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# Dance Inquiry: The Concept and The Process of Practice-Based Research (PBR)

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## Abstract

“Practice-based Research (PBR)” can play an important role in dance studies, which can help locate dance practical outcomes in the center of Humanities Science researches. Of course, the accumulated data evidence is still lacking, but it is the PBR research method that has infinite potential for dance inquiry.

## Abstrak

“Penelitian Berbasis Praktik (PBR)” memiliki peranan yang sangat penting dalam studi tari, dan dapat membantu menemukan hasil praktik tari di pusat penelitian Ilmu Humaniora. Tentu saja tidak sempurna, tetapi metode penelitian berbasis praktik (PBR) memiliki potensi yang sangat besar untuk digunakan dalam penelitian tari.

## 1. Introduction: Concept of Practical-based Research

“Research on Practice” is a form of academic research in which practical elements are combined with research methodology or research results. This is a phenomenon that is revealed when the traditional dichotomous viewpoint between theory and practice and between body and mind is dismantled. This research method to study practical skills crosses multiple academic fields and is expanding into academic practical research methods. In Europe, various terms and concepts --“Practice-based Research,” “Practice-led Research,” “Practice as Research,” “Mixed-mode Research Practice”- are used for research (Biggs & Buchler, 2008, pp. 5-18).

First of all, if creative artistic work contributes to knowledge production, it can be called “Practice-based Research” (PBR). As a representative example, AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) launched practice-based research methods project and was completed in September 2007. The leading researcher of this PBR project said, we should be able to research and analyze the work of the artists in detail and objectively. Although an artist makes a practical dance work very well, s/he cannot gain a degree and become a researcher if s/he does not have any ability to study it. In the end, the AHRC leader emphasized that studying dance is about using any theory for a certain phenomenon of dance, constructing and developing logic, and doing academic writing.

The next is “Practice-led Research” (PLR) that leads a new understanding of the practice itself and develops the knowledge inside the practice. A case in which the research is focused on practical technique is called PLR. This kind of research also suggests new concepts and methodologies in the process of producing original knowledge. This is a study conducted by practitioners such as artists, designers, curators, writers, musicians, and teachers. This research method can be seen to be widely used in various practical fields such as music, screen media, drama, dance and etc. In the PLR writing, the discussion can be sufficiently explained in text format without a created work.

Furthermore, the term “Practice as Research” (PAR) was used to describe a way of bringing out the work of arts-major students, especially from the UK in the early 1990s. Students first contributed creative works and then wrote reflections on their creations. In a PAR, the most important matter is “practical skills” that are the subject of investigation. The basic idea of PAR is that their practical skills become the subject of their own research. In this case, the dance research is based on a subjective first-person experience, unlike the objective and observational research form that analyzes the works of other artists.

**2. Exploring the Process of Practical-based Research**

Basically, PBR does not separate dance practice from research. In the process of creating a dance work, it is necessary to record and study the conception, practice, rehearsal, performance, and subsequent evaluation. In fact, many choreographers feel difficulty when they find ideas, develop movements, and document their practice alone or with others in different ways when practice is something very personal and invisible. However, creation and recording of somatic data – in the entire process, preparation of a practice log, records of exchange of opinions among participants, and video recording of rehearsal scenes – are important primary data in PBR. PBR is a way of thinking about the dance experience and asking various questions about it.

As Fraleigh (1999) emphasized, the research process is both systematic and creative with a balance between planned and unplanned, predictable and accidental. In particular, the PBR research process in dance is composed by combining both objective and subjective methods of the scene where dance takes place and creates. It is not necessarily pre-determined or conducted in a rigid way, but unpredictable individuality and flexibility. Writing about his/her work as a choreographer is not an easy task due to the “uncertainty” that accompanies numerous questions. In some cases, however, this uncertainty is not a hindrance in dance research, but it can be a rich source of imagination and an environment for creative interpretation (Marcalo, 2009). According to Macalo’s argument, it should not be forgotten that everything is related to dancing, and references for PBR should always be rooted in the dancing scene. In my view, the ways in which a choreographer plans and makes dance works and in which researchers plan and conduct research are very similar processes.

PBR is a qualitative research method to acquire knowledge about dance, and it is an inquiry from a first-person perspective. PBR researchers create data by writing about their experiences of dancing. Writing this experience is a very difficult and ambiguous task. This is because, when focusing on improvised expression or the moment of movement, writing is not a work to objectify dance, but a work to evoke a subjective sense. Writing about dancing experiences is an expression of human desires and emotions, and an exchange with the natural world through the body. It is also an understanding and participation in the human world through the body. As Cho (2013) suggested, this participation and understanding are interactively conducted by step-by-step as below:

Table 1. Stages of PBR in Dance

	Practical Process		Writing Process	
Stage 1	Plan, Design	Propositional Knowledge	Writing a research proposal to determine a topic, purpose, and method of the work.	
Stage 2	Creation, Practice	Experiential Knowledge	Occurring physical data through dance experience	Explanatory Knowledge
Stage 3	Performance, Appreciation	Experiential Knowledge	Collecting data through existing studies and audience surveys	Explanatory Knowledge
Stage 4	Analysis, Evaluation	Propositional Knowledge	Analyzing and evaluating the entire process and then writing a manuscript	

As shown in Table 1, “experiential knowledge,” “propositional knowledge,” and “explanatory knowledge” are inter-related for the practical process. Based on this, I will explain how to carry on PBR step by step in following sections.

*2.1. First Stage: Plan and Design*

*2.1.1. Preparation of Practical Skills*

Before starting to create a dance piece, the necessity and purpose of why the work is being done should be clear. In this way, the topic of the dance work and the plan for all stages of the work can be clearly established. Of course, even though the content of the work is clearly defined, the content can go through a process of supplementing, modifying, and changing as much as possible during the practice process. In this process, if movements and feedback are accumulated through “somatic/physical data,” they will become useful data for researching his/her dance work. Somatic/physical data refers to recordings of his/her own consciousness and awakening, which he or she specifically felt while dancing, from the first person's point of view. In PBR, somatic/physical data from a first-person point of view is recognized as the truth without going through the objective verification process required by a third-person point of view.

There are three aspects to the preparation stage. The first stage is to explore on what the content of expectations and aspirations appear when you dance. In other words, it is very important for dance artists to find out how their dance skills are executed, and where their passion for dancing, artistic self-satisfaction, and their intense motivation to dance come from. The second stage is to record in detail what kind of actual practice was carried out. You can learn independently, and your performance can be further improved while recording your dance experience. In the third stage, it is important to see the relationship between practice and research in a cyclical and interrelated way. Because dancers meet the world through practical skills and make their own statements, their existence itself becomes meaningless if dancers are apart from practical skills.

A “self-directed” approach is an important concept in PBR. The self-directed method refers to an artist who autonomously establishes the goal and purpose of practical work in a way that recognizes individual autonomy and becomes the subject of practical work. In the self-directed method, dancers have a high degree of autonomy. Examples of “self-directed” practical skills in dance include Feldenkreis method, and Tamalpa's expressive therapy and improvisation. The key to the self-directed practical method is that the dancer can independently choose a practical strategy. It is because of this autonomy in which dancers form a style and express their individuality through body experiences. The dancer's individual characteristics are also formed when the dance and its execution plan are made by oneself.

### 2.1.2. *Writing a Research Proposal*

After “self-directed” practical skills as a prerequisite for PBR, the next important step in the research process is to write a research proposal. In the initial stage of writing a research proposal, it is necessary to narrow the core of the research to clear and researchable parts (Fraleigh, 1999). The main point of this research process consists of three characteristics in the research proposal. First, a set of research questions should be defined based on the created dance practice. The objective of improving knowledge and understanding in relation to the research questions should be also addressed. Second, the research context related to the research problem or questions should be specified based on the created dance practice. You should specify why the explanation of these particular research questions are important, and what contribution the PBR research has. Lastly, based on the research questions, the research method should set up to answer to these questions. The benefits of possible knowledge and understanding should be also introduced. The rationale of the chosen research method and why it is the most appropriate for answering the research question should be explained.

The function of the PBR research proposal is not to provide a thorough and perfect plan that researchers must follow, but to persuasively research and develop cases learned through practical experience. As mentioned above, PBR begins with an artistic conception and a specific research purpose for the dance work and its process. The research process is a process of back-and-forth movements. In similar vein of a theory-based research, PBR should be described more clearly and in detail in terms of data generation, data collection, thought construction, and seeking a methodology for what the researcher wants to know and how to find it.

## 2.2. *Second & Third Stages: Practice and Performance*

### 2.2.1. *Practice and Performance*

When a researcher, who is an artist, performs a practical technique, it can be said that it is an act similar to creating and collecting data. In other words, the practical practice time performed by PBR researchers is the time to generate data, which is the same as the time used to secure data in other qualitative research. The time to analyze the data generated in this way is the time to execute the research.

From the perspective of PBR, the actual practical skill is a living and vivid experience. Here, the dance experience includes not only what professional dancers accompany in the process of performing, but also any form of learning that is realized through the experience of moving the body even if you are not a dancer. The study on the meaning of dance experience can be said to be an attempt to clarify the dance phenomenon from a subjective standpoint. This search for the meaning of personal experience is similar to the main concept pursued by phenomenology. In PBR research, an important issue is how the aspects and contents of experience are revealed in an original and reflective writing style. In dance research based on practical skills, writing is written according to various viewpoints, but it pursues narratives that appear from vivid experiences (Kim, 2006).

For the performance, specific and practical tasks that can be called “planning and management” are accompanied. The choreographer can work sustainably without overdoing it by establishing a budget that is feasible with actual performance accordingly. It is important to decide where to perform. It can be a performing theater space, or it can be a space anywhere, such as a local cultural space. You also need to decide how much publicity will be advertised. Of course, you can entrust all of these to the agency, but it is important for the choreographer to understand the overall picture. All of these things affect the somatic/physical experience of the dancer.

### 2.2.2. Occurrence of Somatic Data

Thomas Hanna (1928-1990) first coined and used the concept and term “Somatic studies” in 1975. He studied about the body perceived by the first-person effect. Influenced from Hanna, Moses Feldenkrais (1904-1984) applied a theory about “body-mind-environment harmony” (Feldenkrais, 1972, pp. 3-10). In the somatic studies, the body is the body that overcomes dualism. The body is the site of life in which intelligence, emotion, and spirituality are integrated. The somatic studies are conducted from a first-person perspective on what the researcher has learned through actual body experiences. In this way, from a first-person point of view, writing about his/her dance experience each time is called “somatic data.”

The body is the most accurate and precious living memory of the dance art that the media records have missed. The audience's living memory is also very important. This is not a museum that is kept stationary as it is, but it leads to transformation and creation. Therefore, living reproduction is the reproduction that is performed and generates somatic/physical data experienced by a performer and his/her body.

The human body is a repository of living history, and the performer's body is a repository of past histories and roles. The “body” maintains, reproduces and compares those memories, and stores those memories in the context of the past and present. Eddy (2009) found that the common characteristics between the development of modern dance and somatic education in the early 20th century were “body-mind-related functions and cognition,” “organic movement and body learning,” and “self-improvement and subjectivity.” The body-subject can be sensed through the dancer in a dance. In other words, the dancer does not reflect the action of integrating the self and the body in their dance, but when they are living in the present dancing moment, the body-subject can be sensed, and the dancer's entire experience determines the dance. Such somatic/physical data are a very important research foundation in PBR. Up until now, dancers have not had their own voice, and only spoken themselves via critics and scholars. In this respect, somatic/physical data is not only used as research material, but also leads dancers to make their own statements and reflect on themselves to become the subject of their artistic activities.

## 3. Analysis and Evaluation

Analyzing and evaluating the entire process from conception to practice and performance in dance research is not a simple matter. However, it can be based on the followings: First, it is to check whether social and cultural meanings are formed through vivid experiences of concrete bodies. Second, PBR should evaluate whether individual and group dance practices are consistent with the knowledge formed based on them. In other words, it is necessary to check and evaluate the consistency of the actual performance and the analyzed contents. It is necessary to evaluate whether the characteristics of practical skills are revealed through research, and whether the research is a study that accurately reflects the practical skills. Third, the dancing body, as an active subject, creates meaning by itself based on its own movements and life, and it must be able to evaluate its objectivity and validity by itself.

Therefore, “Practice-based Research” can play an important role in dance studies, which can help locate dance practical outcomes in the center of Humanities Science researches. Of course, the accumulated data evidence is still lacking, but it is the PBR research method that has infinite potential for dance inquiry.

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