

Eileen Larsen
James Cook University

Building Visual Art Graduate's Resilience Capabilities: Current tertiary educator strategies and methods

Keywords: Visual Artists, Resilience, Vulnerability, Creative Industries, Tertiary Education

Art graduates are vulnerable to many stressors and risks

Unemployment, career unpredictability and financial hardship are prevalent in the creative industries, with most artists juggling more than one job to financially support themselves (Bain 2005; Bridgstock 2005; Bridgstock et al. 2015; Carey 2015). Art graduates who desire career stability often find themselves embedded into other professions (Haukka 2011; Ashton 2015; Carey 2015; Fleischmann & Daniel 2015). Such characteristics may be common to many creative careers, due to the magnitude of aspiring artists seeking entrance into the creative industries, a domain that is often described as fiercely competitive (Creech et al. 2008; Ashton 2015; Bridgstock et al. 2015; Fleischmann & Daniel 2015). Indeed, some argue that only 'a very few of the most brilliant, determined and/or lucky graduates will succeed' (Goldsmith & Bridgstock 2015, p. 10).

In order to build a reputation as an established professional, most visual art graduates (and graduates from other art disciplines) are reliant on peer recognition and gatekeepers, for sustained success in the creative industries workforce (Bain 2005; Tomlinson 2007; McKay 2014; Pratt 2015). Unfortunately, most artists are often socially underrepresented (Ashton 2015) and visual artists are seen to have quite a low social standing (Bain 2005). The pressures of obtaining social approval can be difficult, as an artist's professional identity is often regarded as separate from 'real' occupations (Bain 2005; Carey 2015). There is much personal investment involved, as artists are generally expected to 'exploit their individuality and feed popular myths to reinforce their occupational identity' (Bain 2005, p. 29). These romanticised myths generally label artists as possessing a form of 'divine madness' that positions them outside the contexts of 'real' everyday life (Eysenck 1993; Bain 2005; Gaut 2012; Daniel & Johnstone 2014).

Such risks and stressors are a few of the many that visual artists may be vulnerable to, hence graduates may suffer from the same anxiety, depression, and emotional conflict that are prominent for most practitioners in the creative industries (Bayles & Orland 1993; Martinsen 2011; McRobbie 2011; Gaut 2012; Morton 2012; Hughes et al. 2014; Carey 2015). As vulnerabilities can be reduced through use of strategies

that strengthen resilience (Jackson et al. 2007; Adamson et al. 2012), it may prove beneficial for specific resilience-focused pedagogies to be incorporated into tertiary art education to combat the egregious difficulties graduates face when transitioning into the creative industries workforce.

Resilience

Resilience, as a psychological concept (McAllister & McKinnon 2009; Beddoe et al. 2011), is often described as the ability to manage responses to adversity (Moyle 2013) by 'bouncing back', or adapting to such an extent that individuals produce positive outcomes and thrive under the experienced hardships (Masten et al. 1990; Luthar & Cicchetti 2000; Jackson et al. 2007; Collins 2008; Duening 2008; McAllister & McKinnon 2009; Adamson et al. 2012; Yeager & Dweck 2012; Moyle 2013). Both internal and external factors can determine an individual's resilience capabilities (Tusaie & Dyer 2004; Hartley 2011; Yeager & Dweck 2012; Pratt 2015). Resilience is also dynamic, having the ability to be altered over time (Luthar & Cicchetti 2000; Luthar 2006; Walker et al. 2006).

Although art educators may foster resilience in their teaching, there appears to be limited focus on resilience and professional wellbeing in Australian art curricula (Daniel & Johnstone 2014). In art literature, resilience is not often mentioned, and when it is, it is generally regarded as one of many skills or qualities required for art practice and not necessarily seen as a priority (Bridgstock 2005; Beckman 2007; Bennett 2009; Morton 2012; Bridgstock 2013). In addition, most of the focus on resilience in tertiary art education has been in the areas of music and performance (e.g. dance, theatre) (Bennett 2009; Wiggins 2011; Moyle 2012). Moyle proposes that 'a potential new frontier for performance psychologists to apply their psychological skills' is in terms of other disciplines within the creative industries, including film and TV, design, and other visual arts (Moyle 2012, p.5).

The development of resilience during training has received significant scholarly attention in the areas of education (Walker et al. 2006; Hartley 2011; Yeager & Dweck 2012), entrepreneurship (Beckman 2007; Duening 2008), social work (Collins 2008; Beddoe et al. 2011; Adamson et al. 2012), nursing (Jackson et al. 2007; McAllister & McKinnon 2009), military defence (Cohn et al. 2010; Reivich et al. 2011), sports, and performance (Moyle 2012). In reviewing this body of literature, it can be determined that resilience can be taught, (Jackson et al. 2007; Duening 2008; McAllister & McKinnon 2009; Beddoe et al. 2011) though it is difficult to implement into classroom learning (Walker et al. 2006; Duening 2008; Yeager & Dweck 2012). This may be due to the frequent misuse and misinterpretation of resilience (Luthar & Cicchetti 2000; Walker et al. 2006; Jackson et al. 2007; Beddoe et al. 2011; Hartley 2011; Adamson et al. 2012; Coleman 2014; Pratt 2015). Given that resilience is contextual, dynamic, and consequently multidimensional and unstable, fostering

resilience through pedagogies requires diverse approaches to 'resilience-linked behaviours and attitudes' (Walker et al. 2006, p. 257). Adamson et al. explain (2012, p. 537):

Resilience cannot be ascribed to the possession of one core attribute, one work context or one strategy. Rather, it is the ever-changing relationship between all those factors mediated through experience and reflection and occurring within environments that constrain, and at other times enable, resilience to manifest.

Although resilience is not central to the focus of student development in Australian art curricula (Daniel & Johnstone 2014), it is implicit within different art education models. For example, guest speakers are valuable for the development of entrepreneurial artists (Beckman 2007), and can foster resilience, as seen in both nursing and social work practice (McAllister & McKinnon 2009; Beddoe et al. 2011). Such resilience-building pedagogies, reviewed from literature in the areas of education, entrepreneurship, social work, nursing, sports and performance, as well as similar strategies mentioned in art literature, will now be examined.

Teaching strategies that foster resilience

Walker argues that attempts to create a 'normative' classroom environment may claim to raise self-esteem, but 'are possibly addressing only a superficial 'feel good' notion' (2006, p. 255). With this in mind, a potentially agreeable alternative would be to allow competitive simulations to expose students to a controlled level of risk in the classroom (Walker et al. 2006; Jackson et al. 2007; Hartley 2011). Duening (2008, p. 269) endorses this strategy, arguing that experiencing the emotional response to 'real failure', followed by reflection and classroom discussions to develop coping strategies, is the quickest way of building entrepreneurs' resilience capabilities. This requires a degree of trust and interdependence in classrooms, and no small amount of assiduousness for the educator, as there arises possibilities of discrimination (Collins 2008) and instances where students will often feel vulnerable (Walker et al. 2006; Duening 2008). However, these vulnerabilities can offer educators 'a plethora of moments and interactions for developing resilience of all kinds' (Walker et al. 2006, p. 262).

Students may also build resilience capabilities through exposure to industry guest speakers, ranging from graduate practitioners to 'fulfilled community elders' (McAllister & McKinnon 2009), who discuss their times of failure and methods for thriving under hardship (Duening 2008; McAllister & McKinnon 2009). According to Duening (2008, p. 269), this is 'far better' than discussing their 'tremendous success'.

Imitative learning provided through academic mentoring and group work, in concert with guest speakers, could provide a way to build students' resilience capabilities (Beckman 2007; McAllister & McKinnon 2009; Beddoe et al. 2011; Haukka 2011). These learning experiences can encourage discussions regarding both professional and personal identity, which are critical for the development of students' resilience capabilities (Walker et al. 2006; McAllister & McKinnon 2009).

Individuals who display resilience often rely on healthy, nurturing and supportive social capital (Jackson et al. 2007). Healthy professional networks are also seen as an important factor for many successful artists (Creech et al. 2008; Haukka 2011; Ashton 2015) and may be embedded and developed in students through industry engagements like internships and work placements. There are various challenges for tertiary institutions to facilitate these engagements, including logistical risks (Daniel & Daniel 2013), limited work experience opportunities (Walmsley 2013), student exploitation (McRobbie 2011), and ultimately striking a balance between employer criticism and 'their own traditions' of academic learning and knowledge transfer (Walmsley 2013). With this in mind, part-time, support, or visiting staff who also play 'active roles' in industry might be invaluable assets to engage students in their prospective workplaces (Bennett 2009).

Methodology

The aim of this study was to explore the extent to which visual art educators assist students in developing resilience capabilities and strategies. While the term visual art can include many different mediums in fine art and new media (Hill & Helmers 2004; Noble & Bestley 2005), the focus of this study was on tertiary art education in design, illustration, film and photography, in light of limited research in these areas as argued by Moyle (2012). Hence, the core question driving this study was: to what extent are visual tertiary art educators focussing on the development of graduates' resilience capabilities and strategies? The primary method for collecting data in this study was semi-structured interviews involving eight tertiary visual art educators who teach theory or practice in Australian institutions across the areas of design, illustration, photography and film. Not all educators responded to the invitation to participate, therefore locations in Australia and genders are not equally represented in the study. Further details can be seen below in Table 1 which displays the participants' title, their area of education, location, gender and years of experience in academia.

Participant	Participant Role	Area of Education	Location	Gender	Experience (years)
A	Lecturer, Academic Relations Officer	Fine Art (History and Curatorship)	Queensland	Female	6
B	Senior Lecturer	Film	New South Wales	Male	10
C	Senior Lecture, Program Convener	Graphic Design	Queensland	Male	30
D	Lecturer	Fine Art, Photography and Film	Victoria	Male	10
E	Lecturer	Film	Australian Capital Territory	Female	10
F	Course Convener, Assistant Professor	Graphic Design, Web Design, Photography, Film, Arts & Design	Australian Capital Territory	Male	12
G	Senior Teaching Fellow, Head of Directing	Film	Queensland	Male	11
H	Senior Lecturer, Course Convener	Fine art and Photography	New South Wales	Female	15

Table 1: Participant Title, Area of Education, Location, Gender and Experience

Interview questions were designed to capture educators' perspectives on art student vulnerabilities, resilience and current strategies that built resilience capabilities. A sample of these questions were:

- As an art educator, what does resilience mean to you?
- Is resilience embedded into your own teaching?
- Do you believe that students have unrealistic expectations of their future career? If so, is this something that you address with them directly?

Telephone interviews were held for roughly one hour, although two of the participants responded to the questions by email, which is considered an adequate qualitative data collection method (Creswell 2003). Data were analysed using abductive reasoning, which can be described as repetitive 'back-and-forth movement' between inductive and deductive reasoning (Cohen et al. 2000) and is often used in qualitative research methods (Creswell 2003). Given there were no significant differences between the responses of participants from each discipline, the findings below present participant views as a whole, with a focus on the definition of resilience, as well as strategies that build resilience capabilities including industry simulations, industry engagement and classroom activities.

Findings

Definition of resilience

Resilience was identified by Participant B as value-based and fundamental to withstanding the challenge of 'simply trying to demonstrate what we try to do'. This requires students' realistic and strategic planning to engage themselves 'in a world where you have to court some kind of failure' (B). Participant G explained resilience as the ability to be inspired by and interpret rejection through reasoning. Such 'inner drive reasoning' was also mentioned by Participant D, who explained resilience as derived from persistence. Perhaps one of the most accurate definitions of resilience was provided by Participant F, who described resilience as not only the ability to cope, but to succeed where others have failed by going beyond 'those immediate problems and barriers'. When defining resilience, contextualizing both successes and failures was seen as important (B, G). This is particularly significant because artists produce work that can have much personal investment (A, G).

Strategies to build resilience capabilities

Most participants felt that fostering resilience capabilities in students was beneficial given that they will need to cope with critical feedback and rejection in such a competitive industry. During all interviews there was an underlying tone that resilience was not overly discussed in tertiary institutions. Two participants openly mentioned that they had not used the word resilience (B, G), and two other participants described resilience as more implicitly woven into teaching strategies (D, F). According to Participant C, resilience can be developed through encouraging students to practice taking risks and exploring new possibilities, which are also characteristics of creative thinking. Participant F encouraged similar practices that incorporated exploring and solving complex problems. Subsequently, students can develop skills through these practices that may be beneficial for them in the future (F). Participant E highlighted self-training as an important factor to fostering resilience in students. This educator maintained an international online network through which students were encouraged to acquire professional feedback. Failure was also seen by many participants as an effective way to build resilience capabilities, as exemplified in the statement by Participant C:

Failure in itself, though, is something else. Fail, and fail often, and fail quickly, and LEARN from your failures. Then the bits begin to fall into place is inherent in creative endeavours. Learn to accept it, and move on. Understand it is a means to success.

Participant A also questioned whether resilience capabilities could be built through academic teaching, given that tertiary educators are, in some cases, restricted and even disempowered, because they are directed to provide comfort and maintain student morale. As explained by Participant A, 'we're less and less able to put

students in situations where they feel unhappy or feel that they might have failed.’ However, the educator worked around these restrictions by offering opportunities for students to build their confidence and ‘have their own voice in the classroom’ through presentations and peer feedback. Such presentations and peer feedback methods were also applied by other participants (e.g. D, E, H).

Industry simulations

Supervised industry simulations - focused on building up resilience capabilities through student failure - were seen as ‘invaluable’ to Participant C who described how in-house design studios can help students engage with community and find employment. Participant G agreed that teaching students to proactively respond to both success and failure is very important, but was hesitant to incorporate failure-inducing simulations without careful management because it ‘can feel very manipulative’. This educator questioned whether this type of learning is more harmful than good, particularly for younger students. Regardless, Participant G explained how his students participated in graduate film competitions, where some students have the potential to fail. Participant A was also unsure of such simulations as they would require resources and psychological skills that educators do not possess. At first, Participant F was doubtful that such simulations could be ethically engineered into ‘pedagogical value’. This opinion was changed after the educator recalled student-driven exhibition projects that are plentiful in opportunities to foster resilience. However, the benefits from any hardship provided by these simulations do require time and reflection to be truly appreciated (F).

Industry engagement and classroom activities

According to Participant A, students did not completely understand the realities of their career trajectories and who their prospective employers are. This may be remedied by building awareness through classroom discussion (B, E, F, G) and industry engagement earlier in the student’s degree (A, G). Classroom discussions may include anecdotes shared by educators and invited guest speakers (A, G, H). For example, Participant G quite often shared his experience in the industry, highlighting times of failure and introducing the idea of ‘emotional scar tissue’ which is developed through hardship:

So in terms of the idea of resilience, I think a lot of it is stories that we tell and for me it’s important that they share experience. Just the fact that we say, “Look, this is how brutal it can be”.

Other participants used classroom discussions to explore such topics as the realities of monetary hardship (D), and the expected time needed to develop practical skills to a specialized standard (E). More authentic industry engagements like internships were ideal for preparing students for their transition into their prospective workplaces

(A, F, G, H). Internships however, were noted as logistically difficult (A, G, H) and described by Participant A as an 'extraordinarily administrative task'. This is partially because there are limited organizations to take on students (A, E) which may be a result of the limited budget (A). Other engagements included industry-based tours (A, H), guest speakers (F, G, H), self-reflection (A, B, F) and mentoring relationships with either staff or industry professionals (B, D).

Conclusion

While this study offers preliminary insights into the relevance and implementation of resilience in tertiary visual art education, it should be noted that the sample size is small and limited to interviews, which can only ever offer insights related to what participants choose to report (Creswell 2003). Regardless, it can be seen from these findings that there is little explicit strategic inclusion of step-by-step resilience-building strategies. It seems that resilience is woven into tertiary visual art education implicitly, through strategies that focus primarily on other skills and qualities. Hence, further investigation on specific resilience-building strategies for visual art graduates may prove to be beneficial, to combat the various challenges they face when transitioning into the creative industries workforce.

References

- ADAMSON, C, BEDDOE, L & DAVYS, A 2012, 'Building Resilient Practitioners: Definitions and Practitioner Understandings', *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 2014, no. 44, pp. 522-41.
- ASHTON, D 2015, 'Creative work careers: pathways and portfolios for the creative economy', *Journal of Education and Work*, pp. 1-19.
- BAIN, A 2005, 'Constructing an artistic identity', *Work, Employment & Society*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 25-46.
- BAYLES, D & ORLAND, T 1993, *Art and fear: Observations on the perils (and rewards) of artmaking*, Image Continuum Press, Santa Cruz, pp. 0-138.
- BECKMAN, GD 2007, '"Adventuring" Arts Entrepreneurship Curricula in Higher Education: An Examination of Present Efforts, Obstacles, and Best Practices', *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 87-112.
- BEDDOE, L, DAVYS, A & ADAMSON, C 2011, 'Educating Resilient Practitioners', *Social Work Education*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 100-17.
- BENNETT, D 2009, 'Academy and the Real World: Developing realistic notions of career in the performing arts', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 309-27.
- BRIDGSTOCK, R 2005, 'Australian Artists, Starving and Well-Nourished: What Can we Learn from the Prototypical Protean Career?', *Australian Journal of Career Development*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 40-7.
- BRIDGSTOCK, R 2013, 'Not a dirty word: Arts entrepreneurship and higher education', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, vol. 12, no. 2-3, pp. 122-37.
- BRIDGSTOCK, R, GOLDSMITH, B, RODGERS, J & HEARN, G 2015, 'Creative graduate pathways within and beyond the creative industries', *Journal of Education and Work*, pp. 1-13.
- CAREY, C 2015, 'The careers of fine artists and the embedded creative', *Journal of Education and Work*, pp. 1-15.
- COHEN, L, MANION, L & MORRISON, K 2000, *Research Methods in Education*, 5th edn, RoutledgeFalmer, London, pp. 1-395.
- COHN, A, HODSON, S & CRANE, M 2010, 'Resilience Training in the Australian Defence Force', *InPsych (April)*.
- COLEMAN, N 2014, 'Promoting resilience through adversity: increasing positive outcomes for expelled students', *Educational Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1-2, pp. 171-87.
- COLLINS, S 2008, 'Statutory Social Workers: Stress, Job Satisfaction, Coping, Social Support and Individual Differences', *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 38, no. 6, pp. 1173-93.

- CREECH, A, PAPAGEORGI, I, DUFFY, C, MORTON, F, HADDON, E, POTTER, J, de BEZENAC, C, WHYTON, T, HIMONIDES, E & WELCH, G 2008, 'From music student to professional: the process of transition', *British Journal of Music Education*, vol. 25, no. 03, pp. 315-31.
- CRESWELL, JW 2003, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2 edn, SAGE Publications, London.
- DANIEL, R & DANIEL, L 2013, 'Enhancing the transition from study to work: Reflections on the value and impact of internships in the creative and performing arts', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, vol. 12, no. 2-3, pp. 138-53.
- DANIEL, R & JOHNSTONE, R 2014, 'Developing mental strength in creative and performing arts: resilience and professional wellbeing for sustainable career in the creative industries'. Unpublished manuscript.
- DUENING, TN 2008, 'Five Minds for the Entrepreneurial Future: Cognitive Skills as the Intellectual Foundation for Next Generation Entrepreneurship Curricula', *Journal of Entrepreneurship*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 256-74.
- EYSENCK, HJ 1993, 'Creativity and Personality: Suggestions for a Theory', *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 147-78.
- FLEISCHMANN, K & DANIEL, R 2015, 'The rise of the embedded designer in the creative industries', *Journal of Education and Work*, pp. 1-21.
- GAUT, B 2012, 'Creativity and Rationality', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 70, no. 3, pp. 259-70.
- GOLDSMITH, B & BRIDGSTOCK, R 2015, 'Embedded creative workers and creative work in education', *Journal of Education and Work*, pp. 1-19.
- HARTLEY, MT 2011, 'Examining the Relationships Between Resilience, Mental Health, and Academic Persistence in Undergraduate College Students', *Journal of American College Health*, vol. 59, no. 7, pp. 596-604.
- HAUKKA, S 2011, 'Education-to-work transitions of aspiring creatives', *Cultural Trends*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 41-64.
- HILL, CA & HELMERS, M 2004, *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, London, pp. 1-342.
- HUGHES, D, EVANS, M, KEITH, S & MORROW, G 2014, *A "duty of care" and the professional musician/artist*, National Library of Australia, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, pp. 31-41.
- JACKSON, D, FIRTKO, A & EDENBOROUGH, M 2007, 'Personal resilience as a strategy for surviving and thriving in the face of workplace adversity: a literature review', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, vol. 60, no. 1, pp. 1-9.
- LUTHAR, SS 2006, 'Resilience in development: A synthesis of research across five

- decades', in DCDJ Cohen (ed.), *Developmental psychopathology, Vol 3: Risk, disorder, and adaptation (2nd ed.)*, John Wiley & Sons Inc, Hoboken, NJ, US, pp. 739-95.
- LUTHAR, SS & CICHETTI, D 2000, 'The construct of resilience: Implications for interventions and social policies', *Development and Psychopathology*, vol. 12, no. 04, pp. 857-85.
- MARTINSEN, ØL 2011, 'The Creative Personality: A Synthesis and Development of the Creative Person Profile', *Creativity Research Journal*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 185-202.
- MASTEN, AS, BEST, KM & GARMEZY, N 1990, 'Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity', *Development and Psychopathology*, vol. 1990, no. 2, pp. 425-44.
- MCALLISTER, M & MCKINNON, T 2009, 'The importance of teaching and learning resilience in the health disciplines: a critical review of the literature', *Nurse Education Today*, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 371-9.
- MCKAY, D 2014, 'The labour of visual art in Western Australia', *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 99-114.
- MCROBBIE, A 2011, 'Re-thinking Creative Economy as Radical Social Enterprise', *Variant*, vol. 41, pp. 32-3.
- MORTON, B 2012, 'The Madness of Art', *Dissent*, vol. 59, no. 2, pp. 81-2.
- MOYLE, GM 2012, 'Performance in the spotlight: Exploring psychology in the performing arts', *InPsych (December)*, pp. 11-3.
- MOYLE, GM 2013, 'Bouncing Back', *Dance Australia*, vol. 179, pp. 40-1.
- NOBLE, I & BESTLEY, R 2005, *Visual Research: An introduction to Research Methodologies in Graphic Design*, 2nd edn, AVA Publishing SA, Switzerland.
- PRATT, AC 2015, 'Resilience, locality and the cultural economy', *City, Culture and Society*, pp. 1-9.
- REIVICH, KJ, SELIGMAN, MEP & MCBRIDE, S 2011, 'Master resilience training in the U.S. Army', *American Psychologist*, vol. 66, no. 1, pp. 25-34.
- TOMLINSON, M 2007, 'Graduate employability and student attitudes and orientations to the labour market', *Journal of Education and Work*, vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 285-304.
- TUSAIE, K & DYER, J 2004, 'Resilience: a historical review of the construct', *Holistic Nurse Practice*, vol. 18, no. Jan-Feb, pp. 3-8.
- WALKER, C, GLEAVES, A & GREY, J 2006, 'Can students within higher education learn to be resilient and, educationally speaking, does it matter?', *Educational Studies*, vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 251-64.
- WALMSLEY, B 2013, 'A reflective perspective on the challenges facing research-led

teaching in the performing and creative arts', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, vol. 12, no. 2-3, pp. 222-33.

WIGGINS, J 2011, 'Vulnerability and agency in being and becoming a musician', *Music Education Research*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 355-67.

YEAGER, DS & DWECK, CS 2012, 'Mindsets That Promote Resilience: When Students Believe That Personal Characteristics Can Be Developed', *Educational Psychologist*, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 302-14.