Chapter 13
The Democratic Potential of Narrative, Poetry, and Performance

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will present an overview of three particular methodologies of arts-based research: narrative, poetry, and performance. This chapter will discuss the ways in which these methodological approaches to research may be effective means through which to capture and share the knowledge possessed by community stakeholders. This chapter has positioned community stakeholders as partners in arts-based research. When university faculty and community stakeholders form reciprocal, mutually beneficial partnerships, it becomes possible to create and disseminate the knowledge needed to support a democratic society.

There is reason to believe that arts-based research may be an effective way to facilitate the communication of knowledge within a deliberative democracy. In large part, the justification lies in the nature of arts-based research. Arts-based research is primarily concerned with advancing human understanding by persuading an audience to see the world through the eyes of another person via creative modes of exploration and representation (Diaz, 2002; Leavy, 2009). Art can spotlight the subjective nature of human experience (Belanger, 1998; Eisner, 2008), and by recognizing and emphasizing subjective, personal dimensions to experience, art has the power "to reveal what [previously] had not been noticed" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 102).

This appreciation for the qualitative dimension of experience makes arts-based research a potent antidote to neoliberal epistemologies that portray standardized, quantitative measures as the only data worth knowing (Ball, 2016). As Eisner (1997) writes, "We have…concretized our view of what it means to know. We prefer our knowledge solid and like our data hard. It makes for a firm foundation, a secure place to stand" (p. 7). While neoliberalism would have us take for granted that "hard data" is the only knowledge worth knowing, Eisner (2008) reminds us that "the life of feeling is best revealed through those forms of feeling we call the arts" (p. 7). In other words, the arts invite qualitative and pluralistic definitions of what counts as knowledge (Gallas, 1991; Rasmussen, 2010; Sinclair, 2003). The arts insist that the world of innermost personal feeling is equally important (and equally real) as the world that is best represented through quantitative data and statistics.

"By connecting people on emotional and visceral levels, artistic forms of representation facilitate empathy, which is a necessary precondition for challenging harmful stereotypes…and building coalition/community across differences" (Leavy, 2009, p. 14). Since these (i.e., facilitating empathy, challenging stereotypes, understanding the lives of others) are precisely the experiences that individuals need in order to participate productively within a democratic society (Cipollone et al., 2018; Cooke, 2000; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Zeichner, 2020), arts-based research may, therefore, be a medium of research worth considering seriously. The remainder of this chapter will present three different arts-based research methodologies that may facilitate the sharing of knowledge between democratic citizens.

NARRATIVE

The narrative method involves "a collaborative method of telling stories, reflecting on stories, and (re)writing stories" (Leavy, 2009, p. 27; see also Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The process of constructing narrative involves an attempt to "access participants' life experiences and engage in a process of storying and restorying in order to reveal multidimensional meanings and present an authentic and compelling rendering of the data" (Leavy, 2009, p. 27). The more evocative and aesthetically compelling a constructed narrative is, the more its readers will be able to empathize with the narrative's protagonist(s).

This approach has clear relevance to the goal of producing and sharing the knowledge held by community stakeholders. Narratives may serve as a way to capture local knowledge in a complex, nuanced, evocative, and personally resonant manner, thus deepening the understanding between researchers, readers, and community stakeholders. Because a compelling narrative has the potential to transform one's outlook on the world and on the lives of others (Jones, 2003; Kim, 2006), it is logical

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