

An Exploration of Self-Employed Arts Educators' Work Patterns and Social Relationships

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Abstract

Many arts teachers are self-employed due to the lack of traditional forms of employment available. The purpose of this study was to understand the messiness of employment patterns of self-employed music, drama, dance, and visual arts teachers to support current and future educators. The overarching question that informed this study was: What is the nature of self-employed arts educators' work and relationships? Elder's life course perspective was used to analyze diverse lives in connection with social interconnectedness and transitions (Elder et al., 2003). Results of this study suggest that business training and social connections are vital to self-employed arts teachers' success.

Introduction

[I was] putting my everything into the school. It was a struggle for me to support myself with the school. There were times I had to do without. I had to beg, borrow, and steal. I worked on baptism by fire. (Joy, drama teacher participant)

Engagement in the arts is associated with feelings of purpose/happiness and reduced anxiety and depression (Ryff, 2019; Seligman, 2011). Yet, arts educators have poor or unpredictable health, overwork themselves, work in employment situations in which they may resemble employees without benefits or career stability, and experience financial anxiety (Chafe & Kaida, 2020; Reid, 2019; Renshaw, 1997). The messiness of being human in self-employment can be viewed through the lens of complicated working arrangements, human imperfection, and the act of learning by making mistakes, coupled with the transformative power of positive social relationships that nurture professional growth (Gholipour et al., 2022; Nikolaev et al., 2023). This study explores the work patterns of self-employed arts educators in the fields of music, drama, dance, and visual arts in Canada to understand the needs of these educators. On a micro level, complexities of self-employment can be defined as working for multiple employers simultaneously by engaging in a combination of teaching/performing and unrelated work to obtain financial resources to survive (Bridgstock, 2013; Canadian Counsel for the Arts, 2024; de Peuter et al., 2022). On a macro/social structural level, messy self-employment patterns in the arts result from competition due to a limited number of standard employment positions, often forcing arts educators to become self-employed to continue to work in their art form (Gross & Musgrave, 2020; Menger, 1999). A discussion about the prevalence of gig and self-employment has been included within the literature review because it is relevant to all working adults.

This study seeks to answer the following research question: What is the nature of self-employed arts educators' work and social relationships? Social relationships mitigate the complexities of being human within self-employment by providing teachers with support to reduce stress, and they promote professional growth (Gholipour et al., 2022; Seligman, 2011). There is a limited body of literature pertaining to the work of self-employed arts educators. Thus, a constructivist grounded theory qualitative design was used to augment existing literature and expand our knowledge of self-employed arts educators' work and social relationships. Elder's life course perspective and Seligman's well-being theory were used to answer the research question and interrogate what it means to be human as a dynamic interplay between social relationships and self-employment. Twenty-six self-employed music, dance, drama, and visual arts teachers were recruited through art school web pages and invited to participate in this study, because this number is a rough guideline to reach a point at which no new insights can be generated in constructivist grounded theory (Creswell, 2018). For the purposes of this research, a self-employed music, drama, dance, or visual arts educator can be defined as a teacher who earns all or part of their wages through self-employment. Results of this study indicate that participants experienced financial anxiety and struggled to run their business, but social relationships mitigated these stressors. This research is part of a larger study pertaining to self-employed arts educators' work and wellness.

Literature Review

Limited research exists on employment patterns in the arts and the types of employment options available to artists and arts educators compared to other professions within North America (Alper & Wassall, 2002; Hill Strategies Research Inc., 2020; Woronkiewicz & Noonan, 2019). Research from other countries such as the United Kingdom and parts of Europe is only somewhat relevant to the employment patterns of arts educators in North America because these countries place a higher value on the arts and provide more funding (Atkinson & Easthope, 2009; Polèse, 2012). In comparison to other Canadian provinces, Quebec places a higher emphasis on the arts than Ontario (Atkinson & Easthope, 2009; Polèse, 2012). Thus, these provinces can be used for comparison purposes. Studies in the arts have negated work patterns of artists and arts educators to explore concepts such as economic development in the arts, the impact of an arts education on entrepreneurial skills, the oversupply of artists, policies to support artists/educators in self-employment, the health benefits of engaging in the arts, and artists'/educators' reliance on non-arts-related employment (Alper & Wassall, 2000, 2002; Hill Strategies Research Inc., 2020; Paulsen et al., 2021; Polèse, 2012).

The use of the term "artist" compounds work pattern confusion because it is used to refer to musicians, actors, dancers, choreographers, visual artists, radio announcers, voice actors, writers, television, radio and film producers, directors, animators, photographers, architects recording engineers, sculptors, illustrators, fashion designers, craftspeople, artisans, comedians, composers and conductors, and arts educators (Hill Strategies Research Inc., 2014, 2020; Gross & Musgrave, 2020; Toronto Artscape Inc., 2015; Work in Culture, 2014). This categorization comprises 24 distinct professions with different incomes and levels of education which may be due to the fact that arts employment is not valued enough

to provide distinct categorization based on employment type. Thus, it is impossible to determine the employment patterns of self-employed arts teachers in Canada through provincial and federal government reporting. Some research and census data do differentiate between teachers and artists, based on the number of hours an individual engages in teaching/creating/performing (Alper & Wassall, 2002; Filer, 1990). However, Statistics Canada classifies teachers under the subcategories of musician or artist or includes these individuals under the category of teacher, which creates further confusion (Work in Culture, 2014). Employment categorization has a profound effect on an artist's earnings and their ability to qualify for employment insurance and other benefits.

Categorization based on art form or employment type is problematic in the arts because employment in the arts is marked by transitions, fluidity, and the messiness of working for multiple employers simultaneously. Arts employment is characterized by portfolio careers, defined as several different forms of employment centering around a skill set (Bridgstock, 2013). Arts-related employment may be supplemented by a "day job" to enable individuals to be active within the arts while earning a stable income (Hinkkala, 2021). My own employment struggles as a self-employed music educator prompted me to become a school bus driver to supplement my income (Hinkkala, 2021).

Arts organizations have few standard employment positions available for artists or arts teachers, which results in high levels of competition. However, these arts organizations tend to hire self-employed independent contractors (Gross & Musgrave, 2020; Menger, 1999). Artists and arts teachers in Canada are much more likely to be self-employed, representing an estimated 51% to 41% of the total artist population (Hill Strategies Research Inc., 2014; Paulsen, 2021). Paulsen (2021) asserts that arts majors may be more intrinsically motivated to pursue entrepreneurial careers than other college graduates. Interestingly, self-employment in the arts dates back to the Middle Ages; thus, the lack of research is somewhat surprising (Woronkiewicz & Noonan, 2019).

Two forms of self-employment are prevalent within arts education in Canada today: solo self-employed teachers, and self-employed independent contractors. Solo self-employed arts teachers have even less job security than employees, do not receive benefits, are not permitted to join unions, and "receive [business] profits, in contrast to wages" (Canadian Revenue Agency, 2016; Vosko, 2006, p. 68). Self-employed arts teachers are personally accountable for obtaining their own employment (Canadian Revenue Agency, 2016; Vosko, 2006). Independent contract workers are self-employed individuals who pay their own taxes, do not earn wages, and are cheaper for employers to hire because they are not required to provide these individuals with benefits such as workers' compensation (Fenwick, 2008; Kalleberg, 2000).

A gig worker is an individual who engages in short, one-time and/or single-task contracts for one or more individuals or businesses (Davis & Hoyt, 2020; Farooqui, 2021; Jeon et al., 2020). Gig workers are hired for a single masterclass or teaching opportunity, while independent contractors are typically hired for a longer duration such as a single semester or school year. Gig work is rapidly growing across all sectors and is not limited to trades such as Uber driving but also encompasses highly educated professions such as arts educators (Davis & Hoyt, 2020; Farooqui, 2021). Gig work has risen steadily since the global

pandemic; approximately 22% of working Canadians, or 7.3 million adults, are engaged in gig employment (Wilson, 2024; Lovei & Hardy, 2024). Gig workers in Canada earn an annual income of between \$4,303 and \$5,000 and are in the bottom 40% of the annual income bracket (Gigpedia, 2025; Hou et al., 2019).

Contract/gig workers are required to effectively negotiate and renegotiate the terms of their employment on a semi-regular basis, which may place these workers at a disadvantage if they lack the skills to negotiate effectively (Fenwick, 2008). Self-employed independent contractors resemble employees and often work in the client's studio or performance venue (Vosko, 2006). Many art schools in Canada, including the Hamilton Conservatory for the Arts, the Victoria Conservatory of Music, and the Royal Conservatory, hire self-employed independent contractors (Hamilton Conservatory for the Arts, 2021). As a self-employed music educator and university sessional lecturer, I have been hired for a single semester or school year.

Until recently, universities have been ill-prepared for changes in current employment trends (Caza, 2020; Means, 2019). For example, universities hire contract lecturers who often have no benefits or opportunities for advancements and earn wages below the poverty line (Means, 2019). Universities perpetuate the stereotype that certain fields such as business lead to stable employment (Caza, 2020; Means, 2019). Notwithstanding, one out of seven business school graduates in the United States will become engaged in gig employment, and most university classes taught by tenure track faculty have done little to prepare students for this reality (Caza, 2020). Some Canadian universities have become aware of the need for business training within the arts. However, of the approximately 223 publicly funded universities in Canada (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, n. d.), only nine offer programs combining arts or arts education with business degrees or business classes. For example, Memorial University offers a joint degree in music and commerce (Memorial University 2025), and the University of Waterloo offers an honors arts and business program (University of Waterloo 2025).

Aside from a small number of specialization programs in arts/arts education and business, few arts-focused programs provide students with adequate training on gig employment, entrepreneurship, and self-employment (Nugraheni et al., 2019; Paulsen et al., 2021). In a study of arts graduates, Paulsen et al. (2021) found that 60% were currently working freelance jobs and/or were self-employed. In a study involving art education majors, Nugraheni et al. (2019) notes that 63% of students lacked business management skills. Thus, there is a need to provide students with business and entrepreneurship skills which include career self-management, marketing, finance, and risk evaluation (Benzenberg & Tuominiemi, 2021; Bridgstock, 2013; Nugraheni et al., 2019). Entrepreneurship training could provide arts teachers with self-confidence as they navigate transitions, career fluidity, and the complexities of self-employment, thereby helping alleviate some of the challenges of navigating this sector. Transitions in arts education can be thought of as a period of reflection that leads to the development of a successful teaching business, or moving between solo self-employment to hiring self-employed independent contractors, and/or shifting between forms of related or unrelated employment.

Gig and Self-Employment in Canada

Little is known about the work and well-being of adults working in gig and self-employment. This is somewhat surprising because one in five working-aged adults, or 22% of the Canadian workforce, is engaged in gig and self-employment (Wilson, 2024). The platform economy has contributed to increases in gig employment through Uber and DoorDash for general workers, and TeachAway, VIPKID, and Skooli for educators (Choi, 2024; Fossen, 2021). Gig and self-employment have been found to increase during periods of economic hardship, such as recessions and rising inflation rates or in response to unemployment (Choi, 2024; Fossen, 2021). In Canada, gig and self-employment is predicted to increase due to rising living costs (Choi, 2024; Lovei & Hardy, 2024) and the tariffs imposed by the United States. Gig and self-employment are not only prevalent in the arts but within professions such as graphic design, English, general education, information technology, psychology, family medicine, and allied health professions such as massage therapy (Lovei & Hardy, 2024). Thus, all working-aged adults need business and entrepreneurial training to successfully navigate current employment conditions. Current trends suggest that everyone should be prepared to work in gig and self-employment at some point in their careers. Insights from this article can be used to help working-aged adults plan for these career trajectories.

Some research found that self-employed professionals experience social isolation due to the solitary nature of their work (Khan et al., 2021), while other research suggests that self-employed professionals turn to family and friends for support (Gholipour et al., 2022). Seligman's (2011) research indicates that social connectedness is vital to well-being and career success. Thus, my research seeks to better understand the messiness of being human within self-employment and how family connections help to support arts educators' careers and well-being. To achieve this goal, I used Elder's life course perspective to understand arts educators' employment in relation to familial connections and social historical context (Elder et al., 2003). However, this perspective alone was insufficient because components of well-being are not well articulated within this framework. Thus, Seligman's well-being theory was used to augment Elder's life course perspective.

Theoretical Frameworks

Elder's life course perspective (LCP) and Seligman's well-being theory have been combined to understand what it means to be human in art self-employment and further support the rationale for this research (Elder et al., 2003; Seligman, 2011). According to Timonen et al. (2018), existing theories can be used with constructivist grounded theory to deepen/expand existing theoretical knowledge; however, the researcher must be attentive to emerging themes from the data. Elder's life course perspective and Seligman's well-being theory were used to shape the overarching question: What is the nature of self-employed arts educators' work and relationships? The follow-up questions required participants to elaborate on interview questions adapted from Gross and Musgrave (2020) to describe the nature of their relationships and their feelings surrounding their work, all aspects reflected within the theoretical frameworks.

The life course perspective can be understood as multidimensional, interconnecting historical, biological, psychological, developmental, and social spheres and age-graded sequences of events and roles that individuals experience/interact with in connection to historical and social time (Elder et al., 2003). I assert that the sequence of life events may be less age-graded than this perspective implies. Key concepts found within LCP include *timing*, *transitions*, *trajectories*, *turning points*, and *linked lives* (Elder et al., 2003; Pavalko, 1997; Wethington, 2005). I created Figure 1 to illustrate intersections between components of LCP. This paper is part of a larger study and thus a discussion of all of the components of LCP are beyond the scope of this review. This article explores turning points, transitions and linked lives in connection with human agency.

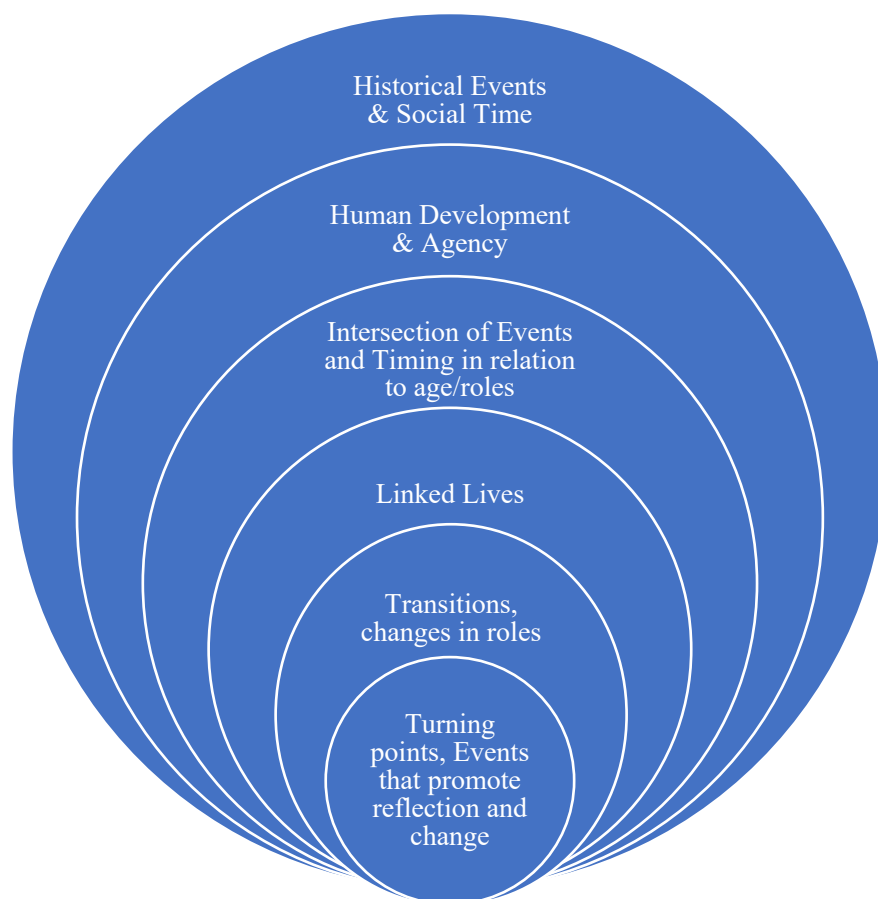


Fig. 1: Life Course Perspective (LCP)

The research question strives to understand arts educators' work through the concept of timing, how historical/social structural events shape arts educators' careers and turning points, and events that prompted participants to reflect on their careers and make changes. Underpinning this research are components of human development/agency as identified by reflecting on personal growth that results from turning points and transitions. The linked lives component, the impact of one person's life on another, was used to better understand how familial connections support self-employment. However, this framework fails to provide an adequate explanation of positive emotions associated with social

relationships. Thus, the linked lives component was paired with the positive relationships element of Seligman's theory of well-being to understand the impact of these relationships in the lives of educators. Furthermore, the engagement and meaning components of Seligman's theory were used to explore arts educators' feelings surrounding self-employment. Seligman's theory of well-being from the field of positive psychology addresses the emotional/psychological components of well-being.

Table 1

The Components of Seligman's Well-Being Theory (Seligman, 2011, p. 27)

Positive Emotion	Pleasure, ecstasy, comfort, warmth, and happiness. Tied to the present moment or a situation.
Engagement	"Flow" state or complete absorption in the activity.
Meaning	A sense of purpose beyond the self.
Accomplishment/ Achievement	Adds value and provides feelings or products of success.
Positive Relationships	Provides support, improved mood, connectedness.

Methodology

I chose a constructivist grounded theory design for this research to generate a descriptive/subjective theory in connection with historical time and social context (Alemu et al., 2017; Charmaz, 2017b). In constructivist grounded theory, results are representative through participants' narratives combined with the researcher's interpretation of the data (Charmaz, 2017a, b). Thus, this methodology allowed me to expand our knowledge of this population through a reciprocal, reflective exchange of ideas between myself and the participants (Alemu et al., 2017; Charmaz, 2017b). I used the constant comparative analytical tool to compare similarities and differences between components of data and engaged in open and focused coding data analysis procedures (Timonen et al., 2018). The theoretical coding stage of this research integrated Elder's life course perspective and Seligman's well-being theory to develop a rich description.

Theories listed above were combined with the theoretical coding stage of this research. Participants for this study took part in one 60- to 90-minute interview with follow-up questions. I based four open-ended interview questions on the work of Gross and Musgrave (2020), a study that involved the work and well-being of professional musicians in the United Kingdom, because these questions meld well with the theoretical frameworks and are well suited to understand arts educators' work patterns and relationships. These interview questions required participants to describe the nature of their work, social relationships, and personal and professional struggles. Unscripted follow-up questions were used to prompt participants to expand on the information provided. Sources of validity for this research include thick, rich description and member checks. All but three of the 26 participants had either a bachelor's or master's degree.

Table 2*Research Participants*

Total of 26. One participant taught both music and drama and was included in both categories. Timeline: September 2022 to March 2023.

Early-Career = 18 to 34; Mid-Career = 35 to 50; Late-Career = 50+

Discipline	Number of Participants	Pseudonym/Career Stage (quoted participants)
Dance	6	Sandra, Late-Career
Drama	7	Neil, Early-Career Emily, Mid-Career Joy, Mid-Career Sharleen, Late-Career
Music	9	Kelly, Early Career Lynn, Mid-Career Lucy, Mid-Career
Visual arts	5	Sarah, Mid-Career Glenn, Mid-Career Jill, Late-Career

I chose to recruit participants with a minimum of six years of teaching experience because burnout levels of teachers are higher within the first five years of their careers (Kimpton & Kimpton, 2016; Schussler et al., 2015). Thus, the inclusion of teachers with less experience could adversely impact the results by indicating that self-employed arts teachers have poor self-care and are more prone to burnout. Self-employed arts teachers and freelance artists face challenges in obtaining adequate employment from teaching. Thus, I included participants in this study if they were working six hours or more as a self-employed arts educator, so as to include participants with caregiving responsibilities, since these individuals typically work fewer hours as self-employed teachers (Cohen, 2015). Participants ranged in age from 24 to 70, with the majority of participants between the ages of 30 and 45; this allowed me to gain a general understanding of their work and social relationships at various career stages.

Results

The majority of participants blamed themselves for not knowing how to effectively run a business, market their services, or address business-related adversities. However, none of the university-educated participants received formal business training. Sarah, a visual arts teacher stated, "I don't think a lot of people have the awareness to manage [a business], it's just not taught." Sarah also noted that the formal training she received in university "had more to do with grant writing and exhibitions than it did with teaching" or managing a business. Neil, a drama teacher who runs a theatre school, observed, "No, I never received any business training." These same sentiments were echoed by the majority of participants. Sharleen, a late-career drama teacher, stressed the importance of training on how to navigate the gig economy. As she notes,

For one thing it [gig and self-employment training] should be in elementary schools [and] in high schools. On another side, the gig workers really should have much more support. As I get older, [I] realize how important this kind of stuff is. It would be a great thing actually to do reality check classes for people starting in the gig economy.

Sharleen went on to describe the need to train people to work within the gig economy.

Many participants expressed insecurities about their business management skills and said they had to learn from their mistakes. Sharleen commented, "We're not known for being good businesspeople." Jill, a visual arts teacher, stated, "There have been moments where I could have been better at managing the business in terms of managing the database and evolving. So, I've had some ups and downs." Joy reflected on the trouble of being both a manager and a friend to those who worked with her. She said, "I was struggling financially, I had a lot of people that owed me money. I had staff that was stealing from me."

Many participants in contract work expressed their fears about money and future employment. Sarah noted, "If one contract ended [and] I knew that I had this other thing, that wasn't so bad. [But] there were several periods where one contract ended and I didn't have any sort of employment lined up." Some participants relied on verbal contracts. As Kelly commented, "I don't even have a contract this year because they know me, and I think that they just trust me."

Participants discussed the effects of financial pressures on their workday and feeling the need to work constantly to earn an adequate living. Lucy, a music teacher, stated:

As a freelancer, when you don't work, you don't earn income, so there's often internal pressure to work as much as possible or take as few breaks as possible. There was a time when I wouldn't even take a lunch break.

As Jill noted, "I don't put my work to rest at night or on the weekends." This type of financial uncertainty resulted in many of the participants claiming to engage in supplemental employment in unrelated fields to survive. Glenn, a visual arts teacher/artist, noted, "That is one thing I find about people in the arts—we become a jack-of-all-trades. It's overwhelming to think about." Some participants held down multiple part-time contracts in teaching, performing/creating, and arts administration.

To compensate for their lack of business training, some participants sought support from formal services such as business coaching programs. Jill stated, “There was a community that was offering a free trial week that you could join this [business] coaching community.” Jill went on to say that she spends \$12,000 per year on business coaching. She noted,

In the arts, you’re self-employed, you have to be a strong businessperson or get some coaching. I really see myself as a small business owner first, but it happens to be in the arts. I think if I saw myself as an artist first, there’s a good chance that I would be reporting very poorly financially.

Participants’ business confidence was positively impacted by familial support and coaching.

Participants discussed approaches they use to grow their businesses, including the use of social media and listening to the parents of their students. Lynn stated, “I’ve done a lot of incidental marketing on Facebook. I will usually post something funny that my students said or post a picture of their reaction, it’s kind of a soft advertising to let people know I’m good with kids.” Jill added, “I was really open to suggestions from my audience on what they needed.” Jill explained that she hosts art parties, which became profitable. Other participants continued to maintain online classes post-pandemic.

Participants’ ability to navigate business challenges were influenced by the linked lives component, the interconnectedness and positive influences of family outlined in LCP (Elder et al., 2003; Pavalko, 1997; Wethington, 2005). As Neil noted, “My dad was a business manager, so I learned from him. He is the mastermind of my business.” Similarly, Sandra commented, “I own [a dance school]. I have three colleagues who happen to also be my three daughters.” Emily added, “My working hours are usually after school finishes. So, my mom [comes to take care of the kids]. I have a lot of support.” Familial support was found to be integral to success in self-employment.

Participants talked about career rewards and positive relationships articulated in Seligman’s theory of well-being. Jill stated, “I feel my own power which is really exciting. I have a business coach now and I’m learning a lot about tapping into mindset and how to maximize the customer experience.” Neil added,

The best thing about my work is being a self-employed boss. I get to make all the decisions. I’m working towards my own goal. So, every little penny that I spend is going towards achieving what I want for myself. So, it’s very worth it.

Lynn, a music teacher observed, “So, I think if more people can figure out a way to work for themselves, that’s good. It can be really rewarding, you know, to work for yourself.”

Meanwhile, Jill reflected,

I’m always learning, and I really love that it keeps me young. I get to be around children. I get to be around great and interesting people, and I get to be my own boss, which is great. You know, there’s no benefits and there’s no paid holiday. This is not perfect but it’s a pretty special life.

Lynn’s advice to self-employed teachers is “just to focus on gratitude.” Jill added, “A lot of my students will say to me when I grow up, I want to be an artist.” Her advice to them is, “You gotta have a knowledge of business and you have to have some general education if you want to make an income as an artist.”

Discussion

Participants expressed apprehension about their lack of business knowledge and sought out business coaching programs. Individuals who took this step developed the knowledge to grow their teaching businesses. Participants spoke about the connections they made during professional development opportunities with other teachers as being vital to their professional growth because they not only provide arts educators with mentorship but also create a community that fosters growth and development (Chafe & Kaida, 2020; Kimpton & Kimpton, 2016). The concept of turning points, a component of LCP, defined as substantial changes during one's life that promote reflection and decisions regarding the future, are reflected in this study (Elder et al., 2003; Wethington, 2005). Participants talked about turning points that prompted them to take actions such as soliciting feedback from clients, engaging in long-term financial and career planning, and seeking professional development and other supports.

Positive emotions were expressed by participants as they discussed a sense of personal accomplishment associated with teaching. Participants expressed a sense of gratitude for their ability to engage in a self-employed teaching career, the meaningful nature of their work, and the sense of purpose they felt. They described overcoming adversity to grow their businesses and engage in lifelong learning activities. *Meaning* is a feeling of purpose or engagement in something that is bigger than oneself, and contributes to well-being (Seligman, 2011). An activity that is meaningful is often pursued for its intrinsic value, independent of rewards, and contains both subjective and objective elements (Seligman, 2011). According to Seligman (2011), "Positive emotions are a subjective variable" that encompasses "pleasure, ecstasy, comfort, warmth" and happiness defined by "what the individual thinks and feels at the present moment" (p. 25). Participants were not motivated by money beyond meeting their financial needs, and they accepted that a career in the arts would never result in high earnings.

The linked lives component of Elder's life course perspective combined with the positive relationships component of Seligman's theory highlights the role of positive relationships in the lives of arts educators (Elder et al., 2003; Seligman, 2011). Positive relationships are fundamental to well-being because they provide us with support and promote positive emotions through engagement with others, and contribute to feelings of purpose (Seligman, 2011). Linked lives, turning points, transitions, and, to a lesser extent, timing from LCP were melded with positive emotions, purpose, and meaning from Seligman's (2011) well-being theory to analyze the data collected, particularly in the theoretical coding stage. The descriptive theory that emerged from this research is one of social interconnectedness and success in self-employment. Both of these elements were found in all of participants' responses to the interview questions. Results of this study indicate that participants derived meaning through positive relationships with family and students and were aware of the impact they were making in their communities. Participants' business success was tied to the linked lives component by launching their business with other family members, learning about business from a parent, and receiving caregiving support from family members. The interconnectedness of family members helped them navigate transitions and overcome the complexities of self-employment.

Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

Results of this study indicate that the complexities of self-employment prompted participants to combine different forms of employment to achieve financial stability. Arts teachers require access to entrepreneurial training to effectively navigate transitions, negotiate contracts, and grow their businesses. Participants blamed themselves for their entrepreneurial mistakes despite a lack of formal business training. Further research could compare business confidence/skills among arts educators who received formal training and those who did not to determine if training has an impact on entrepreneurial success. Post-secondary institutions could explore how to better support future arts educators by preparing them for multifaceted careers in gig and self-employment. Arts organizations could offer workshops to help their membership navigate business challenges such as how to market teaching services, negotiate contracts, and plan careers, aspects that are associated with business growth (Benzenberg & Tuominiemi, 2021; Bridgstock, 2013; Nugraheni et al., 2019).

Linked lives/positive relationships, through the support of family members, was found to impact participants' career choices and their ability to grow their businesses. Relationships with family, colleagues, and students are integral to arts educators' well-being as they navigate transitions and cope with the complexities of the modern gig economy. Future research could explore the influence of familial and social relationships on arts educators' ability to manage their businesses by comparing the differences in levels of well-being between solo self-employed arts teachers and self-employed independent contractors. Universities and arts organizations could help arts educators cope with the messiness of being human in self-employment through networking events to further foster social interconnectedness that would allow arts educators to thrive.

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