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## **VAPEing**

*Emese Hall & Rachel Payne*

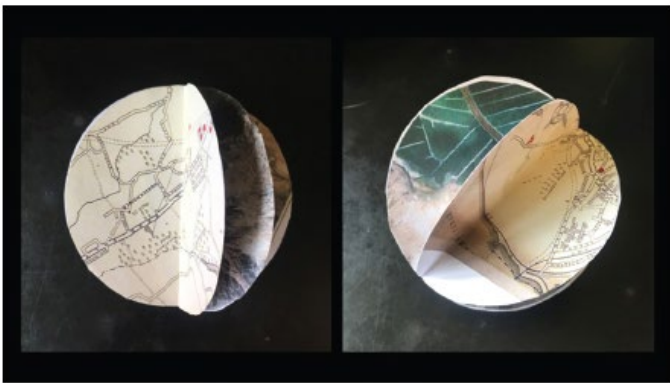
### **Abstract**

This visual essay details our current artist teacher research exploring the theme of ‘our artist-teacher identify’ via the gifting of artworks and notes to each other (e.g., Payne & Hall, 2022). We both experienced frustrations with digital interactions during the Covid-19 pandemic and, craving more meaningful interactions, established a process that prioritises tactile and haptic dimensions to making art. The subsequent visual and physical exchange is called ‘VAPEing’ and includes the sharing of artworks and written reflections. A multimodal reflexive dialogue has been codeveloped through a heuristic methodology, engendering new understandings about our professional identities through artistic practices. Conclusively, imaginative engagement with data facilitates conversations about participatory pedagogies and the value of visual epistemologies, provoking opportunities to learn, unlearn and relearn. Organically, we are finding that the more we make, the more we know about ourselves and each other. The process is supremely cathartic and transformative. We would like to encourage other artist teachers to engage in similar projects for both professional and personal benefits.

Keywords: heuristic; multimodal; tactile; haptic; exchange

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This visual essay details research exploring ‘our artist-teacher identity’ via gifting of artworks and notes (e.g., Payne & Hall, 2022). Beginning in January 2022, one motivation was frustrations with sterile online interactions during the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore tactile and haptic dimensions are foregrounded. Our process involves what we term ‘VAPEing’ - visual and physical exchange. Along with written reflections, posted offerings sent between two locations in England by Royal Mail frequently utilize recycled materials and explore recurrent themes.



**FIGURE 1:** Emese, *Orientation*

Through a heuristic methodology, our research is an immersive process: a dialogue of creative self-expression and written narrative (Mihalache 2019). Reflexive making involves reflecting, making, and reflecting again. Heurism is concerned with discovery through “self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). For us, heurism supports an investigation into our artist teacher identities with our art production as research site.



**FIGURE 2:** Rachel & Emese, *Reappropriation*

We set few parameters: physical artworks rather than digital to champion the act of making with physical materials; to consider relationships between hand and head; to force us to slow down through our making and connect with media, tools, and concepts. We established a timeframe within which to make and produced accompanying writing.



**FIGURE 3:** Emese, *Butterflies*



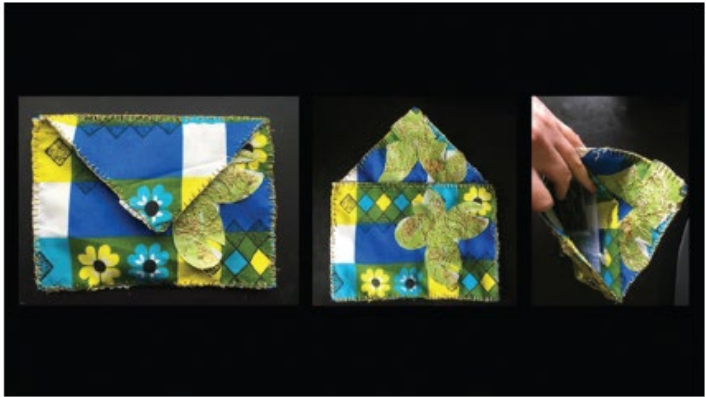
**FIGURE 4:** Rachel, *Treasure Trove*

Butterflies located Emese’s artistic voice, **which** became a metaphor for the fragile professional spaces she occupies, whilst Rachel revisited an autoethnographic project (Payne 2020) to begin. Media choice and approach was intuitive, but these motifs, materials and methods of making represent the origins of a visual language which facilitates a better understanding of our professional selves.

Increasingly, each other’s pieces generated new works. The written accompanies the visual because “in dialogue one is encouraged to permit ideas, thoughts, feelings, and images to unfold and be expressed naturally” (Moustakas 1990 p. 39). Writing and making together reveal more insights than either could alone. Key themes arose in our reflective commentary:

- construction, deconstruction, reconstruction
- learn, unlearn, relearn
- visibility and invisibility

Whilst binaries kept appearing, it was the spaces in-between that interested us most. We no longer responded superficially but instead began to examine content much more deeply.



**FIGURE 5:** Rachel & Emese, *Butterfly Envelope with Blackout Poem*



**FIGURE 6:** Rachel & Emese, *Differences*

Importantly, we placed “art-making and its textual interpretation in a dynamic relationship of inquiry into the purpose, process, and meaning of the making of an artwork” (Greenwood, 2019, p. 2). The research surfaced our professional instabilities and invisibilities. The English education system is often experienced as something that is done to us, not something we are invited to shape; in the process we often feel invisible, pushed to the margins (Payne & Hall, 2018). VAPEing is authentic and powerful; we explore very personal experiences and emotions, articulate tensions and find ways of coping.

Here are some examples of our art with accompanying notes...



**FIGURE 7:** Rachel, *Inside Out*

*... ‘Inside Out’. It’s of a tracing of all the (traced) boxes Emese sent me on top of each other [...] I’m playing with visibility and invisibility, as the stitch that’s presented on the ‘right side’ of the fabric is usually hidden. Whilst I had exposed this before (in my first response), I hadn’t made it the focus of a piece. I’m interested in how the hard work is hidden, yet the undervalued is visible. There’s an emotional resonance but it isn’t fully formed yet (Rachel, 14 June 2022).*



**FIGURE 8:** Emese, *Stitched Square* & Rachel, *Random Composition*

*... the stitched square. It references the Malevich painting in its shape and colour (black) thread but I was also thinking about its contrast with your detailed embroidery. My preference is always for simplicity (Emese, 27 June 2022).*

*I traced around Emese's black square and used it as the anchor, the repeated shape in a series of 4 tracings [...] These are of the tissue cut out from 'Inside Out' – the negative shapes placed randomly within a plastic wallet. These shapes were negative space and now they are positive space [...] Within these binaries are other spaces that enable reconstruction from deconstruction. I don't know how to articulate it but there is a space in-between which feels like its humming or vibrating with life (Rachel, 3 July 2022).*



**FIGURE 9:** Emese, *Cylinders* & Rachel, *Scrunchie*

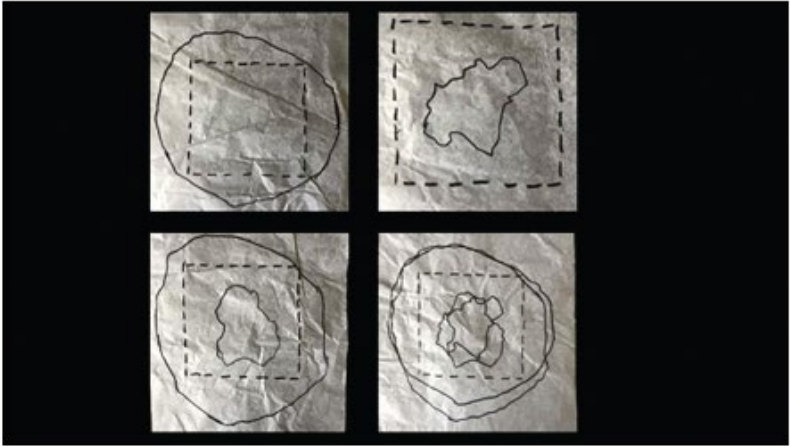
*I was super inspired by your tracing and wanted to transform them into objects [...]. I sooo loved colouring your drawings - it was really relaxing. The 3 cylinders can sit side-by-side and twisted to form a new composition each time! Your drawings prompted this innovation and it all originates from your very first piece! Little did you know the creative power of that work!! (Emese, 27 June 2022).*

*I'm playing around with the tubes of traced and coloured shapes that Emese sent me in her last parcel. I wanted to join them together in a way that represents tensions – of things that swoop in out of the blue and force us to change direction unexpectedly [...] Wanting to join the tracings together (shared experiences) but recognizing it's actually difficult (uncertainty and ambiguity).*

*I created another series of tracings. I was inspired to do something special for her with my 'scrunchie piece'. Anyway, what came out incorporated tracings of the outline and inside hole from 'scrunchie' and the outline of the original square box. I call this series 'Round peg, square hole'. It makes me*



*think of the struggles we both experience* (Rachel, 27 July 2022).



**FIGURE 10:** Rachel, *Round Peg, Square Hole*



**FIGURE 11:** Emese, *Set Me Free*

*'Set me free' is a book based on your tracings. It tells the story of a move from being trapped to being semi-trapped to*

*being free. The different zones of the tracing offer different possibilities. The very centre is the most restrictive. The outside zone offers most freedom / autonomy* (Emese, 29 August 2022).

Through our VAPEing we work intuitively and spontaneously; pose questions; find multiple solutions to ongoing issues; promote self-care and empathy; and imagine new futures and different ways of being. This research helps us to feel more in control of our environments and enhances our intrapersonal and interpersonal understandings. Further, heurism is influencing our pedagogic choices and supporting our students to also examine in-between spaces - in this way it opens up insightful dialogues beyond the project.

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## **Biographies**

Dr Emese Hall is Senior Lecturer in Art Education and former Director of the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Primary Programme at the University of Exeter, UK. With primary and early years expertise, Emese has worked in teacher education since 2005. She is particularly interested in researching the value of professional learning communities, artist-teacher practice, and the potential of art education to address sustainability/ environmental issues. Previously, Emese was Vice President of the National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD), Subject Lead for Primary Art, Craft and Design at Oak National Academy, a Member of the National Expert Subject Advisory Group for Art and Design Education, and a South West Regional Network Coordinator for the Cambridge Primary Review Trust. Emese is Co-Editor (with Nigel Meager) of the Pedagogy Volume of the International Encyclopaedia of Art and Design Education (Wiley-Blackwell, 2019).

Dr Rachel Payne works at Oxford Brookes University as a Deputy Head Education and Student Experience. She was the subject leader of the Secondary Art/Design PGCE from 2004-2012, and since 2006 leads the MA Education: Artist Teacher Practice. Rachel passionately believes that communities of practice can have empowering impact for art and design teachers by elevating professional voices, experiences and status. Research interests focus on emancipatory pedagogies in schools and higher education, which lead to transformative artist teacher practices. She champions visual methodologies and arts-based research, both her own and others. As a Past President for the National Society for Education in Art and Design and a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Art, Craft and Design in Education, Rachel lobbies the UK government for high quality accessible art, craft and design education for all.