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The drivers of reflection in arts-based coaching

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Purpose: The aim of this study was to explore the use of art in coaching and to determine how art contributes to the ability of clients/coaches to reflect critically.

Design and methodology: This qualitative study used in-depth interviews with coaches who make regular use of a visual art form as a coaching tool. The sample focused on the diversity of coaches and the coaching context. A phenomenological approach was used as the focus was to gather the experiences of the participating coaches on their practices of art in coaching.

Findings/results: The views of participant coaches on outcomes have been gathered, which includes better insight (aha-moments), a stronger focus on goals, willingness to use their creativity and changes in perception. Five key drivers of critical reflection have been identified, and it was found that the experience of creating art, as opposed to viewing art, produces these results more often.

Practical implications: The findings of this research provide coaches with an additional mechanism to foster critical reflection with their clients, the educators of coaches with food for thought when developing coaching curricular.

Originality/value: This study contributes empirical evidence to the body of knowledge on reflective practices, transformation and coaching as well as key drivers that enhance critical reflection in clients.

Limitations of the study: Information was gathered from coaches only. For ethical reasons, the coaches could not reveal the identity of their clients. So feedback through the lens of the clients was not gathered.

Keywords: critical reflection; art; coaching; self-awareness; transformation; organisational development; creativity.

Introduction

An executive coach participating in this study commented, 'If you cannot write it, draw it'. This aptly supports the researchers' contemplation of the role of art in coaching and aligns with the famous adage, 'A picture paints a thousand words'. These statements suggest that the visual arts can capture a narrative that is very personal and depict a person's non-verbalised inner world. The question can then be raised as to whether the picture of the individual's inner world can lead them to greater self-awareness and insights and, in turn, lead to change and transformation.

Sustainable personal transformation is a key outcome for clients in the coaching relationship, and critical reflection has been identified as being one of the key themes of all transformative learning processes (Grant, 2003; Jackson, 2004). Moreover, reflection forms the second step of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle and the fourth step in Dewey's (1933) reflective learning cycle. Thus, techniques and tools that enhance critical reflection would be of interest to the coaching profession, their clients and organisations that seek to benefit from coaching interventions.

Reflection is a construct that is foundational to adult learning and transformative learning theory and is generally regarded as the prerequisite to all adult learning, development and transformation (Arlin, 1975; Mezirow, 1990a; Rodgers, 2002). Mezirow (1990) divided human behaviour into two broad levels. The first is the superficial level of action and involves performing habits, using existing knowledge uncritically and spontaneously reacting to situations emotionally. Mezirow (1990) defined these as non-reflective actions that do not lead to change and personal development. The second level of intentional, reflective action does lead to individual transformation. This category involves an individual asking *what* is being perceived by them personally, *how* the perception is formed and *why* those perceptions even exist (Mezirow, 1990). This level of

questioning leads an individual to question their foundational meaning framework, their assumptions and their values.

Reflective action does not come automatically to an individual, and it involves an intentional questioning of their cognitive and affective reactions to felt experiences (Mezirow, 1990; Taylor, 2017). Research into adult learning theory has revealed that some attributes, such as emotional engagement, increased self-awareness, insights, changed meaning perspectives, learning and transformation, are typically associated with reflection (Mezirow, 1990, 2000; Rodgers, 2002).

The literature describing arts-based interventions in art therapy, business organisations, healthcare and coaching reveals similar (reflective) attributes as described in adult learning theory. In the various contexts where the arts are used as interventions, literature observes outcomes such as emotional engagement, improved self-expression, heightened self-awareness, deeper insights, changed perspectives and improved communication (Malchiodi, 2019; Ramos-Volz, 2018; Sheather, 2017).

The key common denominators that seem to link the associated attributes of adult learning theory and the beneficial outcomes of using arts-based methods all point to reflective thinking. Critical reflection is a more profound, advanced and demanding form of reflection because it can transform our meaning schemes and perspectives (Mezirow, 1990). According to Hyde (2021):

> [*T*]he underlying premise here is that critical reflection is an individual activity, making it possible for a person to transform her or his frame of reference through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which interpretations, beliefs, habits of mind and points of view are based. (p. 374)

The links between the use of arts-based methods and critical reflection have not been thoroughly researched and opportunities remain to enhance insights into the nature of the benefits of using the arts in organisational learning contexts (Chemi & Du, 2018).

Models and reflection tools

The aim of this study was to explore the use of the arts in coaching and critical reflection in clients and the beneficial outcomes as alluded to in scientific and practitioner literature. A deeper understanding of the processes involved in arts-based coaching and the beneficial outcomes would serve to enrich the coaching profession with new tools and businesses with a case to apply such tools for organisational development and sustainability. According to SAGE Encyclopedia (2014), one such reflection tool is Kolb's model, which:

> [*I*]dentifies reflection linked to experiential learning and the transformation of information into knowledge. Knowledge is seen to be sourced from observations, questioning and reflection on concrete experience or action. From this, there are generalizations or the formulation of abstract concepts which have implications that are tested in new situations. New concrete experiences then occur with further cycles of learning. The goals of experiential learning are therefore understanding and improvement. (p. 3)

The article is structured as follows: Firstly, it focuses on theory related to reflection and its role in adult learning and development, using coaching. Secondly, the article describes the primary qualitative research method. Thirdly, the findings reveal the dominant themes associated with arts-based coaching and the drivers of critical reflection. Finally, conclusions are drawn that provide management with a motivation to consider arts-based coaching and facilitation for implementation in organisations.

Literature review

This study explored the broader construct of reflection as defined by adult learning theory in literature and sought to distil reflection into a summative definition with key attributes. Furthermore, the study explored literature to understand the arts-based methods used by coaches and the observed outcomes. The theoretical perspectives confirmed the common reflection-based attributes that both adult learning theory and the use of arts-based methods seem to share.

Reflection in adult learning and development initiatives such as coaching

A selection of definitions on reflective thinking (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Boyd & Fales, 1983; Dewey, 1933, 1934, p. 104; Goldblatt, 2006; Hatton & Smith, 1994; Mann, Gordon, & MacLeod, 2009) can be summarised as follows: Reflection is an intentional contemplative exercise following an engaging experience, which operates in both the cognitive and affective dimensions and challenges beliefs and assumptions with the objective of arriving at a deeper understanding and fuller meaning, leading to change and improvement.

The aggregated definition of reflection provided above indicates that it involves an intentional form of systematic inquisitorial thinking after an experience and that a successful outcome should be a form of personal change. The experiential learning cycle is a core model found in Kolb's theory of adult learning and explains how individuals learn and grow from experiences (Kolb, 1984). As part of this learning cycle, individuals should successfully complete the second stage of reflective observation before applying any changes in behaviour and should potentially undergo a personal transformation of perspectives before the cycle repeats itself with the next experience (Kolb, 1984).

However, not all reflective actions constitute the same depth and quality of interrogation. This notion of levels of reflection has been comprehensively researched and documented by Jack Mezirow (Kember et al., 1999; Mezirow,

TABLE 1: Levels of reflection.

Reflective action	Short description
Content reflection	Reflection about **what** we perceive, think, feel and act.
Process reflection	Reflection about **how** we perceive, think, feel and act.
Premise reflection or critical reflection	The highest level of reflection, which challenges our meaning framework by our becoming aware of **why** we perceive, think, feel and act as we do.

1990; Taylor, 2017). In Table 1, the three deepest levels of reflection are listed.

Premise reflection involves individuals questioning their most fundamental level of functioning – their assumptions and belief system (Kember et al., 1999; Mezirow, 1990). Mezirow (1990) used the term 'premise reflection', whilst other authors use the term 'critical reflection', for example, both these terms refer to the same concept, but critical reflection is the more widely used term in literature. Arguably, the most important word that elicits evidence of critical reflection is *why*, especially when the motivations for belief systems and assumptions are questioned.

According to Jackson (2004) and Grant (2003), coaching is inherently a reflective process for both the coach and client, and empirical evidence is steadily building a case that reflection in the coaching context is prompting transformation. Gray (2007) conducted a management learning study on determining that coaching and tools can be used to heighten the levels of critical reflection in organisational leaders. The study defined critical reflection as a route to enable change and collective action in organisations, and it was found that it does not come naturally to individuals, which is why it is necessary to facilitate the process to maximise learning and efficacy (Gray, 2007). The study categorised these reflective tools as written, verbal and cognitive.

Arts-based interventions in various contexts

Historically, the diagnostic and therapeutic attributes of art were first recognised by Freud (1952) and Jung (2009) and later formalised as a recognised discipline called art therapy by Adamson (1984). The foundational principles of art therapy were that an engagement with art can heal and be life enhancing (Lusebrink, 2004; Slayton, D'Archer, & Kaplan, 2011). Art therapy has now developed into a recognised form of psychotherapy, where art is used primarily as a means of self-expression, meaning-making, creating insights and communication (O'Flynn, 2011; Sheather, 2019, p. 10). It is furthermore recognised to be a powerful tool to externalise personal issues, trauma and emotions in a safe environment (Atkins & Murphy, 1993; Freud, 1952; Jung, 2009; Scheidt, 2016).

There is a distinction between two fundamental methods used in either art therapy, business, healthcare or coaching (Malchiodi, 2007; Perry, Maffulli, Willson, & Morrissey, 2011; Sheather, 2019). The first method is called *art process* and concerns itself primarily with the experiential and creative process involved in making any piece of art, and the value lies in the process irrespective of the quality of the artefact produced (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). The process thus takes precedence over the product in terms of value and benefits. Research has shown that the individual's art skills have a minor bearing on the efficacy of the process (Richards, 1995; Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). The experience of the art process is concerned with the reflective work that goes on in the mind of the individual whilst creating the piece of art, and in the process, the artwork makes subconscious impacts on the individual's thinking, assumptions and inner feelings (Richards, 1995). This correlates very closely with Mezirow's (1990) explanation of how reflection works.

The second method of art is called *art product*, and Malchiodi (2007) described it as being a 'window into the subconscious' – meaning that the reflective engagement and the emotional response to a piece of art reveal deeply seated issues, traumas, feelings, assumptions and beliefs of the individual. The value of the art product lies in creating that emotional response between the individual and the artefact via visual and tactile engagement, but Schnugg (2014) explained that unless there is an emotional response, the efficacy of this method is nullified. This correlates with the findings of Mezirow (1990) that an emotional response, in the form of feelings, forms part of content, process and premise reflection.

In the literature review of arts used in the real world by coaches, the art process seems to be favoured over art product (Adler, 2006; Falato, 2012; Malchiodi, 2003, 2007, 2019; Nissley, 2010; Ramos-Volz, 2018; Sheather, 2019). The types of art used in coaching refer to the process whereby the client, or client and coach build a model, create a drawing, create a story, paint something, make a sculpture and even dance. During the process of creating art, all of the five senses are stimulated, which makes for rich learning.

Art in various contexts

Arts-based methods can be used effectively in both coaching and business contexts. According to Malchiodi (2007, pp. 6–7), art is an experience that serves as a form of 'symbolic communication'. Improved health, emotional well-being and deeper insights with greater self-awareness are positive outcomes of using art in coaching (Malchiodi, 2007). These positive outcomes claimed by art coaching practitioners align with the objective of coaching to make a positive difference in the client's life (Cox, Bachkirova, & Clutterbuck, 2018, p. xxix; Ives, 2008). Silverstone (1994, 1997) also claimed that art in coaching improves the overall communication of the inner world of feelings, thoughts and fears that may otherwise be difficult to verbalise. Vick et al. (2004) supported this claim by stating that art taps into the unconscious and expresses previously hidden thoughts and feelings. Hence, art allows greater transcendent connections to be built between individuals' cognitive perspectives and their unconscious inner world.

Falato (2012) noted that, in addition to deepened self-awareness, the experiential nature of art seems to improve

self-reflection and self-directed learning. 'The clients are also able to develop emergent meaning over time when art process is specifically used' (Sheather, 2019; Vick et al., 2004, p. 244). The one advantage of using an art process is that a physical track record exists of the meaning created over time, and the development and growth during this evolving change can be reflected upon (Falato, 2012; Vick et al., 2004).

The making of art allows the client to fundamentally develop greater ability to express themselves and allows for more personal growth (Falato, 2012). The process of art making brings the client into a deep state of focused attention that allows reflective thinking for a sustained period, which improves the likelihood of increased insights, self-awareness and changed perspectives (Falato, 2012; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Thomas, 2019).

The second context in which art coaching can be applied is in business. Art in business had a modest start as only an office or boardroom decoration (Nissley, 2004, 2010). It then became more common practice to use art as entertainment and subsequently as an intervention for team building and leadership development. Businesses are now integrating arts into the formulation of their business vision, mission and branding (Bartelme, 2005; Boyle & Ottensmeyer, 2005; Nissley, 2010; Seifter, 2005).

Arts-based learning is steadily being applied in a variety of forms to enhance strategic planning, innovation and problem-solving in business (Nissley, 2010; Schön, 1991). In the current global economy with its great volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA), businesses are in need of innovation to continually reinvent themselves in order to survive the downturns and thrive in the upswings (Horth & Palus, 2003; Horth & Vehar, 2012; Nissley, 2010; Root-Bernstein, 2003). Research in the world of work suggests that there is evidence that the creativity inherent in the arts drives an innovation culture (Adler, 2006; Bartelme, 2005; Nissley, 2004, 2010; Seifter, 2005). The areas where arts can significantly support business are in dealing with complexity and decreasing the cost of linear, sequential experimentation (Adler, 2006; Schön, 1991). Art is able to depict the future possibilities and realities for a business, and it provides the respective leadership with a tangible picture to achieve these (Adler, 2006; Kinsella & Bidinosti, 2016).

Research into arts-based interventions in organisations identifies different methods in which the arts can be used by a business, varying from light exposure to deep entrenchment into business processes (Schnugg, 2014). Exposure to art is the first step (Darsø, 2004; Schwaiger, Sarstedt, & Taylor, 2010), followed by ownership and learning (Wagner, 1999).

In conclusion, reflection is an adult learning construct that involves some engagement with experiences, a deepened self-awareness, the questioning of personal assumptions, the changing of personal perspectives and learning (Dewey, 1933; Kember et al., 1999; Mezirow, 1990; Sammut, 2014). Art practitioners in coaching, business and healthcare have described similar outcomes in their clients: increased self-awareness, deeper personal insights, changed perspectives and personal transformation (Kinsella & Bidinosti, 2016; Malchiodi, 2016; Sheather, 2019). Each of the two forms of art described (art process and art product) makes contributions to these outcomes. The literature review reveals that there is a correlation between the terminology used to describe the nature of reflection and the inherent outcomes of arts-based methods.

Research methodology

The focus of this article is to discuss the findings of primary qualitative research conducted amongst coaches that used the arts as a tool in their respective genres of coaching. The intention was to empirically analyse coaches' first-hand experiences with arts-based coaching and to confirm or augment the prior theoretical perspectives researched. Given the focus on the personal, subjective experience of coaches in arts-based coaching, the phenomenological approach, as described by Rapport and Wainwright (2006), was applied in this study.

Qualitative data were collected using in-depth interviews to understand the experiences of using the arts in coaching, the nature of the impact arts had on coaching clients was used to gather first-hand perspectives by participant coaches through open-ended discovery questions.

The target population consisted of practicing coaches who specifically used art in the context of coaching and organisational facilitation. The sample of 13 participants was sourced through referrals from within the networks and associations of the coaching fraternity, and individual participation was voluntary. Please see Appendix 1 on page 10 for the demographic information on the participant coaches, detailing pseudo-name, country, gender, age, field of study, supplemental development in arts and coaching; years of experience using arts in coaching; preferred arts-based methods (product or process) and preferred coaching engagement (individual or team)

The study found that less than 6% of the potential participants approached met the arts coaching criterion for the research. The 13 who did qualify were interviewed. Table 2 hosts the interview questions used. The interviews lasted an average of 90 min.

Braun and Clarke (2006) advocated the usefulness of thematic analysis as a 'accessible and theoretically-flexible approach to analysing qualitative data' (p. 2) and went on to outline what it is in relation to other qualitative analytic methods thematic analysis is, locating it in relation to 'other qualitative analytic methods which search for patterns, and in relation to different epistemological and ontological positions' (p. 2). The guidelines offered by these two authors were followed to distil themes.

TABLE 2: In-depth interview structure.

Number	Focus area	Objectives
1	Demographics	To obtain the participant's demographic background Questions asked: Please elaborate briefly on your views of and personal experiences in the arts?
2	Background	To discover the participant's pathways to arts-based coaching and facilitation Question asked: How did you get involved in arts-based coaching?
3	Coaching process	To determine the participant's personal coaching process Questions asked: Please describe in your own words your understanding of arts-based coaching methods and processes? Preferred format (group or individual) To probe the participant's personal perspective on suitable coaching genres for arts Questions asked: For which genres of coaching do you think arts-based coaching is best suited?
4	Client experiences	To understand the coaches' view of the impact that the use of the arts had on their clients Questions asked: Please share some key take-away comments made by your clients at the end of their arts-based coaching journey?
5	Reflection	To probe whether the participants could explain the causal relationship between the use of arts-based coaching and reflection Questions asked: What would you say is the relationship between art-based coaching and the clients' ability to think and reflect more critically?
6	Metaphor	To identify the participant's metaphoric description of arts-based coaching Questions asked: If arts-based coaching should be drawn as a picture or painted or described as a metaphor, what would your interpretation be?

Characteristics of the coaches in the study

The 13 coaches who took part in the study were from diverse demographic and organisational backgrounds in South Africa, Portugal and India. Each coach displayed evidence of having had sufficient practice with a form of art process or art product in their coaching or facilitation sessions.

Most of the participants had a background in social sciences with a specific leaning towards psychology, whilst one participant had a health sciences background, one a mathematical sciences background and two a technology background. An observation in respect of the demographics of the participants was that only one coach had majored in art in their social science undergraduate studies. The other 12 participants had no formal coursework related to the arts at the undergraduate level. Every participant had been undergoing continuous professional development in their art coaching practices, and this echoed the findings by Eisner (1998, 2002) that proficiency in arts-based coaching can be developed formally and experientially over time. The average number of years of experience in art coaching was over 10, and eight focused on group organisational coaching.

Findings and discussion

The participants had the following preferences in respect of coaching genres aligned to their respective niches and interests: life coaching, leadership coaching, executive and management coaching, team coaching, transformational coaching and career transition coaching. There were no obvious limiting conditions except that the arts could only be used effectively within the confines of time, venue and resources available for the coaching sessions. Furthermore, the participants used the arts across all age groups of clients.

Only three participants focused on, or preferred, art product over the art process. The rest preferred the art process. The preference for process over product is revealed in the comments below:

> 'It's all about the process, nothing about the product.' (Maria)

> 'The part of the impact is the process itself. The process is beneficial just in itself …' (Carl)

Participants' subjective views on outcomes having been achieved include Aha-moments, a stronger focus on goals, willingness to use their creativity, changes in perception about people and more positivity – seeing potential solutions and outcomes and not just problems. Although participants reported an improvement in the ability and willingness to reflect on the outcomes of sessions, they could not all clearly articulate a supporting theory that explained the relationship between art and reflection. What they did agree on were five key drivers, which are laid out in the paragraphs below.

Multiple sensory inputs

The first driver of critical reflection was attributed to the clients being exposed to *multiple sensory inputs*, which relate to the five human senses, hearing smelling, seeing, feeling and touching. The participants (pointed out/agreed) that the key senses involved in the process of making art were sight, touch, smell and hearing. The sense of hearing was stimulated by several coaches playing music in the background whilst the coaching was in progress, whilst sight, touch and smell were directly engaged in the process. Art product primarily engaged the sense of sight and had a reduced impact on fostering critical reflection. The drive to involve as many senses as possible is revealed by a participant in this comment below:

> 'That is where you can really enter and have some richness and new sensory inputs. You bring something really deep so that people sense deeper, experience deeper, and from that comes much more interesting, much more concrete reflection.' (Carl)

Externalisation

The second espoused cause of critical reflection was the phenomenon of *externalisation*, defined by the psychological dictionary (Psychology Dictionary n.d.) as a defence mechanism where our thoughts and feelings are attributed to the external world. The coaches stated that this manifested itself primarily during the art process when the clients produced something tangible such as a painting, drawing, sketch, model or sculpture. The power of externalisation lay in that it was able to convey the innermost, unspoken issues and project them onto an external object. This seemed to make the issues of the client more manageable and provided them with the benefit of viewing them from different angles. The ability to see their projection from different angles became a precursor to their being able to consider new perspectives, which led them to question their views, beliefs and priorities in terms of goal achievement. For the client, the critical questioning primarily came after their tangible product was made, and this is an attribute in Mezirow's

(1990) *premise level* of reflection (Table 1). The power of externalisation is reflected in the comment below:

> 'Now you are actually reflecting on something that is external as opposed to something that has been internal in your brain all the time … Creating something is now taking your problem from inside your brain to right in front of you. Whatever your art is, that is the projection of your internal world. That causes your client to shift their way of thinking about things. Now they have something tangible and, when you give a client something tangible that they can work with, and all of a sudden, the problem feels more manageable. That is the aha moment for your client.' (Amber)

Unconscious connection

The third reason why critical reflection was fostered was attributed to the arts seeming to *intuitively connect to the unconscious*. The notion of unconscious connection is supported by evidence in art therapy and coaching (Boud et al., 1985; Freud, 1952; Sheather, 2019; Vick et al., 2004). The ability to connect to the unconscious allowed the clients to express their respective issues, problems or goals that were difficult to verbalise cognitively. Dissanayake (2000) explained that whilst humans are producing artefacts, they enter into a deep meditative and contemplative mental state that accesses remote parts of the mind (the unconscious). A selection of comments by participants supports these findings:

> 'I think it builds a little bridge between what is in the conscious mind and what is in the unconscious mind, also what's in the logical mind and what's in the creative mind. I think that's really what my experience is – it builds bridges, it gives us access to parts that we didn't know existed. You know you can't fix behaviour on a behaviour level – you've got to work under the waterline – what drives the behaviour. So, we use the art to help them articulate that thing that often cannot surface just with words at that conscious level.' (Adrian)

> 'I talk about it creating the bridge between the inner world and the outer world. But it is giving words to subconscious material …' (Maria)

> 'Imagery works a lot deeper. It works from a depth psychology perspective; it works with the unconscious. We can use imagery in such a way that it triggers thinking …' (Sarah)

Emotional engagement

The fourth driver of enhanced critical reflection was the phenomenon of *emotional engagement*. The coaches felt that this was a key prerequisite for any meaningful progress and transformation in the clients during both art product and art process interventions. The reactive emotions were usually a trigger for reflection, and peaceful emotions were generally an outcome of the process. Adult learning theory teaches us that critical reflection necessarily involves intentional questioning of fundamental assumptions in both cognitive and affective (emotional) dimensions (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984; McGilchrist, 2019, pp. 58–64; Mezirow, 1990). Studies in neuroscience further detail the role that the right hemisphere of the brain plays in processing emotions and allowing the left hemisphere to bring cognitive order (reflection) to it. A higher degree of hemispherical lateralisation (whole brain integration) leads to better cognitive expressions of the emotions (McGilchrist, 2019, pp. 58–64). In simple terms, with whole-brain thinking, emotions trigger words, after the art has brought the emotions to the surface. The following comments by two participants propose a link between imagery, emotions and words:

> '… the image can trigger emotional responses.' (Sarah)

> 'I do believe that the connection of the right brain with your intuition and emotional expression is really important [*for verbalising thoughts*]' (Maria)

Silence

The fifth driver of critical reflection was described as *silence*, which manifested itself mostly during times of deep concentration. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2005, 2014) described a mental state of flow, which is intensely creative, and intrinsically motivated. Creativity would generally be associated with an experiential engagement in the arts. The researchers of this study would argue that silence is not necessarily a driver of critical reflection, but that the underlying concentration and state of mind are the true cause of reflection. Silence is thus potentially the evidence of such concentration and focused attention. The comments below by three participants summarise this aptly:

> 'People often also find a stillness, a vitality, but also a stillness. Peace of mind, but attentive in a way.' (Carl)

> 'So, using the model-building brings them to a place of incredibly concentrated attention.' (Kim)

> '[*Art*] silences his mind [*to reflect*].' (Kiara)

Limitations of the study

This study focused on the perspectives of coaches and did not include coaching clients in the convenience sample, and thus, the results provide a valuable, but limited view of the role of art in fostering critical reflection. It is advised that further research be done to include coaching clients' perspectives of the use of art and how it influences their reflection capacities.

Further research in the form of a comparative study that analyses the efficacy between the various drivers of critical reflection mentioned in this study could augment further theoretical perspectives on the dynamics of critical reflection.

From a business perspective, a focused study that quantitatively researches the accelerated delivery of coaching results would be beneficial. Such a study would need to compare the scenarios of conventional management coaching approaches versus management coaching using the arts as a tool. Such a comparative study could possibly indicate the quantity and quality of improved results because of the intentional use of arts-based coaching approaches.

Conclusion

Adult learning theory points to critical reflection as a prerequisite to learning, development and transformation – which are all attributes of personal development and organisational development at a collective level. Critical reflection is also a key habitual action that needs intentional focus to succeed because it does not come naturally to people. Engagement with art is an example of such an intentional intervention. The literature has revealed that arts-based coaching shares many common attributes with adult learning theory, and the association has suggested that critical reflection also takes place during experiences with the arts. This study found empirical evidence that supported this notion. A similar study by Hughes (2009) using sculpture supports the findings of this article. Hughes (2009) stated that the use of art-based learning is a way of reflecting on the experience in the following ways:

> Through artistic endeavour creative ideas are stimulated, unconscious realisations are surfaced, understanding of the self-developed, thought processes freed up and organisations better understood. This can be motivational and enjoyable. It can access an aesthetic epistemology uniquely available through art making. At its heart is the notion that through engagement in creative art, deep responses and emotions can be realised. Through coaching dialogue these insights can be surfaced and shared and form the basis for new learning, understanding and action. (p. 89)

The research identified some of the potential enablers of critical reflection when the arts are used, and these are multiple sensory stimuli, externalisation, unconscious connection, emotional engagement, silence and new neural pathways. These drivers of critical reflection are more evident in the experience of making art than in viewing art.

The findings of this research have implications for coaches who are seeking additional mechanisms to foster the key process of critical reflection as a precursor to changed perspectives, re-considering values and the setting and achieving goals. It is recommended that the coaching profession consider developing and growing its exposure to the arts via formal arts therapy coursework or training.

The identification of the key drivers of critical reflection has implications for businesses. Opportunities exist to intentionally introduce arts-based methods in organisational interventions that promote the adoption of new insights, changed perspectives and stronger focus, both at individual and organisational levels. Moreover, as leadership development is supported, in part, by enhanced self-awareness, insights, learning and changed perspectives, it could also benefit from arts-based interventions. As making art – as opposed to viewing art – is more directly associated with critical reflection and positive outcomes, businesses should consider adding more experiences of making art during their organisational interventions. It is important to remain cognisant of the fact that the use of the arts should not necessarily be relied on as the only form of organisational intervention but as an additional approach.

In summary, arts-based methods can be used as a supporting tool for business when learning, changed perspectives and transformation are required or when more innovative cultures need to be created/enhanced.

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Authors' contributions

H.O. conducted the broader, original research under the supervision of S.V.C.P. in partial completion towards an MPhil in Management Coaching. S.V.C.P. supervised H.O. in the framing, planning and compilation of the original research project. H.O. performed the systematic analysis on relevant literature, conducted the in-depth interviews and performed the thematic analysis on the results to determine the findings and draw conclusions. S.V.C.P. provided supervision, guidance and inputs and aided in the interpretation of the results. H.O. authored this manuscript under the supervision of S.V.C.P. Both authors discussed the findings and S.V.C.P. edited the final drafts of this manuscript.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, S.V.C.P. The data are not publicly available because of confidentiality restrictions to protect the privacy of the research participants.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect any official policy of any institutions affiliated with the authors.

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Appendix 1

TABLE 1-A1: Demographics of participant coaches.

Number	Pseudonym	Region	Gender	Age	Field of study (degree)	Supplemental development with arts or coaching	Art coaching experience (years)	Arts-based methods preferred	Preferred coaching engagement
1	Emma	South Africa	Female	40–49	Social sciences	Arts (informal)	2	Process	Individual
2	Olivia	South Africa	Female	40–49	Social sciences	Arts (informal)	7	Process	Group
3	Elizabeth	South Africa	Female	70–79	Social sciences	Coaching (formal) Arts (formal)	20	Process	Individual
4	Peter	South Africa	Male	50–59	Technological sciences	Coaching (formal) Arts (informal)	20	Product	Group
5	Maria	South Africa	Female	30–39	Health sciences	Coaching (formal) Art (formal)	10	Process	Group & Individual
6	Carl	Portugal	Male	30–39	Social sciences	Coaching (formal) Art (formal)	7	Process	Group & Individual
7	Adrian	South Africa	Male	50–59	Social sciences	Social sciences (PhD) Coaching (formal)	4	Product & Process	Group & Individual
8	Kiara	India	Female	50–59	Technological sciences	Coaching (formal) Arts (informal)	25	Process	Individual
9	Rudolf	South Africa	Male	50–59	Mathematical sciences	Social sciences (formal) Coaching (formal)	10	Product	Individual
10	Sarah	South Africa	Female	40–49	Social sciences	Art (formal) Coaching (formal)	6	Process	Individual & Group
11	Kim	South Africa	Female	30–39	Social sciences	Coaching (formal) Art (informal)	12	Process	Individual & Group
12	Amber	South Africa	Female	20–29	Social sciences	Art (formal) Coaching (formal)	8	Process	Individual
13	Hannah	South Africa	Female	40–49	Social sciences	Art (formal) Coaching (formal)	5	Process	Group