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## Qualitative Paradigms In Music Education Research

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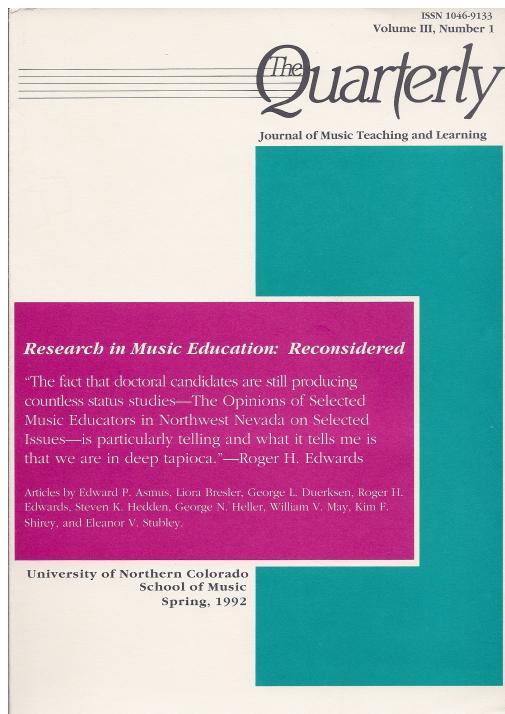
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*It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.*

# Qualitative Paradigms In Music Education Research

**By Liora Bresler**

*University of Illinois*

In this article, we review basic theory of qualitative inquiry in music education research. Qualitative approaches come with various names: *case study, field study, ethnographic research, naturalistic, phenomenological, interpretive, and symbolic interactionist*. We use qualitative research as a general term to refer to several research strategies that share certain characteristics: 1) highly *contextual description* of people and events; 2) emphasis on *interpretation* of both emic issues (those of the participants) and etic issues (those of the writer); and 3) validation of information through triangulation.

The first part of the paper provides an overview of some of the intellectual and methodological roots of qualitative research, its basic assumptions and goals, plus identification of kinds of research questions of central interest. In the second part we examine qualitative research in music, focusing on the kind of issues and methods they use. We examine models in pedagogy, ethnomusicology, and musical biography. Then we review some qualitative studies in music education, focusing on their aims and objectives, their primary issues and findings, and their unique contributions to the field. We conclude by pointing to the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research.

## Roots and Characteristics of Qualitative Methodology

Just as music and education trace back across the centuries ultimately to the crude and custom-driven habits of primitive societies, qualitative inquiry has its roots in the intuitive and survivalist behavior of early

peoples. For ages we have operated on hunches and emotions, increasingly using those that brought us safety and satisfaction. Gradually we saw the wisdom of what we already were doing: observing, questioning, keeping records and interpreting, respecting the experience and rumination of elders. Gradually we formed rules for study and names for our sciences. Music educators, too, increasingly drew from philosophers and social scientists to codify research procedures.

### Intellectual Roots

The intellectual roots of qualitative methodology lie in the idealist movement, in particular in the work of William Dilthey and Max Weber, who found their philosophical origins in Kantian thinking (Dilthey, 1900/1976; Weber, 1949; Kant, 1910). Kant distinguished objects and events as they appear in experience from objects and events as they are in themselves, independent of the forms imposed on them by our cognitive faculties. The former he called "phenomena," the latter, "noumena." All we can ever know, Kant argued, are phenomena. Rather than knowing the world directly, we sense, interpret, and explain it to ourselves. All experience is mediated by mind, and all human intellect is imbued with and limited to human interpretation and representation.

Phenomenologists followed Kant in the claim that immediate experiences and sensory observations are always interpreted or classified under general concepts. Their appeal to phenomena is therefore not an appeal to simple, uninterpreted data of sensory experience. Meaning is the target of phenomenology. Phenomenologists do not assume they know what things mean to others. Emphasizing the subjective aspects, they attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world

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of themselves and others. Giving accounts of their reality construction, phenomenologists believe that these inward construals derive from a developing understanding of self, others, and things. The relationships between these are not "givens" but dialectical, context-bound, and processual.

Qualitative researchers tend to be phenomenological in their orientation. Most maintain that knowledge is a human construction. They reason: While knowledge starts with sensory experience of external stimulus, these sensations are immediately given meaning by the recipient. Though meaning originates in outside action, only the inside interpretation is known. As far as people can tell, nothing about the stimuli is registered in awareness and memory other than our interpretations of it. This registration is not necessarily conscious or rational.

In people's minds, new perceptions of stimulation mix with old, and with complexes of perception, some of which we call generalizations. Some aspects of knowledge seem generated entirely from internal deliberation, without immediate external stimulation—but no aspects are purely of the external world, devoid of human construction.

#### **Concepts of Reality.**

The aim of qualitative research is not to discover reality, for by phenomenological reasoning this is impossible. The aim is to construct a clearer experiential memory and to help people obtain a more sophisticated account of things. Sophistication is partly a matter of withstanding disciplined skepticism. Science strives to build universal understanding. The understanding reached by each individual will be, of course, to some degree unique to the beholder, but much will be held in common. Though the comprehen-

sion we seek is of our own making, it is a collective making. Each of us seeks a well-tuned comprehension, one bearing up under further human constructions: scrutiny and challenge.

The qualitative researcher chooses which realities to investigate. For researcher data or interpretation of findings, not every person's personal reality is of equal use. Society deems some interpretations better than others. People have ways of agreeing on which are the best explanations. Of course they are not always right. There is no reason to think that among people fully committed to a constructed reality, all constructions are of equal value. One can believe in relativity, contextuality, and constructivism, without believing all views are of equal merit. Personal civility or political ideology may call for respecting every view, but scientific study does not.<sup>1</sup>

"According to [a quantitative paradigm], knowledge and truth are questions of correspondence--what is true is what corresponds to reality. In the qualitative paradigm, there is a range of positions, from the idealist belief that social and human reality are created, to the milder conviction that this reality is shaped by our minds."

Researchers interested in the uniqueness of particular teaching or learning find value in qualitative studies because the design allows or demands extra attention to physical, temporal, historical, social, political, economic, and aesthetic contexts. Contextual epistemology requires in-depth studies, leaving less time for the refinement of theme and construct. It is true that naturalistic and phenomenological case studies are

likely to be undertaken by researchers with constructivist persuasions. Why this is the case is not clear, but it probably would be a mistake to conclude that more than a realist logic, a constructivist logic promotes contextualist epistemology or case-specific study. It is not uncommon to find case-study researchers espousing a constructivist view of reality, but

"In actual life, no research study is purely qualitative or quantitative. In each qualitative study, enumeration and recognition of differences in amount have a place. And in each quantitative study, natural-language description and interpretation are expected."

the two persuasions are not one and the same.

Cultural sciences need descriptive as well as explanatory and predictive powers. At the beginning, middle, and end of a program of research, the researcher at times needs to concentrate on interpretive understanding (*verstehen*). This process of *verstehen* involves the ability to empathize, to recreate the experience of others within oneself.

Dilthey and Weber perceived understanding as hermeneutic, resulting from a process of interpretation. The hermeneutic experience is historical, linguistic, and dialectical. Understanding the meaning of any particular part of a text (a word or a sentence) requires an understanding of the meaning of the whole and vice versa. Thus, achieving a meaningful interpretation requires back-and-forth movement between parts and whole. Understanding cannot be pursued in the absence of context and interpretive framework. The hermeneutic perspective means that human experience is context-bound, and there can be no context-free or neutral scientific language with which to express what happens in the social world. At best, we could have laws applying to only a limited context for a limited time.

### **Qualitative Versus Quantitative Research**

The quantitative research tradition, grounded in the positivist urge for a science of society, fostered adaptation of the methodology of the physical sciences to investigate social and human worlds. From the theological to the metaphysical, twentieth-century positivism saw culmination of progress and human knowledge through scientific methods. Objects of study in the social sciences are to be treated in the same way as physical scientists treat physical things. The role of the social scientist is that of recorder and theory-builder for a reality existing outside human experience.

A second assumption in positivist thinking

was that in regard to values, social investigation can and should be a neutral activity. Hence, social scientists should eliminate all bias and value-laden preconception and not be emotionally involved with their subject matter. Knowledge derived from social investigation would eventually result in the same sort of technological mastery over the social world as physical science had for the physical world. The aims of practical application would be achieved by the discovery of social laws which point at the relationships between and among social objects, aiming, like physical laws, at context-free social laws (Hempel, 1966; Popper, 1969).

Dilthey and Weber challenged the positivist point of view, arguing that social studies has a different ontological and epistemological status. They claimed that we are both the subject, as well as the object of inquiry: The subject matter concerns the product of human minds and as such is inseparably connected to our minds, bringing along all our subjectivities, cognitions, emotions, and values. Furthermore, the complexity of the social world and cultural differences make it impossible to discover laws as in the physical sciences. Rather than a series of overarching causal laws, they said, emphasis must be on understanding the individual case or type.<sup>2</sup>

Philosophically, we are dealing here with two paradigms. The quantitative paradigm supports investigation of how reality exists independent of us. Ontological questions concerning what is can be kept separate from the epistemological questions about how we come to know "what is." According to that paradigm, knowledge and truth are questions of correspondence—what is true is what corresponds to reality. Done well, the activity of investigation does not affect what is being investigated.

In the qualitative paradigm, there is a range of positions, from the idealist belief that social

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and human reality are created, to the milder conviction that this reality is shaped by our minds. But all the positions posit a degree of mind involvement with subject matter not acceptable to the quantitative, positivist, realist tradition. The idea that the process of investigation can be separated from what is being investigated is possible only within that realist perspective. In the realist view, an investigation is directed toward an external referent. In the idealist view, the process is external as well as internal, a part of the investigator's active participation in shaping the world (cf. Peshkin, 1988).

In actual life, no research study is purely qualitative or quantitative. In each qualitative study, enumeration and recognition of differences in amount have a place. And in each quantitative study, natural-language description and interpretation are expected. The distinction as we see it is an epistemological distinction that can be identified as the distinction between inquiry for making explanations versus inquiry for promoting understanding. This distinction has best been developed by the Finnish philosopher of science Georg Hendrik von Wright, who emphasized the epistemological distinction between formal explanations and experiential understanding (1971).

Quantitative study was nourished by the scientific search for grand theory, seeking generalizations that hold over diverse situations, trying to eliminate the merely situational, letting contextual effects "balance each other out." Quantitative researchers try to nullify context in order to find the most general and pervasive explanatory relationships. Research in education, including music education, has been dominated by this universalist approach, this grand search for explanation. Quantification occurs in order to permit simultaneous study of a large number of dissimilar cases, in order to put the

researcher in a position to make formal generalizations about teaching and learning. Proposition-shaped knowledge obviously can be important.

It is apparent, though, that much important knowledge about education is situational. Qualitative researchers have a great interest in the uniqueness of the individual case, the variety of perceptions of that case, and the different intentionalities of the actors who populate that case. These interests force the researcher to find easy access situations for repeated observations, to limit attention to small numbers of teachers and students, to rely little on objective measurement, and to probe in unexpected directions. Fixed designs are less necessary and can be less productive for providing understanding of particular cases. Still, in a discipline governed strongly by an existing composition or score, the musician may find the structures of quantivism attractive and the open-field behavior of the qualitative researcher too improvisational.

Qualitative researchers are not devoid of interest in generalization, but it does not dominate their thinking. Often the qualitative researchers' commitments to multiple interpretations become manifest in a desire to assist practitioners to interpret the situations for themselves. The intent of research then may become the provision of vicarious experience for report readers who will draw their own generalizations, combining previous experience with new. It often is research specially designed to assist practice. The choice of epistemological role for research and the immediacy of its assistance to practice should be part of our distinction between quantitative and qualitative inquiries.

Qualitative researchers too have interest in frequency, typicality, and generalizability (cf. Stake, Bresler, & Mabry, 1991). Still, their craft is distinguished by an overly holistic viewing of phenomena. They examine mul-

tiple situations, but each at close quarters, not forcing them into comparison, not fixated on common variables. It is not uncommon for a qualitative researcher to ask in mid-study, “Of all things, what is it that is most important to be learned from this case?” In music education, we have need for formal generalizations and need for experiential understandings of particular situations. We need high quality research, both quantitative and qualitative.

### **Characteristics of Qualitative Research**

- 1. It is holistic.** Its contexts are well studied. It is case-oriented (a case may be a student, a teacher, a classroom, a curriculum, or any “bounded system”). It is relatively noncomparative, seeking to understand its case more than to understand how this case differs from others.
- 2. It is empirical.** It is field-oriented, the field being the natural settings of the case. Its emphasis is on observables, including observations by informants. It strives to be naturalistic, noninterventionistic. There is a preference for natural-language description. The researcher is the key instrument. For qualitative research, researchers typically spend considerable time in schools, homes, neighborhoods, and other locales learning about educational concerns. Data are collected on the premises. Qualitative researchers go to the particular settings because they are concerned with context. Action can be better understood when it is observed in the natural setting.
- 3. It is descriptive.** Data take the form of words and graphics more than numbers. The written results of the research contain quotations to illustrate and substantiate the presentation.
- 4. It is interpretive.** Its researchers rely on intuition, with many important criteria not specified. Its on-site observers strive to keep attention free to recognize problem-relevant events. It is attuned to the fact that research is a researcher-subject interaction. Qualitative research is concerned with the different meanings that actions and events carry for different members.
- 5. It is empathic.** It attends to the presumed intentions of those being observed. It seeks actors' frames of reference, value com-

mitments. Though planned, its design is emergent, responsive. Its issues are emic issues, progressively focused. Its reporting provides vicarious experience.

**6. Some researchers emphasize working from the bottom up** (e.g., Glaser's and Strauss's term “grounded theory,” 1967). Indeed, the direction of the issues and foci often emerge during data collection. The picture takes shape as the parts are examined.

**7. Observations and immediate interpretations are validated.** Triangulation, the checking of data against multiple sources and methods, is routine. There is deliberate effort to disconfirm one's own interpretations. The reports assist readers to make their own interpretations, as well as to recognize subjectivity.

### **Qualitative Studies in Music**

The first decades of research in music education, much like in general education, were characterized by adherence to quantitative models. Little research employed qualitative strategies to illuminate education problems. The late 1960s affected research mores, too; national foci on educational equity and back-to-basics curricula swung concern to values, feelings, and minority perspectives. Many recognized that we did not know enough about the educational experience of children who were “not making it.” In general education, qualitative emphasis on understanding the perspective of all participants challenged the idea that the views of those in power are worth more than the views of others. Student perspectives (cf. Jackson, 1968) and the viewing of school as a system of discipline (cf. Dreeben, 1968; Foucault, 1977; Henry, 1966) were widely considered. Concern about student achievement yielded somewhat to concern for what students were actually doing in school. All this stimulated the need for different content, goals, and methods. It opened up educational researchers to qualitative approaches.

Music education, too, followed that route, perhaps delayed a decade or so. The emphasis in formal music education research on quantitative methodology is reflected in books, reports, journal papers, and dissertations. But researchers and practitioners, teachers and conductors, have always used

qualitative observations. To establish pedagogy requires observation of students in order to pinpoint problems and suggest remedies. In an ancient example considered to be the first music pedagogy book, *L'art de Toucher Le Clavicin*, François Couperin (1933/1717) expressed pedagogical assertions based on observations of student behavior: "With regard to making grimaces, it is possible to break oneself of this habit by placing a mirror on the reading-desk of the Spinet or harpsichord" (p. xx); "It is better and more seemly not to beat time with the head, the body, nor with the feet" (p. xx). Because the discipline of Couperin's observations and analysis is not known, we do not consider his writings to be research-based, but rather a source of pedagogical knowledge.

As Couperin's book illustrates, pedagogical books on performance and conducting are designed to foster learning and remedy problems more than to arrive at causal explanations or understandings of the situation. Performance, like some aspects of pedagogy, involves a self-synchronous process of constant listening (either in one's own playing or in ensemble) and comparing it to the score. Through score interpretation, the performer knows not only individual details—parts and sections of the score—but also develops a conception of the complete work. The style of performance best suited to any given work; the need for a sound knowledge of music theory, harmonic analysis, and musical form; musicological knowledge relating to the composer's various works, as well as to other works of the period; all of these shape a performance.

Ethnomusicology is a field in music that draws its intellectual roots and methods from musicology as well as from anthropology. Merriam (1964) and Nettl (1983) discuss two major approaches in ethnomusicology. The first, standardized musicology, is a comparative study of musical systems and cultures that aims to record and analyze music in order to produce an accurate structural analysis of the music investigated. The study is based upon a fact-gathering descriptive approach, dealing with such questions as the modes of Persian or Indian music, names of instruments, how they are made, and who owns them.

The second approach, aiming to under-

stand music in the context of human behavior, is an anthropological speciality. Here, the field worker tries to approximate the anthropologist, for his concern is upon much broader questions of the use and function of music, the role and status of musician, the concepts which lie behind musical behavior, and other similar questions (cf. Merriam, 1967; Nettl, 1987). The emphasis is upon music but not upon music divorced from its total context; the investigator attempts to emerge from his study with a broad and generally complete knowledge both of the culture and the music, as well as the way music fits into and is used within the wider context (Merriam, 1964, p. 42). This second approach is typically a field-oriented naturalistic study. The researcher stays at the site for a considerable amount of time, getting immersed in the culture. The issues, a combination of emic and etic, are progressively focused. The direction of the issues and foci often emerge during and after data collection. With few exceptions (cf., Kiel, 1966; Oliver, 1960), ethnomusicological studies typically examine other cultures. Few ethnomusicological studies examine familiar musics in familiar settings.

Biography and autobiography have always been important parts of musicology and recently have become a topic of renewed interest in literary criticism (cf. Elbaz, 1987), as well as in sociology (cf. Denzin, 1989) and anthropology (cf. Geertz, 1988). Feminist views have had an important influence in this discussion (cf. Jelinek, 1980; Spacks, 1976). While sociology focuses on *interpretive biography*—the creation of literary, narrative accounts and representations of lived experience (Denzin, 1989), the traditional use of biographies in music centers around life-events, especially family, patrons and mentoring, a written account or history of an individual. The goals and methods of qualitative methodology are compatible with those of the interpretive sociological tradition. Jean-Paul Sartre illustrates these goals and assumptions in the preface to *The Family Idiot, Gustave Flaubert, vol. 1, 1821-1857* (1981):

What, at this point in time, can we know about man? It seemed to me that this question could only be answered by studying a specific case....For a man is never an individual; it would be more fitting to call him a

“[I]n a discipline governed strongly by an existing composition or score, the musician may find the structures of quantivism attractive and the open-field behavior of the qualitative researcher too improvisational.”

universal singular. Summed up and for this reason universalized by his epoch, he in turn resumes it by reproducing himself in it as singularity. Universal by the singular universality of human history, singular by the universalizing singularity of his projects, he requires simultaneous examination from both ends. (pp. ix-x)

Even though these knowledges have not, until recently, entered the established domains of music education research, the methods of observation, the interview, the use of archival materials, and immersion in the case have long been important tools in music education, and in performance and musicology as well. A pioneering work which drew upon these methods, done within the formal boundaries of music education research, was the Pillsbury Foundation Study, (Moorhead & Pond, 1941; 1942; 1944; 1951). Initiated by people outside music education (conductor Leopold Stokowski and composer Donald Pond), the Pillsbury study was dedicated to the discovery of children's musical development through analysis of free, unhampered musical play. Amazed at the spontaneous outpouring of music in young children, Pond wanted to understand how and why children become musically expressive. Thinking along Deweyan lines, he wanted to provide them with opportunities and materials so that they might function in their own ways as musicians. In the study, Pond made a conscious attempt to set aside adult notions about elements of music, processes of learning music, and ways of assessing musical development.

The Pillsbury study was conducted with children ages 3 through 6 who attended a kindergarten designed specifically for research into musical creativity. This environment was full of enticing instruments (e.g., sarong, Chinese and Burmese gongs, Indian drums, and tom-toms) and supportive, musically knowledgeable (but not intrusive) adults. The methods of study involved in-

depth observation and analysis. Since the context of sound was of major importance, the observations included such activities as speech and physical movement. All sounds produced were considered musical or “embryonically of musical value.” In his reports, Pond provided such examples as when a child calls from the sandbox: “I want a red spoon” in a rhythmic and tonal pattern or a child riding on a tricycle is singing over and over to himself in unvarying rhythm: “I ran over a whole basket of cherries.” The final report was a set of three short case studies of individual children selected for individual differences and approaches. Data included personal and biographical information such as age and family and school histories.

Some naturalistic studies are taxonomic; others are not. Pond and Moorhead worked toward classification of the musical products. A classification of instrumental music, for example, included flexible and asymmetrical measures, exploring wide intervals, tone colors and pitch contrast. Another category of sonic physical activity, “insistent and savage,” was based on rigid and symmetrical rhythms, indifferent to melody and color variety. Pond distinguished between two types of spontaneous vocal utterances: “song,” private rhythmically and melodically complex entities; and “chant,” a more public utterance, often spontaneously improvised by groups of children. Social-personal contexts were seen to be highly relevant; most chants were developed first by one child and then continued by that child or undertaken by others to form a series. Pond raised issues such as: Are these rhythmic patterns fundamental to the child's musical consciousness? What are the relationships between rhythmic patterns and physical rhythms?

The Pond and Moorhead study was holistic, case oriented, non-comparative. The authors sought to understand each child more than to understand how children differ from each

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other. The natural setting was stressed, with an emphasis on observables. Pond and Moorhead did not try to intervene but rather to observe, describe, and understand that which was not known and understood before.

The Pillsbury study set a new direction for investigation of free musical activities and improvisation. For music education research, it provided methodological directions and legitimization of the use of naturalistic methods. In the late 1970s and 1980s, music education saw a spurt of qualitative works, independently undertaken in different locations and universities across the country. Jean Bamberger (1977; 1978) examined two subjects' perceptions of a melody, noting the strategies used by each to compose a melody and the relationship between perceptions, models, strategies, and the completed melody. Interestingly, a protocol analysis employing an innovative computer-based recording system to study compositional process was included.

Most reported qualitative studies have been dissertations, works of solitary, inexperienced researchers, backed by few financial resources (cf. Gerber, 1975; Freundlich, 1978; Cohen, 1980; Lewers, 1980; L'Roy, 1983; Thiel, 1984; Garrison, 1985; Kreuger, 1985; Upitis, 1985; Bresler, 1987; DeLorenzo, 1987; Harwood, 1987). Veronica Cohen (1980) examined the generation of musical ideas in a loosely structured situation. Discussing her methods, Cohen noted that:

This is not a conventional study in which the researcher set up a plan and then followed it, reporting in what ways it was successful or not. Instead, borrowing on the naturalistic, exploratory and yet scientific tradition exemplified in some of the most important of Piaget's studies, it searched through observations over many years, focusing finally on a few of two children's musical productions that held the most promise for revealing the underlying structure and dynamics of children's spontaneous music (p. 1).

Data collection included a three-year period of general background observation, an immersion in children's free musical play in the kindergarten, followed by a rigorous and detailed study of videotaped data involving two kindergarten children. Cohen discussed the role of intuition and accumulated knowledge of the whole field of music in making the thousands of decisions in data collection in the field. "The researcher becomes the chief instrument who selects, interprets and synthesizes evidence in order to break through to the mind of the child" (p. 2). Engagement in musical dialogues with children was a focus. Descriptors included the role of kindergarten music, teacher interest, and the participant-observer role of the researcher. Cohen reports that she was constantly involved in planning the music curriculum, taught demonstration classes for university students, demonstrated ways of interacting with children at the music center, and discussed and analyzed children's work for classroom teachers, parents, and university students.

Cohen investigated musical gestures, noting how the children organized sounds into "musical ideas." Using videotapes for data collection, Cohen found that such behavior could be nicely placed into three broad categories: exploration, mastery, and generation of musical gestures. She speculated that even at this early age children tended to specialize; some almost always engaged in "mastery" activities (reproduction of known melodies) whereas others "improvised" their own gestures.

Influences of culture and society on the musical behavior of children is a relatively sociology-based area studied by qualitative researchers. In Israel, Devorah Kalekin-Fishman (1981, 1986) investigated the nature of music in kindergartens, examining it from teacher as well as student perspectives. A kindergarten was chosen as the case because it is here the child encounters society as officially organized by educators and is exposed

to conceptual frameworks deliberately arranged to fit at least a dozen years of life in educational organizations. Kalekin-Fishman made intensive observations and conducted semi-structured interviews. An analysis of tonal patterns in kindergartens in Germany and Israel showed that with minimal framing (intended pitch and intended rhythm), children produced varieties of typified music-making. Their kindergarten teachers, however, restricted the children's varieties of music by encouraging music-making that resembled quite limited, traditional forms and by discouraging music that did not conform.

Ethnomusicology provides an important model for music education research. Virginia Garrison (1985) examined the transmission process of folk music, a process that is as vital to that tradition as is its product, the music. If folk music is to be included in formal music educational settings, then it is important that those social and musical aspects of the folk music tradition which are essential to that tradition are identified. In order to investigate the transmission process and the effect of changed instructional context on that process, Garrison used ethnomusicological methods of extensive and intensive naturalistic observations of 72 practicing fiddlers and 49 beginning fiddling students in a variety of contexts for a period of six years, as well as open-ended interviews and photography.

In a similar vein, Eve Harwood (1987) opened her dissertation by discussing the difficulty of researchers studying music of a culture different from their own. While at one time it was considered sufficient to analyze musical artifacts in the form of tape recordings and transcription, using terms appropriate to traditional Western musicology, modern ethnomusicology holds that understanding and describing the cultural context in which music-making occurs is a necessary part of understanding the music of a given group. Whereas an outsider's analytical tools and observations are not necessarily invalid, an insider's view of what is significant about his music can illuminate our understanding in a unique way.

In the case of North American children, folklorists and musicians were collecting children's repertoires before 1900, but little scholarship had been directed toward the

singers themselves. Harwood's study was based on the assumption that children's music and their musical world are distinct from those of adults; children and adults differ on what is beautiful, attractive, or good to sing. Harwood's was not a naturalistic study; her procedures included semi-structured interviews in which the 15 children sang all the songs they could remember, discussed how they had learned each song, and described their singing habits and preferences. A parent of each child answered questions regarding the child's singing habits and preferences and the musical life of the family. Interviews and singing were taped and transcribed, and a fieldwork journal of impressions and visual observations was kept. In conclusion, Harwood once again asserted the need to study children's music as one would study that of any outside culture, attempting to appreciate both the insider's and the outsider's view of the material.

In the studies just reviewed, researchers examined relatively uncharted territories in order to understand musical activities in context. The study of innovation is another such uncharted territory. Qualitative methodology not only allows but features the study of contexts. One innovation has been an introduction of instructional computer programming which, many music educators claim, dramatically affects the music education scene. Case studies are one of many ways to examine accommodation of computers and other advanced technologies into music classes (Bresler, 1987; Bresler & Walker, 1990).

Focusing on social and cultural contexts, Saville Kushner (1985) studied an innovative, three-year course for third- and fourth-year students at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. The course, a response to fundamental misgivings about the education of musicians in conservatories, arranged student performances and workshops at a range of unconventional community sites. Kushner was commissioned not to judge the merits of the program, but rather to collect and record information that evaluators would find useful in making such judgments. His report was rich in descriptions of program development over time, noting student and teacher perception and audience response. Through

vignettes and vivid pictures, it conveyed conservatory life, its inside rivalries, competitions, participant experiences, and implicit and explicit goals and values. The personal debates about destinations, the dreams, the dilemmas—some personal, yet so common to performance-oriented people—captured a reality pertinent to musical lives, innovations, and experiences. The portrayal of student perspectives, including those at the lower social strata, captured personal and cultural meanings of music, confusion over what the role of the professional musicians should be, and the social context of repertoire.

Case studies are usually confined to one setting but some, often those funded by major agencies, encompass larger scales. In 1987-1990, a series of eight case studies portraying ordinary arts instruction in the United States was conducted by the Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation (CIRCE) under the auspices of the National Arts Education Research Center, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (see Stake, Bresler, & Mabry, 1991). Described in detail were the fundamental differences in elementary program offerings between music education specialists and the general classroom teachers, not only in curricula and pedagogy, but in impact on scheduling, resources, and the use of curricular organizers as well. One etic issue was the role of community resources and performances. Classroom observations brought out the "hidden curriculum," art as relief from schoolwork, plus the regularity of music presented without background or interpretation, whether for class participation or as background activity to eating, doing worksheets, or reading. The emphasis was not on what ought to be, but the study did provide researcher interpretation as to what is needed.

Another federally funded project was the Elementary Subjects Study funded by the U. S. Department of Education at Michigan State University. Music and the visual arts were studied along with mathematics, science, social studies, and literature. The program focused on conceptual understanding, higher order thinking and problem solving in elementary school teaching through a series of case studies of music and visual arts instruction (May,

1990). Research questions include:

- What content is taught when teaching for conceptual understanding and higher level learning?
- How do teachers negotiate curricular decisions?
- How do teachers concentrate their teaching to use their limited resources best?
- In what ways is good teaching subject-matter specific?

## Methods and Criteria

The primary task of the researcher is interpretation, with interpretations presented eventually not just as findings but as assertions (Erickson, 1986). The most obvious work of the qualitative researcher is data gathering in the field. The ethic of qualitative research calls for abundant description, sufficient for readers to participate in verification of the researcher's interpretations and to make some of their own (Stake, 1978). Thus, most of the methodological advice in the literature has to do with data gathering.

### Data Collection

The examples of music education research described earlier identify the main methods for qualitative research: intensive observation in natural settings, examination of documents and other artifacts, and interviews. Even when audio- or video-taped, the principal "instrument" is the researcher, who constantly interprets what is important and assesses the need for further data, for probing, and for small or large redesign of the study. The design of the study is said to be emergent or progressively focused (Strauss, 1987). The design is based not only on a strong sense of the research questions or issues at hand (Smith, 1978), but on the growing body of interpreted observations.

When assuming the more common nonparticipant role, the researcher observes ordinary activities and habitat, the people, the exercise of authority and responsibility, the expression of intent, the productivity, and especially the milieu. Believing that important understandings are situationally rooted, the researcher carefully describes the contacts, noting not just space and time characteristics, but social, economic, political, historical, and aesthetic contexts. The nonparticipating observer is as invisible and

“Quantitative analysis is used more to work toward generalization across specifics observed in the field....Uniqueness of each particular situation is given little attention; the typical, aggregate and generalizable are given more.”

nonintrusive as possible, often even refraining from appearing to record what is going on.

In the participant-observer role, the researcher engages in the ordinary activities of the group or program being studied, but tries not to redirect those activities. Participation can be marginal, perhaps paralleling the role of help-mate with some sharing of interests and problems (e.g. Kushner, 1985; Stake, Bresler & Mabry, 1991) or more extensive, such as the teacher as researcher in the classroom or the researcher as consultant providing inservice training to teachers (e.g. Cohen, 1980). The growing interest in action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) was apparent at recent meetings of the American Education Research Association. Here especially, but even in the more passive role as interpreter, the researcher is seen as an interactive force in documenting events.

Document review is an essential component of data collection (Andre, 1983). Formal and informal documents may provide the qualitative researcher with important data. Many useful documents are fugitive records, stored in forgotten places, making it necessary for the researcher to look through countless papers to find a useful one. Often the information needed is a marginal notation or not even a document at all, such as an inscription on a trophy or notes on a calendar.

Interviews are conducted not as surveys of how people feel but primarily to obtain observations that the researcher is unable to make directly, secondly to capture multiple realities or perceptions of any given situation, and finally to assist in interpreting what is happening. When standardized information is needed from large numbers of people, the written survey is more efficient, but most qualitative researchers want to probe more deeply than is possible with questionnaires. With a structured interview the researcher assumes questions are comprehensible and consistent in meaning across respondents.

Semi-structured interviews, with topics or questions predetermined, allow latitude for probing and following the interviewee's sense of what is important. Unfortunately, they are costly to administer and time-consuming in analysis. The degree of structure for individual questions, for the interview as a whole, or for the project as a whole are key decisions to be made and remade (Mishler, 1986).

The qualitative researcher seeks to be unobtrusive, knowing that the more attention drawn to the study, the more posturing and less ordinary activity available for observation. Even interviewing and testing are interventions, drawing attention to the presence and purpose of the research. The researcher takes advantage of indications of accretion and use, such as graffiti on walls or repair records for tape recorders. Gene Webb and his Northwestern University colleagues provided many examples of unobtrusive measures (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966), but one of the authors, Don Campbell, later expressed concern that heavy use of such methods persuade readers that social scientists are covert and deceptive, undermining the credibility of all research. Researchers, often in effect guests at the workplace and in the privacies of others, should be considerate. With its probing orientation, qualitative research easily intrudes into the personal affairs of others, and anonymizing the report is often insufficient to avoid the risk of harming people. Handling data is an ethical as much as a technical matter (Rainwater & Pittman, 1969).

#### **Data Analysis**

Techniques vary widely. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses of data are used by the qualitative researcher. Quantitative analysis is used more to work toward generalization across specifics observed in the field. It proceeds largely by coding, classifying, and aggregating observations (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Thus, for example, teaching episodes are increasingly seen to be of

"Qualitative analysis is...focused on a small number of issues or themes....The researcher selects the most revealing instances, identifies vignettes, and composes narratives from day to day, then uses an even smaller selection in the final presentation."

perhaps three kinds and the length of student deliberation in choosing a musical instrument is treated statistically. Uniqueness of each particular situation is given little attention; the typical, aggregate and generalizable are given more. Such an approach is often followed in policy analysis (Yin, 1984).

Qualitative analysis is organized more around the notes and stories the researcher keeps, increasingly focused on a small number of issues or themes. The researcher selects the most revealing instances, identifies vignettes, and composes narratives from day to day, then uses an even smaller selection in the final presentation (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). The choice of what to report is subjective, evolving, emphasizing more what contributes to the understanding of the particulars observed than relating to cases and situations elsewhere, usually giving no more than minor attention to comparisons, not worrying much about typicality or representativeness. Thus, the integrity, complexity, and contextuality of individual cases are probed. Readers fit them in among cases they have known. If theory building is the ultimate intent of the researcher here, qualitative analysis paces it not by years but by decades.

Multiple case studies require a kind of analysis that remains largely unformalized. One tries to preserve the uniqueness of the individual case, yet produce cross-site conclusions. The usual reporting procedure is to present a long or short summary of each case, then chapters on understanding the aggregate (Huberman & Miles, 1984). Panels of interpreters, some of whom may not have observed at any sites, are often more useful for enriching and challenging the interpretations—but require more comprehensive site summaries than site-visiting researchers usually provide for themselves. For self-use, panel or instructional purposes, such summaries provide a synthesis of what the researcher knows about the site, tentative find-

ings, the quality of data supporting the findings, indications of what is still left to find out, and perhaps suggestions about an agenda for the next wave of data collection (Bogdan & Taylor, 1984).

### **Criteria of Quality**

The characteristics of quality in quantitative studies are widely agreed upon: representativeness of the sample, reliability and validity of measurement, objectivity in interpretation and the probabilities of Type I and Type II errors, to name several (Campbell & Stanley, 1966). No such summary of characteristics of quality has been developed for qualitative research. Many of the same concepts are worthy of consideration but when purposes are different, (e.g., a low interest in broad generalization), then the criteria will be different. Whether the alternative purposes are legitimate is a question that researchers continue to debate.

The most important criterion for any research is that it is about something important, important to readers as well as researchers. Researchers are given great respect for recognizing what needs to be studied, and they should not abuse that privilege. Perhaps an overly large share of music education research is the psychological study of musical skills and knowledge; perhaps too little is the study of curriculum change and of music teaching. Still, the health of any research enterprise depends more on intellectual curiosity and studying what needs to be better understood, rather than what can be funded or will be pleasing to patrons and readers.

In a response to critics of naturalistic inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1988) asked methodologists and philosophers of science for evidence that well-crafted research grounded in qualitative and phenomenological traditions could be judged and found

- (1) systematically congruent with the context,  
i.e., valid;
- (2) not subject to aberrations in research pro-

cess or instrumentation, i.e., reliable; and (3) not open to charges of bias, prejudice or political advocacy of the investigators.

Lincoln and Guba rejected these more quantitative or positivist criteria on grounds that they were incompatible with the axioms of naturalistic research. They saw the naturalist's criteria to be (1) credibility (rather than internal validity), (2) transferability (rather than external validity or generalizability), (3) dependability (rather than reliability), and (4) confirmability (rather than objectivity). These alternative terms were advocated primarily to make clear the inappropriateness of conventional criteria for qualitative research (House, 1980).

To illustrate these criteria, consider a naturalistic case study of a program for preparing prospective band directors. As does a quantitative researcher, the qualitative researcher unconsciously or deliberately takes into account the experience, sophistication, curiosity and concerns of the eventual audience. But unlike the quantitative researcher, the qualitative researcher intends to build upon the uniqueness of personal understanding, offering for each reader a credible account and a vicarious experience for substantiation or modification of existing generalizations.

Transferability refers to the extent to which the research facilitates inferences by the reader regarding his or her own situations and responsibilities. Such are petite generalizations rather than the grand generalizations of the theory builder, relatively context free and a basis for general policy. Good transfer is based on similarity of situations, intuitively weighting as to what is important and unimportant in the match.

Our campus researcher seeks to describe band director trainees meaningfully to readers, observations transferable to their situations. Rather than measuring with an instrument(s) or frequency count, he or she observes and portrays the band teacher training experience, clearly describing people, dialogue, settings, expressions of intent and frustration, enabling the reader to associate this new vicarious experience with previous experience, recognizing ordinary use of both reasoning and intuition in clarifying views and improving understanding.

Confirmability is a sophisticated way of suggesting accuracy. With qualitative data we seldom have an accurate impression the first time we look; we have to confirm or triangulate (Denzin, 1970), and when we can we have others, including our readers confirm the finding. The researcher is not content to note available confirmatory evidence but deliberately seeks new facts that might refute the present facts (Popper, 1969). What are facts? Always, several important facts are in some degree interpretations (e.g., a professor's apparent disinterest in band appearance, particularly synchronous movement—whether or not she confirms it), the meanings differing from observer to observer. The researcher triangulates the observations, working toward some common perception, but expects and reports on certain differences in perception (for example, between male and female faculty members) and goes out of his way to relate certain ways he, with background and value commitment showing, interacted with the scene and arrived at assertions. With different backgrounds, the readers too interpret the account differently. Confirmability is an aim, not an ideal, to be tempered by the indefiniteness of reality and sticking with questions that matter.

Drawn by his persuasion toward constructed reality, our quantitative researcher finds it of little use to hypothesize some "true account" of the band director training program, an account independent of human observers, an ideal to which actual accounts might be compared. Even those parts of the account most agreed upon are not good grounds for considering "validity"—for many of those easily confirmed facts are of little interest and one way to get confirmation is to omit things, even important things, that people see differently. The account should be dependable among relatively neutral readers, portraying, had they been there, much of what they would have seen and omitting most of what they would have found irrelevant and distracting. The researcher is privileged in what to attend to; on the other hand, the audience can invalidate, at least for their purposes, the researcher's account as off-the-mark and incomplete.

Complete objectivity is unattainable and unsought in this research paradigm (Dilthey, 1910; Barone, 1990). The researcher seeks to

diminish subjectivity that interferes with comprehension, but also to exploit subjectivity for deeper interpretation (Peshkin, 1988). Although most readers have little interest in reading the researcher's track record, autobiographical and opinion statements are useful footnotes for deliberately revealing lack of experience, alliances and value positions. And to carry the handling of subjectivity further, the competent qualitative researcher finds ways of including contrary views and alternative explanations in the final accounts.

The criteria for high quality inquiry and for high quality reports are not one and the same. The inquiry process belongs largely to the researcher. Each of the data gathering and analysis methods have their own criteria. The criteria for reports (reports being communications requiring both a sender and a receiver) lie both in the hands of the researcher and the user of the research. With validity of quantitative measurement, it is not the test or instrument that has validity, it is each use of the measurements which is valid or invalid (Cronbach, 1971). Similarly with qualitative research, the meanings arrived at by individual readers and the applications to new practice are the ultimate indices of validity of the reports (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990). A final assertion might be that in the program studied here, band directors are reconsidering their roles in protection and perpetuation of local culture. If readers misinterpret this as indicating the graduates are hostile to change, the finding should be considered invalid. The researcher can do much to increase the quality of his work but it serves no more than to facilitate cautious and insightful use of his accounts.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

As summarized by Miles and Hubermann (1984), qualitative research is weakest in its contribution to basic research generalizations and policy study—but such contributions are not its intent. Its purpose is to facilitate understanding of the particular. Still, by charging the researcher with directional responsibility in the field, it lacks good protections against:

1. unaccounted subjectivity in its observations;
2. imprecise language in its descriptions;
3. vague descriptions of the research design;

4. unwieldy and voluminous reports;
5. implication of generalizability when little is warranted;
6. cost and time overrun; and
7. unethical intrusion into personal lives.

But the strengths of qualitative study are impressive as well. We would summarize those strengths as:

1. a holistic, systemic purview, emphasizing inner workings and contexts;
2. a strong, empirical commitment to triangulated description of teaching;
3. an obligation and opportunity to get the most from fieldwork interpretations; and
4. a sense of empathy enhancing the utility of use for applied practice in education.

These features have not characterized the majority of the music education research in our journals. Certainly it would be a mistake were all the issues and developments of music education to be studied naturalistically—but that imbalance is far away.

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*The author addresses this topic more extensively in the Handbook for Research in Music Teaching and Learning (Richard Colwell, Ed.), soon to be published by Schirmer Books.*

### **Notes**

1. Guba and Lincoln (1981) have identified gradations of belief in an independent versus a constructed reality. One's belief is linked to belief in how we come to know what we know—but ontology and epistemology are not interdeterminate. Belief in independent reality does not fix one's belief in a simple world. Nor does belief in constructionism fix belief in a heterogeneous, particularist world. Realists too believe that generalizations are regularly limited by local condition. "Do teachers always prefer authoritarian milieus or only under certain conditions?" Though idealists, relativists, situationalists, contextualists, and other champions of local knowledge often resist broad generalizations and are found to support constructivist ontology, their support for a contextualist epistemology is a correlate, not a derivative of that ontology.

2. Rorty's perspective on both idealism and positivism moves us towards the role of literature in qualitative methodology. Kant and Hegel, claims Rorty (1989), went only halfway in their repudiation of the idea that truth is "out there." They were willing to view the world of empirical science as a made world, to see matter as con-

structed by mind. But they persisted in seeing mind, spirit, the depths of the human self, as having an intrinsic nature, one which could be known by a kind of nonempirical superscience called philosophy. Thus, only half of truth, the bottom, scientific half, was made. The truth about mind, the province of philosophy, was still a matter of discovery rather than creation. The idealists confused the idea that nothing has intrinsic nature with the idea that space and time are unreal, that human beings cause the spatiotemporal world to exist. Claiming that truth is not out there, Rorty says that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages, as whole vocabularies, are human creations.

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