



ResearchPuzzles

for music teachers

Research Puzzles editor's note: This month's contribution is from Dr. Cathy Benedict, FMEA research committee member.



Cathy Benedict, Ed.D., is finishing up her first year at Florida International University. As the coordinator of music education, she advises all music education students as well as teaches undergraduate and graduate classes such as elementary pedagogy, Orff/Kodály and music education and special needs students. Her research agenda focuses on the processes of education and the ways in which teachers and students interrogate taken-for-granted, normative practices.



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Why Do I Need a 'Why'?

by Cathy Benedict, Ed.D.

As a regular reader of *Research Puzzles*, you know that the writers of this column address questions that help us think through the most basic of research uncertainties to those that involve the most esoteric of statistical mechanics. Those of us who have engaged in research that takes us into the depths and wonderment of numbers and measurements, or into the intimacy and familiarity of our own classrooms, know that conducting research can be as much a great source of joy as it can be one filled with agony and frustration. This world, the one of consideration, contemplation and messing and mucking about, is one we enter for any number of reasons. We enter to find correlations, to test hypotheses; we enter to pursue great truths, to consider who we are; we enter to become more informed, to find purpose. We enter because not to enter would mean to stop pursuing the "why" that makes us human.

No matter what one's purpose, there is an underlying philosophy that helps guide our research. Some of us may fall into a more positivist paradigm in which the questions we are pursuing demand a set of quantitative tools that seek to measure and perhaps count. Others pursue questions that call for observation, questioning and rich descriptions. How we move forward often depends on where and how we see ourselves in relation to the questions we ask. How we move forward depends on our philosophical

grounding within our problem. How we move forward always, however, depends on ethical considerations.

As one of the reviewers for *Research Perspectives in Music Education*, and other scholarly journals both national and international, I have had the honor of reading multiple research studies. As someone whose trajectory of research has more often than not followed the lines of political theory, I bring a particular filter to the way I read these studies. Perhaps it is because of my research background that I am keenly attuned to the subject positioning of both the intended reader of the study and the author. Questions such as "who does the author presume the reader to be" frame my reading as I consider the mode of address, which as Ellsworth (1997) reminds us is "aimed precisely at shaping, anticipating, meeting, or changing who [we think we are]" (p. 7). I am, in other words, concerned about the extent to which the author recognizes the ideological world that her or his research inhabits.

To that end, as a reviewer, I find myself wondering about two interrelated issues, the assumptions (and the inextricably bound implications) that are being made and the "why" of the study. What actually is this "music program" about which so much is written, and what is even meant by "good music programs"? Is every reader in agreement as to the purpose of a music education program? Indeed, are

we all in agreement there should be such a thing as a music program? Unchecked assumptions are more often than not connected to either an unarticulated why or a why that has been made up to justify the research. Why should I care about this research, why is this important and finally, and perhaps most ethical of all, for whom is this research?

Each of us in our own way is a storyteller; we are historians as we think about the questions of our day and of our time. Our day and time, of course, are shaped and constructed by and related to the dominant ways of seeing and knowing the world. We live our discipline—music education—and make our place through the questions we choose to ask. The challenge is not to valorize method over engagements that allow us to realize our human capacities. Why the "why" is important is the basis of our humanity; it signifies who and how we are in the world. ☰

Reference

Ellsworth, E. (1997). *Teaching positions: Difference, pedagogy, and the power of address*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Email your questions and feedback to d.coffman1@miami.edu with a subject heading *Research Puzzles*. Your questions, if selected for publication, will remain anonymous.