

What's in a Name?

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From Sounding Board, July 2014

The C-word (as in community music) gets a bad press these days. People prefer terms such as "participatory" or "socially-engaged." *Whatever happened to community music?* (see xx) is concerned about the lack of consensus around a definition of the term. So why, at Sage Gateshead, do we run a degree programme called BA (Hons) Community Music? Do prospective students know what it is? We thought it was time to check whether the name was still fit for purpose, so we asked our students what they thought. The results surprised, and pleased us!

We'd also been asking our colleagues the same question. In one reflective practice meeting (down the pub) Lee Higgins explained that getting Community Music to mean something as a term means having to own what it means for you. And this was borne out in the subsequent dialogue with our students, who pretty universally were quite attached to the 'community' tag. As well as helping to differentiate the course from other more generic music courses - which was really useful feedback for us – they highlighted four reasons to keep the course emphasis on 'community':

1. Not surprisingly, a significant focus of the course is about **working in and with communities** – of geography, age, ability, interest, music etc. The curriculum is all about developing the broad practical knowledge and musical skills to be able to do that well.
2. As well as taking their skills into existing communities, they also aspire to **build their own communities**, through participation opportunities which increase social cohesion. Because the course emphasises their own skills as musicians, it's also about building audiences through performance, and developing their own artistic identities, putting themselves at the centre of their own emergent communities.
3. They value the opportunity for **learning within the community** of Sage Gateshead, and its diversity of 100s of inspiring musicians working in different performance and participation contexts, from Early Years to care homes, orchestras to turntables, and all points in between. Learning 'on the job', alongside more experienced musicians.
4. They also value the opportunity to **learn as a community** of learners. We say that you can't really learn the values which underpin the work except by experiencing them for yourself, so the way the course is taught helps them to appreciate why dialogue, inclusion, access, trust, mutuality and a healthy group process are as important as excellence and product. Learning to negotiate, compromise and account for the 'other', are all invaluable attitudes for practitioners in the field.

They might also have added that this is just what Sound Sense recognises in its description of community music as "taking place in all types of community, however defined, where it reflects the context in which it takes place."

For all those reasons, we realised that we didn't need to change the name after all. However, asking the question really helped us to crystallise what our 'Community Music' is. What's yours?