The Liminal Zone

Working Paper

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1. The beach (introduction)

Aims

The Liminal Zone project was a year-long mixed-methods research study funded by the Carnegie Trust for Scottish Universities. The project explored the seashore as a metaphor for the boundary between teaching and creative practice in order to investigate how creative arts teachers achieve synergies between their teaching and creative practice and how employers can support and empower them to do so. The study, carried out in 2021, aimed to understand how creative arts staff in universities and colleges balance their teaching responsibilities with their creative practice, and how teaching and art can be supported in order to nurture and complement one another.

Specific objectives were:
- To explore boundary crossing between creative and teaching practice by Scottish university and college arts staff.
- To develop the A/R/Tography community of practice at UHI and share learning and best practice between this specific community and other creative arts teachers in Scottish universities and colleges.
- To create a collective artistic response to the liminal zone as a metaphor for the boundary between creative practice and teaching.
- To improve understanding of and support for creative arts academics in Scottish universities and colleges.

Research questions

The primary research question was: How can universities support synergies between teaching and creative practice of arts staff? Subsidiary questions were:
- What is the extent and nature of boundary crossing between creative and teaching practice by arts staff?
- What insights can be generated from the inter-tidal zone as a metaphor for the experience of the creative/teaching interface?

Rationale

For creative arts academics, there is considerable interplay between teaching and creative activity, with each influencing the other. These effects can sometimes be negative, *e.g.* when teaching uses so much creative energy that creative practice is side-lined or even impossible, yet they can also be positive, *e.g.* when students are inspired by their teacher's creative work. With the increasing demand for success of creative practice University degree courses there is a growing need for staff who can sustain both teaching and

creative practice, but there has been little research into the experience of these 'hybrid' staff, the methods they use to maintain balance between the two areas of their role and the support University management can provide to them. The risks of creative burn-out of staff are high, as this causes loss of experience and expertise from Universities, so this is a significant issue. A sustainable situation is needed where creative practice and teaching nurture each other and boundary crossing is facilitated.

This research explored first person experience by a creative writer and a visual artist and second person experience of the wider landscape of practice among creative arts university and college staff, to generate a third person analysis relevant at the institutional level both at UHI and beyond (Coghlan & Brannick 2014:7).

The project was responding to a significant national expansion of the need for arts teaching in Scottish Universities. We are seeing rapid growth of the arts sector in Scotland, with the Highlands and Islands playing a significant part in this, and the Scottish Government's Culture Strategy is to support continued development of the creative arts, with Universities playing a key role. This will require sustainable growth with a balance being maintained to ensure that arts teaching and arts practice can flourish alongside each other. According to recent UK government data (DCMS 2018), the Creative Industries has seen a 30% increase in jobs since 2011 and in Scotland it employs more than 140,000 people. Scottish Universities must respond to this growth through teaching to prepare students for employment in the ever-changing contemporary creative sector, without jeopardising the wellbeing of their staff and enabling them to be active creative practitioners in their own right.

Many University creative arts teachers feel themselves to be inhabiting a liminal zone, as partial outsiders to academia, and this hybridity can limit their ability to nurture the next generation of creative talent. It is necessary to challenge what Lam (2019:17) calls the 'higher status' afforded to science and social science research in Universities compared to creative practice, addressing it through both individual identity work and institutional support. There are many issues, from contractual to well-being focused, from literary to curatorial, from pedagogical to managerial, which were raised by this project which have relevance to the academic community across Scotland and beyond, and not limited to the arts. The use of art in University institutional discourse of this sort is highly innovative and it was hoped that the artworks developed in the project would trigger genuinely novel conversations about the edge zones we inhabit.

2. The seabed (theory)

Landscapes of practice, boundary crossing

At the heart of this project is a commitment to the idea of learning happening through communities of practice, by which we mean groups of people who consciously come together with shared values or interests to take part in a joint enterprise of some sort. Communities of practice were first discussed from a theoretical perspective by Etienne Wenger, who has gone on to take a wider view of how such communities are embedded and navigate wider landscapes of practice, noticing that the interfaces between different practices are crucial. With colleagues, his research has shown that '[c]rossing boundaries, boundary encounters and boundary partnerships are necessary for the integration of a landscape of practice'(Wenger-Trayner *et al.* 2015). This project has therefore set about establishing boundary encounters at the edge zone between teaching and creative practice, using art as a way of creating 'boundary objects' to facilitate discussion about this interface.

As exemplars of boundary crossers, 'hybrid' academic-artist practitioners have been studied previously, in particular exploring how they manage the 'uneasy' boundary crossing between academia and art through 'identity work' (Lam 2019). We have therefore used the concepts of hybridity, boundary crossing and identity work to help us to elucidate the teaching/creative practice boundary in universities and colleges.

ARTography

Inquiry at the interface between Art, Research and Teaching, seeking to integrate and develop synergies between these roles, is known as A/R/Tography (Gouzouasis *et al.* 2008). The wider Arts-Based Research movement (of which A/R/Tography is a part) has demonstrated the power of creative and artistic practice as research inquiry (Leavy 2015). Research also shows the benefits to students when teachers bring their creative practice into their teaching role (Vanada 2017).

Poetic inquiry involves the use of creative writing (Harper 2008) and in particular the writing of poetry and 'poemish' writing (Lahman, Richard & Teman 2019), in various ways in research, including as a stimulus for research participants, using poetry as data, writing poetry as an analytical technique and as a dissemination tool (Faulkner 2019). In this case, we have used metaphor, a linguistic technique most commonly associated with poetry, as a method for stimulating participant interactions and thinking. We have also used poetry as an analytical and dissemination method, with a number of our participants articulating their response to the metaphor through poems, which are included in our end-of-project exhibition. Our participants have been encouraged to use whichever art form they feel most comfortable with to develop their thinking about the metaphor.

Metaphor

We have conceived the seashore as a metaphor for the teaching/creative practice interface due to the belief that metaphorical thinking has the power to change the world. Lakoff and Johnson expound 'the power of metaphor to create a reality, rather than simply to give us a way to conceptualise a preexisting reality' (2003:144). Use of metaphor is a key method in poetic inquiry as it provides a powerful way to articulate emotion and generate new insights (Gitlin & Peck 2008), (Barrett 2011), (Vincent 2018), (Fernández-Giménez, Jennings & Wilmer 2019). Beyond its use as a literary device, metaphor has been promulgated for other disciplines, including educational discourse (Cameron 2003). Wenger proposes collective exploration of metaphor as a method for facilitating social learning in the central of three stages: engagement, imagination and alignment (Wenger 1998). Leggo encourages researchers 'to linger in the spaces of binary oppositions in order to build bridges like metaphors from one vertex to another'(Leggo 2008).

Previous research suggests that insights about institutional support for teaching and creative practice are likely to be generated by exploring the liminal tidal zone metaphor. The liminal metaphor has been shown to be important in identity studies (Beech 2011). In a teaching context, Todd claims that 'exploring the existential dimensions of pedagogical relationships … requires a language of in-betweenness, or liminality'(Todd 2014). The tidal zone is already active as what Wenger-Trayner *et al* call a 'boundary object' in the landscape of practice (2015:82), being used as a metaphor to represent a fruitful ebbing and flowing dialogue between artists, teachers and researchers, for example at the 'Shoormal' creative arts conference in Shetland (Shetland Arts 2019). A tidal zone metaphor exploration seems therefore particularly relevant for building meaningful knowledge exchange between hybrid artist/teachers. It has particular resonance in our northern geography. We take inspiration from the artists, writers and anthropologists brought together by the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Academy, who explore the ocean through the lens of 'tidalectics', modelling their dialogues on the rhythms and patterns of the ocean rather than through traditional dialectical academic debate.

3. Tides (methodology)

This was a mixed methods action research project, involving a 'sequential mixed design' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011:25) of four action research cycles: an initial quantitative inquiry, followed by a participatory qualitative (appreciative and arts-based) inquiry, then triangulation or 'integration' of data (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004:22) through creative, collaborative work, and then discussion and promotion of the results. A similar combination of methods was used successfully to explore studio practice among teachers in Australia (Peterson *et al.* 2015). The action research paradigm is appropriate for a project such as this because it explicitly aims to empower participants through processes of change that they control (Boog 2003), described for this reason as a 'noble cause'(Winter, Richard & Badley 2007). It recognises that change within 'the swampy lowlands' of an organisation is inherently political and requires buy-in from and persuasion of many people with differing perspectives, values and priorities (Coghlan & Brannick 2014:4).

In order to elicit insights in a qualitative way, appreciative inquiry interviews were used because rather than framing the art/teaching interface as a problem to be solved, appreciative inquiry allows a focus on the sharing of best practice (Coghlan & Brannick 2014; Ye He & Oxendine 2019). An arts-based inquiry method developed and deepened the participation of practitioners in exploring the central metaphor and taking co-ownership of the project.

Quantitative survey

The first cycle of the research was a quantitative inquiry cycle using a survey to establish the extent to which Scottish university creative arts staff experience interaction between their creative and teaching work. This quantitative component of the research was intended to provide 'hard' comparative data that may be more persuasive for some audiences and provide a nationwide contextual backdrop for the qualitative results. The survey also provided a 'sampling frame' to identify staff outwith the current community of practice of the primary investigator with positive insights and experience to share about the art/teaching interface(Brannen 2005:178). The survey questions sought to determine:
- the proportion of teaching staff who carry out creative practice at work and/or in their own time;
- how many experience a positive effect of teaching on their creative practice, and vice versa;
- experience of the temporal balance between teaching and creative practice;
- measures staff find helpful in achieving positive interaction between the aspects of their work;
- metaphors and methods for conceptualising links between creative and teaching practice.

The survey evidence was analysed to provide a comparative overview of staff experience of the creative and teaching practice interface.

Another crucial use of the survey data was the selection from it of eight survey participants to take part in the second and subsequent action cycles, to undergo qualitative, in-depth interviews and to be included in the community of practice that we aimed to foster through the rest of the project and bring together for a creative retreat in Lochmaddy. Several criteria were taken into account in selecting people to invite for interview and further engagement.

1. Willingness to be interviewed.
2. Positive experience of balancing creative practice and teaching (because this is an appreciative inquiry and we are seeking cases that can tell us what works)
3. Interesting ideas about the liminal zone as a metaphor for the creative and teaching practice boundary (to give us a sense that the interviews will be fruitful)
4. Other thoughtful ideas and experiences shared in qualitative answers (to give us a sense that the interviews will generate a good range of recommendations)
5. Artform (to give us a range)
6. Institution (to give us several across the Highlands and Islands and other Scottish participants from different colleges and universities and to give us a diversity of genders etc)

The process we used for this selection was as follows.

1. Elimination of all who do not want to be interviewed.
2. Selection of all positive responses on criterion 2 and elimination of everyone else.
3. Selection of responses on criterions 3 and 4 that stood out as particularly thoughtful.
4. Identification of all of these people's artform and location.
5. Selection of four from UHI with a range of artforms and 4 from elsewhere in Scotland with a range of artforms and institutions.

This process was used to identify eight participants for the subsequent qualitative inquiry. Remarkably, all of those invited agreed to take part, and only one was subsequently unable to carry on due to other work and private commitments.

Qualitative interviews

The second action cycle used appreciative inquiry interviews in coastal locations, where possible, and online when not (mostly due to COVID-19). These explored the experience of creative arts teachers and the tidal zone metaphor.
1. What is your creative practice?
2. What positive effects are there from creative practice on teaching?
3. What positive effects are there from teaching to creative practice?
4. How is the shoreline like the interface between creative practice and teaching?
5. Is your teaching practice boundary tidal?
6. Are there activities that are both creative practice and teaching?
7. How might you respond to the metaphor in your art?
8. What practical steps help creative practice and teaching practice nurture each other?
9. How could our employers help support more?
10. What else should we have asked you?

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and summaries were fed back to all eight participants.

All of these participants were explicitly invited to take ownership of the ongoing research process as full and equal partners, forming a creative community of A/R/Tography practice.

All of the interview participants were invited to reflect creatively on the liminal zone metaphor in their own artform. The PI had hoped to carry out her reflection on the results so far, and invite others to do so too,

through a poetic inquiry at Inverewe Gardens, Wester Ross, where she was due to be poet in residence, but this was not possible due to the pandemic, so her reflection instead took place on her home croft, which is also in a coastal location and on a sailing boat.

Creative inquiry

In the third cycle, results of the quantitative and qualitative phases were triangulated collectively at a reflective retreat for the community of practice, in Lochmaddy, hosted by Taigh Chearsabhagh. We used insights and ideas developed in the qualitative phase to seek to explain and understand the quantitative results and explore dissonances that could indicate interesting complexities in the relationship between teaching and creative practice (Brannen 2005:180).

This was a weekend-long retreat involving participants from a range of educational organisations and artistic media, all of whom had responded positively to the idea of the tidal zone as a metaphor for the boundary between our teaching and creative practice. The retreat began and ended for most of us with the ferry journey to the Isle of North Uist. During the weekend the state of the tide was used as a device to shape our interactions, playing at the seashore at low tides and high tides. In the spirit of appreciative inquiry, whilst of course constraints, barriers and problems in achieving a balance between teaching and creative practice formed part of our dialogues, this report focuses on summarising positive lessons we can learn from each other.

The retreat had three main phases: introduction/participation, co-creation and action.

1. The introduction involved the participants discussing the summary of the findings from the online survey, which demonstrated the overwhelmingly positive impact of our creative practice on our teaching and on our wellbeing. We then focused on learning about each other's art practices and responses so far to the metaphor of the shoreline. We did this via a cut down version of Liz Lerman's critical response process (https://lizlerman.com/critical-response-process/).
2. The conversation around co-creation explored the overlaps and synergies between our work and how they could be brought together into a coherent exhibition.
3. The discussion about action was stimulated by a visit by Professor Keith MacIntyre for a session in which we discussed potential recommendations that the project could make to our institutions and senior managers, based on the experiences of the group. We also had a final action-oriented session on our final morning before departure in which we developed the outline of our recommended policy. We also made a plan to curate an exhibition of the artworks, drawing together the ideas we had discussed.

Institutional action

The final action research cycle involved various contexts for discussion of the project's findings. Early in the project a Reference Group of senior managers at UHI was convened to familiarise them with the project's aims and approach. This group was re-convened for discussion of the project findings. In addition a roundtable was held at The Edge conference in December 2021, involving members of the community of practice, plus students and senior managers of UHI, to discuss the project findings and in particular the model policy generated by the community of practice. The exhibition of creative responses to the metaphor was curated and shown at Moray School of Art, followed by a showing at Taigh Chearsabhagh, Lochmaddy. This was followed by disseminating results to all survey responders, to senior management at UHI and other participants' universities, and to Universities Scotland, sharing insights, seeking feedback and nurturing best practice.

4. Seaware (findings)

Tidal Methodology

The four-cycle action research methodology was highly effective, progressing from quantitative (survey), through qualitative (dialogue), onto creative (art) and finally institutional (impact) research. Each cycle was conceived of tidally – and this is just one way in which the tidal metaphor has permeated the project. The planning phase of each cycle was conceived of as the tide rising. Action is high tide: for the survey that was the action of getting people to join in the project; for the interviews it was encouraging our participants to really imagine their hybrid identity in terms of the seashore metaphor; for the creative phase it was designing and co-designing our artistic responses to the metaphor; and for the impact phase it was acting together to raise awareness of our findings.
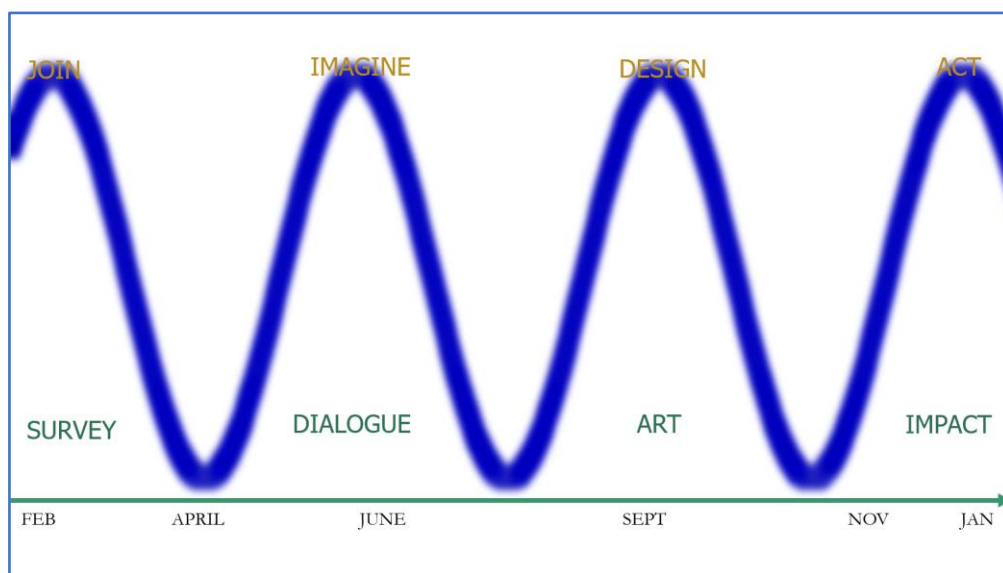
These action phases have been the times when the project has involved most energy and visibility. Following them there have been quieter times, conceived of as the ebbing and low tides, for monitoring and reflecting before embarking on the next action research cycle.

The principal investigator and research assistant are both keen coastal swimmers, and we organized meeting times not to interfere with the best times for a dip, which normally meant we were meeting at Cromarty low tide or thereabouts.

The retreat in Lochmaddy was explicitly planned around the tidal metaphor as noted in the methodology section. This was highly successful and reflected well the way energy and attention ebb and flow in meetings.

This report is also structured to reflect the tidal metaphor: the introductory and contextual information is seen as the beach, where we first encounter the sea; the theoretical basis of the research is conceived of as the sea bed underpinning the liminal zone; the methodology reflects the pulsing motion of the tides; our findings are like the useful organic seaweed matter washed up on the shore, commonly known as seaware, which can be collected and used to nourish us; and finally our conclusions and future directions are a passage plan out to future horizons.

The process of nurturing the Liminal Zone community of practice has been successful, with seven out of eight of the original interviewees remaining committed members of the group. The one person who was unable to join us in Lochmaddy was a musician, and serendipitously, a musician-academic resident in North Uist was able to join the retreat and has fitted in brilliantly with the community, taking a full role from that

point on including in our exhibition. The project was designed, based on past experience with communities of practice, in line with Wenger's theory of social learning and co-design, which involves three vital components: engagement, imagination and alignment (1998: 237). The interview phase ensured a gentle, trust-building engagement. Our creative retreat was an opportunity to nurture our collective imaginations. The nature of our joint output was left open in order to allow alignment to emerge in a form that everyone felt comfortable with.

The resulting outcome is an exhibition and a policy. We anticipated and hoped for the first but the second was a surprise. The exhibition has been greatly enhanced through the fact that the group has real ownership of it as exemplified by the fact that two colleagues are hosting it in their own institutions, and this means that it can take a form and gain an audience far greater than it would have been had the PI and RA retained control over it, although the RA deserves massive credit for bringing it together.

The exhibition consists of painting, sculpture, collage, photography, video, sound, concrete and experimental poetry and music and includes our policy hand-written on an unfurled scroll and 'spoof' versions of the policy masquerading as artwork. This exhibition therefore explores, through many different media, how our community feels about our hybrid identities, using the seashore metaphor to show and challenge that reality. In presenting our excitement and frustrations so vividly, the exhibition serves as a powerful 'boundary object' pointing out the importance of careful nurturing of the interface between teaching and art in our academic institutional landscape of practice

Key quantitative data

The quantitative survey provided us with some significant data points which the subsequent phases of the project have explored. We had 60 responses to the survey, mostly from Scotland, from artists involved in higher or tertiary education. The data provides a stark picture of the marginalization of staff's creative practice by educational institutions despite its deep importance to their teaching work.

- 65% are on part-time contracts, though 57% actually do their job full time

- 91% feel creative practice has a positive impact on teaching

- 79% feel teaching has a positive impact on creative practice

- 57% spend =<1day /week on their creative practice, 96% want more time

- Only 31% feel supported by their employers in their creative practice

The Liminal Zone Metaphor

The seashore metaphor for the boundary between teaching and creative practice can be interpreted in two ways: teaching as shore and art as sea; or teaching as sea and art as teaching. Our participants are roughly equally divided in how they conceive the interface. These two interpretations, although inconsistent, are nonetheless what Lakoff and Johnson term 'coherent' in that they 'share a major common entailment' (2003: 44), in this case, the rhythmic pulsing and interaction at the tidal zone. Many participants did not see their practices as either one or the other (land or sea) but saw the two practices as intermingled or connected as described by one lecturer as "form, flux, threshold, edge." The metaphor helped participants to use their imaginations to explore their feelings about their creative and teaching practices and where they saw themselves in relation to them.

The use of the metaphor has shown itself to be a powerful methodological tool to encourage expression and to explore nuances and feelings of our participants. Offering our survey participants the suggestion to think in terms of the seashore metaphor triggered some strong emotional responses, with descriptions such as 'eroding my shore', 'crashing waves', 'a storm', ' drowning', 'clawing', 'engulfing', 'overwhelmed', or 'grounded', 'washed up', 'at peace', 'safe haven' (see Figure 1). The wide variety of ways that they used

their imaginations to interpret the metaphor results in a rich picture of how these two aspects of people's lived experiences synergise and overlap.

Figure 1: *Commonly used words when describing the seashore as a metaphor for the interface between teaching and creative practice.*

Thinking in a metaphorical way is creative and fun and it encourages thoughtful and expressive responses, enabling us to gain a depth of understanding of why our respondents have responded in the ways they have. The shared use of a common metaphor helps to integrate these responses, giving us some traction for comparing them.

Some ways in which participants used the metaphor in creative and insightful ways include the following.

- *Craft.* The skilled use of materials and techniques that is involved in all artforms translates in metaphorical terms into a physical boat that can be used to explore a conceptual and creative ocean. Teaching can be thought of as onshore activity, helping learner artists to build their own craft for their own marine/artistic exploits and purposes. Our institutions are like harbours, with safe berthing for a wide range of crafts, welcoming visiting vessels and helping passengers on their way to all manner of destinations.
- *Immersion.* The sea as a creative element into which we dive, in which we swim, and the corresponding idea of art as something that is fully immersive, whilst also being playful or competitive.
- *Depth and distance.* Many people responded to ideas of wishing for distant horizons or being restricted to frustrating shallows. Others talked negatively about being out of their depth or at risk of drowning.
- *Beachcombing.* We find treasure on beaches, as we do with art – the process of strolling a beach, with an eye out for a serendipitous form or discovery is related to the creative process by several of our participants.
- *'Waves, tides, equinoxes, ripples'* (MacLaverty 1998). The sea is in perpetual, rhythmic motion, and those rhythms and pulses are a powerful metaphor for both our creative and teaching practices. These elements of time are discussed further below.

- *Stormy weather.* Many participants made references to the weather and in particular to unpredictable and uncontrollably turbulent, stormy or even tempestuous conditions, as a metaphor either for the artistic process or to the institutional context of their teaching role. There are references to climate change here pointing to a sense of a building crisis.

Overall, the liminal zone metaphor for the teaching/creative practice interface is rich and deep, enabling us to see the complex and varied ways creative arts teachers experience their hybrid identities.

Boundary crossing

The study highlights the extent and nature of the boundary crossing between creative and teaching practice by university arts staff. It makes clear the overwhelmingly positive impact of creative practice on teaching and the benefit that our institutions and students are therefore gaining from this work, which is largely going on unpaid in teachers' own time. It is not surprising to find that the boundary zone between these two areas of practice is fertile territory – the theory of landscapes of practice would predict this (Wenger-Trayner et al 2015) – but this survey has made clear the friction between the two practices. In addition our responders have helped to generate a useful body of understanding and advice about how to switch between their teaching and artist roles.

All participants expressed a genuine love of their art practice, and though some felt that their creative practice had been sacrificed in favour of time spent on teaching, more than 90% felt that being an active creative practitioner was a vital, prominent and motivating factor in teaching practice. Benefits cited include: confidence both for them as teachers and for their students; credibility; authoritative and active knowledge; the ability to illustrate points not only explain them – to show as well as tell; the ability to keep teaching fresh and up to date with new ideas and experience to share; familiarity with the world of creative employment; and professionalism. Nobody surveyed found that being a practicing artist had a negative impact on their creative arts teaching.

It is interesting that most participants (79%) said that teaching also had a positive effect on their creative practice, some of the reasons being that it provided them with inspiration and continuous growth through challenges, learning opportunities and information that they may not have encountered otherwise. However, most participants struggled to indicate how they achieved these positive links and those that did used their own creative practice to synergise with their teaching practice.

In successfully transitioning between the two practices, many used time management strategies, or routines or rituals to switch over from one to the other, whilst others intertwined their practices and didn't see them as separate.

Time

Importantly, our research suggests that many creative teachers are in a crisis of imbalance between their work and creative life and there is a need for change in order to help staff to integrate their practices and transition between them. The findings demonstrated that 96% of respondents want to spend more time on their creative practice with 57% spending a day or less per week on it and only 7% achieving better than half-and-half balance with teaching. Many staff felt overwhelmed by the demands of teaching: the workload, administration and being in front of a computer for long periods. The results demonstrate that staff regularly worked more than the hours they were employed for. The severity of this crisis is well illustrated by the responses to the liminal zone metaphor.

When asked to think of the seashore as a metaphor for the edge between academic and artistic practice most of the participants described how they imagined the teaching practice as an overwhelming sea, eroding the shore of their practice, revealing how many felt that their creative practice was compromised or engulfed though the demands and time taken up by teaching. The metaphor of the seashore demonstrated that many

creative staff felt like they were drowning in teaching responsibilities and often struggled to find time to get back to their creative homeland.

The metaphor was also used the other way, by people who felt stranded on a teaching shore and desperate to get back to the fluidity of their creative ocean. The many imaginative and descriptive responses to the seashore as a metaphor for the boundary between practices generated insights that highlight the rift and separation between the two roles as well as highlighting when they intermingle.

The metaphor also helped staff to reflect on the rhythms of teaching and creativity and to identify how many of them use strategies such as daily (tidal) patterns of time to maintain an active practice. There was an emphasis throughout the survey on the importance of having time to spend on their art practice and time to adjust to the different rhythms required for creative or teaching work. Even participants who achieved a better balance or merging of their practices still wanted to spend more time on their creative practice. Most participants did not achieve a good balance between time spent teaching and on creative practice.

Artistic practice has a rhythm which is interpreted on an individual basis for each creative practitioner. It swells in one direction or the other to the artists own tide, sometimes alone and other times as common ground. For some people the rhythm of practice is daily while for others it is seasonal or annual.

Institutional support and protection

One of the most worrying findings of our survey is that only 31% of creative arts staff felt that their employers supported their creative practice. They recognised the positive effects of being part of an academic institution and nearly 80% felt that their teaching benefited their creative practice. However, they felt that their creative practice was not given enough recognition in relation to its positive effect on teaching and research and they were not given enough time, space, or encouragement to allow all these aspects to flourish.

Most participants felt that research was a crucial element of teaching and creative practice and saw them as being intrinsically linked. The responses showed that staff acknowledge the strong connection between creative practice, teaching and research, so managers who view linkages between these practices as important should find ways to support them, for example by encouraging A/r/tography methods. Staff's creative practice could be a valuable resource for universities, stimulating the evolution of research activity and contributing to the Research Excellent Framework (REF) submissions.

Questions about stress were not asked of the participants in the survey but comments made clear that many creative staff were stressed, overworked, or frustrated due to feeling unable to find the time to work on their creative practice. This is consistent with other research: Ferguson (2019) discusses in her commentary about the levels of stress incurred by UK academics being at an all-time high and Fazakerley (2019) notes that 40% are thinking of leaving. Our study reveals that there is a crisis in the balance between teaching and creative practices and structures are needed to reduce the teaching workload.

Overall, the results of this study confirmed that most staff don't feel that their employers understand their creative practice and the impact that too much teaching is having on them and their students. Teachers require support from management to achieve better balance between teaching and creative practice. The survey reveals how employers who are aware of how crucial creative practice is for creative teaching can explore ways of supporting their staff, for example:

- by allocating time for creative practice as research and professional development;
- supporting peer groups;
- offering physical studio space and equipment;
- encouraging use of and resourcing libraries;
- taking an active interest in and supporting creative work through marketing and publicity;
- hosting staff exhibitions or other showcases;

- funding study or research; and
- above all, ensuring recognition of the vital role and positive effect of art practice on teaching activity.

In order to articulate more clearly the way that universities and colleges can support creative arts teaching staff, we collectively wrote an institutional policy (see Box 1). This is a model that draws together all of the best practice identified by our participants. The policy went through several drafts before a consensus was reached in the community of practice about its contents. It was hung in the Liminal Zone exhibition as an artwork and disseminated to senior managers and creative arts teachers to stimulate discussion. The project's reference group held a dialogue about its content, and it was the subject of a Roundtable at the Edge Conference in December 2022.

These dialogues revealed a disconnect between the aspirations of senior managers for research excellence and the implementation of working conditions that could deliver this in the arts sector. The project's reference group of senior UHI managers has expressed firm commitment to the importance of creative practice as research and the need to support creative arts staff in balancing their teaching commitments with sufficient time to practice their art. This is demonstrated through strong support for the institutional policy we have proposed. Professor Donna Heddle, acting Vice-Principal for Research at UHI said, 'I fully endorse this policy'. In the Roundtable that we convened at [The Edge conference in December 2022](#) Professor Chris O'Neil, Principal of Inverness College, said, 'even though I'm a manager and I know that you're after time away from the classroom and teaching and so on, I completely support what you're doing and the way that you're thinking', and 'I absolutely agree and support everything that you have put into that document to date but what I would say is that it does not go far enough'. He went on to outline definitions of creative practice research excellence used in the REF. It is clear from that there is genuine openness to the importance of developing creative practice research and recognizing the value of the art practices of creative arts staff.

However, there is a serious mismatch between this aspiration and the reality of the creative arts research environment, staff's contractual terms and capacity to pursue their art, both in UHI and in other universities and colleges in Scotland. At Inverness College, the principal may agree with the policy we propose, yet there are creative arts academic staff who have research grants or other funding from multiple sources, were entered into the 2021 REF, supervise PhD and MRes students, yet have contracts that make no reference to research at all. In some cases, some hours may be allocated by line managers to do some research activities, though these do not meet the required minimum of 0.2 FTE. We have no rights to sabbaticals. One respondent reports having been allocated funding for a sabbatical but their manager failed to reduce their teaching responsibilities to enable them to have the time to use for their project.

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Box 1: University/College Policy on Creative Arts

Recognising that many creative arts staff are hired and valued because of both their teaching skills and their creative practice, [this organisation] aims to nurture staff's creative practice so that it can continue to add benefit to the student experience, contribute to research outputs, maintain relevance to sectorial developments and aid in well-being.

This is underpinned by the following value statements:

1. We value the multiple benefits that creative practice brings to teaching, as research, on institutional reputation and on staff well-being.
2. Our managers recognise that their creative arts staff are creative practitioners and support that creative practice.
3. Creative arts methods need not only be limited to arts subjects and the use of creative arts methodologies and practices in sciences, social sciences, medicine and other disciplines is encouraged along with interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary collaborations.
4. We recognise creative practice as research, contributing to knowledge and a positive research environment and producing outputs, impact and public engagement that can be entered into the Research Excellence Framework.
5. We encourage creative staff to link their creative practice with their teaching.

For this to be effective, [this organisation] will provide mechanisms to support a good balance between teaching, administration and creative practice by adopting the following measures:

1. Creative staff contract time should be 0.4 full time equivalent (FTE) for teaching, 0.4 FTE for creative practice research and 0.2 FTE for administration (and pro-rata for part time staff). At least one day per week (0.2 FTE) for creative practice is essential.
2. Time off in lieu (TOIL) is guaranteed for when teaching duties go beyond contracted hours.
3. Sabbaticals are available to provide concerted time to spend on creative activity. Good practice is one sabbatical every six semesters.
4. Arrangements can be made for 'soft time', 'porous or fluid time' where creative activity can flow into teaching practice and collaborations can emerge. Use of unconventional spaces, including outdoors, are encouraged, and activities involving motion or exercise, such as walking, cycling or swimming meetings.
5. We will support staff by making financial and in-kind resources available for creative work, including studio space, exhibitions, publications, online showcases *etc*.
6. We will enhance student experience through active engagement with the creative practice of arts staff.

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5. Passage planning (conclusions and future directions)

This research has demonstrated immense creative power from the use of the Liminal Zone metaphor as a rhythmic, living source of energy and way of exploring the potential of the boundary between art and teaching. We have used the metaphor in many ways: as a pulsing framework for meeting planning, as a source of imaginative insights, as a stimulus for art and as a methodological model and the results are inspiring on many levels.

The tide is an effective way of conceiving of action research cycles, from the rising tide of planning through high tides of action, monitoring on the ebb and reflecting at the tidal low. The four action research cycles, which have moved from quantitative and qualitative inquiries to creative and institutional actions, have

enabled us to build an increasingly rich engagement with the metaphor as the project has developed, and left us with a legacy of empowering and impactful material: an art exhibition that will tour and inspire in various educational settings and a practical model policy for educational institutions to better support their creative arts staff.

Our research has shown that many college and university creative teachers are in a crisis of imbalance between their work and creative life and there is an urgent need for change. In failing to allocate sufficient paid time for their staff to practice their art, universities and colleges are missing an opportunity to support the rich synergies between the teaching and creative practice. Management aspirations for research excellent need to be matched by implementation of policies that create staff capacity to achieve it, with time being the key resource in short supply. This project has just begun what must be an ongoing process to enhance the support for creative arts staff, which will require monitoring and further stimulation.

This research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. The difficulty in achieving a balance between teaching and creative practice has been exacerbated by the pandemic and lessons can be learned about the links between teaching and creative practice in light of the pandemic, which demonstrated how people were affected in different ways depending on their individual situations. The results differed depending on the individual's creative practice, for instance, although social practice artists could not engage with others during lockdown, some illustrators or writers could find inspiration in it or benefit from solitude to work. Some were able to spend more time on their art due to gaining time from not commuting or the flexibility offered through working at home. Further study could reveal more about the ways that management can help creative staff to adapt to online and hybrid working in ways sensitive to the range of individual circumstances and artistic practices involved. Administrative duties and teaching responsibilities are commonly cited as reasons that teachers feel over worked and struggle to do creative practice and respondents indicated that these demands were a lot higher throughout the pandemic, so creative practice generally got even less time than usual. The cumulative effects on teachers' wellbeing of having less time for creative practice and how it has affected the quality of teaching merits further investigation.

Our participants felt strongly that their creative practice was something that students valued highly. Our survey did not invite students to respond, so this question was beyond the scope of the project, but it would be of great interest to collect the opinions of students to explore this area further.

Another key question is whether the boundary between teaching and the practice of our art is similar to that between teaching and disciplinary practice in other fields. It would be fascinating to explore the liminal zone metaphor with practicing scientists, for example.

The seashore as a boundary metaphor can also be used to explore other interfaces in our lives: between work and play, art and science, nature and culture, past and future, life and death. There is rich creative potential here for this metaphor to help us to understand and re-invent our approach to many such limiting dichotomies, 'staying with the trouble', firing our 'response-ability' and complexifying over-simplistic binaries (Haraway 2016:116)

The interface between art and teaching is porous, soft and shifting, just like the tidal zone. In this study the liminal zone has been revealed as an important creative area where education and artistic wisdom may reside and mix and influence each other. It is a shared space, a place of reciprocity and gratitude, a place for play, a place to be carefully stewarded.

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Appendix 1

Survey questions

Title of the study: The Liminal Zone

1. Which art form(s) do you carry out creative practice in? (writing; visual; music; theatre; other) Please describe in your own words your art form(s).
2. Where does your creative practice take place?
3. Does your workplace provide you with the following support? Studio, digital facilities, library, exhibition space, other, none?
4. Do you have time allocated to pursue your creative practice as part of your paid work? (Yes/no)
5. Do you carry out your creative practice in your own time outside of your job? (Yes/no)
6. Does your work involve: teaching; research; administration; technical support; other.
7. Would you like to spend more time teaching? Both? Neither?
8. Would you like to spend more time on your creative practice? Both? Neither?
9. Would you describe your teaching activity as having a positive effect on your creative practice? (Yes/no/other) can you give an example
10. Would you describe your creative practice as having a positive effect on your teaching activity? (Yes/no/other) can you give an example
11. Does your employer support you to achieve a positive interaction between teaching and creative practice? (Yes/no) if you selected other, please specify.
12. Are there any positive lessons about the links between teaching and creative practice that can be learned from your experience of the COVID-19 pandemic?
13. What helps you to achieve positive links between teaching and creative practice in your life?
14. How do you transition between teaching and your creative practice?
15. What connection do you see between creative practice, teaching and research?
16. Do you use any metaphors for thinking about teaching and creative practice, if so, what are they?
17. Do you find the idea of the seashore as an interesting metaphor for the edge between academic and artistic work? (e.g., teaching as land and art as an ocean or teaching as the sea and creative practice as shore) Can you describe how you imagine this in relation to your own experience?
18. Which Higher Education institution(s) do you work for?
19. If you work for UHI please select form the following
20. If other, please select
21. What is your job title?
22. Do you have a permanent contract of employment?
23. What level of students do you teach? (Further education; undergraduate; post-graduate)
24. What proportion of full-time equivalent work are you contracted to do?
25. What proportion of full-time equivalent work do you actually do?
26. What proportion of full-time equivalent work do you spend on your creative practice?
27. Would you be willing to be interviewed on this topic? (Yes/no)
28. Would you like to see the results of the survey?