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Thinking with Arts-Based Methodologies for Educational Research: A Conversation between Anita Sinner and Fernando Hernández Hernández

Pensar con metodologías basadas en las artes para la investigación educativa: una conversación entre Anita Sinner y Fernando Hernández Hernández

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Abstract

This conversation is an adapted transcript of a roundtable held during the opening session of the 8th International Conference on Artistic Research and Arts-based Research, which took place at the University of Girona from November 20 to 22, 2024. The session aimed to provide a historical contextualization of artistic and arts-based research, while also examining its methodological frameworks, inherent tensions, and potentialities. Contributing to the dialogue, Professor Anita Sinner from the University of British Columbia offered insights from her transdisciplinary approach to research, which integrates qualitative methodologies across various forms of artistic inquiry, particularly in relation to curriculum studies and socio-cultural issues in education. Emeritus Professor Fernando Hernández-Hernández of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Barcelona contributed perspectives grounded in his expertise on educational innovation, curricular reform in the arts, and equitable access to culture, learning, and education within contemporary society.

Keywords: Arts Based Research, Artistic Methods, Performative Paradigm, Genealogies.

Resumen

Esta conversación es una transcripción adaptada de una mesa redonda llevada a cabo durante la sesión inaugural del 8.º Congreso Internacional de Investigación Artística e Investigación Basada en las Artes, que tuvo lugar en la Universidad de Girona del 20 al 22 de noviembre de 2024. La sesión tuvo como objetivo ofrecer una contextualización histórica de la investigación artística y basada en las artes, al tiempo que examinó sus marcos metodológicos, tensiones inherentes y potencialidades. En su contribución al diálogo, la profesora Anita Sinner, de la University of British Columbia, aportó reflexiones desde su enfoque transdisciplinar de la investigación, el cual integra metodologías cualitativas a través de diversas formas de indagación artística, especialmente en relación con los estudios curriculares y las cuestiones socioculturales en la educación. Por su parte, el profesor emérito Fernando Hernández-Hernández, de la Facultad de Bellas Artes de la Universidad de Barcelona, aportó perspectivas fundamentadas en su experiencia sobre innovación educativa, reforma curricular en las artes y acceso equitativo a la cultura, el aprendizaje y la educación en la sociedad contemporánea.

Palabras clave: investigación basada en las artes, métodos artísticos, paradigma performativo, genealogías.

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The genealogies

Karo Kunde: This opening session was planned to situate the current state of artistic and arts-based research. Do you think it is important to talk about tensions which could arise, as well as about possibilities and methodologies?
Fernando Hernández-Hernández: The issues you've raised, Karo, require our attention, particularly because the field of Arts-Based Research (ABR) has evolved significantly over the past 30 years (Suominen, Kallio-Tavin et al., 2025). We need to consider various aspects, such as terminology, positionalities, and funding perspectives. Most importantly, we should establish frameworks to help us better position ourselves within this field. Currently, any artistic action that involves a process of inquiry is often labelled as "artistic research," while any research or teaching project that employs artistic strategies is classified as "arts-based research." This broad categorization diminishes the clarity and understanding of these research frames, making it challenging to grasp the phenomenon we are discussing. To situate ourselves, we need to consider a possible genealogy of the field. We should ask ourselves, as in Gauguin's painting: where do we come from, where are we now, and where do we want to go? Although we may not resolve all these questions, our goal is to situate our thoughts, approaches and research practices on this matter.
Anita Sinner: When we think about the genealogies of ABER (Arts-based Educational Research), we can begin by thinking of the maturation of the methodology. It is an emergent disposition, and we can be mindful to value and receive ABER on different aesthetic planes, with all the qualities of the different approaches that we can bring into this conversation. And I refer to Gerard Genette when I make that reference, specifically, the aesthetic relation to works of art, and in this case to methodology, and that methodology requires all forms and levels of engagement. So translating this to our context, ABER is a process. It is 'becoming.'

We can begin with the debate between Gardner and Eisner at an AERA (American Educational Research Association) in 1997. Can a novel be a dissertation? This is something that is still being debated today. And of course, then we have just a short time after that, Rishma Dunlop (1999) wrote *Boundary Bay: A novel as educational research*, at the University of British Columbia, and we see the beginnings of what part of our methodological inheritance is today. We are also reminded of the commitment to the arts which bring different responsibilities to the debate: O'Donoghue (2009) discusses this at length; we do have bigger questions to consider as we move forward.
Karo Kunde: When talking about genealogies in ABER aren't we somehow deviating attention from the specific methodologies, those which bring art as a method of research into practice?
Anita Sinner: By attending to the genealogies, we are not overlooking and flattening methodologies, we are coming, in effect, to embracing arts-based and artistic research as an emergent 'post' methodology in its own right. We need to be very thoughtful

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about the historical antecedents that are needed for the theoretical dispositions and the methodological propositions. The question then becomes: Can anything be art? And thus, can anything be researched?

Fernando Hernández-Hernández: These questions lead to others in the field of fine arts: What does it mean to do research in the field of arts? Therefore, the discussion needs to centre firstly on what research is. Is research the practice of the artist? Or is it something more? Or is research about explaining the process of doing, and how do we make this process visible? Or is research based on practices? What is our research and how can this research be assessed? How is artistic research part of academic life? All these debates are underway in scholar institutions.

And yet there is another genealogy: when art is introduced into a scholar context, let's say in a College of Arts, one needs to start communicating and preparing projects to be assessed and evaluated. This brings up questions as: What does research mean in the arts? Does research have to be about the intricate practice of art, or, is research something external that you could give as an account of the process of the artmaking? Or is the process about practical arts? Basically, research in art is research based in these practices. All these questions lie at the heart of the genealogies surrounding Artistic Research (AR) and Arts-Based Research (ABR). The answers to these questions outline the paths followed since art institutions were integrated into universities in the 1970s. This change raised important questions about what constitutes a thesis, the nature of research in the arts, and the process of peer review. By retracing the debates and proposals related to these issues, we can sketch a genealogy of AR. Regarding ABR, as Anita has pointed out, there is a genealogy emerging from the discussions between Gardner and Eisner within the American Educational Research Association (AERA) that focuses on the "nature" of research in general and educational research in particular. This perspective situates genealogy within the onto-epistemological methodology of research (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Additionally, another genealogy is linked to the evaluation of artistic methods in research (Leavy, 2025), applicable not only in the arts but also in fields such as health, economics, and geography. The common thread here is the role of artistic methods in revealing what might otherwise remain invisible. These three genealogies provide a foundation for situating ourselves and proposing new lines of inquiry.

Anita Sinner: I recently read a book by Clive Cazeaux (2017), called *Art, Research, Philosophy*. And Cazeaux writes that art is research when it persists as a series of forms, objects, events, conversations, commissions, publications, and so on, and poses the question, what is after the end of art? It becomes a research situation. And I think this is a launch point: art is an infinity of forms, and the obligation of the researcher is to recognize all the elements that may become their practice as concepts, and that we need to surrender the sense, or the understanding of the singularity or the uniqueness of art, and move with concepts to create the conditions of speculative discourses. As we think about object, space, and body, and we start to expand the concepts that are involved, we can think differently about relationality and agency and how we create novel forms in relation.

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Other ways of inquiry

Karo Kunde: In the specific case of educational research, do you think the arts can open new ways of inquiry?
Fernando Hernández-Hernández: Looking back at the debate that began with Eisner, who served as president of the AERA from 1992 to 1993, we can reflect on an important discussion. Eisner hosted a debate regarding whether applying the scientific method was the only valid way to conduct research, or if it was feasible to conduct research grounded in artistic practices. At that time, this was a significant issue. We were beginning to think differently about qualitative approaches. However, we still held fixed notions of what research should entail.

From this debate emerged the idea that it was possible to create a different form of research based on artistic practices and strategies. Fast-forward to today, just ten years after the concept of the performative paradigm (Østern et al., 2023) entered academic discussions. We can see that the performative paradigm has evolved beyond merely relating to performative artistic practices. Instead, it serves as a framework for understanding research results through a different lens. This approach emphasizes that research unfolds not through pre-defined designs or predetermined outcomes, but rather through the process of conducting the research itself. Thus, the essence of the research cannot be established in advance. When we provide an account of our research, we are describing what occurs during the research process. Additionally, the performative paradigm contributes to the organization of current conversations centred around arts-based research.
Anita Sinner: And just following on that, regarding the performative paradigm, Erin Manning (2015) writes against method. Erin argues for the importance of creating choreographic thinking, which lends to what you were just discussing Fernando. This is not a method, but a dynamic. It is about opening and shifting from repetition and engaging in ways in which the body changes and ecologies in relation are composed.
Fernando Hernández-Hernández: To conclude this first issue on genealogies, you can find many different names and different approaches, but what is important is to pay attention to the onto-epistemological foundations of a given approach, and therefore, to the methodological foundation. What can this approach offer to you? So what is important is not the name, but the foundation of the name. So here the real question is: What are the foundations of the names? Because names guide into different directions, so we need to focus on the histological foundation, and the methodological decisions that follow.
Anita Sinner: Yes, the workshops for the Textile Cartographies project illustrate these shifts and the histories and the potentials of the art research. Teresa Eça and her team from Portugal have established this remarkable international community-based initiative where we are making 10x10cm squares, and we exchange them all around the world, coordinated by scholars such as Samia El Sheik from Egypt or Celia Matsunaga from Brazil, just to mention a couple of contributors. It demonstrates the process of making with materiality, of making as part of our larger discussion that we're having.

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On methodology and methods

Karo Kunde: So, can we understand the name as the artistic approach on which each research methodology is based?
Fernando Hernández-Hernández: It is important to differentiate between methodology and methods, which are often confused. For us, the methodology is the glasses you use to see reality in some way. It is a lens into reality. And the methods are the strategies you use to catch part of this reality.
Anita Sinner: Methodology can be thought of as applied theory, and we talk about methodological ecotones, in the sense of a continuum, beginning with arts-based educational research, practice-based approaches, a/r/tography as the nexus, if you will, of the approaches, followed by artistic research and research-creation. And it's on that continuum of conversation that we situate research. In the Canadian context, we're often moving in between and across, and borrowing and blending and overlapping with our different approaches. However, if the notion of methodology stands as the aesthetic grammar of art as research, we need to know the rules before we can break the rules. And that's something I still adhere to.

And perhaps it's because I come from the social sciences that I'm still very firm on methodology. Now, of course, method has become quite controversial, and we have theory-practice, with debates that are ongoing around what method is in terms of the creative arts, and the creative approaches to research. One of the propositions that I like to suggest is that we think beyond method, which is one approach, to think about the norms, the modes, and a mode of the act of doing, a mode as an act of thinking. So instead of adhering to this notion of ordered steps that are required in a particular sequence, we start to think more about the coherence between the methodology and the modes of inquiry.
Karo Kunde: Does this then mean that there can be research without methodology?
Anita Sinner: Coming back to Erin Manning, who has been a leader in this conversation, we can think about how art activates and constitutes a practice that thinks. I'm not sure I can agree on discarding methodology just yet. It may be a matter of asking some different questions, as Donal O'Donoghue suggests, are we asking the wrong questions? And perhaps we are asking the wrong question if we are going to argue that methodology and method is not something we necessarily need in the future for art as research. And this is something I think a lot about, and there are many different perspectives on this. But if we think about the event as the yet-not-thought and the unthought-without-thought itself, we move our conversation to a space of rhythm.

As we move to a space of new ecologies of practice. I'm reminded of Colebrook (2016) who talks about engaging in the experimental, the playful, in creative enactments of non-recognition, and that not knowing comes with the essential risk of stupidity. And I love that because how many of us are willing to undertake a project, an inquiry, a study, and accept that there is a potential of our own stupidity embedded within that. Now, this was something we discussed at length in my class recently, and students seized on this notion of stupidity. And I thought this was fascinating. It was fascinating to me that as a

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generation of incoming emergent young scholars, learning about artist research for the first time, they took comfort in the notion that they could take that risk, that they could undertake an experiment. And I think perhaps that comes full circle to Erin's argument, but in a slightly different way. We begin to think about usefulness and uselessness, and what does that then constitute in the ways that we proceed-in with our research.

Karo Kunde: This reflection on the possible absence of methodology makes me think of a previous comment of Fernando, where he mentions that one of the genealogical issues is the fact of writing arts-based research projects, which have to be assessed. Is this even possible if there is no methodology?

Fernando Hernández-Hernández: This issue highlights the relationship between epistemology, ontology, and ethics. Naturally, the question arises about whether research can be conducted with or without established methodologies and methods. We must consider what might lead some researchers to pursue research without methodologies and methods. This perspective may be "disturbing" to some researchers. However, the essential point is to question whether research is a process that follows a series of predetermined steps and decisions, or if it is something that evolves organically as a research phenomenon. When we adopt a methodological perspective or method, we shape a specific type of reality (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015).

By adopting this viewpoint, we can temper our fixation on defining research methodologies and methods in advance, understanding instead that they are not fixed but rather develop over time. When we become overly focused on methodology, we may define reality too rigidly and become closed off to what reality can reveal. By prioritizing methodology before engaging with reality, we risk framing and shaping that reality in a way that limits our understanding. Research based on our relationship with the phenomenon can also transform us. This connects to the performative paradigm, where methodology is viewed as the process of documenting the decisions, movements, engagements, and shifts that occur during the research.

Anita Sinner: I agree. And you know, thinking about arts-based research, artistic research, arts-related research, we have different methodological entry points, and there is a question of antagonism between the different approaches and what does that then constitute. And one of the ways that I try to articulate that is, thinking about artistic research as a micro practice. It is material based. It is studio based. We have arts-based educational research being the meta- or the macro practice, so that is looking at the pedagogic implications. And then the third I would suggest could be the meso practice. And here I'm referring to the work of Taguchi and St. Pierre, and concept as method. I keep coming back to this notion of concept as method, and concept of acts of thoughts. Mieke Ball writes about traveling concepts in a parallel way, but we also have to be mindful that not all concepts are words, as Cazeaux suggests.

And so, what then does a concept constitute? And when we think about these intensive orientations, as Fernando describes, these are forces, these are qualities. They bring us into the more-than-human. We are reconfiguring concepts as radiances and ambiences and vibrations and tones. And so, in this sense, we can then learn something different about every event in the educational situation, in the artistic situation, in the

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research situation. And the potential of this particularly with the notion of the trans-, not just transnational and transdisciplinary, but translanguaging and transmedia, but the notion of trans- potentially holding the rupture point to opening inquiry in ways that methodology cannot even be thought of yet.

Fernando Hernández-Hernández: What you are saying, Anita, is particularly important because arts-based research is becoming increasingly prevalent across various fields such as nursing, health, sciences, management, education, and the arts (Chemi & Dum 2018; Lupton & Leahy, 2021). You can utilize artistic methods in any way you choose, as their purpose is to reveal insights that may remain hidden when using traditional methods. The effectiveness of these artistic approaches also stems from a growing commitment to transparency in results. This ensures enhanced trustworthiness and promotes inclusivity and participation. However, we often create distance between ourselves and the participants in this process, which can hinder these objectives. The methods we select should align with our intentions. When we employ artistic methods, the individuals we work with become active participants in the research. Artistic strategies facilitate collaboration, allowing us to shift from merely researching people to conducting research with people. This represents a significant shift in approach, and arts-based methods play a crucial role in advancing this conversation and moving us forward.

Anita Sinner: But also with a cautionary note, because adapting the tenets of creative arts as part of an inquiry could also generate lesser art. So yes, it is participatory, and yes, it does enact the intent.

This concerns me because there are claims being made under the guise of arts-based research that are not just lesser art, but potentially lesser research. And I think that we do have some responsibility now to rethink some of the 'anything goes' approach. There has to be a cautionary note always with all research, and what does that then constitute? Having been part of the generation who were essentially at the beginning of ABER, 20-25 years ago, where we were adventuring in and we were learning the way, there is a need to mature methodologically. It is a different time now. And I think that is the part where I'm starting to flag, when students have no qualitative background, they may take up arts-based approaches in a historical and methodological vacuum, and that has ethical implications. There are different ethical implications when we engage with art as research. We have to be very attentive to that in a different way.

I have some cautionary notes at the same time, as much as I'm a supporter and a promoter and an advocate for art as research, I also have some concerns, and those concerns are growing. For example, should it be a prerequisite to have taken qualitative research before undertaking art as research? And I ask myself this question repeatedly again, in part because sometimes we take up art practice in a very problematic way. I say this of my past work also. This is reminiscent of early ABER debates, and the argument that Patricia Leavy offered if I draw a stick person, I'm doing arts-based research. Well, technically that is correct. But is that what we want to see as the defining, or the potential of what we are dedicating our scholarly lives to, when creating a paradigm that is unfolding now?

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Fernando Hernández-Hernández: A key tension in arts-based and artistic research is its foundation in a Western tradition, where knowledge is primarily intellectual and rational. However, in other traditions, knowledge can be sensorial and sensitive, tied to the body and emotions. We are also defining the nature of the knowledge we create and the methods we use to generate it. Another important tension concerns the type of data and evidence we gather. What constitutes data in arts-based research (ABR)? What kinds of data and evidence do we produce as part of the research process? We need to engage in discussions about these questions and invite others to participate in them.

Anita Sinner: And if I can build on that notion of a post medium, if we think about research always as a work in progress, as we think about an artwork as a work in progress, we are defining what it means to create art and when is an artwork, rather than what is an artwork. This is now about openings and open-ended constellations of thought, about co-creating in the ways that we're generating discursive spaces as artists-researchers-teachers. This is a continuous sense of becoming. So in terms of an a/r/tographic lens, I think that's one of the reasons that a/r/tography has had such an international appeal and been taken up by many different fields of study, in many different ways, because it operates theoretically, methodologically, as a practice-based approach, and it entwines all of those potentialities. I often describe a/r/tography as the centre of the approaches. If you think about them as a knowledge cluster, a/r/tography is very acrobatic. It is a flow. It is about movement. And it encapsulates the spaces within which we can operate within research situations.

Fernando Hernández-Hernández: Another question to consider is how we define rigour. What does rigour mean in the context of ABR and artistic research? In more traditional forms of research, such as realistic or interpretative research, rigour refers to the consistency among our objectives, methods, analyses, and the narrative we provide about ourselves and the research process. This concept is currently under debate, as we understand rigour in various ways, and these interpretations are linked to ideas of fluidity, predictability, and our overall conception of rigour. However, discussions around rigour must be contextualized, as different levels of rigour can create distinct environments for ABR and artistic research.

Anita Sinner: Yes, and just following on the a/r/tography discussion, Imag 17 is a special issue that just was released and the theme is sensorial a/r/tography (IMAG_issue_17_v3.pdf). This issue came out of a course I taught last year on walking with public art. The invitation was for students to think about art and public space differently, because generally, in the Canadian context, we don't think about public art as a source of pedagogic potential. So, this was the invitation for the graduate students. Some of their essays are included in the issue, and we also have essays from around the world. We have an essay from Japan, walking in Korea, by Koichi Kasahara and Sunah Kim. In their work you see the aesthetic potential of working in an a/r/tographic context. This notion of the sensorial as a concept beyond words was in fact the impetus for this special issue.

Fernando Hernández-Hernández: The question we need to consider is how to evaluate the sensory experiences between people. It might be necessary to revisit the discussion

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from a different perspective. As we near the end of our time, we are just starting to uncover connections, links, and tensions that will help us continue the conversation.

Anita Sinner: Yes, I want to come back to something you said earlier Fernando, and it's about the notion of the hotspots in the world where this work is leading our current conversations. As arts researchers, we must be very mindful because if we don't situate our work historically, we inherit and we contribute to the colonizing dynamic that is inherent in our spaces of research. We are inevitably reproducing histories by virtue of where the hotspots reside. For example, Canada, we think about Europe, we think about Australia, and this is where a lot of the artistic and arts-based work is edgy and dynamic. However, western art practices are underpinning a lot of that discussion. And if we don't attend to that, we're not mindful of that inheritance and that genealogy bringing us back to the beginning, what are we doing? What do we fail to do as researchers in the context of equity, diversity, inclusivity, and decolonization? And as a new generation of emerging scholars come to this work, they will initiate the next iteration, that is the next conversation, perhaps the next panel that will be on this theme.

Fernando Hernández-Hernández: In conclusion, this raises a debate between those who possess the truth and those who hold power. Behind the truth lies power as well. Reality has multiple facets, and we are continually approaching a new understanding of it. We are exploring just one aspect of reality, and we have never had a complete view of it. Therefore, if we engage in this type of research—be it through artistic practice, sensory responses, or a/r/tographic approaches—we will not conduct our research in isolation. We are continually shaping our understanding through various perspectives. It's not solely about power or whether someone has the right answer; the key question is about our contributions. Are we expanding knowledge and providing new perspectives in our processes and practices?

Anita Sinner: I can end on one final question about speculative futures: How are we preparing ourselves for 21st century creative research relevant for living in the world today? So, I think that's also part of the task ahead.

Karo Kunde: Thank you, Anita. Thank you, Fernando for the reflections, which opens the discussion we can have here. There were a lot of ideas, a lot of things. And each of those ideas, each of those tensions are worth an account for themselves.

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