



## “The Art(ist) is present”: Arts-based research perspective in educational research

Monica Pentassuglia

*Cogent Education* (2017), 4: 1301011



Received: 26 September 2016  
Accepted: 25 February 2017

\*Corresponding author: Monica Pentassuglia, Department of Humanities, University of Verona, Verona, Italy  
E-mail: [monica.pentassuglia@univr.it](mailto:monica.pentassuglia@univr.it)

Reviewing editor:  
Mark Boylan, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

Additional information is available at the end of the article

## TEACHER EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT | REVIEW ARTICLE

# “The Art(ist) is present”: Arts-based research perspective in educational research

Monica Pentassuglia<sup>1\*</sup>

**Abstract:** A growing interest in the concept of practice within workplace settings has been seen in the last two decades in a variety of fields. Although some authors highlighted the importance of this type of research, there is still a poor scientific understanding of this process. The first serious discussion and analysis of the construction of knowledge emerged during the 1900s. In the field of humanities, questions have been asked regarding the use of traditional research paradigms in terms of its limitation of understanding complex subjects. In line with this perspective, the current article provides an opportunity to advance the understanding of new research paths. Specifically, after an overview on the traditional research paradigms, particular references are devoted to the Arts-Based Research (ABR) approach and to the use of arts within the research processes. Then, this contribution provides a deep exploration of dance-based methods for educational research. As a transdisciplinary approach, the ABR can be used in different fields. For this reason, the current article tries to provide insights about the use of dance-based methods in the educational context. An in-depth literature review will highlight the issues linked to the use of dance in research paths highlights different connotations of it within the research process. The author identified and explored three main uses of dance in academic field.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Monica Pentassuglia (University of Verona, Department of Humanities) is due for completion of PhD in Humanities (PhD School in Arts and Humanities) in December 2016.

The thesis is on the use of Arts-Based Research (ABR) in the field of Teaching and Teacher Education. Her PhD focuses on several ABR issues including: the study of the body in professional practice; embodied ways of knowing in professional contexts; and the use of ABR and dance-based methods in educational research.

Her methodology uses Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and the Labanotation coding system developed by Rudolf Laban in Educational Research.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

New methodological approaches were explored in a scenario of evolution (and re-volution) of the epistemology of educational and social research. Educational research needs to be developed with new approaches that can in one hand open new points of view on the practice and on teaching-learning process; on the other hand, practitioners and all people involved should be able to understand the research findings that are often summarised in scientific papers which do not have a direct impact on the community. For this reason, this paper aims to explore a methodological approach that, within the 1970s and the 1990s, imposes itself in the social and educational context: the ABR.

The ABR could be considered as a new and further paradigm in which new forms and research methods appear. These methods use the evocative force of aesthetics in order to reject and refuse the modern dualism of art-science.

**Subjects: Educational Research; Research Methods in Education; Dance**

**Keywords: arts-based research; dance-based methods; educational research; methodology**

The function of the artist in a disturbed society is to give awareness of the universe, to ask the right questions, and to elevate the mind. (Marina Abramovic)

### 1. Warm-up: Defining the arts-based research

During the last century, the research process as a cognitive process rather than a mere procedure aimed to verify hypothesis was developed. This represents an important turning point for scientific research: the qualitative paradigm begins to be accepted by many researchers in contrast with the positivist view of reality. On the one hand, the positivist paradigm considers the understanding of phenomena that appears to be measurable, tangible and observable; on the other, the qualitative approach focuses on the common qualities of phenomena in order to achieve a deeper and contextualised understanding of them. As a consequence, new methodological approaches have been explored. For this reason, the current paper aims to explore a specific methodological approach that imposed itself during the 1970s and 1990s in the social and educational context: ABR.

The use of terms such as “art” and “artistic” in academic research can be traced back to 1914 and the 1940s. For example, Swiss psychologist Carl Jung suggested *art imagery as inquiry* (Chilton & Leavy, 2014); in 1940, American philosopher Theodore M. Green used the term *artistic inquiry* in order to state artists’ involvement in the research process. Successively, during the second half of the twentieth century, the idea of “art-as-research” began to be scientifically defined with the rejection of dualism and positivistic conceptions of truth and science. This shift made way for the expansion of what could be considered acceptable within academic research (Leavy, 2009; Sullivan, 2010). In 1975, Elliot Eisner introduced the term *arts-based education research* (ABER). He has been one of the most important supporters of the application of art inside research processes. However, Shawn McNiff punctually defined *arts-based research* (ABR) as it is known today. In his definition, ABR included all practices that use artistic processes as a way of investigation and knowing (1998; 2011). Greenwood (2012) argued that practices based on the ABR approach respond to the need to both bring out and share understandings and phenomena that are difficult to read properly through traditional approaches.

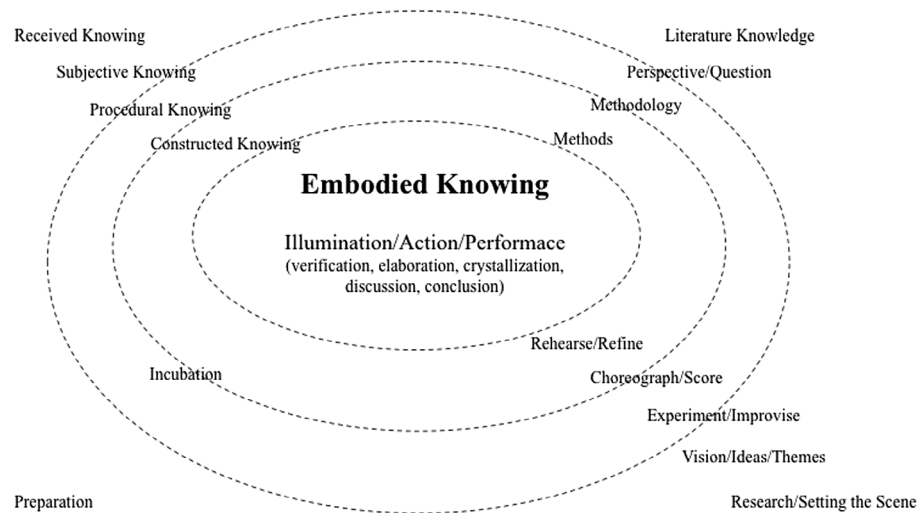
In this scenario of evolution (and re-evolution) of the epistemology of educational and social research, ABR can be considered as a new paradigm where new forms and research methods appear. These methods employ the evocative force of aesthetics in order to reject and refuse the modern dualism of art-science (Eisner, 1981; McNiff, 1998). Consequently, in recent years, ABR has been recognised as a legitimate and useful methodological approach especially in education field (Greenwood, 2012).

The impact of this recognition was that knowledge is considered not only as a matter of mind, but something embedded and incorporated. In this regard, Barbour suggested *embodied ways of knowing* (2011) in order to highlight the importance of a “total” involvement of the researcher over the setting that she/he wants to understand, but also in the wider research process. Knowledge is not something out of our world or divided by inner life; it represents a close relationship between body (with its perceptions, sensations and reactions) and material world. K. Barbour also highlights the embedded nature of ways of knowing. She described an embedded knowledge, created and constructed by experience and by what we learn from others.

Figure 1 represents the distinction that K. Barbour suggests between three processes: the construction of knowledge; the research process; and the choreographic process. This kind of comparison becomes an interaction in terms of *embodied ways of knowing* as a new epistemological strategy linked to the change of different and innovative ways of knowing and research. From this perspective, studies on experience and its role in the learning process are considered to be quite

**Figure 1. Embodied engagement in arts research.**

Source: Barbour (2011, p. 96).



fundamental; for example, Kolb and Fry’s model of experiential learning (1975) is considered to be one of the most important frameworks. The researcher’s body engagement and awareness entail new questions about how we can develop, in a new and creative way, a research process based on an embedded construction of knowledge. The model of experiential learning places the concrete experience (or the artistic practice) inside a continuous cycle of reflection. This process highlights the importance of a reflection on experience, followed by an appreciation of it and identifies a further action plan of a new practice (Barbour, 2011).

The methodological approach that emerges uses the potential of Art in order to reach a deep understanding of phenomena. ABR can be defined as an effort to go beyond restrictions that limit communication in order to express meanings that otherwise could be unintelligible (Barone & Eisner, 2012). From a methodological perspective, ABR could be understood as a systematic use of processes and artistic expressions as a main way to understand and analyse experience not only from the point of view of the researcher, but also from stakeholders’ perspective (McNiff, 2007): “Artists have the potential to significantly contribute to the generation of new understanding, not only of artistic practice, but also to knowledge and to society in general” (Barbour, 2011, p. 86).

ABR practices support research processes helping researchers to access and represent several points of view that otherwise are generally overlooked by traditional research methods (Leavy, 2009). The legitimization of artistic practices passes through the research of meaning that allows the creation of a connection among new research methodologies in order to increase the regard to experiential and innovative ways of knowing. The acquisition of *multiple meanings*; this means to reach a wider and more complete vision of reality that not only opens up to new questions and ways of knowing, but further allows a new kind of communication with stakeholders and all actors involved in the research process.

In Education *a/r/tography* is defined as “a hybrid form of practice-based research within education and the arts” (Gouzouasis, Irwin, Miles, & Gordon, 2013, p. 2) and it is used as a research approach due to its ability to focus and concentrate the efforts on corporeal, unsaid and sensible experiences of artist/researcher/teachers’ lives (Springgay & Irwin, 2005). With particular reference to the field of teacher education, these types of approaches use the meaningful experiences of these three actors (artist, researcher and teacher) as the main way to improve embedded ways of knowing in professional contexts.

The success of ABR entails several implications and many forms of Art are involved in these research paths. Five of them could be considered the most widely used methods.

- *Narrative inquiry or narrative method*: based on the ethnographic method and on qualitative interviews, narrative inquiry could be defined as a participative and collaborative method that involves participants' life in a process aimed to highlight multidimensional meanings linked to the phenomena investigated. Data gathered are analysed through *narrative analysis* with the aim to provide evidence from the experience described (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Kim, 2006). Fiction is widely used as a form of representation of research paths and findings (Banks, 2008; Berger, 1977).
- *Poetry Research*: the use of poetry as a form of data representation and research method appears following the need to find new ways to represent research findings that can go beyond boundaries of qualitative paradigm (Brady, 2004; Denzin, 1997; Furman, 2006; Hartnett, 2003; Hirshfield, 1997; Langer & Furman, 2004).
- *Music Research*: music as a model to support qualitative research (Bresler, 2005; Casey, 1992; Jenoure, 2002; Morrison, 1992) during recent years was identified as a key instrument to interpret and study social reality not only through the metaphor of music, but also as an instrument for data analysis.
- *Performance Studies*: in this perspective theatre, becomes a research process, an instrument for data collection and a form of data representation (Finley, 1998; Frisch, 1990; Saldaña, 1999, 2003, 2005; Thorp, 2003).

These expressions explain how Art is not merely considered as a mediator for learning processes, but it becomes something else, something more complex.

As part of a wider research project linked to my doctoral research, this article concentrates the discussion on a literature review about ABR methodological approaches. Specifically, as researcher and as dancer, the author improved a specific practice within ABR approaches: dance-based methods.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Evolving perspectives: Dance-based methods

Unlike other forms of art, dance is contemporaneously musical, performative, visual, autobiographic and narrative. The term (as well as its meanings) is often linked to the term "choreography" that allows a different articulation of this form of art. Generally, the term choreography refers to a structured movement, not necessarily a human one. It is often the case that choreography is used in contrast with improvised and instinctive elements of a performance. Dance and choreography can be considered as a reflection of cultural values, as well as a production of them (Eliot, 2007). Novack (1990) and other authors such as Martin (1996), Franko (2002) and DeFrantz (2004), have firmly challenged the idea according to which choreography works only through aesthetic, divided from social and political experiences (Foster, 2011). The Oxford English Dictionary's definition of choreography, reports two meanings of this term:

- *The art of dancing;*
- *The art of writing dances on paper.*

From an etymological perspective, choreography derives from the Greek term *choreia*, and it has two meanings: a set of dance, rhythm and vocal harmony expressed in Greek chorus; and the writing of movements. However, the first use of the term was woven to two Greek roots: *orches* (the space between the scene and the audience where the chorus performs) and *chora* (a general notion related to space and sometimes used with reference to countryside and regions). It is following this second meaning of the term that choreography, within sixteenth and seventeenth century, was often used to indicate the process of mapping regional area. In eighteenth-century *choreography*, understood as the art of dance notation, becomes the essential base through which the creation, the performance and the learning of dance take place. Having been forgotten during the nineteenth century, the term reappeared with a new attention during the last century with a general meaning connected to the individual expression performed through body movement.



Today the term choreography has a wider meaning and it refers to the construction of movement in many settings that have in common an intentional and regulated movement. “In the last year I have seen the word ‘choreography’ used in our local newspaper, The Los Angeles Times, to describe troop movements in the war in Iraq, the motions of dog whisperer Cesar Milar, the management of discussion at board meetings, and even the coordination of traffic lights for commuter flow – all their applications of the term in addition to the patterning of movement observed in a dance” (Foster, 2011, p. 15).

The fundamental process of translation of body movements into words and symbols becomes an important topic also beyond artistic settings.<sup>2</sup> Dance is no longer considered only as an artistic discipline; it has assumed a deeper meaning, as a mirror of something that cannot be understood through other points of view. Greenwood (2012) identified two uses of ABR in the research project. On the one hand, arts can be considered as tools to study, collect data, analyse and represent findings; on the other hand, the research process is an investigation of art works in order to deeply understand and describe them. This article will focus on the first approach. Art becomes a posture, a lens and an instrument through which it can be possible to study phenomena thanks to different perspectives and sensibilities.

Literature review on issues linked to the use of dance in research paths highlights different connotations of it within the research process. The author identified three main uses of dance in academic field; dance could be seen as:

- (1) A lens and *habitus* to observe the reality;
- (2) A research method and instrument for data collection;
- (3) An “alternative” form of data representation.

These previous perspectives represent the three “souls” that Art (in this case dance) could have. As a posture and habitus, as a method and instrument, and as a data representation; thus, dance becomes, in the ABR methodological perspective, a support and a new way for the researcher’s purposes. In fact, these connotations could be interpreted and understood as different uses of dance in a wider research path.

### **2.1. Observing reality: Dance as lens and habitus**

The consideration of dance as an interpretative category of the world implies a special attention to its main “instrument”: the body. On the one hand, the body becomes a reflection of meanings both hidden and few recognisable (Laban & Ullmann, 2011), on the other hand, it is concerned with the awareness of its meanings and how it can become a crucial aspect of the acquisition, for researcher itself, of a habitus and a posture that allow a better understanding of the phenomena.

Starting from the studies of Foucault (1976), the body is set at the centre of studies on society (Bordo, 1993). Hence, the attention is focused on what is defined as an *inscriptive body*: that is to say, a place where social meanings are created and remained. Specifically, it is within the concept of *lived body* (Grosz, 1994) that the connection with the research process becomes evident. This concept is closely related to the experiential knowledge of individuals. “The body is not viewed as an object but rather as the ‘condition and context’ through which social actors have relations to objects and through which they give and receive information” (Grosz, 1994, p. 86).

Stinson (1995) considers the body as a microcosm of the world and a way to achieve a deep understanding of its meaning; from the perspective of phenomenological approaches to the study of knowledge construction, she suggests that the body could be considered as a container of memory and experience. For this reason, an individual’s knowledge can be revealed through it in unexpected ways. A focus on bodily dimension becomes more meaningful if we consider the social and relational plane where bodies act. Here, the role of the researcher acquires a new light that allows observing

various meanings closely connected to her/his presence (physical as well as mental) within this context. In the artistic field, numerous studies are related to the relational nature of knowledge that occurs through body meanings. During the first years of twentieth century, J. Martin highlights the presence of a strong relationship between the dancer on the stage and the audience, and a fundamental connection between movement and emotion. Again, during the first decades of 21st Century neurophysiologists confirmed this idea and they recognised an intrinsic connection between the dancer and the audience based on the discovery of mirror neurons (Foster, 2011). These studies proved that at the cerebral level the same zones are activated both when observing an action or perform an action. Then the relationship entails sharing not only spaces, but also emotional conditions resulted by somatic reactions connected to what the individual observes. These assumptions could influence the development of educational practices and research paths. In 2000, following the revolution paradigm of homunculus<sup>3</sup> by W. Panfield, questions shifted from the anatomical level (related to the awareness of all the parts of the body) to one that refers to the sensibility and the attention on what it could mean a gesture, an action and a movement that is necessarily in relation with the world that it tries to change.

These implications allow several reflections in the field of educational research. Let us consider their importance, for example, of the role of the researcher within the research setting, or further (as highlighted in the next section) of the different forms of representation and communication of research findings.

## 2.2. Dance as research method

Although the literature is plentiful of studies on dance as principal source of cultural meanings (and then as the object of the research) (Cohen, 2000; Eliot, 2007; Fairfax, 2003), only in the last 20 years, dance has begun to be considered as a method and an instrument to acquire knowledge. Particularly, it is in the field of qualitative research that it was largely used.

ABR is considered as a creatively grounded research path. For this reason, in relation to *dance-based methods*, currently there are no protocols to establish a priori the entire path to be followed. Based on her/his own competence the research/artist has the responsibility to choose the right key to use dance at the service of the research aims. In order to provide some clear examples, the author summarised some key studies inside boxes 1, 2 and 3. These studies used dance as a method for data collection; they represent only a few examples within the great set of ways in which dance could be used in the research process, but the author considers those as representative of very different ways of using dance as a method.

The first box briefly explores how dance instruments can be used inside the research path. This particular example shows how dance can contribute improving research path with innovative and different methods. In this case the Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) was used in order to explore dance movements. R. Laban (Laban & Ullmann, 2011), one of the most influent theorists of movement, developed a theory of movement and a coding system (Kinetography Laban, better known as Labanotation) for the analysis of human movement. Although his work has been employed predominantly in the dance field (especially to code and analyse ballet choreography), the Labanotation coding system and his theory of movement have been increasingly adopted in the other contexts of academic research.

### Box 1

Freedman (1991) explored Romanian couple dances in order to study gender relations and meanings. Her innovative aspect consists in the use of Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) as research method for a systematic study of movement that allowed her to develop a second research aim: a kinaesthetic analysis for the study of movement as *way of knowing* (Barbour, 2011; Sklar, 2000). Based on the first step of data collection through videotaping, Freedman created a list of indicators “effort/shape”. She then separated the videos in five seconds intervals for a further analysis. At the end of the research path, she defined cultural profiles on the base of patterns found.

Box 2 explores a different example of dance as method; in this case corporeal activities are used to understand their effectiveness compared to multimedial ones.

Although Beck, Martinez and Lires's studies do not explore correlations deeply, what is important for the aim of this article is to see how the Art, once and again, can be used as source of transversal interpretative skills indicators useful for data collection.

Even if knowledge in dance domain has been mostly considered as emotional, irrational and practical it has been marginalised as something not really linked to social and cultural meaning (Gehm & Husemann, 2007). For this reason, Box 2 provides important insights for the understanding of dance as something social and cultural defined and, then, as a meaningful source itself.

#### Box 2

A second example of the use of dance as an instrument for data collection is represented by the study of Beck, Martinez, and Lires (1999) on the analysis of interpretative skills for multimodal and multicultural texts. The study aimed to identify what between interactive media and direct experiences of dance more influences individuals' interpretative skills.

During a preliminary step of the study, two experts were observed: the first one was a historian and the second one was a composer. Researchers asked them to interpret an Aztec dance called Concheras. Thanks to their work, the researchers found four interpretative skills that are further used as indicators for the observation of subjects involved in the research. The sample of 60 participants was divided into two groups: the first one was considered the control group and the second one was considered the experimental group. Group 1 learned the dance Chocheras only with dance lessons. Group 2 learned it through dance lessons, but they also saw a video of a performance using a 90 min interactive CD-ROM. As a result, authors observed that the experimental group obtained higher scores in the test on interpretative skills.

The third box represents another example of how dance, as a physical and corporeal activity, can be considered as a specific way of knowing. In this case, Snowber emphasises the role of movement in improving auto-reflection processes. In her latest book "Embodied Inquiry: Writing, Living and Being through the Body" (2016) described as "poetic and visceral language", she explores the role of body as a place of inquiry, learning, understanding and perceiving. Her inspirational writing guides the reader in the exploration of ways through which it can be possible to connect with inner life of our body and its meanings.

#### Box 3

Snowber's study (2002) aimed to observe the connection between autobiographic narration and dance. Specifically, the author argued that improvised dance could be used to open up dialogues as it can reveal multiple meanings and dimensions of inner world: "there are kinds of data that our bodies experience before our minds" (Foster, 2011, p. 188). Dance and movement are then considered as a meaningful experience to develop self-awareness as well as to explore inner world. "The process of improvisation and creation in all the arts is an embodied ritual which leads us into not-knowing, and ultimately into knowing" (Snowber, 2002, p. 28).

These studies, even if briefly outlined, serve as meaningful examples of how Art can be used within the research process as a support to lecturers. Although these boxes represent only three examples that the author selected based on her literature review, the aim of this discussion was to show the ways through which dance can actively contribute to different and innovative research paths providing new point of views on phenomena.



These kinds of research processes are closely related to the sensibility of the researcher. Mainly in the American context, these approaches widely affirmed their importance in favour of an “alliance” able to highlight the complexity of social and cultural phenomena.

### **2.3. Representation of data through dance performance**

The use of dance as a form of data representation is still less known in the academic field compared with other arts, as explained above. The real difficulty is the multiplicity of meanings that the body has; the researcher is required to pay attention to all of them (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2002). “Researchers must be very careful to use movements that convey only a range of meanings that are appropriate to the theme of which he or she is communicating dimensions” (Foster, 2011, p. 191).

A further step in the scientific field will be the development of the practice of representing findings through ways and method that go beyond the traditional texts. This process takes place as a “parallel” research path and it becomes essential if we think about the importance to be clear and effective in the return of research findings.

An inspirational example can be located in international studies, which is Bagley and Cancienne’s (2002) research with the title *Dancing the Data*. Authors combined their scientific competence (C. Bagley) with artistic ones (M.B. Cancienne) with the aim to represent in a choreographic performance the research findings. The project took place in an educational context with the aim to explore the influence that the choice of school has on families who have children with special needs. What is relevant to the aim of this paper is the interesting construction of the final performance that M.B. Cancienne describes carefully.

After a first preliminary step for the familiarisation with the educative context in which the research took place, M.B. Cancienne narrates her choreographic work highlighting some key steps:

- A deep study of data (primarily interviews) and constant comparison with her colleague for a better understanding of the entire research process;
- Choice of “objects” to be represented in the performance and what style is better than another;
- Revisit data collected in order to find recurring topics that could be more representative than other;
- Performance construction;
- Presentation of the *performance* to a “chosen” audience (colleagues and students) in order to discuss about the effectiveness of it and to collect *feedback*;
- Modification and creation of final performance.

As result the performance involves two actors in: on one side the researcher with his voice, on the other side the artist with her movements who attempts to perform the imagines derived from the data collected (participants’ voice). This process reflects the creative process showed above in relation with the research process and the process of knowledge construction (Figure 1).

Although the great impact of this kind of works, still less are studies which adopt, at an international level, these research protocols with the aim to represent research findings “artistically” (Mienczakowski, Smith, & Morgan, 2002; Rogers, Frellick, & Bebinski, 2002).

The study, the choice of data, the reflection of the results, the research of the “better way” to represent findings, the “assembly” of a coherent and clear story, the “test” of the performance for the collection of feedback, are only some of the steps that the artist/researcher must consider in order to create an artistic performance anchored to data and functional for an effective divulgation (especially in the stakeholders community) of research results. The choreographic process becomes

a real research path: “The approach of integrating the choreographic process as central to research begins to shift the perception that we have bodies to the reality that we are bodies. [...] The knowledge intrinsic to the choreographic process can contribute to the larger paradigm of how research becomes a continued place of discovery, one that includes a physical apprehension and expression of the world” (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003, p. 239).

Ottoboni’s paper (2014) is an illustrative and evocative example of a deep understanding of the choreographic process, (of *decomposition, composition, transformation*); in fact, the contemporary dance performance *Naveneva*,<sup>4</sup> is carefully described from the basic idea, through the research process (real work of study and reflection), and the creation of final performance.

These experiences could help the reader to understand this kind of research that is able to integrate the traditional research path, which often ends with the creation of a research report or an academic paper. This is a very important aspect of the separation still present between the world of scientific research and the practitioners who can rarely access the scientific texts of research findings.

Works such as Picasso’s *Guernica* and Brecht’s *Mother Courage* are notable examples of how art-based reports of investigation are used to provoke public awareness, shifts in understanding and catalysts for action.

Such considerations bring to light how Art, once again, is transformed into a precious “ally” able to embellish the research process and to put together the world of scientific research and society.

### 3. Conclusions

In light of the recent innovations and changes in educational and social fields, I argued that there is a need to develop methodological approaches as well as their epistemological bases. The contribution showed the perspective of ABR and, specifically, dance-based methods as a valid alternative for a development of traditional research paradigms (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003; Leavy, 2009). Three different connotations that dance can assume within a research path were identified. These connotations have been highlighted to understand their support for the researcher/artist in order to improve one or more aspects of her/his work (from instruments used to data representation). The paragraph 2.1 explored the use of dance as lens and habitus. In this perspective the practice of a/r/tography can deeply contribute to evolve educational research thanks to the analysis of meaningful experiences of actors considered as artists/researchers/teachers. Conversely, the connotation of dance as method (Par. 2.2) highlighted the interdisciplinary nature of dance methods and instruments. Studies explored this use in different fields; for example, research works in education that used teachers’ movement analysis are providing a different point of view on teachers’ professional work and teaching styles (working papers). Finally, Par. 2.3 explored the use of dance as data representation. Representing data through dance and performance can contribute to a wider dissemination of research findings. In fact, scientific reports can be difficult to understand for teachers and stakeholders; dance can effectively represent data through a universal language.

As explained, within human sciences, research exploring knowledge construction has become more complex due to the nature of the object under investigation. Most of traditional approaches fail to explore some aspects of this object in an adequate capacity and an interdisciplinary perspective is becoming a preferred way to understand the complexity of social phenomena. Lincoln and Guba (1985) affirm that “the arts-based domain privileges hybrid empirical, interpretive and naturalistic theory-building practices” (Lang, 2013, p. 5).

In recent years, with the aid of instruments, methods, perceptions and points of view from the field of Art, research in human sciences has proven that an interdisciplinary approach could help with the knowledge acquisition process. This line of research is not limited to investigate a single point of view: instead, it is able to investigate aspects often overlooked and hidden.

As suggested by the title “Art(ist) is present” (inspired by a well-known and brilliant performance by Marina Abramovic) both artists and the Art in general can significantly contribute in advancing the knowledge in educational context thanks to new and innovative research paths. At the present time, the challenge is to go beyond stereotypes that consider Art and the ABR as a less scientific and unreliable approach to research. Furthermore, continuous efforts are needed to develop paradigms of references that, especially in educational and social research, could contribute to deep understanding social, educational and cultural phenomena.

#### Acknowledgments

I thank the referees for their constructive feedback and comments. I am also grateful to Philippa McDonald (University of Sunderland) for her revision of the present manuscript.

#### Funding

The author received no direct funding for this research.

#### Author details

Monica Pentassuglia<sup>1</sup>  
E-mail: [monica.pentassuglia@univr.it](mailto:monica.pentassuglia@univr.it)

<sup>1</sup> Department of Humanities, University of Verona, Verona, Italy.

#### Citation information

Cite this article as: “The Art(ist) is present”: Arts-based research perspective in educational research, Monica Pentassuglia, *Cogent Education* (2017), 4: 1301011.

#### Notes

1. This approach has been used to explore teaching practice of secondary school teachers (working papers).
2. Several are the attempts to codify human movements: Feuillet’s system; Arbeau’s narrative; Tournefort’s taxonomy; Eshkol-Wachman system; Benesh Notation; Labanotation (Foster, 2011).
3. The homunculus is the representation, in the cerebral cortex, of the motor and sensitive systems concern of all parts of body. His parts have a different size that depends on the sophistication and the sensibility of movements.
4. Interpreted and conceived by Silvia Bertoncelli, Chiara Guglielmi and Paolo Ottoboni – direction of Silvia Bertoncelli.

#### Cover image

Source: Claudio Maellaro, an independent drawer.

#### References

- Bagley, C., & Cancienne, M. B. (2002). *Dancing the data*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Banks, S. (2008). Writing as theory: In defense of fiction. In J. G. Knowles & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research* (pp. 155–164). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Barbour, K. (2011). *Dancing across the page*. Chicago: Intellect Ltd, The University of Chicago.
- Barone, T., & Eisner, E. W. (2012). *Arts based research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Routledge.
- Beck, R. J., Martinez, M. E., & Lires, V. (1999). The application of an expert model of interpretive skill to a multicultural-multimedia system on ethnic dance. *Studies in Art Education*, 40, 162–179. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1320339>
- Berger, M. (1977). *Real and imagined worlds: The novel and social science*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674418998>
- Blumenfeld-Jones, D. S. (2002). If I could have said it, I would have. In C. Bagley & M. B. Cancienne (Eds.), *Dancing the data* (pp. 90–104). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Bordo, S. (1993). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, western culture, and the body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Brady, I. (2004). In defense of the sensual: Meaning construction in ethnography and poetics. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10, 622–644. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077800404265719>
- Bresler, L. (2005). What musicianship can teach educational research. *Music Education Research*, 7, 169–183. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14613800500169399>
- Cancienne, M. B., & Snowber, C. N. (2003). Writing rhythm: Movement as method. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9, 237–253. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077800402250956>
- Casey, D. E. (1992). Descriptive research: Techniques and procedures. In R. Colwell (Ed.), *Handbook of music and teaching and learning* (pp. 115–123). New York, NY: Schirmer Books.
- Chilton, G. & Leavy, P. (2014). Arts-based research practice: Merging social research and the creative arts. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 403–422). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 35–76). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/978145226552>
- Cohen, S. R. (2000). *Art, dance, and the body in french culture of the ancien régime*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- DeFrantz, T. (2004). *Dancing revelations: Alvin Ailey’s embodiment of african american culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (1997). *Interpretive ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21st century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452243672>
- Eisner, E. (1981). On the differences between scientific and artistic approaches to qualitative research. *Educational Researcher*, 10, 5–9.
- Eliot, K. (2007). *Dancing lives*. IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Fairfax, E. (2003). *The styles of eighteen-century ballet*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Finley, S. (1998). *Traveling through the cracks: Homeless youth speak out*. Paper performed at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, San Diego, CA.
- Foster, S. L. (2011). *Choreographing empathy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1976). *The history of sexuality*. Vol. 1: An introduction. London: Penguin.
- Franko, M. (2002). *The work of dance: Labor, movement, and identity in the 1930s*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Freedman, D. C. (1991). Gender signs: An effort/shape analysis of Romanian couple dances. *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 33, 335–345.
- Frisch, M. (1990). *A shared authority: Essay on the craft and meaning of oral and public history*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Furman, R. (2006). Poetic forms and structures in qualitative health research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16, 560–566. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1049732306286819>
- Gehm, S., & Husemann, P. (2007). *Knowledge in motion: Perspectives of artistic and scientific research in dance*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14361/9783839408094>

- Gouzouasis, P., Irwin, R. L., Miles, E., & Gordon, A. (2013). Commitments to a community of artistic inquiry: Becoming pedagogical through a/r/tography in teacher education. *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 14, 2–23.
- Greenwood, J. (2012). Arts-based research: Weaving magic and meaning. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 13 (Interlude 1). Retrieved 2014 from <http://www.jjea.org/v13i1/>
- Grosz, E. (1994). *Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hartnett, S. J. (2003). *Incarceration nation: Investigative prison poems of hope and terror*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Hirshfield, J. (1997). *Nine gates: Entering the mind of poetry*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Jenoure, T. (2002). Sweeping the temple: A performance collage. In C. Bagley & M. B. Cancienne (Eds.), *Dancing the data* (pp. 73–89). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Kim, J. (2006). For whom the school bell tolls: Conflicting voices inside an alternative high school. *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 7(6), 1–19.
- Kolb, D. A., & Fry, R. (1975). Toward an applied theory of experiential learning. In C. Cooper (Ed.), *Theories of Group Process* (pp. 33–57). London: John Wiley.
- Laban, R., & Ullmann, L. (2011). *The Mastery of movement*. Hampshire: Dance Books Ltd.
- Lang, P. (2013). *Arts-based research*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Langer, C. L., & Furman, R. (2004). Exploring identity and assimilation: Research and interpretive poems. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 5(2) (19 paragraphs).
- Leavy, P. (2009). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Martin, R. (1996). Overreading the promise land: Toward a narrative context in dance. In S. L. Foster (Ed.), *Corporealities: Dancing, knowledge, culture, and power* (pp. 183–206). New York, NY: Routledge.
- McNiff, S. (1998). *Art-based research*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publisher.
- McNiff, S. (2007). *Research in new keys: An introduction to the ideas and methods of arts-based research*. Retrieved from <http://www.lesley.edu/journals/jppp/9/McNiff%20Intro.html>
- McNiff, S. (2011). Artistic Expressions as Primary Modes of Inquiry. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 39, 385–396.
- Mienczakowski, J., Smith, L., & Morgan, S. (2002). Seeing words-hearing feelings: Ethnodrama and the performance of data. In C. Bagley & M. B. Cancienne (Eds.), *Dancing the Data* (pp. 34–52). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Morrison, A. (1992). The undisciplined muse: Music among the fields of Knowledge University of Chicago 29–30 May 1992. *The Journal of Musicology*, 10, 405–415. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/763656>
- Novack, C. J. (1990). *Sharing the dance: Contact improvisation and American culture*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Ottoboni, P. (2014). Naveneva: Metaphysical being and the human gear. *Mimesis Journal*, 3, 34–44. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4000/mimesis>
- Rogers, D., Frellick, P., & Bebinski, L. (2002). Staging a study: Performing the personal and professional struggles of beginning teachers. In C. Bagley & M. B. Cancienne (Eds.), *Dancing the data* (pp. 53–69). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Saldaña, J. (1999). Playwriting with data: Ethnographic performance texts. *Youth Theatre Journal*, 13, 60–71. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08929092.1999.10012508>
- Saldaña, J. (2003). Dramatizing data: A primer. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9, 218–236. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077800402250932>
- Saldaña, J. (2005). *Ethnodrama: An anthology of reality theater*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Sklar, D. (2000). Reprise: On dance ethnography. *Dance Research Journal*, 32, 70–77. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1478278>
- Snowber, C. (2002). Bodydance: Enfleshing soulful inquiry through improvisation. In C. Bagley & M. B. Cancienne (Eds.), *Dancing the data* (pp. 20–33). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Snowber, C. (2016). *Embodied inquiry. Writing, living and being through the body*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Springgay, S. & Irwin, R. L. (2005). A/r/tography as living inquiry through art and text. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11, 897–912.
- Stinson, S. W. (1995). *Body of knowledge*. *Educational theory*, 45, 43–54. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/edth.1995.45.issue-1>
- Sullivan, G. (2010). *Art practice as research. Inquiry in visual arts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Thorp, L. (2003). Voices from the garden: A performance ethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9, 312–324. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077800402250969>



© 2017 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.

You are free to:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

No additional restrictions

You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

