

Insight-Out:

*A phenomenological exploration of the nature and
appearance of learning*

by

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Abstract

Learning has typically been conceptualized and operationalized, especially in formal schooling, in objective, psychological terms. Subjective qualities of learning have been marginalized or dismissed altogether. As a career educator and someone involved for many years in alternative schooling designs, I provide an exploration of *the nature of learning* – critiquing how learning is defined by generalizable characteristics and appearances and describing how learning can be immanently and uniquely felt.

I begin the study by considering manifestations of learning in my personal growth. This is followed by a literature review of learning frameworks considered in light of my professional educational experiences. The themes uncovered in this impressional account of learning are then interrogated in a study of other autobiographical accounts of learning and a qualitatively designed fieldwork project exploring the nature of learning for six youth engaged in both formal schooling and informal self-directed education.

Hermeneutic phenomenology yields essential characteristics of learning, with autobiographical and interview data attesting to six core themes. Learning is: idiosyncratic and personal/ized; aligned with generative, creative and imaginative acts; always about some way of being in the world; enacted methodically and strategically; relationally configured; and individually animating and life-enhancing.

I propose new ways for educators to see their students holistically by perceiving their learning arising in fields of subjective, interactive affectivity. Educators can personalize learning through cultivating pedagogical relations and creating environments that maximize individual sense-making. Research results provide critique as well as credence to present attempts to personalize learning in K-12 and post-secondary institutions.

Keywords: personalized/personalizing learning; holistic learning; subjectivity; pedagogy; phenomenology