



The practical implications of applying a theory of practice based research: a case study

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Scrivener (2002) argues that the proper goal of visual arts research is visual art, and that visual arts research should be conceived as being concerned not with original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding, but with original creation undertaken in order to generate novel apprehension thus revising both the activity and goal of research as commonly understood.

In many respects, practice based doctoral programmes can be seen as academic exercises designed to instantiate a theory and practice of the arts (and design) research. Scrivener's notion of creative-production is just one such instantiation. According to Scrivener (2004), the academic exercise is worth pursuing on the basis of a number of assumed values, that:

- there is a positive relation between productive excellence, .i.e., innovative artefact production, and reflective practice;
- reflective practice is a productive mode of personal creative development;
- reflective practice yields practitioners who can give accounts of their work, which, e.g., explicate overarching theory, appreciative system and the norms used to evaluate the unintended and unexpected consequences;
- these accounts are a valuable resource for other practitioners and interested parties: providing, amongst other things, 'examples, images, understandings' (Schön, 1983:138) and strategies for action that other practitioners may employ to extend their own repertoires.
- reflective practice equips practitioners to induct novices into that practice.

If the proposed creative-production programme does not work or cannot be made to work, and if the assumed values described above cannot be demonstrated, then there would be good reasons for thinking that the whole enterprise was misguided. It is therefore important to constantly assess the applicability of theoretical practice based research degree frameworks and the validity of the assumptions that underpin them.

This paper reports on a supervisor and his student's experience of directing and undertaking a creative production doctoral programme, as outlined above. This case is interesting because the student, Chapman, came to the PhD as a mature practitioner and was therefore able to judge with a high degree of confidence the value of the programme to his practice. The paper will describe how this debate has uncovered limitations in the framing of the programme and how it has subsequently been revised to accommodate new understanding, for example, about the relation of "theory" to making and how accounts of making might be communicated. It will also provide evidence in support of the assumed values of this mode of art making.

Scrivener, S.A.R. (2002) "Characterising Creative-production Doctoral Projects in Art and Design." *International Journal of Design Sciences and Technology*, 10:2, pp. 25-44.
Scrivener (2004) "Introduction." In: *The Pool Project, Exhibition Brochure*. Coventry University: Coventry.