

Issues and Prospects for Art-based Research Methodologies and Methods

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Summary

This paper is a *philosophical analysis* of the *discourse* of the art-based research methodology and method from scientific and socio-cultural perspectives. It aims to determine the philosophical underpinning, inquiry approach, and context of art-based research. It also examines the current issue in the relevant topic. In this paper, the author will broaden the discussion beyond the boundaries of art-based research methodologies and methods. The discussion of art-based research will mainly include a variety of aspects of art and art educational research. The present paper regards visual perception as scientific and socio-cultural approaches to art-based research, with an emphasis on analyzing the rationale for the integration of both approaches and the theoretical framework of the methodology and method.

One essential concept and premise on which this paper rests is that research in art and art education are rooted in the same foundation-both can be understood as a socio-cultural product created through a process of socio-cultural inquiring. According to this connection, it is believed that a broader view of art-based research can certainly enrich our understanding of the issue in research in art and education. In the present paper, the Crotty's scaffolding framework of social research is adopted to argue and examine the current methodologies and methods used in art-based research in Taiwan, China, and Hong Kong. Final suggestions will be made to contribute to enrich our understanding of art-based research. In the scaffolding framework of social research, Crotty not only reconceptualizes the development of the research methodologies and methods systematically, he also analyzes the philosophical underpinnings of the Western research approaches. What he

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concerns is not to distinguish or identify different quantitative or qualitative research approaches; on the contrary, he much concerns what the philosophical ideas are hidden behind these approaches; thus governing and affecting the research structure and the way of resolving the research question.

Qualitative inquiry approaches are one of the most common research methods seen in art educational research nowadays. A study indicates that most of the methodologies and methods used by scholars in their papers submitted to *Visual Arts Research* during 1994-2000 are of narratives and case study methods (Thurber, 2004). On the other hand, Stokrocki (1997) who embraces a qualitative approach concludes six major research methodologies usually adopted by art educators, including ethnography, microethnography, phenomenology, educational criticism, case study, and social critical theory. Influenced by the qualitative inquiry approaches, both Wilson (1997) and Stokrocki (1997) emphasize that the methodology and method used in educational criticism suggested by Eisner (1991) can also be practiced in research in art education. Besides, taking a significant publication *Research Methods and Methodologies for Art Education* by La Pierre and Zimmerman (1997) as an example, different authors in the manuscript discuss several important contemporary approaches to art educational research, covering the qualitative inquiry method, historical inquiry and narratives, postmodernist's feminism approach, and action research. Although the above-mentioned outlines a picture of how qualitative inquiry methods can be integrated into art educational research, some essential research methodologies and methods such as grounded theory or phenomenological approach are still missing.

Furthermore, most of the art-based researchers rely on qualitative frameworks to *generate* categories and explanations of their data collected. Nevertheless, according to different artistic forms, media, and characteristics, approaches to art-based research are diverse. Obviously, Rasberry's (2001) conceptual framework for his writing research is totally different from Pollock's (1998) performance-based research in writing, though they both claim that they adopt qualitative research methodologies and methods in their studies.

In the early 90s, Eisner (1993, 1997) and Barone (2001) first introduce the concept of art-based educational research as a research method. Since then, relevant discussion has begun. In addition, Sullivan (2001, 2005) highly regards art as a core of study, in which it can contribute to literature in art education practice as well. He believes that an artist is

indeed a theorist, intending to theorize *art practice* as research through scientific research processes such as testing the assumption of art questions, design of experiments, and explanations of the complex art phenomena. However, Sullivan (2006) also criticizes Eisner's idea of art-based educational research that much borrows the social research framework and narrows the scope of art-based research. In this sense, Sullivan (2006) even suggests that art-based research should expand the horizons of studio art research.

Visual thinking can be examined from a socio-cultural perspective. The reason is that various symbols carrying various social messages are hidden in the visual form. Based on this connection, Banks (2008) explicates that we much depend on visual system that is mainly constructed by images, objects, and interpretation to understand the meaning. He sees this interpretation of the visual system as a process of visual data collection and explanation. Meanwhile, Reiger (1996) describes the process of data collection and interpretation as a visual process, emphasizing the importance of using triangulation to increase *validity and reliability*. In fact, art-based research methodologies and methods today *have various terminologies, reflecting diverse visual thinking patterns*: art-based educational research (Baron & Eisner, 1997) ; arts-informed research (Cole, Neilson, Knowles & Luciani, 2004) ; Canadian A/R/Tography (Irwin & De Cosson, 2004; Mitchell, Weber & O' Reilly-Scanlon, 2005); practice-based or practice-led research (Candlin, 2000; Frayling, 1997); and art therapeutic research (McNiff, 1998). All theses can be regarded as art-based research inquiries, but they have different focuses. For instance, Canadian A/R/Tography mainly emphasizes the importance of creation process, subjectivity, and memories of the artist.

In short, in the Asia Pacific context, the academic world shows less concern about art-based research methodologies and methods. With reference to the mainstream regional journals in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China, there has only been one paper published in *Research in Arts Education* (Taiwan) focusing on art-based research since 2000 (Liu, 2004). None of the related articles are found in *Asia-Pacific Journal for Arts Education* (Hong Kong) and *China Art Education* (China) either. According to this background, art-based related research methodologies and methods are an important issue but have long been ignored in the Asia Pacific context.

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