

# Be Open and Improvise!

## Drawing parallels between qualitative research methodologies and practice as a rhythmician

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*This article examines possible connecting points between qualitative research and eurhythmics seen as a pedagogical approach, as an art form and as a teaching philosophy. Therefore, it includes the strategies of inquiry such as Ethnography, Grounded Theory Methodology, and Performative Social Sciences. It is shown that the ethnographic research values techniques like improvisation within the process of collecting and interpreting data. Both ethnography and Reflexive Grounded Theory Methodology postulate the importance of a general openness in the research process to be able to change its focus if the subject of your inquiry demands it. Here, a reflexive approach is also suggested within the process of inquiry. In Performative Social Science artistic methods are applied to create and interpret data, and to present the findings of a research project.*

*Cet article examine les points de connexion possibles entre la recherche qualitative et la rythmique vue comme une approche pédagogique, comme une forme d'art et comme une philosophie d'enseignement. Par conséquent, il inclut les stratégies d'enquête telles que l'ethnographie, la « Grounded Theory-Methodology » et les « Performative Social Sciences ». Il est démontré que la recherche ethnographique valorise des techniques comme celle de l'improvisation dans le processus de collecte et d'interprétation des données. L'ethnographie et la « Grounded Theory-Methodology » font le postulat de l'importance d'une ouverture générale dans le processus de recherche pour pouvoir changer d'orientation si le sujet de l'enquête l'exige. Ici, une approche réflexive est également suggérée dans le processus d'enquête. Dans les « Performative Social Sciences », des méthodes artistiques sont appliquées pour créer et interpréter des données, et pour présenter les résultats d'un projet de recherche.*

Holding a first degree in eurhythmics, until today, I always identified my professionalism through being a rhythmician.<sup>1</sup> This especially in an artistic way but also in education and in my philosophy of teaching, even partly in how I was seeing things in life. Now, as PhD candidate in the field of music education, I cannot help it but to look for connections between the discipline I know best and the new field I am seeking proficiency in. This journey was inspired by Liora Bresler's keynote at the International Conference for Dalcroze Studies (ICDS) in summer 2019 at the Karol Szymanowski Akademy in Katowice, Poland.<sup>2</sup> During the last part of her presentation, which is typically reserved for questions of the audience, she said addressing everyone in the Academy's Concert Hall: "You already know so much." And these words got stuck in my head since then. As I am convinced that well trained rhythmicians can easily adapt not only to a wide range of professional fields but also feel familiar with several art forms, I could easily relate to this aspect of the words' meaning. But what is there in terms of research? Do rhythmicians here really 'already know so much'? Intrigued by these questions and encouraged by Bresler's words, I started diving deeper into empirical qualitative research methodologies and was surprised of the many connections I could easily make with my own professional field. I would like to share some of my findings in the following.

## Eurhythmics

Considering my personal experience as rhythmician, this article relies mainly on the theoretical framework of eurhythmics that can be found in the compilation of articles edited by Hauser-Dellefant and Witoszynskyj (2016), in which the team of fourteen eurhythmics teachers at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna define the main aspects of their work. As former student of this institution myself, I feel closest to their point of view

1 I choose this term to describe my profession over the widely used "practitioner of eurhythmics" in the English-speaking context for two reasons: it is most similar to how I describe my profession in my first language German – "Rhythmiker" – and it reflects my understanding of eurhythmics as a pedagogical approach, art form and teaching philosophy based on the phenomenon of *rhythm*, which I will describe more profoundly below.

2 The keynote can be found online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzH03AS78x8> (accessed on 29/1/2021); for more information about her approach to qualitative research see Bresler (2008).

on our discipline. Nevertheless, I am also sure, that most of my conclusions will sound familiar to everyone with a profound training in eurhythmics and even to others working in connected professional fields.

Keeping this in mind, I will define *eurhythmics* as the following:

- As a pedagogical approach, historically linked to the teaching of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, that uses the given interdependence of the phenomena *music* and *movement* to accompany learning processes of an aesthetic, creative and / or social dimension. These refine the sensory perception and giving improvisation and personal expression a special importance in these processes.<sup>3</sup>
- As a transdisciplinary art form, connecting different artistic modalities, such as music, dance, theatre, video, spoken word, drama, and fine arts.<sup>4</sup>
- As a teaching philosophy based on the phenomenon of *rhythm*.<sup>5</sup>

The main question for me is, how could eurhythmics as an art form, as teaching philosophy and pedagogical approach influence the rhythmician researcher, or in general, how could eurhythmics be integrated into the field of qualitative research methodology. Reading about different types of strategies of inquiry, I felt a close identification in the description of *Ethnographic Research* as given by Breidenstein, Hirschauer, Kalthoff and Nieswand (2015), as well as with the methodology of *Reflexive Grounded Theory* described by Breuer, Muckel and Dieris (2019) and with the field of *Performative Social Science* as it can be found in Mey (2020) and Roberts (2008). Therefore, in the following I am going to discuss eurhythmics linked with these three wider fields of qualitative social science research and I will draw my conclusions at the end.

## Ethnography

Breidenstein et al. (2015) state that *exploration of phenomena through writing* is the key to an ethnographic approach. This important branch of qualitative research aims to decode social practices and institutional procedures, putting its whole attention on the discoveries in the field: its social systems, artefacts, myths, and other forms of believes (p. 7). Right in its centre, there is the method of *participatory observation*.<sup>6</sup> Here, the rising tensions between participation and taking a critical distance, between being present and re-presenting play an important role (p.7). Thus, what is highly valued here is the lived experience in the field, or with other words, the embodiment of an experience, the recognising and naming of a special phenomenon. It is hard to see the similarity to practical eurhythmics, in which, as a teacher, you seek to create an environment, where students can embody musical phenomena and then are softly guided, step by step to understanding and naming them. Kinsky (2016b) cites Mimi Scheiblaue, who established the three-step procedure of *experiencing–recognising–naming*<sup>7</sup> of a phenomenon as the base of teaching through eurhythmics (p. 140). This three-step procedure is what in ethnography is described as a method in field research.

Breidenstein and colleagues (2015) speak of empirical inquiry as a form of research based on (social) experience and give special importance to the concept of openness during the process of inquiry. For them, it is the interaction of the researcher with the field that leads to

3 For a different classification of eurhythmics in the context of learning and teaching see Juntunen (2019), who points out that eurhythmic can be understood as “meta-narrative [...], philosophy or philosophic attitude [...]; and/or a pedagogy or an approach.” (p. 56).

4 On how inter- and transdisciplinarity shape the practice of Dalcroze Eurhythmics, see Habron (2019).

5 For further reading see Neira Zugasti (2009).

6 Emerging in times with a strong colonial understanding of the world, former ethnographic research practices have been criticised severely over the past years and ethical consideration of data collection as well as analysis have been discussed profoundly under the aspects of racism, othering, and exoticization. For further readings on this topic, taking postcolonial theory into account, see Montero (2012) or Elie (2006). For general ethical issues in ethnographic field work focussing marginalized groups, see Li (2008) or Zavisca (2007).

7 In German: *Erleben – Erkennen – Benennen*.

dynamic experiences (p. 37). Especially an openness for surprises is required, being in the field with the subject one is trying to understand (p. 39). The authors state that it is the subject itself that might require a certain methodological procedure or even strictness in the way one must proceed with his / her research (p. 38). In the context of eurhythmics, Falschlunger (2016) describes the concept of subject orientation. In his drafts of eurhythmics classes in the context of inclusive teaching, he shows how the teacher must be prepared on the spot to lower the requirements of an exercise for some participants or know how to make things more demanding for others. For the teacher, this means a constant negotiation between the abilities and needs of the students with the aim to make everyone participate. The teaching material that was chosen beforehand, as well as the initial aims of the classes must be taken in constant consideration and are spontaneously adapted during the class. Kinsky (2016a) also states the importance of thorough observation of the students in the class, for example, in the process of musical accompanying a group in movement. This is required to be able to catch the students' movements as exactly as possible and to support them in the best way through the music the teacher improvised on his / her instrument (pp. 115–116). Ethnography seems to have a similar need of a thorough observation of a subject.

As a teacher for improvisation, Kinsky writes that she always tries to create a comfortable atmosphere in her classes for her eurhythmics students. She concludes that only in this way these can explore music and movement freely and without fear (p. 115). The fear of making mistakes often holds us back to learn new things, as Hauser-Dellefant (2016) points out as well, but is essentially important for the learning process itself (pp. 37–38). Even in qualitative research mistakes are given high value. Breidenstein et al. (2015) write that you can even use mistakes in the approach to the field, for example, when facing the resistance of the informants or even in interpretation. The authors suggest seeing those as chances for a check of relevance: where something is being hidden, the field might show that there is something to see; where there was a misinterpretation, there might be something interesting to understand; what seems to be a wrong approach in the beginning, might be yet the first data (p. 39).

While being at the same time and at the same place as the subject of interest is a very important principle for ethnographic research (p. 40), coming home and taking a necessary distance after the field work is as important (p. 42). Breidenstein et al. (2015) literally speak of a *rhythmic disruption*<sup>8</sup> of the presence in the field with phases in the academic workspace. Like this, the individual moments of intensive data collection are interrupted by processes of discussion with colleagues about the data, which allow to learn about the impression the data has on unfamiliar eyes (p. 44). This oscillation between two poles is one of the properties Neira Zugasti (2016) names as fundamentals of her teaching as a rhythmician (p. 190). Besides *polarity*, she claims seven other properties being conditions for the appearance of rhythm within processes. The table provides an overlook of how these can be related ethnographic fieldwork.

<b>Property of Rhythm</b> (Neira Zugasti, 2016)	<b>Relation to Ethnography</b> (Breidenstein et al., 2015)
Polarity	Oscillation between fieldwork and coming home, individual work and work with colleagues.
Synchronization	Being in the field together with the subject.
Entirety	Capture everything around the studied phenomenon in the field.
Continuity	Describes the course of a research project from beginning to end.

Repetition	Repeat an observation in the same place for a longer period helping to become more familiar with the field (prolonged engagement); ask different people the same questions either to check the gained data or personal impressions or to get new points of view (member checking).
Interdependence	The presence of the researcher in the field changes it, for examples as the behaviour of subjects is not the same with him / her around, but also gaining knowledge of the field changes the researcher in an academic or personal way.
Irreversibility	Once an inquiry took place, the changes mentioned above cannot be taken back.
Structure	Describing the different stages of a research project as following: coming up with first ideas, planning the project, collecting the data, analysing them – maybe going back and forth between the latter two – and finally, publishing the findings.

Graphic: A. Riedmüller

## Grounded Theory

Having described various points of connection between eurhythmics and ethnography practiced as a common method in qualitative research, I would like to also consider a short comparison of eurhythmics with Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM). This special methodology was developed in the 1960s by the two US sociologists Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser for their field research about the organisational structure of hospitals. Nowadays well-established GTM was meant to produce new theoretical ideas on a subject area, where it was not enough to describe situations. It bases on a set of certain rules in the process of theory development. All different kinds of data can be used, such as interviews, field notes, websites, transcripts of meetings. Also, personal notes the researcher writes during the whole research process – or ‘memos’ as they are mostly called in GTM context – that could possibly contain emotional resonances or thoughts to a specific piece of data, are used as data themselves in the process of inquiry. Usually, after a complex coding procedure of the data, categories are built out of them and emerging concepts are developed to theories (Breuer et al., 2019, pp. 7–8). Over the decades, several specific forms of GTM have been established. One is the Reflexive Grounded Theory Methodology (RGTM) by Franz Breuer. In his approach the concept of extensive self- reflection, or rather the decentralisation of the person, social role/s, activities, attitudes, points of views and the disclosure of all other kinds of the researcher’s personal biases are given great significance in the creation of the theory (p. 10). It is easy to point out here a proximity to eurhythmics, where the same kind of reflexivity is asked of eurhythmics teachers, who must constantly reflect on their actions and reactions in class (Mayr, 2016). Profound reflection takes place after the class and are about on what could be observed of the students, on the structure of the class, of the goals that could or could not be achieved with the group, on how the participants reacted on the music, if the different children could be accompanied in their learning process and so on.

Other important principles of RGTM are also manifested in ethnography and can be connected likewise to eurhythmics, as it was already shown above: Breuer et al. (2019) point out the great value the individual has in RGTM, which leads us back again to subject orientation. Also, a general openness is asked of the RGTM researcher during the process of inquiry. Furthermore, moments of comparison and contrast stand central in this methodology,

where the smallest or biggest differences in cases are indicated. This relates to aspects of polarity, variation, and repetition (pp. 8–9).

### Performative Social Science

After these two examples of a method and a methodology commonly used in the context of qualitative research, one other field is to be discussed that appears to be utterly suitable for linking it with eurhythmics as it gives the arts a special place: Performative Social Science. There are many ways of research that take art/s into account, whether it is namely *artistic research*, *arts-based research*, *arts-informed research*, *practice-based research*, or *performative research*, just to name a few. Schreier (2017) states that in literature these terms sometimes even overlap regarding how they are defined (para. 13). Yet the author sees a clear distinction between three of them: *arts-informed research*, in which the artistic means are subordinated to the scientific purposes and therefore treated as tools or methods within the research project (para. 25); *arts-based research*, which values especially the process of the creation of a work of art within the process of generating knowledge (para. 27); and in *artistic research*, which is mainly done by artists themselves to generate pre-reflexive, not conceptional knowledge while practising their art (para. 26). In 2008, the online journal *Forum Qualitative Social Research – FQS*<sup>9</sup> published an entire issue on the topic of Performative Social Science (Jones et al., 2008) and was one of the first collections especially dedicated to this area.<sup>10</sup> According to Mey (2020, p. 202), it was Denzin (2001) who first gave Performative Social Science its name, describing it within the canon of social research methodologies. In his article he focusses on the performative in interviews:

[Qualitative research today] is defined by a performative sensibility, by a willingness to experiment with different ways of presenting an interview text. The performative sensibility turns interviews into performance texts, into poetic monologues. It turns interviewees into performers, into persons whose words and narratives are then performed by others. (p. 25)

Roberts (2008) makes a distinction between the terms *performance* and *performative*, whereas he sees the former “as forms of art, ethnography and social science” and the latter as “processes and ‘tools’ from all of the arts and humanities and social science” (para. 3), which include for the arts, for example, “music, dance, video, poetry, or drama”, and for the humanities and social science “text based journal article[s] or overhead presentation[s]” (para. 3). For him, “Research can be a performance, by performance, of a performance, or in performance” (para. 9) and he suggests that researchers should be aware of “to what extent and in what sense [he or she] is to be a dramatist, actor, director, poet, painter, or choreographer-dancer [...]” (para. 9). Although he speaks of a “performative turn in social science” (para. 124) that took place some years ago, Roberts is convinced that in social science research there has always been a note of “its creative, innovative and ‘artistic’ aspects” (para. 11). He points out that initially Performative Social Science has been “associated with ethnographic study, and qualitative methodology”<sup>11</sup> (para. 18).

### Connections to Eurhythmics

Keeping this last statement in mind and having already introduced the connections that can be made between eurhythmics and ethnography as well as eurhythmics and R/GTM, it is impossible not to link eurhythmics to Performative Social Science. The variety of different

<sup>9</sup> [www.qualitative-research.net](http://www.qualitative-research.net) (accessed on 29/1/21)

<sup>10</sup> For another example of a peer reviewed online journal on qualitative research going a similar way, see issue 27 (7) of *Qualitative Inquiry* (2017) that published a special edition based on “poetic and performative reactions” to the terrorist attack in the LGBT community’s night club *Pulse* in Orlando, Florida in June 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Roberts also mentions that there has been likewise an “ethnographic turn in art” in different art forms since the 1920s until today. As the main concern of this article is in ‘the other direction’, there will not be further discussion here. For further reading on the topic see Foster (1996).



methods and methodologies that are used in this context is vast. Likewise, the designing of a qualitative research project and its execution can be of very creative nature. As methods there are, for example, Saldañas' approach of *ethnodrama* (2005), or later *ethnotheatre* (2016) as ways of including actors and audience into the research process, the methodology of *A/r/tography*, in which "the 'a', 'r' and 't' stands for artist, researcher and teacher" showing the practice-based nature of this "living inquiry" (Vist, 2015, p. 269), *fiction-based research* that raises findings of inquiry to a fictional level and is presented, for examples, in novels or in films (Mey, 2020, p. 206) or *autoethnography* as a form of autobiographic ethnographical writing (Schreier, 2017, paras. 5–12). All these methods and methodological approaches can be linked to eurhythmics, when the latter is understood as a transdisciplinary form of art.<sup>12</sup>

Applying different forms of art in the research process, the researcher should reflect on their role within this process (Roberts, 2008, para. 113): Do I have the necessary artistic capabilities required for my planned endeavour? Why and to what account can my project make use of the arts? This reflexive approach is like what was already described above as the role of a eurhythmics teacher following Mayr (2016). The different roles a research-artist or artist-researcher must take due to Roberts, can be connected to Mayr, who describes the role of a eurhythmics teacher as constantly shifting during a class: from being a leader, to being a companion, an initiator, a playmate, a partner, an observer, a presenter or an improviser, and back. (p. 133).

As one last point of connection between eurhythmics and Performative Social Science, I would like to mention what Roberts (2008) describes as "coming back to our senses" (paras. 133–140). Besides a performative turn, he sees another turn in social sciences, that started to take the concept of embodiment more and more into account. And that for both the researcher him / herself in the process of analysing data and for the communication of the inquiry's findings to an audience. The concept of the body senses is here much shorter than it is in eurhythmics, which would take all body senses into account (Hauser-Dellefant, 2016). Although, the appeal to make qualitative research bodily experienceable can definitely be seen as connecting point here.

## Conclusion

The given examples make it obvious that there is a growing interest in the arts in general throughout the research disciplines, but especially in artistic methods and methodologies in the field of qualitative research. I am convinced that eurhythmics with its transdisciplinary artistic approach, could and should be a part of this canon. Furthermore, eurhythmics can be related in many ways to qualitative research methods and methodologies. This has been shown in this article linking it to three important fields of empirical inquiry. At the same time, as Habron (2019) indicates, it appears that "other modes of enquiry, such as action research, arts-based educational research (ABER) or practice-as-research, remain untapped" in the field of Dalcroze Studies (pp. 98–99).<sup>13</sup> Although they promise to be as suitable as the ones mentioned before.

So, let me try to give an answer to my initial questions: I am not sure if we as rhythmicians 'already know so much' in this area. But I am certain that there are a lot of connecting points between qualitative research and our discipline, may it be as a pedagogical approach, a teaching philosophy or as an art form. More of them are yet to be discovered and tried out. At the same time, I am sure that the same Roberts (2008, para. 113-114) pointed out for the researcher-artist might be right for the rhythmician-researcher: either of them must know the skills of the other field sufficiently enough to succeed with his / her endeavour. Knowing of the various possibilities one has being a rhythmician, should make it worth a try

12 One very good example for this is Daly's (2019) artistic research project including Dalcroze Eurhythmics using an autoethnographic approach to her work as performing artist and violinist.

13 See Beaulieu, Kang and Heino (2017) here as an exception.

for whoever wants to enter this broad field of qualitative inquiry, having his / her profession in mind as a possible starting point.

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### Links to websites

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