

# Methodological challenge in arts and dementia evaluation: A critical perspective on the literature

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# Introduction

- The methodological challenges of conducting a literature review about methodological challenge
- Categories of challenge
- Context and complexity

# Definition : *methodology*

“...the study – the description, the explanation, and the justification – of methods...”

“I believe that the most important contribution methodology can make to science is [...] to help unblock the roads of inquiry.”

Kaplan, A. (1964). *The conduct of inquiry: methodology for behavioural science*. San Francisco, Chandler, p18, p24.



# Definition : *critical*

“Critical social research [...] aims at an analysis of social processes, delving beneath ostensive and dominant conceptual frames, in order to reveal the underlying practices, their historical specificity and structural manifestations.”

Harvey, L. (1990). *Critical social research*, London, Unwin Hyman, p3

“...scientific knowledge and technologies do not evolve in a vacuum. Rather they participate in the social world, being shaped by it, and simultaneously shaping it.”

Law, J (2004). *After method: Mess in social science research*, Oxford, Routledge, p12

# What kind of literature review?

- Little published work specifically on the topic of methodological challenge
- A sense that information was to be found in the 'gaps'
- Potentially important grey literature, including unpublished practice-based evaluations and reflective practice of artist practitioners
- Wide area of focus
- Arts or health paradigm?

# Categories of challenge

## Method and measure

- Design, delivery & implementation of evaluation studies
- Theorisation
- Measuring key concepts

## Communication

- Cognitive (in)capacity
- Perceptions and stigma
- Interpretation and meaning of aesthetic experience

## Ethics

- Formal ethics processes
- Accounting for 'riskiness' of art
- Rights and voices of people with dementia

## Values

- Evaluation choices value-laden and perspectival
- Cultural value and arts engagement
- Economic valuation

## Context

- Capturing and accounting for complexity
- Understanding mechanisms

# What do I mean by context?

“Context includes anything external to the intervention that may act as a barrier or facilitator to its implementation, or its effect” (Moore *et al.* 2015). For example:

- Setting in which arts activity is experienced - physical space, routines and associated practices
- Time
- Cultural, social and relational networks of participants
- Personal and clinical histories, cultural demographics or aesthetic preferences of participants
- Policies, practices and discourse surrounding dementia

...these interact with the artistic, technical and relational practice of the individual arts practitioner.

# Context and complexity

- Effects are frequently measured or observed, but mechanisms (why something has an effect) less well explored or understood
- Simple cause and effect view unlikely to help us understand whether the same effect will be seen another time or in another context
- Is it the arts activity or intervention that is complex, or the context (Hawe *et al.* 2009)?



# How might we better capture and understand complexity?



Olafur Eliasson, *The wave moving on the sea between Greenland and Iceland* 1999.

Source: <http://olafureliasson.net/>

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