



Research through practice: positioning the practitioner as researcher

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A new conceptualisation of the relationship between practice and research is evolving as individual institutions put forward different examples of research and its relationship to professional and/or academic practice. It seems unlikely that as a discipline group we will reach consensus as to the legitimacy of one approach over another. A more likely process is the development of a debate, in which there is no one right way to do research, but in which the proposing of different interpretations of the practice /research relationship becomes a vital aspect of research culture itself.

This paper evaluates selected examples of doctoral and postdoctoral research currently being developed at Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen, in which practice constitutes a critical part of the research methodology, a form of research through practice. It is shaped both by the academic and cultural /professional context in which the research is placed. Research questions or issues are articulated from the outset, the research is therefore intentional, not assumed; a methodology is identified to address the questions and with analysis, published as an argument which is text and visually based, depending on the nature of the original research questions. Practice and the framing of research questions through practice, forms the experimental basis of the research, in which individuals function as practitioner- researchers. This approach is legible and negotiated with the academic community as well as with sectors of the professions involved in culture, cultural policy, museums, art administration, design management.

The paper will articulate in what way practice through research differs from other current approaches, such as within the context of studio practice in which research is fused with creative development as an assumed and unpublished personal activity. It also differs from a more professionally led approach in which research is "time off" from the pressures of creating product for an audience/client body to focus on the creator's process. This provides a mechanism for developing new fresh avenues, the outcome of which is often text based publication.

Within this co-authored paper the different phases of postdoctoral and doctoral research are represented within a research centre which itself is positioned at a nodal point between academic, cultural and professional contexts. The paper attempts to address the current confusion surrounding different interpretations within both the terminology and practice of research, which arise in different locations and within different funding and support structures.