

[More From This Issue](#)

[Current Issue](#)

[Back Issues](#)

[Guidelines](#)

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A World of Full of Voices

By Carolyn Kenny [|Author bio & contact info|](#)



For several hundred years now, the primary research method in anthropology has been ethnography. One does not see many experimental studies that use randomized clinical trials in the study of culture. And there is a very practical reason for this. Culture is far too complex to control variables. Culture cannot be studied in a lab. Culture is its own unique kind of container with implied signals that are difficult to observe. Culture is lived within a context, but not in a laboratory. So we have *thick descriptions* to help us find knowledge and truth about the lives lived within these contexts. We have stories.

One of the tremendous challenges facing our Forum on Music Therapy is to honor the diversity of these stories, the ones that emerge from many different cultures and continents. In this issue of *Voices*, we have examples of some of the paradoxes that occur between cultures..

For the first time in the history of our publication, we have several articles that use quantitative measures. These texts have emerged from non-Western cultures where professionals, and in some cases, professional activists, are attempting to establish research protocols for Music Therapy. Then we have two powerful stories about Music Therapy from contributors in Western cultures.

We also have a very provocative interview conducted by a non-Western advocate for Music Therapy in India with a leader in standard-setting in a Western country. One of the deeply provocative aspects of this interview is the introduction, written by our Interview Editor, Leslie Bunt.

What does it all mean?

Well, we have to invoke C. Wright Mills, the great sociologist who wrote the classic text, *The Sociological Imagination*. When non-Western Music Therapists create their research protocols and standards on models from the West, we can use our imagination to balance out the cultural factor in an attempt to avoid hegemony. Hegemony reminds us that any system is embedded with the values and beliefs of the people who created the system. We can ask the question:

What kind of research and standards would these cultures have invented for Music Therapy if they had not had Western models upon which to base their own models?

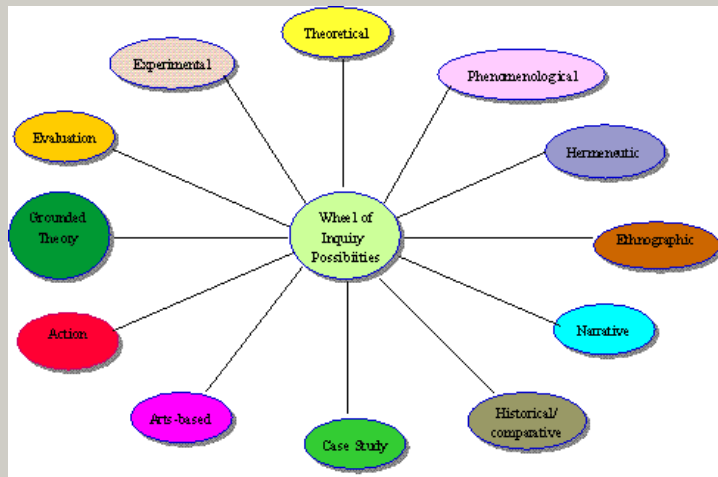
Of course we are global citizens now. And we borrow from each other on a regular basis. We have developed an aspect of human life that echoes our nomadic ancestors, who gathered whatever they could as they traveled, never asking the questions emerging from the crises of representation about cultural context, intellectual property rights, hegemony, postmodernism, deconstruction, construction, or any of the other contemporary intellectual traditions.

But we can only function well as global citizens if we embrace the diversity of life, which includes the diversity of standards of practice and research protocols.

Any financial consultant would advise a person to have a diversified portfolio of investments. In

research, we would be wise to develop research practices that represent a variety of approaches. Here is a wheel of possibilities:

Figure1: This Wheel of Inquiry Possibilities includes the following types of research: Theoretical, Phenomenological, Hermeneutic, Ethnographic, Narrative, Historical/comparative, Case Study, Arts-based, Action, Grounded Theory, Evaluation, and Experimental



Many of the types of research overlap. But each one also represents a distinct possibility. The one which might be the most fascinating right now and which is really coming in to its own is Arts-based Research.

In my own imagination, I chuckle, because this, in fact might be the type of research which would come first in non-Western cultures. And it is, in fact, the oldest type of research. After all, the arts, including stories and narratives, communicate a special kind of knowledge that defies logic, a kind of knowledge and information that is not available through the other types of research – just like music, dance, arts, and Music Therapy.

The great anthropologist Edward Hall wrote:

Two widely divergent but interrelated experiences, psychoanalysis and work as an anthropologist, have led me to the belief that in his strivings for order, Western man has created chaos by denying that part of his self that integrates while enshrining the parts that fragment experience. These examinations of man's psyche have also convinced me that: the natural act of thinking is greatly modified by culture; Western man uses only a small fraction of his mental capabilities; there are many different and legitimate ways of thinking; we in the West value one of these ways above all others—the one we call "logic", a linear system that has been with us since Socrates. (p. 9)

Within the arts, we access the body and sensations, the emotions and feelings as "thinking, judging, making, moving, being, knowing". What Music Therapist would not agree? (Austin & Forinash, 2005).

The diversity of voices represented in *Voices* invites us into a shared conversation about how to improve our human condition in old and new ways, diverse ways, without a pre-ordained hierarchy placing West, East, South, and North.

Or as Humberto Maturano, the great Chilean biologist, once said to me at a European conference on Music Therapy: "Why are you Music Therapists so obsessed with science? Poetry is so much more interesting."

References

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