

EDITORIAL

A Researcher's Talk of Ethics

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In each decade, it has been a small minority of practitioners who have taken it upon themselves to ensure that the discipline examines its ethical stances. They have often done so passionately and polemically, sometimes sounding like Old Testament prophets in their condemnation not so much of ethical lapses as of indifference. In so doing, they perform an important service....

—Pat Caplan, *Anthropology and Ethics*, 2003

As long as I've been a researcher, I've been living with unease, often vague, but sometimes pronounced discomfort concerning my relationship with my research participants. Whether they are students, educators, artists, or another, I ponder: What is my responsibility, my indebtedness to those whose experiences I seek to understand? From my years of reading research, service on editorial boards, and now in my capacity as journal editor, I know that I have company. By the open, unassuming, and persistently reflexive way that good researchers write about their participants, by their critical awareness and responsiveness, that reverberation of ethical self-consciousness is clear. In *Fields of Play* (1997), Laurel Richardson encapsulates those concerns that trouble—I believe should trouble—the thoughts and actions of all researchers engaged in social inquiry: “A continuing puzzle for me is how to do sociological research and how to write it so that the people who teach me about their lives are honored and empowered, even if they and I see their worlds differently” (p.106).

As the disciplinary boundaries of art education dilate and shift, those persistent puzzles proliferate and gnarl. As theory turns toward the critical and the social, cultural ramifications of visual imagery, and as pedagogy becomes cross-disciplinary, critical, and transformative, what researchers want to know and relate, and how they want to proceed in their inquiries take on new substance and complexity. Researchers in art education—contemporarily visual culture art education—continue to draw upon theory and methodology not only from more traditional instrumental social inquiry but, increasingly, from critical studies, postmodern and feminist ethnography, phenomenological sociology, ethnomethodology, art practice, and more. As visual

culture art education moves into the future of qualitative inquiry (the “seventh moment” Denzin and Lincoln dub it) where the objectives, methodology, and even the identity of the researcher fracture into multiple possibilities, times are uncertain, even risky, yet they brim with initiative and resource (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). It is during these moments, asserts anthropologist/ethicist George Appell, when the borders of a discipline are redefined and certainties splinter, that “the shared moral base of its members begins to deliquesce and ethical discourse expands” (1978, p. 1). As we wend through the changing topography of our discipline, increasingly, there is the need to reflect on our own evolving research dispositions and designs. In the exuberance and the disquietude of transition, we need, again, to consider our research participants, past, present, and future, and think anew about ethics, troubling the morality of method, the fairness, and value of our goals. I agree with Appell, that these times of shifting energies create a propitious basis for taking stock of the ethical and moral issues entailed in the way we conceive of and carry on research in the field. It is time for visual culture art educators to reconsider their responsibilities, to revisit the grand tour questions with which anthropologists and sociologists have long been wrestling: How shall I be toward these people I am studying? and What is it all for?

In this issue of *Studies*, you will read the work of six researchers, all of whom have immersed themselves in disparate qualitative projects with human implications. Some more immediate, others in the offing, all hold potential for education change. Flavia Bastos “examines issues of naming, describing, and representing contemporary Brazilian art” towards the ends of articulating “a political position more fitting to capture and interpret the art produced in our global age...” Kryssi Staikidis reports on an ethnographic study providing insights into “Mayan pedagogy and implications for transformative curricula for the art experience of preservice art educators.” Karen Keifer-Boyd and Deborah Smith-Shank analyze their own students’ perspectives and ensuing discourse toward a revision of the fundamental narrative of art education. EunJung Chang explicates and advocates a museum model that accommodates the needs and interests of a diverse population of visitors. Jennifer Eisenhauer argues for “more focused attention to how visual culture presents a critical rethinking of subjectivity within art education.”

As a whole, these works of qualitative inquiry move toward transformation, in the questions they pose, in the methodologies, and in the small, but significant, increments toward education reform. As fundamental change emerges in our discipline, a material basis is created for discourse on the researcher’s ethical stance. We are not philosophers. We are not ethicists. But we are a discipline with tenacious self-

consciousness, and it is my hope that this editorial will serve as an invitation to open the conversation about researcher ethics and morality concerning how we should be toward these people whose thoughts, feelings, and actions we seek to understand.

References

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