**Title:** Music Education Research in the 21st Century: Theories, Questions, Problems, and Methodological Pluralism

**Description**

In this text we contend that pluralistic approaches to research in music education are key to gaining complex, nuanced understandings of the behaviors, interactions, and thinking that music teaching and learning entail. Pluralism, as it has been defined in religious education, involves not just the acceptance of other paradigms of inquiry, but acknowledgement of the goodness of those paradigms and of ways in which they might enhance understanding (Feinberg, 2013); we propose a similar stance in music education research.

For the purposes of this book, we define research as the systematic quest to answer relevant questions. Research encompasses the many approaches to inquiry that fall within and beyond traditional categories of empirical, philosophical, historical, and naturalistic perspectives that we draw upon to address questions (Froehlich & Frierson-Campbell, 2013). Pluralistic research holds the potential to blend frameworks, foundations, methods, and analysis protocols, and leads to sophisticated understanding of music teaching and learning. This blending could take place in a range of contexts that may span an individual study (i.e. mixed methods) to a lifelong research agenda. Additionally, pluralistic ideals would guide the addressing of questions as a community.

While pluralistic approaches to research have the potential to address questions with greater depth than traditional approaches might, the openness associated with pluralism has not always been reflected in the realities of published music education research. Indeed, it could be argued that a certain methodological segregation in American Music education research has occurred, which may be evidenced by method-specific conferences, separate graduate-level research courses that lack attention to synthesizing ideas across coursework, researchers who are "steeped in a particular research methodology by their training and experience" (Reimer, 2008, p. 201), journals that favor a certain method (Killian, 2014; Yarborough, 1996), and research literature devoted to a particular approach (Conway, 2014).

Mixed methods researchers have offered a response to methodological segregation by advocating for the blending of methods within a single study; however, some have argued that the emergence of mixed methods has simply added an additional paradigm, or a third silo, that reinforces methodological differences (Symonds & Gorard, 2008). While there may be some truth to this, the argument fails to account for the music education researcher who has been well-equipped to conduct quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods research (as well as other approaches) and applies pertinent methods not to adhere to a strict governing paradigm, but to pragmatically answer a research question, advance a theory, or address a problem facing music education. Such researchers apply pluralistic
research methods within single studies, but also across research agendas to better understand music education phenomena. They synthesize findings from a wide variety of studies representing different approaches in order to better understand areas of inquiry, collaborate with others to address questions via multiple studies and approaches, and use those collaborations to continuously strengthen and broaden their own research skills. While this proposed text is not exclusively about mixed methods research, and we do not suggest that pluralism can be a panacea for real or imagined paradigmatic conflict, we aim to reveal the favorable possibilities inherent in taking a pragmatic view of research methods which acknowledges the goodness of varied paradigms.

The purpose of this text is to examine methodological pluralism in light of recent music education research history and examine pluralistic approaches in practice. Further, we will illuminate the work of innovative music education researchers who are constructing pluralistic research studies and agendas, and advocate for the music education profession to embrace such an approach in order to advance shared research goals. The ramifications of this transformation in music education research will be discussed, including the implications for researcher education and the challenges inherent in conducting and disseminating such research.

The following are general descriptions of the three parts of this book as we envision them. We have also included in this proposal abstracts we have collected from authors who have agreed to contribute to the book. We hope that these abstracts will further illustrate the intent of each of the sections.

Part 1 of the text will provide an overview of the origins of methodological pluralism and a discussion of its role in music education research. Additionally, chapter authors will introduce ideas related to research conducted with primary attention paid toward problems, questions, and theories as motivating factors, rather than toward methodological adherence.

Part 2 of the text will examine several practical aspects of pluralistic approaches to music education research. These include conducting mixed methods research from the perspective of former graduate students, using technology as an aid in varied types of research, and the preparation of future researchers to conduct pluralistic investigations.

Part 3 of the text is designed to highlight several contemporary researchers who approach their work from a pluralistic perspective and who base their research on theory. They are personal stories that provide examples of individuals who have demonstrated openness to varied paradigms in researching a single question, or throughout their research agendas.


