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How intergenerational knowledge shapes conceptions of art practice and teaching

Anna-Maria Bribiesca

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education
The University of Auckland, New Zealand
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ABSTRACT / ABSTRACTO

This auto-ethnographical study focused on the importance of family being at the centre of my 'conversaciones con mi sangre – conversations with my blood.' My aim was to explore through conversations with my immediate family, in particular my father José María Parra y Bribiesca, how intergenerational knowledge about art and art making has been, and continues to be, transmitted by my Mexican / English / Irish ancestors. I wanted to understand more deeply, and critically reflect on how art is created, what meanings art works carry, and how those meanings are taught and learned within familial intergenerational situations.

The design of this study was informed by a qualitative interpretative paradigm. It was underpinned by literature on the theoretical and methodological framework of auto-ethnography, a form of self-reflection that explores a researcher’s personal experiences and connects their autobiographical story to wider cultural, political and social meanings. Although my family and cultural heritage were the main foci, it was important to explore how others pass on knowledge. I perceived that approaches to indigenous research methodology, and the passing on of knowledge by Mexica (indigenous Mexican people) and Māori in Aotearoa-New Zealand, intersected with auto-ethnography and was a means to empower not only myself but other indigenous peoples. As a researcher, also with English / Irish ancestry, I was also interested in how non-indigenous people pass on intergenerational knowledge.

The research design challenged my ability to unite and integrate the roles of artist, teacher and participant-researcher through the theoretical and methodological perspectives of a/r/tography, which focuses on the concept of ‘living enquiry’ via the ‘self’ and others to explore issues. From the perspective of being an artist, I examined what types of intergenerational knowledge have informed my conceptions and practices of art making. From the perspective of being an art teacher, I explored how intergenerational knowledge could be transmitted through my pedagogical practices in art to support students, including indigenous students, in a secondary school context. From the perspective of being a participant-researcher, I seized the opportunity to become more informed about myself as an artist, teacher, researcher, and person as opposed to someone who reports findings about others.

The findings are presented through the conversaciones with my family. They are illustrated through documented sources and the lens of personal ephemera gathered – the ‘true little incidents’ between me, art, my parents and my children - that serve not as bricolage but as emblems, signs and appeals. Most importantly, they are expressed through the enactment of the collaborative art making conversaciones with my father, José María Parra y Bribiesca.
DEDICATION / DEDICACIÓN

This Master of Education thesis is dedicated to the spirit of Lois Marie Quaid Ashton Bribiesca and to the soul and vision of José María Parra y Bribiesca, my brothers José Maria Bribiesca, Riccardo Stancion Bribiesca, my sister Sofia Bribiesca, and my beautiful children Angélita, Maxito and Sofia.

Viva la Vida!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / EXPRESIONES DE GRATITUD

A liability of undertaking research is that the researcher is dependent on favours from others, namely the researched. Quite a few courtesies have to be asked of the participants, who respond with generosity and goodwill even though they possibly have absolutely nothing to gain from their endeavour. In the context of this research my participants (mi familia – my family) have everything to gain from their input. It is not only an academic inquiry focused around the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, but also an archive of an important part of mi familia, and is particularly pertinent to the offspring of the Ashton Bribiesca familia. To add to culpability, another responsibility of investigating an inquiry that involves the writer’s family is the accountability to one’s family members. This is because la familia is ‘blood’ and therefore the biggest critic.

I would like to acknowledge the people who have helped guide, contribute and support my nine years of academia. I am humbled by the continued mentoring and advice over this time and the contribution this has made to my journey in education and in my life. The opportunity to observe, experience and discuss art making and visual culture with the participants has bettered my understanding of being an artist, researcher and also a visual arts educator.

First and foremost I would like to thank my parents for always encouraging me to follow a path of lifelong learning in art. They as well as I (now know) that this has contributed significantly to the growth and maturity of my character. Their words of wisdom (and sometimes their silence) have always been and continue to be inspiring and motivating, leaving me with a constant reminder to be humble, motivated, and with a strong desire to always do better for myself, my family and others.

I thank my father José Maria Parra y Bribiesca, who over the last two years has given me unconditional support with this research. He assisted me in writing what I knew deep down, but needed confirming. His courtesy, generosity of time, patience and good humour astounded me and taught me the virtue of these values more than ever. I repeatedly and unpredictably requested and required information as the auto-ethnographer I became. This research is also his, part of his soul and vision. I would not have finished it to the pleasing point reached without his cherished contribution.

I also thank my mother Lois Marie Ashton Bribiesca who passed away at the beginning of this research. She was ever-present and this thesis is dedicated to her spirit. To be able to remember her teachings and have my father recall them was very emotional for us both. It is comforting to know that I discussed this inquiry with her and she approved of it before her passing. She was very pleased that I was undertaking this academic approach to writing about our family and how I could implement it into my new profession, teaching art. This research is also hers and I would not have completed it to my satisfaction without her memorable input. She would have wanted me to ‘make’ it this way.

I also thank my children, Angélita, Maxito and Sofia who, from the beginning of my academic journey in 2010, complained about how much time I spent hovering over a computer or studying and neglecting them. After years of ignoring their pleas for attention they became accepting and accustomed to what I was doing. I believe that in the future they will look back on this time, read this written and visual narrative and appreciate the importance of their mother documenting their transmission of intergenerational knowledge. As with my two parents – this research belongs to my children and without their thoughts and words I could not have achieved this goal.
Finding the ‘right’ supervisors was very important to me. One had to be someone I could trust to support me on my academic journey, understand my ‘arty’ stance, and also be an artist. This was Associate Professor Dr Jill Smith, School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland. She had prepared me to be a secondary school art teacher in 2011, was my lecturer in subsequent visual arts/arts postgraduate courses, and inspired me to embark on a Master of Education. Jill took me under her wing, encouraged me to express what I needed to convey with panache. Her sense of humour and ‘push’ made me want to finish when times seemed hard. I have grown professionally, but would not have done so without the grace of this Associate Professor. I am forever truly grateful for Jill’s knowledge, direction, expertise, critiques, professionalism and call beyond duty, that she shared with me to conceptualize this research project. Her commitment and constructive feedback helped me stay focused, motivated and committed to conducting valid research for the betterment of myself and other visual arts educators and students. I am truly honoured to have studied under this ‘master’. I thank Jill for shaping my understanding of being a visual arts educator and opening up my mind to the possibilities of innovative research and its contribution to professional practice.

My other supervisor needed to be someone who understood that I wanted to express myself through my indigeneity. I am very thankful that Dr Mera Lee Penehira, Lecturer/Director Postgraduate Studies, Te Puna Wānanga, Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland was able to contribute with such invaluable suggestions. Her critical opinions and experience in this type of scholarly (indigenous) writing were crucial to components of this research which are very close to my heart. Mera responded to my requests and gave me resources invaluable to an outsider (as I claimed myself to be indigenous, but not to Aotearoa-New Zealand). Her insight and advice supported me while writing this thesis through contributing largely to my understanding of Kaupapa Māori – an indigenous research theory pertinent to tangata whenua (original inhabitants) of Aotearoa-New Zealand.

I would also like to thank my friends who have conversed, assisted, given information or encouraged me along the way - Wayne Pihema (for his forever attentive help at the beginning of this project and invaluable support over many years), Kiri Turketo, Marie McCarthy, Barbs McLoughlin, Trude Karaka, Te Kawehau Hoskins Smith, Sandy Johnson, Ana Maria Ter Huurne, Mariela Wagner, Charlotte Graham, Tia McIver, Delina Tahitahi, Debez Ross, and Huia Hanlen.

I am also grateful to have had the judicious assistance of Miranda Playfair, a photographer whom I have admired since 1991, and one who I could trust to make me ‘look good’ graciously when captured with my father while making jewellery together! Her unobtrusive documentary style added to the imagery of this thesis and her curious sense of humour made me feel comfortable about being photographed. I would also like to extend this gratitude to all the other photographers for their contributions of either taking photos or gifting them for the research. These images enriched the data.

Finally, I wish to thank The University of Auckland, the Ministry of Education (the Secondary Teacher’s Study Award Grant), the Board of Trustees at Manurewa High School, the (past) principal of Manurewa High School Salvatore Gargiulo, and my colleagues for believing in my project from beginning to end.
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Chapter 1: OPENING THE CONVERSATION

Preface

“El mejor maestro es el tiempo. Incluso sin que hagas preguntas te da las mejores: The best teacher is the time. Even without you doing questions gives you the best answers.”

Mexicano diciendo (Mexican saying)

1.1 Locating myself in the research

![Figure 1. Ashton Bribiesca family tree](image)

This Ashton Bribiesca family tree crosses the generations from my grandparents to me and my children. My design is inspired by the Mexican árbol de la vida (tree of life).
1.2 Who am I?

I am Anna-Maria Bribiesca. I am 53 years old and am the second child and the first daughter born to artist parents, José María Parra y Bribiesca and Lois Marie Ashton Bribiesca. I was born in Aotearoa-New Zealand. I am also a mother to Angéla (Angélita), Maximiliano (Maxito), and Sofia. I practice art making in multiple disciplines and I teach art at a secondary school in Aotearoa-New Zealand. I am a postgraduate student in the Master of Education course at the University of Auckland, for which I have researched a topic close to my heart. My thesis, titled *Conversaciones con mi sangre / Conversations with my blood: How intergenerational knowledge shapes conceptions of art practice and teaching*, speaks of my relationships with my family and how knowledge has been passed between us.
My stance – How do I stand as an indigenous person?

The United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights (2007) pronounces that the definition of Indigenous Peoples is the role of Indigenous Peoples themselves to determine both individually and collectively. A common definition of an indigenous person is that indigenous people are the descendants of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. Being categorized indigenous is not a label I choose – it is a word I use to position myself in the research.

I feel I am indigenous. I feel I am a Mexicano person, a ‘mestizo’ (one of mixed cultural heritage and descent) on my father’s side. I am also of Irish and English cultural heritage on my mother’s side. Although I have lived in Aotearoa–New Zealand all my life this has not shifted my thoughts of my place of longing or origin. I have always strongly identified with Mexico. This has made me more determined to declare my ethnicity. Even though I claim to be an indigenous person, I perhaps may not be considered either an indigenous Mexican or a non-indigenous person with Mexican / Irish / English ancestors. And at the same time, although I am neither the one nor the other, I am both the one and the other. I have included these words where I was able to use the word ‘I’, and have positioned myself in the research.

Mexicano – What is it to be Mexicano?

I describe myself as being Mexicano and, in that self-description, I am what the colonizers would call indigenous / native / original / aboriginal / home-grown or local. As part of a collective of people, I call myself Mexicano. As an individual I call myself Mexicano. Being labelled Mexicano is what I choose to call myself. If I am to simply express in my own words that I am a mestizo – some would not understand. A word such as ‘indigenous’ is for the benefit of non-indigenous people who do not understand me or know me. I am a unique identity who has no desire to be re-formed and re-shaped by anyone. In essence, I am who I always was, I am who I am (both colonised and decolonised as every day goes by), and I am who I will be. I will change and evolve. I am one of a kind – I am me - Anna-Maria Bribiesca.

What is it to be an artist, art teacher, and the daughter of artists?

This research is about me and my family. My Mexicano father, José Maria Parra y Bribiesca, is an artist and was the key participant. My eldest daughter Angéla (Angélita) Hanna, my son Maximiliano (Maxito) Bribiesca y de Hohepa, and my youngest daughter Sofia Bribiesca y de Hohepa, were family participants. In the roles of artist, secondary school art teacher, and the daughter of artists, I was the participant-researcher.

Auto-ethnography is a method for putting theory into action. Tamas (2013) observed that in auto-ethnography individuals are peered into social issues and problems through the lens of their own experiences, and that one’s vulnerability and exposure are the price of seeing something that is insightful or profound. Chang (2008, p. 56) proposes that “auto-ethnography is a qualitative research method that utilizes ethnographic methods to bring cultural interpretation to the autobiographical data of researchers with the intent of understanding self and its connection to others.”
1.3 Who are my family?

José Maria Parra y Bribiesca

José Maria Parra y Bribiesca is my father. On 2nd July 2016, he will be 80 years old. He is the son of José Maria Florencio Bribiesca and Cyrilla Parra y Bribiesca (mis abuelos Mexicanos – my Mexican grandparents) and was born in Taylor, Texas, United States of America. He is el abuelo (the grandfather) to my children Angélita, Maxito, and Sofia. He was the husband of my mother Lois Marie Ashton Bribiesca, now deceased. As I grew up, my parents made art together – architecture, fashion design and contemporary jewellery – and my father continues to make and exhibit his jewellery. My father has a very strong personality, and over the years I have learnt to accept my father for what and who he is. He continues to challenge core values more often than not on principal. His intentions have not always worked out as he had envisioned, but what matters to me is that they are and were always true. I love my father for who he is, a funky gypsy caught up in a modern world going at a pace that is all his own. He is indifferent to the spin around him and truly unaffected by it. He is amazing, one of a kind, talented, passionate - and together with my mother - he created a very unique form of art. My father in his own unobtrusive style, has always encouraged me along the path of lifelong learning in art. I am forever grateful for his wisdom, motivation and patience with my journey.
Lois Marie Ashton Bribiesca was my mother. She passed away in 2014 when I was embarking on the journey for my Master of Education study - this thesis. My mother was the daughter of Stanley Ashton and Monica Quaid (my English and Irish grandparents). She was the grandmother of my children Angélita, Maxito, and Sofia. She was a wife to my father José Maria Parra y Bribiesca. As I grew up, my parents made art together – fashion design, architecture and contemporary jewellery. My mother is always in my heart and I love her and miss her dearly. Mothers and daughters have estranged relationships at the best of times, but I feel that is only because they want the best for their ‘mini-me’. My mother was a pure soul, taken right out of her very conservative comfort zone in Christchurch, Aotearoa-New Zealand, into the world of art mixed with dutiful motherhood. She taught me a lot and without saying much at all. My mother was naturally artistically talented. She had some special times together with my father on this planet raising and guiding a family of very diverse individual souls. I witnessed the art of my parents coming from a very true, true love that, no matter, what will never fade, and one that is untouchable. I discussed with my mother before her passing that I wanted to acknowledge her in my inquiry, not just as an artist but as a woman artist - she approved. She did not quite understand what I was about to do but was very pleased that I was undertaking this academic approach to writing about our family, and how I could implement it into my new profession: teaching art. I felt that she was very proud of me.
Angélita Hanna, now 33 years old, is my oldest child and first born daughter. Her señorita (young adolescent) name is Angélita. Our family still call her by the name Angélita, though she is now a young woman. She is the oldest grandchild and the first born granddaughter to my parents. Angélita agreed to participate in this study. She spent a short period of time working alongside her grandfather (Papa José— or PJ as she fondly calls him) making the jewellery. Angélita has a different disposition from her siblings where her grandfather is concerned. She has been around him the longest and is a mature grandchild. Angélita is very fond of her grandfather. Her relationship with her grandmother - Nana Loie – was not as comfortable as it is with her grandfather. I guess granddaughters and grandfathers have a special bond. In my young adolescence I was a naïve mother learning about being a mother when I had Angélita. Often solo motherhood was the case and at times this tested our relationship. She is a true angel (Angélita means little angel) and an old soul all in one. She has a dreamy personality (like her grandfather) and I love that she has a zest for life (like her grandfather). She is my angel and supports me with her younger siblings, informing me of how it is for youth today. She is very aware of my personality and this does not faze her at all. After having made some jewellery with her grandfather, she laughed and said that she totally understood me now. She declared that she understood very clearly why I am like I am – and that I was her grandfather’s daughter. I believe she finds me stubborn (like her grandfather), going through life my way. I love it that she has the courage to confront me on any issue. I love her dearly.
Maximiliano Bribiesca y de Hohepa

Figure 6. My son, Maximiliano Bribiesca y de Hohepa, 2016

Maximiliano Bribiesca y de Hohepa, now 23 years old, is my second born child and my only son. His niño (young boy) name is Maxito. Our family call him by the name Maxito though he is now a young man. He is the second oldest grandchild and the first born grandson to my parents. Maxito agreed to participate in this study. He has at times spent short periods working alongside his grandfather (Papa José – as he respectfully calls him) constructing in the building industry. Maxito has a different disposition from his siblings (all girls), where his grandfather is concerned. He has been around his grandfather for a few decades now and is the first born and oldest grandson. Maxito is more distant from his grandfather in comparison with his older sister. His relationship with his grandmother – Nana Loie – was comfortable, as he loved her cooking and baking. He perhaps wasn’t as afraid of his grandmother as he is of his grandfather. I guess grandsons and grandfathers have a special, but different kind of bond. Maxito is a youth who struggles with what essentially amounts to this life and what it throws at you. He is extremely politically aware – and has been for a very long time – of the goings on in Aotearoa-New Zealand, and how it impacts particularly on the youth, especially indigenous youth. An example of this would be his one word description for the changes over the years – due to politics and socio-economics – of the suburb he has grown up in. Maxito refers to Ponsonby as ‘Ponsnobby’. I know he is incredibly open to what life throws at him. Maxito has a soft side where he honestly displays his openness, empathy, and love in his search for what the meaning of life is all about. As a mother I continue to hold a positive and beautiful vision of peace, health and love for my son, so that he may find a way through what seems to be a dark place that he is in at present. He is a strong soul and has it in him to come through. After all he is his mother’s son. I love him dearly.
Sofia Bribiesca y de Hohepa, now 18 years old, is my youngest child and my second born daughter. Her niña (young girl) name is Sofia. Our family all call her by the name Sofia, though she is often referred to by her brother as Fia. She is the youngest grandchild and the second born granddaughter to my parents. Sofia agreed to participate in this study. She has at one time spent a short period working alongside her grandfather (Papa José – as she also respectfully calls him) learning how to make the jewellery. Sofia has a different disposition from her siblings, where her grandfather is concerned. She has been around her grandfather for the shortest period of time and is the last born and youngest granddaughter. Sofia is more distant from her grandfather compared with her older siblings. Her relationship with her grandmother - Nana Loie – was favourable as she also loved her cooking and baking. Sofia also loved to quietly play, touch and observe Nana Loie’s things. She doesn’t feel that she has to be wary of her grandfather or had to be of her grandmother. I believe the youngest grandchild has a dear bond with the grandparents. There is an innate understanding between the youngest grandchild and the elders. The youngest grandchild is the baby of all babies, and there too lies a very special bond. Sofia is also at a crossroads in her life where she is trying to be fiercely independent. At times this doesn’t agree with her mother’s agenda. She is for the time being, accepting of what life throws at her. Sofia has a very soft side where she honestly and naively demonstrates her compassion, empathy, and love in her search for the meaning of what life is all about. As a mother I always hold a positive and beautiful vision of peace, health and love for my youngest child, so that she too may find a way through what seems to be an insensible ‘adult’ world that she finds herself in right now. She is a determined strong soul and has it in her to come through. After all she is her mother’s baby. I love her dearly.
1.4 What motivated this research?

This auto-ethnographical research project was motivated by my desire as a practicing artist, art teacher, and daughter of artists to investigate the importance of the transmission of intergenerational knowledge, and how this has shaped my personal art making and teaching. It was also important for me, students of all ethnicities and cultures, educators and secondary school systems to understand the significance and transmission of intergenerational knowledge and how this can challenge our own beliefs, values, definitions of knowledge, perceptions in art-making and our pedagogical practices. Although my family and heritage were the main focus, I explored how others pass on knowledge, in particular the pūrākau and storytelling approaches of Māori. Battiste (2008) makes an important claim that resonated with this research:

Today indigenous peoples throughout the world are feeling the tensions created by a modern conventional education system that has taught them not only to mistrust their own indigenous knowledge and elders' wisdom but also their own instincts, creativity and inspirations (p. 498).

This research was also motivated by the theoretical and methodological perspectives of a/r/tography, an arts-based research method which unites the roles of artist, researcher and teacher. Irwin and de Cosson (2004, p. 27) maintain that when the roles of artist, researcher and teacher are integrated together, “knowing (theory), doing (praxis) and making (poesis) will inform our understanding of ideas and practices.” My role as a participant-researcher throughout the study, via the a/r/tographical concept of ‘living inquiry’, provided opportunity to become more informed through my own perspective as an artist, researcher and teacher, as opposed to a person who simply reports the findings. Like Smith (2009, p. 266), my ‘A/R/T cycle’ began with my grandparents, then parents, with each informing my art practice and this educational research.

What was the aim of the research?

The central aim of my auto-ethnographic study, underpinned by an a/r/tographical methodology and theoretical framework, was to focus on the importance of ‘family’ being at the centre of my ‘conversaciones’. My intention was to explore through conversations with my family in Aotearoa-New Zealand how intergenerational knowledge about art and art making has been, and continues to be, transmitted by my Mexican / English / Irish ancestors. I wanted to understand and reflect on how art is created, what meanings it may carry, and how those meanings may be taught and learned within familial intergenerational situations. From the perspectives of being an artist, art teacher, and research participant my aim was to examine how these understandings and experiences have shaped my conceptions and practices of art making, and how they could inform my art teaching practices with students, including indigenous students, in a secondary school context. I considered, too, that this research might offer art educators in secondary schools, and other educational settings, the motivation to examine their epistemologies and how this study could influence their teaching programmes.
What questions did I explore?

The research question was:

- How is intergenerational knowledge about art and art making from my ethnic Mexicano / Irish / English lineage transferred between generations, and how might this shape my conceptions and practices as an artist and art teacher?

To assist in answering the research question, the following sub-questions were used:

- How is intergenerational knowledge transmitted in my own and in others' cultures?
- In what ways has intergenerational knowledge between transmitted by my ancestors?
- What types of intergenerational knowledge have informed my art making?
- How could intergenerational knowledge be transmitted through my teaching practices in art to support students, including indigenous students, in secondary schools?

Why is this research significant?

I was unable to find any studies, similar to mine, prior to commencing my research. Comparatively little research has been conducted in Aotearoa-New Zealand which focuses on art teachers and visual arts education in secondary schools, or which showcase for other researchers the possibilities for creative research. This study has the potential to inspire art teachers to conduct research using an auto-ethnographic approach in combination with arts-based methodologies such as a/r/tography. The findings of this research will be disseminated within the research community and to art educators via publications and presentations. The findings, which have been presented using auto-ethnographic narrative and visual imagery, may provide opportunity to generate new approaches to visual arts education and professional practice in secondary schools. By presenting the data as narrative / text and image / text, this thesis offers a creative perspective, an opportunity to make new meaning from the research, and a means of continuing the journey towards new approaches within the qualitative interpretive paradigm (Leavy, 2015a).

1.5 Summary of the thesis

Chapter 1 opened the conversation. It located me in the research and presented my stance as an indigenous Mexicano person, artist, art teacher and daughter of artists. It introduced the research participants - my father, my late mother and my three children. It explained the motivation for this study, the questions I explored, and why the research is significant. In Chapter 2 I have contextualised the conversation through the literature about auto-ethnography, how indigenous peoples are positioned within auto-ethnographical studies, what is meant by intergenerational knowledge and how it is passed on, and how art making is used as a means of recording personal histories. In Chapter 3, I have positioned the conversation in the research design. It focuses on how it was framed and conducted. Chapter 4 presents the conversaciones with mi familia. In Chapter 5 I enact a conversación with my father through collaborative art making together. My critical reflection of the findings and the conclusions I have drawn are the focus of Chapter 6.
Chapter 2: CONTEXTUALISING THE CONVERSATION THROUGH THE LITERATURE

2.1 Tracing the literature

The foundation of this research encompasses four bodies of literature which shaped the research question and informed its design. First, there is the literature on auto-ethnography and the ways in which it is defined and discoursed. There is a critique on how auto-ethnography differs from ethnography, and why it is a vital approach for researchers wishing to study their own families and cultures. Conversely, there is consideration on how an auto-ethnographical approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and in lieu of others. Second, there is a body of literature on cultural knowledge, from the perspectives of tangata whenua (indigenous Māori people) of Aotearoa (New Zealand), and of the Mexica (indigenous Mexican people) of my father’s homeland Mexico. Third, there is literature on intergenerational knowledge and how the passing on of knowledge by, and within, cultures shapes personal perspectives and practices. Added to this is a fourth body of literature about art making as a means of recording personal histories.

2.2 Auto-ethnography

What is auto-ethnography?

Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2013, p. 247) describe auto-ethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno).” Auto-ethnography is therefore a form of self-reflection which combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details. Ellis et al claim that auto-ethnographic perspectives seek a positive response to critiques of canonical ideas about what research is and how it should be conducted. An auto-ethnographer is able to engage an audience with meaningful, accessible and evocative research grounded in the researcher/author’s personal experience. This capacity allows readers to empathize with those who are different from them.

Chang (2008, p. 56) proposes that “auto-ethnography is a qualitative research method that utilizes ethnographic methods to bring cultural interpretation to the autobiographical data of researchers with the intent of understanding self and its connection to others.” Auto-ethnography could be considered to be more authentic than ethnography. This is because ethnography is more concerned with the description of ethnic groups. Chang observes that ethnographers commence their investigations with an unfamiliar topic (others). This contrasts with auto-ethnography where the research field is entered with a familiar topic (self). Chang expands this colloquy, implying that ethnography is a more scientific approach whereby an initial focus is refined, often narrowed, and sometimes redirected in the course of the study. Ethnography lends itself to a research process consisting of data collection, data analysis / interpretation, and report writing. The field data is collected via participation, observation, interview, artefacts and document review. Data is then verified by triangulating sources and content from multiple origins. It is then analysed further and interpreted to decipher cultural meanings of events, behaviours, and thoughts. Upon conclusion, an ethnography is
written. Auto-ethnography, on the other hand, is a research method that utilises the researcher's autobiographical data to analyse and interpret their cultural assumptions. Dyson (2007, p. 36) voices this in the following way:

Auto-ethnographic writing links the personal to the cultural and is recognised as a methodology that combines the method with the writing of the text, which in turn explicates the personal story, or journey of the writer, within the culture in which the investigation, or experience, takes place.

Auto-ethnography is a tool that a teacher can use to help themselves gain profound understanding of not only oneself, but others. This tool can assist them to function more effectively with others from diverse cultural backgrounds. This notion of selfhood opens up new ways of writing about social life. Chang (2008, p. 14) eloquently states, “Whether seeing self through others or against others, the study of self-narratives through self-reflection is beneficial to cultural understanding.”

A key dimension of auto-ethnography is that it explores a researcher’s personal experiences. Dyson (2007) began to recognise that the knowledge which he was constructing - through his own experiences, encounters and interactions with the world - was legitimate. It was his reality that he was a part of, yet also apart from, that he was constructing and creatively inventing through the narrative text generated using language. In Reed-Danahay’s (1997, p. 1) words, “auto-ethnography involves a rewriting of the self and the social.” Auto-ethnography connects a researcher’s autobiographical story to wider cultural, political and social meanings. Reed-Danahay suggests that “One of the main characteristics of an auto-ethnographic perspective is that the auto-ethnographer is a boundary-crosser and the role can be characterised as that of a dual identity” (p. 3). She defines her use of the term auto-ethnography as the form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text in a similar way to ethnography but the self is embedded. Reed-Danahay suggests that voice and authenticity are open to question. She goes on to claim that “an auto-ethnography is more authentic than straight ethnography and that the voice of the insider can be assumed to be more true than that of the outsider” (p. 3). In contrast, the ethnographic writer can only relate the story as an outsider.

**Why do researchers use this theoretical and methodical approach?**

Researchers and particularly practitioners – teachers, medical personnel, counsellors, and human services workers (who work in the field of human relations in multi-cultural settings) - use the theoretical and methodical approach that auto-ethnography employs because they consider it to be an excellent instructional tool. Chang (2008, p. 13) argues that auto-ethnographers “…gain profound understanding of self and others and function more effectively with others from diverse cultural backgrounds”. This author discusses why the inquiry methods employed by auto-ethnographers have many benefits. First, the inquiry method is user-friendly for both researchers and their readers. Second, there is easy access to the primary data source at initial stages of the research because the source is the researcher himself/herself. Third, auto-ethnographers contain a holistic and intimate perspective on their “familiar data” (p. 52) which often results in in-depth data analysis and
interpretation. Chang observes that the reader-friendly approach employs a more personal and engaging writing style which appeals to readers, as opposed to conventional, more objective, scholarly writing.

Another reason why researchers use this theoretical and methodical approach is because it is an ideal means through which they come to understand themselves and others. Florio-Ruane and Nieto (cited in Chang, 2008) indicate that self-reflection and self-examination are the keys to understanding. In Dyson’s (2007, p. 46) view:

An auto-ethnography is a presentation of one person’s view, or map, of reality, constructed around and through other people. It is a good story, which does not establish truth, like an argument, but presents verisimilitude, that is lifelikeness.

Leavy (2015) agrees that innovative qualitative methods, such as auto-ethnography and other such holistic approaches to inquiry, lean more towards the relationship the researcher has with his or her work. She explains that “the recent rise in auto-ethnography as a stand-alone method, or as a tool used in multimethod research projects, is linked to a surge in the academic literature about the role of the researcher in the research process and the overall increase in qualitative sociology” (p. 38). Auto-ethnographers also use this approach because they view research and writing as socially-just acts. Holman (cited in Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2013) proposes that auto-ethnographers are not preoccupied with accuracy but, rather, the goal is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change people and the world they live in for the better. Dyson (2007, p. 45) shares a similar view, claiming that humans have the capacity to create a new ‘Spirit of the Earth’. He goes on to say that the new ‘Spirit of the Earth’ is about the re-development and movement of the mind or the human psyche:

[T]his new ‘Spirit of the Earth’ is particularly relevant for educators and researchers, who are significant change agents within society and have the potential to be the ‘challengers of society’ rather than be the maintainers of the status quo. The retelling of our research journeys and the unravelling of our perceived truths, through new consciousness, have the potential to move humanity forward into the ‘Landscape of Transformation’. That is to transform itself and reach the next level of its evolution.

Austin and Hickey (2013, p. 141) also argue that “auto-ethnography holds significant potential as a point of interrogation for critical, reflexive practice in education.” Freire (cited in Austin & Hickey, 2013) promotes the idea that critical pedagogy goes hand in hand with personal text in that auto-ethnography’s methodology provokes a type of conscientisation necessary for authentic community engagement and commitment espoused by critical pedagogues. Stephenson (2004) confirmed this theory when considering the examples of “historical combines” that integrate collage with material culture from the time represented, thus being able to present an enriched education history. From the literature it is evident that auto-ethnographical methods of process and product challenge canonical ways of doing research and representing others.
How are auto-ethnographical studies conducted?

Auto-ethnographical studies are conducted in particular ways. With growing demands for reflectivity, self has become the object and thus the researcher becomes the story that they write. One could argue that the researcher is more fully present in their work, more honest, and more engaged. This is because auto-ethnography employs personal experiences as primary data alongside an analysis of their experiences. The researcher's role is to make their personal text valid. This is supported by the research literature on auto-ethnography being in its entirety a theoretical and methodological tool – "an intriguing and promising qualitative method" of inquiry (Wall, 2013, p. 277).

Alongside personal, scholarly, analytical, descriptive and theoretical accounts, evocative writing may be used as a writing style in auto-ethnography. Richardson (2013, p. 184) says that this mode of "literary device re-creates lived experience and evokes emotional responses". With auto-ethnography the author writes their personalized revealing texts with story-telling about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural. Through these narratives the researcher can elaborate with enthusiasm using techniques of dramatic recall, strong imagery, fleshed-out characters, unusual phrasings, puns, subtexts, allusions, flashbacks and flash-forwards, tone shifts, dialogue, and interior monologue. Richardson maintains that "Writing-stories sensitize us to the potential consequences of all our writing by bringing home – inside our homes and workplaces – the ethics of representation" (p. 185).

Epiphanies come into play with the auto-ethnographer. Dyson (2007) came to recognise that his auto-ethnographic style was not only an appropriate methodology but also the only way to present, in a meaningful and mindful way, the cultural phenomenon that he was living and researching. He realised that he was changing as an individual and as a researcher as he reflected about his journey into the literature and recognised the wider implications of his research journey. In other words, Dyson used his experiences to garner insights into the larger culture or subculture of which he was a part. At the very centre of his auto-ethnographic study resided his own self-awareness and the reporting of his experiences and introspections as a primary data source. Dyson recognised that he was a subject in his own research and it was legitimate for him to be so. Dyson also came to know that this approach was much more than just an in-depth abstract account of research. Thus auto-ethnography assists the reader in understanding the researcher's patinas.

Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2013, p. 250) claim that auto-ethnographers "must also consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders." Tamdgidi (2011), a Middle-eastern Iranian researcher, discovered that Anzaldúa’s mestiza (Latina) consciousness resonated harmoniously. Anzaldúa’s work gave Tamdgidi affirmation of what she had been discovering and pursuing in her own work. Encountering Anzaldúa was highly transformative for Tamdgidi for it gave credence and validity, in the public stage of social and cultural theorizing, to her own thinking and interests. Anzaldúa’s comparative pursuit of diverse cross-cultural modes of transformative theorizing and practice was highly inspiring for Tamdgidi’s own interest in utopystics as an applied borderlands sociological research across utopian, mystical, and scientific paradigms. As Tamdgidi (2011, p. 109) says:
The struggle is inner: Chicano, indio, American Indian, mojado, mexicano, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian—our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.

Tamdgidi (2011, p. 218) observes Freire’s ‘banking system’ of transmitting knowledge, noting that one person deposits information into another person or people being a one-directional, hierarchical monologue. ‘Bridging’ is inclined to be of the nature of “dialogic and assumes the existence and equal value of banks of knowledge on two (or more) sides of a conversation.” She discovered that bridging is about sharing knowledges that are also independently growing. Bridging involves further dialogue arising from inner conversations.

Keeping in mind that auto-ethnographers see their research and writing as socially-just acts, as opposed to a preoccupation with accuracy, the final goal is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change the world we live in for the better. Thus the process incurs distinguishing patterns of cultural experiences. This can be in the form of differing writing modes. Denshire (2014) observes that evocative auto-ethnographical writing foregrounds the writer’s personal stories. The author may commence with an account of one’s personal life, paying attention to physical feelings, thoughts and emotions. They use systematic, sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience that they have lived through. The experience is written in a story form. By exploring a particular life the writer hopes to understand a way of life. Denshire claims that by “emphasizing the centrality of the personal, their account arguably backgrounds the social or cultural world in which the writing occurs, or rather, reads the social and cultural through the personal” (p. 835).

The analytical tradition values a sense of objectivity. Anderson (as cited in Denshire, 2014, p. 835) claims that the analytical approach features “(1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytical reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis.” Denshire (2014) postulates that contemporary auto-ethnographic writing has become increasingly common in a range of disciplines. Social questions of difference enable voices previously silenced to speak back. Denshire continues:

Social science auto-ethnographers writing with a range of genres – literary and performance studies, social and political sciences, cultural studies, international relations, higher education, communication studies, disability studies and health and social care – are starting to challenge the discourses dominant in professional lives (p. 834).

Alternative forms of presenting research may also lean towards the visual arts and performing arts. This medium can be used in presenting history research. Stephenson (2004) realized that visual images could significantly enlarge the range of telling. In her study of the *Archaeology of My Parents’ Lives, 1943-1949*, Stephenson used text image and 3-dimensional objects / artefacts to refer to the expression of an idea through the use of the elements and principles of design (line, shape, colour, texture, form, rhythm, unity, repetition) to create an aesthetically pleasing and meaningful whole. During what she refers to as “an archaeological dig”, Stephenson unearthed rusted objects, “a child’s
plastic wading pool from the 1980s, parts of a barbeque from the 1970s, remnants of a bike from the
1960s and a laundry tub from the 1950s” (pp. 156-157).

With an auto-ethnographical approach the academic must describe the patterns with
engaging storytelling, whether it be evocative or analytical. With the crafted usage of whichever
accessible narratives, a researcher is able to reach a wider and more diverse mass audience. This
shift can make a personal and social change possible.

2.3 Indigenous peoples and auto-ethnography

How are indigenous peoples in Aotearoa-New Zealand and in Mexico defined?

Indigeneity and auto-ethnographical research have strong ties, as evidenced in the research
literature. Underpinning my research is the concept that genealogy is the essence of any ethnic group
being indigenous (Smith, 2012). Penehira (2011, p. 93) informs us that the Encarta World English
Dictionary (1999, p. 957) defines indigenous peoples as “the people who occupy a region at the time
of its contact with colonial powers or the outside world”. Penehira also clarifies that the Declaration on
the Rights of Indigenous Peoples document does not include a definition of Indigenous Peoples. The
rationale for this exclusion is explained in the explanatory notes to the document – ‘Indigenous peoples
wish not to be defined by others as has been done throughout their history’ (United Nations, 2007).
Penehira goes onto say that “Clearly the UN wanted a document that reflected and respected the
wishes of the Indigenous Peoples themselves, and in their view the emphasis is instead placed on
self-identification” (pp. 93-94).

An indigenous person is one who has indigenous ancestry and considers them self to be
indigenous. Kawharu (1989) observes that Māori - through the passage of time and the fact that
generations have arisen in Aotearoa-New Zealand – are tangata whenua in the sense that they have
their roots here and nowhere else. Indigenous peoples do not necessarily claim to be the only people
native to their countries, but in many cases indigenous peoples are indeed ‘aboriginal’ or ‘native’ to
the lands they live in, being descendants of those peoples who inhabited a terrain prior to colonization
(Smith, 2012). Smith also suggests that the “term ‘indigenous’ is problematic in that it appears to
collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly
different” (p. 6). She goes on to claim that ‘indigenous’ is a mode of including the many diverse
communities, language groups and nations, each with their own identification within a single grouping.

In Aotearoa-New Zealand the terms ‘Māori’ or ‘tangata whenua’ (people of the land) are used
more frequently than ‘indigenous’ (Smith, 2012). Norman (1989, p. 209) describes tangata whenua as
“people tied to each other and to their resources of land and sea, measured over time by layers of
generations back to a common canoe and to an even earlier people than themselves”. Alongside the
word ‘Māori’ being an indigenous term, it has been identified as a label which defines a colonial
relationship between the ‘Māori’ and ‘Pākehā’ (non-Māori New Zealander) settler population. In
Aotearoa-New Zealand, Coates (2008) argues that the present-day focus is exclusively on what Māori
call whakapapa (genealogy). In other words, if you have one Māori ancestor, no matter how far back,
you are legally entitled to identify as being Māori.
Smith (2012) says that labels such as ‘First Peoples’, ‘Native Peoples’, ‘First Nations’, ‘People of the Land’, ‘Aboriginals’ or ‘Fourth World Peoples’ are often employed by researchers in their descriptions of ‘others’. She proposes that indigenous peoples draw upon the notion of a time before colonization. Here absolute authority over one’s life was intact and the universe in which indigenous peoples lived was entirely of their own making. Whitinui (2013, p. 9) observes that:

[T]oday there are numerous indigenous scholars (Houston 2007; Tomaseli, Dyll and Francis, 2008) engaged in using indigenous auto-ethnography as a tool to challenge misconceptions of other about their identity as indigenous peoples – historically, socially and politically.

In a Mexican context, Merrell (2003) suggests that in Mexico today the cultural make-up of the indigenous person is a ‘mestizo’ which means one of mixed cultural heritage and descent. Because there is such a cultural hybridity existing in Mexico Merrell asserts that the indigenous person “cannot be genuinely either Amerindian or Spaniard, and at the same time, although he is neither the one nor the other, he is both the one and the other” (p. 89). Further, he suggests that “It is neither the one cultural manifestation nor the other, but rather something emergent” (p. 235). Jung (2008) posits that the cultural distinctiveness of indigenous Mexicanos stakes its identity on the history and traditions of the indigenous Mayans and Aztecs. Indigenous Mexicanos today are a mixture of Hispanic-criollo-mestizo-Amerindian-African bloods. Lópex (2010) agrees with other researchers that Mexico is one of the most culturally integrated countries in the world. An understanding of how indigenous peoples in Aotearoa-New Zealand and in Mexico are defined was critical for my research. This provided a starting point for examining the literature on how Māori methodologies intersect with auto-ethnography.

**How do Māori methodologies intersect with auto-ethnography?**

’Self’ is consistently connected to others in the realm of indigenous cultures, and so too with Māori. Māori researchers, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1997), state that Kaupapa Māori (ground rules, agenda) is a term used by Māori to describe the practice and philosophy of living a Māori culturally-informed life. This is a Māori world view that incorporates thinking and understanding. Sharples (as cited in Pihama, Cram & Walker, 2002) explains that Kaupapa Māori has its roots in old knowledge, including Māori spiritualism and traditionalism that belongs to another time. From this source Kaupapa Māori has emerged as a modern-day dialogue and a certainty, as a theory and a praxis, directly from Māori lived realities and experiences.

It could be debated that Kaupapa Māori methodology connects with indigenous methodologies and that auto-ethnography is a non-indigenous researcher’s parallel to indigenous methodology. Whitinui (2013) considers that a number of indigenous researchers (including Battiste, 2005; Martinez, 2008; Meyer, 2005; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2009) have argued for a new way of communicating how indigenous peoples see the world from their own world view. He observes that when indigenous people speak about the self, it can be implied that knowledge and knowing “self” has in some way been influenced from within existing social contexts, structures and environments over time and this should not be overlooked.
Smith (2012) recalls tikanga (culture, custom), practices of cleansing herself by sprinkling water over her body upon returning home from the museum where she assisted her father’s work. This practice was passed on to her by her mother and grandmother and it was through the kuia (grandmother) that her sense of place became so firmly grounded. The koroua (elderly people) instilled knowledge of her context and environment. Here she worked out the ways of knowing. Smith maintains that “indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology” (p. 15). Such factors are thought about naturally, declared openly as part of the research design, discussed as part of the final results, and circulated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood. This is respect, as it reports back to the researched and shares the knowledge. Indigenous knowledge includes knowledge of the soul or heart; knowledge of practice that is both habitual and characteristic of a given person and “determined by the various communities that share in the exchange” of knowledge (Sullivan, 2007, p. 1191).

Lee’s (2012) research investigated culturally responsive pedagogy of marae in mainstream secondary schools. She employed a Kaupapa Māori methodological framework - a pūrākau approach - to narrative inquiry. This method enabled the stories of the individual Marae-a-kura to be told, as well as the creation of the wider cultural portrait that drew on themes across the Marae-a-kura. Butt (as cited in Meade, 2011, p. 1) acknowledges Mauriora-ki-te-Ao, describing pūrākau as:

A Māori term for stories which contain mythological perspectives concerning the nature of reality and the human condition. A pūrākau is a story within which is contained models, perspectives, ideas of consequence to the people who recite them.

More than just a compelling narrative, pūrākau are culturally specific vehicles for the retention and transmission of knowledge. They are ritual, story, legend, language and mythology. Traditional tales of the natural world are embedded in pūrākau. Butt (as cited in Meade, 2011, p. 2) asserts that “this mode of indigenous regeneration deconstructs Western assumptions about the relationship between the present and the past”. A Māori whakatauki (proverb), “Ka haere whakamua me hoki whakamuri” – we must walk into the future facing the past - has layers of potential for meaning and significance and is open to any depth of interpretation and storytelling.

Kaupapa Māori research methodology may also be in the form of whakairo (carving or relief), such as Michael Parekowhai’s He kōrero pūrākau mo te awanui o te motu: Story of a New Zealand River, 2011), or waiata (songs), raranga (weaving) or tā moko (tattoo). Of the latter – moko - Penehira, Smith, Green and Aspin (2011, p. 184) claim that:

For Māori, moko carries with it the mouri of our tūpuna of whakapapa and our identity. It is its own narrative, telling its own stories using the language of Māori visual art and spirituality.

Te Awekotuku and Nikora (cited in Penehira et al., 2011, p. 158) explain further that moko symbolizes an idea which includes “bloodlines and lifelines, about being Māori. And being more”. Smith (2012, p. 36) maintains that “telling our stories from the past, reclaiming the past, giving
testimony to the injustices of the past are all strategies which are commonly employed by indigenous peoples struggling for injustices.” From the literature it was evident that Māori methodologies do intersect with auto-ethnography.

**How do Mexica (indigenous Mexicano peoples’) perspectives intersect with auto-ethnography?**

Indigenous peoples want to tell their own stories, write their own versions in their own ways, for their own purposes (Merrell, 2003). This author points out that “Mexicans are steeped in their past; they have more faith in their myths of the past, where imagination is more valid than an ephemeral truth (p. 32).” Merrell believes that for Mexicano the community’s past is the measure of all things. As with Māori, Mexicano also sustain oral traditions of knowing which are stored within genealogies and passed on to the following generations. These stories may be reiterated in oral languages, in visual arts or performing arts, or within personal names people carry (for example, Maximiliano, an emperor who reigned in Mexico in the 1860s).

An example of indigenous Mexicano peoples’ perceptions overlapping with auto-ethnography is the writings of Mexicana Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and her book *Borderlands/ La Frontera The New Mestizo*. Anzaldúa elaborates on how she experienced the violence of dualistic paradigms in deeply personal, sensual, emotional, intellectual, political, and historical ways. Tamdgidi (2011) interprets Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera 88* representing moments where the absurdities of dualistic knowledges and constructions are not only known but also immediately experienced. She comprehends Anzaldúa actually living the borderlands and therefore being able to inform the readers not only of how things are, but how they can or should be:

> [A]nd this, the dualism of what is and what should be, is itself a confusing borderland to live in, a dualism to heal and transform, in favour of the radical changing of existing conditions (p. 220).

Tamdgidi emphasizes this point because the “significance of her ‘borderlands’ theory cannot be fully appreciated without recognizing its development from her efforts to understand and overcome dualistic modes of knowing and living in the self and in the world” (p. 219). Tamdgidi observed that Anzaldúa was deeply aware of the simultaneity of “self - and global knowledge and transformation” through her auto-ethnography, creatively expressing through prose and poetry with her insights permeating every single word (p. 222).

In contrast, some researchers imply that auto-ethnography may be interpreted as a non-indigenous researcher’s parallel to indigenous methodology. Tomaselli, Dyll and Francis (2008) argue that one might consider auto-ethnography as a kind of science in that it aims to facilitate a form of inquiry, a way of knowing, which includes rather than excludes the researcher(s). Tomaselli (2013) questions whether this is *faction*, a blend between fact and fiction. Auto-ethnography involves the use of cultural richness for self-reflection and understanding the nature of the encounter. “How much of myself do I put in and leave out?” is the way Holman Jones (2005) frames the question (as cited in Tomaselli, Dyll & Francis, 2008, p. 348). Other authors such as Ellis and Bochner (as cited in Denzin
& Lincoln, 2000, p. 740) take their personal accounts as the heart of their research, where they use cultural reflexivity to “bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions.”

2.4 Intergenerational knowledge

What is meant by intergenerational knowledge?

Critical to my research was an examination of the concept of intergenerational knowledge and how it is defined. Sullivan (2007) perceives that intergenerational knowledge arises from a human disposition and a social construct. Greenfield (2004) points this out when she observes the Zinacantec theory of development - that parents can, and should, influence children’s learning. Greenfield expresses this through the Mayan theory of knowledge:

The Tzotzil word na’ could be translated as “know” in English. But the kind of knowledge central to the word na’ differs from that indexed by the English word “know”. Na’ includes knowledge of the soul or heart; “know” refers to knowledge of the mind. The central meaning of na’ is knowledge of practice that is both habitual and characteristic of a given person. In contrast, the English “know” refers centrally to factual knowledge… to theoretical understanding… to the solution of novel problems… and to skills… Habit and character are not implied (p. 52).

Greenfield (2004) elaborates further:

To say “I know how to weave” in Tzotzil is to assert far more than skill development: it is to say that I am in the habit of weaving, and weaving is a part of my identity, of who I am. It is knowledge of the heart, not just of the mind (ibid).

In many cases of cultural transmission, one learner serves as the next learner’s teacher. Languages, legends, superstitions and social norms are all transmitted by such a process of “iterated learning”, with each generation learning from data produced by the one that preceded it (Kalsih, Griffiths & Lewandowsky, 2007, p. 288). These authors support the view that cultural transmission of information between generations plays a central role in shaping human knowledge. Some of the most complex knowledge that people acquire, such as languages or cultural norms, can only be learned from other people (a collective of), who themselves learned from previous generations. Intergenerational knowledge is also further inclined to consider the idea of “hands-on” experience, thus the need for learning to result in concrete, tangible outcomes.

Capetillo-Ponce (2011, p. 166) discusses the methodology that Mexicana auto-ethnographer Anzaldúa applies when passing intergenerational knowledge on to others: “She intuitively follows her passion while using her autohistoria in creative ways. Indeed, her method is more akin to “style” in art than it is to “analysis” in the social sciences.” This author likens her to Foucault, the archaeologist of knowledge. He elaborates on Anzaldúa’s searching for the ideas, symbols and myths of her own historic and mythic past. Here the auto-ethnographer can invent new concepts that are inspired by others in her findings. Such pre-Hispanic concepts and deities as nepantla (a Náhuatl word meaning ‘in-between space’), Coatlicue (Aztec earth Goddess), and Coyolxauhqui (Aztec Moon Goddess) are refashioned in her work, acquiring the form of new spiritual and psychological theories that can then
be applied to the study of identities and society in general. This passing of knowledge from one generation to another is creatively engaging the viewer / reader to analyse and thus transform.

In Aotearoa-New Zealand, the concept of intergenerational knowledge for tangata whenua is primarily centred within the whānau (family) and the practice of whanaungatanga (sense of family connection, relationship) which is a central part of Māori identity and culture. Pihama, Cram and Walker (2002, p. 39) maintain that “The cultural values, customs, and practices that organize around the whānau and “collective responsibility” are a necessary part of Māori survival and education achievement.” Thus, for both Māori and Mexicano indigenous peoples’ intergenerational knowledge is closely linked to blood ties.

**How is intergenerational knowledge passed on in indigenous cultures?**

Central to human culture, and to its preservation and transformation, are processes by which knowledge gets passed down or transformed from generation to generation. Azaola (2012) argues that it is the schools which are responsible for the conservation and transmission of culture. In Mexicano culture the familia (family) is the most concrete means of understanding and passing on knowledge. Traditions and values are perpetuated through family relationships. Greenfield (2004) gives an example of how family creativity is observed through the embroidered blouses of the Zinacantán Mayan back strap loom weavers. Two generations – mothers’ and daughters’ - blouses are similar but not identical. A family style, in this instance, indicates that individuation is unimportant. What is significant is that the practice of copying designs from a family member indicates that helping other members of the family, or perhaps expressing a family identity, may be more important than unique, individual expression.

Azaola (2012) observed in an analysis of the Community Education Programme conducted in rural Michoacán, a southern western state of Mexico that Mexicano families of primary school pupils in the multi-grade classroom were not really competing among themselves. Nor did they struggle to decode the instructors’ messages, mainly because they shared a common language and beliefs. It was also found that the children’s habitus - individuals’ dispositions and practices - transmitted from home, were reinforced at the community school level. This finding sustains the notion that intergenerational knowledge is transmitted naturally through the family and the extended family (wider community), and permeates into the school. With Māori too, the extended family structure is esteemed. The elderly are respected for their experience and wisdom (Merrell, 2003). Meade (2011, p. 18) explains that:

> Myths, inventions and reinventions founded in our innermost and ancestral wish for the truth are the essential substance of our cultural development. The identity of a community is, no doubt, the collective acknowledgement of a founding myth and its ramifications.

Hall (cited in Merrell, 2003) claims that “culture is a complete form of life, a composite of an entire community’s way of living. It includes values, beliefs, aesthetic standards, linguistic expressions, patterns of thinking, behavioural norms and styles of communication” (p. 244). From this, it can be concluded that in indigenous cultures intergenerational knowledge is transmitted via belief patterns
and attitudes through family structures. An example, today, of this value with tangata whenua in Aotearoa-New Zealand is Kaupapa Māori. It is the conceptualisation of Māori knowledge that has been developed through oral tradition. Nepe (cited in Pihama, Cram & Walker, 2002) states that “this base influences how Māori people think, understand, interact, and interpret the world” (p. 36).

An important example of how intergenerational knowledge is passed on in Māori society is via Te Köhanga Reo (the language nest). This pre-school educational facility consists of tamariki (children), kaikako (teachers) also known as whāea (mother or aunt), kuia (female elder) and koroua (male elder). Te reo (the language) and tikanga (culture) are incorporated in their implementation of intergenerational knowledge transmission.

Smith (2012) maintains that indigenous peoples’ knowledge is intrinsically connected with spiritual relations of the universe, the land and things seen and unseen. According to Smith, these concepts of intergenerational knowledge continue to be a struggle for Western systems of knowledge to deal with or accept. For Māori, this discourse claims the “different world views and alternative ways of coming to know, and of being, which still endure with the indigenous world” (p. 78).

**How is intergenerational knowledge passed on in non-indigenous societies?**

It is a given that all societies originated from somewhere at some stage. It could also be argued that all societies are indigenous to a place of origin. All societies have ways of passing down intergenerational knowledge, whether they are an indigenous or non-indigenous society. For example, intergenerational knowledge may be passed down through cultural archives (genealogy, stories, ideas, conversations, photographs, events). One could argue that Freire’s (1974) liberatory pedagogy and its North American descendent, critical pedagogy, supports all peoples to acquire knowledge. This involves guiding people to know themselves and their worlds and to live and act within their communities and society as critical citizens, employing the principles of justice, liberty, and equality to create a participatory democracy.

Smith (2012) purports that Western knowledge and science are ‘beneficiaries’ of the colonization of indigenous peoples. She claims that non-indigenous knowledge incurs knowledge of the mind; referring centrally to factual knowledge to theoretical understanding to the solution of novel problems and to skills – habit and character are not implied. Smith investigates Foucault’s theory of ‘cultural archive’ – a storehouse of histories, artefacts, ideas, texts, and/or images, which are classified, preserved, arranged and represented back to the West. According to Smith, non-indigenous societies’ attitudes regarding the passing of knowledge, is more inclined to be orientated towards the individual. This is contrary to the indigenous whose disposition is concerned with the collective. Smith argues that this Western approach leans towards the reasoning upon a society which promotes individual autonomy and self-interest.

There is evidence that the ‘nuclear family’ predominates in Western, non-indigenous, societies. According to Georgas (2003), in the United States, Canada and the countries of northern Europe the nuclear family – father, mother, and the children – appears to be dominant. Worldwide, extended families – the grandparents, father, mother, children, but also aunts, uncles, cousins, and other kin – are considered to be “family”. It has also been observed that nuclear families have been
increasing in all the continents of the world. These nuclear families maintain very close relations with their kin. Georgas claims that even in cultures with a dominant extended family system, there are always nuclear families.

Access to education has been a major factor in differing types of families, particularly in the changes in their make-up. In numerous societies the changes from agricultural economic systems to an industrial system (19th and 20th centuries) meant that more young people became educated through the state (secondary schools and universities). Once qualifications were obtained, employment in the industrial sectors, services or professional fields were more attractive. Thus education played a major role in changes in the family from the extended type to the nuclear type. In the second half of the 20th century, women increasingly continued their education at university levels, and became employed. This also resulted in changes in their roles as mothers in the traditional family (Georgas, 2003). Rules, family types and practices continue to change within societies.

The passing down of intergenerational knowledge is not confined to indigenous peoples. The importance of ancestry - manifested through family trees, family-held Bibles, photograph albums, artefacts and stories – is an instinctive response of non-indigenous peoples worldwide. This proposition impacts on students in schools. Bourdieu (1974, p. 41) explains:

By giving individuals educational aspirations strictly tailored to their position in the social hierarchy, and by operating a selection procedure which, although apparently formally equitable, endorses real inequalities, schools help to perpetuate and legitimize inequalities… and legitimate the transmission of the cultural heritage.

While schools share responsibility for the conservation and transmission of culture, each student will have their own personal culture. They, too, will have great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, siblings and extended family members who contribute to their ‘habitus’. Nash (1990, p. 433) explains Bourdieu’s concept of habitus as referring to “a system of embodied dispositions which generate practice in accordance with the structural principles of the social world” (p. 433). In this context, habitus comprises socialised norms or tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking. Habitus is created through a social, rather than an individual process. Habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously. Nash (1990, p. 435) discusses Bourdieu’s habitus concept further:

[S]chooling does have its own power to shape consciousness, over and above the power of the family, and it is clear that the role of the school is acknowledged as active, and not merely passive in its "legitimation" of family acquired habitus.

Navarro (2006, p. 16) maintains that habitus “is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period.” Thus for non-indigenous societies intergenerational knowledge can be passed on through various processes – cultural archives and through the channels of nuclear and extended families, ancestry and habitus.
2.5 Art making as a means of recording personal histories

Butt (2011, cited in Meade) proposes that all stories come from a place, and that sharing stories is a natural instinct that has always had a role in the work of the artist. The history of art, worldwide, is abundant with examples of how artists, no matter what their ethnicity or culture, creed or religion, record personal histories. These art forms are presented in a limitless range of styles, forms and media. Butt concludes the story finds its value within a specified experience or moment.

An example of this, in the context of the indigenous Māori, is manifested in a sculpture by artist Michael Parekowhai (Ngā Ariki, Ngāti Whakarongo, Pākehā). *He kōrero pūrākau mo te awanui o te motu: Story of a New Zealand River*, 2011, comprises a cherry red, intricately carved Steinway grand piano. The layers of personal histories that accompany this piece are evident when one views and interacts with it. The piano played a significant part in the growing up of the Parekowhai whānau (family). His mother and sister both played piano and he even attempted to play it himself. This piano was part of the family whose iwi (tribe) affiliation is to the Whanganui River (on Michael’s Māori father’s side). The art represents for the Parekowhai whānau the importance of the awa (river) and it being the life blood for many Māori in the past and the present. Another patina of this visual art work is that one hears it, even before one sees it, and then one senses it and thus interacts with it. The art plays with the viewer’s senses. It takes on the performance element, and with it layers of history. These layers are not only for the artist, but intended for the viewer - the audience’s experience and response. Parekowhai’s pūrākau (Figure 8) is more than just a narrative. His sculpture is a culturally specific vehicle for the preservation and transmission of knowledge. It is a ritual, story, legend, visual language and mythology.

![Figure 8. Michael Parekowhai, He kōrero pūrākau mo te awanui o te motu: Story of a New Zealand River, 2011, wood, brass, automotive paint, mother of pearl, pāua shell, upholstery. Image courtesy of Michael Parekowhai and Te Papa Tongarewa The Museum of New Zealand.](image-url)
An example of art making as a means of recording personal histories is the work of the San Felipe and Santo Domingo Pueblos potters’ postmodern creativities. Greenfield (2004) observed the cultural transformation in the process of economic development of these potters. After studying art and art history, and researching their roots, these potters recreated their pottery using clay from ancestral sites and embedded ancestral Pueblo pottery shards. Shard-shaped indentations were made in the clay and then filled in, with each “shard” decorated with a design from a different pueblo and from a different historical period. This is an example of creativity in which the creation comes from combining old images into new forms and in which there are multiple sources. As Parekowhai’s art work implies, the San Felipe and Santo Domingo Pueblo pottery can be comprehended as suggestions of ancient or traditional art works taking on new perspectives - histories of the contemporaries.

Well-known examples of art making, in a Mexicano context, are the murals of Diego Rivera in which he recorded his personal historical accounts of Mexicano society. Rivera saw the artist as a craftsman at the service of the community who needed to deploy an easily accessible visual language. Rivera held the view that mural painting was the only true art because it had the purpose of educating the people, portraying what the people believed, and setting ideals for the people. He also recognized that art was the highest form of human communication, and thus was a key force in social revolution.

![Image of Diego Rivera's mural](Image)

**Figure 9.** Diego Rivera (1886-1957). *Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central (Dream of a Sunday afternoon in the Alameda Central Park)*, 1946–47, 4.8 x 15m Museo Mural Diego Rivera, originally Hotel del Prado, Mexico City

**What role does art making play in recording personal histories?**

Visual art has the potential to convey particular messages when it intentionally addresses specific issues and is also a work of art. Art making can encourage understanding and reveal shifting historical practices and perspectives. Greenfield (2004, p. 52) references the research of anthropologist Zambrano to demonstrate how art making plays a role in recording personal histories. To say “I know how to weave” in Tzotzil is to assert far more than skill development; it is to say that I am in the habit of weaving, and weaving is part of my identity, of who I am. It is knowledge of the heart, not just of the mind (Tzotzil is a Mexicano tribal dialect).

In 2007 my Masters supervisor, Dr Jill Smith, a Pākehā-New Zealand artist, researcher and teacher educator, re-presented key findings from her doctoral thesis in an exhibition, *Talking my way*
through culture. Fourteen of the most significant findings from her research were reconceptualised in an installation of 14 talking sticks. In her exhibition catalogue (Smith, 2007) she wrote:

My decision to use the talking stick as a vehicle for artistic expression arose from a long-held interest in ngā rākau tū marae, the Māori ceremonial staffs of the marae… My talking sticks do not replicate nor appropriate the forms and significance of the tokotoko of Māori, nor the talking sticks of other indigenous peoples. Rather, I have drawn upon the concept of the talking stick and re-conceptualised this so that the talking sticks themselves have a ‘voice’ (p. 6).

The most personal talking stick, Why am I like I am? speaks of her ethnicity and elements of her habitus. The upper part of the stick presented ethnic markers – the distinctive and shared cultural, ancestral, and physical heritage and the sense of ‘group identity’ of being one of identical triplets. The lower part of the stick spoke of other aspects of her habitus – those social and cultural experiences that have shaped her ‘individually’ as a person, distinct from her triplet sisters. This talking stick was “a challenge to art teachers to acquire greater cultural knowledge and awareness of the individual differences of students within their cultures, and to implement culturally inclusive pedagogies that permit the individuality of each student’s ‘voice’ to be heard” (p. 18).

![Image of Jill Smith's Why am I like I am? installation](Image)

**Figure 10.** Jill Smith, Why am I like I am? 2007
Timber, archival photographic paper, paper, 1240 x 50mm, Talking my way through culture.
Images courtesy of Jill Smith

Artist-researcher-storyteller-historians can also present an alternative, personalized version of histories, as in the case of the photo-collage paintings of Cree artist George Littlechild (Stephenson, 2004). Littlechild’s transformational art presented an alternative, personalized version of First Nations history. The artist incorporated materials and symbols from his Cree heritage using such visual
vocabulary as beadwork, feathers, spiritual imagery, textile patterns, mythological characters and symbols (a star and a horse). The symbols represented his Cree culture while providing the decorative, sensual aspect of his work that made it aesthetically appealing to the viewers.

As with Parekowhai’s pūrākau (Figure 8), Rivera’s murals (Figure 9), Smith’s talking sticks (Figure 10) and Littlefield’s photo-collage paintings, visual art not only represents history but the potential to communicate history even more fully. These visual examples of representations of history and identity not only become more accessible and appealing to a larger audience but have the capacity to support the audiences’ lateral observations and thus learn more deeply through their reflection and experience in relation to the art works.

How are personal histories recorded?

Artist-researcher-teachers are using various modes of gathering, with each offering and representing research and inquiry. One such initiative, originating from the University of British Columbia, has been led by Rita Irwin (2004), a key advocate of the theoretical and methodological approach known as a/r/tography. A/r/tography is becoming an embraced qualitative methodology used by artists-researchers-teachers who both pose and solve problems while making and perceiving art. This approach combines research, teaching and art-making i.e. knowing (theoria), doing (praxis), and making (poesis) (Irwin, 2004). Artist-researcher-teachers are finding that these three roles coupled with three forms of thought are not only “separate entities but also as connected and integrated identities that remain ever present in our work” (p. 28). Thus the relationships between and among these arrangements of thought are fundamental to the works. They refashion, re-explore, and re-absorb ways of accepting, appreciating, and representing the world. What is of the essence is that the practice of making art gives rise to the practice of making meaning. As Irwin says, “…teaching is performative knowing in meaningful relationships with learners” (p. 31). With a/r/tography arts-based forms of research may be presented through narrative, autobiography, performative ethnography, reader’s theatre, poetic inquiry and self-study.

Silverman (cited in Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) expands this discourse: “A/r/tographers are living their practices, representing their understandings, and questioning their positions as they integrate knowing, doing, and making through aesthetic experiences that convey meaning rather than facts” (p. 31). This influential and engaging pedagogy is a source for relationship sharing, discussion and appreciating. Through aesthetic experiences one is able to convey meanings as opposed to facts. Smith’s (2009) approach to a/r/tography, within a New Zealand context, features an ongoing A/R/T ‘cycle’ which begins with educational research that informs her art practice. Both influence her teaching, and continue to inform further research. In turn, new ideas for art practice are generated.

A/r/tography connects with auto-ethnography in that personal histories are recorded via attention to memory, identity, reflection, mediation, storytelling, interpretation, and representation. Artists-researchers-teachers in their practices of teaching/learning and research/inquiry seek out ways to embrace their methods and creations. Stephenson (2004, p. 155) suggests that “history provides information and introduces new points of view, which in turn have the capacity to teach with a view to changing attitudes”. She expands on this theory that teaching and art practice have the ability to
converse with research which, in her case, focused on the history of education. For Stephenson, art is a visual form that has the potential to reveal intended meaning. Her collage/assemblage entitled *The Archaeology of My Parents’ Lives, 1943-1949* consulted media coverage in the Greater Vancouver region of that period, and made use of reproduced newspaper clippings, photographs, maps, and very old discarded 3-dimensional household objects and tools. More recent past-era objects were discovered in her physical search and incorporated into the art works. Collectively, these represented layers of family life that three generations had contributed to, juxtaposed with the culture in the greater society. In an analysis of her art work, Stephenson concurred that meanings were discovered in terms of the personal, the cultural, and the social. Her art visually depicted aspects of social history. Stephenson realized the potential for using such “historical combines” in visually representing her research about British Columbian art education prior to the 1950s. She found that her approach could encompass boundless possibilities – historical photographs, newspaper clippings, objects of school culture, images of school art, personal journals, diaries, letters, lesson plans, professional periodicals, photographs of art educators and their classrooms etc. The challenge, however, was to integrate research data collected into a visual form that went beyond a ‘display’. Stephenson posits that “to create any art requires the exercise of one’s intuitive faculties” (p. 159).

Similarly, Mexicano muralist, Diego Rivera, believed that murals could convey to the Mexicano people the writing and rewriting of history (Henry, 2000). His murals were an effective example of using the visual arts as a form of communication. From the large (4.8 x 15m) mural *Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central* (*Dream of a Sunday afternoon in the Alameda Central Park*) 1946 – 47 one gets a sense of the inequality that stirred average Mexicano to overthrow their dictator and initiate the Mexican revolution (which lasted from 1910 until 1920). More often than not history is written by the victor and reflects one side of the story. Histories normally edit out the stories of the indigenous and the masses. Rivera’s art work reminds the viewer that the struggles and glory of four centuries of Mexicano history are due to the participation of Mexicano from all veins of society.

### 2.6 Summary

The foundation of this research encompassed four bodies of literature which shaped the research question and informed the study – a critique of auto-ethnography; a presentation of viewpoints about cultural knowledge from the perspectives of tangata whenua (indigenous Māori people) of Aotearoa (New Zealand), and of the Mexica (indigenous Mexican people) of my father’s homeland Mexico; an analysis of literature on intergenerational knowledge and how the passing on of knowledge by, and within, cultures shapes personal perspectives and practices; and literature pertaining to art making as a means of recording personal histories. This conversation through the literature provides the context for positioning the research design – the methodology and methods - in Chapter 3.
Chapter 3: POSITIONING THE CONVERSATION IN THE RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Positioning the research methodologies and methods

This research was positioned within a qualitative interpretive paradigm and involved the combination of several methodologies. In this chapter the research paradigm, my rationale for the choice of methodologies, and the methods of data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations relevant to the study are outlined. The research design was informed by indigenous research methods and traditional qualitative research methods, and by auto-ethnography and the arts-based methodology of a/r/tography. Employing such holistic approaches allowed me to acknowledge that the context of experience is a valid research methodology and enabled me to embrace an interactive and reflexive research act which involved critical and creative practice. The research question is presented again, to contextualise it in this chapter:

How is intergenerational knowledge about art and art making from my ethnic Mexican / Irish / English lineage transferred between generations, and how might this shape my conceptions and practices as an artist and art teacher?

3.2 Situating myself as an indigenous Mexican researcher

In Chapter 2, literature was presented which explained how indigenous peoples want to tell their own stories, write their own versions, in their own ways, for their own purposes (Merrell, 2003). Although I am not an indigenous Māori person, Merrell (2003) points out that “Mexicans are steeped in their past; they have more faith in their myths of the past, where imagination is more valid than an ephemeral truth (p. 32).” This author believes that for Mexicans the community’s past is the measure of all things. As with Māori, Mexicans also sustain oral traditions of knowing which are stored within genealogies and passed on to following generations.

Deck (cited in Reed Danahay, 1997) observes that auto-ethnographers are “indigenous anthropologists... as concerned with examining themselves as ‘natives’ as they are with interpreting their cultures for a non-native audience” (p. 128). Throughout the data collection with my family members, and my own self-reflections, I kept in mind how fortunate I was to have experienced such a unique and rich cultural upbringing. My childhood era was at a time (1960s – 1980s) when a Western society (New Zealand) strongly dominated numerous aspects of my family’s existence. I recall that throughout this period I was strongly influenced, without even realising it, by my ancestors who had been before me. My parents were continuously passing on knowledge to me and my siblings that was steeped in tradition, whether it be the Mexican way of culture or the English / Irish way of beliefs.

3.3 Auto-ethnographical methodology and methods

The literature presented in Chapter 2 defined auto-ethnography, justified why researchers use this theoretical and methodological approach, and how auto-ethnographical studies are conducted.
My research question lent itself to an auto-ethnographical paradigm, a research method that is both qualitative and transformative and employs autobiographical writing. It differs from ethnography, a research method in which a researcher uses participant observation and interviews in order to gain a deeper understanding of a group’s culture (Ellis, 2004). Auto-ethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2013). Auto-ethnography thus explores one’s unique life experiences in relationship to social and cultural institutions. In this section of Chapter 3 the focus is on the methods of auto-ethnography and how these intersect with my own. I was particularly drawn to the work of Custer (2014).

How is auto-ethnography a qualitative research methodology?

Custer (2014), whose insights into auto-ethnography played a large part in informing my research, says that the process “changes time, requires vulnerability, fosters empathy, embodies creativity and innovation, eliminates boundaries, honours subjectivity, and provides therapeutic benefits” (p. 1). Custer informs us that:

- **Auto-ethnography can alter an individual’s perception of the past and in doing so inform their present, and reshape their future, if the individual is aware and open to the transformative effects.**

- **Auto-ethnography promotes vulnerability,** which consists of physical, psychological, emotional, or spiritual insecurities to self and others. Vulnerability invites the writer to engage the intrigued reader, thus placing the reader in a comfortable voyeuristic position that will enable them to look at their own. Custer believes that writing auto-ethnography is a test of one’s ability to be vulnerable to his or her self and that one becomes the embodiment of courage through writing.

- **Auto-ethnography enables empathy** through the embodiment of stories. Anderson (2001) adds that “Embodied writing brings the finely textured experience of the body to the art of writing. Relaying human experience from the inside out and entwining in words our senses with the senses of the world, embodied writing affirms human life as embedded in the sensual world in which we live our lives” (p. 2). Anderson (cited in Custer, 2014, p. 5) says that embodied writing “contains true-to-life, vivid depictions intended to invoke sympathetic resonance in the readers or audience.” Ellis (1999) claims that the final goal is not to just **portray** the facts of what happened accurately. The writer needs to **convey** the meanings that are attached to the experience. A story is required to be told in such a way that readers can **enter** and feel a part of it. This involves writing in such a way as to evoke the readers to feel and think about the writer’s life and their lives in relation to the writer. Ultimately, the writer wants the reader to **experience** the experience the writer is portraying.

- **Auto-ethnography embodies creativity and innovation** because it incites creativity by enabling the imagination of the readers. Custer maintains that auto-ethnography is innovative by design because it focuses on unique individual experiences. This suggests that auto-ethnography is
not only a tool for deep inquiry but also a tool that promotes re-evaluation, re-interpretation and re-invention from the inside out. Brown (cited in Custer, 2014, p. 6) concurs that “thinking out of the box” about our lives in retrospection and introspection stimulates creativity and innovation which are social tools used to “…transmit our identities and social positions to others. They are social products that represent cultural norms and beliefs and transmit normativity, hegemony, power, oppression, and resistance”.

- **Auto-ethnography eliminates boundaries** because it uses metaphors, symbols, and allegory to communicate knowledge between individuals and cultures. This inextricable link between the personal and the cultural, communicates the ‘self’ to the world and the world is a better place for it. With this approach the writer and the reader have to set aside any preconceived ideas of their experiences and allow them self to be open to multiple worldviews.

- **Auto-ethnography invites and honours subjectivity** of which the researcher/writer becomes aware and honours their ability to affect the world around them. The auto-ethnographer is not separated from the research because the writer is the research. As a transformative research method, “auto-ethnography is valuable to science as it incorporates and reveals individuality” (p. 9). In doing so it permits the researcher a way of comprehending their intimate and influencing relationship with the research process itself. It embraces objectivity verses subjectivity – the researcher/writer can ease into an authentic editorial slant simply because of being able to acknowledge their situated-ness – creating and shaping knowledge.

- **Auto-ethnography provides therapeutic benefits** because it is therapeutic in nature and writing about one’s Self in relation to a theory, experience or belief is transformative. Furthermore, Custer argues that insights can be gained via the vulnerability that an individual places him or herself in in order to relive and share events from their private lives. To be in dialogue with another individual about such writings can contribute to growth.

A critical feature of auto-ethnography is that it draws the attention of the researcher to the ‘self’. Learning can be facilitated through reflexive narrative and personal narrative as a means for growth and transformation. This transformative research method encompasses the idea of fostering self-awareness and self-discovery. For the readers, the audience of the auto-ethnographer – their participation in the process of introspection, reflexivity and contemplation - is to their benefit and advantage. McIlveen (cited in Custer, 2014, p. 17) points out that “Reflexivity in research and practice offers more than a checking process; it is a process which in itself proffers new understandings and actions—transformation.”

Auto-ethnography, as a qualitative research method, provided me with the opportunity to communicate multiple world views without compromising the need to be scientific (the quantitative research method). Creativity and innovation that inspire change, transformation, and revolution offers numerous ways of seeing the world. As far as humans are concerned, one authoritative truth or vision is not sufficient, as we all live unique stories.
Why is theory important in auto-ethnographic writing?

Holman Jones and Harris (2015) stress the importance of theory in auto-ethnographic writing. These authors claim that “theory and story share a reciprocal, symbiotic relationship…; that theory asks about and explains the nuances of an experience and the happenings of a culture [whereas] story is the mechanism that illustrates and embodies these nuances and happenings” (p. 1). It is important to use the vocabulary of theory and the mode of story to “create a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response” (Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013, p. 22). A technique suggested by these authors is ‘collaging’ in which images and words are connected together and grouped, and become the starting point for the story. However, the story has to move from being a ‘diary entry’ to the scholarship of research. These ideas connect with me as an auto-ethnographer and a/r/tographer.

How do I position myself as an auto-ethnographer?

As an auto-ethnographer, I possess the qualities of permanent self-identification with mi familia (my family) and full internal membership, as recognized by both myself and mi familia. I have an “insider” status as opposed to another “other” position. The family and the inclusion of extended family is an integral part of identity and culture. Cultural values, customs and practices that organise around the family and collective responsibility are a necessary part of survival and educational achievement. Pihama (in Pihama, Cram & Walker, 2002) relates this parallel in her argument about Kaupapa Māori theory, that “the critique of power structures in Aotearoa that historically have constructed Māori people in a binary opposition to Pākehā, reinforcing the discourse of Māori as Other” (p. 39). Auto-ethnography is life writing, life stories. It is a form of ethnography of my own culture. In the context of this thesis, it is a form of writing that addresses me, mi familia and a wider one – my students. With my auto-ethnography, I am able to talk back to the academic world and discuss the transmission of intergenerational knowledge. I am able to confirm to myself, my children, my students - this notion of knowing which is not to be excluded, marginalised or dismissed as invalid. Chang (2008) notes that “As teachers face increasing cultural diversity in the classroom, their interest in using self-narratives as cultural texts to analyse themselves and others will only grow” (p. 38). I, as the author, will describe a way of life at the same time that I will be telling my readers about events in my particular life. Thus auto-ethnography refers to a type of text.

3.4 A/r/tography as an arts-based research methodology

Alongside auto-ethnography, my research methodology and methods focused on a/r/tography, an arts based research practice that “celebrates and invites interconnectivity” (Leavy, 2012, p. 6). A/r/tography integrates the roles of artist, researcher and teacher, who occupy the in-between space. Irwin (2004) writes that “There are spaces between and spaces between the in-between. There are multiple borders diffused again and again” (pp. 31-32). A/r/tography fosters an engagement between us. Irwin and Springgay (2008) explain that a/r/tography is about the self and is also social when we come together as a community to share and exchange our work as a part of
reflective, ethical practice. Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis & Grauer (2006) argue that this form of arts-based research unfolds as a provocative inquiry. For Barone and Eisner (1997), “What arts-based educational research seeks is not so much conclusions that readers come to believe, but the number and quality of questions that the work raises” (p. 266).

As a holistic approach to inquiry, a/r/tography bridges theory and practice, combining “knowing, doing, and making” (Pinar, 2004, p. 9). Leavy (2012) considers that the most significant contribution of a/r/tography is the relationships – those that are fostered between the a/r/tographer and his or her work, the a/r/tographer and reader, and the reader and the a/r/tographical rendering. This is what is meant by a form of living inquiry. Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis and Grauer (2006) agree that arts-based methodologies can assist data to become richer, gaining more depth. These authors suggest that:

[To] be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create additional and/or enhanced meanings (p. 1224).

A/r/tography unifies images and text. It doesn’t privilege one over the other. Instead it opens up and creates new meanings and conceptions. Leavy (2012) suggests that “Through metaphor, juxtaposition, presence and absence, reverberations and excess, the marriage of “texts” in different mediums and the fusing of different ways of knowing, multiple meanings are created, reflected, and refracted back” (p. 7).

How do I position myself as an a/r/tographer?

A/r/tography is about me as an artist/researcher/teacher. Choosing a/r/tography enabled me to use this arts-based methodology in conjunction with auto-ethnography. I was able to emphasize visual inquiry alongside my narrative inquiry. A/r/tography was conducive to my journey of discovery because while learning about myself I was learning about myself in relationship to others. As Leavy (2012) observes, “A/r/tography invites us to actively, subjectively, and wholly engage with our work and the work of others from within” (p. 6). In the instance of this thesis it was also about being social, as when groups or communities (teachers and students) come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis & Grauer 2006). This happens to me on three levels:

- **As an artist**, working and learning alongside my father [and mother], during the processes of jewellery design and production, and of exhibiting my jewellery-making in the public domain.
- **As a teacher**, with my students in the art classroom, where my role is to work alongside and in collaboration with teenagers (Smith, 2009).
- **As a researcher** (postgraduate student), envisioning a research approach, engaging in inquiry, selecting sources of information and ideas, and then offering interpretations with “intellectual
openness and creativity” within practice, in essence, portraying new understandings textually, visually, and/or performatively (Finley, 2003, p. 283).

Thus, with my ‘expert’ knowledge on these three levels I am able to offer my understandings of the phenomena investigated. I chose to broaden the way my qualitative data would be collected, analysed, reported and represented. I used the narratives of a/r/tography alongside an autoethnographic approach to emphasise my lived experience. This avenue of arts-informed research integrates scientific inquiry with a creative and responsive research process. It stands to reason that if I am occupied in creative and intellectual studio-based work (art making i.e. designing and producing jewellery) this becomes also a form of research and inquiry (meaning-making). I agree with Smith (2007) that art practice cannot only re-present research but in doing so can challenge views about relationships between art, culture and curriculum. Artworks can be used as an instrument to convey, as well as confront the western pedagogical practice. Such methods of re-presenting key findings i.e. proposing practice-based approaches that place research practice at the centre - as opposed to the more traditional forms of research - have the potential to inform my teaching.

The aim of creating art (jewellery), working collaboratively with my father, was to draw on lived experience – which involved me, my father and my daughters. I was actively searching for meaning, but for what specifically didn’t really seem to matter. This is because many tangents branch off from this practice, this course of inquiry. The making of the jewellery serves as the primary source of data for inquiry, and the exhibition of the exchange of knowledge between three generations, is going to be the means of sharing research understandings. By making art, researchers generate sources of information and understandings for their inquiry (Sinner et al., 2006, p. 1246). In my research, a/r/tography and the ‘knowing’ evolves from being active in the art making and teaching/learning through living inquiry. Sinner et al summarise my position as an a/r/tographer:

It incorporates the processes, forms (or structures), and approaches of creative practices in academic scholarship….arts-based research draws from the creative arts to inform and shape social science research in interdisciplinary ways, thus redefining methodological vehicles in the field of education (p. 1226).

3.5 Data collection methods

Data was collected over 12 months from the participants – me, my father, and my three children - who are introduced to readers in Chapter 1. As Battiste (2008, p. 499) suggests, “The most significant meanings quickly pass from family to family and to succeeding generations through dialogue, storytelling, and appropriate rituals and legendary archetypes. Through analogies and personal style, each person in tribal society modelled the harmony among humans and the environment in their stories, through art and design on their crafts, and on their personal objects and clothing.” The data collection encapsulated the theoretical and methodological perspectives of autoethnography and a/r/tography, underpinned by my position, presented in Chapter 2, as an indigenous person. Similar and different methods were used with each participant.
How did I collect data as a participant-researcher?

The data I collected from myself, as a researcher-participant, comprised on-going self-reflection, writing and art making. The aim of my written and visual narratives was to enable me to relate my personal experiences. As explained by Ellis and Bochner (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), the goal is to enter and document the moment-to-moment, concrete details of a life. That’s an important way of knowing as well, “conveying the meanings you attached to the experience” (p. 751).

How did I collect data from the key participant - my father?

The data I collected from my father was through semi-structured interviews, informal conversaciones, observations and collaborative art making with me. One aim was to gain my father’s perspectives about the way he was brought up and if he thought he was influenced by his culture. I was curious to know what experiences he undertook as a young Mexicano growing up in the Mid-West of America. Did his immigrant farming parents’ ways impact on him and as an artist? As my mother was no longer alive, I also wanted to probe my father about my mother’s upbringing and her family’s influences upon her and as an artist. Another aim was to observe my father’s art making processes over a period of time, to write reflections and create a contemporary counterpoint from which to seek another view of myself and that transmission of knowledge. The ultimate aim of working collaboratively with my father was to create art work/s in the vein of the family visual art – contemporary jewellery – and to exhibit our work together in the public domain. In doing so, I anticipated that through exploring the existential creation of contemporary art work, I would have another echelon added to my comprehension of the transmission of intergenerational knowledge. I knew that I had gained some understanding through earlier series of personal interactions with my past. But this stratum would confirm in a conducive way, ensuring that I would abstract it and feed it back into my inquiry, practices and therefore my students.

How did I collect data from other family participants - my three children?

I collected data from my three children through semi-structured interviews and observations. The aim was to gather the perceptions they had towards their understanding of transmission of intergenerational knowledge. What did they understand this notion to be? Were they aware that they were incessantly part and parcel of this family’s diverse cultures’ knowledges and it being passed to them? Did they also comprehend that knowledge was being passed from not just one generation - their parent – but from other generations before their mother - and in due course, onto themselves? What did they feel influenced them and how did this impact on the way they viewed their world today? Did they hold strong fast to these values and beliefs as past generations before them had? I wanted to deliberate their standpoints as I considered this to be a valid part of my inquiry.

Why did I collect personal ephemera and documented sources?

An important part of the data collection was gathering, documenting and analyzing personal ephemera. The aim was to collect letters, diaries, notes, photographs, videos and other personal ephemera which Hodder (2003) refers to as ‘material traces.’ The purpose was to provide sources
and entry points for a discussion on how I came to understand, interpret and experience art as I do today, through the lens of past ‘true little incidents’ between myself, art and my parents, that serve not as bricolage but as emblems, signs and appeals.

**Why did I visit Mexico to collect data?**

The incentive to visit Mexico with my father was prompted by this research. I had an intrinsic feeling that I would have my inquiries confirmed by visiting and immersing myself in Mexico. I knew that the art of Mexico had been calling me for a very long time. I recognized and relished in the ways that the people are naturally inclined towards the arts. I respected and admired how the Mexicanos demand that the familia is held sacred to the survival of these primordial traditions and beliefs. The knowledge being passed from one generation to another confirmed what I already knew deep down – that this way was inherent. Having my father (and my brother Riccardo Bribiesca and his wife Liliana Zuyovich Bribiesca) accompany me was advantageous as I was constantly teasing out several generations’ transmissions and able to get feedback as I observed and experienced intergenerational knowledge. I was privileged to be able to document through photographs the vivid expressions of the various modes of intergenerational knowledge transmission.

### 3.6 Presentation of the data

My aim was to present the data using two modes – written narrative and visual images – both of which are pertinent to auto-ethnography and a/r/tography.

**Narrative as data**

Narrative as data can be viewed as experiences worth writing about deeply, creatively, and analytically. Translating one’s knowledge about and experience into an interesting story (auto-ethnography), can become a useful resource, and an approach to research. Holman Jones (in Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2015) proposes her stories to locate her in the field, the writing, and the political contexts of the research. She wrote, “Today my work focuses less on the story of doing research and more on storying lives as research” (p. 5).

Narrative as data enabled me to merge my personal experiences in and through my research. I was able to express emotionally my perspectives into the qualitative research process – I was doing and living auto-ethnography. Personal narrative as data illustrates a methodology that prompts one to reconsider how one thinks and does research. Holman Jones, Adams and Bochner (2015) observe that in academic discourse, this has recently become a refreshing “change in how researchers approach their work” (p. 8). My narrative recognises the value of the personal, which I wanted to include and feature in my thesis. This research method, which incorporates narrative at the forefront, allowed me to embrace it.

Harris and Holman Jones (2015) purport that for auto-ethnographers, theory and story share a reciprocal, symbiotic relationship. Theory asks about and explains the nuances of an experience and the happenings of a culture; story is the mechanism that illustrates and embodies these nuances and happenings. In the context of this thesis, narrative as data poses a challenge to entrenched
beliefs, practices and ways of understanding experience. As a researcher I felt confident about my right (and privilege) to speak for myself. One encounters the challenges of making links between theory and story alongside figuring how to use vocabulary of theory while writing in the mode of story (Harris & Holman Jones, 2015).

Visual images as data

There is a burgeoning literature on the theoretical grounding for using images as a powerful tool in research. Weber (2008) advocates for the “ability of images to evoke visceral and emotional responses in ways that are memorable, coupled with their capacity to help us empathise or see another’s point of view…” (p. 47). The inclusion of images also provides a challenge to prevailing modes of academic discourse. The inclusion of images in research is also an effective means for making research more accessible to a wider audience because we have become accustomed, in the twenty-first century, to reading visual and multimodal texts (Barone, 2008). These visual methods of data collection, analysis, and representation are used with the aim of legitimizing images as a method of inquiry (Sullivan, 2007; Weber, 2008). Theorists who advocate for arts-based methodologies agree that the power of images can assist researchers by revealing the hidden and unknown, and can support the ability to complement text, reveal what text cannot, and reach a broader audience beyond the research community (Leavy, 2012, 2015; Sturken & Cartwright, 2009; Weber, 2008). Images have the power to provoke new ways of seeing (Irwin, 2004; Weber, 2008). This was significant for my research which aimed to increase understanding and awareness of how intergenerational knowledge about art and art making from my ethnic Mexican / Irish / English lineage is transferred between generations and how this might shape my conceptions and practices as an artist and art teacher. Furthermore, it has been argued that a visual depiction of data can evoke a more emotive response from the viewer as well as making the inevitable subjective lens of the viewer more explicit (Garcia Lazo, 2012). The images of jewellery made by me and my father, the personal ephemera and family photographs, my diaries and reflective notes, and other visual artefacts are research data, not mere illustration.

3.7 Data analysis

Although auto-ethnography has gained a significant following as a research method, it has been criticized “for its rejection of traditional analytic goals such as abstraction and generalization” (Pace, 2012, p. 2). Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 744) object to this, explaining that “the narrative text refuses the impulse to abstract and explain.” Ellis (2000, pp. 195-196) argues that “when people tell stories, they [do] employ analytic techniques to interpret their worlds.” Ellis (2004) also argues that it is possible to generalize from an auto-ethnography, but not in a traditional way. This author claims that the generalizability of an auto-ethnography is tested by readers “as they determine if the story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know” (pp. 194-195).

Despite her objections to traditional analytic processes in the context of auto-ethnography, Ellis (2004) offers suggestions for combining storytelling and analysis, referring to the process as
“thematic analysis of narrative.” This she describes as “treating stories as data and using analysis to arrive at themes that illuminate the content and hold within or across stories” (p. 196).

You may simply want to position yourself in your research by telling your story, then move to analyzing the stories of others, which you connect back to your story. Your focus would be on analysis of narrative. Alternatively, you might focus on telling your story, then frame it with an analysis of literature, and concentrate on raising questions about that literature or about accepted theoretical notions, or on generating new ideas (p. 198).

**How did I analyze the conversaciones and visual images?**

The interviews were transcribed by me from the audio recordings. Following this process, I used a framework for the thematic analysis of written information based on Wolcott’s (1994) D-A-I method, which aims to ‘describe’ what was said by the participants, ‘analyze’ the similarities and differences, and ‘interpret’ how the data was understood to create meaning, and draw the final conclusions. I then categorized key themes to allow for comparisons between each other (Punch, 2009). Relevant comments made by the participants – mi familia - have been used verbatim as quotes in Chapters 4 and 5 to express their ‘voices’ alongside the visual data.

Springgay (2002) explains that “When we research using art forms the art becomes the tools of analysis” (p. 11). To analyze the visual data I used a four-phase process articulated by Collier (2001). This involved observing the visual data as a whole; making an inventory of images using categories that reflected the research goals; using a structured analysis of data with specific questions to produce detailed descriptions; and searching for meanings and drawing conclusions based on the entire visual record.

**3.8 Ethical considerations**

Prior to commencing data collection, ethical approval was sought from The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC). Although this research could be perceived as involving a conflict of interest, because the participants are all family members, they were free to participate only if they wished. However, on the recommendation by UAHPEC, to mitigate any suggestion of coercion my main supervisor, Dr Jill Smith, issued the invitations to each family member to take part in my research. It was clearly stated in each Participant Information Sheet that any participant – my family members – had the right to withdraw any information they provided through conversations and observations up until 30th July 2015 (see Appendices 1 and 2, Letter containing Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms). My family also knew that their identities would be known in the reporting of the research in my thesis and in any publications and presentations. While I understood, when I embarked on this research, that the University’s ethics guidelines state that it is not usually appropriate to conduct research with family members, the intention of this project was to understand in more depth the significance of passing on intergenerational knowledge within a family. As world-renowned qualitative researcher and methodologist Denzin (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) has cogently argued for many years, the depth, nuance and honesty in responses, along with the
researcher’s ability to assess the quality and truthfulness of information, is significantly increased when the researcher is immersed in the environment over a period of time and has trusting relationships with the people in them. Denzin argues that such ‘quality’ of information is much more difficult to acquire and evaluate in short-term studies or forms of information gathering such as anonymous questionnaires.

For the data collection, my family members agreed that our informal conversations and more formal interviews would be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy of what was said. They knew they could ask me to turn the audio-recorder off at any time, or decline to answer any questions. They also understood that my observations of them in family, or other settings, would be filmed as digital movie clips, and digital photographs.

My father and my three children were given the opportunity to view the raw footage of all visual material and were able to request that any aspect, verbal or visual, they were not happy with would not be used. Data from the research, including visual material, was carefully selected. It has been used in the thesis and may be presented in publications and at conferences. This was agreed to by all my family members as the research participants.

3.9 Summary

Chapter 3 has focused on outlining the research paradigm, rationalising the choice of methodologies, and explaining the methods of data collection, data analysis, and the ethical considerations relevant to this research. I have thought about the benefits of this research for myself, my father, and my three children. I have concluded that this research will provide ‘material traces’ (see Hodder, 2003) for my intergenerational family on how knowledge has been passed down. It may be of interest to them, in turn and with time, to pass this thesis on to their own children. My family will hopefully see this research as a ‘celebration’ of our family as an intergenerational family. The conversaciones with my father and my three children are unfolded in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4: UNFOLDING THE CONVERSACIONES WITH MY FAMILY

4.1 Unfolding the conversaciones (conversations)

In this chapter I unfold the most personal component of this auto-ethnographical study, Conversaciones con mi sangre / Conversations with my blood: How intergenerational knowledge shapes conceptions of art practice and teaching. I speak of my relationships with my family, in particular my father as the key participant, and how knowledge has been passed between him and me and my three children in order to answer the research question.

These conversaciones are personal accounts and feelings from mi familia. Very sadly I was unable to share first hand conversaciones with my mother who passed away in 2014. To include my mother in these findings, and on such a personal level, I relied on my father and his personal narratives. This was often emphasised when he periodically referred to “we”, as opposed to “I”, speaking on behalf of my mother too. From time to time, throughout our conversaciones, it became clear that as I engaged with my father we were able to recall her words and thoughts. As the personal narratives revealed themselves, I felt empowered to express thoughts through recalling memories of my mother. When writing this narrative I have “felt” her peering over my shoulder; she says nothing but smiles at me for what I am doing. She recognises the importance of intergenerational knowledge and knows who it is for – her ultimate creation – her familia.

It was essential, too, that the conversaciones were supported by visual images. Like Stephenson (2004, p. 156), I realized that locating objects and visual images – what she refers to as “an archaeological dig” - could significantly enlarge the range of telling.

4.2 What did I find out from my father?

Generations come and go. Most are documented in one form or another. Future generations can archive these resources and discover new findings to support their investigations. Chang’s (2008, p. 56) notion that auto-ethnography brings “cultural interpretation to the autobiographical data of researchers with the intent of understanding self and its connection to others” was pertinent to the conversaciones I had with my father.

My father was born in Taylor, Texas in 1936. He moved to Kansas, in Garden City, at an early age and was raised on a farm in Holcomb, Kansas, USA. Before I embarked on this auto-ethnographical study I was aware that he came from a very humble upbringing, but it is not until now that I fully appreciate the influence of his family and background on his early years. My first and only experience when visiting Holcomb with my father, 20 years ago, was joyful but I was quickly bored. I gained an insight into where and how he lived. I admired my Grandfather (Papa José Maria Florencio Bribiesca) for having built a family home out of not much (Figure 12), and a shed (Figure 13), both of which were still standing seventy years later! I felt there wasn’t much happening in that town and I wondered how on earth my father evolved to be the person he is today. During our conversaciones
new knowledge and multiple epiphanies and confirmations have been revealed to me. I asked him the questions below, and by delving deeply I was able to gain knowledge that has informed this inquiry.

**What were my father’s responses to the questions I posed?**

**Q1 “Where did you get your ideas and conceptions of ‘art’ from?”**

For my father - ideas and conceptions of art - came at a young age. It was what he naturally liked and what appealed to him. He observed that he was appreciating art forms – even if it was ordinary “every-day things, and in actual fact it was a vocabulary of art that was coming through” (pers.com 6.10.2015). My father feels that “art is everywhere” (pers.com 6.10.2015). As a youngster in Holcomb, Kansas, in America’s Mid-West, he observed art all around him, especially on the farm on which he grew up. The colourful pheasants were so much more appealing to look at compared with the chickens. At the Garden City Zoo in Kansas he saw foreign, exotic colourful birds such as parrots – they were very beautiful. To him these colours of nature were an art form. Kansas didn’t boast about art or contemporary buildings. There was no sophisticated modern architecture. My father could only find this in books and appreciated the stimulation of visual difference: “It was just natural things that actually became an art form” (pers.com 6.10.2015).

*Figure 11. José María Parra y Bribiesca aged 8 years old, USA*
As a child from a humble background, my father was not only a sponge for knowledge, but thirsty for the 'new'. Literature - through his conservative American westernised system of education - quenched this thirst to some degree, but the physical and aesthetic was what captured his eye. The latter held his gaze and stimulated his imagination. This bloomed into a love for, and an appreciation of, the arts. When my father was eight years old he saw a picture of a house that Frank Lloyd Wright designed. *Fallingwater*, the Kaufmann’s House in Southwest Pennsylvania, USA, designed in 1936-1939 is an iconic building for all times. Frank Lloyd Wright was another great influence on my father. He told me that it was during this period that he started to begin to understand the difference between designing and architecture. This had a significant impact on him.
To this day, my father hasn't viewed *Fallingwater* in real life, or walked amongst its rooms, but he considered this house, along with many in the architectural world, to be a masterpiece with its simple clean lines. These lines he observed, this architect he greatly admired, and this iconic building enthralled him. Back then, as far as my father was concerned, it was the house of all times. Its design influenced him immensely and, “From then on I equated anything to that house” (pers.com 6.10.2015).

It wasn’t until later in life that my father learnt the architect’s name – Frank Lloyd Wright.

At sixteen years of age, my father experienced his first critique through a drawing he had done. He was bluntly compared to Picasso by one of his peers, who asked, “Who do you think you are - Picasso?” My father was oblivious to Picasso. His drawing, which was on his bedroom wall, was his concept of movement – it depicted continuous lines drawn in all directions. He felt he didn’t have the usual things that most young people had on their walls; instead, he had his own art work. At that time – sixty to sixty-five years ago - Picasso was alive and a world-renowned figure in the art world.

In the 1940s, America’s Mid-West had a love affair with the car and “hot rods were it.” Customising cars was a major trend. My father, at seventeen years, was drawn to cars. He told my eldest daughter Angélita, and me, that at that age he had a 1936 Ford Roadster convertible. He would drive it to school in his final year. It cost him $40 to purchase. He was seduced by the natural sculptural lines of the car bodies minus all the chrome. These cars were an “art form” to him.

My father was drawn to the theory of ‘less is more’. One of his leading influences, the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), also adopted the motto “less is more”. This described his aesthetic approach of arranging the necessary components of a building to create an impression of extreme simplicity, enlisting every element and detail to serve multiple visual and functional purposes.

During the 1940s my father started architectural drawing – he was given a plastic form known as the *French curve*. He said that he couldn’t help but notice that the *French curve* was incorporated into the design of these cars. The curve was an important feature used on swooping forms of the car, such as the fenders (mud guards), “like the Jaguar’s and the Bugatti’s – all those flowing lines” [see Fig. 16] (pers.com 6.10.2015). Dad recalled that the use of the *French curve* seemed to be around
from the 1920s up until the late 1940s. The cars appeared to be racier and racier and the lines appeared to be longer. Then in the 1950s the lines became more compressed – there were no longer elongated. My father still has this French curve on his drawing board. Even though he didn’t use it much, it has remained with him. He felt those sorts of lines were very satisfying when one was designing.

My visit to Holcomb with my father, even though it was 20 years ago, made me think about why my father perhaps rebelled against the conventional, conservative, accepted ‘norm’ in Mid-Western society. I concluded that he must have realised at a young age that he just had to get away from there and see what the rest of the world had to offer him. Nonetheless, it was in Holcomb, at a very young age, that his ideas and conceptions of ‘art’ were formed.

Q2. “Where did you get your ideas and conceptions of ‘art practice’?”

I discovered that my father’s design ideas and conceptions of ‘art practice’ evolved partly through the disciplines of architecture and what that practice can encompass in its entirety. He said to me, “You start to materialise a shape” (pers.com 6.10.2015). In addition to this, another belief my father has for his art practice is simplicity. When architecture is involved he is not a fan of decoration. I noticed when we were growing up that my father practiced this philosophy. He would only use a few materials when designing and building the homes we lived in – concrete (and block), minimal wood and lots of glass. He said, “You are confined to the shape according to what materials you use and all those factors come into how you think of a building” (pers.com 6.10.2015). My father is a strong believer in utilising what building materials he has chosen while considering the design on the drawing board: “Real early on the main thing was to make it simple…crept into my designing” (pers.com 6.10.2015).

Another concept that my father inclines towards is the notion of minimalism and things that are small, if not miniature. He likes Fiat Bambinas, not to mention Chihuahua dogs! I feel that this attraction with minimalism and small scale has also shaped his conceptions of art practice. Our home was a small house and was constructed mostly of glass. Thus a glass house was pretty normal to me. However, I recall visitors thinking it was an unusual house as it was fashioned out of glass, with little wooden joinery or other ordinary building materials such as bricks and tiles. It was open plan, too.

I’ve always liked glass. I like a lot of glass. Being born and raised in a typical Mexican confined farmer’s house with small windows – I attribute that they were designed to live in the house. Because of the sun I wanted to bring that in, and make my little house bigger and I could do it with glass (pers.com 6.10.2015).

Growing up, I didn’t really think there was anything different about our home until I went into my friends’ houses and they had lots of walls, corridors, doors, and curtains on the windows too. I felt this was a bit too claustrophobic. I didn’t like not being able to see the garden outside right there in my living space. I have observed that my father’s longing for flora in his living space is an essential component he has incorporated into his architectural designs too. Where my father grew up in Holcomb, Kansas – it was defined as a farming community, with plains of produce as far as the eye
could see. In Garden City, Kansas, it is inclined to be more attractive with its garden status. Perhaps the contrast of plains and garden impacted on my father – directing him to integrate nature into his architectural (and later on the jewellery) designs and thus as a conception of his art practice.

When I was young our family would sometimes visit architects or artist friends of my parents. I remember going to Ian Athfield’s home in Wellington. He was an architect who my father admired. They would discuss architecture and concepts while my siblings and I would clamber and explore all the rooms. I was enthralled by the weird cave-like design of each quarter in this organically-shaped house. It appeared so spacious and yet the rooms were small. I recall one of these rooms having a large vine growing across its interior wall. Ian’s design was unique but in hindsight his concepts were comparable to my father’s theories of architecture - small and bringing nature into your living space.

![Figure 17. Sofia (aged 4) on top of Ian Athfield’s house overlooking Wellington harbour, 2002](image)

My father doesn’t believe a well-designed house or building needs to have today’s particular Council requirements, such as air conditioning and central heating. He finds some design concepts unnecessary and an added expense. He also observes that such extra facilities at an abode or building have not necessarily improved the design. At times it’s more about making the house grander than what it really functions for. With these added additions the dwelling consequently becomes larger, leaving no room for the exterior living. This type of modern living arrangement especially affects children and of them being able to play in a yard outside. My father doesn’t consider that to be living. “Our grandfathers and our fathers never had it and we’ve never had it. All these things creep in and they haven’t made the house any better, it’s the same with buildings, they’ve made them a little bit larger” (pers.com 6.10.2015).

My father comprehends that today’s families, the ones who can afford to own a home, spend a lot of time working and commuting to jobs. He observes how families only ever really get to live in their homes on a Sunday. He thinks that in today’s time, homes aren’t designed with families in mind. They are more designed with the prerogative of the developers (“cutting costs to stretch the dollar
further”). He does admit that the look and acceptance of glass is more widely used now. However, he thinks the designs are still limited and can come across as awkward in their final proposal. Their concept is not simple. The developers have good marketing skills to convince people that their dream home coincides with the developer's ideals. My father argues that home buyers do not think about, let alone design their homes these days. This notion of ‘progress’ has led to this and he finds it disappointing.

Figure 18. Les Mill Gym - Aerobics and Weights Rooms addition. Architect José Maria Parra y Bribiesca, 1986. Victoria Street, Auckland CBD, New Zealand. Photo 2015

My father’s attraction to nature, minimalism and the ‘small’ has clearly influenced the conceptions about his own art practice of making jewellery (see Chapter 5). I think that both my father’s (and mother’s) ideas and conceptions of art practice came from the influences and context of the era that they were situated in - 1960s, Auckland, Aotearoa-New Zealand. They had a young family to raise in a house that was designed and built by my father, and art to create together as a means of surviving.

I believe that my parents were somewhat rebelling against what they knew - the old and established - and had been exposed to this in each of their individual upbringings. This era of the 1960s-1970s in Auckland was a period of “out with the old and in with the new”. As far as my parents were concerned this epoch signified a new phase for the artists of Aotearoa-New Zealand. They and their peers, embraced ‘new-fangled’ art innovations and initiatives, and presented them to the international art arena.

Q3. “What do you define as ‘good art’ and art practice?”

I believe my parents appreciated things that were different. They liked the concept that an artist would dare to be different and could be different. They relished in the fact that good art could stop you, make you think and question. I believe their jewellery defined this for them – ‘good art’.

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An artist who my father thought dared to be different and practiced good art was Picasso. His use of various media in art works was greatly admired in our household. I know my father liked his modern approach and his style – it was naïve (folk-like) and characteristically Latin. One of Picasso’s phases that he experimented with was Cubism. Picasso spent time living in France and Spain which equated to his contexts of art – depicting the people and places of a particular period. The subjects he painted were observing their environments and what was happening at the time: war, politics, and the society's reactions. My father believed that the subjects Picasso painted expressed their feelings through their eyes. This is depicted extensively throughout David Douglas Duncan’s photographs in the book *Lump the dog who ate a Picasso*.

![Figure 19. Pablo Picasso, Guernica 1937 Oil on canvas](www.nuevayork-exhibition.org)

My father especially appreciated Picasso because his art was so unlike other artists of this period. He was breaking rules and he was expressing himself in new ways, unheard of before. He championed the people, being their messenger via his art. My father believes that art imitates life. Picasso was expressing his life through his art.

I’ve always liked Pablo Picasso’s work…But you ask yourself what was Picasso trying to do? All of his art, he was painting, expressing, how people see. He was just painting eyes and the importance of the eye…If you look at his paintings and you look at the eyes of the painting and everything else goes away and you’ll see that the person he’s painted is sad or happy or young or old or angry or like the ones he did on this one (Guernica) – despair and agony (pers.com 6.10.2015).
My father admired Picasso because he was daring and unaffected by what anyone thought of him. He was ahead of his time in his concepts of art, such as Cubism. He continuously experimented with all forms of media and styles of art making. I think this influenced my parents in their practice – that is, to continuously try new concepts and mediums of art.

I am glad my parents were accepting of the multitude of art forms, as this encouraged me in my art. They were extremely productive at the time when I was most susceptible to influences – that is while I was growing up. In fact all I remember was that my parents only ever made good art, spoke of good art, talked about art, had ‘arty’ friends and lived in art. I believe that has got to have had some sort of impact on one as a child. I suspect my parents were accepting of all kinds of art as they became worldlier and were being exposed to other types of international art – the kinds of art that you wouldn’t see in New Zealand.

My mother was a very talented artist. She practiced her art forms continuously and was very good at whatever she took on. She was so disciplined, methodical, practiced and knowledgeable. It appeared to be so natural for her to execute any form of art well. She had an incredible eye for exact proportions and detail, not to mention finesse. I later learnt that when I was a baby, she attended a year of painting at Ilam Art School in Christchurch. I remember the black and white profiles of my father and mother that they used as an icon for their jewellery. My father explained how he had expressed himself through pop art in this icon:

I did a pop art form in the seventies of our sign (Ashton Bribiesca). I did it. I didn’t even think about it, I didn’t even consider it to be pop art. In our studio we had two big circles, one was a mirror and one was a sign. It was of your mother and I - faces, little stamps, in a round circle. And that’s pop art. I didn’t even think about it. Then a couple of years ago Warren Viscoe said that was pop art (pers.com 6.10.2015).
In my youth I was surrounded by many of my parents’ friends who were practicing artists and distinguished at their craft. I met many artists, architects and associates of my parents. Warren Viscoe (sculptor) and his wife Pierrette (fashion designer); Wailin and Tom Elliot (potters); Lyndon Craig Smith (sculptor); Pat Hanly (painter) and his wife Gil Hanly (photographer); Ian Athfield (architect); Kim Goldwater and George Kohlap (photographers) and all the art and craft members of the Brown’s Mill Market Co-operative. There were also the many jewellers who were members or guest artists of Fingers Contemporary Jewellery Gallery. All of these artists were talented and I sometimes saw their work at our home or theirs. I remember Frank (jeweller and sculptor) and Tina Finan (potter). I was particularly drawn to Tina’s art work because her style was very different from other artists. She was Mexican, spoke with an unusual accent and always spoke Spanish with my father. Tina made very colourful Mexican pottery platters and pottery dolls. I used to spend a long time looking at her pottery dolls. I would draw them – and what resonated with me in her art work was the colour and her folk art style. I identified with her naïve Latin style.

Figure 22. Ashton Bribiesca Jewellery marketing art c. 1970s. Bribiesca family collection.

Figure 23. Tina Finan (a Browns Mill co-op member) with her pottery dolls in Titirangi, Auckland. Photo 2015
I grew up with my parents’ art studio spaces all around me – at home or in the suburbs. They always worked as a family and periodically with other like-minded people. They would do this for long periods of time, so there was always a family-like atmosphere present. Seeing my parents work like this was my example of how to work. I vividly recall the art scene in the 1960s and 1970s in Aotearoa-New Zealand as being an intriguing period – very ‘unafraid’, experimental and innovative. “If you make money or you don’t make money, as long as you can keep exploring what you do and continue on that path – you are producing good art” (pers.com 6.10.2015). My father explained this notion, which resonates with me. I agree with my father on his point of view – as long as you keep making and trying new concepts – that is good art practice. And it’s not always about the money.

My father thought that his and my mother’s jewellery was an art form though a lot of other people at the time begged to differ. The workmanship and the ‘look’ that my parents were trying to achieve was machine made, not hand made. Even if an artist’s finished work is ‘crude’ looking it may still maintain very good workmanship. My father was referring to such artists as Jeff Thomson, Peter Nicholls and Warren Viscoe. He stressed, “You keep exploring but don’t drop your standards, you explore but don’t copy” (pers.com 6.10.2015). My father explained that their jewellery was more inclined along the lines of component jewellery. It wasn’t sculptural or cast as other jewellers were exploring at the time. In saying that he never considered himself a jeweller, he thought they were little sculptures. For me they are more like miniature buildings.

Figure 24. Ashton Bribiesca chess set c.1970

Q4. “In what ways do you think your parents influenced you?”

In the early 1900s, my grandfather Papa José Maria Florencio Bribiesca was a new immigrant to the United States of America. He didn’t speak English, and only Spanish was spoken at home. He saw that his children could advance in Western society through education. My father recalls, “My father
only ever encouraged education. He viewed education as absolutely essential. So from that point of view and his time in America and all that – that was a father giving his children a future advantage” (pers.com 6.10.2015). All my life my father was steadfast about our education. He ensured that we went to the best state schools he could afford. We had to be equally self-disciplined in doing our work at school and our homework too. If we didn’t understand things we had to ask. Woe betide any teachers who did not act professionally in giving us every possible learning opportunity.

I can’t begin to conceive what survival would have been like for new immigrant Latino families in the Mid-West in the early 1900s. I can only envisage the firm stance my grandfather would have taken to influence his sons. He was a non-English speaking man with a large young extended family to support. Immigration - let alone mere acceptance - into a foreign society must have been difficult.

According to my father’s recall, my grandfather was opposed to any of his children becoming artists: “As far as being a designer of any kind, he was totally against it. He considered artists layabouts and not getting on with earning a living” (pers.com 6.10.2015). I was saddened to learn that my father’s father wouldn’t support him in his choice of vocation – to become an artist.

My grandmother, Mama Cyrilla Parra y Bribiesca was, no doubt, the dutiful wife and mother to her family. What her husband said – went. She was also wanting for her sons to be educated in the new country they were calling home. “My mother wanted me to educate myself and she was very proud that I was top of the class all the time” (pers.com 6.10.2015). I recall 20 years ago that my grandmother appeared very reserved and serious. She didn’t smile when I photographed her. I think life in Kansas, Garden City, away from the support of her immediate family in Texas, had been hard for her too.

Figure 25. My Mexican grandparents - Papa José Maria Florencio Bribiesca and Mama Cyrilla Parra y Bribiesca, Holcomb, Kansas, USA, c. 1940
My father remembers when he customised his first car – his father was up in arms. My grandfather was only interested in farming, surviving and feeding the familia as well as his mother, brother and sister. He didn’t have the time to be flittering away on unnecessary work. My father told me, “Because my grandfather died very early and my father being the oldest, my father took on the job of helping to raise his own family and raise the younger brothers and taking care of his mother, my grandmother. So he just didn’t have time for artists” (pers.com 6.10.2015).

Q5. **“In what ways do you think your grandparents influenced you?”**

My father said bluntly, “My grandmother – no influence” (pers.com 6.10.2015). Despite what he recalls about his grandmother I believe that grandparents can have an incredible influence on their grandchildren, thus I tend to view this differently to what my father states. I think grandparents can sway their grandchildren one way or another. My father’s viewpoint was also contradicted when he said, “My aunty and grandmother – when visiting them once a week, we had little special foods and an Easter egg hunt and we always had piñatas for birthdays. That was the colour brought in” (pers.com 6.10.2015). I gather from what my father said that the women relatives were carrying on tradition – in all its glory – colour and form. He recalls this and perhaps it impacted on his appreciation for colour later on in life with his jewellery.

Piñatas are colourful, sculptural and they were traditionally made with a clay pot base (olla). Today piñatas are a container often made of papier-mâché, usually fashioned over balloons. They are decorated with ribbons, tinsel and coloured crêpe paper, and filled with small toys or candy, or both. Piñatas are broken - as part of a ceremony or celebration. Each child has a turn at hitting the piñata, which is hung from above on a string. The child is blindfolded, given a wooden stick, and then the piñata is spun a number of times. As the child attempts to hit the piñata, another moves it to make it harder to hit. They have an element of surprise about them as well as festivity, ritual and often represent nature. My father may not have conceived this at the time but I believe my great Aunty and great Grandmother were instilling the culture of his Mexican heritage.

![Figure 26. Piñata detail, Oaxaca, Mexico, 2016](image)

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Food is an ever important part of any culture because it gathers people and stories may be shared. My father admitted that, “They gave us a love for the food – simple food and it stuck. The right ingredients and the right mix. I think it’s just the natural instincts that make you put this much salt and this and that…Your mother was like that. Nobody taught her that, she learnt a little bit from Grandma. I know she was making food like Grandma taught her – this and that. She learnt and picked it up herself” (pers.com 6.10.2015).

I never got to visit much with my other grandmother and grandpa in Texas, on my mother’s side because we lived a long way away… I was about eight…in Texas the houses had a rock veneer… You’d go through Oklahoma and that and getting into Texas and you’d start hearing western music…I would start seeing buildings that were rock. And I liked rock. The first house I designed for your mother and I, and I wasn’t even married yet, I did a model and it was in rock (pers.com 6.10.2015).

My father explained that when he first came to Aotearoa-New Zealand from America and wanted to work for an architect, he was paid less than a brick layer. My grandparents (my mother’s parents) didn’t say much but also didn’t think there was much of a future in architecture. I admire my father for continuing in a vocation that he believed in. Even if he had a young growing family to feed, he wanted to design houses and buildings. He had experienced no support from his father. So to have his in-laws frown upon him for not earning much money was nothing new. I assumed that made him work harder. I admire my mother for believing in her husband and tolerating the tensions her family may have put upon them as a newly married couple with a young family of their own. Life was hard in New Zealand in the early nineteen sixties, especially for married couples of different cultures. However, my father said, “Grandad influenced mum in art. There was an Aunty Mary Ashton, she was a painter, on his side of the family. You are going to be like your aunty and paint” (pers.com 6.10.2015).

I recall my Papa Stanley (my mother’s father, my grandfather) being kind to everyone. I know he loved us grandchildren so much. He was one of those grandfathers who encouraged us no matter what. My mother was fortunate to have a father who encouraged her interests. My grandfather was a middle-class income earner – a salesman. My grandmother was a stay-at-home mother who knitted professionally. Their family was small in comparison with my father’s but the extended family was large. The extended family was supportive of the newlywed couple. My father recalls “When your mother went to work at a photographer’s studio, she took up the painting there. She went to Ilam in Christchurch – she had to do a year there – water colours and oils” (pers.com 6.10.2015).

My mother used to love going to see her English spinster Aunty Edith. Aunty Edith apparently had “class” according to my father. She had a lot of antiques. My mother would always go upstairs to their bedroom and read books, and they had little dolls and other tasteful artefacts. My father recollects that my great Grandmother (Nana Quaid) used to take my mother under her wing and tell her about these different things. The family encouraged my mother to do water colours and painting. She picked it up quickly. My father said “It was a natural thing that came out of her” (pers.com 6.10.2015). I was too young to recall my mother going to work for a photographer in Auckland. But I do remember later on when I was attending a professional photography course discovering her oil paint coloured photographs. She had painted over her own black and white wedding photographs. She was so
talented. They looked like real colour photographs. They were so refined and the oil paint colouring style was subtle, sophisticated and like photorealism.

My mother was very attracted to dolls. She had so many types of dolls. Her mother (my grandmother Mama Monica) was the same, with her china cabinet filled with miniature dolls. She had collected these, as a tourist from every country in the world. My sister Sofia and I were drawn like magnets to that cabinet! We were allowed to take the dolls out of the cabinet, play with them, examine them, and use them for role-playing together. I still have a lot of dolls, as does my sister. Funnily enough neither of my daughters have this attraction to dolls. They don’t have the same fetish that my grandmother, mother and sister and I had.

I believe my father’s family situation was vastly different from my mothers. He came from a low socio-economic background. In comparison, my mother came from a much smaller immediate family, surrounded by what seemed to be a supportive extended family that lived close by. They were a working class family. My grandfather, Papa Stan, was a door-to-door salesman and my Mama Monica was supported in being able to be a stay-at-home mother/grandmother. As well as domestic duties, much of her time was spent knitting, playing cards, and attending race meetings. Despite my parents’ differing childhoods, and whether or not they were supported by their families in the arts, the urge to design and create was very strong in both of them.

Q.6 “In what ways do you think your art owes something to your culture?”

My father recalled, “Certain amount. You think of your ancestry – straight away you get an image in your mind, what has gone ahead of you. You see the good parts and the majority of it isn’t as good, but when you get to see some of the good stuff - Luis Barragán’s houses, Verde Ricos’s houses Andres – when you see ordinary houses that have just added that extra little thing about it. And your eyes pick up on this, and then that culture kicks in” (pers. com 6.10.2015). My father believes he would have been more colourful had he have lived in South America.

He explained, “You can have an ordinary house, simple made out of mud bricks and you put paint on and they stand out – beautiful. In Mexico if you walk in Guanajuato – bright colours on the facades of all the buildings, bright colours, splash of colour, not afraid of it. Just beautiful. That love has been there and it sort of comes out whenever I am in that part of the world. I love it.” (pers.com 6.10.2015). From his explanation I could see that colour is very much part of Mexican culture for him. Mexican culture in America today is different again. Western America’s culture is very dominant over any other culture, including Mexican culture in America. My father and I agree that you can take the Mexicano out of Mexico. But you can’t take the Mexicano out of a Mexicano.

My father went to Mexico in 2014. He talked to me about the meaning of colour for the people of Latin descent. “We walked up to a big sculpture that was there and all along the houses are of different colours. In wasn’t gaudy, it didn’t look gaudy at all, here it would. You don’t see it here. Looks like a postcard. So beautiful, dabs of paint everywhere”. In comparison, Aotearoa-New Zealand culture is relatively conservative and reserved. It is becoming more exposed to other cultures with the mass foreign immigration that we experience today. The Māori culture is different again to the dominant European culture. It has always been active and now thriving more than ever – in traditional
and contemporary modes. If one is exposed to their own culture from an early age then one is more aware of the meanings and significances of their culture – and that in itself is colourful. My father said, “Same thing in Chile. Like Wellington - hilly - and you have all these bright colours. Same thing in Littleton, cute little houses, but no colour. No bright colours” (pers. Com 6.10.2015). He explained further, “When you say I’m going to paint the house anywhere in Mexico - it’s never white, it’s never black, and it’s never brown. When you think of colour here, they are afraid to use colour or the one that is presented to them. Manufacture’s paint has fancy names to make your mind look at that dull colour”. My father concluded, “Colour - years ago I used to say I have a religion. Indian people didn’t have Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ came in later with the colonizers. We used to have Gods to the Sun, the moon, to the water, to everything. Gods to colour. I have a God that I sort of relate to which is colour” (pers. com 6.10.2015).

My father related these thoughts back to his art. He explained his culture and how it impacted on him with his art: “In the 1970s you only had a few colours – they were English colours - Perspex green. Perspex is a British trade mark. And they only had the primary and secondary colours. Then they started getting in translucent colours. Then later on we got all these other colours and pearls and glitters finally” (pers. com 6.10.2015).

Q7. “What do you understand by ‘intergenerational knowledge’?”

When I asked my father this question he answered in his way – and from that - I have come to the conclusion that I can only comprehend his considerations if I put myself in his shoes. For me, this means putting myself in his culture, his era and taking into account his values. I believe that my father cogitates intergenerational knowledge as a self-analysis, when he is doing something and where the idea for his doing may have come from. He explained:

To me it’s like a self-analysis when you think of whatever you are doing – and you think where did I get that idea? How did I come about that? I don’t think that really applies until later in life. I don’t think when you are young – you just plough ahead. I think you sit and think when you are much older – I think. I never thought of influences (pers. com 14.11.2015).
I understand and relate to his concept of intergenerational knowledge, applying (more so) when one matures. When one is a young person one tends to 'just do'. Thoughts about 'the doing' and the ideas of where that has come from occur later on in life. Kalsih, Griffiths and Lewandowsky's (2007, p. 288) notion that intergenerational knowledge brings “cultural transmission of information between generations plays a central role in shaping human knowledge…who themselves learned from previous generations” was pertinent to the answer to my next query I had with my father. I probed further – I asked him if he thought that intergenerational knowledge was referring to knowledge or information that is passed down, for example from a parent to a child or a grandparent to a grandchild. He acknowledged that various kinds of knowledge is passed down to one from an elder, but ever so slowly. This slow process of knowledge transmission is part and parcel of one’s upbringing “Different things come down to you but it’s just so gradual - it’s the way how you are brought up” (pers.com 14.11.2015).

Another point I found very interesting in our discussion of intergenerational knowledge was some of the experiences my grandfather had and what he learnt from them, which he then - cautiously and tactfully - passed onto my father. I believe strongly this had a lasting impact on my father, which he passed onto me. This discussion is applicable to the question put forward as it speaks of an issue that all indigenous people can relate to, from the past to the present. Merrell (2003) suggests that for the Mexicano the community’s past is the measure of all things. He says, “Mexicans are steeped in their past; they have more faith in their myths of the past, where imagination is more valid than an ephemeral truth (p. 32).” My father recalls his parents not approving of artists. They thought artists held an attitude of being very carefree, Bohemian and not moralistic.

When I said to my dad that I wanted to be an architect he interpreted that as an artist. He didn’t know what an architect was. I didn’t know what an architect was. His impression was that I would be lackadaisical and sort of be irresponsible. That I wouldn’t buckle down and it wasn’t a proper job. Architecture is not looked on everywhere in the world as a great job. It’s very hard being an architect or being an artist” (pers.com 14.11.2015).

I urged my father further, asking him if it ever occurred to him that my grandfather was demonstrating his “pioneering ways” and that, in itself, was passing on knowledge to his son – that this is how you do it, this is how you build your house, this is how you feed your children. My father agreed, “Yeah, he wanted you to know when to plant, when to harvest, where to gather your food for winter. We lived in an era where you didn’t have refrigerators, there was no supermarkets. You had to be as self-sufficient as possible. He showed us with good example, a huge garden to eat with and raised animals strictly for the family” (pers.com 14.11.2015).

I queried whether my grandfather’s knowledge that he passed on to my father was in a sense “survival.” “Yes survival. He didn’t say it, but there was a couple of times where he’d say “don’t rock the boat, you not a white person”. Sometimes he didn’t want to say it, but he would walk around the corner and say, “You could do it but the society won’t let you. They would put obstacles in your way most because of your colour” (pers.com 14.11.2015). Having travelled to Holcomb, Kansas, (Mid-West USA) with my father twenty years ago, I immediately understood what my father was referring
to - the era of the 1940s and the 1950s in the Mid-West of America. We both agreed it was still the same there. “In the Mid-west you are a real minority, there’s hardly any people there”. From this, I asked my father if his father’s actions and advice had made him a stronger person. “You grew up safe. But the race card started coming in, you noticed it when you were a kid. One day somebody said to my dad something derogatory about Mexicans. My father told me later – “There’s two ways to be called whoever you are, and it’s the tone of the voice whether they despise you or they respect you” (pers.com 14.11.2015). My father told me that my grandfather witnessed slavery. He was from Texas in the early 1900s-1920s. He saw it all. He saw a young Negro adolescent dragged from his farm, tarred and feathered - because he stole a chicken – because he was hungry. My father elaborated,

My dad had a little farm in Texas. And he had a corn field and he saw these people coming with a burning cross (Ku Klux Klan) walking up the road. And he took Uncle Tony and I think mother as well and they went into the cornfield and hid. And they could see through the corn field and this crowd went on by and they were taking this little Negro with them. They started out because the law couldn’t do everything, so they took it into their own hands, the vigilantes. That’s how the Ku Klux Klan happened. And my dad saw all of this. I think that is one of the reasons he left Texas to go to Kansas. Texas was full of Negro people and in those days Mexicans were just one step above the Negroes (pers.com 14.11.2015).

I questioned my father further on whether his father was referring to Mexicans as “second rate citizens”:

Yes. The new name is - you are an economic immigrant. You know, because they were just there to work. They went over to work. Those things my dad stored. He passed it onto us. I think that was one of the reasons he went to Kansas - because there were no Negores – very few Negroes there, mostly Mexicans. And there were hardly any Mexicans - in Holcomb there wasn’t any, just us. We were the only family and there was another family and they were Indians from New Mexico. The rest were Germans. Mostly Germans and they were very loyal because their sons went to the war to fight Germans. So they were very loyal Americans. And they spoke German at home. And they were over in Germany and were able to talk to the Germans and intercept and died for America. Dying for Holcomb. And so there are a lot of things your parents hand down to you and they don’t even know they are doing it. It’s just automatic. That’s my idea of it (pers.com 14.11.2015).

This knowledge of racism that my grandfather had passed down to my father, was also (subtly) passed onto my siblings and me, from my father. What I found particularly interesting about this discourse was - that within our Mexican family, with each of the generations approaching this subject and passing it onto the children - it was delivered by the men in the family.

Q8. “How do you think you have passed down knowledge about your Mexican heritage to me?”

I asked my father this question and at first I only understood his answer to a certain extent. His reply “Well I tell you who you are and who your grandparents are. That’s how you pass down knowledge” (pers.com 14.11.2015). This response wasn’t enough for me, so I pressed him further about some of the ways I felt he had passed on knowledge to my siblings and me. One of my questions
was to do with not having much Spanish language spoken or taught to us at home. I told him that I felt he didn’t pass much language onto us, and that we only knew what he was saying by his tone. My father responded with “It’s a bit silly to try to converse in another language here if your partner or your associates don’t speak it. Who are you speaking it to – nobody? So you go with the dominant language” (pers.com 14.11.2015). To which I asked, “Did your parents do that? They didn’t speak English at home.” My father agreed they didn’t speak English at home and they only spoke Spanish to each other. That was their first language. They learnt English as a necessity as they had no choice. My father felt that this is all a person “…can do in NZ. Unless there is a group, you talk the dominant one” (pers.com 14.11.2015).

We then discussed values within intergenerational knowledge, with each generation having different values to the last one, and how this was transmitted. Because my father hadn’t experienced the same life as what his father (my grandfather) had experienced, he saw many aspects of his life very differently from his father’s:

When I was seventeen I still had him. I still relied on him. When he was 27 - when he lost his dad - you take on the world, there is nobody there, and you are it. You don’t even think of yourself, you have to think of the whole group. And your responsibility is there and you have got to do it. And it is just so strong. For what my father handed me down - thinking back - all sorts of things he handed down, you have to look back further (pers.com 14.11.2015).

I thought more about this and asked my father if he thought he had passed down knowledge to me about my Mexican heritage through colour. His response was “Everybody is born with an appreciation of colour or the excitement of colour or the appreciation of anything. Some people develop it more than others” (pers.com 14.11.2015).

I remember I got a box of crayons that had a huge selection of colours. I loved to draw and this time it was just the most! I think my dad bought it for me and I saw all these colours. I didn’t get appreciation of colours for flowers and birds until later on. Colour - I liked when I was 16, when hot rods started coming in. We had these iridescent - what you call ‘Cherry Red’ and ‘Candy Apple’. I had a hot rod, I painted it turquoise. Most of them were red. And then the customs were all beautiful colours. So that’s when I started looking at colour, I was 16 and 17, that era. That’s when you started looking at colour, I also liked all the murals in Mexico. I liked the colours in all those (pers.com 14.11.2015).

My father elaborated about colour as I pondered - is it anything to do with the culture of a country? He recalled having always been attracted to colour, and reminisced about the first time he saw a Mexican blanket and how the colours excited him. My father also remembered seeing Mexican pottery and Mexican jewellery for the first time - and there was always colour. I celebrated many colourful art forms when I visited Mexico with him in 2016. I was especially attracted to the colourful bead work of the Huichol people (Figure 29). While in Mexico I observed and was told that this type of art uses traditional patterns, symbols and designs that have been used for centuries to represent and communicate with the gods. Even though non-traditional materials (beads) are used today, traditional symbols are maintained and transmitted to younger generations. The patterns and designs have religious and cultural significance.
Q9. “In what ways do you think I have been influenced by my mother’s Irish / English heritage?”

My father had to gather his thoughts regarding my mother and the question I put to him. What he did consider was my similar attitude to my mother’s habit of putting money away for a rainy day. “She was very thrifty. Her father, your grandfather, was very thrifty. So your mother was from early stages always putting money away. So you should have learnt something from that” (pers.com 14.11.2015). He elaborated further about my mother, her motherliness and the womanly role a mother plays. “When we got married we got stuck in and she was very supportive. You do that part and you just accept it. I think you probably got that from her. Your role as a woman. What you do. I think that definitely comes from her” (pers.com 14.11.2015).
Q.10 “What influences do you see in my art making?”

My father said that he thought I had been influenced by folk art, a more naïve style of art. “To me, when you were little you used to draw more childish drawing – develops into a folk art. Everybody does folk art and that’s the first art… You didn’t go into abstract you sort of stayed on that line and developed that line more than abstract” (pers.com 14.11.2015). With my Hei Tiki dolls (Figure 34) I was expressing a multitude of concepts in my art. Alongside the naïve style of these textile sculptures I was portraying my Mexican culture using bright flat colours and basic embroidery stitchery (tack and blanket stitch). The Hei Tiki aspect was an influence from my children (Māori / Mexican / European). One reference about Hei Tiki is the Goddess of childbirth, Hineteiwaiwa. With these dolls I further extended concepts of Hei Tiki within a women’s group show, held in Auckland along the theme of Matariki. My father observed that over time my art making was intrinsic, “It’s just a thing that comes naturally to you and you think about it and you just start doing it. You just keep searching on it, it’s never ending” (pers. com 14.11.2016).

Figure 32. Anna, la madre con sus tres hijos (Anna, the mother with her three children).
Photo José María Parra y Bribiesca, 2010

Figure 33. My Hei Tiki dolls textile sculptures, 2009
Q11. “In what ways have your grandchildren been exposed to your art and art making?”

My father spoke of how my children (his grandchildren) had, at times, seen him creating the jewellery or working on an aspect of the family home. He concluded that this was them being exposed to his art and art making. All of my children have attended my father’s jewellery exhibitions at different times of their lives. They have seen their grandparents’ jewellery in the permanent collection at the Auckland Memorial Museum. They have also seen their grandparent’s jewellery in a recently published book Fingers: Jewellery for Aotearoa New Zealand – 40 Years of Fingers Jewellery Gallery. My children know that the glass building beside the Les Mills Gymnasium in Victoria Street West, Auckland – which is also part of the gymnasium - was designed by their grandfather. He said:

They have heard about me. That’s how they’ve been exposed, like the jewellery. The house. A lot of buildings they don’t see where I worked years ago. We don’t look at it as art – it was a living and we designed houses for people and buildings for people. Put them up as well (pers.com 14.11.2015).

Q12. “In what ways have you had an influence on your grandchildren?”

The last question I put to my father was whether or not he thought he had influenced my children, his grandchildren. Firstly, I asked him about my son Maxito and the scaffolding industry he is employed in. He pondered and replied that it hinged on what my son was looking at when he goes to put a scaffolding up around a building. “If he thinks about it - not just there to do the job - but look at what’s there when it comes down and look at what’s been built. It’s bound to start sticking in the head” (pers.com 14.11.2015). My father insists that mathematics is part and parcel of the designing/building industry. He acknowledges that his grandson has to take this aspect of his job into serious consideration. “There’s maths involved. He gets certain terminology from working. When you are working with frames and a frame is a certain size – so you start talking like that. You start talking the terminology of your job. When we look at a building we say, “look at that building – what? – the elevation” that’s a term from the work. To anybody else it would be “look at that” it comes from that. He will pick that up” (pers.com 14.11.2015). My father remarked that he has noted my son observing certain facets of pre-production of building.

When he does come here every now and then he’ll look at different elevations. I noticed when he was here he was looking across at the scaffolding over there at the neighbours and he could see that it was incorrect. That’s just the experience he has had from working. So his eyes are observing. That comes from scaffolding (pers.com 14.11.2015).

I told my father that I thought my son liked the mental challenge of scaffolding. He agreed.

I can see he likes it. And the comradeship is all part of it at that age. I think he likes his boss. And that all works. And he’s wanting to be better at it. I appreciate that he gets up early and goes to work. That’s a bit of self-discipline. Because the attitude today is “Oh, I’m a too tired”. It’s too easy. The government has brought up that attitude in mind (pers.com 14.11.2015).

I then asked my father about his influence on his oldest grandchild, my daughter Angélita who had worked on the jewellery with him. He thought, during this particular experience they had, that he
had “…emphasized quality of workmanship. And showed her that’s what I go for and I criticized her on it when she would do certain things – another lesson. I think she learnt that I’m pretty precise and that I really look at all details. And it’s not a thing that I’m doing and that I don’t look at everything about it and what I envision to be the finished product and every little step of the way is part of it. So I think she got there. I’ve just polished up 30 of her bases just now (for the jewellery). She did a good job” (pers.com 14.11.2015).

The last question I put to my father about the transmission of intergenerational knowledge concerned self-employment. Did he consider that he influenced my children with this action?

I hope I have. I think they can see that I’m not unhappy at where I’m working or whatever I do. I’m not unhappy. Part of your job is to be happy at work and then it is not a job. And you should strive to find something that you are happy at and then you are happy to go to work. And you should feel like you are improving at it, getting better at it. Every days experience adds to the next day - if they can pick that up. I think they are aware that I know a few things, not just one thing. Maybe that will encourage them to not be afraid to look at things. I never have anything against changing jobs because I think that is part of searching. But definitely they should be happy at work (pers.com 14.11.2015).

4.3 What did I find out from my children?

From the outset, I had decided that I would interview not only my father but also my children – his grandchildren. The generation gap between los nietos (the grandchildren) and el abuelo (the grandfather) spans almost six and a half decades. I felt confident that interesting revelations would be disclosed. So bearing in mind the age differences, and the contexts of each individual child, the naivety and openness of the grandchildren’s responses needs to be taken into consideration. Their comments do not have the wisdom, experience or sophistication of their grandfather’s. But what they do have is honesty and directness to the questions at hand. Their answers also assisted me in being able to gain other understandings to inform my inquiry.

Angélita

“In what ways have you been exposed to Papa José’s and Nana Loie’s art and art making?”
The first child I asked questions regarding the transmission of intergenerational knowledge was my oldest daughter Angélita. She, at the time of writing this thesis, is thirty-three years old. Being the oldest grandchild she has had the longest relationship with her grandfather and a close one. Their age difference is approximately 47 years. Angélita furiously defends her grandfather’s standpoint on life. She finds his unique manner and ways are what make him so interesting. For her, his attitude keeps him ticking along and going about his affairs with his own style, regardless of what anyone else thinks. She likens this outlook on life to a strong personality trait and relishes in reminding me that I am my father’s daughter!
I asked Angélita the above question and her response was intriguing. She divulged freely that “From a young age I knew they were different. I knew they were not your usual, generic grandparents. My grandparents thought outside the box and put this into practice with their creativity on a regular basis” (pers.com 19.9.2015). I urged her to give me an example of what she meant. Angélita claimed that she felt she was exposed to art whenever she visited her grandparents at their home:

I was exposed to this creativity every time I visited them at their house on Tonks street. The house alone was an art piece with its top to bottom mirrored glass exterior and its giant, clear Perspex ‘bubble dome’ ceiling in the corrugated iron cylinder bathroom. Not to mention the giant jellybean shaped swimming pool out the front which I loved to swim in (pers.com 19.9.15).

The architecture of our homes had to run parallel with my father’s love affair with glass. This glass cladding, with the interior walls doubling as the exteriors walls, is black mirrored and has no wooden joinery. This means the panels (cladding) of glass are held together with a very strong commercial silicon. Any part of the walls of the house that happen to open out (i.e. doors, swing windows) are joined with black aluminium. These windows act like picture frames, framing specific
views to the garden. When seated inside we have often mused when we can see people entering through the front gate, walking around the pool and catch them looking at themselves in the exterior full length mirror, or not knowing where to knock. Open plan is another feature that my father insists on inside a house, as well as a garden. This garden contrasts with the architecture, but also harmonises with it and there is always a happy merging of design and nature.

*Figure 35.* Detail of the family home designed and built by my father in 1986. Photo 2001

*Figure 36.* Angélita swimming in the pool that Papa José built at the family home. Photo 1989
There were multitudes of things to touch inside the family home. I was surprised to hear Angélita say that, out of all the things that were at the disposal of her curious little fingertips, she was drawn to the chess set that my parents had designed. “Their space was colourful and alive! I would play with Nana Loie’s and Papa J’s chess set and marvel at the shiny chrome finish and wonder how he got the colours inside the individual pieces?” (pers.com 19.9.15).

I asked Angélita to share with me her experience of producing the Ashton Bribiesca jewellery with her grandfather. “As an adult I spent some time with Papa J learning how to make the famous Ashton-Bribiesca rings. They are made with similar materials to the chess sets - brass, chrome plated and perspex. It was really cool to learn about the production and get a hands-on understanding of his craft” (pers. com 19.9.15). Angélita firmly recognizes that her grandfather loves what he does, “Papa J is very passionate about his work and I enjoyed seeing him in his element. I did have a wee giggle at the tiny studio space overflowing with stuff piled high from floor to ceiling! You could hardly move in there and it was especially tight with two people, but every item had a purpose and I soon learnt there was a brilliant ‘method to his madness’” (pers. com 19.9.15).

“Do you think you have been influenced by Papa José and Nana Loie? If so, in what way?”

Angélita feels her grandfather is an inspiration to her. She believes he has not only influenced her but he inspires her too, “I can honestly say he is probably one of the coolest old dudes I have the pleasure of knowing. He collects Snoopy memorabilia and has a solid ‘Tonka Toy’ collection. His dress sense is always kooky but he pulls it off with style and his hats are epic” (pers. com 19.9.15). She finds him a very nonchalant personality.
Having lived overseas for a decade, Angélita identifies with her grandfather’s desire to travel. She acknowledges that travel has a tendency to take one out of one’s normal day-to-day comfort zone, but that one can have their life enhanced by this too. “I like the fact that he still travels well into his later years and that he thrives on being out of his comfort zone. He seeks adventure. He creates art pieces and travels the world exhibiting them in multiple spaces. I admire this greatly” (pers. com 19.9.15). Angélita told me she relishes the thought that her grandfather is a rebel at heart and often hasn’t abided by what life has thrown at him. She observes him pushing the boundaries:

I love the fact that he’s a bit of a renegade in his own right and hasn’t always followed the ‘rules’. He likes to push boundaries and maybe that’s where I get some of my ‘rebellious streak’ from? I feel he has influenced me to find my passion, to seek out what makes me happy and to do so with an open mind and not listen to the critics. His work ethic is strong and I too have inherited this trait. I work hard for what I want and I also get itchy feet when my ‘zone’ becomes too comfortable. I also love adventure. I hope to one day adventure with him (pers. com 19.9.15).
Sofia

“In what ways have you been exposed to Papa José’s and Nana Loie’s art and art making?”

The next child I asked questions about the transmission of intergenerational knowledge was with my youngest daughter Sofia. She, at the time of writing this thesis, is eighteen years old. Being the youngest grandchild she has had the shortest relationship with her grandfather and, perhaps, not as close as her older sibling Angélita. However, her stance is different from her sister’s because she was closer to her grandmother. She called her grandmother Nana Loie. The age difference between Sofia and her grandfather is approximately sixty-two years. I asked her the same questions that I asked her older sister:

Like everything – like everything in the house – like the clothes in the house – the hats – Papa José’s hats - some of them are woven. They are everywhere – all over the house. They are all different – shaped differently from each other – but a lot of them are woven and made out of a similar material or fibre. Some of them are decorated with cloth or strips of fabric going around the hat. There’s sun hats, bowler hats, sombreros, cow boy hats. They are all from different countries (pers. com c. 11.2015).

She then elaborated on the facets of design in the family home and the household contents:

The stairwell in the house (spiral) is like ‘going straight upwards’ – it’s been ‘made’ and it’s not made out of brick or wood and carpet – it’s made out of iron. The kitchen is tiled and you walk through from one room, past the kitchen and straight into another living space. The rooms are ‘open plan’. In the kitchen there are old things on the window sills – artefacts – they are
unusual because you don't normally see those sorts of things in kitchens. The tiles in the kitchen are also peculiar because they are black (pers. com c. 11.2015).

Sofia, like her siblings, found the outside of the home just as unconventional as the interior. She likened a lot of the surroundings to her grandmother, “Outside in the garden – it’s colourful and in each area of the garden it is different from another part of the garden. There are these flowers growing in the garden - pink and yellow (*Lantana*) – they remind me of Nana Loie – they are little and very old fashioned” (pers. com c. 11.2015). Sofia recalls Nana Loie having lots of dolls in the house. They are still throughout the house. “Nana Loie had lots of dolls everywhere. In her drawers she had baby dolls – very little miniature dolls – she collected things and dolls was one of them. I don’t collect things – I don’t know much about collecting things. But I have perfume bottles that I have collected. Nana Loie had a collection of perfume bottles too” (pers. com c. 11.2015).

Figure 41. Papa José and his youngest granddaughter Sofia (aged 2 years) with one of Nana Loie’s dolls that I made, 2000.

Sofia finds the furniture in the house ‘strange’, and the way it is placed in the house is unusual:

The furniture is pretty strange and the way it is placed in the house – the book shelf is a room divider – its blocks off the dining area from the living room area. The rooms are open but there are things that ‘block off’ different areas in the house. You can walk from one part of the house to another part of the house without having to open a door. Its ‘open’ - and the furniture is arranged within this living space to fit with the openness of the house (pers. com c. 11.2015). She observed, “The piano is old (and out of tune) – I don’t really like that piano – I like a new piano, one like what I had – highly lacquered and not an ‘old style’ look” (pers. com. c. 11.2015).

Sofia then switched back and forth to explain further her understanding of what she considered exposure to her grandparents’ art was. She continued to focus on the form of their house:
There are no walls inside the house. You can’t see into the house from the outside because the glass is black tinted and mirrored. But it is tinted inside as well – but you can see out, though it is darker. This is abnormal and ‘cool’ at the same time. It is different to other houses. I haven’t seen other houses like that only tall buildings - like towers - in the Central Business District - that look like their house. The swimming pool is unusual - as it’s in the front yard and it is tiled (mosaic tiles). Each tile looks like it got placed there individually – every single little tile. The pool is shaped like a peanut, a cashew nut – it’s an unusual shape (pers. com. c. 11.2015).

*Figure 42.* Sofia (aged 2) in the door way, and her cousin Andre (aged 2½) at the family home, 2000

*Figure 43.* Sofia (aged 6), in the pool in front of the family home. Seated are Uncle José and Nana Loie, 1999

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As is the nature of the young adolescent, I could see that Sofia had many visions racing around in her mind. She wanted to express this, and was vividly recalling aspects of what she considered exposure to art. Of interest to me was that Sofia focused on refined art, such as antiques. This was very different from her older sister’s conceptions of exposure to their grandparents’ art. The fine antiques and artefacts that Sofia was drawn to exhibited my mother’s influence, which came from her English Irish background. Sofia explained further:

The large wardrobe with pāua shell inserts. It has a picture on the face of the doors and cupboards that make up a picture. It is an Asian influenced Japanese themed picture. The pinkish-cream coloured marble dining table has unusual chairs around it – there are coconut wooden chairs and there are ‘old’ ones – antique chairs. There is an old wooden cabinet-like/dressing table piece of furniture in the dining area with antique vases and artefacts on it. It has drawers. Upstairs in the bedroom you are up high with a different view. It’s like you are standing outside but up high. You can see everything around you. It’s like you can go right up to the glass wall of the house and you feel like you are standing outside (pers. com. c. 11.2015).

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 44. New jewellery designs 2015, photographed in front of the black lacquered wardrobe with pāua inserts that Sofia observes in the family home.*

I asked Sofia to be more specific with the ‘art making’ part of the question. Sofia, like her older sister, has had an experience with her grandfather learning to make the jewellery alongside him.

The jewellery in the studio is *everywhere* - all the components are all over the place - because that is where Papa José makes it. This is where I learnt how to make the jewellery with Papa José, where I learnt from him. This is where I was exposed to his art making. When I’m around Papa José making jewellery with him it’s pretty interesting watching every little thing being done to make one ring. Watching all the steps it takes to make a product. Each step takes a long time to do. Like when you are filing all the components – you do a bulk amount at once – and it takes a long time, like a week to do a whole lot of these components. It makes sense to do it this way a bulk amount of components at once – i.e. knock out all these components at one time – as it’s a waste of time just doing one ring at a time. Every single one has to be of a very good standard so it’s ready for the next step. It has to be done properly or you have to do it again. It’s interesting seeing how a little square becomes a ring (pers. com. c. 11.2015).
Sofia then traced back to the family home, recalling the various textiles her grandparents had around the house. I was picking up on her attraction to colour. In particular, the colour of the Mexican blankets caught her eye:

They are very colourful – pink, green, brown, yellow, orange. The house is colourful – the carpet is colourful. There are some colourful artefacts around the house – like the colourful beaded head piece – I’d wear that. The glass coffee table with wheels is ‘weird’ – and it has little games on it for you to amuse yourself with – like puzzles and Rubik’s Cube. There is lots of Charlie Brown and Snoopy memorabilia around the house and at Papa José’s studio. Lots of different sorts of figurines everywhere in the house and in the studio. Skateboards, Mickey Mouse, Snoopy, ugly trolls with fluffy coloured hair – toys everywhere. Russian Babushka Nesting Dolls – the wooden ones that come apart.

There is a great deal of literature on the book shelves in the family home. These books contain a wide range of subject matter. “There are lots of different subject books – cooking books, music books, art books - I look at these books sometimes – Where’s Wally? Books – lots of cartoon books” (pers. com. c. 11.2015).

“Do you think you have been influenced by Papa José and Nana Loie? If so – in what way?”

I wasn’t surprised by Sofia’s answers. She had two differing thoughts about her grandparents. She perceived her grandmother’s stimuli to be quite different from her grandfather’s influences.
I think I’ve been influenced more by Nana Loie with clothes and make up. I like clothes and make up. She had a lot of clothes and wore make up. She was feminine – had ‘girly’ stuff – like clothes, make up, accessories, things in her room. She had matching accessories – handbags and shoes – she had a ‘complete’ look. There was all different types of makeup and lots of it (pers. com. c. 11.2015).

Sofia felt that her grandfather had influenced her in a different way from her grandmother. She felt more strongly that he was an artist, had practised art making around her and was still creating art.

Papa José has influenced me in a different way – like art. When I was at college they came to an art exhibition of mine, I had painted a self-portrait. I feel like I can’t paint – but I like painting. I feel like Papa José has influenced me more with art because he hasn’t stopped making art, he is still making jewellery. Nana Loie didn’t make jewellery with me or around me. I consider him more of an artist because he practices it and he has done it around me. And I have been to most of his studios that he has had in the past when I was younger (pers. com. c. 11.2015)

Sofia’s understanding of art and art making was perhaps a little more youthful than her older siblings. However, she still felt that her grandparents’ had influenced her via art and in other facets too (i.e. Nana Loie with her fashion). She concluded:

Papa José has influenced me more with art because he makes jewellery. He has made this around me while I’ve been growing up, more than Nana Loie ever did, as she didn’t make jewellery around me. He has influenced me more in this way. Nana Loie has influenced me with the way she dressed and her clothes. How she liked shoes, clothes, make up, accessories - fashion. How she presented herself from head to toe – the whole look. It was ‘feminine’ looking. Even her style of clothing – from ‘back in the day’ – everyone probably dressed like that then (pers. com. c. 11.2015).
Maxito

The last of my children I put these two questions to was my son. Maxito is twenty-three years old and the age difference between him and his grandfather is fifty-seven years. He has decided that he does not want to be interviewed. I asked him why he had made such a decision as initially he had agreed. He felt that when his older sister was participating in the first interview (14.9.2015), that she spoke on his behalf too. He was sitting beside her and agreeing with what she said with the occasional quiet input and nod. Being the oldest and first born grandson he has had a very different relationship with his grandfather compared with his sisters. It is not as close as his siblings, nor one that consists of lots of conversation. Nonetheless, I am able to recall the discussion that he quietly took part in with his sister Angélita who was happily doing most of the talking.

When I proposed the question to my two oldest children “In what ways have you children been exposed to Papa José’s and Nana Loie’s art and art making?” Maxito agreed with his sister that the family home was a definite exposure to his grandparents’ art making. He also established that the ‘things’ in the house were also part and parcel of this same art exposure. In particular, my son felt that the carpet was something he was drawn to – the colours and the floral patterning in the carpet visual. This fascinated him and spoke to him of art. Maxito also found the dome-like perspex ceiling above the toilet captivating. Maxito agreed with his older sibling that he felt that the dwelling consisted of a very unconventional design approach for a house – this he observed was different to other house designs - and this was relevant for him in regards to the context of his grandparents’ art.

I had asked them both together the second question “Do you think you have been influenced by them? If so – in what way?” Maxito agreed that he too, like his grandfather, has embraced an ethic for hard work. His attention to detail in the construction industry had been influenced by his grandfather being ‘busy’ or ‘active’ around him as he was growing up. Construction occurring in-front of him – as a youth - he couldn’t but help notice this practice.

Figure 47. Papa José with his two grandsons Maxito and Andre at the family home, 2000
4.4 Summary

This chapter reported on how I enacted conversaciones (conversations) with mi familia. Reed-Danahay (1997) suggests that “an auto ethnography is more authentic than straight ethnography and that the voice of the insider can be assumed to be more true than that of the outsider” (p. 3). In this chapter I, as an insider, unfolded a delicate component of the research which contributed to my thesis. This chapter spoke of my relationships with my family, and how knowledge has been passed amongst us. The conversaciones that unfolded were subjective accounts and feelings from mi familia, pertinent to the research questions put to each of them.

Chang (2008) maintains that auto-ethnographers contain a holistic and intimate perspective on their “familiar data” (p. 52). In accord with this I felt that what was expressed, especially when it concerned my late mother, Lois Marie Ashton Bribiesca, was openly and honestly shared amongst us. We were unable to speak her words, but between us we were able to speak for her, recalling the mother, grandmother, wife and artist that she was. This recounting, we considered to be a valuable contribution in the context of the transmission of intergenerational knowledge. As the personal narratives revealed themselves, I was able to digest the findings to further inform my auto-ethnographical inquiry.

The next step was enacting a conversación with my father, Jose Maria Parra y Bribiesca, through making art together. This collaboration was informed by the conversaciones with mi familia reported in this chapter, and is the focus of Chapter 5. The findings from these two chapters have informed the conclusions I present in Chapter 6.
Chapter 5: ENACTING A CONVERSACIÓN THROUGH COLLABORATIVE ART MAKING

5.1 An earlier conversación: The Ashton Bribiesca jewellery making collaboration

My father, José Maria Parra y Bribiesca and mother, Lois Marie Ashton Quaid Bribiesca, have produced, sold and exhibited their jewellery since the mid - late 1960s. Their jewellery is distinctive, made mostly using brass, electro silver plating and coloured perspex and has largely focused on designing and making rings. It has featured for many years on the website of Fingers Jewellery Gallery in Auckland. In 2013 my father’s exhibition, ‘77’, represented a series commenced as a celebration of his 77th birthday. Some of my mother’s designs were part of this exhibition too. The website notes that “These are all first edition pieces by one of New Zealand’s most recognised and charismatic artists, their bold architectural quality is unmistakable and speaks for itself” (FJG).

My parent’s jewellery is well known and has been admired and collected since the late 1960s. When I first met Dr Jill Smith in 2011, when training to be a secondary school art teacher at the Faculty of Education, she asked if José was my father. She told me that when she first began teaching art at Papatoetoe High School in 1969, her ‘arty gear’ consisted of embroidered waistcoats, long skirts and boots. The only jewellery she wore were Lois Ashton’s and José Bribiesca’s rings purchased at Browns Mill Market during the 1970s, which she still has in her collection of New Zealand jewellery. Those were the early days of experimentation for my parents. My father’s recent work, Jill says, “has reached great heights, aesthetically and technically, and are beautifully sophisticated” (pers. com, 12.10.2015).

Ashton Bribiesca jewellery (rings) through the decades

The jewellery that my parents made together, from the late 1960s to the present, tell their own stories. The rings (Figures 48-56) illustrate the technical innovations and refinements, and the imaginative artistic conceptions that my parents developed and produced over the years.

Figure 48. Ashton Bribiesca jewellery c. mid - late 1960s
Figure 49. Ashton Bribiesca jewellery c. early 1970s

Figure 50. Ashton Bribiesca jewellery c. mid 1970s

Figure 51. Ashton Bribiesca jewellery c. late 1970s
Figure 52. Ashton Bribiesca jewellery c. late 1970s - early 1980s

Figure 53. Ashton Bribiesca jewellery c. mid 1980s

Figure 54. Ashton Bribiesca jewellery c. late 1980s
5.2 Passing on intergenerational knowledge through making jewellery with my father

All my life, my father has passed on knowledge to me in many different ways. In 2014, when I was planning this auto-ethnographic study, it seemed a perfect time again to learn from him the secrets of his success as a maker of rings. Prior to this time, I had had periods of time where I would make the jewellery with my father, but not to the extent of producing my own designs and resulting in an exhibition with him. This process aligns with Ellis et al's (2013, p. 247) description of auto-ethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno).” In 2015 my understanding of art making was gained through the experience of a collaboration with my father, producing jewellery for a joint father and daughter exhibition at Fingers Jewellery Gallery, Auckland, from September 14 - 28, 2015. Preparing for this exhibition was a perfect opportunity for passing on intergenerational knowledge.
In this chapter I discuss and express my thoughts about the process and the expertise I gained while making this form of visual art with my father. I found myself in agreement with Custer (2014, p. 1) that the auto-ethnographic process “changes time, requires vulnerability, fosters empathy, embodies creativity and innovation, eliminates boundaries, honours subjectivity, and provides therapeutic benefits.” The jewellery making collaboration confirmed my findings about how knowledge was passed between my father and me. The expertise required to design and make these items of ‘wearable art’ consisted of many parts - the combination of spoken words, showing how, experimenting, trial and error, achieving, scrutinizing and completing. This ‘lived experience’, the hallmark of a/r/tography, enabled me to “…actively, subjectively, and wholly engage with [my] work and the work of others [my father’s] from within” (Leavy, 2012, p. 6). I have used “evocative narrative written in the first-person style” (Pace, 2012, p. 2), supported by visual images to capture the journey.

![Image of Dad and me making art together](Figure 57. Dad and me making art together
Photo Miranda Playfair 2015)

5.3 Processes my father and I experienced while making art together

Anderson (2014) says that embodied writing about one’s experiences “contains true-to-life, vivid descriptions intended to invite sympathetic resonance in the readers or audience” (cited in Custer, 2014, p. 5). In writing about my experience, and recording the process, I wanted readers to enter and feel a part of it, rather than receiving a portrayal of facts (Ellis, 1999).

**Space:** I observed, and could appreciate, that a creative space was crucial to the making of our art. This space was the confines of my father’s small studio, a separate place from the home workroom. A studio space is where one can think, create something, leave it, go away and think some more about it, come back to it, and proceed. My father’s studio is one of these spaces. It has natural light so that we can see clearly, without straining. One of the many tools my father uses is jeweller-magnifying eye glasses. He will soon be 80 years old. With this tool he can view his workmanship at very close quarters and inspect the quality. He informed me in the past that quality control is essential so as to
honour the workmanship. Work benches are scattered across the room so we could move fluently from one technique (area) to the next, even if we weren’t working in order of method. Instruments of the trade and other ‘make shift’ utensils are everywhere. The space is alive with images, cultural artefacts and assorted objects, with the garden beyond. My father’s passion for the work of Spanish artist Pablo Picasso is present in the reproduction of *Guernica* (1937), a mural-sized painting acclaimed as one of the most moving and powerful anti-war paintings in history. My father’s studio has an energetic element about it – it is where he crafts his art. It is who he is.

**Method:** The transformative methods of auto-ethnography encompass the idea of fostering self-awareness and self-discovery (Custer, 2014). Because of the nature of this type of visual art, I discovered that working in sequence isn’t always the case. Being methodical is necessary, but doing things in order can be haphazard at times. This was the way my father worked and I had to learn quickly to accommodate and adopt his methods in his surroundings. It went against my principles of working methods, but I could appreciate the reasoning behind his approach. One advantage of this mode was teaching me not to be constrained by order or materials. I quickly learnt to *play* with the materials and concept. My preconceived ideas of working vanished and I found myself enjoying the challenge of trying new techniques and modes. A/r/tography “celebrates and invites interconnectivity” (Leavy, 2012, p.6). This process fostered engagement between us. No matter what stage I was at during the art making, my father was close by to ask if I doubted my step or needed confirmation of my art making techniques. I established unusual combinations of working that didn’t interrupt my flow or train of thought, but quite the opposite – they enhanced it. I came to realize that thinking about my life, and art making, in retrospection and introspection stimulates creativity and innovation (Brown, cited in Custer, 2014).

![Figure 58. My father filing a component - Photo Miranda Playfair 2015](image-url)
Thinking: I am unsure what compelled me to make the designs I created for the exhibition. I acknowledge that my father did influence me to some extent as he had recently shown me some of his new designs. These incorporated the triangle as well as the square. They appeared rather masculine to me, and prompted me to consider making something not similar, but finer and more feminine. I quickly sketched some ideas that were floating around in my head. I liked my father’s concept of protruding the coloured perspex out of the components (see Figures 54-56), but I also liked the ‘neat’ idea of having the colour enclosed (inserted) into the component. I drew several concepts that integrated both of these aesthetics. Whether I could transfer these ideas into finished products never crossed my mind! I just captured an idea as a starting point. Inspired by Holman Jones (in Adams & Ellis, 2015, p. 5), I began to focus “less on the story of doing research and more on storying lives as research.”

Figure 59. Sharing work stations in the studio space
Photo Miranda Playfair 2015

Drawing: Designs started pouring out of my head onto paper as I visualized ‘2-d’ becoming ‘3-d’. Then the names for the designs I sketched just seemed to follow, flowing easily too. Colour was not such a concern, and I knew this would come later after I had finished making the rings. I noticed that my father sort of worked like this too. He doesn’t draw his ring designs other than when he is reminding himself of what particular ring he sent to which client. I have seen my father’s sketches of completed designed rings, usually on the back of his invoice sheets. He gets his ideas from architectural designs of buildings, nature, and art – other artists’ drawings of concepts inspire him and influence his jewellery designs. He then makes a ring from these stimulations. It was more important to me that my first stage was conceived - that is - visualized, and documented (drawn). Then the next few stages (preparing and making) would challenge me and from there I would then consider the colour.
Figure 60. Villa Savoye Poissy-sur-Seine France 1928, architect Le Corbusier. Image [www.architectuul.com](http://www.architectuul.com)

Figure 61. Sketch of Villa Savoye Image [www.feliciafchenarc.com](http://www.feliciafchenarc.com)

Figure 62. Ashton Bribiesca ring c. 1990s

Figure 63. Sketches of my designs on a paper napkin
Discussing: I noticed on the work benches that my father would have a few designs half made up, unfinished. This prompted me to first lay out my components and arrange them in the design idea that I had sketched. I then presented my arrangement to dad and asked him what his thoughts were on my design idea. He would discuss with me the practicalities of making the design and being able to carry it through all the steps to the finished product. I would question his methods for my own clarity and seek alternatives to making solutions. This discussion would end either way – 1) it would work or 2) re-jig it to make it work. He never said, “No, that idea won’t work”. My father would also show me exemplars of what he had previously tried, some of which worked and others that needed another application to be successful. He would even show me completed designs that at the last moment didn’t hold together. For these he would create a solution. There was never any giving up. It was good to have an exemplar with an explanation. I appreciated the argument by Adams et al (2015, p. 8) that writing narrative as data “has recently become a refreshing change in how researchers approach their work”. Placing narrative at the forefront, complemented by visual images as data, allowed me to embrace these methods when writing about the discussions with my father.
Trialling: Weber (2008, p. 47) advocates for the “ability of images to evoke visceral and emotional responses in ways that are memorable…” For me, Miranda Playfair’s photograph of me observing my father’s technique (Figure 65) captures something of the relationship between us. We are both strong-minded characters, yet we respect each other. If my father implied that my design concept may not be successful for various reasons, I found that this conclusion challenged me to ‘trial’ it. I needed to see for myself that it could possibly work out and be a successful design. Even though this action would take time and effort I found in the end that it was well worth doing. If a design notion I showed him was successful, he gave his approval and this also encouraged me to push the boundaries further. Either way, the trialling of ideas was crucial to the making.

Experimenting: I realized that part of designing and creating involves lots of experimenting. A ‘2-d’ drawing becoming a ‘3-d’ object is quite different. I was making something beautiful that had to be practical. It had to be able to be worn. It had to be balanced, not clumsy. It had to ‘sit right’ on a finger, not be dangerous, and had to be feminine all at the same time.

Trying again: Chang (2008) maintains that the inquiry method used by auto-ethnographers is user-friendly for both researchers and their readers; that auto-ethnographers contain a holistic and intimate perspective on their “familiar data” (p. 52). I learnt quickly to be patient. The qualities of my designs demanded that of me. I discovered that part of the process involved repetitive application to get it ‘right’. My father never discouraged me, even if I did challenge his expertise. He would do the contrary
– he would tell me to try it out. Part of the learning was making mistakes and learning from that. Sometimes I repeated the same mistake. Eventually I resolved my own design issues.

**Achieving:** From the thought, to the sketch, to the making is all part and parcel of the creating. To achieve each step is essential for what is to follow next.

**Completing:** I gained great satisfaction from completing the few designs I conceived. I had played with ideas, experimented with the materials, and resolved issues that arose. From this I succeeded and produced what I intended.

**Evaluating:** Taking a step back and looking at what you’ve done is part of the process that is on-going when designing and creating. This happens from the beginning to the end.

**Concluding:** Springgay (2002, p. 11) explains that “When we research using art forms the art becomes the tools of analysis.” The exploration and the making of this visual art was the most important aspect. In the end I learnt that it was not just about a finished product for an exhibition. The sheer construction of, and finishing it, despite the odds – or even not finishing a design - was just as important. This, I concluded, was a cultural practice which I didn’t realise at the time. The fact that my father didn’t intervene, and only advised me when I requested it, permitted me to investigate. The theories and practices involved provided new comprehension and proficiency which were passed down from my father to me.
5.4 Exhibiting together at Fingers Jewellery Gallery, Auckland, 14 – 28 September, 2015

This was my first jewellery exhibition. For my father it was one of many. I was delighted to see that Fingers had used my photograph of one of my designs (Brown’s Mill) on their website to promote the exhibition (see Figure 67). I had placed my ring on the finger of a black-painted plaster mannequin hand. This hand had come from the full figure mannequin my mother had in her boutique, when she was producing her ‘one-off’ fashion designs in the late 1970s. I was a little nervous and had a list of reminders which constantly preoccupied my mind all day. I had to work a ‘back to back’ day (five one-hour art lessons in a row with no non-contact time) and leave South Auckland semi-late in the afternoon to arrive in the city in time for the opening. Where was I going to park my car? Did I remember my speech? I must remember to acknowledge mum. I must briefly explain my Master of Education to put the exhibition into perspective from my educational point of view. Have I got the camera for the photographer? Will Sofia turn up? Don’t forget to thank Dad, the children and their partners, the Fingers gallery, and thank people for attending... All these thoughts were racing through my mind as I sped to the CBD from the South side of Auckland.

I found a car park. Fingers had a good turn out and there were lots of people waiting to go in. Dad was chatting with ‘fans’. My daughter Angélita embraced me, took my camera and smiled. She elbowed her brother who also gave me a big smile. Rings were already red dot stickered – a mark of ‘sold’. Alan Preston (a jeweller and an original member of Fingers Jewellery Gallery) told me Dad had a ‘fan club’. He asked me if I was interested to sell, as people were inquiring. People mingled and mooched. I remembered my speech – it was typed up so I could read from it, so I wouldn’t forget anyone or anything important. Very slowly and unobtrusively Alan tapped his wine glass until the room was silent. He then welcomed those present, spoke briefly and invited Dad to speak. When he had finished Alan asked me to speak. I read from my typed paper that was severely folded by now. When I had finished speaking, people clapped and I felt a huge sense of relief. The opening and exhibition were successful. Dad and I invited all to enjoy.

Figure 67. The photo I took of my Brown’s Mill ring which Fingers Jewellery Gallery used on their website to promote our exhibition
Figure 68. My father and I at the opening of our exhibition at Fingers Jewellery Gallery, Auckland, 14 – 28 September, 2015. Photo Angélita Hanna

Figure 69. My Pyramid Painted ring, 2015
Figure 70. My Painted Bridge ring, 2015

Figure 71. My UFO ring design, 2015

Figure 72. My 4th July ring, 2015
Figure 73. My Bridge with Triangle ring, 2015

Figure 74. New designs by my father, José Maria Parra y Bribiesca, for the exhibition at Fingers Jewellery Gallery, Auckland, 2015

Figure 75. Dad and Maxito at the opening of our exhibition. Photo Angélita Hanna
5.5 Summary

During this collaboration of art making with my father, I found myself back in the shoes of being a student. Kalsih, Griffiths and Lewandowsky (2007) state that in many cases of cultural transmission, one learner serves as the next learner’s teacher. These authors also support the view that intergenerational knowledge is inclined to consider the idea of “hands-on” experience, thus the need for learning to result in concrete, tangible outcomes. Like Stephenson (2004), too, I realized that visual images [of the art making with my father] could significantly enlarge the range of telling [my story].

I perceive that working together with my father for our jewellery exhibition was the type of ‘good art practice’ that he spoke about so often during our conversaciones (see Chapter 4). I explored a different art form which took me out of my comfort zone. I was achieving by initiating my own concepts and style. Through my own proficiency I gained finesse. I was not concerned so much with my father’s exemplars but more with the ‘getting on with it’ and making it ‘my way’. I had the notion of
commercialism at the back of my mind, knowing that my rings were going to be exhibited at the Fingers Jewellery Gallery Exhibition but I found that this didn’t inhibit my creations. As I became more involved in my art form, I found myself motivated to aim for a higher standard. Once I reached that pinnacle I didn’t want to reduce that achievement. I think this notion comes with maturity, confidence and proficiency.

I designed and created some new art works. In the process I enjoyed the experience of learning and achieving a diverse visual art. I am not completely resolved with all of my investigations but, what I do know is that what I produced intrinsically evolved. My exploration was an enjoyable one and I had a feeling of what it was possibly like for my parents when they were at their peak period where they designed, made, and exhibited jewellery together for a living.

![Figure 78. Mum making a ring c.2000s](image1)

![Figure 79. Dad grinding perspex for a ring](image2)

It is a great accomplishment when one can spend a lifetime believing in what one does and continue that ideal on a daily basis. It is also very satisfying when others appreciate your conceptions too. “How much of myself do I put in and leave out?” is the way Holman Jones (2005) frames the question of how auto-ethnography involves the use of cultural richness for self-reflection and understanding the nature of the encounter. Just as potent, Dyson’s (2007) viewpoint about auto-ethnography resonated with me during this collaborative art making with my father. For him, an auto-ethnography “is a presentation of one person’s view, or map, of reality, constructed around and through other people [in this instance, my family]. It is a good story, which does not establish truth, like an argument, but presents verisimilitude, that is lifeliness” (p. 46).
Chapter 6: REFLECTING CRITICALLY ON THE CONVERSACIONES

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I reflect upon the multiple layers of what I discovered - the findings - presented in Chapters 4 and 5 of my auto-ethnographical journey. I begin with a critical reflection of who I am and who my family are in the context of what I discovered about the intergenerational connections between mi familia. I examine how I position myself as an indigenous Mexicano person, and how stories are passed on. I reflect also on the findings in the context of the literature on indigenous, auto-ethnographical, and a/r/tographical theories and methodologies, and how I have used these perspectives to enact conversaciones with my blood. At this point I also reflect on the implications of this research for me as a secondary school visual arts teacher, and for the students I teach now and into the future.

6.2 Reflecting on the multiple layers of discoveries with mi familia

The findings from my research align with, and reflect the important insights I gained from the literature about indigenous and auto-ethnographical theories and methodologies. In Mexicano culture the familia (family) is the most concrete means of understanding and passing on knowledge. As Azaola (2012) says, traditions and values are perpetuated through family relationships and in many cases of cultural transmission, one learner serves as the next learner’s teacher. Kalsih, Griffiths and Lewandowsky (2007) concur that “Languages, legends, superstitions and social norms are all transmitted by such a process of “iterated learning”, with each generation learning from data produced by the one that preceded it” (p. 288). These authors support the view that cultural transmission of information between generations plays a central role in shaping human knowledge. Some of the most complex knowledge that people acquire, such as languages or cultural norms, can only be learned from other people (a collective of), who themselves learned from previous generations. Intergenerational knowledge is also further inclined to consider the idea of “hands-on” experience, thus the need for learning to result in concrete, tangible outcomes.

The multiple layers of discoveries I experienced with mi familia were informed by Mexicana auto-ethnographer Anzaldúa, who, when passing intergenerational knowledge on to others, “…intuitively follows her passion while using her autohistoria in creative ways. Indeed, her method is more akin to “style” in art than it is to “analysis” in the social sciences” (Capetillo-Ponce, 2011, p. 166). For Chang (2008, p. 48), auto-ethnography should be “ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation.”

I learnt that my early childhood experiences, and those of my parents and my children, contributed unequivocally to the transmission of intergenerational knowledge. Each of us, in our intergenerational ways, perceived that we had been influenced by mi familia. These multiple layers of what I discovered from, about, and with mi familia are recorded as narratives and visual images. My life has been studied by me, along with the lives of mi familia, in a “reflexive connection” (Ellis, 2004, p. 30). Being surrounded by familia - one’s own personal immediate community - undoubtedly leans
towards multiple layers of values, customs and experiences. These teachings impact on one’s outlook in life. They reflect Ruy-Sánchez’s (2004) claims that:

Often the hands of a woman or a man making a beautiful object are like mirrors replicating the gestures that other hands made before them: The hands of their parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, great-grandparents. There are many hands contained in every craftsman’s hand. And besides those hands from the past there are the hands of a community engaged in similar activities, thus engendering a kind of collective shape for the work...And it also animates the individual artist, who is bolstered by his sense of community (p. 28 – 33).

I also resolved that cultures and ethnicities are intrinsically significant for the transmission of intergenerational knowledge. No matter which culture or ethnicity I was referencing - be it my Mexican or my English / Irish culture - they all strongly impacted on the kinds of knowledge I received and how I received it. Mexican culture undoubtedly contributed to my father’s art which took the form of architecture and also in the mode of colour - the use of, appreciation for, and celebration of. The elders (family members), in particular the elderly women (Great aunt and Great grandmothers) in my father’s family, instilled the rituals and culture of my father’s Mexican heritage and retained this knowledge with the next generation of the familia.

My father believed that by informing me of who I am, and who my grandparents were, was his way of passing down his knowledge about my Mexican heritage to me. We discussed the principles of colour in Mexican culture and how this attributed to the latter. We were attracted to the same architectural and art forms when we visited Mexico together in 2016, in particular the sheer beauty of the colour. As the people of Oaxaca say when discussing their creations, “inebriate the eyes” (de Orellana, 2004, p. 51). We also considered the passing down of knowledge from my mother to me of my English / Irish heritage. My father believed that came more in the context of role playing – mothering. Over time, my father observed that my ‘naïve’ style of art and art making reflects many of the practices of Mexicano artists. He noted that it was an intrinsic nature of mine. I agree that my Mexican ethnicity and culture have had a major influence on my art and practice.

During this journey I became much more conscious that the art my parents made, in particular the jewellery, influenced people to view art from a different and broader perspective. Their context (1960s – 1970s era) was an experimental period in the world and in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Times were changing and attitudes were shifting. I am fortunate to have had these values and different concepts of life around me as I was growing up. It has impacted on me in many ways and I find myself passing this knowledge on to my own children, and to my art students.

The importance of the relationships between mi familia

This research has confirmed that cultural transmission of information between generations plays a central role in shaping human knowledge. With this principle in mind, my understanding of art making was further confirmed through the experience of a collaboration with my father, producing jewellery for a joint father and daughter exhibition at Fingers Jewellery Gallery. Preparing for this exhibition, and the relationship which developed further between us as we created art together, was significant for experiencing the passing on of intergenerational knowledge. This process aligns with
Ellis et al's (2013, p. 247) description of auto-ethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno).”

My father and I agree that the grandchildren have been exposed to my parent’s style of art and art making through observing his architecture, their jewellery, the family home and the making of the jewellery. The way my father has influenced his grandchildren is through the family home and their involvement with it. He acknowledges that this must have had an influence on them – alongside the construction of the family home, the making of the jewellery and most importantly how these forms of art are made. During my conversaciones with them, each of my children considered that from an early age they were exposed to their grandparents’ “difference.” They have also been inspired by the art and modes of their grandparents and how the attitude of difference and indifference is not objectionable. This sense of innovative ‘creating’ by their grandparents is reflected in Ruy-Sánchez’s (2004) view that:

Traditional is in the hands of the artisans because they create instead of mechanically repeating the past. They are the new shoots of a plant that has its roots in the past, leaves and flowers in the present, and seeds for the future (p. 33).

The influences of generations upon each other

An understanding of intergenerational knowledge came to my father via the method of self-analysis and he stated that this manner requires maturity to fully comprehend it. He understood that it is a slow process and part and parcel of the way one is raised. My children noticed their grandfather’s happy disposition in life. They also observed his boundary pushing. This has been influential for them. They seek their passions, find their happiness in their work and life with an open mind and do not listen to the critics. Their grandfather’s work ethic has been a strong persuasive force. Paz (2004) observe that “craftsmen have no country: they are from their village. What is more, they are from their neighbourhood and their family... His boss is not an invisible figurehead but an old man who is his master and almost always a relative” (p. 16 - 19). Ruy-Sánchez (2004) reinforces this by saying,

Those of us who see these handmade objects as outsiders learn to recognize the presence of their maker and the community in them: two superimposed identities. A thousand hands move in each pair of hands (p. 33).

The importance of sharing ideas

My parents’ art practice, and how their art is made, influenced me and the grandchildren. Living in a world of art and accepting that difference is agreeable and intriguing is an important concept to grasp. The many, various collections of tangible things to remind one of art and its functions, other than aesthetics, is an ever important element of my parents’ life. My children embraced this notion. They witnessed self-contentment and self-employment. They realised that beliefs and concepts, persevering, a strong work ethic, boundary pushing, experimenting, and searching is understood in our family as fundamental for survival in this world today. This notion is best explained by de Orellana (2004):
The past renews itself in the present. When teaching their daughters to weave, the weavers of Chiapas and Oaxaca transmit not only the techniques of their craft but also the secrets and traditions that conform it: the meaning of life (p. 64).

6.3 Reflecting on myself as an artist / researcher / teacher

Underpinning my auto-ethnographical study was an attraction to the literature on the theoretical and methodological approach to a/r/tography, an arts based research practice that integrates the roles of artist, researcher and teacher and “celebrates and invites interconnectivity” (Leavy, 2012, p. 6). Irwin and Springgay (2008) explain that a/r/tography is about the self and is also social when we come together as a community to share and exchange our work as a part of reflective, ethical practice. Before, during, and since enacting the collaborative art making journey with my father I have reflected on my desire as an artist / researcher / teacher “to uncover, record, interpret and position, from an insider's perspective and experience, the processes [they] I use” (Stewart, 2003, p. 1) within the context of my art practice.

A connectedness between a/r/tography and auto-ethnography enabled me to write in the first-person style, as the narrator, and make myself the object of the research (Ellis, 2004). This connection also allowed me to compose my pedagogy via these two modes to document an expression of my experiences with images through my writing practice. This style of arguing my research, academically,
was attractive as I could use a blend of visual and textual elements to express my perspective on how intergenerational knowledge shapes conceptions of art practice and teaching. I also saw it as a different, less confrontational and more shared form of discourse that doesn’t have the prior intention of persuasion or argument. From the collaborative art making with my father I have come to realise that the more I practice making diverse art the better I become at creating it. Experimenting with other new concepts could impact on my students as I demonstrate this confidence and curiosity which may, in turn, encourage their own investigations.

In the classroom, which is a small scale version of the world, there is an opportunity to practice whatever ideals I may cherish. I enjoy encouraging creativity and collaboration. I hope to foster a non-competitive environment that strives to include all student voices in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance.

6.4 Reflecting on how to enact the research findings in my art room

Auto-ethnography has features that make it valuable to the art education community in Aotearoa-New Zealand, and beyond, and to those of us who are artists, teachers and researchers. Central to human culture, and to its preservation and transformation, are processes by which knowledge gets passed down or transformed from generation to generation. Azaola (2012) argues that it is the schools which are responsible for the conservation and transmission of culture. At this point I am asking myself, “How do I relay this experience back to my students?”

I envisage that what I have learnt from this auto-ethnographic study can inform my professional practise as a secondary school art teacher. Manurewa High School, the large co-educational school at which I teach art, has a decile rating of 1 and an enrolment of approximately 2,200 students of whom 941 are Pasifika (47%), predominantly Samoan, then Tongan, Cook Islands Māori, Niuean and Tokelauan. After Pasifika, the next largest groups are Māori (24%), Asian (16%), European (11%) and other ethnicities (2%). The students at my school represent the changing face of the youthful population in Aotearoa-New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). They represent the rich diversity of cultures - Australian, Cambodian, Chinese (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore), Cook Island, Dutch, Filipino, Fijian, French, French Polynesia, Indian, Indonesian, Iranian, Iraqi, Irish, New Zealand, Korean, Malaysian, New Caledonian, Niue, Polynesian, Samoan, South African, Sri Lankan, Syrian, Thai, Tongan, Vietnamese – who have made Aotearoa-New Zealand a home.

During my search of the literature about art making as a means of recording personal histories (see Chapter 2, 2.5), I was excited by how Māori artist Michael Parekowhai’s sculpture, *He kōrero pūrākau mot e awanui o te motu: The story of a New Zealand River* (Figure 8) tells the story of his whanau and their connection to the Whanganui River and of the importance of the awa (river) as the life blood for many Māori. I was deeply moved by how Mexicano artist Diego Rivera created murals (Figure 9) which told the stories of the history of Mexicano society. I was also intrigued by the way in which Pākehā-New Zealand artist-researcher-teacher, Jill Smith, created talking sticks (Figure 10) to tell the stories of her research findings in secondary school art departments. Each of these examples
illustrate diverse approaches to art making and story-telling. All of them suggest approaches that I could apply in my classroom.

Having discursive pedagogical practices that allow all students to bring their own experiences, culture and identity into learning, supports them to become active learners whilst respecting their own contributions to learning. Sharing diversities of knowledges – bridging - that are also independently growing is crucial and fundamental to students of other non-dominant cultures and ethnicities in mainstream western education systems. Tamdgidi (2011, p. 218) observes Freire’s ‘banking system’ of transmitting knowledge, noting that one person deposits information into another person or people being a one-directional, hierarchical monologue. ‘Bridging’ is inclined to be in the nature of “dialogic and assumes the existence and equal value of banks of knowledge on two (or more) sides of a conversation.”

The ethnic and cultural diversities of the students at Manurewa High School provide opportunities for them to explore the transmission of culture from generation to generation – to tell their stories about themselves, their families and their communities. Custer’s (2014, p. 9) argument that “auto-ethnography is valuable… as it incorporates and reveals individuality”, reinforces the need for my students to be given opportunities to express their individual ethnic and cultural identities. My own example of exploring my relationships between and within mi familia through conversations and collaborative art making; and my creation of the ‘Ashton Bribiesca’ Family Tree (Figure 1), inspired by the Mexican árbol de la vida (tree of life), suggest approaches in which students could engage as ‘researchers’ and ‘art makers’ in differing, including intergenerational, contexts. A starting point for students could be researching Frida Kahlo’s painting, My Grandparents, My Parents and I (1936) as inspiration to discover and record through art making the histories of their immediate, adopted and extended families.

![Figure 81. Frida Kahlo, My Grandparents, My Parents and I, Oil painting, 1936](image)
Positive caring relationships between students and their art teacher, the acceptance of non-dominant cultures, customs and knowledges, and unifying processes can provide a sense of competency, autonomy and relatedness. These aspects assist students to develop a sense of self-esteem and solidity. This enables them to feel connected, and that their cultures and identities that encompass their knowledges count as valid and worthy.

6.5 Drawing conclusions about the conversaciones

This auto-ethnographical study set out to understand and describe human experience, in this instance, the importance of family being at the centre of my ‘conversaciones con mi sangre – conversations with my blood.’ My aim was to explore through conversations with my immediate family, in particular my father José María Parra y Bribiesca, how intergenerational knowledge about art and art making has been, and continues to be, transmitted by my Mexican / English / Irish ancestors. I wanted to understand more deeply, and critically reflect on how art is created, what meanings art works carry, and how those meanings are taught and learned within familial intergenerational situations.

The shape and form of my small-scale study did highlight potential limitations. First, it could be considered a limitation that there were only two ‘key’ participants – me and my father – and that our conversaciones were, by their very nature, highly subjective. However, the foremost limitation could be perceived as the issue of validity, especially since validity of interpretations and meanings has long been questioned in debates over the legitimacy of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Validity and generalisability have also been questioned in the context of auto-ethnographical research (Pace, 2012). Anderson (2006), in particular, expresses concerns about aspects of the evocative and emotional auto-ethnographic method promoted by Ellis and Bochner (2000). He proposes an alternative research method that he labels ‘analytic auto-ethnography’. For Anderson (2006, pp. 386-87):

The purpose of analytic ethnography is not simply to document personal experience, to provide an “insider’s perspective,” or to evoke emotional resonance with the reader. Rather, the defining characteristic of analytic social science is to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomenon than those provided by the data themselves.

Ellis (2004), on the other hand, argues that it is possible to generalize from an auto-ethnography, but not in a traditional way. This author claims that the generalizability of an auto-ethnography is tested by readers “as they determine if the story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know” (pp. 194-195). In this auto-ethnographic study it was not possible to escape the subjective experience. I acknowledge that this small-scale study is not generalizable in the traditional sense. Rather, it has verisimilitude through “the creation of a realistic, authentic, life-like portrayal” (Leavy, 2015, p. 57).

Deck (cited in Reed Danahay, 1997) observes that auto-ethnographers are “indigenous anthropologists…as concerned with examining themselves as ‘natives’ as they are with interpreting
their cultures for a non-native audience” (p. 128). Throughout the data collection with my family members, and my own self-reflections, I kept in mind how fortunate I was to have experienced such a unique and rich cultural upbringing. My childhood era was at a time (1960s – 1980s) when a Western society (New Zealand) strongly dominated numerous aspects of my family’s existence. I recall that throughout this period I was strongly influenced, without even realising it, by my ancestors who had come before me. My parents were continuously passing on knowledge to me and my siblings that was steeped in tradition, whether it be the Mexican way of culture or the English / Irish system of beliefs.

I believe that the knowledge generated by my study is significant in its own right. For the readers - the audience of the auto-ethnographer – their participation in the process of introspection, reflexivity and contemplation is to their benefit and advantage (Custer, 2014). The conversaciones with mi familia, visualised through personal photographs of mi familia, of me making art with my father, and of the art we made together, encapsulate the importance of building and sustaining enduring relationships. This study has the potential of transferability of the rich and empowering experiences of mi familia to other families and similar settings. It is a great accomplishment when one can spend a lifetime believing in what one does and continue that ideal on a daily basis. It is also very satisfying when others appreciate your conceptions too. “How much of myself do I put in and leave out?” is the way Holman Jones (2005) frames the question of how auto-ethnography involves the use of cultural richness for self-reflection and understanding the nature of the encounter. Just as potent, Dyson’s (2007) viewpoint about auto-ethnography resonated with me during the collaborative art making with my father. For him, an auto-ethnography “is a presentation of one person’s view, or map, of reality, constructed around and through other people [in this instance, my family]. It is a good story, which does not establish truth, like an argument, but presents verisimilitude, that is lifelikeness” (p. 46).

6.6 Summary

What I have concluded from my critical evaluation of the conversaciones and how intergenerational knowledge has been passed on through these, and through the collaborative art making with my father, is that my auto-ethnographic research was made possible only with the support of mi familia. As Chang (2008) says, “Given that culture is a web of the self and others, auto-ethnography is not a study of self alone” (p. 65). A window into my world was motivated by mi familia and this self-examination has been inseparable from them. Their stories and my story – our narratives and enactments – have reinforced the inevitable biographical dimension of auto-ethnography. At the end of this journey I have concluded that mi familia helped me, as Maydell (2010) suggests, “to articulate my own place in the world and understand who I am here, ultimately, as a citizen of the world, in an endless search for the meaning of life” (pp. 18-19).
Dear Mr Bribiesca

My name is Dr Jill Smith and I lecture in visual arts teacher education at the Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland. I first met your daughter, Anna-Maria Bribiesca, in 2011 when she was preparing to become a secondary school art teacher. In 2012-2013, when she completed a postgraduate diploma, she studied in two of my papers, one on visual arts education in New Zealand and the other on how to use innovative practices in visual arts research. This year, Anna-Maria has invited me to be the main supervisor for her Master of Education thesis, and for Dr Mera Lee Penehira to be her co-supervisor.

I understand that Anna-Maria has informally discussed with you her proposed research topic, Conversaciones con mi sangre / Conversations with my blood: How intergenerational knowledge shapes conceptions of art practice and teaching.

Anna-Maria has told me that you are willing to be part of this research as the ‘key participant’, with her as the ‘participant-researcher’, and that her three children are also agreeable about being ‘family participants’.

One reason for this letter is to explain how you would be involved in this research, the aim of which is to gain your perceptions of how you, and your late wife, have passed knowledge about art and art making down to your daughter. Anna-Maria will be collecting data from you, herself, and her three children over a 7 month period in 2015, in the following ways:

1. Some informal and semi-formal conversations between you and Anna-Maria (8-10 hours)
2. Conversations with, and observations of you with Anna-Maria and her children as an intergenerational family (up to 4 hours)
3. Collection of relevant Bribiesca family ephemera (photographs, artefacts, etc) (up to 2 hours)
4. Collaborative art making by you and Anna-Maria (10-20 hours)

Anna-Maria has also told me there is a possibility that the collaborative art works you and she make will be taken to an exhibition in 2015 in Guadalajara, Mexico, at your family Arts Polytechnic (equivalent) Artes Instituto de Bribiesca. This sounds very exciting.
Consent Form – Key Participant

This form will be held for a period of six years

Key participant: José Maria Parra y Bribiesca

Researcher: Anna-Maria Bribiesca

Title of research: Conversaciones con mi sangre / Conversations with my blood: How intergenerational knowledge shapes conceptions and practices of art practice and teaching

I have read the Key Participant Information Sheet and understand the nature of the research and how information from me will be gathered. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I understand that information from me will be collected using the four methods outlined in the Key Participant Information Sheet

- I understand that I can choose the location where the conversations and observations take place

- I understand that the conversations and observations that I am part of will be audio-taped.

- I understand that the conversations and observations that I am part of will be filmed as digital movie clips, and that digital photographs will be taken by my daughter.

- I understand that I may request that the recording devices be turned off at any time, without giving a reason

- I understand that I will have the opportunity to view all the visual material and can request that any part I am not happy with will not be used in the thesis or in any publications or conference presentations

- I understand that the visual and written data will be used in my daughter’s thesis, and may be used in publications and presentations

- I understand that my identity, and that of my family members, will be known.

- I understand that I may withdraw from the research up until 30th July 2015, without giving a reason

- I understand that this Consent Form will be securely stored separately from the research data for six years beyond the completion of the research, after which family-related material will be returned to my daughter.
I agree to participate in this research project

| YES | NO |

Signature……………………………………………………………………………………………………

Date………………………………………………………………………………………………………

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 24 October 2014 FOR 3 YEARS, Reference Number 2014/013107
Appendix 2 (example of Family Participant PIS and CF)

School of Curriculum and Pedagogy

Participant Information Sheet – Family Participant – Angélita Hanna

3 November 2014

Dear Angélita

My name is Dr Jill Smith and I lecture in visual arts teacher education at the Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland. I first met your mother, Anna-Maria Bribiesca, in 2011 when she was preparing to become a secondary school art teacher. In 2012-2013, when she completed a postgraduate diploma, she studied in two of my papers, one on visual arts education in New Zealand and the other on how to use innovative practices in visual arts research. This year, Anna-Maria has invited me to be the main supervisor for her Master of Education thesis, and for Dr Mera Penehira to be her co-supervisor.

I understand that Anna-Maria has informally discussed with you her proposed research topic, Conversaciones con mi sangre / Conversations with my blood: How intergenerational knowledge shapes conceptions of art practice and teaching.

Anna-Maria has told me that you are willing to be part of her research as a ‘family participant’, in which she will be the ‘participant-researcher’. Her father/your grandfather, José Parra y Bribiesca, is agreeable to being the ‘key participant’.

One reason for this letter is to explain how you would be involved in this research, the aim of which is to gain the family’s perceptions of how knowledge about art and art making has been passed down to your mother. Although you will only be involved with the second method, Anna-Maria would be collecting data from you, herself, and her father/your grandfather over an 8-month period in the following ways:

1. Some informal and semi-formal conversations between Anna-Maria and her father
2. Conversations with, and observations of you children with Anna-Maria and her father as an intergenerational family (up to 4 hours)
3. Collection of relevant Bribiesca family ephemera (photographs, artefacts, etc)
4. Collaborative art making by Anna-Maria and her father

Anna-Maria has also told me there is a possibility that the collaborative art works that she and her father make will be taken to an exhibition in 2015 in Guadalajara, Mexico, at your family Arts Polytechnic (equivalent) Artes Instituto de Bribiesca. This sounds very exciting.

Another reason for my letter is to explain that all the conversations and observations would be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy of what is said, filmed as digital movie clips, and digital photographs will
Consent Form – Family Participant

This form will be held for a period of six years

Family participant: Angélita Hanna

Researcher: Anna-Maria Bribiesca

Title of research: Conversaciones con mi sangre / Conversations with my blood: How intergenerational knowledge shapes conceptions and practices of art practice and teaching

I have read the Family Participant Information Sheet and understand the nature of the research and how information from me will be gathered. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I understand that information from me will be collected using the second method outlined in the Family Participant Information Sheet
- I understand that I can choose, with other family members, the location where the conversations and observations take place
- I understand that the conversations and observations that I am part of will be audio-recorded and filmed as digital movie clips, and that digital photographs will be taken
- I understand that I may request that the recording devices be turned off at any time, without giving a reason
- I understand that I will have the opportunity to view all the visual material and can request that any part I am not happy with will not be used in the thesis or in any publications or presentations
- I understand that the visual and written data will be used in my mother’s thesis, and may be used in publications and presentations
- I understand that my identity, and that of other family members, will be known.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research up until 30th July 2015, without giving a reason
- I understand that this Consent Form will be securely stored separately from the research data for six years beyond the completion of the research, after which family-related material will be returned to my mother
I agree to participate in this research project

YES  NO

Name………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Signature………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Date………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 24 October 2014 FOR 3 YEARS, Reference Number 2014/013107
Appendix 3  Interview Questions – Key Participant

Indicative interview questions (prompts) for two semi-formal discussions with my father, José Maria Parra y Bribiesca

The aim is to ensure that I gather particular information, should this not occur incidentally during informal conversations.

For a discussion which focuses on my father

- Where did you get your ideas and conceptions of art from?
- Where did you get your ideas and conceptions of art practice?
- What do you define as ‘good’ art?
- What do you define as ‘good’ art practice?
- How did you come to those ideas?
- Do you think your parents influenced you? If so – how?
- Do you think your grandparents influenced you? If so – how?
- Do you think your art owes anything to your culture? If so – in what way?

For a discussion which focuses on the relationship my father has with me and my children

- What do you understand by ‘intergenerational knowledge’?
- How do you think you have passed down knowledge about your Mexican heritage on to me?
- In what ways do you think I have been influenced by my late mother’s Irish / English heritage?
- What influences do you see in my art making?
- What processes do you and I go through when we make art together?
- In what ways have your grandchildren been exposed to your art and art making?
- Do you think you have had an influence on them? If so – in what way?
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