

Third Culture Kids as Cultural Caretakers within Creative Practice

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Abstract

As a teaching artist and PhD candidate at QUT, my practice-led research explores how contemporary visual arts and pedagogical approaches can give voice to the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids (TCKs), young people who navigate transnational identities due to highly mobile upbringings. This paper outlines my studio and classroom strategies designed to respond to their cultural hybridity, identity formation and search for belonging. It focuses on practical, arts-based methods that foster agency, empathy, and visibility for TCKs. Furthermore, it presents a transferable pedagogical model for supporting TCK wellbeing and inclusion. Drawing on over twenty-five years in arts education, I examine how visual expression enables TCKs to put form to feeling and share their narratives in safe, collaborative environments. Within a post-pandemic public school context in Brisbane, I position myself as an empathetic witness to their stories, facilitating workshops where participants reflect on place, memory, and identity. Their resulting artworks reveal nuanced perspectives on cultural hybridity and express the emotional complexity of existing in a cultural third space. By analysing these creative engagements, this paper highlights the powerful role teaching artists can play in amplifying marginalised voices and promoting pluralistic dialogue, both within the classroom and broader artistic discourse.

Keywords: Third Culture Kids, Practice-led research, Care, Cultural Hybridity, Creative Practice.

Introduction

What pedagogical and artistic strategies can a teaching artist utilise to give voice to the experience of Third Culture Kids, to promote empathy and an understanding of the complex factors that influence their transnational identity formation and wellbeing?

With over 281 million migrants worldwide, global nomads now constitute what some call “the fifth biggest tribe in the world” (World Migration Report, 2020). Among them are Third Culture Kids (TCKs), children who spend significant formative years outside their parents’ culture or country of origin. Navigating between home and host cultures, TCKs face complex identity challenges shaped by dislocation, hybridity, and frequent transitions. These experiences can lead to unresolved grief and trauma, often overlooked in conventional educational settings (Pollock et al., 2017; Gilbert, 2008). This paper examines how contemporary visual arts and pedagogical practice can address these challenges by fostering empathy, agency, and belonging (Bennett, 2005). As a teaching artist and PhD candidate, my practice-led research investigates how transnational identity formation, a self-concept developed across multiple cultural contexts, can be explored and supported through artmaking. Drawing on experiences with TCK students in a Brisbane public school, I share studio and classroom-based strategies that enable students to express their stories, negotiate a sense of place, and reflect on their hybrid cultural perspectives. By responding creatively and reflectively to the TCK experience, my practice-led research promotes a deeper awareness of their capacity to make valuable contributions to educational and artistic settings, highlighting the transformative potential of art in supporting transnational identity.

This paper further presents a transferable pedagogical model designed to support Third Culture Kids (TCKs) in the classroom through creative practice. The model draws from practice-led research and classroom experience to propose adaptable approaches for educators working with transnationally mobile students. It also elucidates the nuanced role of teaching artists, hybrid practitioners who integrate the expressive aims of artmaking with the cognitive and relational capacities of educators. Their dual perspectives enable the creation of inclusive learning environments that centre student voice, especially for those navigating the complexities of transnational identity. A recurring motif in my creative practice is the Bicephalous Beast, who embodies this duality; serving as a metaphor for the multiple vantage points of both migrants and teaching artists, and the necessity for holding space for contradiction, hybridity, and layered narratives. The transferable pedagogical model has emerged from my work within the International Baccalaureate Visual Arts program at the Queensland Academy for Creative Industries (QACI), where a notable concentration of TCK students is identified as ‘highly capable learners’ (Gifted and Talented Education, 2024). Many of our families are transient and the IB’s globally transferable framework offers these students both flexibility and academic rigour. By embedding consciousness-raising frameworks into classroom spaces, teaching artists can foster connection, empathy, and visibility for TCKs. This paper advocates for the replication of such approaches across educational contexts to better support the wellbeing, identity formation, and nurture the creative potential of students growing up between cultures.



Figure 1: Studio record of creative practice in process, 2024.

Knowing and Understanding TCKs

While the acronym “TCK” may appear problematic or linguistically reductive, it operates as a monogram of belonging. It is an affective shorthand that unites a diverse, often misunderstood demographic under a shared identity. For many in the ever expanding online TCK communities “these labels have been embraced by the community as it is seen as their unique upbringing and identify getting global recognition [sic]” (Chalermpananupap, 2022). The use of acronyms is highly prevalent in educational discourse and youth culture as an effective and concise means of communication. Such mnemonic devices can signal shared identity and foster coded connection (Radović & Manzey, 2019). The term TCK encapsulates a nuanced, non-homogenous identity. Far from universalising, TCK is an holistic term that embraces the multidimensional nature of transnational identity, capturing the cultural hybridity, challenges, and strengths of growing up between worlds. It offers space for complexity without over-definition, making it a meaningful linguistic tool within both pedagogical and personal contexts. Within the scope of this paper, I use the term TCK with endearment and respect.

Existing research notes that TCKs often struggle with seemingly simple questions such as, “Where do you come from?” It can trigger anxiety and confusion, especially for those whose nationality and “home country” may be different, or for those who identify with a culture that does not seem to align with their physical appearance. For such students, ‘fitting in’ is an enduring issue that can persist for into adulthood (Pollock et al., 2017). As an IB Visual Arts educator at QACI, I recognise the importance of supporting TCKs in articulating their complex identities. The art room, where individuality and unique perspectives are central, offers a space for dialogical exchange and meaning-making. Artistic expression enables students to externalise conflicting emotions and reframe their differences as strengths. By engaging with creative processes, TCKs can transform their cultural double vision into

innovation, drawing from their hybrid, global perspectives. Facilitating this shift in self-perception through positive expression not only nurtures individual wellbeing but cultivates collective understanding of identity as layered, fluid, and richly complex.

In response to the distinct needs of TCKs, I have developed a pedagogical strategy that frames students as *cultural caretakers*, empowering them to approach artistic challenges through a kaleidoscope of cultural perspectives. Grounded in postcolonial and educational theory (Andreotti, 2010); Manathunga, 2015), this approach encourages students to both honour their heritage and interrogate how traditional visual languages might evolve in new cultural contexts. In doing so, students navigate and reconcile the interplay between their cultural roots and their current environment, Brisbane's Anglo-European inner suburbs, through reflective artmaking. This strategy is purposefully designed to address three key challenges TCKs commonly face, as identified by Van Reken (Van Reken, 2010):

- Negotiation of language barriers: Visual arts become a non-verbal, expressive medium through which students can communicate complex internal narratives without linguistic limitations.
- Rootlessness: Creative practice fosters placemaking and connection, offering stability and continuity through the exploration of memory, identity, and belonging.
- Multifaceted identity or identity crisis: Art provides a flexible platform for students to explore, integrate, and represent their hybrid identities, transforming perceived fragmentation into cohesion and agency.

The Classroom

By centring these challenges within the learning experience, the model supports TCKs in expressing, owning, and celebrating their unique cultural positions. Artistic practice offers TCKs a powerful alternative to verbal expression, bypassing language barriers to communicate complex, emotionally charged narratives through visual means. Their struggle to articulate conflicting feelings of displacement informs my pedagogy, which prioritises a safe, inclusive space for identity exploration and place making. Rather than fostering compliance, my classroom invites meaningful connection, where students engage in storytelling, listening, and reciprocal exchange. Empowering TCKs to express their narratives through art validates their internal experiences and affirms their agency. This approach replaces transactional instruction with a relational, process-driven model that encourages intrinsic motivation and views each project as a journey of creative discovery, not a prescribed outcome. TCK students often navigate educational spaces where dominant voices overshadow their own (Pollock et al., 2017). To counter this, my pedagogical approach invites reflection on their diverse cultural backgrounds, enriching classroom dialogue and artistic outcomes. By actively listening and validating their experiences, I foster an environment where multicultural expression is supported, and difference is valued. This aligns with the IB mission to cultivate “active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right” (Our Mission, 2014). Encouraging students to share the richness of their identities not only affirms TCKs but enhances the learning experience for all through cross-cultural exchanges. In classrooms shaped by cultural plurality, educators have a responsibility to nurture belonging and voice for TCKs, whose hybrid identities mirror the future of global society (Pollock et al., 2017). To

support their wellbeing and self-expression, I have developed consciousness-raising frameworks with our schemes of work to include object-based explorations that prompt students to consider how memory and belonging are tied to physical and emotional spaces. Within my teaching practice, I create structured yet flexible activities for TCKs to externalise their experiences of existing within a cultural third space that help avert the risk of future disenfranchisement (Van Reken, 2010). This approach offers a transferable model for inclusive, future-focused arts education.

Due to my intersectional experience as a migrant parent and teaching artist, who has identified their under-representation, I “work and engage the next generation in thinking about the arts in a way to ask questions and imagine new possibilities” (Ulvund, 2015). Broad inquiry questions such as “Can a place be a part of you?” provoke students to consider the perplexing notion that something physical can affect that which is intangible, our emotive self. Mind maps and annotated drawings go into overdrive as students contemplate the personal relevance of the concept of connection to place. Cultural, physical and even emotional places are considered in relation to thematic concerns around belonging, sense of place and memory. No restrictions are placed on their interpretations of the inquiry starting point. The places they choose can be real or imagined, a home, a room, urban or natural, micro or macro. My observations are that the stories they communicate through their selection of places are culturally complex, highly nuanced and engaging. My role is simply to ‘guide participants to make things they really care about.’ (The History of Teaching Artistry, Revised 2020, Booth, n.d.) Fortified by personal ownership of places they identify as significant, materials and processes are considered to reflect an array of conceptual values such as transience, relocation, belonging and not belonging, enclosing, comfort, containment and even escape. This is achieved through critical investigation into the work of artists who communicate diasporic themes in their own practices. Working in this informed context, students’ thought-provoking responses are captured in annotated visual diaries and witnessed in the dialogical exchange between groups. These discussions are further edified by their teaching artist as verbal free flow is refocused with questions like “So, what can you see in that place? What can you hear? And how does it make you feel?” Casual verbal meanderings are compounded into meaningful conceptual directions. Drawing from these sensory and perceptive reflections, they interpret memories, events, people and places that signpost their personal narratives. My objective as a teaching artist is to act as a guide on a cognitive journey to find connection, belonging and communicate their sense of place in the world through creative practice.

Following the formulation of a personal conceptual basis for their projects and planning stages, the classroom becomes a hive of self-directed activities as their abstract concepts take shape through sculptural processes. I intentionally elect sculptural processes because these methods are vital to the concept of place making, giving voice and being seen. Its physicality enables these works to claim space and engage viewers relationally and spatially. Sculptural forms, inherently multi-perspectival, reflect the layered vantage points of TCKs’ worldviews. Tactile surfaces and varied textures convey meaning beyond the visual, inviting the audience into an emotive, affective connection with both the artwork and the TCK artist. Freed from static interpretation, viewers encounter complex stories embedded in form, while students are simultaneously kept at safe distance from scrutiny, offering their use of

image and visual metaphor for analysis instead. Students are encouraged to consider how their choices in material and composition support their intended communication. This process, framed by reflection and autonomy, fosters excitement and purpose as students translate lived experience into meaningful creative expressions, affirming identity through making and deepening connections between self, place, and viewer.

In planning a group exhibition, my students collaboratively chose cardboard boxes as a unifying material, symbolic of transit, storage, and impermanence. This collective decision fostered cohesion and a shared sense of belonging. Students augmented their sculptures with personal materials, fragments of a grandmother's carpet, quilted clothing infusing works with emotional resonance and layered memory. The ephemeral nature of these objects conveyed the fragility and transience of remembered places. While all students contributed personal narratives, TCK participants found connection through their shared desire to establish a sense of place that rationalized their diverse and dynamic lived experiences. In expressing difference, they discovered common ground. Through listening to one another's stories, themes of comfort, loss, and home surfaced, creating a culture of mutual recognition and care. For TCKs, this became a form of self-care as they articulated hybrid identities and constructing meaning from personal understanding. In sharing their work publicly, they positioned themselves as active cultural communicators, offering transnational perspectives shaped by mobility, memory, and belonging.



Figure 2: Participant A10, reflection on place of birth in China, 2024.



Figure 3: Participant B10, reflections on migration from UK, 2024.



Figure 4: Participant 10C, reflecting on home of origin, memory and sense of place.

Creative Workshops and Exhibitions

Motivated by a genuine commitment to TCK wellbeing, I facilitate creative workshops at QUT's visual arts studios for QACI focus groups as part of my practice-led research. These creative workshops aim to amplify TCK voices, offering agency in shaping narratives around their transnational experiences. Exhibiting collectively fosters peer connection and invites the broader community, educators, parents, and caregivers, to engage with their perspectives. This process not only affirms participants' identities but cultivates empathy and understanding, creating a ripple effect of awareness for the unique challenges faced by young people living in a cultural third space.

Within a creative workshop context, reflecting on identity can be both powerful and emotionally challenging for TCK participants. Aware of this, I have worked closely with QUT's ethics approval processes to ensure participant wellbeing remains central. My pedagogical approach is grounded in the intersection of studio practice, teaching, and critical reflection, drawing on research and real-time observations of workshop dynamics. These sessions offer not only a space for expression but aim to empower TCKs to embrace the value of their hybrid cultural identities. Framed by the principle that *what makes you different is your superpower*, the workshops facilitate storytelling and artmaking that reveal shared experiences and foster group connection. What follows is a selection of transferable activities designed to help educators support TCK wellbeing and identity formation. Developed through practice-led research with the Third Culture Kids Collective, it can be adapted to varied educational settings to promote empathy, agency, and creative exploration among culturally mobile students.



Figure 5: 'Highly capable learners' participation in TCK creative workshop at QUT, 2024.

Inspired by anthropologist Gary Weaver's "cultural iceberg" model, which distinguishes surface-level aspects of identity (such as language, customs, and behaviours) from the deeper, often invisible layers of beliefs, values, and worldviews, I designed an activity inviting participants to map their own cultural icebergs (Weaver in Pollock et al., 2017, p.56). Students began by listing the traits by which they felt others identified them. Through drawing and discussion, a shared realisation emerged; external perceptions, often based on physical appearance, frequently misrepresent the richness of their multifaceted cultural identities, particularly for those of mixed heritage. The task then shifted to exploring the unseen aspects of their personal identity. Participants reflected on what lies beneath the surface and annotated personal insights, gradually developing visual symbols and motifs to represent these hidden layers. The activity offered a safe, creative space for TCKs to articulate the complexity of their self-perceptions and assert their narratives in a space where they were acknowledged and valued.

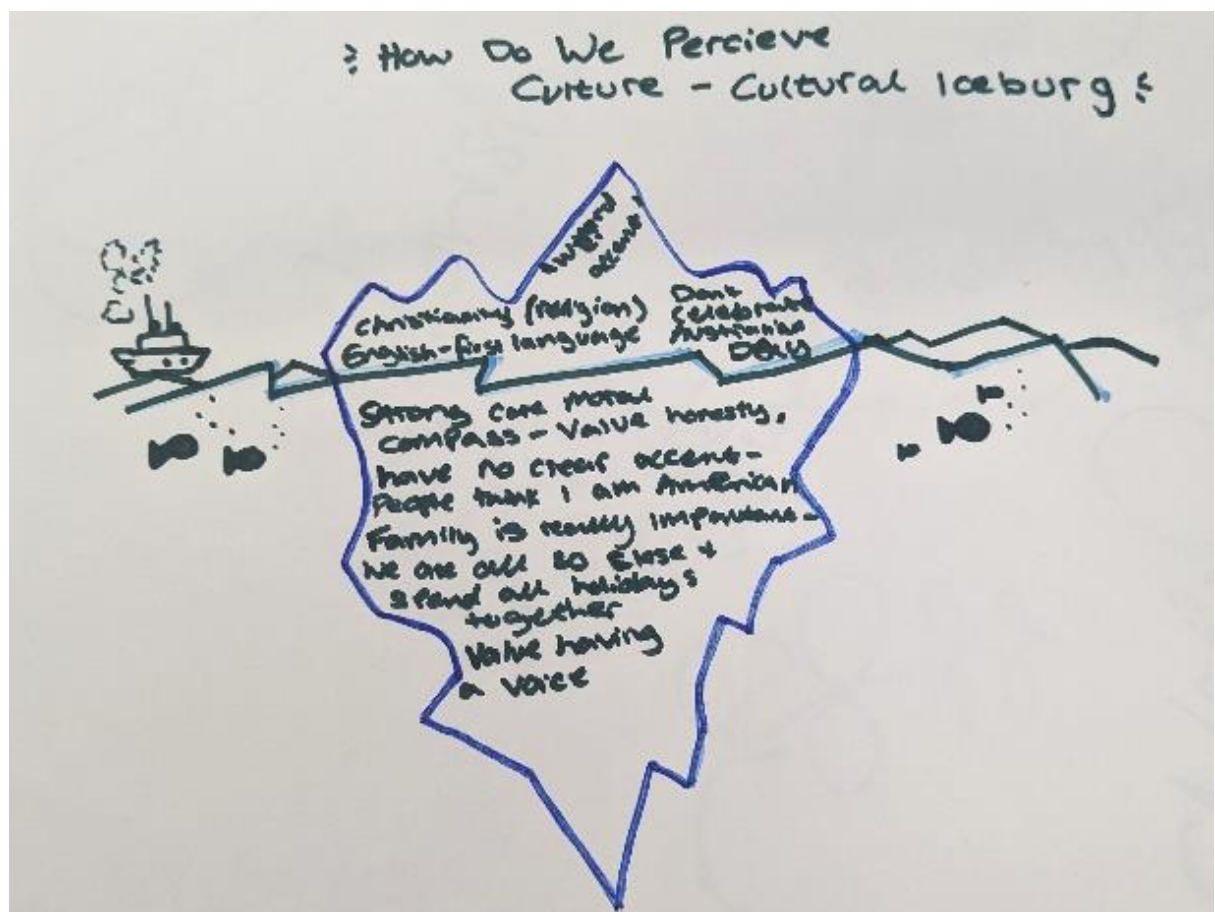


Figure 6: Participant 10 D responses to cultural iceberg challenge, 2024.

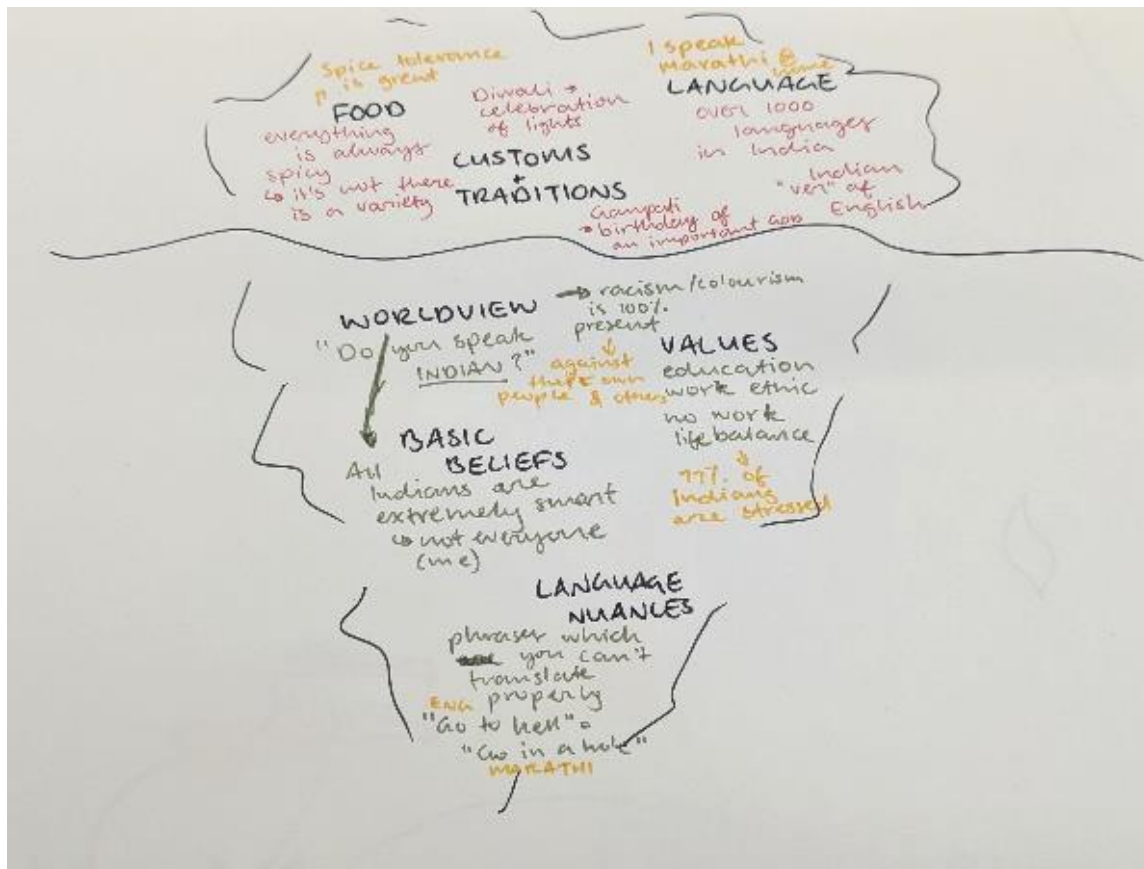


Figure 7: Participant 10 E responses to cultural iceberg challenge, 2024.

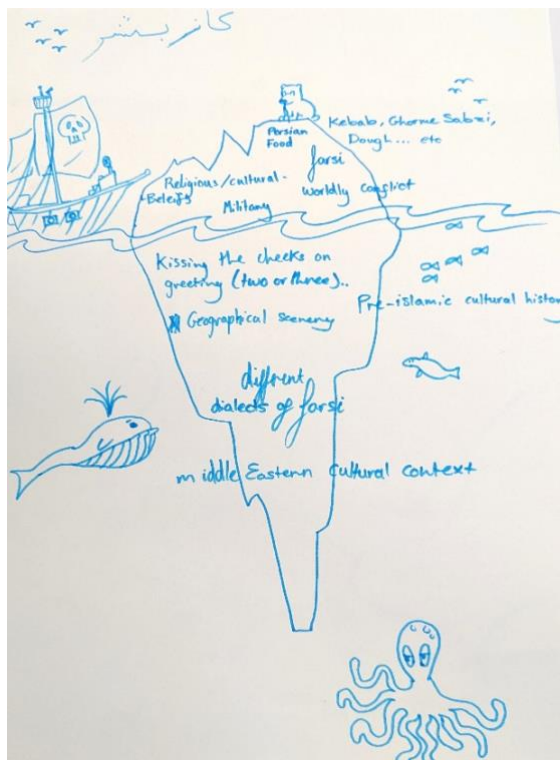


Figure 8: Participant 10 F responses to cultural iceberg challenge, 2024.

Another activity encouraged participants to act as empathetic witnesses for each other. Working in pairs, they listened to each other's migration stories, recording the intricacies of their narratives through abstract mark-making. The listener guided their drawing tool on a journey in response to the biographical account of the narrator, creating an improvised artwork that was in conversation with their counterpart. The scribe artist asked questions about their counterpart's origin story such as:

- Why do you live here?
- Where else have you lived?
- Can you speak any other languages?
- Where are your parents from?
- Have you ever been there?

The fluid, intuitive questioning between TCK pairs revealed a deep, mutual understanding. They instinctively knew how to ask each other meaningful questions with sensitivity and compassion. This genuine care was evident not only in conversation but in their artmaking. Their abstract biographical drawings captured vivid, layered stories. The serendipity of their parents' crossing paths, memories of international and interstate moves, and the emotional turbulence of growing up globally were evoked through mark-making. The messy, unstructured compositions mirrored their diverse, nomadic nature of their lives. During peer evaluation, these chaotic visuals sparked connection and humour. "Yeah, my life is complicated," one student remarked, met with laughter and recognition. The focus shifted from *fitting in* to celebrating their unique journeys. I reminded students that, like all great *origin stories*, complexity is the source of power. Their transnational lives are their *superpower*, enabling them to navigate diverse cultures, build bridges of understanding, and act as cultural caretakers both in their creative work and in the world (Abe, 2018).

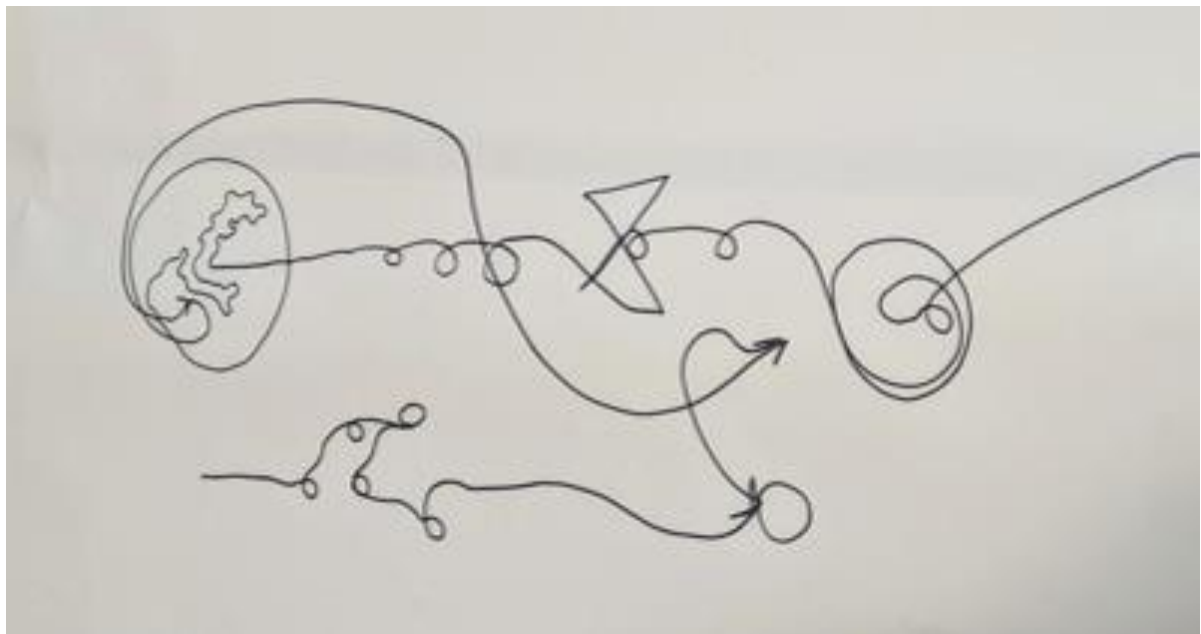


Figure 9: Participant 11F responses to biographical mapping challenge, 2024.

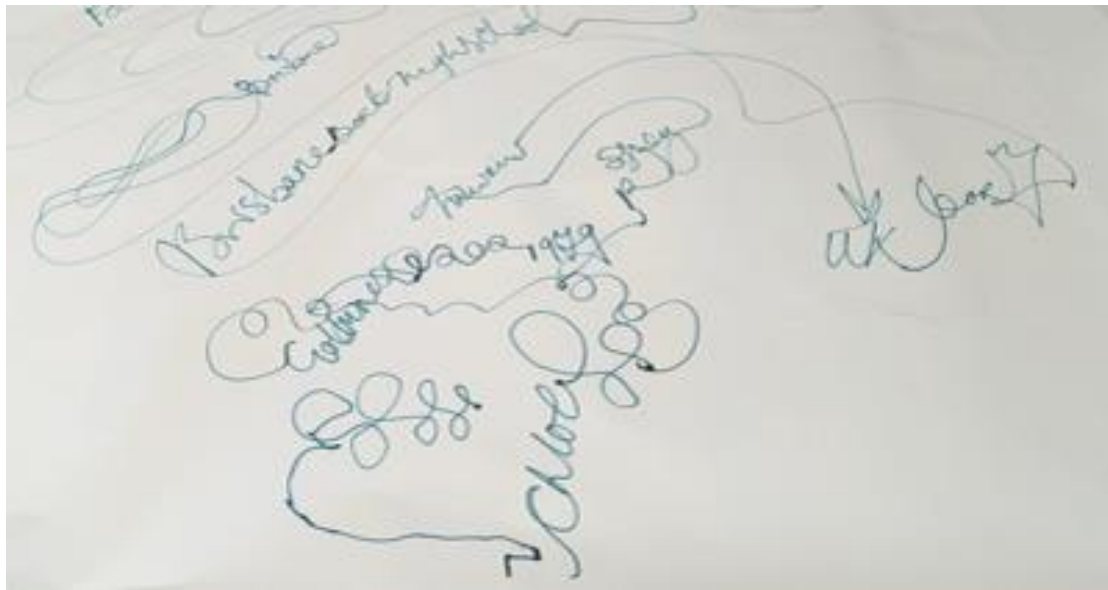


Figure 10: Participant 12 A response to biographical mapping challenge, 2024.

In other activities, participants responded visually to questions such as:

- If you had to leave this place, what would be the most important thing you would pack or bring with you?
- Have you ever had to leave something behind in another place that you miss?

Participants responded eagerly to prompts about childhood memories, revealing the emotional intensity of their attachments. Common motifs included pets and soft toys, symbolising unconditional love, companionship, and acceptance. The emergence of these themes was particularly meaningful for the focus group as they discussed navigating cultural dissonance and external judgments. These recollections highlighted the challenge of grieving non-tangible losses “ambiguous loss,” experienced through repeated relocations and disrupted attachments (Gilbert, 2008, p. 96). Their reflections underscored the emotional complexity and quiet distress that often accompanies transnational lives, reaffirming the importance of prioritising wellbeing in pedagogical approaches for TCKs.



Figure 11: Participant 12B, final IB submission inspired by TCK creative workshop response, 2024.

Additional workshop activities involved mixed media explorations of place and memory. Using ephemera such as newspapers and maps, students created layered, gridded surfaces as foundations for personal motifs. These materials, themselves temporal and culturally situated, reflected the transience of time, place, and belonging. The act of layering became a visual metaphor for their multifaceted identities. As participants engaged in dialogue about headlines and symbols that resonated with them, I gained insight into the broad, global awareness that Van Reken describes as the “wide world view” characteristic of many TCKs (Van Reken, 2010, p.637). These activities offered both a reflective space and a means of externalising the intangible, transforming lived experiences into narrative, and memory into form.

After completing the workshop activities, students were challenged to extend their insights into personal artworks for a collective exhibition. Through guided reflection, they developed symbolic motifs to express their evolving sense of identity. One participant, for example, chose a pearl as a visual metaphor, representing the internal cultural clashing and friction experienced in her place of origin. This metaphor illustrated how self-protection and discomfort can give rise to something layered and beautiful. She paired this with a curl motif drawn from her Afro hair, integrating personal and cultural symbolism.



Figure 12: Participant 12C, final IB submission inspired by TCK creative workshop response, 2024.

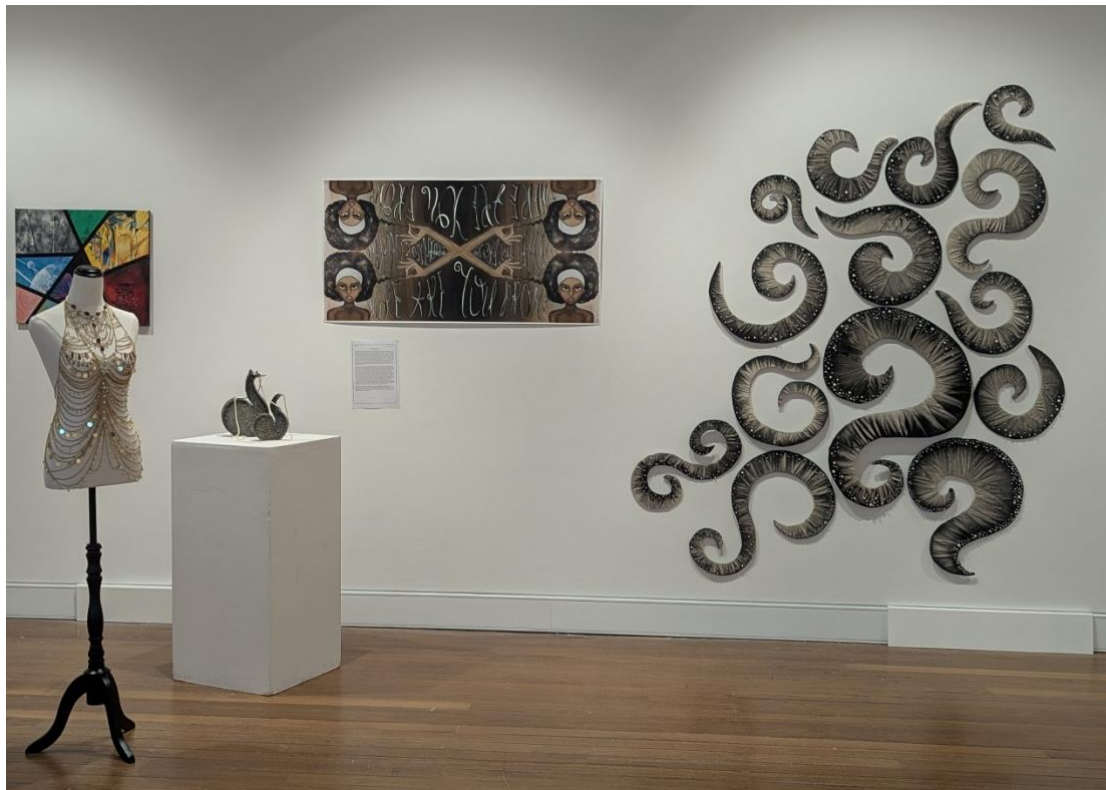


Figure 13: Participant 12C, final IB submission inspired by TCK creative workshop response, 2024.

The resulting body of work confidently explored her hybrid identity, intentionally positioning herself as “Other” in a way that was both assertive and nuanced. Through this dual symbolism, she sought to challenge stereotypical or exoticised readings of her image and story. Rather than conform to external narratives, her artwork reclaimed agency, inviting viewers to confront their assumptions and engage with complexity. This process of motif development became a powerful method of self-definition for TCK participants, enabling them to articulate layered identities shaped by transition, resilience, and cultural multiplicity. Exhibiting collectively provided both a platform for shared experience and a public space for reframing difference as a source of strength and pride.

Participants were empowered to voice their experience of existing in a cultural third space, some addressing issues of social concern related to their hybrid vantage points. Rejecting the notion that they were not enough of a single culture to deserve a political position; they made bold statements about human rights issues related to their home cultures with a newfound sense of fearlessness. Evidence of this was manifest in the 2023 and 2024 Third Culture Kids Collective Exhibition at the Frank Moran Gallery, QUT. The reframing of events through creative practice offered an opportunity to engage publicly and stimulate inspiring conversation with their community who could connect with the creative responses presented through comparable shared experiences.

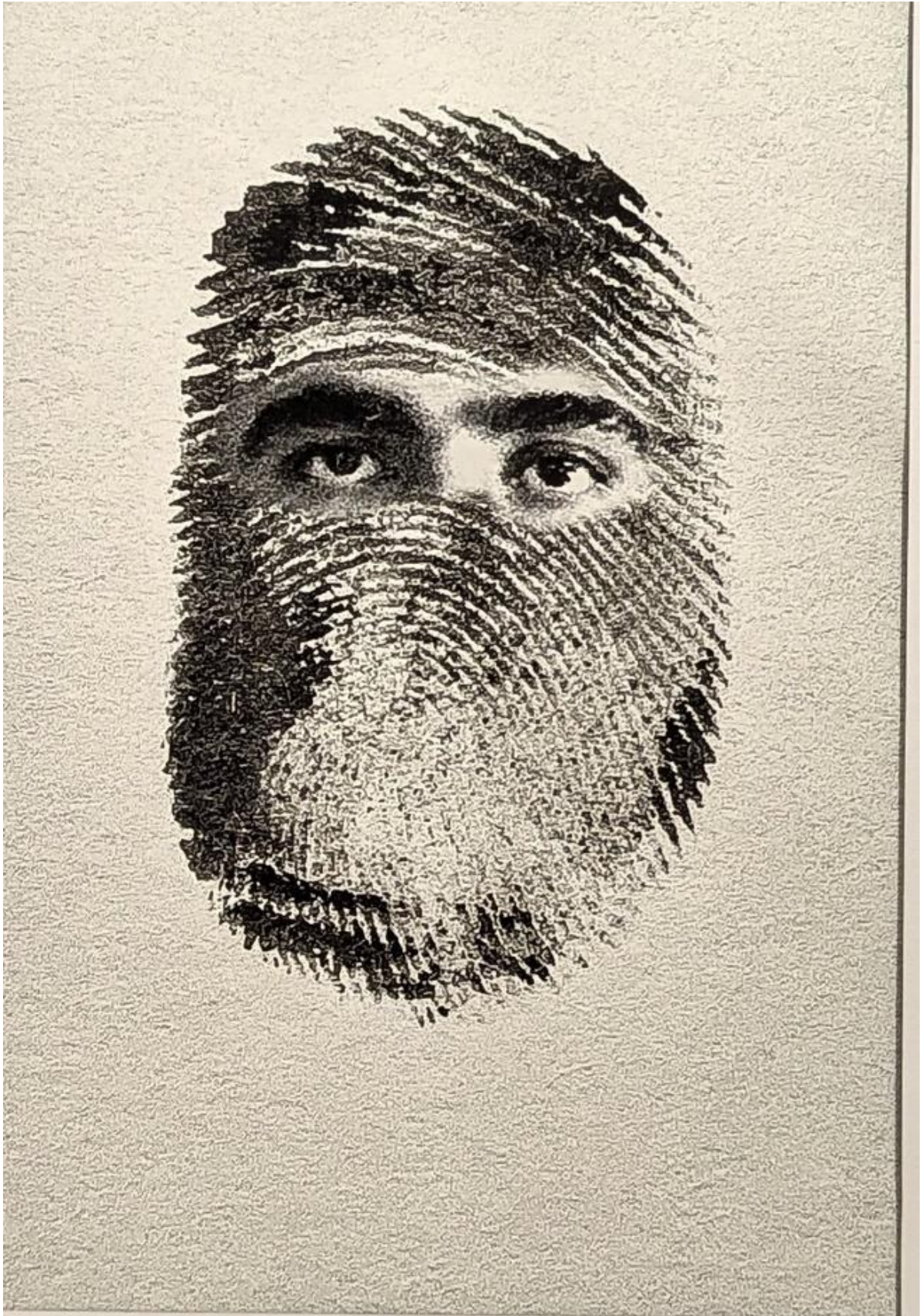


Figure 14: Participant 11C, final IB submission inspired by TCK creative workshop response, 2024.

A Transferable Pedagogical Model for Supporting TCK Wellbeing, Agency, and Inclusion

Drawing from years of practice-led research and teaching experience, I have developed a pedagogical model designed to support the wellbeing, agency, and inclusion of Third Culture Kids (TCKs). This model, though grounded in visual arts education, is adaptable for use by educators and artists across disciplines who seek to amplify the voices of transnational students navigating hybrid identities. The research reveals four distinct but interrelated stages that shape the pedagogical process: *creating a culture of care, raising consciousness, enabling storytelling and placemaking, and community sharing*.

1. Creating a Culture of Caring

The foundation of the model is the deliberate creation of a classroom culture rooted in care for all students, augmenting this with particular concern for the wellbeing of TCKs. The teaching artist sets the tone by acknowledging the emotional complexity of TCK experiences and positioning the learning space as a safe, non-judgmental environment. Through consistency, sensitivity, and genuine engagement, the educator becomes an empathetic witness, someone who listens with intention and validates student narratives without requiring disclosure (Papastergiadis in Bennett, 2005, p.10) This emotional groundwork is crucial for building trust and empowering students to participate fully in the learning process.

2. Raising Consciousness Through Embedded Frameworks

Once care is established, the second stage involves embedding consciousness-raising frameworks into pedagogical strategies and schemes of work. This includes acknowledging the unique socio-cultural position of TCKs and the challenges they face, such as rootlessness, language barriers, and complex identity negotiation. Educators are encouraged to design inquiries that reflect these lived realities and invite students to reflect on their own experiences. In doing so, classrooms become spaces where difference is not only accepted but celebrated as a strength. Importantly, these frameworks are not added onto curricula but woven into its conceptual and thematic fabric, fostering inclusive educational environments where TCKs enrich collective understanding.

3. Storytelling and Placemaking Through Image and Metaphor

In the third stage, students are invited to engage in storytelling and placemaking through dialogical exchange and creative activity. Using image and metaphor as tools, students externalise their narratives, transforming lived experience into visual form. This process offers a safe distance between self and subject, allowing them to discuss and analyse their artworks rather than their identities directly. Activities such as cultural iceberg drawings, biographical mapping, and symbolic object-making offer entry points for articulating complex feelings around migration, memory, and belonging. These artworks become affective carriers of meaning, accessible to both maker and viewer, fostering empathy and deeper understanding.

4. Sharing With Community

The final stage involves sharing these narratives and creative expressions with a wider audience. Exhibitions, performances, or presentations extend the learning experience into

the community, encouraging dialogue across cultural boundaries. This public engagement affirms the students' voices, strengthens peer relationships, and invites broader recognition of the challenges faced by TCKs. It also reinforces the concept of cultural caretaking, where students not only process their own stories, but act as cultural bridges within their learning environments and beyond.

This four-stage model offers a meaningful, adaptable framework for teaching artists and educators seeking to centre inclusion, empathy, and creative agency in their work with culturally mobile learners.



Figure 15: Detail of studio practice, Bicephalous motif, 2023.

Studio-based practice-led research

As an Irish-Australian multi-disciplinary teaching artist, I employ an auto-ethnographical studio-based approach to explore diasporic themes. Having led a globally mobile lifestyle, my practice-led research unpacks the dichotomy of existence in a challenging transnational third space. The longevity of my career in international arts education has uniquely positioned me as an empathetic witness to the TCK phenomenon as I've observed the high attrition rates that cause families to migrate, often for financial necessity causing painful relationship ruptures. Consequently, my current studio-based practice responds to the stories that have been entrusted to me, either formally in semi-structured interviews with focus group participants, through their curatorial rationales or incidentally in dialogical exchange in the classroom or studio. The narratives that emerge during these exchanges are

gleamed with interest and amazement; and subsequently captured either literally in written word or emotively through creative expression.

This process is reflexive to the fact that I am enriched as a teaching artist through dialogical and creative connections with my TCK students. The resulting artworks are characterised by richly layered visuals in the form of drawing, painting, ceramics and sculptural media. My responses are further informed by scholarly methods of research into the impact of colonization on the formation of both personal and collective memory and identity. Scrutinising hierarchical perceptions of dominant culture, I seek to invalidate timeworn perspectives whilst simultaneously making space for the navigation of new social, emotional and physical places. This practice-led research is underpinned by postcolonial theory, asserting that to meaningfully navigate our futures, we must better understand our present and re-historize our pasts (Bhabha, 2004).



Figure 16: Bicephalous Dialogues: Mapping Identity and M(y)igration, 2024.

My studio practice operates as a conduit for dialogical exchange, offering a visual and emotional response to the experiences of Third Culture Kids. Through layered symbolism and material processes, it engages with themes of displacement, hybridity, and transnational identity formation. These concerns materialise in my large-scale installation *Bicephalous Dialogues: Mapping Identity and M(y)igration*, a ten-metre mixed media scroll that verifies the emotional currents of growing up globally. Suspended from two elevated

points and cascading toward the viewer, the work evokes a topographical map, an abstracted, emotional geography of migration. Its undulating surface contains torn fragments of migration documents, ephemera, and handwritten texts from my own history, which are deconstructed and reconstructed in a ritualistic act of conscious forgetting and remembrance. This process of layering and weaving mimics the experience of navigating hybrid identities and resembles a *mappa mundi*, not as a literal world map, but a metaphorical space of cultural and emotional mapping (*Mappa Mundi*, 2024).

The aesthetic draws on the ornamental quality of a Persian carpet, acting as an archive of lived experience and cultural memory. Every crease and torn edge tells a story of border crossings, bureaucratic tensions, and deeply personal aspirations. Cascading ink flows mimic deltas and migration routes, guided by gravitational forces and unpredictability. Organic forms intersect with geometric structures, mirroring the arbitrary and structured aspects of transnational life. The work's largely monochrome palette is punctuated by vivid turquoise and azure, reminiscent of illuminated manuscripts, while delicate paper planes inscribed with Persian poetry chart lines of hope, resilience, and displacement. Central to the composition are *bicephalous beasts*, two-headed creatures derived from mythologies across cultures, here adapted as a personal symbol of dual vision and cultural multiplicity. These beasts gaze in opposing directions, eastward and westward, signifying the divergent, contemporaneous perspectives of those who straddle multiple cultures. They assert the necessity of transformative dialogue, for the brain in each head to recognise and communicate across internal and external divides. Their commanding scale asserts the visibility of stories often left untold, claiming space for cultural narratives that are routinely marginalised.



Fig 17: Bicephalous Dialogues: Mapping Identity and M(y)igration, detail , 2024.

The installation's embroidered red thread offers a further layer of metaphor. It traces the movement of paper planes and the emotional pull of migration. Some threads stretch taut

with tension; others freefall, abandoned and unresolved, mirroring the instability and impermanence experienced by many TCKs. These dichotomous visuals deliberately disrupt the mundane, asking viewers to pause, reorient, and reflect on the emotional pursuit of belonging. The installation thus becomes not only a visual spectacle but a meditative space of care for the students who inspired it, and for the memories that shaped its making. Created across multiple locations in Brisbane/Meenjin, the work also embodies a nomadic process of creation. Each site left its mark, contributing to a sense of *object memory* and placemaking. It reflects the non-linear rhythms of transnational lives, where identity is not fixed but constantly reconstructed in dialogue with place, time, and community. Ultimately, *Bicephalous Dialogues* is both a personal and collective response to the complexities of cultural intersection. It is a visual manifestation of care, of listening, witnessing, and amplifying the voices of TCKs. In translating their shared stories into artistic form, the work becomes a site for cathartic exploration, empathetic connection, and cultural understanding. Through this process, the studio becomes not just a space for making, but a platform for reimagining belonging in a globally mobile world.

Conclusion

This paper explored the question: *What pedagogical and artistic strategies can a teaching artist utilise to give voice to the experience of Third Culture Kids (TCKs), to promote empathy and an understanding of the complex factors that influence their transnational identity formation and wellbeing?* Drawing from practice-led research, a transferable four-stage pedagogical model emerged that fosters agency, inclusion, and belonging through creative practice. The model comprises of four stages: (1) establishing a culture of care; (2) embedding consciousness-raising frameworks that recognise the unique position of TCKs within educational settings; (3) facilitating storytelling and placemaking through image, metaphor, and dialogical exchange; and (4) sharing artworks and narratives with community. These stages offer a replicable strategy for educators and artists to support culturally mobile students in articulating their lived experiences.

Central to this approach is the teaching artist's role as an empathetic witness and catalyst—one who creates a safe space for students to explore complex identities. Visual arts practice proves particularly effective in this context, enabling TCKs to externalise emotionally nuanced narratives in ways that are safe, affective, and communicable. In reframing difference as strength, the classroom becomes a site of connection, transformation, and pluralistic learning. This research demonstrates that when artistic practice is intentionally aligned with pedagogical care, it not only enriches students' creative development but also promotes broader cultural understanding. Arts-based strategies thus hold significant potential in supporting the wellbeing and identity formation of TCKs, while modelling inclusive approaches relevant to diverse and globally mobile learning environments.

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Figure 16: Bicephalous Dialogues: Mapping Identity and M(y)igration, 2024.
Figure 17: Bicephalous Dialogues: Mapping Identity and M(y)igration, detail , 2024.

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