

Editorial

Explanation Through Conversation

Joe: George, I would like to thank you for arranging this arts-based Research Special Issue of *ajer*. Although you know that I have been an advocate of the arts in general and arts-based research and the arts as a learning medium specifically, my major focus has never been the arts for arts' sake. I envision the arts as a tool, and like any good steward its purpose is to serve. For me the arts have a major role to play in epistemological and research arenas. If the medium and content are intricately and intimately entwined as I believe they are, we must continue to push the textual boundaries of our research. I am pleased that the approximately 30 submissions did just that. In addition, I am delighted that we obtained funding to include a CD-ROM bound to the journal and that we decided to play with the editorial writing in a conversational form. We too must practice what we preach.

George: Joe, I must thank you for proposing the arts-based theme issue. *ajer* endeavors to be an eclectic scholarly journal, yet part of being eclectic is to explore new ideas and new directions, not to become satisfied only with the traditional. As education defies being categorized by a single research type, unlike some areas of science, it is important for educators to explore and to use different approaches to research. Whether we like it or not, educators have been influenced by media to a greater or lesser extent. Marshall McLuhan's (1964) dictum of "the medium is the message" is now especially poignant given the pervasiveness of computer technology in schools and the resurgence of nontextual means of instruction. It seems logical, therefore, that not only will inquiring from an arts and/or media base add a dimension of understanding to what occurs in education, but it may also shed light on the path that education is taking. Without doubt *ajer* has taken a bold step in its eclecticism, especially with the inclusion of a CD-ROM. Nevertheless, by including the CD-ROM, *ajer* is reflecting the media and technology of the time. Moreover, the CD-ROM enables *ajer* to include elements that cannot easily be included in conventional print media.

Joe: Because we have taken thankful tone, before we proceed let's also thank the many who have submitted and the 30+ reviewers who provided a diverse pool of research and research perspectives. We had no consistent focus or agreement, and for me this is one of the strengths of our ever-increasing research methodologies. We have many lenses through which we "interpret the world," and although the *t*-test still has its place, we have expanded exponentially since then. This issue includes poetry, drama, installations, drawings,

quilts, and a novel accompanied by epistemological explanations of their research orientation. My hope at its conception as it is now is that the pieces will act as exemplars for our colleagues and students, not to adopt, but to use as a launching pad for their own research endeavors.

George: It has been enlightening to me to discover that there are many arts-based educational researchers. No doubt some people will regard what appears in this issue of *ajer*, as well as the CD-ROM, as something other than "proper educational research." In spite of this view, and in spite of the seemingly diverse nature of the topics and methods included, the reviewers for this theme issue applied a discernible rigor and a high standard. The submissions and review process were not at all *laissez faire*. However, if this theme issue disturbs or causes reactions, then I believe that it is serving a useful purpose. When we consider how the narrative inquiry approach of Barone (1990) or Connelly and Clandinin (1990) and others is now featured at meetings of the American Educational Research Association, when just a matter of years previously the approach was regarded as anathema, it focuses the point that educational research is neither static nor confined simply to research methods appropriated from other disciplines.

Joe: So this issue is serving *ajer* and the research community. It has the potential to expand our understanding of what knowledge is and open our eyes, ears, and souls to new approaches. I await the day when sounds, touches, and smells are more than merely talked about. I am reminded that linguists claim that much meaning is not conveyed merely in the word, but how it is spoken. What is lost in transcriptions will never be known. So I guess we are just beginning. The other issue you raise is that of the skeptic. Although I am aware of it, I am glad that we didn't listen to it. For me much of the debate is about epistemological turf more than truth claims. Like Banks and Banks (1998), I do not see a distinct line between reality and fantasy, as even the keyboard that we are typing on was once nothing more than another's imagination. This brings us to the opening piece by Neilsen on liminality (which is not in my spell checker). This could be threatening to some as it questions the very nature of thought. I am comfortable with it, but it does challenge the positivistic notions of data sources and verifiability. Recently I have come to believe that all data are a trigger for the thoughts of the researcher, who constructs a personal meaning to share with others, and so on. Lori's article provides a provocative opening.

George: Poetry has its place in this theme issue as well, as represented by the works of Dunlop and Butler-Kisber. Perhaps surprisingly, poetry as a means of informing and representing has a much longer tradition than what are considered "traditional" research methods. Consider the troubadours, minnesingers, and minstrels of the medieval

period. Although these artists transmitted their information in a verbal/musical form, most of what appears in this theme issue is visual as well as textual.

- Joe: The drama submissions by Butterwick and Conrad provide an interesting difficulty as we only have the printed texts represented. Later we will see artful images with other submissions, but the cost of video is still out of reach to display some of their moving images and sounds. Butterwick articulates the problematics of interpretation, and in some way perhaps the written text is better in that it keeps it open. I can see many performed versions of a script and enjoy different takes. Both her text and Conrad's scripts allow space for readers' interpretation. They tell stories that evoke one's imagination.
- George: In a different vein, however, some works are visual in nature, specifically, Clark/Keefe, Springgay, de Cosson, and Ball. Each manages to convey the message, but largely in a nonword form. It is for this reason that I am reluctant to say more about them in a textual manner.
- Joe: Bravo! So we conclude with the written medium where Willis uses the metaphor of panels to tell a story that explores expressive knowing and phenomenology. So we come full circle and return to the written text, albeit on a CD-ROM. We can now make comparisons among media, exploring the strengths and limitations of each.

Joe Norris and George H. Buck

References

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