



Critical
Approaches
to Arts-based
Research

Volume 5
Issue 1
2015

UNESCO
Observatory
Multi-disciplinary
Journal in
the Arts

UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

Volume 5 | Issue 1 | 2015

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ISSN 1835 - 2776

Published in Australia

Published by
The UNESCO Observatory Melbourne
<http://unescomelb.org>

In conjunction with
The University of Melbourne,
Parkville, Victoria 3010.

UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

Volume 5 | Issue 1 | 2015

ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

Critical Approaches to Arts-Based Research

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THEME

Arts based research (ABR), its products, processes and critical theorising have come a long way in recent times. Nuanced distinctions indicate the development of the field, as arts-informed research, arts-based research, practice-led research, applied research, and creative participatory action research all claim different relationships with the art and criticality present in such innovative scholarship. Finally, it seems, we are moving away from a defensive stance regarding arts based research and its ‘validity’, and toward a celebration of this proliferation of diverse ways of knowing, theorising and doing research. This ‘coming of age’ is evident in this special issue, which urges readers to move beyond binarised notions of scientific ‘versus’ arts based research that still at times dominates academic research environments and conversations, and outmoded practice/theory divides. For we co-editors and for the authors here, theorising is indeed a creative practice, and goes hand-in-hand with the epistemological and ontological potential of arts-making methods. This issue celebrates the opening of new doors in theorising innovative arts based research from a range of global contexts, theoretical and epistemological frameworks, and inter/disciplines. We avoid any attempt to codify or limit the parameters of what contemporary arts based research is or can be. Indeed, we seek the opposite: to highlight its ever-expanding possibilities.

The essays here aim to encourage critical analysis and dialogue about the objects and subjects of arts based research for contemporary times, poststructuralist, posthuman and other critical approaches to arts based research, and the interdisciplinary application of performative and practice-led research in transferable methodological models. We are pleased to be able to include digital assets with many of the articles in this special issue. Indeed, the layered and multimodal complexity of arts based ‘outputs’ or artefacts is one of its rich distinguishing features, and it requires commitment from editors and publishers to not always demand a ‘reduction’ back into text-based forms, a diminishment of many forms of ABR. For this we thank the UNESCO editorial and production team, and hope you enjoy this contribution to the critical development of the arts based research field.

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Editorial
Critically Evolving:
Critical Approaches to
Arts-Based Research

Anne Harris
Mary Ann Hunter
Clare Hall

Arts based research (ABR), its products, processes and critical theorising have come a long way in the past few years, nowhere more noticeably than in public pedagogy and education. Whether framed as arts-informed practices, practice-led research or applied research, it is certainly interesting times for those of us working at the nexus of arts, research and education. There has been an unprecedented proliferation of critical frameworks and approaches and we are continuing to move away from a defence of arts based research and its ‘validity’ and toward a celebration of this proliferation of diverse ways of knowing and doing research. This ‘coming of age’ particularly in arts based education research (ABER) opens new possibilities for critically theorising arts based research, and artfully doing critical investigation.

This special issue urges readers to move beyond the binarised notion of scientific ‘versus’ arts based research that still at times dominates academic research environments. Yet at the same time, we acknowledge the need for more thoroughly theorised and critically-threaded approaches. As such, this special issue

celebrates the opening of new doors in theorising innovative arts based research from a range of global contexts, theoretical and epistemological frameworks, and inter/disciplines. We avoid any attempt to codify or limit the parameters of what contemporary arts based research is or can be. Indeed, we seek the opposite: to highlight its ever-expanding possibilities.

The contributors to this issue embrace what Rolling calls “art for scholarship’s sake” (2010, p 102), suggesting tangible moves not only toward new methods and methodologies, but toward shifts of paradigm. From visual, musical and other performative methods to more interdisciplinary approaches like visual sociology (Taylor 2013), this special issue attempts to explore the ways in which arts based research is finding new ways to combine practice-led work with robust theoretical approaches. Therefore, a unique feature of this special issue are the digital assets that accompany several of the articles. Audience is a core consideration for all arts based researchers, and we approached this issue in the same way by making it user-friendly and widely accessible, while theoretically rigorous.

In this introduction, we will briefly contextualise the field into which this special issue launches, and how it builds upon our closest progenitors: Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund (2008) and Barone & Eisner (2011) in education; Leavy (2013, 2011) and Knowles & Cole (2008) in social science and interdisciplinary research; Gallagher (2008) in urban drama research; McNiff (2007) in arts therapy; Massumi (2002), and Massumi & Manning (2014), in sensory research creation; and Pink (2007, 2014) in visual ethnography. We seek to highlight the ever-expanding possibilities of ABR rather than contain them; arts based practices and their move into research have always been based in the ideal and practice of multiplicities, and here we allow this to be celebrated.

NEED FOR THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue is a reflection of methodologically diverse arts based research, including more established methodologies such as *a/r/tography* (a methodology that represents the intersection of artist, researcher and teacher), and *scholARTistry*, representing methodological merging of artist and scholar practices and identities.

From Harvard University's comprehensive arts based research site (Harvard, n.d.) to Leavy's (2008) assertion that arts based research is proliferating in rhizomatic ways, arts based researchers now assert confidently how it can be informed by social research but written and performed in artistic ways, opening still more possibilities for thinking about and doing the work of ABR in diverse fields. Leavy and others have contributed so widely to both the method and methodological literature on ABR that the essays in this issue owe a great deal to this proliferation both conceptually and formally. Carl Leggo (2012) uses narrative inquiry as method to "promote connections between narrative knowing and research in the social sciences... [supporting] a poetics of research by investigating ways that creative writing contributes to knowing and understanding" (p. xiii). Drawing on Freire (1997) he urges us to "produce forms of knowledge that do not exist yet" (Freire p. 31 in Leggo p. xiv) and to counter the "hegemony of certain kinds of discourse in academic research" (p. xiv). As arts based researchers know, he draws on the strength of ABR to "seek more possibilities of mediation, more possibilities for understanding how human beings live in the world, for attending to the art of researching our lives" (p. xvii). These possibilities for understanding extend to the dissemination opportunities of ABR outcomes to also reflect and change the real worlds in which we live. This potential of ABR to affect the dissemination of research is one area of particular focus in today's literature, and in this journal issue.

For critical researchers, the opportunity to combine our pedagogical, artistic and research experiences, knowledges, and purposes means all these areas of endeavor benefit, not just the research ones. Leggo draws on Calvino (1995) to suggest a “pedagogy of the imagination” (p. 92), and leads us to opening of still more methodological doors, in thinking about ABR as both creative and imaginative methods which are inextricably tied to other areas of our lived experiences and work.

Such a paradigm shift is what this issue addresses. The disruption and extension of current discourses can be found in these diverse articles that juggle multiple research balls at once. By taking an expansive and inclusive view of emerging methods and methodologies, we have tried to allow readers themselves the room to make critical and artistic connections. This issue attempts in both construction and content to address those exciting new possibilities, particularly how they inhabit or intersect with various disciplines and fields of scholarship.

This volume builds directly upon Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund’s (2008) call for an increased range of engagements with arts based research, including greater criticality, particularly so within public pedagogy and education (Harris 2013). Some believe this is the ‘Achilles heel’ of arts based research, which plagues so much that we do. It is often the basis upon which ABR and researchers are harshly criticised or even dismissed in the academy. And yet, as the debates around ABR clearly acknowledges, this antagonism presents a danger of the discourse becoming too defensive, acknowledgement becoming a kind of justification of our ‘validity’ or ‘rigour’ (Barone 1997). As with our predecessors in autoethnography, narrative inquiry, and other qualitative methods, ABR recognises that it has room to grow. Fear and dismissal plague all innovations and new movements, and we consider ourselves to benefit and also suffer from aspects of this conundrum, not a new phenomenon. So this volume firstly acknowledges our debt to Cahnmann-

Taylor & Siegesmund in naming the need for a critical approach to this emerging area of research, yet not a preoccupation with it.

Secondly we reject any need for outmoded binaries in arts based research. We often hear arts based research is an excuse for ‘bad art’ (for more on this, see Leavy 2013, 2011 and McNiff 2007). Yet ‘bad art’ abounds, both within and outside of research and academic contexts, and one might argue has its purpose too. The current explosion of ABR doesn’t suggest this for the first time. Yet it does suggest that more researchers are taking more artistic risks; or put another way, more artists are doing research. It also suggests new areas of inquiry concerning mastery, training and craft. In this volume, we acknowledge the need for more critique, and a critique that moves beyond simple ‘quality control’ (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund 2008, p. 11; Barone & Eisner 2011; Eisner 2002). The state of play in research is driven by imperatives for interdisciplinarity, by arts based research’s ability to connect across and beyond traditional scholastic/ artistic borders. ABR can respond to an increasingly pervasive ‘knowledge economy’ and market forces to ‘maximize’ research impact because of its strengths in hybridity, accessibility, and innovative approaches to meaning-making.

THIS VOLUME – AN INEVITABLE INNOVATION

The articles here draw from a range of discourses. Some contributors argue that the ways in which digital technological innovations are bridging arts-based and other research paradigms opens opportunities for a democratisation of more ‘academic’ research that has widespread repercussions – potentially relocating ABR and ABER in the centre of this shift in conceptualising and innovating new research and research designs. We are pleased to feature contributors from Ireland, Australia, Canada, the UK, Japan and the USA. We believe this breadth of perspectives only enhances the wide range of

methods and methodologies on offer, highlighting the global nature of ABR expansion, offering a cross-regional analysis of the lineage of arts based research developments.

The emerging methods in this volume represent an evolution of arts based research. Innovations in digital technology appear to be causing increasing (not diminishing) reverberations for research– both arts based and otherwise. It is also contributing to a kind of accelerating process of popularisation or democratisation of research, particularly its dissemination that lends itself to greater uptake of arts-informed and arts-based methods in research. That makes these exciting times for those of us who are passionate about the inherent value that we have always understood in these previously ‘alternative’ approaches, and we hope this special issue contributes to that expansion.

The essays here aim to encourage critical analysis and dialogue about the objects and subjects of arts based research for contemporary times, poststructuralist, posthuman and other critical approaches to arts based research, and the interdisciplinary application of performative and practice-led research in transferable methodological models. These contributions connect analysis with applied practice in many forms and formats. We have welcomed contributions from those who find arts based research problematic as well as productive. We are particularly proud of the ways in which these articles address complexities of contemporary arts based research, including formal, informal and alternate sites of arts-led research in education; power, governmentality and the arts; new and emerging methodological perspectives; imagination and creativity as practice-led methods; affect and memory in ABR; virtual / online ABR as embodied practice; cultural / corporeal geographies of arts based research; visual sociology and other hybrids; zombie arts as institutional liberatory practice.

We are pleased to be able to include digital assets with many of the articles in this special issue. Most importantly, the

ability of arts based research ‘outputs’ or artefacts is one of its rich distinguishing features, and it requires commitment from editors and publishers to not always demand a ‘translation’ into text-based forms, a diminishment of many forms of ABR. While arts based artefacts have long enlivened conference presentations and performances by arts based and other researchers, we still struggle to effectively include them in our publications. The dissemination opportunities of digital forms means that digitality is becoming a core component or tool of almost all arts-based (and other) research. This journal’s digital format is perfectly matched to issues of this kind with digital assets.

David Rousell opens the issue with his treatment of the cartographic network, defined by Rousell as ‘immersive cartography,’ an emerging new methodology. His featured *Cubic Reflections* project embodies many of the conceptual and methodological concerns of this issue, including the intersection of aesthetic and ecological relationships and environments, theorised through philosophy, and contemporary arts criticism.

Following Rousell, **Jack Migdalek**’s ‘Dance as intervention: Disrupting gendered norms of embodiment’ describes and comments on the process of using dance as a tool through which to research the author’s own comforts and discomforts with embodied norms commonly prescribed and valorized for those who present as male, in opposition to those who present as female. The process documented here (and shared via video clips) of creating what was to become a danced physical theater performance piece proved to be both emotionally confronting and enlightening. It also served as a form of intervention. Not only has critical interrogation of his own practices and aesthetic sensibilities as a male dancer, choreographer, and dance educator shifted and enhanced his (and readers’) perspectives and understandings of gender and embodiment, but it has also disrupted embedded and habituated ways in which Migdalek operated in dance and other contexts. His performance piece,

‘Gender Icons’, which has been performed to large audiences, is viewable with this chapter.

‘Doing sociology with musical narratives’ by **Clare Hall** explores the productive intersection between arts based research and the sociology of music education. The field of music education has been influenced in various ways by arts based and arts-informed methodologies and methods; however, music-based methods are slow to be taken up by scholarship in general. As an attempt to redress this, Hall explores how creative music-making—primarily musical composition—can be deployed as an (auto)ethnographic method when conceptualised as a critical and multilayered form of narrative. She describes (and shows in a sound file and digital image) how she examines her pre-service primary school teachers’ musical identities and troubles some of their taken-for-granted notions about musicality. This discussion of her experiences raise fresh questions about how notions of musical creativity relate to our subjectivities and supports the broader argument that doing sociology with music has much to offer performance-based methods.

‘Slamming In(to) the Ivory Tower: A Consideration of Slam as Method’ follows with **Glenn Phillips’** explosive answer to the poetry/performance ethnography divide by using his unique brand of slam poetry to shout back at history, poverty, social exclusion and arts-based education research critics who claim that the performative and deeply personal aspects of this discipline undermine its academic rigour. Phillips is able to skilfully interweave his performance text (and video on link) with a performance studies history of the radical politics of performance and some ways in which this is increasingly being demonstrated in education research. This chapter will explore the boundaries of slam or performance poetry as a model of social critique and critical research representation. According to Phillips, many slammers are already wrestling with important issues like poverty, education, and social oppression, but their art is often not considered part of the scholarly conversation.

This article (and video) argues the value of tracing this development, offers practical suggestions for how to develop slam-as-research, and ways of considering slam as data for research projects.

In ‘Articulating an Arts-Based Research Paradigm: Growing Deeper,’ **Diane Conrad and Jaime Beck** build an argument for an emerging arts based research paradigm shift that is more centred in questions of epistemology than previous paradigms may have been. Certainly they see ABR as a ‘way of seeing’ rather than simply a set of research or teaching practices, with still-untapped aesthetic and transformational power. Their article helps readers better understand a critical way of entering work that has long been critiqued as lacking in rigour or a coherent conceptual framework, and draws heavily on non-western and participatory research paradigms. Like them, **Chilton, Gerber and Scotti** address considerations of the aesthetic in arts based research, and whether or not AB/E/R constitutes a new paradigm, which they begin to articulate as *an aesthetic intersubjective paradigm*, drawing on art therapy.

Two articles that address questions of indigenous knowledge from different perspectives (and regions) bridge the UK and Australia: **Gilbert, Phillipson & Morin** test the confines of scientific reporting through their account of a practice-based contemporary art intervention which explores the challenges and opportunities presented by creating and documenting live performance, translating it into a format suitable for installation at an exhibition of Indigenous performance and subsequently developing an interactive digital exhibition. The investigation is grounded in Nicholas Bourriaud’s theory of relational aesthetics and attuned to indigenous epistemologies that understand objects and places as having agency. While in Australia, the work of **Elizabeth Mackinlay** highlights fields of practice in their emerging aesthetic and place-based enquiries. Mackinlay argues aesthetics as a way of combining head and heart learning about Indigenous knowledges. Long an

area of innovation in both methodological and epistemological approaches to knowledge-building and knowledge-sharing, Indigenous studies and Indigenous education in Australia offers rich an interdisciplinary possibilities for expansion. Here Mackinley opts to use a single but deeply layered case study to illustrate her methodological innovations. She invites readers to experience firsthand the power of arts based bricolage and the multiple entry and exit points possible within educational and Indigenous learning contexts.

Jake Burdick takes us back to North America and into very different methodological terrain. His 'Bodies in the Desert: An Aesthetic Excavation and Narration of Two Lives and Four Deaths' derives from data generated in an arts based and auto/archeological narrative inquiry of two individuals' negotiations with and performances of critical dispositions amid otherwise stifling normativity. Diverse data sets were used to compose a series of thematically interbraided short stories, collectively serving as a novella. Burdick leaps from this fairly straight-ahead arts based approach into a third section – both methodologically and formally innovative – comprised of stories that are neither entirely Jeanie's nor entirely Burdick's. These pieces describe four deaths that have affected multiple individuals within the overall plot that developed. Separating these pieces from the fiction-based structure of the research and re-storied as prose poems as a way to call attention to the kinds of "oceanic" (Silverman 2009) relationships that intrude in, intertwine, and intersect the stories in the overall piece.

'Seeing the World Differently: Understanding Creativity in Autism through the use of Technology in Social Spaces' by **Schutt, Rizzo and Staubli**, encourages readers to consider virtual landscapes as another kind of place-based site of arts based research, drawing on the conceptual approach of Baron-Cohen (2009) in working with young people with autism. These co-authors challenge readers to explore new ways of thinking pedagogically, through the use of digital technology

and social spaces. Not only do the young participants in this article ‘see the world differently’, but the co-authors suggest that imagination, creativity and the arts in research and pedagogical contexts are the best ways to assist all collaborators (including teachers, students, parents and industry partners) to see and act differently.

Next **Tracey Fahey** interrogates the complexities of straddling the theory/practice ‘divide’ using gothic literature as an approach and a framework for expanding fine arts pedagogy in an Irish context. Drawing on Feinstein (2005) to theorise the uses of gothic in arts pedagogies, Fahey suggests new ways in which the potential of other disciplines intersecting with arts based research can enliven multiple research areas, methods and methodologies in increasingly rhizomatic and multi-directional ways. As such, Fahey echoes this special issue’s foundational concerns with the explosion of interdisciplinary arts based research, particularly in education.

Jane Luton writes from a drama education perspective to interrogate the possibilities of ethnographic performance as a ‘dyadic dramatic qualitative method, an approach that extends beyond conventional scripting of experience to re-imagine new way of engaging with new knowledge; while **Koichi Kasahara** discusses the challenges for arts based research methods and conceptual approaches within early childhood education in Japan where artistic discipline and creativity sometimes interact in specifically coded ways.

Gray, Snell & Goldstein continue to explore the breadth of ‘research-informed theatre’ in their article ‘Shaping Research-Informed Theatre: Working beyond an “Aesthetic of Objectivity.’ In it, they draw useful links between this method that engages in a set of research practices that analyse and share research findings in the form of dramatic scripts and performances, ethnography, and the complexities of aesthetic and theatre design.

CONCLUSION

From emerging methods in previous under-explored method areas including poetry, music and dance, to new methodological possibilities and implications for an ‘aesthetics of research practice’, we hope this special issue will provoke readers to consider their own role in the development of this rapidly changing research arena. We hope that this issue will contribute to the many current conversations surrounding arts based that cumulatively constitutes the expansion of arts based research in diverse fields.

Lastly, we wish to thank journal editor in chief Lindy Joubert and associate editor Naomi Berman for the opportunity to bring this special issue dedicated to advancing critical arts based educational research into the global conversation at this particular and pivotal time. We are grateful for the opportunity, and hope you as readers find these diverse contributions as important as we do, and that you will now engage in this dialogue and advance the discussion further in your own contexts worldwide.

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