

IMAGE-BASED NARRATIVE INQUIRY: AN ORIGINAL QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD [Abstract]. Proceedings of the American Art Therapy Association, USA, 107-108.

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Image-based narrative inquiry is an original qualitative research method that was designed to investigate and develop a theory of response art as it is used in art therapy (Fish, 2006). This method establishes the image as the subject of the inquiry and weaves a nest that consists of its life story. Instead of moving the images aside and interviewing the artist, or analyzing the image according to predetermined criteria, this method begins with and maintains its focus on the image. Following the image's life story, the image is conversed with directly using methods developed by Allen (1995, 2005), witness writing, McNiff (1992), dialoguing with images, Jung (1959, 1963), active imagination, and Watkins (1984) waking dreams.

The image's life story (Fish, 2004) is a narrative that is told by the art therapist who made the image. It consists of how the image was inspired, where and how it was made, how it was used, who it was shown to, what has happened to it during its life course, and where it is now.

The life story is told in the same way that a parent reports the history of a child that he or she takes to a medical appointment.

The image, as the subject of image-based narrative inquiry, is carefully explored through its life story and direct dialogue. This approach recalls the theory generating use of case studies in the research of Freud and Piaget. Freud (Brenner, 1955), related case studies of his patients to illustrate his theory of psychoanalysis and Piaget (Maier, 1978), observed his own children to inform his theory of cognitive development.

Art-based research is a valuable tool for art therapy (Allen, 1999; McNiff, 1998; Kapitan, 1998; and Hervey, 2000). Allen (1988), warned us about employing research methods that do not reflect our skills as art therapists. Image-based narrative inquiry uses heuristic and phenomenological methods (Moustakas, 1990, 1994; and Patton, 2002), along with a narrative epistemology (Coles, 1989; and Polkinghorne, 1988), to reveal rich information that informed the development of a theory of response art.

The images that are interviewed in image-based narrative inquiry are selected through an inductive process. The interviewing process continues until the subject of the investigation is thoroughly explored. This method embraces a post-modern, feminist philosophy that understands knowledge as culturally influenced and socially constructed.

For that reason, images made by art therapists with inclusive backgrounds are interviewed along with images made by the researcher in order to enrich the resulting theory. Once all of the interviews are completed and transcribed, a pattern analysis is used to reveal prominent themes. This analysis informs the theory and raises questions for future study.

Research designed to produce theory is a speculative activity as opposed to research intended to prove theory which requires methods that can be standardized, replicated, and generalized (Patton 2002). Theory generating research is designed to identify a phenomenon and describe it as fully as possible. Keen observation is critical in theory development. Image-based narrative inquiry is an art-based method that may be used to investigate other aspects of art therapy and generate theory beyond response art. Further, this method may be used beyond art therapy by disciplines that use images as primary resources in their work.

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