

Marja Heimonen

Book review

Beyond Methods. Lessons from the arts to qualitative research

Liora Bresler (Ed.) 2015.

Publication from the Malmö Academy of Music. Perspectives in music and music education No-10. Lund: Lund University. ISBN 978-91-982297-4-5

What can qualitative research learn from the arts? This challenging question is reflected upon by the editor of *Beyond Methods: Lessons from the Arts to Qualitative Research*, Liora Bresler, internationally well-known Professor in art education at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. She has visited the University of the Arts Helsinki several times, and is presently a member of the advisory board for the Academy of Finland funded international research project *Global visions Through Mobilizing Networks: Co-Developing Intercultural Music Teacher Education in Finland, Israel and Nepal* (<http://sites.uniarts.fi/web/globalvisions/home>).

In 2010, Liora Bresler was invited to the University of Lund as a visiting professor. The position was established in honor of Hedda Andersson 1861–1950, the first female student at the Swedish university, with the first iteration of this visiting professorship granted to Malmö Academy of Music at the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts. One cannot think of a more perfect Hedda Andersson Professorship for the university's research community consisting of students, researchers, and professors than Bresler. Her numerous international contacts and excellent skills, competence and interests in interdisciplinary research and arts-based research methods were most valuable for the Swedish research community during her visiting professorship that lasted from 2011 to 2015.

The publication of this book is one of the most important outcomes of the numerous collaborative projects Liora Bresler directed during her time as Hedda Andersson Professor. In addition to a profound Overture, the book consists of six chapters by Swedish researchers and six chapters by international researchers that were invited to join the book project. This is one example of how a visiting professor is able to promote the development of international networks, one of the most important factors in fostering international research communities. Moreover, the book is published through a not-for-profit publisher. As such, this book is available not only as a printed volume but also free-of-charge as an electronic version. This kind of open-access-publishing is widely supported by the international research community since it bypasses the often prohibitive paywalls of many publishing houses, enabling the research to be read globally, and to be accessed by those without the financial resources to invest in—increasingly expensive—research literature. The aim of this book is thus to promote an on-going discussion, in which everyone is able to take part.

Polyphony, several voices equally composed into the work, is emphasized in Liora Bresler's writing. According to her, aiming at understanding is more important than the explanation of a phenomenon. Dissonances and tensions between voices have a crucial role to play here, since complexity is favoured in her view of qualitative research. Such as in music, dissonances in research create tensions. What becomes most important for the reader is then to listen to the different kinds of voices, aiming to understand each of them

empathically. This means that there is no one right answer or interpretation. The ethics of care, as influenced by the work of Nel Noddings and the concept of dialogical relationships (see, M. Buber's *I and Thou*, 1971), among others, are visible in Liora Bresler's writing. Sensitivity and intuitive understanding are usually connected with artistic work but she sees them as part of qualitative research as well. Subjectivity is not only essential in the arts but also in qualitative research that focuses usually on a single human being. She stresses the importance of "unknowing" (p. 7), ignorance, in order to be able to understand emphatically and to have a fresh attitude towards others. In the academics, researchers tend to be sophisticated authors, and have considerable expertise and knowledge in their field, which may in practice hinder their abilities of being flexible and open to new ideas and other views.

Aiming towards emphatic understanding and appreciating different voices is relevant in reading this book as well. The contributing authors are at various stages of their research careers: for instance, one author may have recently started his or her doctoral studies, whereas another may be an internationally well-known retired professor still actively conducting research. It is not only the different backgrounds and identities of the authors that are described, but also the varieties of identities within a person that are opened up for the readers. The authors are thus not only artists but also directors, educators, researchers, and musicians.

The book is divided into three parts (p. 11). The first section, on arts and research, begins with a chapter by Lia Lonnert, a Swedish music researcher and harpist. She writes about the power of the arts to represent un-lived lives, and in this way makes it possible for the audience to experience something outside of their real life. In this sense, she suggests that we all have two kinds of lives: that which is *real*, and that which is *ideal*. The arts may promote empathy in touching the senses of human beings via the stories of others, or fictive stories, and in this way promote emotional understanding between human beings, and self-understanding as well. The next chapter is written by Tyler Denmead, artist, arts educator and manager; he writes here on "not knowing" and connects artistic work with educational ethnography. The third contribution is from a well-known Swedish jazz-musician, Sven Bjersted, whose background is in classical music, jazz, and drama. He has conducted research on Swedish jazz-musicians, and is interested in what jazz improvisation can teach for research. "It is all process" is the title of his chapter. The following chapter by Bruno Faria concludes the first part of this book. Faria, a classical flautist and director of sound-painting, explores his own artistic work and research, and focuses on the balance (and imbalance) in both of them. In summary, all the authors write from both the perspective of artist and researcher, and their backgrounds in different kinds of art forms, musical genres and instruments, for example, shape their understandings of research: rather than teaching music students, they are now sharing important lessons for researchers.

The second section of the book focuses on ethnography and ethnomusicology. Here, the authors aim at understanding Otherness, that is, human beings in other cultures. Koji Matsunobo, pianist and Shakuhachi player, reflects on the cultural aspects of sensing time. Bruno Nettel, Professor Emeritus at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, discusses in his chapter "The meat-and-potatoes book" how to write ethnographies. Eva Saether, Professor in music education at Malmö Academy of Music and docent in music education at University of the Arts Helsinki, discusses the role of music making in data collection and as a research tool, and her experiences in doing field work in Gambia and Malmö are extremely intriguing. In her chapter, she describes how she has used the violin as a research tool and playing the violin as a research method.

The focus of the third and final part of the book is on education. Göran Folkestad, Professor in music education at Malmö Academy of Music with a background as a



musician in classical, pop and rock music, questions the common dichotomies of classical and popular music; informal learning outside of school and formal learning in school; autodidactic and teacher-centered learning; performance and teaching; and artist and teacher identities. Based on his experiences, no such dichotomies exist, promoting a more integrated view and approach to music education. This is followed by a poem by Robert Stake, exploring how education can be inspired by the power of the arts. Anna Houmann, Senior lecturer in methodology at Malmö Academy of Music, writes about the role of expressive objects in her study, in which these kinds of objects were used as a pedagogical tool, and as a research tool, when assumptions on music teaching were examined. They might be seen as “the key to the life-world”, referring to a phenomenological perspective, life-world as the complex every-day world we live in (p. 125). Susan Stinson discusses dance, teaching, and research and describes how her teaching was inspired by dance. Both dance and teaching were connected with her understanding of research and these all are incorporated in her life as a whole. In the final chapter, Betsy Hearne describes the power of narratives in the light of education, research, and self-knowledge. When a researcher interprets facts, she or he tells a story; in fact, all research tells a story.

This fascinating book tells us many stories. As interpreters, the readers are presented with a polyphonic composition of different kinds of voices that have been structured by the editor into a meaningful whole. The book suggests that it is essential to understand the importance of emphatic understanding as a key to find out what lies ‘beyond methods’. We do not know beforehand what we might find, nor do we have strict guidelines directing us to find it. The search for the unknown is emphasized and the process is forever ongoing. Just as in the arts, openness and sometimes even ignorance is important for qualitative research in order to be creative, and to find something new. ■

These open lessons can be enjoyed by everyone around the world:

http://www.mhm.lu.se/sites/mhm.lu.se/files/perspectives_in_music10.pdf

This review has been undertaken as part of the ArtsEqual project funded by the Academy of Finland's Strategic Research Council from its Equality in Society programme (project no. 293199).