

Dariusz Kubinowski
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin,
Poland

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Book Review

Barone, Tom and Elliot W. Eisner. 2012.
Arts Based Research. Los Angeles, London,
New Delhi, Singapore, Washington, DC:
Sage Publications

An inspiration for writing a review of the book *Arts Based Research* was an incentive coming from its authors, which was addressed for all potential readers and encouraged them to search mutually for adequate criteria of evaluation of projects and texts that belong in this research tradition. Since the methodological thought of Elliot W. Eisner and his disciple Tom Barone has been close to me for many years, I decided to reply to this invitation in a constructive way, as an educational dance based researcher (Kubinowski 2003) and a methodologist of qualitative educational research in general (Kubinowski 2010). The authors of the reviewed book suggested and justified a list of a few basic criteria of evaluating the quality of arts based research, for example, incisiveness, concision, coherence, generativity, social significance, evocation, and illumination. In a summary of the appropriate fragment they wrote:

[s]o, finally, we invite you, the readers, to use your own judgment in applying these criteria to the ex-

amples of the works of arts based research included in this book and to those many that are not included. But, we also urge you to use your imagination in ascertaining other criteria that may emerge from your encounters with arts based work in the future. As an informed and imaginative reviewer and critic of examples of arts based research, you may serve to ensure that those works positioned to achieve the purpose of raising questions about important social issues in a powerful manner will more likely be made available to others. (p. 155)

Before I move on to extend the list of the important criteria with three new ones, for example, idiomaticity, synergeticity, and emergence, I would like to point out, in my opinion, the key virtues of the book from the perspective of contemporary qualitative research and make a basic critical remark. I would also like to highlight the fact that by a critical remark I mean the pedagogical gift, which, as I suppose, is concurrent with the intentions of already classic concepts of educational connoisseurship and criticism as proposed by E. W. Eisner (1976).

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The main virtue of the book is its competent, synthetic, and exhaustive presentation of the essence of arts based research and of suggestive examples of its use in the deepened understanding of the selected educational issues. This lecture, which is unrivalled in the available literature as far as high methodological quality is concerned, was prepared not only by the experienced researchers but also the creators of this paradigm, and its leaders and propagators. In the following chapters they discuss the essence of arts based research, the reasons for its application beside some other social research, the question of its scientific nature, predisposition to its effective realization, its target group, the issue of fiction as a key epistemological category, its political and ethical context, a choice of adequate criteria of its evaluation, the role of theory in its designing and practicing, and fundamental ideas of humanistic epistemology resulting from the research. A discussion of any aspects of arts based research is preceded by an analysis of a given conceptual field with the highlighting of ambivalence in understanding the basic methodological categories and the profiling of their meaning adopted by the authors. For instance, concepts such as: research, fiction, criteria, theory, et cetera, are ambiguous. Also the specific features of arts based research are presented intentionally in an open, pluralistic form, not specified in content, which stems from the rooting of the authors' methodological thinking in pragmatism (J. Dewey) and neopragmatism (R. Rorty), cultural anthropology (G. Geertz), theory of literature (M. Bakhtin), aesthetics and theory of art (E. Gombrich, S. Langer), or even the feminist thought (J. Kristeva), and most of all, the philosophy of science (T. Kuhn, S. Toulmin), and contemporary interpretation of qualitative research (N. Denzin, Y. Lincoln).

What is more, the reviewed book is full of innovative, deeply humanistic epistemological, methodological, and pedagogical theses, which are still considered quite bold in the academic world. Out of these, attention should be paid particularly to clear criticism of the positivistic paradigm of social sciences, based on the statistical method, of simplistic standardization, behavioral approach, and a tendency to quantify all the qualitative data in a reductive manner and to measure statistically humanistic phenomena, yet in combination with resigning from a confrontational approach in the traditional discussion between the qualitative and quantitative researchers. It is even postulated that the two of them could be complementary in their view of reality. What is also interesting is the distinction between research and science, in which the scientific research is just one of many means of knowing and understanding the human being and his/her world. It is connected with the postulate of humanistic-like redefinition of science, particularly in relation to social sciences. The authors present a set of convincing arguments for bringing the specific features of art and artistry to the ground of scientific activity, or in a broader context, research activity, thus, promoting the concept of a research project and a scientific text as a work of art, and of a researcher as a special kind of artist. Inspired by the thoughts of R. Rorty, they discuss the idea of epistemological humility, pointing out that the aim of arts based research is not to discover and explain the universal absolute truth but rather to deepen the understanding of a unique phenomenon or a case in the contextual approach, and to interpret this phenomenon in a polyphonic and ambivalent space of various ethical, aesthetic, axiological perspectives. From the point of view of knowledge about the

human being, arts based research is an alternative and complement to the conventional scientific knowing, and is a special kind of social research which is placed within the new paradigm of integral humanities. The interpretation of arts based research by T. Barone and E. W. Eisner offers a clear, multi-dimensionally interpreted pedagogical aspect, which is expressed not only through educational examples but also in the main ideological message within their teleological scope. To be precise, the final aim of their usage in social research should be, according to the authors, the drive towards pro-humanistic and pro-democratic changes of the contemporary world and people, which relates this interpretation very clearly with the traditions of critical theory in social sciences, and the resulting critical pedagogy.

The publication has more to offer. This review may only cover some part of it. Let us come back to the evaluation criteria of arts based research. In my opinion, the three criteria, namely: idiomaticity, synergeticity, and emergence seem to be the most important ones in the quality evaluation of the contemporary qualitative research. They were not acknowledged in the criteria lists offered by T. Barone and E. W. Eisner. It is surprising as the book, while discussing the following aspects of arts based research, frequently refers to those criteria in various ways. Hence, concepts such as: idiom, synergy, and emergence are used constantly while describing the constitutive features of the research, then by analogy, idiomaticity, synergeticity, and emergence should be found within the basic evaluation criteria. The criterion of idiomaticity, as far as arts based research is concerned, refers mostly to the quality of understanding and using idioms typical for particular artistic sub-fields, whether in a research project or a scientific

text. It can also be used in the corresponding sensory data and forms of representation, and also in the difficult tasks of translating one artistic/media/cultural idiom into another. The criterion of synergeticity entails having a closer look at synergy quality between art and science, which is reflected in the hybrid arts based research, and which is aimed at accepting the used solutions both by the art critics interested in the knowledge-related values of art, and by the scientific reviewers who are sensitive to the artistic value and open to various ways of knowing and understanding. The criterion of emergence is used in this case to understand the appropriateness and adequacy of using artistic logic and media in order to deepen the understanding of social phenomena, which is often limited to the conventional scientific knowledge, and which try to avoid the label of art for art's sake. That is why the choice of an artistic discipline and a specific artistic medium has to be the result of a methodologically justified decision and not a matter of chance, fashion, or showing-off. It seems to me that the proposed three criteria of evaluation of arts based research are just a reinterpretation of the authors' intentions, and result from the philosophy of this paradigm.

As a dance based researcher, I will allow myself to make a critical comment. The book quotes in full the three original research studies as examples of texts which represent arts based research. All of them make use of verbal medium and literary art. The whole book does not contain any visual images, such as photography or drawing, nor any examples of arts based research concerning theater, music, and dance in a broader context. The only publications today concern qualitative research supplemented by DVD's, which present audio and audio-visual examples, however, these

may have not been the intention of the authors. It seems, though, that thinking and writing about arts based research by T. Barone and E. W. Eisner is too dominated by literature. Although they write about film, photography, dance, music, they do not try to break with the dominance of verbal representation, which is already outdated in qualitative research. The kinesthetic understanding of dance entails a much more deepened and adequate research than merely watching dance and then representing it by means of words. The same applies to music and theater. However, the authors understand that kind of idiomaticity perfectly, which is evidenced in their comments on non-literary arts. Undoubtedly, they know many social research projects which are based on the theater, dance, music, fine arts, performance, et cetera (Knowles, Cole 2008). Why did they resign

from presenting a more developed, multi-sensory, and multi-dimensional image of contemporary arts based research, which would represent distinctly different aesthetics?

To conclude, I would like to share the wish of E. W. Eisner and T. Barone, also present in the book, for community of arts based researchers to be made stronger by new, creative members all around the world. Let me formulate this wish in the 20th anniversary of organizing the inaugural institute in educational arts based research at Stanford University, and in the 80th anniversary of E. W. Eisner's birthday. Let the emergent "dance" of qualitative diversification last in the synergic "circle" of researchers/artists community with idiomatic "figures" of approaches, metaphors, "gaps," and representations.

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