as core themes that the participants in this study established is linked to life as a unique and interrelated experience because our control over our life encounters is more contingent than encoded within a specific milieu. The participants' contributions exhibit the relationship between consciously and unconsciously defined vocational attributes and values that establish unique identities through the creative process of producing artefacts. The creative process established the participants' personal worth, and recognition of their shortfalls, cognitive abilities, and passion to live meaningful lives in relation to others enhanced their self-esteem.

As humans, we establish networks that test our potential and influence our view of life. Work serves as a vessel to establish our contributions to and essence

of life. This observation is re-affirmed by Madden's (2015) understanding about meaning in work:

...for the search for meaning in work is a journey that carries the potential both for great individual satisfaction and for gains in society as people seek ways to serve, honouring their connectedness with each other and with the surrounding world. (p. 75)

When we live for the self and others, we are accountable for why we live and for whom we live. Acknowledging self-worth is complex in isolation of the other. Understanding the impact of personal actions reconnects us to the 'Why?' question of existence.

Linking the meaning of work to personal identity development connects individuals to nature through creative pedagogy (the arts). This process helps us to understand that creativity has more to do with nurturing than with training. The arts are interconnected with the other disciplines that constitute the formal academic system. The various acts of participation (pedagogies) in creating awareness of the co-existence make the interconnections interesting. The power of the hand -- the applicability of ideas, the heart - the soul/emotional attachment, the body - the physical, and the mind - cognitive connection - being in the moment of logical reasoning - in interactions results in awareness of the self and in relation to the other. We not only network; we do so with purpose, and each experience is unique to each individual. Our challenges, adaptabilities, and mastery of skills help us to realise our personal attributes. Acknowledging individual strengths, threats, opportunities, and weaknesses in a given context

frames the dynamic life strategies that we use to understand who we are and why we are what we are.

My experiences with the participants in the research process further validate my conscious thoughts about human beings having a salient and creative consciousness that is unknown to them at certain time in life until certain activities trigger it and help them to realise its significance. The participants took an interdisciplinary learning approach to establish the impact of their vocational career experiences through the visual expressions that they consciously and unconsciously linked to their professionalism. Considering the guiding philosophies of aesthetics used to establish meaning in this study, I realised that there is a thin line between art, work and life. More so, Rancière (2009) and Benjamin's (1968) theories on aesthetics resonate with the Afrocentric theory that upholds intuitiveness and symbolism of the fine arts. The two theories have broadened my scope of understanding about the creative processes that individuals engage in while establishing meaning. Rancière and Benjamin believe that the notion of spiritual and emotional consciousness occurs during one's engagement in creative work. This act has been a key aspect interfered throughout the study and contributed to each participant's uniqueness, creative ability and identity. The participants' choice of materials disclosed mostly unarticulated inner meanings. Previous teacher-centered activities based only on developing art skills rather than a combination of skill and imagination have not been the focus when producing and establishing the meaning of the artefacts. This distinction is core to these two theorists' understandings of creativity; because an

individual gains a sense of freedom to express his/her mind by engaging the hands as well as the body and mind thus liberating this experience to levels beyond skill acquisition.

This study's findings demonstrate that, within the current training in vocational education at the institution in which I conducted the research, the participants went beyond acquiring practical skills and knowledge during their classroom instruction. It is likely that, consciously or unconsciously, vocational educators embrace the uniqueness of each student and help them to define who and what they are. The understanding of work that I derived from the literature that I reviewed and the participants' contributions embraces other ways of knowing and understanding the world. Work as a human activity is both an emotional and a monetary award in life.

Relating to Harpaz's 1998 concepts about how the meaning of work is derived, this current study revealed that personal commitments towards learning a vocational oriented skill as a social norm was not an obligation per se, but a personal choice made by the participants. The participants expressed personal challenges were experienced when they sought enrolment opportunities in their desired vocational area. As a personal observation, society continues to pre-determine and influence one's life choices. There is a social system that defines communal strategies that individuals are obliged to abide. The participants' commitment to work as expressed in this study was linked to a conducive working environment that promoted teamwork, verbal and monetary appreciation, work relevance and self-contentment. Social norms within these vocational-

oriented careers and experiences encountered in a workplace can affect an individual's productiveness.

The work outcomes shared by the participants showed that social status (positioning) and prestige were barely considered. Their main concern was the professionalism exhibited in what they did and was not intended to exploit those who needed their service. At the beginning of this study, I anticipated that the participants would be more interested in financial remuneration in comparison to other work oriented benefits. To my surprise that was not the case. Participants engaged in work, financial remuneration was recognised for purposes to provide a basic sustainable living and execution of the required work assignments. From personal experience, individuals have enrolled into professions for economic reasons and not entirely for soul satisfaction. In this study participants were more inclined to be in their chosen areas for personal relevance and satisfaction. Financial benefits should not be used in defining an individual's competence, social class or even influence his/her full participation. Participants believed in negotiations as strategies to perform a work task within the available financial means and discouraged client exploitation. The participants' contributions to this study include observing time management, contributing to society, establishing work related relationships and obtaining hands-on experiences. With these elements, an individual can create a balance between personal desires, values and work related expectations.

Expectations continue to define the goals and values individuals hold when engaged in work. To the study participants, purposeful work engagement

remained an important aspect as to why they chose what they did. Knowing the applicability of skills in day-to-day life was paramount to the participants as well as reflecting on the existing learning and work-related strategies with colleagues. This last finding was considered a basis for professional interaction and knowledge sharing.

Also to my surprise, identity formation dominated the study findings. Most attributes from participants consciously or unconsciously shared depicted their personalities across various contexts. Personal identities continue to be defined in relation to others as well as in contexts individuals are positioned. Identity formation does not happen in isolation with the environment around us.

### **Limitations**

The timeframe for my research limited the number of participants. Therefore, I cannot generalise the results, but this work contributes to the existing scholarly work and will possibly lead to future research.

A comparative analysis of the contributions of participants from North America and Uganda would have further enriched my research, but because of the financial implications, I was unable to use this strategy, and I conducted the research in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Vocational education and arts-based research might be different in the North and in the South.

The voluntary aspect of participation in the research resulted in an unequal gender representation, although this factor does not affect the validity of the information that I gathered during the research processes. The participants'



willingness to become involved determined only the number of artefacts that they produced.

### **Future Possibilities**

Because participation determines the length of time required and the completion of any type of research, a larger number of students and the inclusion of their instructors would have resulted in a broader empirical perspective on the dreamscape and meaning of work within this vocation-oriented institution.

A comparative analysis of students and teachers between North America and Uganda is a collaborative-research possibility to establish the uniqueness of understanding and appreciation for the dynamics within vast educational milieus. As an educator who knows well the challenges, successes, and complexities of VET, I believe that a collaborative study of the pedagogical strategies applicable to this academic area would enhance its relevance and perception. Additional cross-cultural research in Uganda into the meaning of work would be a logical next step.

Realising that some of the participants entered Canada through the skilled-workers immigration route, I believe that research on immigrants' integration into the Canadian workforce and their meaning of work would be a worthwhile contribution to both the education sector and policy makers.

Art is not in isolation to any other life activity. In this study, arts-based research has led to increased understanding of the nature of work through the dreamscape. The participants' understanding of work was increased through their art production. They were able to define personal traits, establish a strength,

weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis of themselves in relation to why they were pursuing their career choices and how the three concepts (art, work and life) were interconnected within the experiences lived. The researcher's interpretation of that understanding has been accomplished through reflecting on these art productions, conversations with the participants and also the researcher's art production as it connects with scholars from the fields of work, qualitative research and vocational education. I realize that I entered the research process with an assumption that economic rewards might be one of the work outcomes that would explicitly overshadow Harpaz's (1998) other concepts that frame the meaning of work. To my surprise, my assumption was refuted by the findings of this study. Social norms, valued work outcomes except economic ones, work goals and work-role identification prevailed over what framed the meaning of work. Participants linked their meaning of work to how they viewed themselves within a given context with others, the relationships they developed on the way while mastering their skills, their social engagements and beliefs in relation to personal experiences and their learning processes.

Art as a school subject provides important experiences for students enrolled in it, and art also has the ability to cross the school subjects to promote learning for students and teachers who engage in it. I have come to further understand the importance of critical reflection on art production, which was not considered as important in my earlier educational experiences. The voices of the participants reveal their self-understanding about the engagement in making meaning during their art production and afterwards. My voice on the dreamscape

and meaning of work also shows growth, confidence and depth that I will take into my future research and teaching. Different readers of the findings for this research may have unique interpretations themselves depending on their backgrounds, but what unifies us in these findings may speak to us differently. Although this is the same material we are looking at, its impact will vary and can uniquely influence the individual responses in areas of self-expression, arts-based research, teaching and policy.

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## APPENDIX A

## ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL



---

**Ethics Application has been Approved**

ID: Pro00037535

Title: The Dreamscape and Meaning of Work in Vocational Education and Training

Study Investigator: Justine Nabaggala

This is to inform you that the above study has been approved.

Click on the link(s) above to navigate to the HERO workspace.

Description:

**Note:** Please be reminded that the REMO system works best with Internet Explorer or Firefox.

Please do not reply to this message. This is a system-generated email that cannot receive replies.

University of Alberta  
Edmonton Alberta  
Canada T6G 2E1

## APPENDIX B

### INFORMATION LETTER

Dear *Name of participant*,

This letter is an invitation for you to participate in my doctoral research study titled: *The Dreamscape and Meaning of Work in Vocational Education (VET) and Training/Career and Technology Studies (CTS)*. You are being asked to be part of this study because of your experience either in the Architecture, Interior Design, or Landscape Architectural Technology program. The results of this study will be used in support of my doctoral thesis and there will not be any commercialisation of research findings apart from you as a participant giving me consent to include a 2D format of your artefact within my thesis

The purpose of this research is to explore the values/attributes students within specific CTS programs hold to frame their meaning of work. This will contribute to a better understanding of how the inner voice might construct meaning about work. These contributions will add to existing knowledge that continues to advance the connections between the academy and community.

As a participant you will be invited to a 60 minute meeting where details about the research activities will be shared with you and the other participants. Your will be asked to select any material and tool to produce an artifact of which you retain full rights and ownership. You will later hold a 60 minute reflection conversation about your experience with me to explore key factors that guided your production process. With your permission, this conversation will be audio-recorded. A written synopsis will be returned to you for verification if you want. You will also be asked to share your artifact with the community in a joint exhibition with the other research participants. During this time you are invited to share your ideas with the audience. A benefit of your participation is that you will have the opportunity to connect with your inner voice and others about the personal choices made towards a better understanding of a meaningful life.

You will not receive any compensation for your participation and there may be risks to being in this study that are not known. Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to opt out without penalty at any time. If you wish to withdraw your interview responses and/or your 2D/3D artefacts, you should contact me within one month following the date of the interview and/or recording of the 2D/3D artefacts. I will return written synopses to participants who request a copy. Information gathered will be used in conference papers, presentations, academic publications, and reports.

Your consent is required to whether or not identify you in the thesis and during the exhibition with your 2D or 3D format artifact. Your anonymity cannot be guaranteed in a group context but data will be kept confidential, although be made

accessible to the research supervisory committee. Textual and recorded data will be kept at the Department of Secondary Education and Faculty of Graduate Studies for a minimum of 5 years and when appropriate destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality. I may use the data we get from this study in future research, but if we do this it will have to be approved by a Research Ethics Board. By signing the consent form below, you agree to participate and adhere to the mentioned conditions for the proposed study.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at nabaggal@ualberta.ca or the supervisor. All researchers will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants including those relating to confidentiality of data. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

**Principal Investigator**

Justine Nabaggala  
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Phone: 780 492 5191

Yours sincerely,

Justine Nabaggala  
Principal Investigator



**APPENDIX C**

**LETTER TO REQUEST PERMISSION TO CONDUCT**

**RESEARCH AT THE CHOSEN SITE**

To: The Chair, Environmental Design Technology at NAIT

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta and I am conducting my doctoral research study titled: *The Dreamscape and Meaning of Work in Vocational Education and Training (VET)/Career and Technology Studies (CTS)* in a post-secondary Institution within Edmonton area. I am interested in establishing what frames the meaning of work amongst students in Architecture, Interior Design, and Landscape Architectural Technology programs.

The purpose of this research is to explore the values students within specific CTS trades hold to frame their meaning of work. This will contribute to a better understanding of how the inner voice might construct meaning about work in relation to the participants' social experiences. These contributions will add to existing knowledge that continues to advance the connections between the academy and community.

6 participants will be required to participate in the research study. 2 students from each program that would have consented to participate in the research study will be invited to a 60 minute meeting where details about the research activities will be shared with me. The participants will be asked to select any material and tool to produce an artifact of which they will retain full rights and ownership. The participants will later hold a 60 minute reflection conversation about their experiences with me to explore key factors that guided their production process. With their permission, this conversation will be audio-recorded. A written synopsis will be returned to them for verification if they want. The participants will also be asked to share their artifact with the community in a joint exhibition with the other research participants. A benefit of their participation is that they will have the opportunity to connect with their inner voices and obtain an understanding of a meaningful life through their integrated identities.

The participants' consent will be required to whether or not they would like to be identified in the thesis and during the exhibition with their 2D or 3D format artifact. Their anonymity cannot be guaranteed in a group context but data will be kept confidential, although be made accessible to the research supervisory committee. Textual and recorded data will be kept at the Department of Secondary Education and Faculty of Graduate Studies for a minimum of 5 years and when appropriate destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality. I may use the data we get from this study in future research, but if we do this it will have to be approved by a Research Ethics Board. Any published reports will

not name the school or participants and this study is not a means to evaluating teachers,' students' or institution's competencies within the career and technology studies. Participation in this study is voluntary and students may withdraw at any time within a month after data has been collected. Student academic progress and achievement should not be affected by this study. Therefore their participation will be during time outside the school dedicated hours. My receipt of your approval is necessary before I begin the visits and direct involvement with the students. In case of any further clarification you are free to contact me or my supervisor.

**Principal Investigator**

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Yours sincerely,

Justine Nabaggala  
Principal Investigator

## APPENDIX D

### CONSENT FORM

#### Statement of consent (interview, focus group, observations)

- ☐ I agree to participate in the following research activities under the conditions outlined above:
- ☐ One 60 minute introductory research meeting.
- ☐ One 60 minute research conversation/interview
- ☐ One 60 minute focus group
- ☐ One art display/exhibition where a 2D depiction/photograph and/or 3D version of my artwork is viewed by the public
- ☐ Use of a 2D depiction/photograph of my artwork in the dissemination of the findings

\_\_\_\_\_ (signature)

\_\_\_\_\_ (date)

I would like a copy of the written synopsis of the conversation/interview returned to me. ☐ (check box)

If you wish to receive the written synopsis of the conversation/interview please include e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX E**

**CLARIFICATION LETTER TO THE PARTICIPANTS**

**IN RESPONSE TO THEIR QUESTIONS DURING**

**THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

**Justine Nabaggala** <nabaggal@ualberta.ca>

9/19/14

Hi to you all,

Thank you so much for having accepted to be part of my research team and it was nice meeting you today. I look forward to our collaboration during this time and hopefully even after the research process.

Maybe to further clarify on the artifact, you are all free to use any materials within your reach. it could be assembled metal, plastic, fabric, wood, designed paper surfaces, a mixed media mood board, recycled objects, collage or mosaic. In this case, there is no limitation to either tangible or intangible objects as long as you can explicitly provide a detailed understanding for the choice of items used. This activity of producing an artwork will be considered a visual insight of your meaning of what work (career choice) is. You are free to explore your values, morals, emotions and other social influences that frame your meaning of work.

As you all continue to work on the project please feel free to contact me in case you need further clarification. we also agreed during our meeting today that we shall work on these projects from 20th September 2014 to the 24th of October 2014. During this time period you are free to send me a communication in case you are ready with your artifact and in position for a one on one meeting with me. As for the group meeting when we shall all share our creativity experiences as a team I am kindly requesting you to discuss amongst yourselves the best date and time during the last week of October 2014 (27th-31st) and then inform me of what you would have agreed upon as a team.

Once again thank you so much and I look forward to working with you; and have a good weekend.

Yours Sincerely

## APPENDIX F

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Students

1. What influenced your choice of materials for the artifact?
2. Could you explain to me your experience while you were producing the artifact?
3. What relationships are there between the different materials used to produce the artifact?
4. Do you always look forward to attending your lectures?
5. What do you share with your teacher in CTS about your expectations, rewards and work?
6. How and what does your teacher say when explaining to you what work is within CTS?
7. Do you think the explanations have contributed to the way you frame your meaning of work within your CTS career? If Yes or No, could you please explain?
8. Whom do you share with outside school about your CTS option? And why do you do so?
9. How do others not within the CTS describe your career choice?