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How Do Arts Contribute to Educational Research? A Book Review of Arts-Based Research in Education: Foundations for Practice

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Abstract

I write this review as a recommendation for potential readers: those who are new to and veterans with respect to arts-based research. *Arts-Based Research in Education: Foundations for Practice* is edited by Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor and Richard Siegesmund, with contributions from 22 authors and a cover artist. In addition to providing some information from a usual structure around contents, central themes and concepts, intended audience, genres of writing styles, strengths and weaknesses, and uniquenesses, I primarily focus on the content of the chapter entitled “Four guiding principles for arts-based research practice” which I found extraordinarily significant in the second edition of this book and most meaningful for those planning their arts-based research projects.

Keywords

arts-based research, usual structure, genres of writing styles, strengths and weaknesses

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How Do Arts Contribute to Educational Research? A Book Review of *Arts-Based Research in Education: Foundations for Practice*

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I write this review as a recommendation for potential readers: those who are new to and veterans with respect to arts-based research. *Arts-Based Research in Education: Foundations for Practice* is edited by Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor and Richard Siegesmund, with contributions from 22 authors and a cover artist. In addition to providing some information from a usual structure around contents, central themes and concepts, intended audience, genres of writing styles, strengths and weaknesses, and uniquenesses, I primarily focus on the content of the chapter entitled “Four guiding principles for arts-based research practice” which I found extraordinarily significant in the second edition of this book and most meaningful for those planning their arts-based research projects.

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What Is the Second Edition of the Book About?

The field of research known as arts-based research (ABR) is expanding and incorporates creative processes like visual arts, music, dance, theater, and other forms of expression into research practices in education. ABR in education offers alternative approaches to comprehending and researching challenging academic issues as well as involving students and teachers in fruitful and authentic research experiences. Art installations, musical performances, dance recitals, and theatrical productions are just a few examples of the various ways that ABR projects in education can be presented. ABR gives researchers in education a way to investigate research questions in a more comprehensive and multifaceted manner. It enables the exploration of aspects of learning that may be challenging to measure using conventional research techniques, such as emotional, sensory, and embodied aspects. Additionally, ABR allows participants to interact with people from different perspectives, life experiences, and cultural backgrounds, enabling more respectful and inclusive research practices.

The book's first edition provided definitions and illustrations of arts-based educational research; identified tensions, issues, and models in the field; and offered suggestions for both novice and seasoned practitioners (Smithbell, 2010). As ABR gains popularity and prominence in the social sciences and education, the boundaries across empirical, institutional, and artistic research are eroding, and new opportunities for discussion, consideration, and reflection are opening up. The book was written in response to a growing, global need to comprehend and navigate this developing field of research. The text combined critical essays on arts-based research in the performing, visual, and literary arts with illustrations of outstanding theory and practice from a wide range of contributors.

The editors give more emphasis on the discussion of the theoretical and historical foundations of arts-based educational research in the book's second edition to better inform

readers about how the field has emerged since its inception (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2017). The terms "arts-based research" (ABR) and "scholaristry" are used synonymously in the book by the editors to reflect the generative power of the arts to enliven social science inquiry and social science to propel the arts and ABR. The editors looked for representations from a range of artistic mediums and theoretical orientations while maintaining "translation" clarity for audiences in the social sciences. In general, *Arts-based research in education: Foundations for practice* is a book that focuses on the use of arts-based research methods in education. It is comprised of 21 chapters written by experts in the fields of ABR. Each chapter discusses a unique aspect of ABR in education, such as dance, poetry, theater, and visual arts, as well as the theoretical foundations and practical applications of their medium. What is contained on the interior in the book is most impressive, but I will tell you that I was taken by the cover illustration. The artist depicts a collage of diverse images, including a dancer, a musician, and a painter, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of ABR and demonstrating the potential power of ABR for researchers, educators, and graduate students: how art can be used to investigate issues related to education and learning.

New voices and chapters on various artistic genres have been included in the book to challenge the grand narratives of expressing and/or reporting qualitative data. The second edition extends and enhances the first edition's introduction of scholaristry as a hybrid approach to studying the human condition that combines methods from the performing, visual, and/or literary arts with those used by educators and other social scientists. The contributors integrate and put into practice theoretical frameworks like sociocultural theory and critical pedagogy in order to build interdisciplinary connections and give scholars a wider range of tools to encourage innovation, inquiry, and risk-taking in their academic and artistic pursuits.

Four Guiding Principles for Arts-Based Research Practice

As a book reviewer, I believe it is essential to approach the text with an open mind and without preconceived notions or biases (Dahal, 2023a) to provide insightful and constructive feedback that can benefit both the author and prospective readers. For that reason, I have considered the book's genre of writing, target audience, purpose, and message, as well as the intended audience (Dahal, 2023b). I have familiarized myself with the contributors' backgrounds, previous works, and any historical or cultural contexts that may have influenced the book content. For this review, I also considered the book's organization, writing style, and pacing, as well as its strengths and weaknesses. From my position as a reader and reviewer, I observed that the book offers an adequate foundation for the practice of ABR and is approachable, engaging, and thought-provoking – I was fascinated.

I was particularly taken with the chapter, "Four guiding principles for arts-based research practice," in which chapter contributor and book editor Melissa Cahnmann-Taylor takes into account the issues of who should or can participate in ABR in education, why, and for what purposes. These queries raise "persistent tensions" regarding the novelty, usefulness, and worthiness of ABR emanating from uncertainty, arguments, and discussion surrounding ABR results. We have probably all noticed, heard about, or experienced some of these tensions. In light of the aforementioned tension and unease, she offered the four following guidelines and/or principles for thinking and giving advice when approaching artmaking as a social scientist and social science as a poet: the principle of subjectivity and public good, the principle of attribution and ethical good, the principle of impact and aesthetic good, and the principle of translation to scientific good.

One of the four guiding principles for arts-based research practice is the subjectivity and public good principle. "What and who are the subjects of this work, and to what extent does this project contribute to the public good?" is the underlying question that all arts-based

researchers must ask. It refers to the ethical responsibilities of researchers who engage human subjects and audiences through artistic methods and implies that researchers should respect the diversity of perspectives and experiences that inform their work and consider how their work can contribute to social justice and the common good. In this chapter, the subjectivity principle acknowledges that the researchers' personal experiences, biases, and perspectives influence the research process and findings. In the postmodern era, arts-based researchers are expected to explore the unknown with a commitment to complexity, humility, bravery, and beauty. However, ABR respects the subjectivity of the researcher and encourages them to reflect on their positionality and how it may influence their research. In visual art-based research, for instance, the artist-personal researcher's experiences and perspectives may influence the choice of medium, style, and subject matter. The subjectivity principle recognizes the significance of the artist-unique researcher's perspective and how it contributes to the research process. Likewise, the public good principle recognizes that ABR must contribute to the greater good and benefit society. It emphasizes the importance of engaging with communities and stakeholders and utilizing research findings to promote social change and improve the lives of individuals. For example, a dance-based research project may investigate the experiences of people with disabilities and use dance to raise awareness and encourage inclusion.

In the chapter, the principle of attribution acknowledges the significance of giving credit and acknowledgment to the sources, artists, and collaborators who contributed to the research project. In art and science, ethics, attribution, and veracity have long been controversial topics. Researchers, artists, and members of the community frequently work together in ABR. This principle emphasizes the significance of recognizing and attributing the contributions of all those who participated in the research process. In a music-based research project involving collaboration with local musicians, for example, the principle of attribution requires that the musicians' contributions be acknowledged, and their work protected. The ethical good principle emphasizes the significance of conducting research in an ethical and accountable manner. Because it frequently involves the use of sensitive personal information and the artistic representation of individuals and communities, arts-based research raises unique ethical concerns. This principle acknowledges the importance of protecting the dignity and rights of research participants and conducting research in a responsible and respectful manner. In a photography-based research project that involves photographing members of a vulnerable community, for instance, the principle of ethical good requires that the participants' consent be obtained, their privacy and dignity be respected, and their images be used responsibly and with respect. In conclusion, ABR can facilitate conversations about ethics and attribution that are unique to human-subjects research in the 21st century and beyond. When the distinctions between "private" and "public" and "fact" and "fiction" become increasingly blurry, attribution and ethics require greater care than ever before.

With the ethos of always seeking innovative ways to employ old tools in service of the highest quality, impact, and implications of the work, the principle of impact acknowledges that ABR must significantly impact individuals, communities, and society as a whole. This principle emphasizes the significance of considering the intended and unintended outcomes of the research and utilizing the findings to effect positive change. In a theatre-based research project that investigates the experiences of immigrants, for instance, the principle of impact requires that the research findings be utilized to raise awareness about the challenges immigrants face and to advocate for policies and practices that promote their inclusion and well-being. The principle of aesthetic good acknowledges the significance of creating aesthetically compelling and captivating art. This principle emphasizes the importance of using artistic forms to communicate research findings in a way that captures the attention and imagination of the audience. As an example, in a visual art-based research project that investigates the experiences of people living with chronic illness, the principle of aesthetic

good requires that the artwork be visually engaging and convey the research findings in a manner that resonates with the audience.

The principle of translation to scientific good is a crucial concept in ABR, and the chapter highlights the importance of presenting knowledge gained through unconventional methods in a format that can be comprehended and utilized by the scientific community. Due to the non-traditional methods and forms of data collection and analysis used in arts-based research, conventional scientific techniques may struggle to interpret and validate findings. Therefore, the principle of translation to scientific good stresses the need to transform results into a format that is accessible and meaningful to the scientific community. For example, in a dance-based research project studying the impact of dance on mental health, the principle requires that findings be presented in a manner that can be comprehended and validated by the scientific community. This may involve using quantitative measures or developing a theoretical framework to explain the results. Additionally, the principle emphasizes the significance of utilizing findings from ABR to advance scientific knowledge by providing new insights and perspectives on complex phenomena.

There is much to celebrate in ABR, and the creation of this chapter and book inspire new directions. I found that each chapter demonstrates the power of art in science and the science in art and how this mutuality can contribute to freshness and motivation to thinking and acting differently in our educational endeavors. I worry about scholarship that overvalues the self and undervalues participants, overemphasizes the conceptual and underemphasizes practice that some scholars may focus too much on their own opinions and experiences and not enough on the people they study, or that they may place too much emphasis on abstract concepts and neglect practical applications. It also implies that some academics may favor certain perspectives or methods over others without considering the value of alternative perspectives or methods. For instance, some academics may rely too heavily on their intuition and not enough on careful analysis and skillful writing, or they may favor scientific or artistic modes of knowledge without appreciating both. While these are genuine ABR risks, this chapter and the book are filled with risk-takers who recognize that failure is an experience from which to learn and improve.

This review is an attempt to help to bring ABR discourse even more into the mainstream of qualitative research. In my own situation, ABR is becoming increasingly prevalent in educational research and even at my institution, the Kathmandu University School of Education, Nepal. In the international scenario, ABR communities have also had the opportunity to present their research at prestigious conferences and annual meetings, such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the American Anthropological Association (AAA), the International Congress for Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI), the European Congress for Qualitative Inquiry (ECQI), and The Qualitative Report (TQR) conferences (to name a few) in order to advance the field and provide opportunities to test our ideas and develop our arts-based thinking.

Even though I shared my particular appreciation for the “Four guiding principles for arts-based research practice,” I read all the chapters thoroughly and would suggest this book to other readers who wish to learn more about the methodologies and practices of ABR in education. I commend the contributors for focusing on arts-based research's social justice and ethical aspects. All in all, the book provided a broader range of viewpoints and voices on ABR, especially from the Western contexts, and I will next look forward to viewpoints and voices from across the globe and disciplines on the methods and practices on ABR. What will you contribute?

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