



ART/RESEARCH: WORKING THE SLASH

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Diane Conrad has been Professor of Drama/Theatre Education at the University of Alberta since 2004, where she was founder and director of the Canada Foundation for Innovation funded Arts-based Research Studio. With Patricia Leavy and managing editor Jaime Fiddler, she also co-founded *Art/Research International* in 2015 and served as co-editor-in-chief for the first 6 years.

Patricia Leavy, PhD, is a best-selling author with more than 50 published books. She has received critical and commercial success in both fiction and nonfiction. Her work has been translated into many languages and has garnered more than 100 book awards. She has received career awards from many organizations including the American Educational Research Association and the National Art Education Association. In 2024, the London Arts-Based Research Centre established “The Patricia Leavy Award for Arts-Based Research”. Her website is www.patricialeavy.com.

Abstract: In this short, invited piece for the journal’s 10th anniversary issue, co-founding editors of *Art/Research International*, Diane Conrad and Patricia Leavy, reflect upon their experiences of envisioning an open access online journal for the publication of creative scholarly research. The journal that evolved realized the inclusive forum they sought to showcase through international and transdisciplinary scholarship that embraced the myriads of creative forms and provocative themes authors were exploring. They are honoured to have played a role in bringing *Art/Research* to life.

Keywords: art/research; arts-based research; arts research; creative scholarship; transdisciplinary; open access

Diane: I remember more than a decade ago when we were conceiving this journal, we spent some time thinking about what we wanted to call it. We knew we wanted to establish an online open access forum for publishing a range of creative scholarly work that was interdisciplinary and international in scope. We considered the various terms that were being used to talk about this sort of work. There were many to consider. The term I was most familiar with, *arts-based research*, was commonly used in the field of education. The notion of arts-based research was developed by U.S. visual arts educator Elliot Eisner and narrative and arts-based educational researcher Tom Barone through the late 1980s, and the term first appeared in print in the early 1990s. It expanded to incorporate various arts forms and gained popularity over the following 30 years in Education and in some other disciplines. The term offered legitimacy to the approach of using the arts within scholarship at a time when these ideas were still emerging in the social sciences. It's worth acknowledging that artists in the academy had been engaging in creative activities as part of their scholarship before this, so the social sciences were catching up.

Patricia: Yes. In the early 2000s I began looking for new, different, more creative ways to do research beyond the conventional qualitative and quantitative methods I had been taught. Coming from a social science background, the arts could be a *subject* of inquiry, but not a *method* of inquiry. At the time I was researching what a colleague and I referred to as “emergent methods”. I began noticing projects from various disciplines that drew on the arts. It immediately resonated as a way to ask different questions, get at things differently, and share research with broader and more diverse audiences. I didn't know there was a name for this work, so I just coded it as “creative methods”. When I first stumbled upon the term arts-based research, it was a revelation. An aha moment! Others were doing this and had even named it. It was exciting. When I wrote the first edition of my book, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, which was written in the mid-2000s and published in 2008, I adopted the term ABR. I would not have created this term, but I saw value in using language that was already gaining legitimacy.

Diane: I first came upon the term during my graduate studies at around the same time. As a drama/theatre education specialist, arts-based research gave me a way to integrate the content and form of the work I was passionate about. The idea of it made so much sense to me as an arts practitioner; it offered an innate process of generating and representing knowledge through creative inquiry. The landscape is quite different now and the terminology used to talk about it has exploded. So how did we land on *art/research* for our journal title? Do you remember?

Patricia: I remember that we felt it was important to have a term that was as broad as possible. We wanted to be inclusive. While arts-based research is a popular term and

one I still use for my own work, it also has specific definitions. Not all research that includes the arts in some way is necessarily ABR. We didn't want to close off possibilities or shut anyone out. We also thought it was important to brand the journal both international and transdisciplinary for the same reason. We wanted more voices, more perspectives, more practices. While we talked about the term "interdisciplinary", I think we both agreed that "transdisciplinary" aligned more with the idea that practitioners aren't simply combining disciplinary knowledges, methods, and resources but, in doing so, they are building new approaches greater than the sum of their parts.

Diane: That's right, we didn't want to use terminology that aligned the journal with any particular approach, so we came up with *Art/Research*. For me the slash opens space for any approach that brings art and research together. I think we succeeded in creating a forum that allowed the inclusivity we sought. I was amazed, right from the start, at the diversity of the submissions we received. They represented everything we imagined for the journal and more. The myriads of art forms engaged in and the topics explored kept our editorial team on our toes. Our online, open access format, to which we were also committed, allowed us to publish authors' works in various formats including text, images, audio, and video files. Many publication forums that existed didn't have that capacity. It's also worth mentioning, I think, that the reviewer guidelines we devised—something generally not accessible to readers—were also quite novel. We asked reviewers to consider the *relevance* of the submission to the focus of the journal, the scholarly and social *significance* of the piece, the *aesthetic power* of the creative work, the article's likelihood to *resonate* with the reader, its adherence to *high ethical standards*, the authors' commitment to *reflexivity*, and the *quality of its documentation*. A colleague of mine, whom at one point I asked to review an article for us, wrote this in introducing the journal to another colleague: "It is the first time that the questions a journal asked me to focus on in reviewing an essay made me fall in love with its mission and ethics. Seriously impressive" (N. Loveless, personal communication, September 10, 2016).

Patricia: When I look now at the research landscape and all the practitioners doing work at the "slash" between art and research, I'm even more excited than I was when I first stumbled upon the term arts-based research. The landscape is growing, shifting, expanding. It's an incredible time for creativity. I'm proud that this journal has created a space within that blossoming terrain. What do you observe when you think back to where things were when we began this journal versus where we are now?

Diane: The landscape has definitely expanded with more and more authors finding their way to include creative scholarly practices within their approaches. The articles published in the journal continue to amaze me. They continue to work the slash in innovative ways that open up my thinking around what is possible in bringing together

the arts and scholarly inquiry. I am amazed by the way that artist-scholars can, through the arts, focus our attention on the things that matter, from the big issues that preoccupy us as a society to small yet vital details that shape our life experiences. I'm impressed by the eclectic array of theoretical perspectives they draw on, the range of emotions they elicit from gut-wrenching to joyous, the ways the arts allow us to imagine yet unimagined possibilities. The diversity of the work makes its practice vigorous and exciting. I'm so pleased, Patricia, that we got to play this role in bringing *Art/Research International* to life. Thanks so much to Ardra Cole and Christina Flemming for continuing to make it a vibrant forum for the publication of international, transdisciplinary, creative scholarship.