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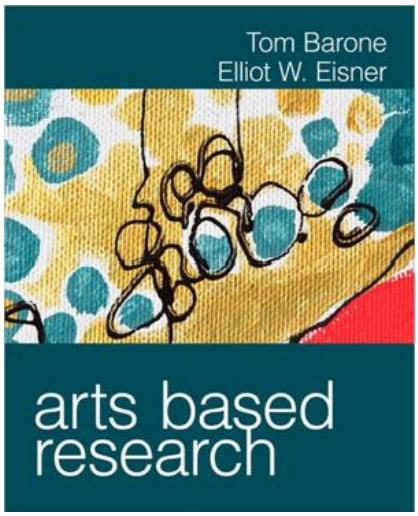
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Barone, Tom & Eisner, Elliot W. (2012) *Arts Based Research*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

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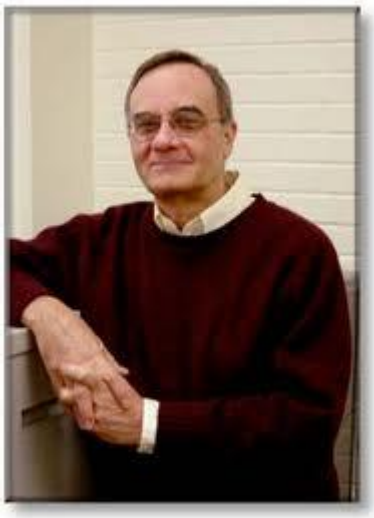
Reviewed by Melisa (Misha) Cahnmann-Taylor
University of Georgia



This eloquent book expands readers' understandings of *arts-based research*, its origins, intentions, and possibilities. The preface recounts the time when the term *arts based research* was born, an occasion in 1993 when Elliot Eisner secured AERA support and funding for a two and a half day institute at Stanford with an intimate group of 25 other artistically-minded scholars. Barone, a former doctoral student of Eisner's who had employed creative nonfiction techniques in his 1970s dissertation work, was invited to be an instructor and then co-director of these institutes which continued to take place eight times between 1993-2005. Jointly (e.g. Barone & Eisner, 1997); and individually, Barone (e.g. 2008, 2001;

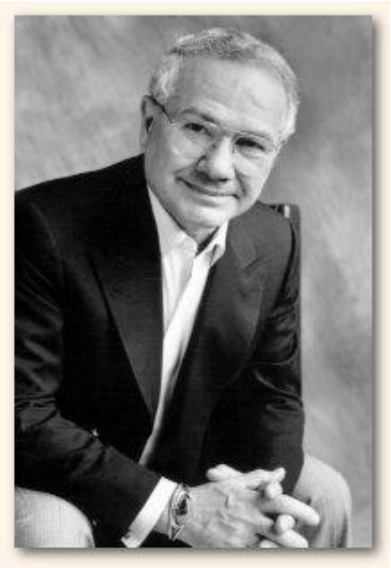
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2000) and Eisner (e.g. 2008; 2005; 1998; 1997); have written numerous articles, essays, and books on arts based research; this new volume builds upon the many important contributions these scholars have made in defining and expanding what constitutes as "research" (qualitative), by raising numerous and important new questions for consideration.



Tom Barone

Indeed, questions become a theme for this volume in which each chapter title is formed in the shape of a question from Chapter 1 *What is and What is Not Arts Based Research?* and Chapter 2 *Why Do Arts Based Research?* to the final Chapters, Chapter 9 *Is there a Place for Theory in Arts Based Research?* and Chapter 10 *What are Some Fundamental Ideas from Arts Based Research?* Any reader wishing to find propositional statements and clear answers will undoubtedly be frustrated by this conceit. The answers to most questions result in further questioning, where even definitions offered remain filled with ambiguity and openness to interpretation. The authors describe questions as the ultimate goal of arts based research, "inviting members of an audience into experiencing aspects of a world that may have been otherwise outside their range of sight and to thereby cause them to question usual, commonplace, orthodox perspectives on social phenomena" (p. 56). If the goal is to cause readers to question commonplace perspectives, then this reader asks: what enables an arts based researcher to see what their audience—often a well educated academic community—has been unable to see before? What training is required, and how much, in qualitative research? What training, and how much, is required in the given art form? The authors provide three full-length examples of arts-based research to respond via illustrations.



Elliot W. Eisner

Case (2010), the second of the three exemplar ABER scholars, states at the end of Chapter five in this book that she "had been trained in creative writing and literary criticism" prior to her two year experience in Teach for America (TFA) in Arkansas and this training influenced the later construction of an "experimental autoethnography" (p. 117) as part of her doctoral degree in Critical and Sociocultural Studies in Education. Her hybrid training led to the creation of what she called a

"nonfiction short story" relating a new, white teacher's experiences in a racially divided community, the injustices and physical abuse that took place in and outside the school, and the narrator's own complicity in discriminatory practices—silent to the racist comments of her White landlord and the abusive actions of a violent, African American principal who showed signs of reverse discrimination.

> Mr. Armstrong had it out for me. But not just me; he observed each of the seven white TFA teachers with the same frequency, in the same manner. We were constantly on our guard….We called him a racist and we believed it (p. 87).

The story ends with what Case refers to as "the uncertain reliability of its narrator," (p. 117) one who both condemns racism but who also thanks her racist landlords for the rental of a temporary home and moves swiftly and eagerly to a more privileged and presumably (unstated) more White life in Oregon.

> Everyone was talking about his or her plans. We were moving to Oregon. Why? Because it seemed like the opposite of Arkansas in terms of its liberal mindedness….all over the region—probably all over the country—corps members were engaged in this act, this final, hollow display of martyrdom. Serving these kids had been internalized as a moral imperative, so we had to look convincingly torn about leaving. (pp. 94-5).

Despite having fallen short of her students' academic goals and having reproduced injustices through a "Delta Idol" fundraiser event and complicity in racism, the main character (implicitly Case herself) receives her TFA supervisor's approval. Case's short story resists exposition and leaves the nuances of the main character implicit.

In contrast, Sullivan's (2000) essay reprinted as the first of the three exemplars at the end of Chapter two, showcases nine of her poems, followed by a prose essay. The poems center upon Sullivan's childhood with a marine biologist mother and illustrate her experience as a poet. Here I excerpt the third stanza from the four stanza title poem, "Notes from a Marine Biologist's Daughter:"

She leads me where *renilla* bloom
purple and white colonial lives,
where brittle stars, like moss,
cling to stone. She knows
where the sea horse wraps its tail
and the unseen lives of plankton.

Though not mentioned, as Case does, in the book or exemplar, I am aware that Sullivan was a student of poetry in the prestigious Warren Wilson low-residency MFA program after having become a teacher educator (personal correspondence). Following the poems, Sullivan's prose argues for poetry as metaphor and pedagogy rather than as empirical method, illuminating new meaning for the word "attention" in classrooms, in teacher education, and in educational research. The loose connections between a childhood in "the salty mud of estuaries" and Sullivan's later career in English education and teacher education were articulated in the second, prose half of the essay.

Barone's creative nonfiction account of "Billy Charles Barnett," (pseudonym) an "at risk," Appalachian, young teenager, is the third and final exemplar in the book, aptly appearing at the end of Chapter 7 *How Might Arts-Based Research Be Both Political and Ethical?* The "story/essay" (p. 125) concludes with a clear message to the reader: teachers, schools and districts need to spend more time (and more societal resources) to better understand students like Billy, both the risks in their lives as well as their vast and untapped resources in order to make their retention and graduation meaningful. Of each of the three examples in the book that address social issues, Barone's own example may be the one that both raises important questions and attempts to answer them, directly asking readers to rethink "gimmicks to lure our children back to school" versus dropping out which may actually be a valid choice in an "impoverished" educational environment (p. 144). Barone and Eisner argue this is representative of "epistemological humility" (p. 128, see also Barone, 2008), offering further questions rather than answers, ambiguity rather than certainty.

Case's, Sullivan's, and Barone's contributions to artful educational scholarship all experiment with aspects of creative writing (poetry, short story, creative nonfiction). They also walk a similar line between research which is focused on the researcher's own personal experience and memory and the social origins and implications of the work for others—teachers, teacher educators, multiculturalists, counselors, other educational researchers, among others. Unlike the references to visual work alluded to in the book, the three exemplars all include aspects of prose, reproducible essays/stories in their entirety (unlike a more lengthier novel, play, or museum installation for example). Though I would have loved to have been able to "see" more of the examples referred to in the text (e.g. a link to a youtube performance of Saldaña, Finley and Finley's (2002) "Street Rat"), I was pleased with the authors decision to keep the book more concise and affordable, providing in-text links and references to additional, exemplary arts-based research resources.

Chapter four, *Who Can Do Arts Based Research*? hedges in the assertion that "an arts based researcher must become a skilled artist," (p. 61) but insists that the researcher exhibit *artistry* and likens this artistic skill to attorneys who artfully persuade a judge or jury of innocence or guilt. While the book includes the three examples previously discussed by Case, Sullivan, and Barone who would label themselves in this ABER category, there are many more references to exemplars of arts based research from those who are clearly artists in their own right and likely do not self-reference as researchers—famous fiction writers such as Nadine Gordimer, filmmakers such as Steven Spielberg, playwrights and performers such as Arthur Miller and Anna Deveare Smith, and photographers such as Robert Doisneau. Implicit by these examples, is an understanding that arts-based research of the highest quality, demands the highest attention to the art form itself and would thus implicitly require focus on the specific craft and technique of each art form in relation to research processes and goals. This may be too much to ask of a book covering all of the arts; however, given the focus on only three examples (two prose; one poetry), perhaps some further discussion of the prose and/or poetry strategies might have been useful to qualitative research instructors and students who may use this text.

Unattended to, for example, is Sullivan's use of sensory detail, lexical choice, line break, rhythm, and stanzaic structure in her poetry or how the poems' metaphors are revisited in the prose argument that follows in her blurred genre essay. Eisner's (1998) concept of "connoisseurship" to analyze the particular strengths in Sullivan's poems might be applied both to her poetic craft and research process/outcome, teaching readers about poetic composition. In Chapter seven the authors briefly discuss the empirical ethics and considerations of referring to the researcher's own remembered childhood as "data" for Sullivan's poems and their relevance to education research but I believe this is insufficiently covered for an audience of aspiring arts-based researchers developing arguments for their own arts based research methodologies. I believe this book is best accompanied by texts that might then cover the nuances of composing artful research in specific forms (e.g. Saldaña, 2011; Galman, 2009) and the various ways, for example, a photographic (insert poetic, fictive, dramatist, etc.) researcher, might use her skills in figurative memory and metaphoric representation as well as perhaps as a strategy for collecting data (e.g. attending to teacher and student images), data analysis, and composition decisions in representation.

The conclusion to Chapter four suggests the need to offer more artistic training for social researchers but there is no discussion about the qualities of that training or who would provide it and how anyone would qualify to prepare a researcher in any or all kinds of artistic practice. The authors may give false hopes to young researchers as they showcase what they mean by artistic research with popular, high production value films of great range—The Godfather, Pan's Labyrinth, Raging Bull, The Hurt Locker and that "the most important question one can pose to the work [these films] is: Does it raise questions about important social issues past and/or present?" (xiii). By holding these films up as models of arts-based research without information about the fims' budgets or network of creators (e.g. set designers, film editors, cinematographers, producers, directors, screenwriters etc.) may give false hopes to aspiring arts-based researchers working in doctoral degree programs of study.

However, the value of these examples as connected to arts-based research pursuits is also clear. The authors encourage readers to appreciate the artistic potential of their work as well as recognize a plurality of "methods" as forms of research and method that are equally, if not more valuable, in their power to document human experience. Barone and Eisner make an excellent case that the arts already exist in great scholarship and that what is missing is their articulation. Eisner and Barone are excellent "attorneys," using the full power and aesthetic of their scholarly prose to persuade students of qualitative research (and their teachers) that the arts matter and need to be taken seriously as possible "tools" in the researcher's "toolkit."

This text is an excellent addition to the small number of other texts published in the last decade that aim to explore arts-based research and its influence upon what counts in social science scholarship (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Knowles & Cole, 2007) as well as the more numerous texts that address specific forms of artful social science inquiry (e.g. Kusserow, 2013; Gottlieb & Graham, 2012; Gergen & Gergen, 2012; Nayaran, 2012; Saldaña, 2011; Theron, Mitchell, & Smith, 2011; Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010; Isbell, 2009; Norris, 2009; Prendergast, Leggo, & Sameshima, 2009; Sullivan, 2009; Charon, 2008; Clandinin, 2006; Irwin, Cosson, & Pinar, 2004; Denzin, 2003). I would recommend Barone and Eisner's (2012) text in any course on qualitative research in social science disciplines to introduce students to consider the authors' many good questions regarding the place of the arts in research contexts: What is it? Why do it? Is it Research? Who can do it? Who can appreciate it? How can we assess it? --these and many more questions, addressed (though unanswered) by Barone and Eisner's skillful prose, will facilitate rich discussions in any social science research classroom.

At the conclusion of this thoughtful text, I am reminded of William Carlos Williams's oft-quoted lines: "*It is difficult/to get the news from poems/yet men die every day/for lack/of what is found/there"*(cited in O'Connor, 2012). Barone and Eisner echo this lyrical sentiment: policy makers, parents, teachers, researchers, those of us with a stake in understanding how the social world works--

none of us will find concrete answers about the social world through arts based research. But we may get what we need: concrete encouragement to expand our ways of knowing and an acceptance of uncertainty.

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About the Reviewer



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