

Book Review

Arts-Based Inquiry as Educational Research: New Visions

The Art of Writing Inquiry. Lorri Neilsen, Ardra L. Cole, and J. Gary Knowles (Eds.). Halifax, NS: Backalong Books, 2001, 321 pages, Softcover.

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To suggest that arts-based inquiry is continually changing shape has become virtually a commonplace. However, the speed with which it is changing is still remarkable. A recent text that is particularly concerned with the evolution of arts-based inquiry into the processes and representational forms of educational research is *The Art of Writing Inquiry*, edited by Lorri Neilsen, Ardra L. Cole, and J. Gary Knowles. The collection of "writing as inquiry" and "inquiry into writing" provides examples of arts-informed accounts of educational research and powerfully represents various performative genres that inform pedagogies of higher education. The multitude of essays and excerpts of writing inquiry take metaphorical journeys and produce imaginative responses to complex interpretations of both processes and forms that are possible through arts-informed research. Readers of this book engage in a dialogical journey with the authors as they absorb the aesthetic representations of the arts-based research of these exceptional writers.

The collected works assert the validity of arts-based inquiry as a method of critical research into arts-informed "writing as inquiry." Fiction, poetry, plays, essays, and reflections investigate and report on an "inquiry into writing" and "writing as inquiry." The educational experience is represented through artistic and creative scholarship. Teaching and learning are themes that are woven throughout this performative collection. The scholarship presented in this book represents alternative research processes and representational forms that illuminate possibilities for unconventional social science research. Literary, feminist, hermeneutic, aesthetic, postcolonial, and curriculum theories inform the writers' series of work. Drawing on an interdisciplinary approach to arts-informed research, critical inquiry eloquently encounters imaginative, aesthetic, and poetic inquiry providing a forum for educational research.

In its 27 entries *The Art of Writing Inquiry* highlights the work of many academic writers and encompasses topics ranging from an excerpt of a novel as educational research, to research as poetic rumination, to inquiries on writing and learning that explore epistemologies, processes, and forms. Because this eclectic mix lacks a unified approach to arts-based inquiry, it reinforces the

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very multiplicity it espouses as the writers aim to explore “the art of writing inquiry” through various genres.

Aside from featuring articulate pieces from the editors themselves, the book also highlights the work of acclaimed writers such as Cynthia Dillard, Rishma Dunlop, Carl Leggo, Allan Neilsen, Gary Rasberry, Laurel Richardson, and Sandra Weber—among others. *The Art of Writing Inquiry* is an important and refreshing collection of literary works of art that open vital spaces for necessary conversations on aesthetic investigative practices, art as a mode of knowing, curriculum as aesthetic text, and how artistic practices play an integral role in the research and lives of scholars today. The collection draws together the efforts of established and emerging scholars and researchers, all of whom seem appropriately challenged by the power of aesthetic responses in pedagogical settings—its pleasures, its risks, its possibilities. In this regard, the title *The Art of Writing Inquiry* alludes to the meaning-making process as unfixed, with the ability to shift and change, which might be understood as a site for learning to investigate learning.

The assortment of collected works offers such a variety of genres that it should appeal to a wide range of readers interested in developing their ideas on arts-based forms of inquiry. This book will certainly accelerate the rate of change in an already quickly changing area of arts-based educational research as it provides thought-provoking readings.