

CREATIVE RESEARCH IN THE ARTS: INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL SECTION

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This special section of the Waikato Journal of Education focuses on creative research in the arts. In particular, the special section supports the multiple ways in which the authors and artists represent creative practice as research and research in arts and education. As special section editor, I have advocated a broad understanding of creative arts as encompassing performing and visual arts, including theatre, music, dance, moving images, Māori performing and creative arts and interdisciplinary performance, as well as sculpture, drawing, painting, fibre and fabric arts. I have also advocated a broad understanding of education as encompassing life-long learning from primary school curriculum contexts through to mature artists' engagement in creative practice as research. Consequently, the authors of these submissions discuss creative research in the arts in the context of: their own personal or collaborative artistic practice; their explorations of the relationship between artistic and pedagogical practice; and their pedagogical innovations in specific community, tertiary, secondary or primary arts education programmes. The submissions in this special section have been arranged to reflect these contexts but many of the authors offer insights that apply across multiple contexts.

Underlying the focus of this special section is the perspective that artists do have the potential to significantly contribute to the generation of new knowledges, not only of creative practice but also of pedagogy and social issues in general. For those of us engaged in creative research in the arts, there has been a welcome shift towards the legitimization of artistic practice and research in education (Bannon, 2004; Barbour, 2006; Brew, 1998; Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1998, 2004; Piccini, 2005; Tertiary Education Commission, 2003). This shift has inspired new research methodologies and forms of research representation through which artistic knowledge and findings can be shared with wider audiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The authors in this special section have embraced opportunities to engage in creative practice as research, producing innovative arts works and performances themselves, and engaging in creative pedagogy. In addition, these authors incorporate narratives, reflective journal entries and still and moving images, alongside more traditional discussions of literature, methodology, practice and pedagogy in their submissions.

Particularly in performing arts, the shift towards the legitimization of artistic practice and research has been propelled by the growing acceptance of experiential and alternative ways of knowing (Bannon, 2004; Barbour, 2004, 2006; Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1998, 2004) and a move away from 'somatophobia' (Grosz, 1994), or fear of the body as a site of knowledge. In the context of an increasingly virtual and

globalising world, it seems that people are becoming more disembodied, more disconnected from local communities and contexts, and more self-destructive. Consequently, a re-engagement in lived experiences in specific local arts contexts has the potential to counter the sense of personal disempowerment that many people, especially artists, feel in the face of violence, social injustice, environmental destruction, globalisation and terrorism. Engaging in description, interpretation and reflection on personal and shared experiences in the arts can open all our hearts to recognise and appreciate the diversity of human experience. Some of the authors in this special section reflect on and analyse lived experiences in specific arts contexts. Others move from the detail of lived experiences to the consideration of broader themes, such as the nature of reflective or collaborative practice, of social, political and environmental activism through the arts, of expressing cultural and personal identity in the arts, and of curriculum development and creative pedagogical practices.

Through creative arts research we can potentially engage actively with our own and other societies, cultures and environments as artists. Maintaining an awareness of, and respect for, diverse lived experiences may potentially enhance our own capacity to empathise with others. Such awareness may also encourage us to represent our research through the arts in order to enhance the capacity for our audiences and readers to empathise with others' lived experiences. And as artists and researchers, the knowledges we gain through creative arts practice are available in our everyday lives. Such knowledges can be shared with our students, families and communities through our art, our pedagogical practices and through living. Additionally, engagement in creative practice as research can lead to improved health and well-being for us as artists and researchers, through opportunities to be active in local contexts and environments, potentially communicating messages of change, protest or support. Empowerment through creative practice and research is a vital aspiration. Through such engagement we can become empowered to act and aim to be responsible human beings. We can, as Andrea Olsen (2002) wrote, expand our ability to respond to our world and to recognize the ways in which we can contribute to the world around us.

In order to support non-traditional forms of research, this special section on creative research in the arts contains some submissions that can be found in the print journal. Other submissions can be found on the CD Rom, allowing video, images and multi-media material to interact. All submissions have abstracts contained in the print journal and submissions with visual images in colour can be downloaded as pdf files from the CD Rom.

On a personal note, I have been privileged to read and engage personally with the authors who have submitted to this special section. Their insights as artists, researchers and educators have been inspirational. My acknowledgements also extend to the many others nationally and internationally who contributed as reviewers for the submissions. Finally, I would like to personally acknowledge the courage and passion of Bella Te Aku Graham, who passed away recently. Bella re-ignited my commitment to invoking the power of art to motivate social and political change.

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