

ART BASED PRACTICE AS CREATIVE INQUIRY: INNOVATION IN RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Ngene Eze, Ph.D

*Dept of Fine and Applied Arts,
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri,
Imo State.*

Abstract

The paper takes critical look at art practice based research which is used in art disciplines in the universities and by professional artists. The paper explains that although modern philosophy is the interpreter of research and organisation of research findings in natural and social sciences, the significance of art practice based research cannot be ignored in the processes of some research. The paper states that art based practice research methodology is a positive shift from the use of scientific methods. It uses multiple methodologies to link between processes and standard academic research representation. The paper further explains that art based practice methodology when used in research creates knowledge that is new and shared among recipients as visual knowing. The paper discusses that the processes of art practice based research have generated new things, and products that their knowledge is not just novel to the artist researcher but the recipient. The methodology also lends credence to the development of reflective thinking capacity. The paper states that when art based practice research is used in conducting research it becomes an inquiry. It involves scholarly presentation that gives insights to emotional and intellectual understanding. The paper concludes that art based practice research finding provides information which helps the recipient in the understanding of the world in a new and different perspective through visual art knowledge.

One might say that where research in the contemporary world is associated with scientific investigations which lead to the discovering of facts for a better understanding of an issue and problem solving, art activities engaged in different ways are being recognised as processes of research because they give insights to problems solving in the society. The scientific method is in variance with the processes which the art uses to conduct research. The reason is because the scientific methods of conducting research emphasises in the literal sense that research should be predesigned and its

findings presented in a concise statistical format.

The art is subjective, it creates meanings rather than discover facts. It has become an innovation that is integrated into ways of conducting research which involves human experience. Eisner in Knowles and Cole (2008) states that “in this sense, the products of this research are closer in function to deep conversation and insightful dialogue than they are to error-free conclusions”. Since the art is subjective and openly gives out its work as a novel invention, reality and symbol to the sense of the viewer the issue of bias is

not ruled out in its processes. The plausibility and recognition of bias in art research has often made those in science disciplines to regard art based research as being incapable of creating new knowledge, a conception which has continued to hinder the numerous impacts which the art has on the conduct of research. Eisner in Knowles and Cole (2008) holds that Plato was of the opinion that the sensory side of human experience belonged to the arts and that the sense is a hindrance to the achievement of that exalted state in which forms could be known.

Whereas Plato's philosophy for construction of knowledge emphasised the removal of bias 'sense' in the conduct of research created the scientific methodology, but the scientific methodology which quantifies materials does not suit disciplines in humanities that create new knowledge by experience. Leavy (2009) states that traditional methods which are grounded in scientific method suit some, traditional qualitative research methods create a working space for others, but that there are others that these research conventions make in which what was once a passion starts to feel more like it is a job. Thus research has becomes a routine and boring process.

It necessitates that the conduct of research should have innovation in its methodology and processes for use by the other disciplines which the traditional scientific methodology does not suit. Thus, innovation in research methodology and education are being carried out in disciplines such as; humanities, social

sciences and behavioural sciences to generate knowledge that solve problems in the society rather than depend on the universal scientific methodology to create knowledge. The type of research problem that is being solved determines the methodology to be used. Methodologies used in research have diversified which enables art based practice to become innovative process of engaging research. Eisner in Knowles and Cole (2008) states that we can embark on those studies of human experience and behaviour that intuitively are difficult to deny. Furthermore Eisner maintained that art in research has limits of evocation, even when it has aspects of it that are descriptive in character. It entails that Art-based practice research is an innovation in research methodology which addresses the different experiences and changes in humanity.

Debates about the impact of foundational knowledge by science on ways to carry research without bias are viewed as having short comings. Sullivan (2010) states that when science became the manifesto of the Church of reason. It introduced a period that logical reasoning became institutionalised as the way to gain knowledge. But the logic of the mind which fits the logic of the physical world has proved inadequate. Thus it is important to create innovations which diversify research processes in order to give opportunities to other disciplines which conduct research that are based on human experiences, and social changes in the society. Wilson in Sullivan (2010) affirms that educators in the creative

practices are inspired by the vision that they are agents of dynamic change, critical renewal and bearers of cultural values which are beyond the exchange system of the market place or some human forces.

The issue here is the question of art becoming an innovation in research methodology in order to create new knowledge. In Nigeria the prevailing notion around Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Educations is that art has no methodology in conducting research. It is because of this notion that their students are compelled to conduct art research using scientific and educational methodologies. But the idea is that the Fine Arts Departments in those institutions have failed to present to the quality assurance and curriculum planners of the different institutions that art plays important role in different researches and it is a methodology on its own. To understand the creation of novel knowledge clearer in this way entails that one should understand that the knowledge which art creates is unique and cannot be reproduced. Rather it answers research questions through reflection, evaluation, and analysis with the entire processes being revisited in order to give new insight. Sullivan (2010) supports that “while the meaning may be an elusive construct, the processes of coming to know something involves accessing and using new knowledge”. Thus the art has the attributes that create new knowledge through processes of exploration of materials and idea which end in research findings that are subjective.

Research therefore, entails the use of insights acquired from previous experiences, ideas and activities to create new knowledge in a new way that is novel. The implication is that Art plays important innovative role in research as a methodology. In conducting research, it applies ideas, experiences, materials and activities to create visual images which serve as data for solving the research problem. The visual images which are imagined in the processes of research as data provide visual information that are presented in theory and practice. Gustavsen in Reason and Bradbury (2006) supports that in the 1960s Norway recognised the relation which exists between idea and field experiments with new forms and structures that emerged because of the influence of Lewinian assumption. Visual images such as; drawing, cartoons, film, video photographs, cyber graphics, signs, symbols, diagrams and three dimensional models became processes which involved theory and practice in the conduct of research in most disciplines. This is because the processes seem to involve aspects of research that Gutavesen regards as field experiment. Visual images therefore are engaged as innovation in the conduct of research in some disciplines such as: anthropology, psychology, biology and ethnographic research.

The paper therefore examines art based practice research methodology as a new innovation in research. Method of research analysis such as narrative and intuitive inquiry are discoursed.

Art Based Practice Research Methodology

Methodology is “a set of methods, and principles used to perform a particular activity” (Hornby, Turnbull, Lea, Parkinson, Phillips, Frances, and Ashby, 2010). Thus, methodology investigates and compares, different research approaches and the various methods which are used to generate knowledge. It enables a researcher to structure strategies on how to proceed and gather existing information about the research.

Kaplan in Gray and Malins (2004) state that

The aim of methodology is to help us understand, in the broadest possible terms, not the products of inquiry, but the process itself: to describe and analyze methods, throwing lights on their limitations and resources, clarifying their presuppositions and consequences, relating their potentials to the twilight zone at the frontiers of knowledge. It is to venture generations from the success of particular techniques, suggesting new applications...suggesting new formulations.

The above explanation emphasises that the stages or processes, which a researcher employs in carrying out research should be clearly defined. Art practice based research methodology is one of the innovative processes which is used in conducting studio research.

In studio research; Arts-based research, Art-practice as research, Practice-led research, Research-led

practice are some of the terms that have been used to describe studio methodology. Smith and Dean (2010) explain that “creative work within, the University environment is now, often referred to as practice-led research, practice-based research, creative research or practice as research”. In furtherance, they maintained that the terminologies are means to characterize the way, in which practice can result into research insights, such as those that arise out of making a creative work, documentation and theorisation of art work. This suggests that, the method is being used as innovation to research in some Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. Sullivan (2010) speaks about this issue of arts - based practice research in a chronological order of their history. He states that:

In the early year of the Enlightenment, the idea of the artist-as-analyst, or artist-technologist, flourished. By the middle of the 20th century, the artist- as- teacher was prominent and vision and voice of the creative iconoclast held sway. Following the social upheavals of the 1960s, a generation of artists infused art schools with a new sense of openness and creative freedom. During the 1970s and 1980s, places like Goldsmith College in London and Cal Arts in Los Angeles became hothouses of popular culture. Inspired by artists who saw teaching in art school as social process; students were encouraged to freely explore the excitement of being artist.

This suggests that art based practice research methodology is a research innovation that provides different possibilities, approaches and information, about creative process of conducting research. McNiff in Knowles and Cole (2008) defines arts based practice research as the systematic use of the artistic process, art making, and artistic expressions in all of the different forms of art studies as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and people. It entails that art practice based research offers opportunities which have become a methodology for conducting research. Leavy (2009) holds that, interdisciplinary arts-based practice has developed to service all phases of research endeavour; data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation. She further states that arts based practice research, allows the researcher to question and restructure the research questions in new ways and to reach new non-academic audiences. It creates opportunities for particular projects that aim to explore, describe or discover through a process.

Thus, since art is emotive, it has a characteristic that is pluralistic in approach and uses a multi-method technique that is tailored to the individual project (Gray and Malins, 2004). On this premise, art based practice research when used as methodology, finds solutions to the research problem by recording the progress made in the organisation or

management of the information gathered. The methodology is used to create new knowledge in visual form. Thus the processes of art based practice research methodology is inter-subjective, content and the context bound. The reason is because the methodology is flexible, creative and non-verbal form. Smith and Dean (2010) as well as Sullivan (2010) opine that critical imaginative and creative investigations which take place in the studios, galleries, on the internet, in higher institution and the community space are systematic inquiry which creates knowledge which is taken as being knowledge given. A researcher using art based practice research methodology as an innovative process in conducting research tries to understand research problems through multiple ways that are based on different research insights.

Art based practice research methodology is phenomenological and empirical. It creates knowledge consciously and sub-consciously from human experience, practice and direct observation of knowledge. The use of art based practice research which involves multiple methodologies within the studio environment enables a researcher to proffer solution to the research problem through theory and practice. In Nigeria Irokanulo Emmanuel Ikemefula, (2014), Sani Mazu (2014), Blaise Gundu Gbaden (2014), John Oyedemi (2014), Amos Osakor Akprar (2015), Wale Olusegun Ajayi (2015), Eze Ngene (2015) and Lamidi Lasis (2015) adopted art based

practice research as an approach, in their epistemological and empirical studies. It provides a plan or strategy in which the researchers control the processes of their researches. Art based practice research has different perspectives that are different from the paradigmatic scientific methods and social sciences research methodologies.

A researcher who uses art based practice research as innovative processes in research methodology, brings creative and visual processes to research. Arts based practice research methodology therefore enables a researcher to present clearly in visual form the research processes, and findings in a systematic and concise way. Art based practice research methodology as an innovative process aids to differentiate in visual forms ideas and experiences. In research it has been used to distinguish in visual way between inner imagination from things in physical, and natural space.

Most researchers in the social science and behavioural science disciplines often adopt art based practice research methodology as a new innovative creative processes in engaging research that involves visual images and representation. Leavy (2009) states that the art methodology is adopted by researchers as a better way to address research questions. She maintained that other researchers engage art methodology in order to merge their scholar-self with their artist-self in a holistic way.

Art practice based methodology when used in a research is project-based

and constructive. It conveys meaning through creative experimentation or exploration of visual images. Thus art based practice methodology is innovative and brings into research activities; cognitive, affective and psychomotor abilities together in order to create new knowledge. It solves research problems and encourages the bringing of ideas from different contexts which gives result to the research problems as findings.

Approaches for collection of data analysis in Art based practice research

Assumption about what research is or the issue being investigated in research and discoveries are the concern of conventional research. Conventional research therefore is logical, autonomous and transparent. But current textbooks, articles, journals soft wares and internet downloads on innovative ways of conducting art practice based research emphasizes that processes, individual participation, and materials of research are to be presented in sequence. Thus, in art based research the methods of collecting data and its analysis are too numerous. The following approaches are among some of the ways used in the collection and analysis of data.

Narrative inquiry

Some artists / researchers commence their works by written description which describes in writing the personal experiences, event and situation which they want to investigate. Questionnaire is also engaged by others in order to derive information by

interviewing the participants. Ifeanyichuku Asoqwa engaged written description and questionnaire in his collaborative art research of the Omabe Nsukka masquerade in Anambra State. The point is that narrative approach to art based practice research involves the making of sketch which interprets ideas in visual forms. Sketch transforms narrative descriptions and ideas being explored into visual forms which makes the processes of research clearer. Leavy (2009) supports that based on the perspective of ethnography, oral history, and qualitative interview, narrative inquiry collaboratively reveals the participant's life experiences through the processes of storytelling and retelling of experience, which creates multi dimensional meanings that are presented in authentic and compelling data. She maintains that narratives are constructed out of data through a reflective, participatory and aesthetic process. Thus narrative inquiry to art based research portrays not only the emotion but creates knowledge. Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson and McSpadden (2011) explain that narrative inquiry are contextualised by the circumstances that influenced how they are obtained, and that consideration is given to the motives and the audience that the information is being presented.

Narrative inquiry in art practice based research presents findings in visual forms as story telling it creates meaning in structural form which is different from statistical data presentation. The visual images created during the process of research are open-ended, that is they can

be contextualised in many ways that are non- verbal form. In art narrative inquiry as a process involves the creation of visual images as text, metaphor, irony and homology. Narrative inquiry therefore analyzes data as visual form which it organizes as an expression by visualizing the ideas. Labov (2006) affirms that narrative inquiry to research is about something and that narrative occurs in daily life when a story is told about others and events. It entails that while science and philosophy inquiries make meanings about humanity, narrative inquiry as innovation to research presents individual's autobiography. Narrative inquiry therefore enables research to be subjective and conducted on self in connection to social context. The approach is purely exploration of works by imagination which the findings of such research is presented in a scholarly way. It gives insight in visual form to others about the problem under investigation. It links the research problems and findings to personal understanding and emotion of the artist/ researcher.

Intuitive Inquiry

Intuitive inquiry is often associated as involving the sense or experience which some philosophers regard as not capable of creating knowledge because it cannot be disciplined and its processes cannot be reproduced as universal knowledge. The reason is because the artist creates art works that gives insight to knowledge by rendering experience alive in representational form. Intuitive inquiry

involves formation/structure (cognition), practice (process) and emotion (affective). Intuitive inquiry has become a method of collecting data, analytical or interpretative tool for the representation of research problem in visual form. It does not translate visual data (imagination) into written text only, but rather closes the gap between imagination, written text, verbal, theory and practice into form /structure that create higher order probing insight. Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson and McSpadden (2011) explain that to explore a topic in intuitive inquiry begins like a spark which possess the imagination of the researcher in an unconscious way. They maintained that the researcher's concern for inquiry may be an ordinary experience that has symbolic meanings, transformative experience, and social interpersonal experience that are known only to the researcher.

Intuitive inquiry is a novel way to question the research problem. It creates visual models, art works which are transformative and aid collection of data, analysis and interpretation or presentation of research findings. Although intuitive inquiry starts from the researcher's imagination it is phenomenological and heuristic. Its process is understood in a concise way or manner that is unique from the scientific research methodology. Intuitive inquiry therefore is an innovation in research methodology which is adopted for selecting research topic, collection of data, data analysis and the presentation of research findings. Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson and

McSpadden (2011) opine that intuitive research have five iterative cycles and analytical activities which a researcher can explore in the processes of research. Thus as research inquiry it conceptualizes research through exploration which is subjective in order to give insight about human knowing.

Conclusion

In research community and the world scientific methodology has often been regarded as the only process of creating insight to new knowledge. It is because of this reason that researches are conducted in most disciplines using the traditional scientific methodology. The scientific methodology which deals with materials, quantity, assumption and removable of intervening variables (bias) do not suit disciplines that their concern is about human feelings and experiences. Art based practice research is an innovative subjective process which is used by professionals in practice, researchers and artists to conduct research. Although the methodology appears plausible, it investigates human feelings, experiences and activities which the traditional scientific method does not suit.

Art based practice research as innovative methodology is used by researchers to investigate different experiences and changes in the society which they proffer solutions to. In studio research the methodology which is project based enables the artist/researcher to understand in the most concise way the processes of inquiry. The methodology when used in research creates new

knowledge through exploration of ideas, art making and use of materials. It documents the research findings by theory and practice which ends in an exhibition. Exhibition is presented to the viewer in public places in order to give information that create materiality of thought. Art based practice research methodology therefore involves cognition which brings ideas from different contexts to create new knowledge.

Narrative inquiry is one of the ways for the collection of data and data analysis in art based practice methodology. Narrative inquiry engages research as descriptive or story telling in non-verbal way that is visual which gives insight to new knowledge. Intuitive inquiry also is used in art based practice research as an unconscious process to transform imaginative data into visual form which creates higher order probing knowledge. In conclusion art practice based research is an innovation in research processes which engages multiple methodologies that give insight to new knowledge.

Recommendations

- i. Research which involves innovation and creativity should engage Art based practice research methodology because it has multiple directions and is open ended in giving insights.
- ii. Students in the Departments of Creative Arts, Theatre Arts, Fine and Applied Arts should use Art based practice research methodology in their project report and the completion of thesis

writing to create novel and new knowledge that gives insight.

References

- Eisner, E. (2008). Art and Knowledge. In: Knowles, J. G., & Cole A. L. (Eds.). *Handbook of the Art in Qualitative Research* (3-12). London, United Kingdom: Sage.
- Gustave, B. (2006) Theory and Practice: The Mediating Discourse. In: Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. *Handbook of Action Research* (pp.15-17). London: Sage.
- Gray, C., & Malins. J. (2004). *Visualizing Research. A guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*. Surrey, England, Ashgate.
- Hornby, A. S., Turnbull, J., Lea, D., Parkinson, D., Phillips, P., Frances, B., & Ashby, M. (2010). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. 8th Edition. Oxford, London: Oxford University Press.
- Leavy, P. (2009). *Method meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*. New York, USA: Guildford Press.

- McNiff, S. (2008). Arts-Based Research the Domain. In: Knowles, J., & Cole, A. L. (Eds.). *A Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research* (pp. 29-40). California, USA: Sage.
- Smith, H., & Dean R. T. (2010). *Practice - Led Research, Research - Practice in the Creative Arts*. Edinburg, Great Britain: Edinburg University Press.
- Sullivan. G. S. (2010). *Art Practice as Research inquiry in Visual Arts*. 2nd Edition. California, USA: Sage.
- Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson R. and McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five Ways of doing Qualitative Analysis*. New York: Guilford Press.