

Workshop on Exploring the Transformative Potential of Arts-based Health Research: Theory, Method and Practice

Background and Context

Interdisciplinary collaboration among the arts, humanities and social/medical sciences is receiving sustained interest from many members of the academic community. This interest is characterized by enthusiasm for the creation of new knowledge and new forms of knowledge translation and exchange. Arts-based research has proliferated over the past decade in various fields including education, nursing and other health sciences fields, art therapy, sociology, and communications studies (Gray, 2003, 2004; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Mason, 2005; Mitchell, Jonas-Simpson, Ivanoffski, 2006; Pink, 2007). Many research products now contravene the conventional boundaries and forms of social scientific writing and include auto ethnographies, poetry, performance texts, layered accounts, and visual representations (Keen & Todres, 2006; Richardson, 1992; Bochner & Ellis, 2003; Boydell, Crawford, Gladstone et al, 1995; Denzin, 2001a; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Nisker, Martin, Bluhm, et al., 2006; Plummer, 2001). The arts informed educational community has contributed much to the field of arts-based and arts-informed research by demonstrating the power of alternative media in communicating research findings (Barone, 2000; Cole, 2002; Cole, Neilsen, Knowles, et al., 2003; Eakin & Endicott, 2006; Eisner, 1991, 1993, 1997; Perselli, 2005; Rossiter, Kontos, Colantonio et al., 2007). Similar arts-based work has recently flourished in the medical community, exploring a wide variety of health care issues (Keen & Todres, 2006, 2007); using media and art genres such as research-based theatre/ethnodrama (Belliveau, 2006, 2007; Conrad, 2006; Gray, 2000; Gray, 2003; Gray, Fitch, Phillips, et al., 2000; Gray & Sinding, 2002; Gray, Sinding, Ivanoffski, et al., 2000; Mienczakowski, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2003; Mitchell, Jonas-Simpson, Ivanoffski, 2006; Morgan, Rolfe, & Mienczakowski, 1993; Rolfe, Mienczakowski, & Morgan, 1995), three dimensional multi media presentations (Cole & McIntyre, 2004), dance (Bagley & Cancienne, 2001; Boydell, Jackson & Strauss, 2008), documentary film (Tilleczek, Cheu, Pong, et al., 2004), and poetic texts (Glesne, 1997; Richardson, 1992). Individuals both within and outside medicine have recognized that arts-based methods illuminate these human dimensions of medicine in ways that help lower disciplinary barriers and improve understanding of both health and the entire medical enterprise. These methods value human experience and interaction; and recognize personal, emotional, experiential, and embodied expressions of knowledge as an effective strategy for communicating research-based knowledge to a variety of audiences.

Recent research-based collaborations between artists and social/medical scientists have offered stimulating potential for crossing interdisciplinary boundaries, transcending the potential strictures of traditional modes of dissemination and developing innovative types of research (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Gary & Sinding, 2003; Kontos & Naglie, 2006; Mitchell, Jonas-Simpson, Ivanoffski, 2006). This work has opened the way to explore creative forms of research that reflect the richness and complexity of data and invite multiple levels of engagement that are cognitive, sensory, emotional and aesthetic (Law & Urry, 2004). Transcending the boundaries between the arts and sciences holds great potential for broadening horizons, not only with regards to new areas and types of research, but also regarding how we come to know, interpret and make sense of phenomena under investigation (Denzin, 2001b; McCall, 2000).

To date, however, although there have been numerous local, isolated examples of artists and health research scientists working together, there have not been any widespread attempts to bring these various individuals together, either provincially, nationally or globally; not just at a

performance-practice level, but at the level of critical inquiry. Efforts have been fragmented so that valuable lessons and best or promising practices are lost simply because there are no obvious structures for collaboration and no easy mechanism for dialogue across sites, within or across countries. The gap in collaboration has meant that local discoveries about arts-based research and knowledge translation are not developed into more generalized methodological and theoretical frameworks that can provide direction for other researchers and artists interested in this breakthrough work. To address this gap, PI Katherine Boydell has mobilized a group of scientists, artists and community members who have been working together via wiki (Web 2.0) to exchange ideas and co-create a Letter of Intent (LOI) submitted January 2009 to SSHRC to fund a major collaborative research initiative in arts-based health research. The proposed workshop will bring these cross disciplinary, high caliber scholars from the arts and sciences as well as relevant non-profit community organizations together face-to-face for the purpose of continuing their work together and developing a full research proposal. The participants will share their knowledge in three key areas: the role of arts-based health research in knowledge creation, the role of arts-based health research in knowledge dissemination and its impact in terms of transformative potential on researchers/artists/clinicians/patients/general public.

Objectives and scope of the event: Workshop – October 26, 2009

The unique team of world class experts will work with students, community and non-academic partners to operationalize the following 3 major research **objectives** with 2 cross-cutting theoretical and practical theme areas proposed in the LOI:

1. To examine the role of the arts in knowledge development/creation/production in health care
2. To explore the role of arts-based initiatives in knowledge translation and exchange
3. To examine the impact (i.e. transformative potential) of arts-based research approaches on researchers/artists/audience members/clinicians

Cross-Cutting Themes:

1. Development of a theoretical understanding of arts-based approaches in health research
2. Exploring and synthesizing the unique conceptual, methodological and artistic challenges and opportunities in arts-based research

The workshop goal is to create a collaborative research agenda for future directions within the field of arts-based health research, which successfully addresses the requirements of all the relevant stakeholders at the table. The proposed workshop will involve 48 scientists and artists, as well as student trainees and community partners of the major collaborative initiative group. The workshop will focus on operationalizing the three objectives identified by the group in the Letter of Intent – this will involve identifying the activities that will be undertaken to achieve the objectives. Participants will explore the following questions: What kinds of activities qualify as arts-based research? How does the introduction of art into research influence and change how research is done? What does art and design contribute to the process that doesn't already exist within health research? How can arts-based research foster critical awareness, facilitate understanding, nurture empathy and thereby provide emancipatory opportunities and insights? How do art and design contribute to the transformative experience of illness, health and, ultimately, health care? What kinds of transformation are rendered possible by arts-based initiatives for participating audiences? This will allow us to provide an empirical/descriptive basis that would assist individuals in attaining a clear and concrete grasp of the kinds of activities we are talking about when we talk about arts-based research, why we're talking about these, and then help ease people into the grey areas at the margin that defy easy categorization.

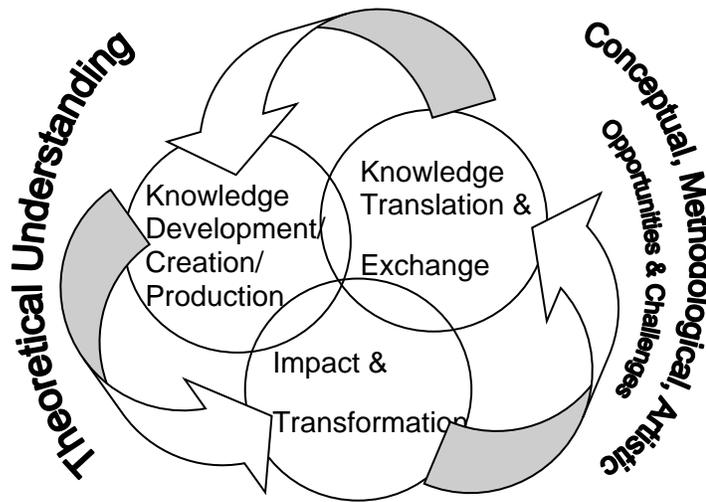


Fig. 1 - The Arts-Based Health Research Collaborative Framework: Three main objectives to be explored within two cross-cutting theoretical and practical themes.

Knowledge Exchange and Dissemination

Inclusion of relevant stakeholders: The collaboration of scholars represents Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and United Arab Emirates. Building on several extant collaborations, these scholars from the humanities, arts, social and health sciences represent such diverse fields as anthropology, education, psychology, medicine, sociology, rehabilitation science, ethics, global health, urban health, nursing, physical therapy, social work, public health, film, drama, dance, media arts and design, to name a few. Team members have past experience in successful arts-based research in health care. This workshop will provide an opportunity to compare how we have measured and evaluated those successes from our varied disciplinary backgrounds and whether there are differences in objectives and considerations of what constitutes success across arts-based research. Canadians represent Eastern Canada (UPEI), Central Canada (Ontario College of Art and Design, McGill, Laval, University of Toronto, Laurentian University, York University) and Western Canada (University of Alberta, University of Calgary, Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia). International participants represent the United States, United Kingdom, and United Arab Emirates. Many of the collaborators are affiliated or based in hospitals/health services organizations (e.g. Hospital for Sick Children, St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, Bloorview Kids Rehab, and Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario). The applicant team along with students has recently collaborated collectively in the co-creation of a Letter of Intent for a SSHRC Major Collaborative Research Initiative grant via a wiki created by the group.

Clearly defined dissemination plans for activity outcomes: As arts-based researchers incorporate visual, performative, poetic, musical, and narrative forms of inquiry in their innovative research projects, they expand the limits of social science research practices, and investigate how these arts-based forms of inquiry can be utilized, represented, and published for academic, professional, patient and public audiences. The team will use audio and video-taped records of the workshop to capture the development of theoretical and methodological explorations in real time (and to document said developments), but also development of practical applications. This will be a living, emergent record of the collaborative. Specifically, it is the intent of the collaborative team to document reflexively the process of the collaborative initiative

using creative expression. Film/video and other techniques will be used to document the unfolding of the project. Several team members use film, audio and photography to document their work throughout the process already, using it as an evaluative tool. As such, the film/audio/material will act as an archive for tracing how our work as a group develops. It will also help us depict some of our thinking about this, i.e. taping our discussions, so that we can trace how we work some of this out. A web 2.0 wiki has already been developed to enhance communication among participants, and will be used to disseminate the outcomes of the workshop, and co-create a research proposal based on discussions and operationalization of the objectives that will occur during the workshop.

Feasibility

Perceived ability of applicants to meet funding opportunity objectives: The applicant team will act as the organizing committee for the workshop and is comprised of a sub group of the larger collaborative initiative. This team represents scientists and artists from across Canada (Boydell, Parsons, Eakin, Leeming - Toronto, Tiliczek – PEI, Edwards – Quebec, Belliveau – British Columbia). The PI recently successfully organized an international symposium on early psychosis and has the requisite skills to plan and execute a similar workshop.

Appropriate budget and justification for amount requested: The main costs of for the conference include: travel expenses, accommodation and the venue. Hart House at the University of Toronto was selected as an affordable venue that can accommodate our estimated 75 participants. Also budgeted for are conference materials and technology for the day in order to adequately disseminate the information. The entire workshop will be filmed by a student of one of our documentary filmmaker participants.

Impact

The proposed workshop has the potential to catalyze an exciting new initiative – arts-based health research – and develop new inter-disciplinary collaborations between the humanities and the sciences. The outcome of the proposed initiative will be the creation of a leading edge international, interdisciplinary research collaboration on arts-based health research that will advance knowledge in the humanities and social sciences and encourage broad discussion and debate on significant ways of knowing, the production process of arts-based research, the use of arts-based research to share knowledge with a wide range of audiences, and the impact of arts-based approaches on health and well being. The collaboration will have a critical effect on how research is conducted and how its results are implemented and disseminated, both within and beyond academia. In addition to public discourse and scholarly publication, our work highlights collaboration with artists, designers, educators, and health care researchers to ensure the broadest possible influence on Canadian society. The proposed collaboration will impact scholarship in several diverse disciplines and will affect individuals and communities nationally and internationally. The initiative will lead to a comprehensive theory and understanding of the role of the arts in health research and the role of research in the arts. The applicant team is enthusiastic about this collaboration and looks forward to the potential of meeting face-to-face to develop a full proposal.

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