

First of all, theory is indispensable for the conceptualization of the phenomenon one wishes to investigate. While a researcher may wish to study learning, it is only after one has engaged with the question how one wishes to conceptualize learning—for example, as information processing, as behavioral change, as acquisition, as participation, as social practice—that one can make decisions about what the phenomena are one should focus on and how one might go about in doing so (the question of design, methodology and methods). Some researchers, more often those working at the interpretative end of the spectrum, object to bringing in theory at the initial stages of research as they feel it would bias the research findings and would blind researchers from seeing potentially relevant aspects that fall outside of one's theoretical frame. While it is of course always important to open in research, this particular objection fails to see that the world never appears unconceptualised, so that not to engage with conceptualization at all runs the risk of uncritically accepting existing definitions and conceptions of the object under investigation. Also, to conceptualize learning as, for example, participation in no way defines what one will find through empirical investigation which means that theory's role in conceptualization never replaces empirical work. (Biesta, 2010, p. 7)