

## **Checklist**

### **1. Have you identified a problem, theme, keyword or idea that you want to explore through practice?**

How emotions 'emerge' and are 'regulated' through clay:

I intend to investigate how the soft, malleable nature of clay enables Chinese international students — particularly those facing cultural adjustment stress — to externalise repressed emotions such as loneliness, sadness, or frustration, without the need for verbal expression. My focus will be on how the tactile process of pinching, kneading, pounding, and glazing clay enables emotional release and gradual healing.

The transformative power of clay into ceramic:

My practice will also examine the symbolic and experiential significance of clay's transformation—from a soft, shapeless material to a solid, fired ceramic object. I believe this physical transition resonates with the personal journey of international students—from confusion to resilience—and may foster a sense of self-understanding and stability.

Rediscovering the self through ancestral culture:

Given the cultural significance of ceramic art in Chinese heritage, I aim to explore how traditional ceramic elements, when purposefully integrated into the design of my workshops, help participants reconnect with their cultural roots and re-establish a sense of identity while living abroad.

### **2. Are there specific 'variables' you want to test through practice? How many?**

Manifestations of cultural adaptation stress:

I aim to observe various expressions of stress such as loneliness, suppression, anxiety, and identity confusion in international students. My practice creates a space in which these phenomena can be externalised and studied.

Characteristics of ceramic interaction:

I will analyse participants' tactile engagement with clay—how deeply they sense through their hands, their gestures during shaping, the symbolic qualities of their creations, and whether the firing process alters their perception of the material and of themselves.

Psychological transformations:

I seek to observe changes in emotional expression, narrative articulation, self-boundary awareness, and clarity of personal identity, facilitated through the ceramic-making process.

Features of the designed intervention:

This includes the language I use as a facilitator, the step-by-step activity structure, material choices, and spatial/atmospheric design—all of which will be carefully planned, implemented, and evaluated.

### **3. Can you connect these variables to your prior readings, experiences, and influences?**

Clay-handling experience (practice-informed knowledge):

My personal tactile experience with clay—its malleability, texture, and the transformation it undergoes during firing — aligns closely with embodied cognition theory (Lakoff & Johnson) and material-based art therapy (Malchiodi). My lived sense of clay ’ s therapeutic effect is now being theorised and systematised.

Cultural adaptation stress and personal history:

As a Chinese international student, I have personally experienced loneliness, identity confusion, and ‘fawning’ tendencies. These directly inform my research motivation and align with Berry’ s Acculturation Theory, which I use to frame the emotional experiences I aim to address through my intervention.

Emotional release through non-verbal expression:

My focus on enabling emotional articulation without words is inspired by art therapy frameworks (Levick, Riley) and psychodynamic approaches, both of which emphasise the symbolic mediation of emotion. Clay becomes a non-verbal channel through which emotions can surface.

Self-awareness and identity formation:

The entire process links with self-identity theories (Erikson, Goffman) and cultural identity models, suggesting that traditional cultural materials — like ceramics — can catalyse self-reflection and identity reformation in diasporic settings.

### **4. Have you recorded how these readings and experiences are shaping your evolving practice?**

Yes. I keep a comprehensive reflective research journal, which documents:

Initial ideas and personal triggers: E.g., emotional crises during cultural transition, which led to the genesis of my research inquiry.

Insights from theoretical readings: I synthesise key concepts and reflect on how they affirm, challenge, or reframe my approach — for instance, how embodied cognition inspired new touch-based activities.

Workshop and artefact design decisions: I log the rationale behind my creative choices— why certain materials, tasks, or structures were used, and how they relate to theory.

Observations from early trials or pilot sessions: I capture responses from informal participants—unexpected outcomes, emotional reactions, what worked and what didn’ t.

My evolving perspective: I track how my thinking deepens as I engage with both

literature and clay-based practice, particularly regarding the therapeutic role of ceramics.

Visual documentation: Initial sketches and structure diagrams.

Photographs and videos of exploratory ceramic works.

**5. Have you conducted any experimental design through making, drawing, sound, or conceptual art?**

Yes—my core practice is an ongoing design-based intervention.

Ceramic practice experiments:

Material exploration: I experiment with various clays (stoneware, porcelain, raku) to assess their tactile qualities and emotional resonance, matching them to different expressive needs.

Process-based exercises: I trial activities such as “blind sculpting” (focusing on sensation over form) or “collaborative building” (fostering shared identity and belonging).

Conceptual forms and metaphors: I create pieces symbolising psychological states—e.g., vessels gradually opening to signify release, or fragmented forms representing emotional rupture and repair.

Firing experiments: I explore how different kilning methods (low, high, raku) affect the aesthetic and metaphorical resonance of the work, incorporating transformation as symbolic of personal growth.

Environmental and experiential design (broad design):

Visual environment design: I develop moodboards and spatial layouts for the studio setting, aimed at evoking safety, calm, and creativity—supporting emotional openness.

Sound/sensory experiments: Though not central, I explore using calming background music or Chinese traditional sounds to enrich the immersive experience (flow state) of making.

All experimental processes are systematically recorded as part of my research dataset.

**6. Have you identified what information to collect from participants, how to collect it, and what you aim to discover?**

Yes — data collection is integral to my qualitative methodology and embedded in practice.

#### A. What information I will collect:

Embodied and emotional experiences: How participants describe the sensory and emotional aspects of working with clay—before, during, and after the activity.

Emotion regulation narratives: How participants articulate moments of emotional release or calm, and any insights into coping mechanisms emerging through clay interaction.

Self-awareness and identity reflections: How they relate the practice to self-understanding, boundaries, cultural belonging, or personal growth.

Meaning-making processes: How participants interpret their own creations, the materials used, and the symbolism of the making process in relation to their cross-cultural life.

Well-being and coping insights: Whether the workshop helped reduce anxiety or loneliness, enhanced emotional well-being, or introduced new coping strategies.

Cultural connection: How they perceive the role of Chinese ceramic culture in their identity and adaptation process.

#### B. How I will collect the information:

Semi-structured interviews: Conducted before and after workshops to capture emotional baseline, cultural stress levels, and post-practice reflections.

Participant journals: Encouraged throughout the process to record subjective experiences, emotional shifts, and emergent thoughts.

Field observation and researcher journaling: I will document behavioural cues, bodily engagement, group atmosphere, and personal insights during each session.

Ceramic artefact analysis:

Visual documentation: Photographing and (with consent) filming the making process and final pieces.

Participant interpretation: Asking participants to describe their own work, its meaning, emotional symbolism, and personal relevance.

#### C. What I aim to discover:

- How tactile engagement with clay facilitates emotional externalisation and contributes to identity construction and regulation.
- In-depth accounts of how Chinese students facing cross-cultural stress find expression, reflection, and transformation through ceramics.

- Evidence-informed insights into how to structure ceramic-based therapeutic activities effectively—towards a replicable design intervention model.