***Calling Percy*—a model for developing value-rich parallel pedagogical and studio research projects that result in significant cultural outcomes**

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Biography:
Dr Laura Woodward is an artist and researcher based in Melbourne. Her current artistic research involves the creation of looped systems embodied in kinetic sculptural installations. Each system's inherent logic drives its formal and systematic emergences, opening up the opportunity for bodily resonances and experiences forged between artwork and viewer.

Woodward's artwork has been nationally recognised through prizes, grants, public commissions, solo exhibitions and significant group exhibitions. In addition to exhibiting, Woodward presents her research through conference presentations and traditional research publication. Woodward is a lecturer in the School of Art at the Victorian College of the Arts.

Abstract:
The exhibition *Calling Percy: Encountering Grainger through engineering and sculptural practice* was held at the Ian Potter Museum of Art at the University of Melbourne in October 2016, as part of *Cultural Collisions: Grainger/Griffins* curated by Jonathan Mills—the university's contribution to that year's *Melbourne Festival*. The exhibition included eight artworks: six by second-year undergraduate students enrolled in the Sculpture & Spatial Practice discipline for the Bachelor of Fine Arts (Visual Art) at the university's Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts and Melbourne Conservatorium of Music; one made collaboratively by two fifth-year students studying Mechanical Engineering at the university's main campus in Parkville; and a new work that I created for the show as a research outcome. Each artwork responded to musician and composer Percy Grainger's Free Music machines, combining sonic and sculptural elements, and many with mechanical components. I taught the project over the 2016 academic year, applying a parallel pedagogical–research approach integrated into the second-year S&SP curriculum, and that also provided a fifth-year 'capstone' opportunity for the Mechanical Engineering students.

This paper outlines the pedagogical–research structure that facilitated this project, resulting in pedagogical and professional outcomes for eight students from two faculties, a research outcome, and a significant public exhibition that was included in two major festivals. It also outlines the evident value of such a project for both the students and the lead researcher. In doing so, this paper offers *Calling Percy* as a model for a pedagogical–research approach that may be relevant and useful to others developing teaching and learning projects with public exhibition outcomes.

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Introduction

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This paper outlines the pedagogical–research structure that facilitated this project, resulting in pedagogical and professional outcomes for eight students from two faculties, a research outcome, and a significant public exhibition that was included in two major festivals. In doing so, this paper offers *Calling Percy* as a model for a pedagogical–research approach that may be relevant and useful to others developing teaching and learning projects with public exhibition outcomes.

Project Context

Calling Percy was one of ten events in the University of Melbourne festival *Cultural Collisions: Grainger/Griffins*. Curated and devised by Jonathan Mills and presented in association with the *Melbourne Festival*, *Cultural Collisions* included a range of arts and music events, plus the international symposium *The Future of the Object*.[1] In this context Jonathan Mills envisaged a project in which students studying sculpture and engineering would come together to create works responding to Grainger's legacy—specifically his Free Music machines—and it was from this vision that *Calling Percy* emerged.

When Simone Slee (head of S&SP) and I were approached to shape this contribution, the previous pedagogical project *Rising: The Victoria Harbour Young Artist Initiative*[2] (2008 to 2014) provided a base for further development. I ran *Rising* for six years, working with Marie Sierra in 2009 (then head

of S&SP), and Simone Slee from 2010 to 2014, along with other key staff. Commissioned by property developer Lend Lease, this project involved an annual month-long exhibition of up to eight public artworks by undergraduate S&SP students, installed in Melbourne Dockland's precinct on the Yarra River. In addition to managing the project, I taught and guided the students from early conceptual stages through to fabrication, installation, and maintenance of their works while on display.

As Simone and I developed our approach to *Calling Percy*, and with the mechanical and experimental qualities of Grainger's Free Music machines aligning with my own practice, we saw an opportunity to expand upon our previous pedagogical experience with *Rising*, by using *Calling Percy* as a testing ground for a combined pedagogical–research approach. In doing so, we hoped that *Calling Percy* would facilitate two things beyond that which occurred with *Rising*: to actively build a strong connection between research and pedagogy for the students' learning and professional training; and to maximise the project value for me as project leader by including both pedagogical and research outcomes.

Grainger's artistic legacy formed a fundamental part of the project context. Percy Grainger (1882–1961) was an Australian-born pianist, composer, folklorist, educator, collector and inventor. One of his enduring preoccupations was his concept of Free Music. Through experimentation over many years, Grainger ascertained that 'the rhythmic, pitch, and dynamic complexities that [he] planned would be humanly impossible to execute, so the need for a machine—a performing machine—was obvious … it would be out of the question to play Free Music by human players … it could only be played mechanically' (Slattery, 1974, 200-204). Working with physicist Burnett Cross (Dorum, 1986) Grainger experimented with various combinations of existing instruments, movie film, vacuum cleaners, transistors, photocells, and oscillators, to eventually create 'a crude performing machine which could produce four voices with the possible addition of three more' (Slattery, 1974, 208-209). Several other machines and designs emerged in subsequent years.

For *Calling Percy*, the students worked variously with Grainger's approaches to making, with his concept of 'democratic' music, with his consideration of the audience, and with the 'gliding tones' that he sought to create through Free Music. Each developed a multi-layered and nuanced understanding of Grainger's legacy, using these concepts and discoveries as a means of considering and shaping their own work.

Figure 1. Jessie McClure, Orchestra in blue denim*, 2016, denim, found objects, timber, acrylic mirror; dimensions variable. Using recycled denim and household items, McClure created a series of musical garments which could be activated by gallery visitors. In* Orchestra in blue denim*, McClure responded to Grainger's seeking of a democratic expression through his free music and his use of improvised, every-day objects. McClure was also interested in the potential of play as a form of creativity, as she outlined in the didactic panel that accompanied the work: 'humorous and unexpected, the work offers a spontaneous musical experience and an opportunity for improvisational performance'.*

All photographs are by Christian Capurro, taken in the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne, in the exhibition Calling Percy: Encountering Grainger through engineering and sculptural practice*, 4th to 30th October 2016.*

Pedagogical structure modelled on studio research methodology

The parallel pedagogical–research approach in *Calling Percy* involves shaping the curriculum in response to the lead researcher's studio research practice, with the learning delivered so that student artworks evolve in parallel with the lead researcher's artistic work.

My studio research methodology sees an artwork gradually revealing itself as it takes form through experimentation and prototyping, moving from ad-hoc, crude assemblages to resolved, highly-finished kinetic installations. Through this methodology, research questions are gradually revealed

alongside the emerging works of art, and are then explored further through writing, theoretical and contextual research. This method results in a continual, cyclical unfurling, where even those trains of enquiry that are eventually resolved open new pathways for subsequent exploration.

These processes, beginning with material, movement and sonic experimentation, as well as problem-solving through detailed note-taking, sourcing of components and materials, and multiple prototyping phases, allow me to develop, test and resolve various aspects of each work as it takes form. Once a functional prototype is running effectively, I start to fabricate the final work. I work relatively quickly, with initial prototype to installation usually taking about two months, followed by installation and exhibition. For the *Calling Percy* pedagogical structure, I stretched this studio practice model over eight months, spanning the academic year. The following diagram shows the relationship between the key phases in my studio research methodology and the project's pedagogical structure.

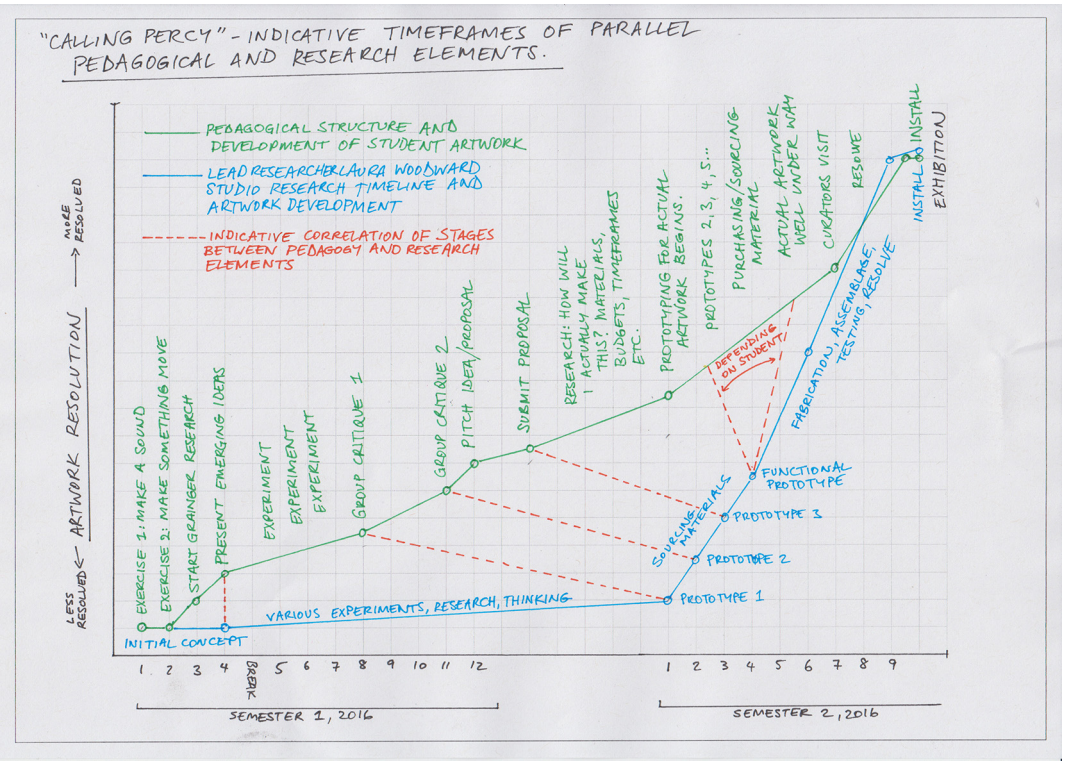

Figure 2. Laura Woodward, indicative timeframes of parallel pedagogical and research elements, 2017.

This project's approach reflects the greater awareness in the university sector of the benefits of enquiry-based learning,[3] and of strengthening teaching–research nexus to improve students' education.[4] Both seek to enable students to enter their professional life 'work-ready'. Teaching practice in many art schools (including the School of Art at the Faculty of VCA and MCM) already embodies many of the considerations of enquiry-based learning, particularly as students undertake hands-on development of their artworks from early in their studies. Additionally, as most art school

teachers are themselves artists, some relationship is often apparent between one's studio research and one's teaching methods. In this paper, therefore, I seek to contribute to these existing pedagogical practices by outlining this specific project approach, which enforces enquiry-based, student-directed learning and explicitly implicates, and puts to work, the relationship between teaching and research in tertiary art education.

Project Commencement

A call-out at the end of 2015 asked all first-year S&SP students to submit expressions of interest. We then selected six who had clearly articulated their interest in the project and its value to their emerging practices, and who we felt were best placed to get the most from it—not only those who were already strongly positioned, but those who we felt were ready for an opportunity to extend themselves and to exceed both their own and our expectations.

The Mechanical Engineering students were selected through a similar process in collaboration with engineering staff.

Figure 3. Kate McGain, Nature echoing*, 2016, PVC pipe, dowel, bamboo, cable, beads, strings, xylophone pieces, motors; dimensions variable. Early in his career, Grainger spoke of his aim to 'make music a mirror of nature' (Bird, 1998, 70). McGain responded directly to this, creating a mechanical imitation of the sound of rain on surfaces. In a simple downpipe, McGain created a vertical conveyor-belt that cyclically dropped beads onto small timber cross-beams, generating a gentle pattering sound that could be heard when approaching the pipe.*

Semester 1

The project was offered to the S&SP students in Semester 1 as the elective subject *Studio Options* (taken by all second-year students in the Bachelor of Fine Arts (Visual Arts)). *Studio Options* is written so that its focus can be driven by a teacher's expertise, so it was an excellent subject through which to undertake the first half of *Calling Percy*.

The two Mechanical Engineering students worked alongside the six S&SP students from early in the project. Though their formal curriculum and

assessment elements were managed and undertaken within their own faculty, they had regular contact and input from me. We chose to avoid enforced collaboration between the two cohorts, instead providing a structure that facilitated opportunities for cross collaboration as the students worked alongside each other.

Following my studio methodology, the students began with open-ended experimentation. Their first tasks were to research various relevant artists, including Grainger, to 'make a sound' and to 'make something move'. I encouraged them to be open to the possibilities offered by the materials and objects with which they were working. Such an approach asks students to avoid predetermination, so that in working in a space of 'not-knowing', they (and the artwork) might benefit from what can arise *from* and *through* their materials, processes, and contexts. Asking students to resist predetermining end-results can be frustrating and difficult for them, so they need support and encouragement to find

Figure 4. Sam La Marca, In an English country garden*, 2016, synthetic grass, cardboard, string, timber, ceramic teapots, lavender, bells, teddy bears; dimensions variable.* In an English country garden *developed in response to Grainger's famous Country Gardens composition. La Marca was interested in how non-sounding objects might be used as sculptural devices to imply or replace actual sounds. The undulating landscape that he created—which extended from the gallery onto the outdoor balcony—spoke to Grainger's interest in gliding tones, whilst the stereotypically English objects such as teddy bears, teapots and potted plants acted as proxies for musical beats and patterns.*

Figure 5. Nicola Lewis, Forward and back*, 2016, plywood, aluminium, 250 × 230 × 250 cm. In* Forward and back*, the viewer was confronted by their own distorted, shimmering, repeated reflection. A deep acoustic hum reverberated through the sculptural form. Lewis was interested in Grainger's sense of his own legacy and the relationship between creativity and ego; as she wrote for the didactic exhibition panel 'one confronts, face to face, an immersive yet elusive self-representation. The intricacy of the individual, here standing, takes on a shifting form; an all-encompassing distortion of a three-dimensional human being'.*

moments of meaning within this 'not-knowing'. It is important that materials lead, as this facilitates movement through, and engagement with, the work as it emerges. This focuses students on *discovery* rather than on implementing predetermined results, creating an environment in which they have opportunity to recognise and work with what the emerging sculpture is offering to them.

In Week 4, the students and I each presented our experiments thus far, focusing on discoveries and implications, and the direction in which subsequent experiments might move. Having loosely sketched out the boundaries of their areas of enquiry, each then began working towards the first prototype. This was interspersed with lessons relevant to kinetic artwork, such as safe low-voltage electricity usage, hands-on lessons experimenting with mechanisms such as pulleys and levers, and showing simple ways to test out kinetic and sonic ideas.

Figure 6. Danielle Cheng and Qalissa Othman, The Percy gurdy*, 2016, acrylic, acoustic strings, direct-current motors, medium-density fibreboard; dimensions variable. Cheng and Othman's work used mechanical and programmed digital elements to create a hurdy-gurdy with kinetic and sonic effects. In each of the upper boxes, a sensor-activated motor turned a crank from which four concentric rings were suspended. Each ring was attached to a different position on the crank, so when it turned the rings would move up and down in different patterns. In each lower box, a small disc turned against a cello string, creating a drone tone. Visitors could adjust this tone by sliding a small felted block up and down on the string. This sliding action altered the crank rotation, affecting the speed at which the ring patterns changed.*

Around Week 5 the two student cohorts—Mechanical Engineering and S&SP—started to work alongside each other. In Week 8 we held a group critique, where all students presented their emerging artworks for feedback from their peers. These were fantastic instances for highlighting the resonances and differences between the two cohorts as they learnt from each other's approaches.

In Week 11 a second group critique marked the second prototype phase. We were joined by *Cultural Collisions* director Jonathan Mills, curatorial staff from the Potter, and staff from Chancellery Engagement (the University of Melbourne department administering *Cultural Collisions*). The Week 11 timing had allowed each student to have sufficient time to get to know—and to 'own'—their emerging artworks, enabling productive navigation of the feedback.

At the end of Semester 1, students 'pitched' a proposal for the work they would develop for the exhibition. The panel included their peers and staff similar to the group who had attended the group critique. Both the proposal and pitch emulated real-world application processes. For *Studio Options*, students were assessed on their experimentation,

their proposals, and their pitch. This ensured a strong tie between the assessment tasks and the professional practice skills that will benefit their future careers as independent artists.

Semester 2

Having framed each artwork's considerations through the Semester 1 curriculum and assessment tasks, students moved into the later prototyping phases to develop their artworks ready for exhibition. This half of the project became part of the S&SP major subject *Studio Studies*. This focused on experimenting to find optimum solutions for their mechanisms, materialities and aesthetics. I met with each student a couple of times per week, discussing everything from conceptual considerations to sourcing obscure industrial materials. Many of the works were reconfigured substantially in this time as both problems and solutions presented themselves.

Throughout this period I had a rough sketch of the exhibition layout (developed with Simone and curatorial staff from the Potter) so that I was able to guide the students and the decisions that they were making in light of the exhibition.

The works were installed after Week

Figure 7. Yuval Rosinger, Noise is free*, 2016, timber, various found materials; 340 × 100 × 100 cm. In* Noise is free *Rosinger brought together dozens of noise-generating assemblies that he had created entirely from found objects. Through processes of assembly and experimentation, Rosinger gradually learnt how to 'play' the instrument, discovering and building upon relationships, harmonies and dissonances that emerged between the various elements. This process continued throughout the exhibition, as Rosinger activated the instrument for up to an hour several times a week. This activation became the central concern of the work.*

9, leaving five weeks between the exhibition commencement and Semester 2 assessment. The exhibited works formed part of assessment, however, rather than finishing on the unusual high of the show, the students were asked to generate new work for assessment that extended beyond their *Calling Percy* work, so that they moved past the successful, highly supported exhibition work.

Value for the students

A project such as this provides students with the opportunity to learn 'studio fitness'. 'Studio fitness' is a learnt skill, and this project gave preliminary experience of studio fitness within a mediated, supportive framework. It is now evident as we see these students in third-year that they are more confident and self-directed in their working methods and decision-making processes.

Students learnt how to source what they needed to make things. Learning how to track down obscure materials and talk with industrial suppliers is fundamental to sculptural practice and an important skill to learn, and they experienced the way in which, in many cases, artworks take form in response to resource availability.

Through direct experience and by observation, students learnt how to effectively liaise with others in the arts industry, including curators, directors and technicians. Their discussions were mediated by me as project leader, providing opportunity for students to observe

Figure 8. Maggie Clare, Free weights music machine*, 2016, timber, nylon fishing line, steel; 100 × 170 × 100 cm. Gallery visitors could interact with and play the* Free weights music machine*, plucking the strings as they turned the handle. The weights retained tension on the strings; as the handle was turned, the pluckable length of each string would change, altering its pitch. Building upon Grainger's vision for a democratic, free music, Clare sought to develop an instrument that enabled intuitive and exploratory responses.*

interactions and ensuring that relationships between the parties were maintained at professional levels.

Figure 9. Laura Woodward, The tolling*, 2016, water, aluminium, acetal, acrylic, fasteners, motors; dimensions variable.* The tolling *draws upon correlations between my own practice—in which I create looped systems often driven by the weight and movement of water—and the action of 'gliding' that was crucial to Grainger's Free Music machines.* The tolling *explores the ways in which gliding as both action and concept can function and contribute to a cyclical system that is embodied within a kinetic sculptural installation. In particular,* The tolling *mobilises water's inherent capacity for 'gliding'; water in motion is incremental, analogue, non-binary, gliding. When coupled with a tubular bell, this shifting capacity of water has compelling potential; the submersion of a ringing tubular bell shifts its tone, the pitch gliding, exposing the full possibilities of the bell's tonal range.*

The project provided significant opportunities for students to learn how and when to make fundamental decisions about their artwork. Much of my role was to help students make necessary decisions in consideration of the overall project arc, budget and timeline, as well as ensuring that decisions made were likely to lead towards the best results for the artworks and the exhibition. The trust developed early in the project between students and the project leader becomes fundamental at this late stage, enabling major shifts to happen when required as the exhibition looms. It must be emphasised, however, that irrespective of the level of direction, input or suggestions made, it is

crucial that this is framed such that each student genuinely retains artistic ownership of their work—in their own experience of it, in how they make decisions, and in the broader project context.
Finally, each student genuinely encountered their own capacities. The high profile of the final exhibition encouraged them to make works that moved well beyond what they might otherwise have undertaken for a university subject. Through this, they each saw the extent of their own capabilities. This, I believe, is the most empowering and enduring lesson that any student can take from a project such as *Calling Percy*.

Value for the lead researcher/project leader

In an era of significant time pressures on academics with teaching and research responsibilities, an approach that makes best use of all available resources (including, importantly, one's own time and energy) should not be underestimated. In addition to the teaching element, I researched, created and exhibited a major new artwork, *The tolling*. The inclusion of this work also determined a professional standard for the show to meet the major exhibition venue.

Additionally, new professional relationships can develop that are based not just on the academic's teaching practice but on an understanding of their research practice. For the artist-academic many of these relationships will cross into the non-university arts sector. This dual exposure of the artist-academic's pedagogical practice *and* studio research practice expands potentials for future possibilities and engagements (whether pedagogical or research-focused, or both).

Conclusion: core characteristics of the model

Within this paper I have sought to offer *Calling Percy* as a model for a pedagogical–research approach that may be relevant and useful to others developing teaching and learning projects with public exhibition outcomes. The core characteristics of the model are:

- Artworks are developed by the students and the project leader (lead researcher) from the start of the project.
- The pedagogical and research elements are separate from each other, running in parallel throughout the project. Though the research approach is modelled for the students (to contribute to their learning), the research element does not include students, and the student works and involvement are developed for pedagogical purposes only.
- The curriculum structure is shaped to ensure a gradual unfurling of the students' interests and artworks within the project context, in order to facilitate maximum artistic growth and engender experimental processes as part of developing 'studio fitness'. The curriculum structure is shaped upon the lead researcher's own studio research methodology, so that they can model this for the students as their own work emerges.

- The project includes a conceptual underpinning which provides context and focus for the students, and which they can use as a developmental tool, touchstone, or framing device for their emerging work.
- The students' engagement with other project stakeholders is managed so that it occurs at appropriate and pertinent points throughout the project, so that students are enabled to make work that is driven from within and navigate and negotiate any feedback towards doing so.
- Throughout the project, the lead researcher is looking toward a final coherent exhibition, gently guiding students towards this to ensure a strong cultural outcome.
- The project culminates in a major cultural outcome (for example, an exhibition) which pushes the students to their fullest ability, and which is an appropriate context for the lead researcher's practice.

As outlined, the model is based on a strong underlying structure that helps to ensure that goals are met, both in terms of pedagogy, research, and the final cultural production outcome (such as the exhibition). Within this structure, the students have artistic freedom and room for growth, but the structure and its boundaries help to balance this with the necessities of the major project outcome. The strong structural core of the project then allows a conceptual impetus to be included without the underlying structure having to change (such as Grainger's legacy for *Calling Percy*). This ability to absorb different conceptual underpinning into the core structure allows the model to be flexible to suit different contexts, institutions, outcomes and projects.

Notes

[1] On Professor Jonathan Mills' curatorial vision for Cultural Collisions: Grainger/Griffins, see https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/jonathan-mills-on-music-mavericks-and-melbourne. The full program is available at https://events.unimelb.edu.au/cultural-collisions.

[2] The 2012 publication *Rising: Victoria Harbour Young Artist Initiative* (Slee, 2012) celebrated the five-year mark of the project, and outlined and underscored the benefits experienced by those students who took part.

[3] Enquiry-based learning (EBL) is characterised by student-centred learning, where 'lecturers become facilitators, providing encouragement and support to enable the students to take responsibility for what and how they learn'. Through EBL, students learn how to 'formulate their own research topics and convert that research into useful knowledge', thus gaining not only a better understanding of the subject at hand, but also 'the knowledge-development and leadership skills required for tackling complex problems that occur in the real world' (Centre for Excellence in Enquiry Based Learning, University of Manchester, 2010).

[4] A major study into the benefits of integrating disciplinary research into teaching practice was developed by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, the Griffith Institute for Higher Education at Griffith University, and Queensland University of Technology. The resulting resource, *The teaching–research nexus: A guide for academics and policy-makers in higher education*, outlines the benefits of integrating disciplinary research into teaching through practical outcomes: 'Students steeped in practical opportunities … throughout their degree study will enter the professional world with an understanding of research methodologies; they will know how to conduct and evaluate research projects … With these abilities graduates will be more 'work-ready' in the first instance and more likely to develop into successful practitioners and lifelong learners in the 'knowledge society (Griffith University, Queensland University of Technology, and University of Melbourne, 2008).' Emerging practising artists require all of the above: an understanding of studio practice methodologies; how to conduct, evaluate and improve their own studio practices (which will underpin all their artistic output); and how to be 'practice-ready' so that they might develop into successful and lifelong arts practitioners.

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