

Representing Practice: Community music and arts-based research

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The study of community music activity is an emergent discipline. Exploration, inquiry, and research into its practices have been growing since the 1980s (McCarthy, 2008). Groups such as ISME's Commission of Community Music Activity (CMA),¹ MENC's Special Research Interest Group for Adult and Community Education (SRIG-ACE),² Sound Sense,³ Sound Links,⁴ and North American Coalition for Community Music (NACCM)⁵ have either shown interest in research or have produced reports, proceedings, and papers. For example, CMA's proceeding including (Coffman, 2009; Coffman & Higgins, 2006; *Community Music in the Modern Metropolis*, 2002; Drummond, 1991; Leglar, 1996); The SRIG-ACE has an ongoing relationship with the *International Journal of Community Music* (IJCM) and articles can be found in issues 1:2 and 2:2/3; Sound Sense worked in partnership with the University of the West of England (Kushner, Walker, & Tarr, 2001); and Sound Links in partnership has just recently published its findings (Bartleet, Dunbar-Hall, Letts, & Schippers, 2009). These activities need to be seen in conjunction with the growth and development of the IJCM and a splattering of other articles published in other journals and books such as (Higgins, 2007, 2008; Koopman, 2007; Langston & Barrett, 2008; Olsson & Veblen, 2002).

In resonance with the theme 'Examining Community Music', this paper will ask 'What research strategies and methods are being used to investigate community music, and how is community music practice being represented and described? Using these questions as a starting point, I will present the research strategies and methods currently being employed within the community music literature. I will then make a case for arts-based research as an appropriate paradigm for community music research. In this context arts-based

research may be defined as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by researchers and the people that they involve in their studies. These inquiries are distinguished from research activities where the arts may play a significant role but are essentially used as data for investigations. The domain of arts-based research is then a focussed application of the larger epistemological process of artistic knowing and inquiry. Drawing from a body of literature surrounding emergent research techniques (Gary, 2003; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008; Hunter, 2002; Leavy, 2009; McNiff, 2008; Puccini & Kershaw, 2003), I will outline the development of arts-based research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Eisner, 1981; Finley, 2003, 2008; Sinner, 2006), offer empirical examples (Gary, 2003; Hunter, 2002; Jones, 2002; Saarnivaara, 2003; Thorp, 2003), and describe how community music practices are well suited to this approach. Through participatory discussion I would like to suggest that the CMA establish some research groups in order to ‘pilot’ these approaches.

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¹ http://www.isme.org/2010/commission_seminars_cma.html

² <http://www.acmesrig.org/>

³ <http://www.soundsense.org/metadot/index.pl>

⁴ <http://www.griffith.edu.au/music/queensland-conservatorium-research-centre/resources/sound-links-final-report>

⁵ <http://naccm.info>