



Critical  
Approaches  
to Arts-based  
Research

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The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

# Critical Approaches to Arts-Based Research

## Guest Editors

Anne Harris

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## THEME

Arts based research (ABR), its products, processes and critical theorising have come a long way in recent times. Nuanced distinctions indicate the development of the field, as arts-informed research, arts-based research, practice-led research, applied research, and creative participatory action research all claim different relationships with the art and criticality present in such innovative scholarship. Finally, it seems, we are moving away from a defensive stance regarding arts based research and its 'validity', and toward a celebration of this proliferation of diverse ways of knowing, theorising and doing research. This 'coming of age' is evident in this special issue, which urges readers to move beyond binarised notions of scientific 'versus' arts based research that still at times dominates academic research environments and conversations, and outmoded practice/theory divides. For we co-editors and for the authors here, theorising is indeed a creative practice, and goes hand-in-hand with the epistemological and ontological potential of arts-making methods. This issue celebrates the opening of new doors in theorising innovative arts based research from a range of global contexts, theoretical and epistemological frameworks, and inter/disciplines. We avoid any attempt to codify or limit the parameters of what contemporary arts based research is or can be. Indeed, we seek the opposite: to highlight its ever-expanding possibilities.

The essays here aim to encourage critical analysis and dialogue about the objects and subjects of arts based research for contemporary times, poststructuralist, posthuman and other critical approaches to arts based research, and the interdisciplinary application of performative and practice-led research in transferable methodological models. We are pleased to be able to include digital assets with many of the articles in this special issue. Indeed, the layered and multimodal complexity of arts based 'outputs' or artefacts is one of its rich distinguishing features, and it requires commitment from editors and publishers to not always demand a 'reduction' back into text-based forms, a diminishment of many forms of ABR. For this we thank the UNESCO editorial and production team, and hope you enjoy this contribution to the critical development of the arts based research field.

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# Towards An Aesthetic Intersubjective Paradigm for Arts based Research: An Art Therapy Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Questions have been raised in the literature as to whether arts based research is solely a method or does it constitute a worldview with its own philosophical assumptions. We argue it is both, as we articulate the beginnings of an *aesthetic intersubjective paradigm*, from our unique perspective as art therapy professionals. Based upon an accepted definition of research paradigms (Guba & Lincoln 1998), we propose ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological assumptions contributing to a worldview for arts based research (ABR) which we call the *aesthetic intersubjective paradigm*. The philosophical assumptions of this *aesthetic intersubjective paradigm*, informed by both arts based research and art therapy, allow for access to multiple dimensions of human experience and understandings typically unavailable by usual research approaches. Providing a systematic explanation for a philosophically informed rationale

for using arts based research methods makes it comparable with other theoretical research approaches and comprehensible by traditional researchers. To illustrate the investigative methods that exemplify the *aesthetic intersubjective paradigm* we present research vignettes and invite continued dialogue.

**KEYWORDS** arts based research, art therapy, philosophical paradigm, aesthetics, intersubjective

## **TOWARDS AN AESTHETIC INTERSUBJECTIVE PARADIGM FOR ARTS BASED RESEARCH: AN ART THERAPY PERSPECTIVE**

Arts based research (ABR) is a broad and emergent construct that represents multiple perspectives and methods within and between numerous disciplinary domains. In this article, we explore constructing a paradigm, also known as a mental model or worldview, to systematically explore philosophical assumptions (Guba & Lincoln 1998; Greene 2007) for arts based research. A systematic and critical examination of philosophical assumptions for arts based research will provide an organising construct while preserving opportunities for creativity and diversity. Our aim for this article is to articulate a vision of an emergent *aesthetic intersubjective paradigm* for ABR, from our particular perspective as both art therapists and arts based researchers. The *aesthetic intersubjective paradigm* refers to the intersubjective realities created and co-constructed through aesthetic—sensory and imaginal—knowledge, the investigation of which results in understanding multiple dimensions of human experience. These dimensions are typically unavailable by usual research approaches. We would like to propose and share this worldview with other researchers as we collectively continue to form and articulate the philosophical and methodological dimensions of arts based research.

We approach this process from our perspective as art therapists, yet recognise that although our profession has shaped our views and beliefs, each of the authors holds a unique point of view and we do not speak for all art therapists. We are also basing our construction of a paradigm for arts based research on the premise that the philosophical assumptions of arts based research and art therapy share similar contextual perspectives on the nature of truth, reality and knowledge. Our central premise is that the philosophical assumptions at the heart of these related disciplines, embrace an intersubjective pluralistic ontology (Johnson 2012), from which an aesthetic knowledge emerges. These arts based realities and forms of knowledge are qualitatively elusive, dynamic and ineffable, the description of which has challenged many philosophers, practitioners and researchers (Bagley & Cancienne 2002; Barone & Eisner 2012; Gerber 2014; Kapitan 2010; Leavy 2009; McNiff 1998; Rolling 2013; Sullivan 2010). In this article, we join these efforts to describe and define the dimensions of reality and knowledge that inform philosophical assumptions in arts based research, building on the work of others whom have addressed the overlap between art therapy and arts based research (Kapitan 2010; McNiff 1998, 2011, 2013) along with those who have pioneered the development of arts based research across all disciplines (Barone & Eisner 2012; Finley, 2008, 2011; Jagodzinski & Wallin 2013; Knowles & Cole 2008; Leavy 2009; Rolling 2013; Sullivan 2010 ).

## **SITUATING ARTS BASED RESEARCH**

In the last twenty years, aesthetic forms of knowledge have gained traction in academic domains where systemic forms of research have been developed using the arts as a way of knowing (Barone & Eisner 1997, 2012; Knowles & Cole 2008; McNiff 1998). Early proponents in the academy included arts educator Elliot Eisner (1975, 1981, 1988) and expressive arts therapist

Shaun McNiff (1998, 2011, 2013) both of whom described the fundamental approaches of this form of research, wherein various forms of art—poetry, fiction, dance, visual art, music, drama—are used not as the subject of research but as the vehicle for conducting research. More recent work has helped describe this practice and elucidate its use in the social sciences (Bagley & Cancienne 2002; Barone & Eisner 2012; Chilton & Leavy 2014; Knowles & Cole 2008; Leavy 2009). As these practices coalesce under terms such as arts based research (ABR), artistic inquiry, or a/r/tography (La Jevic & Springgay 2008; Springgay, Irwin, & Kind 2005) researchers interested in arts based ways of knowing, social justice, public scholarship, narrative inquiry, sensory ethnography and participatory action approaches have created concepts, constructs, and methods for conducting what we will term ABR with a variety of populations (Fraser and al Sayah 2011; Leavy 2011; Pink 2009).

## **SITUATING ART THERAPY**

Using the arts for society's betterment is a global practice. Worldwide, creative endeavors have helped societies to flourish by building culture, fostering wellbeing, and supporting resilience (Florida 2002; Kenny et al. 2004; Metzl 2009; Moneta 2004; Seligman 2011). Furthermore, the arts have traditionally been used as healing practices to aid individuals and communities contributing to the development of the creative arts therapies professions (Graham-Pole & Lander 2009; Malchiodi 2005; Rogers 1993). Art therapy, in particular, uses the practice of the visual arts—painting, drawing, collage, photography, ceramics, sculpture—as a form of self-exploration and expression within an intersubjective relationship as a form of psychotherapy. The emerging evidence base shows benefits when, with the guidance of a trained art therapy professional, individuals use the process of artistic creation to further psychological growth and healing (Maujean et al. 2014; Slayton et al. 2010). Art therapists are both

artists and mental health professionals who facilitate clients' self-knowledge and psychological healing through supporting the creation of artwork and subsequent meaning-making processes about the art. "The primary method of art therapists is to activate the process of creation followed by reflective critique" (Kaptian 2010, p. 31) within an intersubjective context, that is, in the presence of an attentive other (Robbins 1994).

Art therapy professionals help individuals discover through their own artistic endeavors new understandings about themselves (Rubin 1999). Art creation enables new learning about self and others by providing avenues for symbolic speech, and cultivating routes to unspoken inner thoughts, ideas, impulses, and memories (Hogan & Pink 2010; Kramer 1971; Naumburg 1966). Through art, we have a way to share our untold stories, to speak without words to share that which exists beyond the tangible—giving expression to our silent soul (Gerber 2014).

Because art can be such a powerful engine for knowledge-creation, art therapists use art-making practices as a method of self-discovery, just as arts based researchers use art making as a method of inquiry. While these activities have different contexts, both practices depend upon the power of the arts as their agent of activation and inquiry. In the following sections, we sketch for the reader the philosophical assumptions—ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological—illustrating the pluralistic ways of being and knowing that contribute to the theoretical foundations of both art therapy and arts based research practices.

## **ONTOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS**

The following section relates to how we answer the question, what is truth and reality through the lenses of art therapy and arts based research? The ontology of art therapy reflects

its inherently transdisciplinary origins which has roots in indigenous knowledge, the humanities, fine arts and the arts in medicine, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and psychology, and such fields as semiotics and anthropology (Dissanayake 1995; Gerber 2006, 2014; Graham-Pole & Lander 2009; McNiff 1998; Naumburg 1966). Due to these trans- and interdisciplinary origins, we might say that in art therapy, truth is represented through multiple realities, a philosophical assumption termed *ontological pluralism* (Johnson & Gray 2010). In this section, we describe and elaborate on ontological pluralism, which for art therapy, and perhaps for arts based research, includes multiple inter- and intra-psychic and intersubjective realities (Gerber 2014; Johnson & Gray, 2010; Johnson 2008, 2012). These realities exist within the dyadic therapeutic relationship of the individuals participating in the art therapy process as well as within the reflexive relationship of the individual co-researchers participating in arts based research. The intersubjective realities are those that both exist on a meta-social contextual level, such as the larger group or society, as well as on an individual interpersonal level (Gerber et al. 2012). On both of these interactive levels, the intersubjectivity represents the co-constructed realities of unconscious relational narratives (Brown 2011).

By nature, these forms of reality are paradoxical: the logical and illogical, real and surreal, time and timelessness, linearity and spatiality co-exist and dialectically intermingle (Gerber 2014). In art therapy, we might say that these multiple subjective, objective and intersubjective realities are dynamic and dialectic—as there is constant interaction between these multiple paradoxical ways of being in the world (Gerber 2014). Johnson (2008, 2012) called this phenomenon dialectical pluralism, which is positioned within the ontological pluralistic view. Situated within this view, people co-create or construct meaning—what they consider to be significant, real or true—through dialectical and dynamic processes which involve these multiple interactive realities.

For both art therapy and arts based research, we are particularly interested in the dialectical pluralistic view (Johnson 2008, 2012) because it addresses emotional intersubjectivity, an experience of reality that occurs/is created between people. We see this as a relational matrix of consciousness located between individuals through which various interpretations of reality emerge after common experiences (Chilton 2014; Finlay 2002, 2005; Skaife 2001). Therefore, in this paradigm we acknowledge and are curious about pluralistic and dialectic intersubjective realities that influence perception of multiple dimensions of human experience. We focus on the inclusion of multiple co-created perspectives to gain insight into the internal emotional life of human beings and ultimately seek the ingredients for transformative meaning making. We contend that the investigation of the human condition using this view of reality, or multiple intersubjective realities, is particularly relevant to and compatible with the forms of knowledge inherent in and generated through arts based practices.

## **EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS**

Cognisant of the complex realities of emotional experience and knowledge, we see the intersubjective dialectical view of reality contributing to the emergence of aesthetics as a form of dynamic knowledge necessary for understanding human growth and development (Jaggar 1989; Scherer 2005; Turner 2000). Aesthetics is a particular way of knowing in the larger context of philosophy (Cooper 1997; Dewey 1934; Langer 1953; Harris-Williams 2010) and in the more specific context of art therapy practice and arts based research (Barone & Eisner 2012; Gerber, 2014). The more general meaning of the term aesthetics usually refers to art and beauty, however, the word also points to a range of human experiences (Dewey 1934; Langer 1953). The word aesthetics has its origins in the Greek word, *aesthesis*, meaning perception (Cooper 1997) and “sense-

based awareness” (Harris-Williams 2010, p. xiii). Therefore, for our purposes, we expand the definition of the term aesthetics beyond formal or expressive artistic qualities to focus on the precursors of perception and sense-based awareness as central to constructing knowledge in the human experience. Core to the epistemology of this paradigm is the belief that *aesthetics is a form of sensory, imaginal and emotional knowledge emergent within and from multiple dynamic intersubjective realities.*

The relevance of aesthetic knowledge as situated within intersubjective realities lies in its origins. The origins of aesthetic knowledge can be traced back to our early mother-child relationships (Dissanayake 1995, 2000; Hagman 2011). “We see its most archaic presentation in the curve of the mother’s shoulder during nursing, her heartbeat and breath, the melody of her voice, the balance of her eyes and smile—all embedded in the warmth, nourishment, and security in the mother-infant interaction” (Hagman 2011, p. 1). From these early experiences, we develop our sense of what is beautiful. The mother-child origins of aesthetics relate to intersubjective knowing which translates into our understanding of human relationships throughout our lives and in its recreation within the therapeutic relationship in psychotherapy and art therapy. In holding the intersubjective psychological space of therapy, aesthetics are used to explore the expression of human experiences (Robbins 1994). This aesthetic way of knowing is different from logical cognition. Aesthetics provides access to and means of exploring those human experiences that are out of the reach of lexical logic since they exist within the pre-verbal—sensory, kinesthetic, and imaginal (Harris Williams 2010)—origins of the intersubjective beginnings of life.

The aesthetic epistemic includes pre-verbal sensory kinesthetic, imaginal, spiritual and emotional forms of knowledge, which are often represented and expressed through dynamic and interactive symbols and metaphors. Symbols and metaphors are common forms of expression in dreams, stories, and art of all

kinds. Furthermore, this knowledge is fluid and dynamic in that its meaning may shift over time (Pink et al. 2011). The dynamic, emergent and intersubjective nature of aesthetic knowledge poses challenges to researchers in that while it is difficult to categorise, control or articulate, it is simultaneously acknowledged as essential and valuable for understanding human psychological experience (Gerber 2006, 2014; Neilsen 2004). These eclectic forms of aesthetic knowledge are often expressed in art therapy through dialectic dialogues, as meaning is sought in iterative ways such as joint verbal discussions, artistic deconstruction and reconstruction, or working in a series to explore metaphors that shift meaning over time (Chilton 2014; Chilton & Scotti in press; Scotti & Aicher in press). These processes and ways of knowing form new knowledge and emerge from the dialectic and dynamic interaction between intersubjective realities resulting in insights and transformations (Chilton & Scotti in press; Gerber 2014; Gerber et al. 2012; Scotti & Aicher in press). Human experiences, then, are created and re-created through the artistic experience in which story, image, metaphor and symbol simultaneously have fictive and authentic meaning (Leavy 2013). These meanings emerge as aesthetic knowledge within multiple intersubjective realities (Bochner 2005; Gerber et al. 2012; Sullivan 2010).

Art making then becomes a way of telling metaverbal stories through which individuals can re-visit, re-imagine and reform identities, memories and beliefs while supported and witnessed by another (Moon 2006), through what we call aesthetic intersubjective communication (Gerber 2014). Aesthetic intersubjective communication involves creating artwork within a relational matrix for the purpose of nurturing insight, meaning assignation, and the transformation of human emotion and experience into constructive self-awareness (McNiff 1998; Kapitan 2010; Yorks & Kasl: 2006; Gerber et al. 2012). Our occupation of art therapy is based on these ontologic and epistemic assumptions, in which this aesthetic form of

communication nurtures emotional and sensorial expression, self-discovery, healing, and transformation.

The epistemic of art therapy may also be relevant to arts based research. In arts based research, knowledge is systematically yet uniquely created by artist-researchers through *artistic* means (Franklin 2010; Leavy 2009; McNiff 2011). The emergent aesthetic knowledge, be it the impact of orange and yellow paint through an artist's brush, the rhythm of a poet's lyric, or neuron-mirroring the feel of outstretched arms as we view a dance, is valuable in unearthing shifting inner experience—cognitive, emotional, bodily, spiritual—which may be preverbal, unconscious, or otherwise unutterable. This definition of knowing is therefore not exclusive to verbal or visible forms of cognition. It is, instead, descriptive of the dynamic and invisible ways of knowing, requiring us to “embrace a language that speaks of permanency and impermanency, that resides within a realm of appearances and disappearances—that lurks behind shadows of meaning” (Thomas 2004, p. 68). Through art making we can access and reflect on personal, embodied, and emotional ways of knowing (Hervey 2000; Kapitan 2010; McNiff 2011). Hogan and Pink (2010, p.170) summed up the epistemology of art therapy as a way of knowing which is enacted and simultaneously articulated by art making, “a knowing that cannot be expressed in words or that can only be expressed at the interface” of the art-making and meaning-making process situated within the context of the client/therapist encounter. It is these forms of aesthetic knowledge—which we come to know iteratively via reflexivity and art practice—inherent in what we do in the creative art therapies (Kossak 2012) that are transferrable to the philosophy, theory and methods in arts based research.

## AXIOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Axiology refers to “the role of values, aesthetics within any inquiry” (Mertens et al. 2010, p. 195). In art therapy and arts based research, we value the goodness of art (McInyre 2004). This goodness is inherent in our experience of art making as potentially a free expression of lived moments that activates psychological insight, movement, and openness (Lear 1998; Yorks & Kasl 2006). This aesthetic intersubjective way of knowing—sensory, emotional, kinesthetic, imaginal, spiritual, preverbal—can lead to a more fulfilling, creative and free life in which awareness of self and others is expanded (Gerber 2014, Gerber et al 2012; Lear 1998). We value this knowledge and see it as healing and, indeed, transformative for individuals and societies through increasing knowledge and consciousness (Finley 2008; Neilsen 2004; Bradbury & Reason 2008). We know that the critical issues facing our world will require a great expansion of new ideas and creativity on individual and collective levels (Florida 2002; Lombardo 2011) and therefore value our human capacity as creative art-makers to enlarge our knowledge, insight, and psychological freedom (Kapitan 2010).

Consistent with the democratic view in art therapy that all who wish to make art should be encouraged and enabled to make art (Rubin 1999), we believe artistic expertise is not always required or desired in art therapy or arts based research. This is because we see particular merit in art making as a socially responsible act, allowing those who traditionally have been silenced to develop authentic and non-exploitive ways to express themselves and raise their voices (Allen 2011; McLean & Kelly 2010, 2011). We value empowering research participants to “retain control, share their experiences, and have their feelings and perspective taken seriously” (Leavy 2009, p. 229). Therefore, in our view, traditional definitions of beauty and art must expand to emphasise an aesthetic that is participatory and welcoming in these egalitarian uses of therapeutic or investigative art practices (Baldacchino 2009; Finley 2011).

However, authors have identified problems that arise when the art in arts based research does not meet minimum artistic standards and thus does not engage, communicate, or produce empathic resonance with its audience (Barone & Eisner 2012; Chilton & Leavy 2014; Leavy 2009; Piirto 2002). This is an ongoing debate that perhaps first requires that we distinguish between use of art as an investigative process implemented by an expert arts based researcher, art produced by participant co-researchers, and joint art-making processes which blur these boundaries. We suggest that art therapists may have helpful expertise in two areas, 1) in using their art as an investigative method to inform their own reflexive practice; and 2) in assisting those who have little to no prior experience in art making to create art to communicate their concerns (Chilton & Scotti, in press, Kapitan 2010). These professional strengths can help realise our ethical commitment to opening access to the arts *and arts based research* to all whom so desire (Finley 2011). This view is congruent with the axiology of the participatory worldview described by Bradbury and Reason (2008), in which they recommend using extended ways of knowing such as the arts as a way to enact a participative consciousness that assists in producing meaning, spirit and beauty as forms of valued knowledge.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Due to the nascent and formative phase of arts based research, the description of methodology in the literature is still very diverse, and, in some cases vague. Descriptions of methods of arts based research (Kapitan 2010; Leavy 2009; McNiff 1998; Rolling 2013), arts informed research (Knowles & Cole 2008) or artistic inquiry (Hervey 2000), range from the use of artistic data to explore a particular phenomenon to the use of the artistic process as the primary investigative method.

In our opinion, the overall strategic approach to research that emerges from these ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions is based upon the premise that the arts become both the logical investigative method *and* the data for exploring multi-dimensional human experiences otherwise inaccessible (Leavy 2009). Due to the compatibility between the multiplicity of dialectic intersubjective realities and the dynamic, preverbal nature of aesthetic knowledge, arts based research becomes the obvious option for the researcher interested in exploring these dimensions of the human condition, which, while not always visible, have enormous impact on our lives (Gerber 2014). The arts provide a viable method for investigating the conscious and unconscious, subjective, objective and intersubjective realities (Johnson 2008, 2012) by using an artistic language and systematic way of exposing the invisible ways of knowing of mind and soul. Arts based research explores, exposes, and transforms the invisible phenomena into a tangible and communicative result reflective of particular human experience. This result subsequently can be widely disseminated.

To be clear, we define arts based research as participatory, occurring when the researcher(s) are primarily engaged in *artmaking as an act of inquiry* (McNiff 2011); not necessarily as the *topic* of inquiry. This point appears simple but we have noticed repeated confusion in the past within both the art therapy research community and the qualitative research community. *Arts based* research refers to the method, not subject of the research, although of course in art therapy research, the subject does involve artmaking in a particular context. Due to previous confusion on this point, we join McNiff (2011) and Fraser and Al Sayah (2011) who have called for clear descriptions of the methodological approach when writing about this form of research. The approach can involve any form of systematic and investigative artmaking that is responsive to the research question or topic. In some cases, as deemed necessary to answering the research question and contributing to the

credibility of the investigation, the diverse forms of arts based research methods can be combined with other complementary research tools such as qualitative and/or quantitative interviews, surveys or questionnaires.

We trust art as an investigative method that elicits data transferrable from the intimate to the universal, contributing to intersubjective and social constructs and enhancing the visibility of ineffable and embodied knowledge (Barone & Eisner 2012; Paul 2005). The goal of arts based research is the translation and transferrability of these constructs and forms of knowledge into accessible, palpable, and evocative results disseminated within a social context. We agree with Kapitan (2010, p. 162), who describes as the key purpose of this kind of inquiry “to enlarge perception, thought and feeling” and “to imagine and perceive new possibilities or innovation that construct new knowledge.”

## **EXAMPLES OF ARTS BASED RESEARCH IN ART THERAPY**

In this section we present two brief vignettes that exemplify the application of these philosophical assumptions to the practice of arts based research by art therapists.

The first example of an artistic inquiry or arts based research approach was used to investigate the aesthetic self-other phenomena in the context of art therapy by art therapists Scotti and Aicher (in press). Scotti and Aicher conducted a collaborative ten-week process of artistic hypermodal inquiry (Figure 1) to study the phenomena of transference and countertransference, which are the intersubjective or unconscious narratives that manifest themselves in between the client and a therapist in a therapeutic relationship (Andersen & Berk 1998; Calish 1994; Freud 1958; Marshall & Marshall 1988). To unveil these

processes, Scotti and Aicher (in press) simultaneously painted a series of collaborative self-portraits on transparent acetate sheets, placed between them. During this process of mutually receiving and perceiving each other, the artists/researchers illuminated visual representations of the intersubjective space, which opened ways to explore, identify and assign meaning to the emergent transference phenomena. The artist/researchers used transparent substrates and fluid art media to express, contain, and contemplate dynamic and emergent transference and countertransference experiences. They then synthesized the data, which included completed visual images and excerpts from journals and letters, through thematic coding, clustering, concept mapping, and imaginative narrative and artistic response techniques, and compiled an audio-visual video representation to present the findings from this study. Reported results included improved self-awareness, a more complex and dimensional view of one another, and increased authenticity within the relationship (Scotti & Aicher in press).

In another example of arts based research, which did include qualitative interviews, Chilton (2014) developed a method of arts based research to explore the phenomena of the expression of positive emotions in an intersubjective context. In her dissertation, *An Arts based Study of the Dynamics of Expressing Positive Emotions within the Intersubjective Art Making Process*, she created a systematic approach to both the generation and analysis of data using arts based methods. Chilton employed iterative processes of visual individual, responsive, and interactive art making used by pairs of co-researcher art therapists in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. This was followed by a system of data analysis that included and synthesised interview and artistic data. The interview data was coded identifying emergent thematic patterns which were then further investigated through reflexive memoing, a three-dimensional concept map, responsive poetry, short stories, painting (Figure 2), and a short video. The interactive arts

based analysis resulted in the formulation of a preliminary arts based theoretical model that was disseminated with the artistic data in various professional and public forums. Presentation of these results took place through live readings, film viewings, and presentations at national conferences, a public art show, and forthcoming academic publication. These dissemination efforts are important because viewing the arts based results may create empathic resonance in viewers, increasing emotional and cognitive knowledge about the process of emotional expression through creative art making. This dissertation achieved the aim of the study by contributing new knowledge to our understanding of how emotions emerge, are expressed, and assigned meaning within an art therapy relational context.

## **CONCLUSION**

This foray into articulating a philosophical paradigm of arts based research as informed by our perspectives as art therapists is necessarily incomplete. We have assumed that the philosophical assumptions of arts based research and art therapy share similar perspectives on the nature of truth, reality and knowledge; however, we welcome debate. Specifically we propose that in viewing reality through an intersubjective pluralistic lens and identifying aesthetics as the form of knowledge, we have a perspective necessary for the investigation of the multiple invisible dimensions of the human experience using arts based methods. We hope for continued dialogue on this topic among scholars, artists, researchers, as well as art therapists and their clients, as we collectively seek further clarity in this area. This engagement is much needed to illuminate ontologically diverse perspectives and wide-ranging epistemologies.

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