

## CHAPTER NINE

# ENGAGING ARTS-BASED INQUIRY IN A WICKED TIME

VACHEL MILLER  
MEL FALCK  
PEACHES HASH  
HEATHER THORP

### Abstract

As a site of knowledge production and professional training, doctoral programs for educational leaders can encourage students to engage creatively with their dissertation research. In this chapter, the co-authors share their experience with conducting arts-based research in the context of their doctoral studies in educational leadership. In addition to being a vehicle for deeper self-inquiry and embodied engagement with educational processes, we suggest that arts-based research contributes to the larger project of addressing “wicked” problems (Bottery, 2016) in education and the world.

### Introduction

This volume offers a broad perspective on the role of creativity in addressing global problems. For this chapter, we take a much smaller-scale focus on creativity within doctoral education, as a window into the larger questions of the volume. One of the key sites of global knowledge production is university doctoral programs, in which future academics learn to produce scholarly research. Doctoral programs have a unique influence in shaping the kinds of research that are viewed as legitimate, and in shaping the boundaries for what research can look and feel like.

Traditional doctoral programs have been long criticized for training scholars who produce specialized knowledge that has little value for non-academic audiences. Even within the realm of professional doctoral programs in education (EdD), there’s been a movement championed by the Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate to give the EdD a more distinctive, action-orientation (Perry, Zambo, & Crow, 2020). Nationally, many EdD programs are moving in this direction, framing educational improvement (especially improvement that addresses equity problems) as the guiding beacon of dissertation work. Such “dissertations in practice” provide a pragmatic, change-oriented alternative to the traditional PhD dissertation (Belizer, et al., 2016).

Amid the move to make doctoral knowledge production more practical in education, what’s happened to creativity? Our impression is that creativity, and the broader process of artistic engagement with the world, have not

been sufficiently appreciated as a rich source of knowledge production in doctoral education. In dominant educational research spaces, there's little affordance for non-rational ways of knowing and expressive engagement with inquiry. We submit that the limited role of creativity within doctoral education is a byproduct of the larger shift of education toward measurability, propelled by the neoliberal logics of outcomes and assessment.

What would it look like, if doctoral education provided more space for aesthetic, creative engagement with our subject matter, with ourselves as researchers, and with each other? What if our process of teaching and inquiry allowed for more open-ended expression of affect and intuition? In this chapter, we offer three different explorations of those questions, based on the authors' unique personal dissertation journeys. Rather than offering a singular, mono-vocal perspective, this chapter is offered as a collage of thoughts and images, with each author contributing their own experience in their own words. The reflections from Mel Falck, Peaches Hash, and Heather Thorp are grounded in their experience with arts-informed inquiry in our doctoral program in educational leadership.

### **An EdD program with a twist**

The Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Appalachian State University is intended for scholar/practitioners who augment their established identities as educational leaders with their emerging identities as researchers. We introduce students to a range of research paradigms, theories, and methods. Along with the invitation to "taste" a rich menu of research possibilities, we also encourage students to turn inward, reflecting on their own subjectivity as scholar-practitioners and how they want to engage in knowing the world. Rather than starting with a research question, we ask students to listen to the ways of knowing that call their name, and consider how different ways of knowing open up different aspects of the educational problems they care most deeply about.

In recent years, several of our doctoral students have generated innovative dissertations through arts-based research (ABR). Working with arts-based research opens possibilities for engaging with multiple modes of creative expression, in the doing and representation of what is learned through inquiry, blending the arts with aspects of social sciences for more holistic insight (Leavy, 2018). Although their work still fits within the established form of a research text, doctoral researchers who engage with arts-based research often produce texts that look and feel quite different from traditional academic discourse. Such dissertations have included imagery, poetry, reflective interludes, and other non-traditional forms of expression. We give students permission to think and write outside the traditional 5-chapter model for a dissertation, which allows them to follow the lead of where their inquiry takes them, rather than squeezing their inquiry into a predetermined shape.

How did these possibilities for creative engagement with inquiry arise? This EdD program has benefited from connections with an eclectic expressive arts community. That community, centered in our College of Education, attracted faculty members and students from the arts, psychology, and other areas of the university, in the formation of a dynamic, emergent com-

munity of practice (Cornell, 2013). Members of the expressive arts community engaged in innovative, arts-informed pedagogies and research reflecting their commitment to process-oriented inquiry. Some years ago, a group of faculty and doctoral students collaborated on a creative reflection about epistemology and knowledge production, in the form of postcards and “love letters” about arts-informed inquiry (Miller, Plato, Clark/Keefe, Henson, & Atkins, 2013). This reflection offered one example of the creative experimentation and questions being asked in the community. The EdD program developed a concentration in Expressive Arts Education, Leadership, and Inquiry, as an outgrowth of an Expressive Arts Therapy graduate certificate program. This certificate program, in turn, was nurtured by a faculty collective who offered a rich array of arts-informed, experiential courses in which students engaged in dance, dream-work, visual journaling, sculpture, poetry and drumming, among other forms of expressive inquiry.

The rich ecology of arts-based inquiry that flowered at that time period provided ground for the authors featured in this chapter to pursue their own arts-informed inquiries for their dissertation research. In the section that follows, the contributing authors each share their own journeys and insights regarding the process and power of arts-informed teaching and dissertation inquiry.

### Doctoral Graduate Voices

#### MEL FALCK

Arguing for the importance of an aesthetically sensible education, educational theorist and philosopher Maxine Greene (2001) discusses the necessity of an education that helps us to see, feel, inspire, and experience differently. Greene (2001) contends that an education in aesthetic awareness helps us to, “break through the ‘cotton wool’ of dailyness and passivity and boredom and come awake to the colored, sounding, problematic world” (p. 7). Surely, with its increased focus on assessment, standardization, and evaluative criteria and measures, stripping teachers and students alike from their agency, autonomy, and innate human propensities for imagination and play, education as usual, now, perhaps more than ever, has become the cotton wool itself to which Greene alludes.

The focus of my dissertation entitled *Why art? Ways of responding to the world around us* (Falck, 2022) was an exploration of doing education differently, placing processes of art-making not on the fringes of the learning experience, but instead, centering them in the learning and research process for both my students and myself. Together we engaged as a community of arts-based researchers, who embarked upon a journey alone and yet together, through which we utilized Expressive Arts (EXA) based practices, as varied and unique as the individuals themselves who composed the study. Music, collage, painting, movement, visual journaling, and performance art, all wove together to create an aesthetically sensitive experience rooted in the celebration of the arts as a distinctive and necessary feature in the process of inquiry

and a proclamation of our sensual, imaginative, beautiful, and messy humanity that education as usual ignores at best and denies at its worst.

In this section I hope to introduce some of the movement from, with, and between the varied images, writing, thoughts, and feelings that grew from our individual and collective experiences of art making together. The study itself took place over two semesters, framed within an art class I taught as part of one of our university's undergraduate residential college programs. The class design was based on EXA pedagogical strategies, combined with arts-based research (ABR) theory and praxis to provide the students with the theory, tools, and practices necessary to set the foundation for their own ABR projects, the culminating experience of the class. Student projects ranged from songwriting and vocal performance as therapeutic intervention for trans individuals to explorations through visual journaling and meditation around society's influence on creativity and the climate crisis. Each student enjoyed complete autonomy in their choice of topics including the research questions asked and the arts-based modalities used to explore their inquiry.

Arts-based research by nature is an amorphous undertaking with little to no procedural structure to inform the process, therefore, I provided the students with a simple framework to help conceptualize the early phases of their research design. This four-pronged approach includes an interdependent movement between and amongst the students' research question(s), the scholarly articles that inform their research question(s), the artistic modalities used as part of the ABR process, and their written reflections on their unique ABR process. Other than this basic guideline for forming and conducting their research, the students were given full autonomous and creative reign over their ABR projects. Many of the students struggled with the level of openness and self-authorship granted them, alluding to the lack of creative jurisdiction they've been granted in their educational encounters up until this point in their learning within our increasingly policed educational structures and systems.

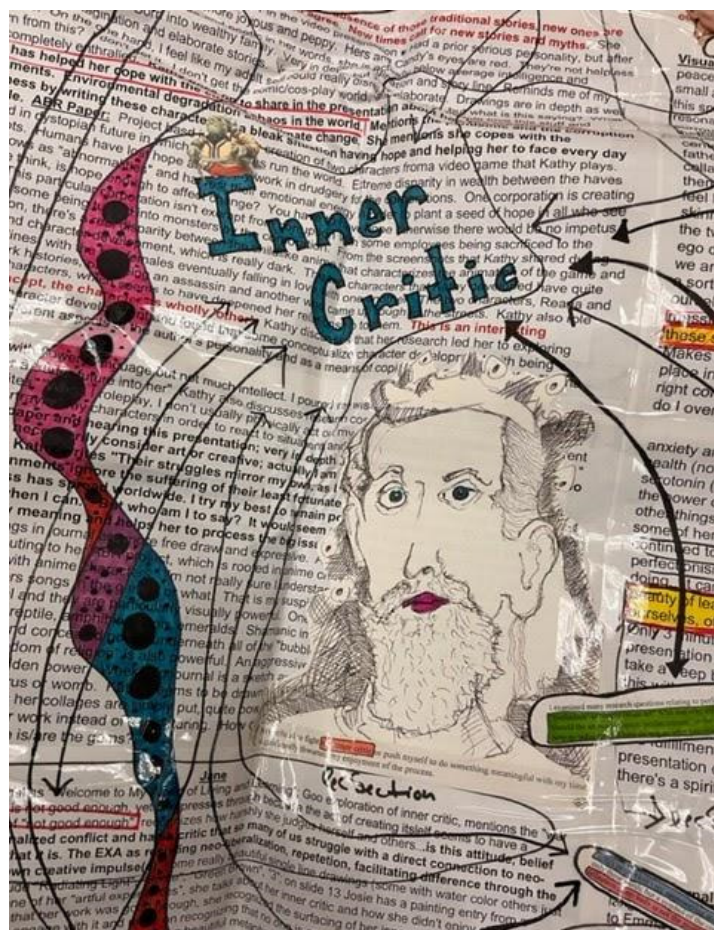
With its focus on organic emergence and its embrace of the aesthetic, felt sensorial experience and relational encounters over rational, procedural based practices, arts-based research serves to disrupt linear educational systems. The openness of ABR and EXA practices can be unnerving. It facilitates a different type of "rigor" in the academy, a willingness to embrace the unknown, mixed with a willingness to share the emotive journey that the arts frequently take one on. The added challenge to this project was determining artistic means to not only represent the art and meanings that were emerging, but also tie them together into an aesthetic whole, including that of each of the student-participants and my own work.

The arts-based process that emerged for me, quite organically, was the creation of what I later playfully titled the "Wall of Data" or WoD. The WoD became the aesthetic representation of the combined work of both myself and the student-participants and consists of a large collage of observation notes, student writing, and imagery produced both by myself and the students as part of their ABR projects, activities and assignments. Through this process I was able to bring to life common themes and ideas strung throughout all of our work, providing a cartographic rendering capturing the whole of our work as individuals and a collective in a visual arts-based representation.



*"Wall of Data" or WoD*

The foundational theme that wove its way across and throughout everyone's experience seemed to be the notion of perfection, tied to an inner criticality, actively thwarting play, spontaneity, and imagination, under the banner of "never quite good enough". One student-participant used their ABR project to reflect upon their struggle with perfection and its hindrance to the creative process, using a visual journal and painting as a means to understand and overcome her perfectionistic tendencies. Another student-participant used the project to reframe her experiences of perfection as they related to body image. As part of her study, she incorporated a powerful piece through which she wrote negative things she would tell herself about her body on a mirror, later smashing the mirror with a sledge hammer, serving as metaphor for smashing her negative views towards herself and her body. Of her experience she writes, "This project was very empowering and made me very aware of my emotions. It felt really good to destroy not only those words, but a symbol of the creator of those words. Smashing the mirror helped me recognize that the reflection of my body is not the problem, it's the framework I see it in."



“The Inner Critic”

Arts-based practices like these afford students the opportunity to reflect deeply not only on their own personal experience, but their connections to broader social contexts and political, economic, and philosophical underpinnings that frame our perceptions of self and others. Another student-participant, using visual journaling as a means to understand our relationship to technology and its propensity to fragment relations elaborates, “What is unique about visual art is that it allows me to explore ideas in a highly subjective and emotional way. Furthermore, it compels me to perceive my life unconventionally, leading to the discovery of meaning in unexpected places.” He goes on to discuss the benefit of using art to allow for the emergence of meaning organically: “And so, art making in this project did not feel like research. Rather, it felt as though I was taking often dryly presented, scholarly ideas and making them more relatable. However, this process did not lead me

to the discovery of a singular answer, but rather caused me to ask more questions. This is the best result I could have asked for, since more often than not, life is a complex, seemingly irrational mess that can be made sense of through art making.”

Considering the deep impact that the incorporation of the arts has on sense making experiences, it is my belief that EXA and ABR practices introduce students to a new form of learning, helping disrupt many of the linear systems and structures in education which impede more imaginative and creative thinking and action. Arts oriented research offers a learning experience very different, yet genuinely necessary, to help capture the totality of human experience, honoring the aesthetic, the unknowable, both within ourselves and the world at large. It is a practice of making art for art’s sake, expressing the deepest and most vulnerable parts of ourselves, if only we have the courage to allow ourselves to be seen in the fullness of the beautifully imperfect beings that we are.

#### **PEACHES HASH**

Early on in my doctoral coursework, I became interested in using expressive arts as a form of qualitative research. While in the doctoral program, I was also completing the Expressive Arts Graduate Certificate along with Mel and Heather and was struck with the depth of learning and engagement I experienced within those courses. Although I thought I had left behind the artistic piece of me with other childhood ambitions, expressive arts offered me a way to re-engage with art as a tool for learning; it was a tool where I could consider how aesthetic education, or learning through the arts (Levine, 2017a), could create meaning for myself and my students. It was a space where I could experiment and play with art and, in turn, my ideas through expressive arts’ emphasis on the process of art-making over a studio-quality product (Knill & Knill, 2017). It was a way of knowing that encouraged me to embrace *poiesis*, the act of bringing something new into the world (Levine, 2017b), and, once I reached the dissertation stage in my doctoral coursework, I was ready to do so.

I came into the doctoral program with a relatively strong writing background. I hold a Master’s degree in English, taught English at the secondary and postsecondary levels for over ten years, and by the time I was ready to begin writing my dissertation, I was published in a few academic journals (Hash, 2019a; Hash, 2019b). Additionally, I had been piloting my potential dissertation research for several semesters thanks to my doctoral-level curriculum course that encouraged me to take risks in trying arts-based methods with my undergraduate students. I was and am currently still teaching undergraduate first and second-year Rhetoric and Composition courses, which has allowed me to experiment with expressive arts for years. As I completed my own expressive arts courses, I began to wonder, “What would happen if I brought some of these techniques into my college writing classroom?” The anecdotal results were successful. Many students began taking both levels of my course specifically because they desired more art-making. I did not fully understand the nuances of their desire; I just knew that I enjoyed expressive

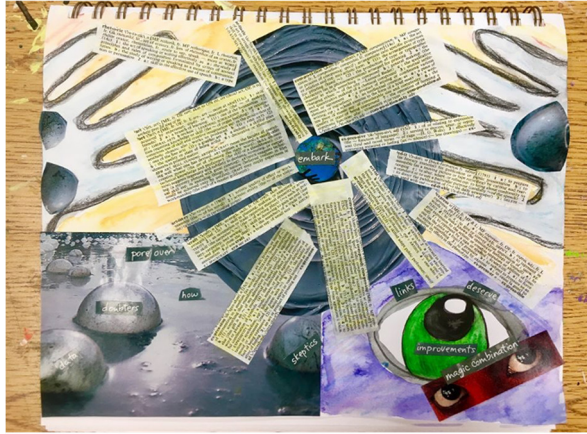
arts, so I set off to study the effects of using expressive arts through practitioner action research, where I could use my own students and serve as researcher as well as teacher.

My data collection involved interviewing voluntary student participants four times over the course of the semester to discuss their experiences with the different arts-based assignments I provided. I triangulated students' data through their visual artifacts they created (the expressive arts products) as well as their journal reflections about their experiences after each project was due. Aside from the exhaustion of working with multiple participants over the course of several interviews while also holding multiple jobs as a full-time doctoral student, this process was straightforward for me since I mapped out my plan in my doctoral qualitative research course. The real challenge, surprisingly, turned out to be writing the dissertation after all.

As I noted in two of my published articles on my dissertation process (Hash, 2021; Hash, 2022), I thought that writing my dissertation would be a simple process: Five chapters with a linear progression. But as I began thematically coding my data, I noticed that there were clear groupings between expressive arts' effects on students' mindsets and feelings about writing (Hash, 2020), curriculum, and students' emotions and abilities to express their lived experiences (Hash, 2021). My dissertation chair suggested that I write a nontraditional dissertation: One in which I wrote separate "chapters" in the form of individual articles I would send to different journals based on the themes I identified. As a student who desired to complete her dissertation within a year and graduate within the minimal three-year span, this option terrified me. I was not sure I could still meet my goals while engaging in this nontraditional form of writing.

Part of my love for expressive arts has been the way it supported me emotionally during my own learning. There happened to be an open studio on campus when I was considering my dissertation format, so I elected to attend and journal about my dissertation ideas. Visual journaling is a method of art-making that can be used as an expressive art to tap into one's ideas and emotions. Making images can create depth that words alone cannot achieve (Ganim & Fox, 1999) and can help people process their experiences to make further meaning (Hutchinson, 2018). The figure below is the image I made during this open studio. The image I ultimately created involves traces of my hands reaching out in different directions, eyes looking in different directions, and different bubbles labeled with words such as "doubt" and "how". In the middle, I created a spiral labeled "embark" and, out of it, I collaged different definitions from a dictionary that related to my dissertation such as "art" and "composition." When I sat back and looked at my visual journal, I understood that while a traditional five-chapter dissertation might be easier, I knew that a nontraditional framework would better illustrate my ideas. In one of my chapters, I describe this realization as the difference between a star with clear points and a paint splatter. As arts-based researchers, we may hope for clear paths to follow, but art is messy, and we have to be willing to follow the splatters rather than force data into our preplanned points (Hash, 2022).





Visual journal on dissertation ideas

Another challenge I faced was how to showcase my own journey with arts-based research. All of my dissertation chapters included my students' visual artifacts (Hash, 2020; Hash, 2021), but as one of my committee members pointed out, my earliest thesis drafts were devoid of my own artistic creation. This bothered me especially considering how much research I presented exploring the intersections between written composition and art-making (Hash, 2020). If I believed in the use of expressive arts in writing courses enough to compose an entire dissertation on it, why had I not showcased them more in my own process?

Part of the divide in my own process was that in expressive arts, the researcher does not analyze participants' creations; only the participants may speak on the meaning, which caused me to rely heavily on participants' interviews and written reflections. But words and images do not always have to be separate. Like with visual journaling, they can create more meaning. With this in mind, I began to play with ways words and images could intersect to illustrate more of how expressive arts became a way of knowing (Allen, 1995) in my dissertation.



Claire's word art data (Hash, 2021)

The figure above is an example of my own artistic work with participant data. Word art is an accessible arts-based method of analyzing data because it requires little artistic skill with the use of digital technology, but can create additional depth of meaning than thematic or in vivo coding. Gulla and Sherman (2020) used what they called “word clouds” in their research with teachers to “allow [them] to see where [their] emphasis was when it came down to the actual words [they] were setting down on the page” (p. 3). As they created their word clouds, they were able to see words that appeared prominently based on how many times they were used. I chose to use this technique, but also create shapes based on what I saw within participants’ data. I put all of my participants’ interview transcripts as well as their written reflections after projects were submitted into the word art program, then I looked at the largest words and their data again to create shapes.

In Claire’s case, her journey throughout the semester involved grappling with negative emotions of being in school when she wished to pursue a music career, lack of motivation, and the desire to create, but feeling uninspired. The expressive arts activities in my course ultimately allowed her to express her feelings, form community within her peer group, and pursue her creative interests while also completing tasks for a course. I felt that the external demands of school were conflicting with her inner feelings and, at the same time, she was searching for understanding from myself and her peers; therefore, I depicted her data as two hands reaching towards each other, with different colors further illustrating her conflicting thoughts, feelings, and influences. While the hands are not touching completely, there is implied movement that could lead to connection, which is how I saw her journey through the semester. With each project, she not only expressed more of her-

self, but also put more effort into her assignments for my course, leading to her achieving one of the highest grades.

After completing the art for my student participants, I realized that my journey could be one of hands moving together as well. While I aspire to focus on expressive arts through my academic career, I too still have preconceived notions of what is expected of me as a writer, student, educator, and learner. My dissertation pushed me to move these “hands” closer together, and now that I have completed my degree, I find myself seeking out publication opportunities where I too can be more expressive. Throughout my dissertation, I wrote a narrative about my own journey that ended up getting published in the Carnegie Project’s *Impacting Education*. At the end of this article, I wrote, “Though a dissertation is a ‘result’ of research, it really showcases one journey, and if executed effectively, foreshadows the promise of future journeys to come. I look forward to my next journey” (Hash, 2022, p. 31). I still do.

#### **HEATHER THORP**

My primary motive for seeking a Doctorate in Educational Leadership with a concentration in Expressive Arts Education, Leadership, and Inquiry was to learn more deeply about something that I loved. I was already a Registered Expressive Arts Therapist (REAT), taught in formal courses and workshops, provided REAT supervision, and served on the International Expressive Arts Therapy Association’s board of directors. What I desired was to build upon my leadership history and creative interests. In my doctoral journey, I theorized the importance of stories and their ability to change our relationship to other people but also to what is considered the natural world, in order to create new possible futures with a greater focus on social and environmental justice. Atkins and Synder (2018) suggest that theories are a type of story. In the following paragraph I will tell a bit of my story that led me to this day, this chapter, my philosophy, and to my *theorystory*, a word I use to describe how the two are entwined.

In my early 30’s I moved from the suburbs and cities in northern Ohio to southern Ohio to a rural community on 150 acres of land in the rolling foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. I felt as though I had moved to sacred ground. Prior to entering the doctoral program, I moved again to the Southern Appalachian Mountains and fell in love with the geology, the flora, and the culture. Along the way I developed my own personal theory which included creativity, sacredness, and social and environmental justice. My initial vision of these three concepts began as I drew a triangle each at a point of the figure. My later theorizing involved seeing these as a braid which later deepened into an integrated vision/theory that the three are actually felt concepts.

As I followed the path on my doctoral journey, I became inspired by other theorists that asserted that traditional science is not big enough and complex enough to tell some *theorystories*. I was inspired by Donna Haraway’s writings that combined arts and science and justice (Haraway, 2016). I theorized within postmodern theories including feminist new materialism and

feminist posthumanism (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Chappell et al, 2021; Coole & Frost, 2010, Holmes & Jones, 2016, Murriss, 2021), challenging the belief and practice that humans are the most important factor in our current geopolitical story. I proposed a *Story Family* composed of not only humans but also time, the Appalachian Mountains, and EXA intermodal processes and EXA supplies. So, while the dissertation story itself was expanding my leadership skills, the program also allowed and encouraged me to research creatively through arts-based inquiry (Clarke/Keefe& Gilway, 2016) which reinforced inquiry that allowed me to tell the complexity through making/ thinking/doing (Springgay, 2016).



I have a long history of creating handmade journals inspired by Ursula Le Guin's (1996) *Carrier Bag Theory*, posing the question about what our world would be like if we told the story of the first tool not as a weapon but as a vessel to carry food, a baby, water. How would that have changed our culture? I conceptualized the handmade journals that the participants and I made as the carrier bag for the processes of data collection/creation. I wanted to explore curiosities about education, leadership, creativity, and justice in nature—outside of the traditional classroom—with women who had finished their formal learning. In this *storyplace* of the Southern Appalachian Mountains, a site described as a type of art studio, lab, (Springgay & Truman, 2016), undercommons, (Manning, 2016), nature-based setting (Atkins & Snyder, 2018; Hofsess et al., 2019) play space (Hofsess et al., 2019) or a combination of these concepts, the participants and I were able to ask questions and explore creative processes.

In this educational space outside of the traditional classroom we were not constrained by traditional practices and were invited to pose questions to inspire further learning. Women participated in arts-based inquiry in the “classroom” which inspired learning about deep time, liminal time, and history and herstory, in this particular setting. This setting or *storyplace* included the geological journey of the ancient mountain range that resulted in

the current natural, cultural, and political landscape of the Southern Appalachian region. The current socio-political and geological times invite and challenge social scientists to *do* inquiry differently to address the complexity of the questions creatively. Each time the participants met we used art as a way of knowing (Allen, 1995). After each meeting I engaged in data creation, not data collection which supposes that data is inert (Bhattacharya, 2013). I wrote stories about each time we met over the year-long study and upon writing the dissertation I curated photos, stories, and the questions that remained of which I share a sampling below. The inquiry was undertaken not to study individual participants. Instead, the stories were an amalgamation of all the participants. Thus, the stories were written from the point of view of she, representing one member of the *Story Family* that included time, the mountains, and EXA materials and practices.



Felted throughout the inquiry process questions or curiosities arose. I proposed that questions, both within and outside of the academy, can invite paths to what we pursue, and later recount as story or theory. The participants and I began the studies with questions and ended with questions, learning to love the questions as well as the “answers” (Rilke, 1934). Through creating/making together or “symposium,” (Dempster, 1998) and thinking/theorizing together or “syntheoria,” (Thorp, 2022) questions arose. I leave the reader with a gift of questions to engage in, adding your own musings, an invitation to creative community inquiry.





- ◇ How can we embrace slow activism?
- ◇ Can we learn differently because we are learning next to trees?
- ◇ How do we take studies like these and put them into real-world use for teachers and students?
- ◇ Do I make a difference if I have an intention to learn by studying what is around me?
- ◇ How might formal and post-formal community education and gatherings be different with attention to *storyplace* and the arts?

### **Expressive inquiry for addressing wicked problems**

We frame our individual reflections with an understanding that sustaining shared well-being in our communities and larger ecological systems has become increasingly precarious. The problems of our time—the tangled and terrifying problems of climate change, political instability and economic inequity—can be thought of as “wicked problems” (Bottery, 2016). We offer a brief review of the notion of “wicked problems” as a way of thinking about the value of arts-informed inquiry in doctoral education.

Building on the work of earlier authors (Rittel and Webber, 1973), Bottery’s book on educational leadership and sustainability contrasts “tame” and “wicked” problems (2016). Tame problems are those that offer a clear definition and straightforward solutions. As such, tame problems are managerialist in nature: they can be addressed with known, ready-at-hand technologies in a procedural manner (Bottery, 2016). Wicked problems, in contrast, have no clear rules to follow and can be framed very differently by different actors. Further, the problem’s causation may be non-linear and shifting over time. There are no standard, ready-made solutions to wicked problems.

In educational settings, tame and wicked problems often come wrapped together. Even situations with clear rules are embedded within complex human organizations and individual narratives; thus, there's an inevitable dimension of uncertainty and shifting of contexts/meanings in any problem-solving situation (Bottery, 2016).

In relation to the focus of this chapter, Bottery notes that fostering creativity among educators can itself be a wicked problem:

*Whilst one can play a game of Monopoly simply by following the stipulated rules, there are no such clear-cut rules for tasks like enhancing creativity in educational institutions; even less so for enhancing creativity in particular classes or faculties in particular schools or universities at a particular time, with particular individuals, as all of these conditions increasingly make this problem more and more unique (p. 41).*

In the context of educational leadership, Bottery invites leaders to acknowledge the uncertainty and shifting meaning of wicked problems. Thus, it becomes imperative for leaders who can address such problems to be able to engage them creatively, to shift the location of their gaze and reframe what they're looking at, in order to appreciate how problems might be framed by others. They must also practice holding a large measure of ambiguity, and be able to invite others into a process of collective creative expression and sense-making. In this chapter, we suggest that arts-oriented inquiry within a doctoral program can be a powerful approach to developing the habits of mind/heart for encountering wicked problems as they are, in all their tangled complexity, without trying to tame them.

## Conclusion

Arts-informed inquiry is not only about exploring alternative ways of being, teaching and learning; it's also about finding spaces to more fully express our own anger, confusion, despair, and joy living on a planet that feels so simultaneously vibrant and fragile. In terms of doctoral inquiry, we argue that creativity is necessary for expressing the powerful emotions that our global predicament has produced. Arts-informed inquiry can open an encounter with the raw, tangled emotions that inevitably arise from the unfolding crises around us, and inspire an imaginative, transgressive courage and sense of radical hope (Reed, 2017). Arts-informed inquiry makes space for acknowledging, rather than avoiding, the pain of perilous times and transforming that pain into creative possibility. Engaging with our affective experiences also enables us to tap into deeper sources of wisdom—generative, embodied ways of knowing—as we search for hope and possibility amid increasingly chaotic times.

Creative engagement with inquiry supports local/global problem-solving on at least two levels. At one level, opening spaces for college students for creative expression, as modeled by Mel Falck and Peaches Hash, validates their own creative energies and expands the possibilities that, in

their adult lives, they will engage with problems in a creative manner. In this respect, arts-informed teaching infuses creativity within the education of college students, who themselves may, in turn, lean toward creative engagement with their lives and future work.

At another level, arts-informed inquiry offers an avenue for engaging wicked problems in the fullness of possibility and humility. The work of arts-informed dissertation research, as illustrated in this chapter, provides a unique window into the processes by which educational leaders can engage with others in shared sense-making by embracing ambiguity, multi-vocality, and the possibilities of emergence. Falck's "wall of data" becomes a physical externalization of the inner process of "holding the mess" of a rich array of data that results from trying to understand arts-based pedagogy. Falck's wall held images and ideas in unruly juxtapositions and, through multiple iterations of embodied engagement, non-linear connections and unexpected insights emerged. Similarly, Thorp's project allowed her to see/taste/feel emergent meanings among a community of women, deepening their moment-to-moment relationship with Earth and each other, as they created data and new stories of connection. In a classroom setting, Hash's teaching opened space for students to create expressions of their experience that traditional essays couldn't contain.

Courses in arts-informed inquiry are best done hands-on, requiring bodies together in space/place. As our doctoral program has moved online, our students now have limited access to expressive arts courses on the main university campus. This barrier, coupled with other programmatic changes and the limited audience for training in expressive arts, has produced a situation in which we have not been able to sustain our formal doctoral concentration in Expressive Arts. Nevertheless, given the ways in which we value expressive inquiry, our program will continue to invite students to consider arts-based research options and creative expression of their learning.

We suggest that arts-informed teaching and inquiry is a unique mode of engaging wicked problems that offers possibilities for collective sense-making that reaches beyond the limits of the rational. It's daring work that isn't guaranteed to produce "results" on a pre-determined timeline. Given the wicked nature of so many educational and global problems, we believe that arts-informed processes offer a unique and powerful avenue for holding the uncertain, ambiguous, shape-shifting dimensions of these problems in their wicked fullness.

It's the work of the arts-informed leader not to create clear, rational solutions, but containers for the processes and rhythms of expressive truth-tellings and shared sense-making. Bottery (2016) notes that the stance of leadership here is one of radical humility, in recognizing the limitations of one's own understanding and welcoming the richness and complexity of multiple human (and non-human) experiences that can inform how we address our shared predicaments.



## References

- Alaimo, S., & Hekman, S. (2008). Introduction: Emerging models of materiality in feminist theory. In S. Alaimo & S. Hekman (Eds.), *Material feminisms* (pp. 1-19). Indiana University Press.
- Allen, P. B. (1995). *Art is a way of knowing*. Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Atkins, S., & Snyder, M. (2018). *Nature-based expressive arts therapy: Integrating the expressive arts and ecotherapy*. Jessica Kingsley.
- Belizer, A., Axelrod, T., Benedict, C., Jakubik, T., Rosen, M., & Yavuz, O. (2016). The problem of practice dissertation: Matching program goals, practices, and outcomes. In J. Perry (Ed.), *The EdD and the scholarly practitioner* (pp. 153-175). Information Age.
- Bhattacharya, K. (2013). Voices, silences, and telling secrets: The role of qualitative methods in arts-based research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 6(4), 604-627.
- Bottery, M. (2016). *Educational leadership for a more sustainable world*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Chappell, K., Natanel, K., & Wren, H. (2021). Letting the ghosts in: Redesigning HE teaching and learning through posthumanism. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 1-23.
- Clark/Keefe, K., & Gilway, J. (2016). Attuning to the interstices of arts-based research and the EXA: An experiment in expanding the possibilities for creative approaches. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 9(2), 159-180.
- Coole, D., & Frost, S. (2010). Introducing the new materialisms. In D. Coole & S. Frost (Eds.), *New materialisms: Ontology, agency and politics* (pp. 1-43). Duke University Press.
- Cornell, M. (2013). *Casting the circle: An arts-based inquiry into creating spaces for emergent, interdisciplinary collaboration in higher education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation.
- Dempster, M. B. (1998). *A self-organizing systems perspective on planning for sustainability*. MA Thesis, Environmental studies, University of Waterloo.
- Falck, M. (2022). *Why art? Ways of responding to the world around us*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Appalachian State University.
- Greene, M. (2001). *Variations on a Blue Guitar*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Gulla, A. N., & Sherman, M. H. (2020). *Inquiry-based learning through the creative arts for teachers and teacher educators*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

Hash, P. (2019a). The educator inferno. *The Currere Exchange Journal*, 3(1), 74-81.

Hash, P. (2019b). Theoretical book clubs: Social experiences with required reading. *English Journal*, 109(2), 47-53.

Hash, P. (2020). Articulation: Engagement in composition courses through expressive arts. *Journal of Higher Education Theory & Practice*, 20(9), 102-120. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v20i9.3642>

Hash, P. (2021) Therapeutic effects of expressive arts curriculum in composition courses. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 16(3), 374-409, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2020.1848679>

Hash, P. (2022). Artful design: Disruptions within the dissertation in practice. *Impacting Education*, 7(1), 26-31. <https://doi.org/10.5195/ie.2022.229>

Hofsess, B. A. (2019). Afterglow anthotypes: Throwing and threading light on my ABER journey. In B. Bickel, R. Irwin, & R. Siegesmund (Eds.) *Arts-Based Educational Research Trajectories: Career Reflections by Authors of Outstanding Dissertations*. Springer.

Holmes, R., & Jones, L. (2016). Flickering, spilling and diffusing body/knowledge in the posthuman years. In C. A. Taylor & C. Hughes (Eds.), *Posthuman research practices in education* (pp. 108-128). Macmillan.

Hutchinson, C. (2018). *The simple guide to visual journaling (even if you aren't an artist)*. Alacris Publishing.

Knill, M. F. & Knill, P. J. (2017). Aesthetic responsibility in expressive arts: Thoughts on beauty, responsibility, and the new education of expressive arts professionals. In E. G. Levine and S. K. Levine, *New developments in expressive arts therapy: The play of poiesis* (pp. 181-193). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Leavy, P. (2018). Introduction to arts-based research. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Handbook of arts-based research* (pp. 3-21). Guilford.

Le Guin, U. K. (1996). The carrier bag theory of fiction. In C. Glotfelty & H. Fromm (Eds.), *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literacy ecology*, (pp. 149-54). University of Georgia Press.

Levine, S. K. (2017a). Aesthetic education: Learning through the arts. In E. G. Levine & S. K. Levine, *New developments in expressive arts therapy: The play of poiesis* (pp. 177-180). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Levine, S. K. (2017b). Preface. In E. G. Levine and S. K. Levine, *New developments in expressive arts therapy: The play of poiesis* (pp. 9-15). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Manning, E. (2016). *The minor gesture*. Duke University Press.

Miller, V., Plato, K., Clark/Keefe, K., Henson, J., & Atkins, S. (2013). Love letters, notes, and post cards: About pedagogy, ways of knowing, and arts-based research. *POIESIS: A Journal of the Arts and Communication*, 15, 22-35.

Murris, K., (2021). Introduction, making kin: Postqualitative, new materialist and critical posthumanist research. In K. Murris (Ed.), *Navigating the postqualitative, new materialist and critical posthumanist terrain across disciplines: An introductory guide* (pp. 1-21). Routledge.

Pearson, M., & Wilson, H. (2009). *Using expressive arts to work with mind, body and emotions: Theory and practice*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Perry, J., Zambo, D., & Crow, R. (2020). *The dissertation science dissertation in practice: A guide for faculty, committee members, and their students*. Myers Education Press.

Reed, S. F. (2017). Something else is more important than fear: Becoming in/appropriate educational leaders on the verge in a time of mass extinction and climate catastrophe. In V. Miller (Ed.), *Apocalyptic leadership in education: Facing an unsustainable world from where we stand* (pp. 55-84). Information Age Press.

Rittell, H. & Webber, M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4, 155-69.

Springgay, S. (2016). Towards a rhythmic account of working together and taking apart. *Research in Education*, 96(1), 71-77.

Springgay, S., & Truman S. E. (2016) Research-creation. *Walking lab*. <https://walkinglab.org/research-creation/>

Thorp, H. (2022) *Ongoing curiosities in post-formal education: Making kin, becoming kin, and becoming kin(d) with/in a story family sojourn* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Appalachian State University.