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My colleague and friend, Philosopher of Education Chris Higgins, has pointed out to me that all research is “me-search.” Chris talked about a “torturing question” that motivates us in our life-long scholarship. If I may paraphrase it to something less torturous, my own “lingering question” concerns the nature and power of intensified engagement. Intensified engagement becomes most readily defined by its (alas, all too prevalent) absence: a lack of engagement manifested, for example, in the indifferent reading of a paper, or while attending a lecture that fails to engage us. Lack of engagement is not exclusive to scholarship but can be present in all aspects of life, including music, for example, when hearing music that does not touch us, or, as I vividly recall from my earlier years, in the drudgery of music drills in preparation for the weekly lesson.

Having identified intensified engagement (both as a subject and quality) as a key theme in my research, I found its presence in everything I wrote, (long before I articulated it as an issue), approached from various angles and perspectives: in my Master’s thesis in musicology, exploring the manifestation of personal and national identity grounded in powerful musical experiences; in my work in music and arts curriculum and the investigation of spaces that allow intensified engagement (as well as those that hinder it); and in methodological investigations of the ways in which empathic engagement facilitates knowing and understanding in conducting research. This chapter belongs to that last methodological strand, knowing and understanding as an empathetically engaged researcher.

In this paper, I suggest that the practices of musicians and qualitative researchers, in terms of structures and ethos, are analogous in their intensity of engagements. On an elementary level, each is essentially a form of communication, and communicative actions have a basic triadic structure consisting

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2 These structures and ethos are also present in teaching, a theme which I have explored in Bresler, in press a.
of sender, addressee and referent. Beyond structures, musical processes and experiences can illuminate significant aspects of qualitative research, including the overlapping processes of data collection, data analysis, and writing. Examining ways in which music provides rich and powerful models for perception, conceptualization, and engagement for both performers and audience members, I highlight the potential of these models to cultivate sensibilities that are directly relevant to the processes and products of qualitative research. These sensibilities and practices share a common spirit, an ethos, in that communication via music or qualitative research can intensify engagement with the phenomenon through the communication with an audience.

The first part of the paper examines the purposes of this telos of engagement, its end and purposes. The ethos of researchers draws their intensity and power from the community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in which the researchers operate, a collective whose ethos is often intensified through the “live performances” of scholarship, much like musical performances. I suggest that the dialogical relationships between researcher and what is studied, similar to the relationship between performer and music, are intensified by the expectation of communication with an audience, creating an engaged tri-directional relationship. In the second part of the paper, I reflect on conferences as supporting the communities of practice of music educators, and specifically, on the site for the original talk on which this paper is based, the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (AERA), as facilitating strong and weak ties (Putnam, 2000) among their members in ways that enhance scholarship in music education.

The sensibilities I address here are not exclusive to music – they are manifested in various forms in other arts, and probably in other disciplines. But as a musician turned educational researcher, I

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3 I am grateful to Yakov Epstein for indicating that the triadic nature of communication has been explored by various scholars in sociology and psychology, for example by George Herbert Mead (1934) and by Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953).

4 The term telos (from the Greek word for "end") used by Aristotle in his theory of biology as well as by other Greek philosophers, is the root of the term "teleology," the study of aims and intentions. I am indebted to Chris Higgins for pointing out Jonathan Lear's translation: "that for the sake of which" which is superior to "aim" or "end" since we often tend to see think of aims in a literal way as target or terminus. Here, the telos of archery is not the target but the cultivation of accuracy, strength, patience, self-control, etc. (see Higgins 2003, 280; Lear, 1988, 35).
recognized the inherent musical qualities of qualitative research during my first educational research project, and my awareness of those questions was deepened through subsequent research experiences. These processes include two sets of seemingly oxymoronic states: 1. A “zoomed”/spacious state, characterized by an interplay between a focused analytic state of mind and an open, receptive one; and 2. an aesthetic space that combines intimacy with critical distance. As I became aware of the need to communicate my work (beyond my advisor and dissertation committee) in research papers and conference presentations, the triadic structure of the communication and its ethos of “reaching out,” essential to musical experiences, became pronounced. This process of communication, in turn, sensitized me to the various ways that the scholarly world, including diverse communities of practice in distinct intellectual disciplines, affect my work.

Sensibilities and ethos in musicianship and research

In this section I discuss the sensibilities and ethos of the three-pronged engagement and connection that operates in music and scholarship. References to engagement can be found in various bodies of literature, including in the literatures on motivation, cognition, aesthetics and spirituality. Connection is implied in theories of the self\(^5\) for example, in sociologist George Herbert Mead’s (1934) discussion of the genesis of the self, and of the peculiar character of human social activity. That character, Mead argues, is found in the process of communication, and more particularly in the triadic relation on which generation of meaning is based\(^6\). Intensified engagement are implied in Dewey’s notion of intensified experience, distinguishing it from the anesthetic. Intensified engagement is also acknowledged in Cziksmentmihalyi’s (1990) theory of flow. Both flow and intensified experience are specific, heightened forms of connection.

\(^5\) A complex and contested concept.
\(^6\) Mead, a symbolic interactionist, was one of the classical “Chicago school of sociology” that included the sociologist Charles Horton Cooley and philosopher, psychologist and educator John Dewey. It is interesting to note how each of these three major figures developed this concept as part of their broader scholarship.
Although it was my encounter with Dewey that helped me identify and give a name to a forceful aspect of my experience, it was Buber’s writing that deepened my understanding of the relationships inherent in intensified engagement. Buber (1971) contrasts two primary attitudes, two ways in which we approach existence, the “I-Thou,” and the “I-It.” The difference between these two relationships is not in the nature of the object to which one relates but rather in the relationship itself. I-Thou is the relationship of openness, directness, mutuality, and presence (Friedman, 1947). “I-It is the more typical subject-object relationship in which one knows and uses other persons or things without allowing them to exist for oneself in their uniqueness” (Friedman, 1947, p. xii). Buber refers to “real listening,” becoming personally aware of the “signs of address” that “address one not only in the words of but in the very meeting with the other.” It is the attainment of the sphere of the “between” that Buber holds to be the “really real” (Buber, 1947, p. xiv). The relationship of I-Thou teaches us to meet others and at the same time, “to hold our ground when we meet them” (ibid).

Indeed, the notion of empathy is now gaining interest in various intellectual disciplines. We note it in the phenomenologically-based realm of verstehen (e.g., van Manen, 1990 who talks about the tact of teaching,) or in the related ideas of empathic teaching, for example in Arnold’s (2005) writing. The concept of empathy is also present in literature on theater education, see, for example, Klein (2005), and Schonmann’s (2006) discussion of catharsis and children’s emotional responses to drama).

Just as it is the quality of relationship rather than the nature of the object to which one relates that distinguishes “I-I” from “It-It,” it is the quality of engaged activity that is of essence. (Clearly teachers, like researchers, have an important role in arousing that quality and thus generating the nature of the educational encounter.) Activity itself does not fully determine how it will be experienced, though certainly some activities are more conducive to engagement than others. Potentially rich activities like listening to music, having a conversation, conducting research, or attending conferences can provide a continuum of connections even for the same individual. Even seemingly routine activities can be experienced as providing spaces for engagement, as Studs Terkel’s study of people’s relationships with
their work manifests vividly (Terkel, 1974). It is this quality that arises from being able to engage in music, in ideas, in the world, that characterizes in my opinion great musicians, and great researchers. The great, too, have their preferred arenas. Dewey is reported to have connected poorly to students within formal classroom settings (Jackson, 1998) (and often, as my students complain, in a first reading of his work). Still, his ideas engage us vibrantly 80 years after he articulated them.

As a “lingering question,” the issue of engagement is not an abstract concern but one that shapes powerfully my everyday life, in my choices of friends, advisees, research topics and book projects. As a learner and a teacher, I am aware that intensified engagements and the personal connections that they can generate, although they cannot be forced, can be cultivated. While an initial spark can be useful, intense engagement involves investment and a sustained relationship with the material learned. In my teaching of research methodology and aesthetics, my most important goal is the cultivation of engagement with material (readings, research project, or artwork, depending on what the focus of the class is) and connections with this material by providing an intellectual space for interaction and some tools for engaging, with both research and artwork.

The commonalities between engagement in research and in music, and the awareness of their shared features, hit me in my very first research project as a doctoral student in what was a completely new area for me (or so I thought) – Education. While the bodies of knowledge in education were indeed unfamiliar and the discursive language style novel, the commonalities of engagement between my “musical identity” (a mix of the performer, the musicologist, and always the listener) and the educational researcher were striking. I often felt that it was these “musical identities” that shaped my research in more fundamental ways than the conceptual frameworks and theories I learned in school. Certainly it was the quality of engagement and the emotional and intellectual connection that they facilitated that made me fulfilled in my new (and later, not so new) researcher role. This intensity of experience was a complete surprise: my (implicit) expectations of research were of a highly textual, formal, and disembodied activity,

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7 Sadly, Turkel’s study points at more incidences of alienation rather than connection.
8 I elaborate on these tools in Bresler, in press a.
9 A visceral, as well as intellectual and emotional realization.
a “cooler” rather than “warmer” relationship (Thagard, 2006). The vibrancy and emotional intensity (up and down) of my field work and writing were unexpected. Equally unexpected were the highly engaged embodied aspects of presenting. It took me several presentations to experience the positive intensity of the live performance of research.

The topic of intensity of engagement is addressed in the field of aesthetics, going back to Aristotle’s’ classic concept of *catharsis* in drama, through Tolstoy’s (1898/1969) communicative concept of art and Dewey’s (1934) and Rosenblatt’s (1978) notion of transaction, to contemporary Richard Shusterman’s (2000, 2004) pragmatism and John Armstrong’s (2000) discussion of perception of art work. Contemporary thinking recognizes the intricate ways that cognition and affect work together. Armstrong (2000) for example, offers these five aspects of the process of perceptual contemplation of an artwork: 1. noticing detail, 2. seeing relations between parts, 3. seizing the whole as the whole, 4. the lingering caress, and 5. mutual absorption.

Armstrong’s first aspect, becoming aware of detail which our habitual and rapid seeing and hearing tend to gloss over, requires a conscious effort to attend to different parts of the composition. The second aspect, that of noting relations, involves apprehending how every element performs with respect to the whole. The third aspect has to do with completeness and coherence, the grasping of unity in the face of diverse elements. These aspects, fundamental of course to musical analysis, are presented as cognitive but have an important role in facilitating an emotional relationship with the work.

The fourth and fifth aspects of experiencing visual art, what Armstrong terms the “lingering caress” and “mutual absorption,” involve a new set of relationships between viewer and art work. Lingering caress is characterized by the lack of instrumental purpose -- a form of engagement which is traditionally associated with the concept of aesthetics. When we linger, Armstrong (2000) points out, “Nothing gets achieved, nothing gets finished – on the contrary, satisfaction is taken in spinning out our

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10 For compelling examples of the interaction of social, affective, and cognitive aspects in math, see for example, Dai and Sternberg (2004), Hannula, (2002), and Epstein, Schorr, Goldin, Warner, Arias, Sanchez, Dunn and Cain (2007).
engagement with the object” (p. 98). The process of a deepening relationship allows for artistic and aesthetic discoveries. The fifth aspect, mutual absorption, refers to the possible transformative character of connection. Armstrong writes, “When we keep our attention fixed upon an object which attracts us, two things tend to happen: we get absorbed in the object and the object gets absorbed into us” (p. 99). I find musical experiences epitomize this absorption on bodily, cognitive and affective levels, which weave together so that “I become the music.”

The intimate, reciprocal relationship between viewer and viewed is a recent theme, part of a postmodern consciousness. In discussing Velasquez’ painting “Las Meninas,” Philosopher Michel Foucault (1973) evokes the reciprocity and dialectic of looking: We can look at the painting, and the painting looks back at us. This notion of reciprocity seems to emerge independently in different domains. From her perspective as a science educator, Margery Osborne makes a similar claim: The act of looking at another can enable a heightened awareness of self, a self-reflexivity (2006). I have made a similar observation in relation to the dialogical relationship of music and research (Bresler, 2005), sensibilities and interactions that are the basis of aesthetic encounters (Bresler, 2006).

Of particular relevance to the triadic structure and ethos that I describe here is what I suggest as a sixth aspect, centrally present not only in the performing arts but also in academic research: communication with audience through lived performance. Drawing on music’s ability to create a community, live performances unify performers and listeners in what can be an intensely shared experience.

These six aspects of engagement--interactive and cyclical, rather than hierarchical and linear (hence Armstrong’s use of the term *aspects* rather than stages)-- are at the core of qualitative research. Shaping perception and interpretation, these features of engagement are inherent to qualitative research during observing interviewing, analyzing, and writing. The first three aspects are analytic and task-oriented as we focus on detail, note relations and patterns, and grapple to see a coherent whole. Just as they function in art and music, these aspects of perception and engagement in a research context involve
an interplay between part and whole, tightening one’s focus and widening it, alternating among description, incubation, and interpretation.

The activities of noting and perceiving create engagement and connection and in turn, are shaped by engagement and connection. The open, receptive space of the lingering caress and mutual absorption, facilitated by prolonged engagement and immersion in both fieldwork and data analysis, allows the researchers, in the words of Armstrong’s book title, to “move closer” in order to connect – to establish intellectual and emotional intimacy.

Taking the theme of connection to a seemingly different arena, love, Armstrong writes in his second book Conditions of Love: The Philosophy of Intimacy:

Love is an achievement, it is something we create, individually, not something which we just find, if only we are lucky enough. But although it is a creation and an achievement it is not something which can be forced simply by effort. . . this is unsurprising if we reflect that love is dependent upon many other achievements: kindness of interpretation, sympathy, understanding, a sense of our own needs and vulnerability. And these kinds of capacity and awareness do not spring suddenly into being. Each requires patient cultivation: we have to take whatever fragile presence each has in our lives and build upon that. (Armstrong, 2002, p. 158)

Here, too, there is an emphasis on the cultivation of relationship, an openness, a giving of oneself. The experience of both fieldwork and analysis requires a connection, the cultivation of (in Armstrong’s words, “kind”) perspectives, the acknowledgement of vulnerabilities.11 This awareness of the role of the self, a sense of “our own needs and vulnerability” in interpretation and understanding and in connecting to what we study is relatively new to educational research. Traditionally, social science emphasized detachment from the “subjects,” for fear of what is regarded as its opposite, attachment, and emotional entanglement. While an understandable taboo in the field of laboratory psychology, given the expectation of uncontaminated “data,” and the structures of the laboratory settings, the concern about attachment has also operated in disciplines that, in fact, relied on connection to enable understanding and generate a

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11 The literature on love is relatively new, boosted by humanist psychology, particularly Abraham Maslow and his theory of needs (Maslow, 1962). Zick Rubin (1970) in his social-psychological construct of romantic love identifies attachment, caring, and intimacy as three elements of love. Educationist Leo Buscaglia (1972) in his widely read books gained enthusiastic audiences when addressing these qualities in a popular domain.
meaningful study. As a result, sociological and anthropological studies used to present narratives that provided little information about researcher’s engagement and interactive experiences of fieldwork and how these engagements facilitated their understandings and interpretations.

The spread of the postmodern paradigm and the expansion of qualitative research methods in the past 40 years has changed the assumptions and expectations of relationship in research. The increasing expectation of verstehen, empathic understanding, is a key goal of research in the social sciences, and it acknowledges that qualitative research depends upon authentic, meaningful connections with participants and their worldviews. Such research entails getting inside these worldviews and letting them get inside us, simultaneously internalizing as well as analyzing them, thus combining empathy with distance.

While relatively new in research methodology, these reciprocal relationships have been long present in experiences of music performances. The openness to connect to the music one rehearses and plays (which also involves an analytic, cognitive relationship) propels a dialogic connection with oneself, drawing on one’s emotions and sensibilities. The triadic element enters due to the ethos of communication. The dialogical connections in both music and research are enhanced by communication (actual or anticipated) with the audience within a public aesthetic space. Because of this inherent similarity in both structure and ethos between music and qualitative research, I regard musical processes as rich resources for the understanding and conceptualization of engagement and connection during research.

Anticipation of communication deserves a comment. Communication has a much deeper and more sustained character than the moment of actual encounter. Mead pointed out that the importance of what we term “communication” lies in the fact that it provides a form of behavior through which a person may become an object to himself. Thus, the communication is directed not only to others but also to the individual himself (Mead, 1934, p. 139). Mead suggested that it is when one responds to that which one addresses to another, and when that response of one’s own becomes a part of one’s conduct, when one not only hears oneself but respond to oneself, talks and replies to oneself as truly as the other person replies to the communication, that we have behavior in which individuals become objects to themselves.
Anticipated communication, the awareness of a future audience when conducting research, is present at various stages from the very start. The processes of research, like musical performances, involve the discovery and shaping of meanings for oneself as well as for others. Already in the early stages of fieldwork, observations attend to what is observed but are shaped by the responsibility of the observer’s intent to communicate to others.¹² Researchers are motivated by their intellectual-emotional curiosity, intensified by the commitment to an outside audience. Losing that sense of audience is akin to losing their motivation as ethnographers, the danger of “going native.” The awareness of a potential audience is, I believe, essential to both music performance and research. It is the act of communication that defines them as such, heightening perception and focus, rendering what could be a private act into a social one, an act undertaken within a community of practice.

Nonverbal aspects of engagement

Richard Shusterman, in his book *Performing Live* (2000), speaks of the exclusivity of the verbal in arguing against hermeneutic universalism, the claim that all understanding is linguistically mediated. The only form of experience, writes Shusterman, that disembodied philosophers (and academics in general) recognize and legitimate is linguistic, thinking in words, talking, writing. “But neither we nor the language that admittedly helps shape us, could survive without the unarticulated background of pre-reflective, nonlinguistic experience and understanding. Hermeneutic universalism thus fails in its argument that interpretation is ‘the only game in town’ because language is the only game in town” (Shusterman, 2000, p. 135).

This argument applies to the role of language in the interpretive process of qualitative research. Engagement and connection can be facilitated and supported by narrative and language, but they are not exclusively linguistic. Traditionally qualitative researchers have regarded interpretation as aimed at

¹² That awareness can be very much at the background rather than the foreground, co-existing with the experience that the more a person gets engaged by his/her observations (or with the music), the less s/he is likely to think about how they will communicate to others.
linguistic formulation. Qualitative research is typically identified with writing and narrative. However, it goes way beyond written discourse (obviously, fieldwork including relationship with participants, requires much more than language.)

The idea that many, perhaps most experiences are not linguistic and that interpretation does not require language is of course a given for musicians. Musicians create musical interpretations that are not verbal but that attend to important qualities of temporal experience. They have also developed an elaborate, sophisticated nonverbal vocabulary for the elements and qualities of musical experience. In an earlier paper, I discussed musical qualities that are at the basis of analysis and interpretation, including form, rhythm, dynamics and texture (Bresler, 2005). These terms may be new to nonmusicians, but the experiences which they represent are clearly not. Naming them is important in sensitizing us to their presence. An adequate vocabulary is important because the concepts we use to make sense direct both our perceptions and our actions. We pay attention to what we expect to see, we hear what we can place in our understanding. This is why the sensibilities of musicians can contribute greatly to researchers studying personal and communal lived experience.

The scholar who first framed the arts explicitly as models for knowledge as well as for the process of inquiry is Elliot Eisner. In his conceptualization of connoisseurship and educational criticism, Eisner, drawing on the visual arts, expanded the modes of inquiry from the verbal and numerical to the senses, and in particular, to vision. By choosing the art critic as his model, Eisner identified a figure that could translate the visual world to a linguistic medium (a role that Eisner himself filled with eloquence and elegance, as I have personally witnessed on several occasions). His notion of the enlightened eye (Eisner, 1991) invited me to explore the possibilities and implications of an enlightened ear, in research settings and beyond, in perceiving the world. However, my own metaphor, rather than that of a music critic, is that of a musician, solo or ensemble player. Art critics and musicians employ two different levels

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13 This view is now eroding with the increasing popularity of arts-based research, which employs different modes of representation that include but are not restricted to discursive verbal modes of representation.
14 My colleague Alyson Whyte commented that creative writing specialists will readily see parallels of each of the four musical qualities named.
of embedded interpretation: The musician participates as an active creator of the music, interpreting and performing, taking into account contextual knowledge of current conventions and performance practices, while the critic plays the part of engaged but somewhat removed outsider\textsuperscript{15}, interpreting the performance and providing a commentary. Both combine intimacy and distance but the starting point of each is different.

The communication of research, in writing and in live presentation, is crucial for its dissemination and usefulness. The topic of writing research has been explored extensively (e.g., Becker, 1986; Richardson, 1994; Wolcott, 2002). In contrast, actual, lived presentations seem to be fairly unexplored. The fear of demagogy that will numb if not destroy the listener’s “objectivity” and critical skills have shaped a typical abstract, analytical format for scholarly presentation. However, making something dull does not guarantee its objectivity. Additionally, we should hope that scholarly audiences are not easily swayed by a superficial performance. The next section examines more closely live performances of scholarship in their natural habitat, conferences.

The Performance of Scholarship: Weak and Strong Ties in Communities of Practice

Communication is inevitably addressed to individuals or members of a group with some shared understandings and assumptions. Others outside this group are outsiders to the communication. In this section I discuss strong and weak ties (Putnam, 2000) as they operate in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) as useful concepts for understanding and furthering academic scholarship in general and research in music education in particular.

People become members of a community of practice through mutual endeavor, e.g., shared practices and common activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The process of social learning occurs when people who have a shared interest in some subject or problem collaborate over an extended period and exchange ideas, find solutions, and build innovations. Such activities bind members of a community of

\textsuperscript{15} The traditional view of the critic as distanced is critiqued by postmodernists (for a compelling discussion of these various perspectives, see Barrett, 2007).
practice together as a social entity. Anthropologist Jean Lave and social learning theorist Etienne Wenger (1991) coined the term community of practice in relation to situated learning as part of an attempt to rethink scholarly conceptualizations of learning. More recently, communities of practice have become associated with knowledge management with an emphasis in the scholarship on communities of practice on ways of nurturing new knowledge, stimulating innovation, and sharing existing tacit knowledge within an organization. AERA provides a space that allows intellectually for both what I will define as strong ties (for example, the Music special interest group for music educators), and what I will define as weak ties among numerous AERA divisions and dozens of AERA special interest groups (SIGs) with their distinct scholarly traditions and bodies of knowledge.

From another perspective, the sociologist Robert Putman, in his book *Bowling Alone* writes about strong ties that link us to friends whose sociological niche is very like our own. Weak ties link us to distant acquaintances who move in different circles from ours (Putnam, 2000, p. 23). Communities of practice, I suggest, are spaces where strong ties operate centrifugally toward a shared core, whereas weak ties operate centripetally, away from that core to outside sources of knowledge.

In the milieu of scholarship and academe, two major media that bind the community together and essentially function as the “oxygen of scholarship” are (i) the written texts of books and journals and (ii) the textural, multisensory spaces of conferences. While the latter are as essential to contemporary scholarship as the written media, they are rarely addressed explicitly beyond referring to their existence as having hosted the earlier oral version of a published paper. In addition to the interesting, complex relationship between the temporal lived presentation and the “fixed” written manuscript (Bresler, 2005), live performances create different dynamics within a community. A live community has more affinity with the ancient (and still very much alive!) functions of music in society, as compared, for example, with the more recent invention of print. The power of live performances is dealt with extensively in the fields of anthropology and sociology (see, for example, Bet-El & Ben-Amos, 1994; Gennep, 1960; Kapferer, 1986; Moore & Myerhoff, 1977; Schechner, 1988; Turner, 1969, 1982; Turner & Bruner, 1986).
In the contemporary worlds of scholarship, books parallel the texts of music compositions, whereas conferences parallel textured live performances with their shared temporal presence. These two modes are often intimately related, as this paper clearly manifests. The written paper you read was initially presented in a conference, an encounter that heightened my attention to the specific role of intensified engagement in performance of scholarship, akin to the role of a live audience in a musical performance. Here, the medium certainly shapes the style. The textual/textural provide an interplay between the fixed/fluid. Thought and the activity of thinking are motivated (at least in the contemporary world of scholarship, if not in those of Socrates and Jesus) by the quest for a product. The fixed product—a research paper, a musical composition—typically serves as a fixed target in the act of creation, parallel to the emphasis of text in classical music. However, thinking—like breathing, talking, lecturing, advising, and writing this paper—is fluid, constantly moving. Our engagement as musicians with the fluidity of sound and music, I argue, can sensitize us to the fluidity of personal and cultural experience, the heart of qualitative research. The relationship between presentation and paper, as those readers who attended the conference can tell, is far from identical. In contrast to scripted written manuscripts my live performances tend to be improvisational in response to audience’s presence and my perceptions of their interests and background.

Big conferences like AERA can facilitate the establishment of weak ties by the conference’s embodied social/intellectual presence. Wenger points out that learning occurs in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world (Wenger, 1998, p. 3). His concept of legitimate peripheral participation, whether in classrooms or in conferences, describes an important type of learning experiences. The community of practice of the music education special interest group is affected by the broader AERA conference, for example, in the formats of sessions and the critical role of discussants, and in the structures of paper presentations and symposia, which often share in the same session research

16 If not necessarily in the explicitly improvisational cultures of the middle East, Indian and African cultures, see for example, Nettl (in press).
17 This sensitization is not automatic: Musicians are as creatures of habits like the rest of us, and the transfer from one domain, music, to another, that of research, takes active, conscious cultivation.
issues across different disciplines. This can, of course, be a process of mutual shaping and reciprocal relationship. We as musicians and music educators can expand AERA beyond its traditions, heightening attention to musical qualities that are an inherent part of scholarship (and life). The function of weak ties and how they operate in communities of practice relates to aesthetician Claire Detels’ notion of “softening of boundaries” (Detels, 1999). The “softening” of the boundaries of what used to be well-defined musical and artistic genres and intellectual disciplines is an important characteristic of the 21st century.

In an earlier writing (Bresler, 2003) discussing the cross-fertilization of school disciplines, I noted how the softening of boundaries results in increasing “border crossing” (Giroux, 1992). In music, performers like Nigel Kennedy, Daniel Barenboim, and Yo Yo Ma cross genres to perform music of various cultures and subcultures, including rock and popular music. Performance centers, traditionally dedicated to classical music, now host what used to be “music untouchables” (Nettl, 1995) performers of music traditionally played only in night clubs.

Crossing genres often results in the generation of new entities, genres, and styles. In music, the boundaries between classical and folk, in Bruno Nettl’s (1995) words, “the high caste of music,” as evidenced in the works of the great masters, from Bach and Haydn through Beethoven, Liszt, and Tchaikovsky to Bartok and Ives, has never been bounded. However, traffic across this boundary was on a limited scale, typically consisting of an adoption of a folk theme within a classical form. There was a clear distinction between borrower and borrowed, and the borrowing involved no blurring of the “dominant style.” This is markedly different from contemporary musical compositions, for example, Osvaldo Golijov’s La Pasión Según San Marco, which mixes together Jewish and Argentinean folk music within a Christian passion genre, or Simunye’s music which blends English Madrigal with South African musical styles. The number of musical works that juxtapose traditionally incompatible styles to create new, hybrid creations is increasing. Their success and popularity among sophisticated musicians are a strong testimony to the changing norms, expectations, and tastes in communities of practice of musicians.

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18 The existence of hybrid genres consisting of “world musics” in pop musics, combining indigenous folk and popular cultures, has been a regular feature of the process of intensifying globalization (for example, in the music of Sting, Frank Zappa, Jaques Loussier and Winton Marsalis).
The same pattern is evident in scholarship. The crossing of boundaries is most noticeable at the emergence of new disciplines, from biochemistry, astrophysics, and computational neuroscience to cultural anthropology and psychological economics. Interdisciplinary work can, of course, cause its own difficulties and disappointments (Sperber, 2005), often revolving around the difficulty of creating criteria that can be shared by the different intellectual traditions (Boix-Manilla & Gardner, 2005). However, crossing borders seems to be rewarding enough that it is here to stay. Often emerging from the ground up by individual researchers, it is also facilitated by institutional structures and funding agencies, in both the sciences and the humanities.

Putnam (2000) regards weak ties as particularly valuable for social capital (Bourdieu, 1984). I argue that weak ties and the cross-fertilization they engender are increasingly vital to our conceptualization of knowledge and its organization into new, hybrid disciplines. Just like the concept of art (Weitz, 1956), a discipline, too, can be constructed as an open-ended entity. Yet, in order to exist, it needs boundaries. At the same time, to maintain its vibrancy and respond to changing realities, an art medium, or a discipline, needs to be able to extend these boundaries, to venture into new territories.

Intellectually, the juxtaposition of strong and weak ties has made for an extraordinarily stimulating environment for qualitative education researchers. One of its products are new methodological genres, such as “mixed methods” and the more recent “arts-based research” (e.g., Irwin & DeCosson, 2004; Sullivan, 2005 in the visual arts; Barone 2001a, 2001b; Cahnmann, & Siegesmund, in press, in the literary arts; and Bresler, in press b, in press c, in music).

Neither AERA nor weak ties are, of course, new phenomena. However, it seems that now, more than ever, scholars thrive on the co-existence of weak/strong ties and their interactions. Academics have more to gain, and less to lose, institutionally (and personally) from venturing into hybrid forms of research.

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19 It is that interplay between strong and weak ties, which allows a cross fertilization of disciplines that motivated me to embark on the *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education* (Bresler, 2007) with its mission of promoting discourse among the various arts education disciplines.
The Life Cycle and Power of Scholarship

Papers, at least my own papers, go through many cycles and metamorphoses. Each stage leaves its mark, adds a layer. The final version (in the sense of being printed and circulated, rather than the sense of a “final thought”), the one you are reading now, feels, at least in contrast to the preceding cocoons, like a butterfly in its mobility, the movement out of (my) private space into public space, the possibility of entering others’ private spaces and interacting with them. All papers have multiple origins and many shoulders upon which they stand. Writing, as Wenger (1998, xiv) has acknowledged, is always the product of a community. Mine can be easily traced to the gigantic shoulders of Martin Buber and John Dewey. Structurally it was enabled by Linda Thompson’s and Mark Campbell’s kind invitation to talk to AERA’s Music Special Interest Group. Its written version is indebted to the related inauguration of Advances in Music Education Research, a new book series generated out of the Music SIG, a cause for celebration for the music education community.

The moment of intellectual encounter, the act of communication, is typically seen as the “end” of scholarship, the culmination of effort to articulate ideas within an aesthetic form. However, good encounters are also beginnings, beginnings of relationships where others enter the conversation, at best, in a dialogue (in a Buberian language – the meeting of *I* and *Thou*; in Gadamerian language, *the fusing of horizons*). Spaces like AERA can be used to create a communal space that generates personal intellectual encounters and sometimes the beginnings of “live” companionships and friendships. This communication, propelled by an interaction between the textural live performance and encounter and textual manuscripts (and emails) is often the step to the next project. Most fundamentally, they allow us to grow, and risk our current opinions by being open to others’ perspectives.

Clearly, there are important differences between musical performances and scholarly presentations. In the case of AERA, one difference has to do with the format of a conference which

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20 To paraphrase Isaac Newton’s comment in his letter to his fellow scientist, Robert Hooke.
21 As a note intended for insiders to the music education community I would like to acknowledge the supporting shoulders of the AERA audience – colleagues like Frank Abrahams, Janet Barrett, Margaret Barrett, Eve Harwood, Koji Matsunobu, Marie McCarthy, Regina Murphy, Sandy Stauffer, and other, familiar and not-yet-familiar faces.
allocates public time for questions, allowing audience members to share thoughts, to contribute to the content, texture, and dynamics of the encounter. This dynamic, typically unacknowledged, is, as I suggest below, an integral part of mutual endeavor within the community of practice. To explicate how this dynamic operate, I will revert to a “vignette mode,” common to qualitative research, grounding the theoretical theme of live performance and engagement within the concrete situation of the past conference presentation.  

In the defined temporal boundaries, beginning and ending of this particular “business meeting” session, activities and experiences were sequenced, much like notes in a musical performance, yet allowing space for individual constructions in this “public/private” setting for co-creation of understanding. Unlike the reading of a text, the experience of the session, as all concrete experiences do, provided a “whole environment” – where the text is embodied, multisensory, and communal. Even at 8 p.m., the fresh energy of the first day of the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, which can easily feel like a big, sweeping wave, had the distinct ambiance of a beginning. The audience, fifty or so bright, alert SIG members accommodated in a cozy room in Chicago’s Hyatt’s fourth floor, had just arrived from their various destination, Ireland, China, New Zealand, and different parts of the U.S. In their leadership roles Mark Campbell and Linda Thompson provided clear yet open, inclusive, and flexible structures of support. The audience, a cross-section of researchers in music education and AERA members, a diverse yet cohesive group, consisted of mostly faculty and doctoral students. In response to my question, all the people in the room raised their hands to indicate that they were qualitative researchers.

A concrete moment of encounter, in this case, 6-8 p.m. on a Monday in early April, exists uniquely in space and time. In contrast, the conceptualizations and interpretations of this moment are multiple. This productive tension between the concrete and the abstract is the stuff that qualitative research is made of: making sense of communal and personal lived experience, theorizing, interpreting,
drawing on conceptual frameworks, and in the process, giving these frameworks new meaning. The concrete seems (deceptively) self-evident; interpreting is, many would say, what makes us human: sophisticated, incisive, grounded interpretations distinguish excellent scholars and researchers from more mediocre ones. Scholarship aims at creating increasingly sophisticated conceptualizations. My own choice of conceptualizations in this paper exemplifies the process of engagement with research, in this case research in preparation for speaking as a musician to a group of musicians and music educators. These conceptualizations evoke similarities to musical engagements -- communal as well as individual, pulling together strong and weak intellectual ties.

While Buber and Dewey have an explicit presence in the conceptual framework of this paper, there are other important contributors that do not have such a well-defined place in the written text\textsuperscript{23}. The marks of lively interactions with philosopher of education Chris Higgins, psychologist Yakov Epstein, art educator Terry Barrett, early childhood educator Su-Jeong Wee, and education and literacy scholar Alyson Whyte, all outside the field of music education, and music and art educator Regina Murphy, have left important marks on this paper. Other interactions can be traced to the questions raised by the music education audience in the AERA talk, indicating diverse and at the same time deeply shared concerns and questions that followed me for these past few months.

Seated at the back of the room, a doctoral student commented that she never thought about research as performance but was rather intimidated by the power structure of the dissertation committee. This comment deepened my commitment to reflect on the role and usefulness of musical sensibilities and ways of being in the world of scholarship. My own change of view from being “under examination” to “having a stage to present something dear to my heart” has proven helpful to me: I hoped it may be of use to others. From the front row, to my right, Ryan asked about intentionality (I learned later that this theme emerged in his dissertation defense), a topic that prompted a discussion of the different genres of research – from the more applied evaluation and action research to the “basic” genres of anthropology and ethnomusicology with their respective goals and intentions. Still, across these different genres, an

\textsuperscript{23} Often relegated to footnotes.
engaged verstehen, expanding our knowledge about the human condition, was a shared intension, motivating the use of qualitative methods. From the middle of the room, Glenda’s question about teaching qualitative research stayed with me through another paper I wrote in the Spring, focusing on the teaching and learning of research. Close by, Margaret Schmidt’s query on how to juggle it all -- in-depth research; solid, communicative teaching, committed service -- is acutely shared by all academics I know, especially since connection and intensified engagement imply the investment of energy. This issue of multiple demanding tasks defined by the meso, institutional context of academe, operates as powerfully on the macro, scholarly level on the micro personal level as we improvise our lives, engaging meaningfully with the world and ourselves.

The communities of practice that come together for the performance of scholarship at a conference as sites of performance (as well as those private dialogues with colleagues through the earlier cycles) engender in a strepata like fashion new and expanded themes, creating the multilayered fugues of scholarship (and life).

References:


Admittedly, connections are also recharging and provide energy.


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