

## ***The learning experience through art-based research: Opportunities for a critical understanding of learning research***

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### **Abstract**

“Art, then, is an increase of life, a sort of competition of surprises that stimulates our consciousness and keeps it from becoming somnolent” (Bachelard, 2014, p. 17). This quote leads to wondering, just as ‘boring’ lectures are Morpheus’ playground for tired students, are we decreasing life from the study of learning as well? Research not only needs to be detailed, thorough – or ‘close-up’ – to comprehend wicked issues like learning experiences, but also needs to bring back life into it, increase it.

The actual learning experiences and processes have a richness that dwells from a complex understanding of them, for example, considering the emotional and affective aspects as well as the cognitive, reflective, amongst others, or by understanding learning experiences as dialogic mediated productions. This complexity and dynamism that is also usually found on the messiness of educational research arguably gets diluted into clarity by research methods, thus prompting alternative ways of conducting research that not only acknowledges it, but that it actively fosters said characteristics.

Working with Bruce Macfarlane’s think piece, doing research about learning experiences in a careless way could make the researcher encounter some issues with positionality, outsiderism, ‘thin descriptions’ or even leaving unintendedly the participants out of the research project by turning dialogue into a monologue. One possible solution argued in this paper is conducting research through art-based research.

Art-based research is not about taking art as a mindless technique within the research procedure but means to convey a certain epistemology that understands knowledge production as relational, dialogical, and processual. Thus, with it, the research endeavour is twisted rhetorically by granting a new place of scientific, valid, and systematic knowledge to the artfully produced data, while properly constructed and open-ended in its meaning and interpretation.

Thus, the opportunities with art-based research are at least twofold: from an epistemological standpoint, art lays the foundations for new perspectives on doing research of/from learning experiences and from a conceptual standpoint, art itself could be thought of as an experience. Here, the case of art-based research can be explained as the possibility of study a learning experience as an experience thought art. It is in that specific sense that some opportunities for a critical understanding of learning research arise: to study learning experiences as an experience, the researcher must device/produce an experience. Research for these purposes should be done as art, following John Dewey’s (1980) understanding of art as an experience.

### **Keywords**

Art-based research, learning, experience, epistemology, close-up research.