Transform
NEW VOICES IN COMMUNITY MUSIC

Diljeet Kaur Bhachu & Ruth Currie
Guest Editors

Lee Higgins
Editor

Editorial
Diljeet Kaur Bhachu & Ruth Currie

Est. 1841 | YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY

International Centre for Community Music

Editorial: wondering about our worlds, in real time

Diljeet Kaur Bhachu & Ruth Currie

Welcome to the 4th edition of Transform, an open-access, peer-reviewed journal by the International Centre for Community Music. This edition focuses on *positionalities* and includes six articles by seven authors, all at different stages of postgraduate scholarship. The authors in this edition do not shy away from the complexities and the messiness that sustained critical reflexivity brings, when, as researchers, we hold the mirror to ourselves and the worldviews and experiences that make our voicings matter in research. We cover some tricky terrain in this edition and the authors face this head on. Their treatment and respect for the processes they take to communicate this, and alertness to their own power and affordances, illustrate qualities from their practice, as community practitioners, which signal to us that community music research, as an interdisciplinary area of scholarship, is in safe – yet daring – hands. As editors, we'd like to invite readers to centre the people in these articles - the authors, their networks, those who participate in research with them – in the interpretations of positionalities. We consider these as embodied experiences, held through a reflexive stance (Soedirgo and Glas, 2020).

For example, Amy Catron reminds us that having good intentions is not enough, and that 'it's vital to acknowledge the uneven experiences that musical spaces foster'. She suggests that 'mutual respect, active listening, and being flexible and adaptive must be a foundational criteria for success'. Laura Benjamins prompts us to take note of our biases and how they can disrupt the relationship between researcher and participant (where this binary is present in the research design), 'particularly where the values and beliefs being explored sit far from our own'. When considering positionalities and how this edition can be of use for future postgraduate researchers, a take-away from all the papers resonate on one question – what rights, affordances or invitations allow us to be actors in our particular research spaces? All authors bring us closer to their understanding of this and why they ask questions in these research spaces. For us, this goes to the core of positionality as an ongoing, flexible and reflexive stance. We invite readers to this year's edition of Transform in the spirit of working things out, though writing, and through engagement with the contradictions and tensions that dialogue with our research positionalities can foster.

All authors are engaged in practice alongside their work as postgraduate researchers, each helping us unpick some of the complexities that coexist with this, by focusing on the situations researchers

can find themselves in when undertaking research as an extension of something they care deeply about. As community practitioners, Richa Okhandiar-MacDougall and Katerina Chatzovoulou highlight that 'as community music and arts facilitators, there can be an expectation to offer empathy, care and support alongside a creative outlet. The confrontation of our vulnerability as individuals and "experts" in this space, play a pivotal role in assisting this shift'. Fiona Evison furthers this critique of positionality, considering the safeguarding needs of the post-graduate researcher and the role of the academy in this. She invites us to consider the process of positionality development and argues that although vital, 'students' perceptions about positionality's relevance and importance depends on how instructors craft and utilize course materials, assignments, and pedagogical approaches'. This resonates back to Richa and Katerina who highlight the distinctions of who makes decisions about positionalities in the research process, and in community arts spaces, they argue that 'unpaid community members who participate in the sessions as service users and research subjects immensely enhance facilitators' learning and universities' research' but that can 'also feed wrong positionality patterns within the organisations or even re-traumatise them in the name of learning and achieving community work aims'. And, to return our feedback loop back to Fiona, she discusses the ways that positionalities can be messy and conflicting. Nicola McAteer draws us into powerful examples of positionalities conflicting power, by illustrating how the process of understanding oneself as a researcher can be a disruptive transitional step in the reflexive shift from practitioner to practitioner-researcher. Particularly, Nicola draws on ways this can alter our understanding of oneself, our experiences, and the work. She reminds us that this work is never often easy and the 'complexity of understanding the term social justice will no doubt be an ongoing endeavour through my research life'.

Finally, understanding one's research life and ways that our lives contribute to our research is illustrated clearly by Laura Curtis, who focuses on the shifting nature of positionalities at different stages of our research journey's. She highlights that although 'previously convinced that "valid" research required setting aside one's personal connections to the topic being studied', engaging in scholarship enabled her to 'become conscious of what I know and how I come to know it, and how my positionality and epistemological standpoint, as an involuntarily childless woman, informs the Doctoral research I am currently undertaking'. It is the idea of 'current' that sparks our interests as editors of this year's Transform. Current positionalities in their present form, informed by where we come from, how we've grown with this learning, and possibilities for where we might go next. Current also in the fluidity of positionality, which many of the authors drawn from; the ebs and

flows and tidal shifts that pull us towards particular ways of doing our research and for understanding our worlds. For some authors, this pull has been about finding a home for our worldviews and experiences, for others, this pull has been about activism and influencing how our worlds work. Through six divergent examples of positionalities, all the authors carry us along with them, through the current of their present thinking, to wonder about how we can do things differently, when we question our researcher role, reflexively.

References

Soedirgo, J., Glas, A. (2020). Towards active reflexivity: Positionality and practice in the production of knowledge. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 53(3), 527-531. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096519002233