

# Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice

---

Volume 3

Issue 1 *Discussing the Convergence of Research and the Creative Arts*

Article 3

---

Fall 2004

## Artists, Arts Educators, and Arts Therapists as Researchers

Phillip Speiser

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/jppp>

---

### Recommended Citation

Speiser, Phillip (2004) "Artists, Arts Educators, and Arts Therapists as Researchers," *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/jppp/vol3/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@lesley.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@lesley.edu).

# Artists, Arts Educators, and Arts Therapists as Researchers

Phillip Speiser

In recent times, the role of the artist in society has been expanded to encompass the fields of education and human services. Since the 1960s, thousands of professionals have been trained in new roles as creative arts educators and therapists. These artists/educators/therapists are changing and transforming the institutions in which they work and the services they offer.

Research in these fields has often been informed by traditional social science and/or case study methodologies. The articles presented in this journal are intended as one small step towards advancing a complementary field of research that places the artist and the creative process at the foreground, allowing methodology to emerge from this experience. The authors are all artists. They are also educators and/or therapists. They each present examples of how they attempt to make meaning out of questions that are important to them through artistic inquiry. All of the researchers are fully engaged in their creative processes. Some explore issues around self and identity. Others deal with effecting change in therapeutic and educational systems or within client/student relationships. In every instance the author's commitment to his/her particular art form is the guiding medium of inquiry and the vehicle through which the research emerges.

Many individuals in our field have begun to call for the further development of what is now being called "arts-based research" (Kapitan, 2003; Hervey, 2000; McNiff, 1998; Allen, 1995; Linesch, 1995).

Drawing on McNiff's (1998, p.13) definition of art-based research, we define "arts-based research" as a method of inquiry that uses the elements of the creative arts experience, including the making of art by the researcher, as ways of understanding the significance of what we do within our practice and teaching. As defined in the American Heritage Dictionary, the word "research" means "to study thoroughly." The authors contributing to this issue of the *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism and Practice* shape a new vision of what research can be, when the arts are used as the basis for in-depth investigation. They each enter a creative process deeply committed to the discovery of new knowledge and to finding meaning through their particular artistic modalities. They form their own methodologies and set their standards of measurement, each particular to the various arts modalities they use.

The creative arts therapy and education professions are by nature interactive. In order to capture this interaction, the contributors also create their individualized forms of inquiry that reflect the various languages of the arts. Experimentation occurs with the manipulation of various artistic forms of expression. Personal engagement with the images, symbols, and forms parallels the engagement of the clients and students with whom the contributors work. The ability to embrace connections amongst the three components of self, other, and art is unique to the creative arts therapy and education fields.

My co-editor Shaun McNiff sets the epistemological tone for the following articles offering different approaches to arts-based inquiry by describing how this work is part of a larger academic tradition of authors. He reminds us of the importance of the philosopher Susanne K. Langer and her contribution towards understanding the intricacies between spoken and symbolic language development. The challenge ahead regarding arts-based research is clearly formulated by McNiff's belief, "that all forms of symbolic transformation are not only basic human needs but they are also fundamental and intelligent modes of conception with each characterized by its unique framework of symbols that cannot be reduced to another system."

Stephen K. Levine follows this introduction with further reflections on the philosophical foundations of arts-based research. He unravels the complexities that lie ahead for a true "arts-base" for research activity and we are given a clear and concise understanding of how the question, "What is arts-based research?" is located in the rich traditions of Socrates and the ancient Greeks. Levine emphasizes the challenge of understanding the important relationship between thought, symbolic language, and imagination. He describes how "...in the Platonic dialogues themselves, the tension between image and word, imagination and thought, is maintained, not eliminated."

If art is a way of knowing by doing then clearly arts-based research must follow this tenet of allowing for "knowing" to emerge out of the creative process and finding adequate ways to document this process. Robert Landy begins the presentation of multi-faceted approaches to arts-based research by identifying his core motivation for delving into his "Search of a Form for Playing God"-- the need to engage in spiritual dialogue with his children. His research is a poignant example of how the self, other, and language/dramatic arts feed into one another, interacting over many years and transforming the personal realm of experience into the larger universal sphere of belief and meaning making.

Mary Clare Powell demonstrates an original model for arts-based research that allows her own poetry to interact with that of her adult students as they explore the question of what personal changes occurred as they participated in a graduate school Creative

Arts and Learning teacher training. Poetry is used here as the *modus operandi* for guiding the research process and as a means of documenting self-discovery and growth.

The therapeutic relationship between client and therapist is one that has received much attention in modern times. Susan Spaniol explores how art therapy can be integrated into a Participatory Action Research model that brings clients and therapists together in a nonauthoritarian, nonhierarchical weekend workshop setting. The use of visual art as a collaborative activity is successfully integrated into the model demonstrating how authenticity and community building can be achieved when traditional hierarchies are dissolved.

In the next article, Lynn Kapitan applies visual art towards an exploration of “artist disenchantment” with art therapists. Here the author identifies two goals: to reveal aesthetically the phenomena of artist disenchantment and to transform it. She embarks on a creative process with “other” colleagues and together finds meaning as she also introduces innovative methods for “holding” and “beholding” images.

Gene Diaz and Zayda Sierra introduce a cross-cultural arts-based perspective as they describe their attempt towards influencing the disparities between school cultures and children’s sociocultural realities in Colombia. Working with dramatic play as the medium, they present a systematic approach that leads to curriculum enhancement - addressing the diversity of the student populations in Colombian schools.

The next two contributions from Hervey/Toncy and Linda Lack highlight two inquiries using the medium of dance. Lenore Wadsworth Hervey & Nancy Toncy engage in a creative dialogue as they describe a project carried out by Toncy, with Hervey as supervisor, involving the empowerment of six Egyptian Muslim women living in Cairo, Egypt. Toncy uses the materials gathered from her movement interviews to create her own dance, as a method for further integration between “self” inquiry and “other.”

Linda Lack immerses herself in a creative process originating in her dance studio, attempting to find methodology that will assist her in sorting through the intricacies between “primary experience” and language. Her research leads her to a movement experience that explores the relationship between performer and “active recipient.”

Arts-based research is used by Bethe Hagens to further the planning of a Symposium designed to facilitate communication between faculties from two institutions that have recently participated in a comprehensive merger. The “research project” slowly emerges as she first builds a Labyrinth and then follows her creative process and allows the Labyrinth to become a central communicative component in implementing the Symposium.

The final three contributions each share a deep personal story as their starting point for embarking on an artistic-inquiry-research process. These processes are ongoing in their lives and somehow mirror or follow the development of each person. Suzanne B. Hanser recounts a painful moment in time, giving birth to her daughter-- stillborn. This event is the motivation for a series of innovative music therapy research projects, which she describes.

Martin Perdoux describes his long-term process of self-discovery through engagement in visual art, sculpture and prose. The starting point of creative embarkation is the discovery in 1982 that he is not the son of his mother's husband. What follows is an account of personal transformation that slowly unfolds through the shape of visual objects and storytelling.

And finally, Vivien Marcow Speiser & Phillip Speiser present their work-in-progress regarding their ongoing attempts at "making sense" from the "non-sensical" personal realities that they share through their families' experiences during the Holocaust.

It is my hope that the contributions in this journal will continue to expand the parameters for doing artistic research and that they will stimulate us to continue the discourse. The artist, artist educator, and artist therapist emerge as legitimate researchers using their own realm of expression. Perhaps the next stage of our evolution as a profession will allow the same creative spirit that brought us into existence fifty years ago, to shape our own arts-based system of research, firmly rooted in the principles of creative process and artistic inquiry.

I would like to thank my co-editor and friend Shaun McNiff for inviting me to co-edit this journal. I also thank the authors for their contributions. Lastly, thanks go to William Stokes, editor of the *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism and Practice*, for his invaluable support and encouragement.

## References

- Allen, P. (1995). *Art is a way of knowing*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Hervey, L.W. (2000). *Artistic inquiry in dance/movement therapy*. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher.
- Kapitan, L. (2003). *Re-enacting art therapy: Transformational practices for restoring creative vitality*. Springfield Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher.
- Linesch, D. (1995). Art therapy research: Learning from experience, In *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 12, (4) 261-265.
- McNiff, S. (1998). *Art-based research*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publisher.