


Arts-Based Research: Paradigms, Methodologies, and the Challenge of Evaluation

Mei-Hsin Chen
mchen@unav.es
University of Navarra
Pamplona, Spain
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2378-2821>

Abstract

This article critically examines Arts-Based Research (ABR), a transdisciplinary approach that seamlessly integrates artistic creativity with rigorous research methodologies. The central aim is to ascertain whether ABR constitutes an independent research paradigm, distinct from conventional qualitative inquiry, or if it is best understood as a specialised subset. To address this, the study meticulously delves into ABR's unique axiological, ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations, with a particular emphasis on its distinctive capacity for knowledge construction through artistic expression and its inher-

ent drive towards social change and justice. The analysis highlights how ABR significantly expands the humanities' epistemological repertoire. It achieves this by incorporating not only discursive but also aesthetic and affective modes of knowing, thereby fostering layered, interpretive, and often embodied understandings that transcend propositional logic. Furthermore, the article critically contrasts conventional research evaluation criteria, such as validity and reliability, with ABR's preferred focus on trustworthiness and crystallisation. In doing so, it addresses the pertinent "anything goes" concern by stressing the imperative for methodological precision and rigour within ABR practice. The findings suggest that ABR,

through its synthesis of academic exactitude and artistic innovation, effectively transcends traditional divisions between art and science. It is argued that ABR operates within specific theoretical frameworks designed to construct knowledge through contextual analysis and a critical examination of society, with the ultimate aim of fostering profound social change and justice, using art as its guiding principle. The conclusion robustly advocates for ABR's recognition as a legitimate and promising independent paradigm, one that enhances accessibility to complex knowledge and significantly expands the boundaries of human understanding through evocative and transformative artistic inquiry.

Keywords

Arts-based research • Arts-based research paradigms • Criteria for arts-based research • Epistemology of artistic inquiry • Methodologies in arts-based research

1. Introduction

Arts-based research (ABR) represents a fundamentally transdisciplinary approach to knowledge construction, meticulously uniting the established principles of the creative arts with rigorous research methodologies (Chilton & Leavy, 2020; McNiff, 2011). It is increasingly recognised as a distinctive variant within the broader landscape of qualitative research in the social sciences, with its core ambition being to deepen our understanding of the human condition through the application of often unconventional and evocative artistic processes (Smith & Shannon-Baker, 2022; Yilmazlı Trout *et al.*, 2022). A pivotal objective of ABR is to engage diverse audiences beyond the traditional academic sphere, thereby rendering complex knowledge more accessible and resonant with a wider public (Cole & Knowles, 2008). This innovative para-

digm thus transcends conventional textual modes of dissemination, adeptly leveraging the inherent communicative power of artistic forms to illuminate research findings and foster more holistic insights.

The theoretical foundations of ABR have been established by numerous scholars, including Barone and Eisner (2011), Borgdorff *et al.* (2020), Cole and Knowles (2008), Leavy (2015, 2025b), and Springgay *et al.* (2024), among others. Their contributions have been instrumental in delineating the scope of ABR, defining its fundamental components, and elucidating its methodological underpinnings. A comprehensive review of these studies underscores the intricacies inherent in ABR, given its dual artistic and technical dimensions. Achieving a balanced and coherent approach necessitates meticulous integration of these components. The question of whether ABR constitutes an independent research paradigm, distinct from qualitative research, or whether it should be considered a subset of the latter due to its unique characteristics, remains the subject of ongoing debate. This article centres on this question, seeking to advance the discourse on ABR by building upon existing scholarship, with a particular focus on the interplay between its artistic and technical elements. The fundamental premise of this study is that ABR employs a distinct, original, and creative approach to investigating human reality while simultaneously adhering to rigorous technical and methodological frameworks. This ensures that the full potential and applied richness of ABR are realised. Cole and Knowles (2008) emphasise the significance of this equilibrium, contending that ABR melds the structured and systematic character of conventional qualitative research with the expressive and imaginative attributes inherent in the arts. This integration, they propose, enables artistic forms to function as potent conduits for reaching diverse audiences and deepening the comprehension of human complexity. The present article therefore examines the axiological, ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations of ABR, which serve as a basis for furthering its understanding and expanding knowledge in the field. To this end, it first explores the principal paradigms and

theoretical-philosophical frameworks that underpin ABR before reflecting on the methodological foundations of the ABR paradigm, as well as its criteria for validity and reliability.

2. Research paradigms and theoretical frameworks in support of the ABR

It is imperative to acknowledge that all forms of research are inherently influenced by a unique perspective, which fundamentally determines the approach adopted to comprehend the reality under investigation. Indeed, as Pretorius (2024) and Rehman and Alharthi (2016) highlight, a plurality of perspectives exists for interpreting reality, a natural consequence of which has been the development of diverse research paradigms. Each such paradigm, whether positivist, interpretivist, or critical, furnishes a distinct explanatory framework that not only informs but also directly guides researchers' thinking and actions. This foundational framework, therefore, implicitly or explicitly, establishes what is considered both appropriate and inappropriate within the entirety of the research process, from the initial formulation of research questions to the selection of methodologies and the interpretation of findings. Consequently, understanding the underlying paradigmatic assumptions is crucial for evaluating the validity and scope of any scholarly inquiry.

Within the context of ABR, scholars such as Cole and Knowles (2008), Finley (2025), Leavy (2015, 2025b), and McNiff (2025) frequently reject the scientific-positivist paradigm, associated with neutrality, objectivity, and replicability. Instead, they advocate for alternative paradigms that align more closely with the nature of artistic inquiry. Amongst the most prominent are the constructivist, critical transformative, and pragmatic paradigms.

Schwandt (2000) argues that the constructivist research paradigm is founded on the premise that reality is socially constructed and subject to interpretation. It rejects the notion of an indepen-

dent, intrinsic essence within entities, contending instead that their essence is defined interpersonally and intersubjectively through interactions within relational networks. Within this paradigm, truth is understood as a socially constructed phenomenon, emerging through shared meaning and consensus within a given social group.

As Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) observe, the critical transformative paradigm emerged in response to criticisms of constructivism. Working within this paradigm, these scholars emphasise a key limitation of constructivism: its failure to account for how dominant interpretations can reinforce injustice. In contrast, the critical transformative paradigm places a strong emphasis on social justice, aiming to improve the lives of historically marginalised groups, including women, ethnic minorities, and individuals with disabilities (Fenge, 2022).

Smith and Shannon-Baker (2022), alongside Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011), demonstrate that the pragmatic paradigm is underpinned by the principles of mixed-methods research. Furthermore, Hall (2020) observes its wide recognition among contemporary philosophers as an effective paradigm for advancing knowledge. Pragmatism is grounded in principles of action and utility, seeking to identify practical solutions to real-world problems. This paradigm demonstrates a notable congruence with action research, as Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) outline. Moreover, it aligns with Dewey's conceptualisation of research as a form of experience and, as Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 5) suggest, the notion of research as a "do-it-yourself" practice. This latter approach underscores the researcher's capacity for creativity, adaptability, and engagement with diverse research traditions and methodologies.

The three aforementioned paradigms are widely acknowledged as foundational to research design in ABR, each characterised by distinct axiological, ontological, epistemological, and methodological attributes (Table 1). However, as both Hall (2020) and Patton (2015) affirm, it is crucial to recognise the validity of alternative theoretical frameworks

Paradigm	Axiology	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology
Constructivist	The foundational principles emphasise the idea that research must be authentic and trustworthy within specific contexts.	Reality is socially constructed.	The researcher actively participates in the construction of knowledge. Objectivity is replaced by concepts such as confirmation and consensus.	Qualitative methods. Research is conducted through an interactive process between the researcher and the participants.
Critical Transformative	Prioritises human rights and social justice.	Truth is not relative; what is relative are opinions about the truth.	True knowledge is legitimised and shaped by systems of power.	Constructivist and post-constructivist approaches. The voices of marginalised groups, which have historically been silenced, are reclaimed.
Pragmatic	Seeks strategies to solve problems as efficiently as possible. Combines multiple methods.	A real world exists, although each individual may have their own interpretation, as truth is intersubjective.	The researcher positions themselves within the specific context in which the research problem arises.	Accepts both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Table 1. The axiological, ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations of the constructivist, critical transformative and pragmatic paradigms. Note: Table created by the author

and philosophical approaches in supporting qualitative research projects. Such approaches encompass ethnography and autoethnography, narrative research, structuralism and post-structuralism, feminist theory, symbolic interactionism, and systems and complexity theory. These offer researchers a range of lenses through which to investigate social and human phenomena, thereby enriching the scope of ABR.

3. Axiological, ontological, and epistemological considerations of ABR as a paradigm of independent research

Following an extensive examination of the various research paradigms and theoretical frameworks, the focus now shifts to the challenge of determining the appropriate research paradigm within the domain of ABR. This issue can be summarised as

a debate over whether ABR should be recognised as an independent paradigm or integrated within existing qualitative frameworks.

Within the context of ABR, scholars such as Camargo-Borges (2025), Eisner (2008), Leavy (2025b), and McNiff (2025) consistently reject the scientific-positivist research paradigm, which is grounded in prediction and control. However, as Camargo-Borges (2025), alongside Smith and Shannon-Baker (2022) and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011), have noted, merely rejecting the positivist paradigm is insufficient; the subsequent step involves transcending the traditional dualistic research framework that contrasts qualitative and quantitative approaches. Quantitative methodologies are primarily associated with the so-called hard sciences, where values such as measurement, replication, prediction, and control are emphasised. In contrast, qualitative approaches are typically linked to the softer sciences, which are concerned with subjective processes involved in

meaning-making. Camargo-Borges (2025) further argues that resolving this dichotomy necessitates the creation of a language capable of bridging these divides, thereby fostering a rigorous framework that unites the scientific and artistic domains.

Achieving a necessary synergy or balance between science/technology and art is proposed as a vital step in establishing ABR as a distinct paradigm. As Carless and Douglas (2024), Camargo-Borges (2025), Fenge (2022), Goessling *et al.* (2021), Finley (2025), and McNiff (2025) collectively demonstrate, ABR operates within specific parameters and theoretical frameworks. These frameworks are designed to construct knowledge through contextual analysis, particular discourses, and a critical examination of society, ultimately aiming to foster change and social justice, with art serving as a guiding principle. Consequently, ABR is characterised by a distinctive axiological, ontological, epistemological, and methodological approach (Table 1), which will now be further elaborated.

3.1. Axiology in the ABR paradigm

The concept of art is characterised by distinct qualities, including immediacy, creativity, imagination, beauty, and aesthetics. These qualities collectively establish the axiological principles and value criteria that underpin the ABR research paradigm. As Leavy (2025b) highlights, art possesses two fundamental attributes: immediacy and permanence. Immediacy refers to art's ability to capture attention, provoke thought, and elicit emotional, psychological, or intellectual responses. Permanence denotes the lasting impact of art, with far-reaching implications for learning, education, and social change. Additionally, some scholars (Chilton & Leavy, 2020; Leavy, 2025 b) demonstrate that art provides access to alternative modes of perception, thought, and communication, encompassing sensory, kinesthetic, emotional, perceptual, and imaginative realms of knowledge.

Creativity, widely regarded as a central component of artistic expression, has been conceptualised in various ways. Camargo-Borges (2018) offers a particular definition, describing creativity as the act of bringing together ideas and perspectives that appear paradoxically different and unrelated. Conventionally, creativity has been attributed to exceptional individuals who generate unique and innovative ideas. However, contemporary perspectives on creativity increasingly recognise it as a collective process. As Camargo-Borges (2025) further explains, the concept of collective creativity suggests that innovative ideas emerge through the interaction of diverse perspectives, thereby challenging the traditional view of creativity as the exclusive domain of individual brilliance.

The imaginative aspect of art is closely linked to the ability to transcend established realities and experiment with novel combinations of meanings. Camargo-Borges (2025) offers a particular definition, describing creativity as the act of bringing together ideas and perspectives that appear paradoxically different and unrelated. Burns (2022) has demonstrated that the liberation of imagination engenders fluidity in meaning, thus paving the way for the emergence of new knowledge. This is further supported by several studies, including that by Zittoun and Pedersen (2024), which show how imagination stimulates new meanings and fosters ingenuity, spontaneity, and novelty. Murphy (2012) argues that the collective imagination, in particular, can be a powerful driver of creativity and societal transformation. As individuals contribute their unique perspectives, visions, and concepts, the potential for creating profound experiences and generating meaningful change increases exponentially.

Danto (2003) contends that traditional concepts of aesthetics and beauty have become obsolete in contemporary art, suggesting they no longer serve as effective markers of artistic value. He argues that contemporary art has blurred the lines between art and everyday objects, thereby challenging conventional criteria such as balance, proportion, and order

—qualities long associated with beauty (Danto, 2003, pp. 20–21). In response, Danto (2003, p. 29) proposes a new understanding of beauty, which he describes as beauty reborn of the spirit. This view positions artistic beauty as an intellectual rather than a natural phenomenon, asserting that the aesthetic value of a work of art is internalised and inherently linked to its meaning and significance.

3.2. *Ontology in the ABR paradigm*

According to McNiff (2025), the concept of art has been broadly used to encompass all forms of artistic expression, including painting, drawing, sculpture, music, theatre, performance, poetry, installations, and various other types of artwork. However, Kirkkopelto (2020) extends the scope of art by introducing the notion of the quasi-object. This concept, as articulated by Latour (1993, pp. 51–55), suggests that entities in science and art are not merely passive but actively involved in shaping social relations and knowledge production. This idea is particularly relevant to artistic research, as it highlights the agency of artistic materials and processes in creating meaning and impacting the world. In this context, Kirkkopelto (2020) employs the concept of the quasi-object to illustrate the object of ABR. As defined by Kirkkopelto (2020), the quasi-object provides a philosophical framework that differentiates between two distinct domains: on the one hand, events and facts associated with the study of the social world, and on the other, material and technological realities linked to the natural sciences. Quasi-objects are described as entities that represent a convergence of the real, the discursive, and the social, belonging to nature, the collective, and the discursive. These entities possess an intrinsic and dynamic structure, allowing them to sustain an independent inner life.

From a different perspective, Leavy (2011) asserts that artistic reality is subjective, intersubjective, emergent, and mutable, which makes its

dialectic and processes difficult to define and challenging to represent using conventional quantitative methods. In this regard, an extension of this idea proposes that art emerges as a response to a blind spot in science, which in turn becomes the focal point for the development of artistic models. This positions art in an intimate relationship with science. The term intimate is used here to indicate that the exteriority of art is deeply intertwined with the informational core of science, while simultaneously occupying a radically opposing position. The concept of intimate also implies appreciation and savouring. While science seeks knowledge, the term knowledge is closely associated with intelligible understanding, which is developed through sensory experience. The concept of sensory wisdom is thus introduced to encompass both cognitive and sensory experiences. Human beings are capable not only of knowing but also of savouring and delighting in experience. Consequently, art embodies the genuine realisation of sensory wisdom, signifying the ability both to know and to feel. Epistemology in the ABR paradigm: construction and generation of knowledge in ABR.

3.3. *Epistemology in the ABR paradigm: construction and generation of knowledge in ABR*

Eisner (2008) acknowledges the long-standing presence of the arts within the domain of qualitative research, suggesting that any association with this field can be seamlessly integrated within the qualitative paradigm. However, Eisner (2008) also underscores the intricate and often paradoxical relationship between art and research, perceiving them as belonging to divergent paradigms and perspectives on reality. Contemporary philosophical thought often associates artistic knowledge with ornamental and emotional dimensions, such as enjoyment, evocation, and emotion, whereas scientific research is typically linked to the production of rational knowledge. Art is thus frequently placed

within the domain of entertainment, evocation, and emotion, rather than being associated with the determination of valid and true knowledge.

Eisner (2008, p. 6) further distinguishes between the evocative and the descriptive. The descriptive process aims to establish a mimetic relationship between an object and its representation, whereas the evocative process seeks to convey qualities that foster an empathetic connection with the object. Within the evocative relationship, elements such as emotion and imagination emerge. Evocation generates empathy, and empathy, in turn, serves as a means of understanding. In this regard, the arts facilitate a form of comprehension derived from empathetic and evocative experience, which distinctly differs from descriptive understanding. Consequently, in ABR, the function of both art and research is to provide an evocative image that creates the conditions necessary to delve into the subject of study and heighten awareness. As Leavy (2011) asserts, art enables a profound exploration of objects of study, allowing for the discovery of their intrinsic essence.

Crucially, ABR expands the epistemological repertoire of the humanities by incorporating not only discursive but also aesthetic and affective modes of knowing. Language, in this context, becomes both medium and metaphor —enabling layered, interpretive, and often embodied understandings that exceed propositional logic. Furthermore, the multimodal nature of ABR allows for expressions that are deeply embedded in specific cultural and linguistic contexts. This is particularly significant in multilingual settings, where language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a powerful carrier of identity, history, and diverse worldviews.

It is also important to recognise that the epistemological approach underpinning ABR is based on the premise that knowledge is not merely subjective but intersubjectively constructed. Contemporary scholars such as Hagberg (2011), Ladislav (2008), and Marples (2017) have implied that the pervasive notion of art as an experience that defies analysis —which stems from the belief that artistic knowledge is derived

from a subjective, non-neutral process undertaken by artists creating their own work— is in need of critical reconsideration. The notion of artistic knowledge as a purely subjective elaboration by artists in ABR gives rise to the so-called “anything goes” problem. As Eisner (2008) points out, in artistic research, there is often little interest in seeking consensus to enable generalisation for the purpose of establishing a singular truth. Nevertheless, this apparent disinterest in generalisation may, paradoxically, result in the unwarranted acceptance of any artistic research or creative process as valid. To circumvent the potential trivialisation of artistic research, it is imperative to establish a methodological foundation characterised by precision and rigour. This methodological foundation serves to ensure that the production of research in artistic creation maintains scholarly integrity and is safeguarded against issues associated with trivialisation.

4. Mixed methodologies in ABR

From these axiological, ontological, and epistemological perspectives on ABR, the resulting methodological design diverges significantly from research that seeks mere discovery or description, as pursued by positivist researchers who remain detached from the contexts and specific issues of the subjects they study in order to extract the most objective and generalisable data possible (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Eisner, 2008; Leavy, 2015, 2025b). However, by diverging from these scientific parameters in its approach to studying reality, ABR faces challenges in establishing a research design that enables it to function systematically within the recognised parameters of contemporary research while maintaining its artistic character.

Scholars such as Camargo-Borges (2025), Fenge (2022), and Leavy (2025b) argue that ABR is not merely an act of discovering social or artistic reality on the part of the researcher. Instead, it is defined by its collaborative nature, where researchers and partic-

participants engage in a collective analysis of society. This collaborative approach is a means of addressing and resolving real-world social problems in a creative and imaginative manner (Fenge, 2022). The unique and original process that emerges from these interactions is shaped by the specific issues and contexts in which it occurs. Consequently, ABR must be relational, participatory, and collaborative, as well as useful and generative in addressing problems in particular settings (Camargo-Borges, 2025; Fenge, 2022). Moreover, it requires a methodological design capable of capturing complexity and multiplicity. As a result, the research model in art must incorporate a holistic and transdisciplinary component to integrate elements from various approaches. This transdisciplinary synthesis is achieved through reflexive processes in iterative cycles of data analysis, combining insights from different perspectives and positions to develop a final, cohesive, and harmonious vision (Leavy, 2011).

ABR is therefore congruent with all approaches to participatory reflection that are aimed at fostering social change and equity (Carless & Douglas, 2024; Fenge, 2022; Goessling *et al.*, 2021), as well as with the action research movement, which is directed towards promoting social transformation (Eça *et al.*, 2017; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Furthermore, Leavy (2011, 2015) and McNiff (2008) highlight that ABR is particularly valuable in exploring emotional and metacognitive individual experiences.

The methodological design of ABR follows the qualitative research design model, as demonstrated by Cole and Knowles (2008) and Eisner (2008). Therefore, a basic framework for its design can be derived, which includes the following key elements necessary for it to be considered a high-quality research design (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015):

- Definition of the research problem: As Patton (2015) explains, defining the research problem within a qualitative research model entails selecting the research topic, reviewing the existing literature on the subject, and determining the research objectives.

- Identification of the sample for data collection: In qualitative research, the most common sampling strategy is purposive, non-probabilistic sampling, in contrast to the probabilistic sampling utilised in scientific methodology (Mertens, 2010; Patton, 2015). Patton (2015, pp. 470–476) further notes that the identification of a sample involves the consideration of factors such as sample size, potential sampling errors, and ethical considerations related to sample selection.
- Selection of data collection methods: Hall (2020) outlines that the qualitative research model encompasses a variety of data collection methods, including case studies, narratives, ethnography, observation, in-depth interviews, and the use of secondary data.
- Implementation of an appropriate data analysis procedure: Hall (2020) identifies two primary approaches to data analysis: holistic and classificatory. Among the holistic methods, the most prominent are discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and narrative analysis, which often employ content analysis techniques (Neuendorf, 2017). In contrast, classificatory methods include coding techniques, which involve categorising qualitative data into thematic codes (Miles *et al.*, 2019).
- Developing a robust interpretation based on data analysis: Strauss and Corbin (2008) identify two predominant analytical approaches as guides to this research process: deductive and inductive analysis. Deductive qualitative analysis examines the extent to which the data obtained in the research supports or aligns with pre-existing theories. Conversely, inductive qualitative analysis generates new concepts, explanations, findings, and theories directly from the research data and the qualitative analytical process itself. This approach does not commence with a pre-determined theoretical framework; instead, it constructs theory through the analytical process and the data themselves.

- Preparation of the research report: Richardson (2000) contends that qualitative research reports do not necessarily have to be written in conventional academic prose. Alternative report formats may include realist tales or impressionistic accounts, which aim to achieve a dramatic effect by conveying the researcher's lived experience. Another option is the use of performance ethnography, as Hamera (2013) details, where research findings are presented through a cutting-edge system of meaning that incorporates theatre, film, video, cinema, text, and narrative, among other media. Additionally, the audience plays an active role in interpreting the research findings, as the results should be presented in a way that brings them as close as possible to the audience, allowing for their direct engagement in meaning-making.

Despite the diversity of representational formats, there is also a prevailing trend towards presenting qualitative research findings in accordance with the scientific conventions established by the American Psychological Association, following the format of introduction-methodology-results-discussion-conclusions. However, McNiff (2025) and Denzin (2025) caution that, while some ABR studies can be structured and interpreted within the framework of qualitative social science research using this template, the field is inherently broad and cannot be entirely constrained within the scientific introduction-methodology-results-discussion-conclusions model. McNiff (2025) advocates for greater flexibility in format, suggesting that the utilisation of this structure should be an option rather than a rigid requirement.

5. Trustworthiness and crystallisation in ABR

The quantitative research model adheres to the criteria of reliability and external validity, thereby ensuring the quality of its findings. In contrast, as Peräkylä (2011) highlights, qualitative research

employs different criteria, focusing instead on the principle of trustworthiness. The concept of trustworthiness was proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), who argued that notions such as validity and reliability are not appropriate for qualitative research. By adopting the concept of trustworthiness as a substitute for the quantitative criteria of validity and reliability, the framework for evaluating the quality of qualitative research is characterised by the following principles:

- **Credibility:** This refers to the extent to which the perspectives of all research participants have been incorporated. Strategies to enhance credibility include the use of appropriate sampling procedures and cross-validation of analyses through multiple researchers. The level of credibility increases in relation to the degree of agreement between the perspectives of both participants and researchers.
- **Transferability:** This concerns the extent to which research findings can be applied to other contexts. Strategies to ensure transferability involve selecting research participants who represent typical cases, thereby allowing for the extrapolation of findings to similar settings.
- **Dependability:** This refers to the consistency with which the research is conducted. Strategies for enhancing dependability include ensuring that researchers are adequately trained in data collection and possess the necessary competencies to conduct robust research. Additionally, for this criterion to be met, research processes must be logical, thoroughly documented, traceable, and readily accessible to others.
- **Confirmability:** This criterion is analogous to objectivity in quantitative research. It relates to the extent to which findings reflect actual phenomena rather than the researcher's personal biases. To ensure confirmability and objectivity in qualitative research, strategies such as peer review can be employed, providing independent evaluation of the study's findings.

Criterion	Definition	Enhancement Strategies
Credibility	Accurate representation of participants' perspectives.	Appropriate sampling, cross-validation, researcher-participant consent.
Transferability	Applicability of findings to other contexts.	Selection of representative participants, ensuring contextual relevance.
Dependability	Consistency of research procedures.	Researcher training, clear documentation, logical procedures.
Confirmability	Findings free from researcher bias.	Peer review, maintaining objectivity.
Member verification	Validation of results by participants.	Allowing participants to confirm or correct interpretations.
Multiple coding	Reduction of subjectivity in data analysis.	Use of multiple coders with a shared codebook.
Crystallisation	Emphasising multiple perspectives.	Presenting nuanced, multidimensional participant experiences.

Table 2. Criteria for ABR. Note: Table created by the author

According to Morse (2015), certain methodologies employed within the scientific research paradigm may be applicable to qualitative research, with a view to enhancing validity and reliability. These include:

- **Member verification:** This strategy involves the presentation of research findings and conclusions to research participants, with the objective of confirming the accuracy of the analysis.
- **Data triangulation:** Triangulating data refers to the process of analysing data using two or more independent methods to ensure that a consistent conclusion is reached through different approaches. This often involves collecting data from multiple participants or sources and subsequently cross-verifying the information obtained from different individuals, channels, or data sources. This approach enhances both the validity and reliability of the research findings.
- **Multiple coding by different coders:** The analysis and coding of data is conducted by multiple researchers, following a codebook that has been mutually agreed upon.

Employing multiple coders for the same data set helps mitigate the inherent subjectivity of the coding process.

From a creative and evocative perspective, such as that of ABR, triangulation is not used as a strategy for validating data; instead, the concept of crystallisation is employed. This concept was introduced by Richardson (1997, p. 92) as a criterion for quality in artistic and evocative qualitative research, replacing triangulation as a measure of validity. Richardson (1997, p. 92) proposed that the central image of validity in postmodern texts should be that of a crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of forms, transformations, and multidimensional perspectives. In order to achieve rigour and validity in a crystallisation process, it is crucial to present the perspectives and experiences of research participants in a personalised and nuanced manner. The subsequent criteria for ABR can thus be synthesised as follows in Table 2.

6. Final considerations

Following an in-depth investigation into the axiological, ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations of ABR, it can be concluded that ABR can be regarded as a distinct research paradigm, separate from other established paradigms. These include not only the scientific-positivist model but also those within the broader scope of qualitative research, such as the interpretivist, constructivist, socio-critical, or pragmatic paradigms.

The argument for ABR as a unique paradigm is supported by the nature of the truth it seeks to uncover. Unlike objective truth, or truth that is merely interpreted, constructed, used to expose injustice, or applied to contextual problem-solving, the truth that emerges from an artistic and evocative approach is a created truth. As Patton (2015, pp. 1–15) emphasises, this truth is defined by its qualities of being visceral, palpable, sensual, raw, cognitive, cathartic, lyrical, contextual, awakening, fleeting, universal, and debatable. However, it is important to note that this created truth also incorporates aspects of interpretative, constructed, justice-exposing, and problem-solving truths.

While this study highlights the distinctive features of ABR in comparison to other research paradigms, the debate over whether it constitutes an entirely independent paradigm or falls within the broader qualitative research framework remains open. However, what is unequivocally essential is the recognition that ABR necessitates a delicate balance between technical and artistic dimensions in its design. This balance must be maintained within clearly defined methodological reference points and grounded in rigorous validity criteria to ensure the necessary quality for its effective development and application. The methodological clarity and rigour that characterise this approach will enable ABR to be recognised as a promising approach for advancing human knowledge and progress. The expansive potential of ABR, rooted in imagination and artistic creation, and its evocative power

to heighten awareness of the human condition in the pursuit of change and social justice, position it as a compelling and transformative avenue for contemporary research.

In conclusion, this article has meticulously examined the axiological, ontological, epistemological, and methodological underpinnings of ABR, arguing for its recognition as a distinct research paradigm. ABR's unique approach, which integrates artistic creativity with rigorous inquiry, allows for the construction of knowledge that is not only intellectually robust but also deeply evocative and transformative. By embracing diverse modes of knowing and valuing collaborative, participatory processes, ABR offers a powerful means to explore complex human phenomena and foster social change. While the debate regarding its precise classification within the broader research landscape continues, the imperative for methodological clarity and rigorous evaluation remains paramount. Ultimately, ABR stands as a compelling and promising avenue for expanding the boundaries of human understanding through the profound interplay of art and research.

Bibliographic references

- [1] Barone, T., & Eisner, E. W. (2011). *Arts Based Research*. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452230627>
- [2] Borgdorff, H., Peters, P., & Pinch, T. (Eds.). (2020). *Dialogues between Artistic Research and Science and Technology Studies*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429438875>
- [3] Burns, H. (2022). Imagining Imagination: Towards Cognitive and Metacognitive Models. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 32(2), 515–534. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2022.2059547>
- [4] Camargo-Borges, C. (2025). Creativity and Imagination: Research as World-Making. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (2nd ed., pp. 88–100). The Guilford Press.
- [5] Carless, D., & Douglas, K. (2024). Arts-Based Research and Social Justice in Sport and Leisure. In S. Lawrence et al. (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Sport, Leisure, and Social Justice* (pp. 504–517). Routledge.

- [6] Chilton, G., & Leavy, P. (2020). Arts-Based Research Practice: Merging Social Research and the Creative Arts. In P. Nathan & P. Leavy (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 601–632). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxford-hb/9780190847388.013.27>
- [7] Cole, A., & Knowles, J. G. (2008). Arts Informed Research. In J. G. Knowles & A. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research* (pp. 55–70). Sage.
- [8] Danto, A. C. (2003). *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art*. Open Court Publishing.
- [9] Denzin, N. K. (2025). The Pragmatics of Publishing the Experimental Text. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (2nd ed., pp. 673–688). The Guilford Press.
- [10] Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 1–19). Sage.
- [11] Eça, T. T., Shin, R., & Chappell, K. (2017). “Insurgence”: Activism in Art Education Research and Praxis. In R. Shin (Ed.), *Convergence of Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Global Civic Engagement* (pp. 210–223). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-1665-1.ch012>
- [12] Eisner, E. W. (2008). Art and Knowledge. In J. G. Knowles & A. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research* (pp. 3–12). Sage.
- [13] Fenge, L. (2022). Using Participatory Arts-Based Approaches to Promote Inclusive Research. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of Social Inclusion* (pp. 511–526). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89594-5_26
- [14] Finley, S. (2025). Multimethod Arts-Based Research. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (2nd ed., pp. 477–492). The Guilford Press.
- [15] Goessling, K. P., Wright, D. E., Wager, A. C., & Dewhurst, M. (2021). *Engaging Youth in Critical Arts Pedagogies and Creative Research for Social Justice: Opportunities and Challenges of Arts-Based Work and Research with Young People*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003100072>
- [16] Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1990). *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Sage.
- [17] Hagberg, G. L. (2011). Dewey’s Pragmatic Aesthetics: The Contours of Experience. In A. Malachowski (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Pragmatism* (pp. 272–299). Cambridge University Press.
- [18] Hall, R. (2020). *Mixing Methods in Social Research: Qualitative, Quantitative and Combined Methods*. Sage.
- [19] Hamera, J. (2013). Performance Ethnography. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (pp. 205–232). Sage.
- [20] Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (2000). Participatory Action Research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 567–605). Sage.
- [21] Kincheloe, J. L., & McLaren, P. (2000). Rethinking Critical Theory and Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 279–313). Sage.
- [22] Kirkkopelto, E. (2020). From Quasi-Object to Artistic Components: Science Studies and Artistic Research. In H. Borgdorff et al. (Eds.), *Dialogues between Artistic Research and Science and Technology Studies* (pp. 31–45). Routledge.
- [23] Ladislav, K. (2008). Art History and the Theory of Mind. *Umeni*, 1, 16–28. <https://kramerius.lib.cas.cz/uuid/uuid:e604cbcc-91dd-9777-b889-e665e931302b>
- [24] Latour, B. (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern*. The Guilford Press.
- [25] Leavy, P. (2011). *Essentials of Transdisciplinary Research: Using Problem-Centered Methodologies*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315429137>
- [26] Leavy, P. (2015). *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.
- [27] Leavy, P. (2025a). Criteria for Evaluating Arts-Based Research. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (2nd ed., pp. 575–586). The Guilford Press.
- [28] Leavy, P. (2025b). Introduction to Arts-Based Research. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (2nd ed., pp. 7–21). The Guilford Press.
- [29] Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage.
- [30] Marples, R. (2017). Art, Knowledge and Moral Understanding. *Ethics and Education*, 12(2), 243–258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2017.1323425>
- [31] McNiff, S. (2008). Art-Based Research. In J. G. Knowles & A. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research* (pp. 29–40). Sage.
- [32] McNiff, S. (2011). Artistic Expressions as Primary Modes of Inquiry. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 39(5), 385–396. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2011.621526>
- [33] McNiff, S. (2025). Philosophical and Practice Foundations of Artistic Inquiry: Creating Paradigms, Methods, and Presentations Based in Art. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (2nd ed., pp. 22–36). The Guilford Press.
- [34] Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2019). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods* (4th ed.). Sage.
- [35] Morse, J. M. (2015). Critical Analysis of Strategies for Determining Rigor in Qualitative Inquiry. *Qualitative Health Research*, 25(9), 1212–1222. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26184336/>

- [36] Murphy, P. (2012). *The Collective Imagination: The Creative Spirit of Free Societies*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315614830>
- [37] Neuendorf, K. A. (2017). *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071802878>
- [38] Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. Sage.
- [39] Peräkylä, A. (2011). Validity in Qualitative Research. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative Research* (3rd ed., pp. 447–462). Sage.
- [40] Pretorius, L. (2024). Demystifying Research Paradigms: Navigating Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology in Research. *The Qualitative Report*, 29(10), 2698–2715. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2024.7632>
- [41] Rehman, A. A., & Alharthi, K. (2016). An Introduction to Research Paradigms. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*, 3(8), 51–59. <http://www.ijeionline.com/attachments/article/57/IJEI.Vol.3.No.8.05.pdf>
- [42] Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*. Rutgers University Press.
- [43] Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: A Method of Inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 923–948). Sage.
- [44] Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied Qualitative Research Design*. The Guilford Press.
- [45] Schwandt, T. A. (2000). Three Epistemological Stances for Qualitative Inquiry: Interpretivism, Hermeneutics, and Social Constructionism. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 189–213). Sage.
- [46] Smith, L., & Shannon-Baker, P. (2022). Integrating Art and Artistic Practices in Mixed Methods Research in Education. In R. J. Tierney et al. (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education* (4th ed., pp. 702–710). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.11070-X>
- [47] Springgay, S., Irwin, R. L., & Kind, S. (2024). A/r/tography as Living Inquiry Through Art and Text (2005). *A/r/tography*, 38–52. https://doi.org/10.1386/9781789388688_5
- [48] Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- [49] Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2011). Mixed Methods Research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 285–299). Sage.
- [50] Yilmazlı Trout, I., Gannon, J., & Poth, C. N. (2022). Integrating Arts in a Collaborative Research Process: An Arts-Informed Inquiry. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 15(1), 367–383. <https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v15i1.1085>
- [51] Zittoun, T., & Pedersen, O. C. (2024). Imagination. In F. Darbellay (Ed.), *Elgar Encyclopedia of Interdisciplinarity and Transdisciplinarity* (pp. 250–253). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035317967.ch55>

Bio

Mei-Hsin Chen holds a PhD in Art History from the University of Navarra (Spain). She has undertaken teaching and research roles at Taipei National University of the Arts (Taiwan) and the Faculty of Design at Shih-Chien University (Taiwan). Currently, she is a faculty member at the University of Navarra. Her research interests span a broad spectrum, extending from visual to sonic arts, with particular attention to their connections with interculturality, sustainability, integral ecology, social change, and, more recently, artificial intelligence. She is the author of several articles in scientific journals, books, and book chapters, and has actively participated in national and international conferences within her areas of specialisation. Furthermore, she is a member of various academic associations and networks, both national and international, dedicated to the study of art and aesthetics. Since 2017, she has been a member of the “Aesthetics and Contemporary Art” research group at the University of Navarra.

Artigo recebido em 2025-07-02

Artigo aceite em 2026-01-03

Artigo publicado em 2026-01-13

© 2026 Mei-Hsin Chen

Chen, M.-H. (2026). Arts-Based Research: Paradigms, Methodologies, and the Challenge of Evaluation. *Rotura – Revista de Comunicação, Cultura e Artes*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.34623/2184-8661.2026.v6i1.487>

© This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)