

## Where are we Twenty Years On?—A Review of Australian Music Education Research for the period 1978–1997

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**Abstract:** In 1984, Lett undertook a review of the state of Australian music education research for the period to 1978. The present article considers the developments that have taken place since that time through a review of scholarly opinion to identify the principal themes and issues that have emerged since Lett's (1984) article. There is also an analysis of approximately 350 research theses completed or in progress to 1997. Conclusions are drawn regarding the level of the higher degree work being undertaken (honours, masters and doctoral degrees), the demographic spread across the various states, the distribution of music education research across the major educational research paradigms, and the focus of research in relation to both content / subject and educational level. The article also identifies general trends and issues in relation to these aspects as well as making recommendations for promoting music education research in the future.

### Introduction

Music education research in Australia has indisputably 'come of age'. Up to the end of 1997, there have been two hundred masters degrees with a music education research component and some thirty–six music education doctorates awarded by Australian universities. As has previously been argued (Stevens, 1993), this should be a source of pride to Australian music educators as a professional group. However, there is considerable ground still to be covered before we can feel fully secure—if we ever can—that music education research is informing music education practice in schools, universities, private teaching studios and other music education settings to the extent that it should.

Part 1 of this article summarises scholarly opinion regarding the perceived needs of Australian music education research over the past three decades. Part 2 focuses on findings from the Bibliography of Australian Music Education Research (BAMER) Project in order to demonstrate that at least some of these needs are being met through theses and other research reports submitted for higher degrees at Australian universities. The 'state of the art' up to 1997 is then discussed, as well as trends in music education research from a number of perspectives, including patterns of growth over the past twenty years, the higher degree level of research studies, the type of research being undertaken, the educational sector to which research is being directed, and the content or subject matter being researched.

As with any new year, decade, century or now millenium, there is always some degree of reflection on the past as well as a looking forward to the future. Despite the now considerable body of research studies in music education in Australia, it is probably still the case, as van Ernst (1993) has suggested, that "for so many music educators, these theses are the first and last piece of research they conduct" (p. 15). The challenge is therefore not only to maintain and hopefully extend the number of higher degree research studies in music education—particularly in the face of the seeming inevitability of full–fee post–graduate courses—but also to maintain a climate in schools and universities in which music educators are both motivated and able—in terms of time—to undertake 'professional' research in areas which will indeed inform and enhance music teaching practice. In Part 3 of this article, some constructive suggestions are made for the future maintenance and expansion of music education research in Australia.

## Part 1—Perspectives from the Literature

Bridges (1970) in posing the question "why research in music education?" clearly identifies an imperative for music education research by stating:

Let us not delude ourselves. If we go on teaching [music] the way our parents and grandparents were taught, we shall find that the twentieth century has passed us by and left us high and dry, isolated from the knowledge explosion, the technological advances and the cultural climate of the times in which we live. ... This is where research comes in, for the object of educational research is to find solutions to the problems confronting teachers ... (p. 25)

Building on this stated need for music education research, Lett (1988) undertook a review and comparison of the 'early years' (1969–73) of music education research in Australia and the following period (1974–82). He noted evidence of change in papers presented at conferences and published in journals with the emergence of studies in ethnic (multicultural) music in education, methods of music teaching (both in classroom and in studio settings), evaluation and assessment, and the historical development of music education. Drawing on Bridges (1975; 1978), Lett also analysed the content of theses in the broad field of music education during the period 1936–78 with the following results:

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Table 1  
*Lett's (1984) Analysis of Music Education  
Theses (1936–78) according to Content*

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<u>Content Areas</u>	<u>Number</u> (n=55)	<u>% age</u>
Theory / philosophy of music education (Aesthetics / Philosophy)	4	7.3
Class teaching school music (Class music teaching)	18	32.7
Curriculum and content (Curriculum development / evaluation)	11	20.0
Radio, TV and Music (Educational media)	2	3.6
History / biography	2	3.6
Instrumental teaching / orchestras	5	9.1
Music appreciation	3	5.5
Attitudes (Music psychology / perception)	2	3.6
Music therapy (/ Special education)	3	5.5
Special teaching systems (Teaching methods)	3	5.5
Vocal music	2	3.6

Adapted from Lett (1984)

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After having also undertaken a content analysis of articles published in *The Australian Journal of Music Education* for the period 1967 to 1982, Lett (1988, pp. 152–153) suggested that music education research could be activated through the following mechanisms:

- cooperative action by all music education groups to identify and sponsor / obtain sponsorship for joint research projects
- formation of local research 'cells' whose members would focus on a single research priority area
- organisation of local research cell conferences to allow detailed planning, development and reporting of research
- utilisation by members of research cells of their study leave in order to relocate for a period to undertake research
- designation, by professional associations concerned with research, of individual researchers as music education research scholars to work on specific projects during study leave periods
- lobbying by professional associations for government funding for research activity
- utilising the research cells as a means of developing the research competence both of less experienced academics and of research students, as well as of practicing music teachers.

Lett (1988) concluded with the warning that, unless some dramatic change was effected through the planning of music education research through professional associations, "we can envisage the continuation of haphazard individualism as the basis for music education for the foreseeable future" (p. 153).

Russell–Bowie (1989), in an overview of trends in music education research (particularly primary school music education research), also drew attention to a set of similar needs:

- the need to establish music / music education research centres to focus initially on a few areas of research which, being added to over a period of time, would provide a research base presumably for the application of research to school teaching practice
- the need for research undertaken for higher degrees to be more carefully selected on the basis of its useful application to music teaching practice
- the need for the music education profession to be better educated about what research is and how it can be usefully applied to music teaching practice
- the need for more opportunities to be found for presenting and discussing both the findings of completed research and research projects 'in progress'
- the need for more lobbying of governments—including state government departments of education—in order to fund music education research activities
- the need to utilise opportunities for inter–disciplinary research with university colleagues as a means of promoting research in music education.

Access to documentation of research studies in music education undertaken as part of tertiary education courses in Australia has long been recognised as an important issue. As far back as the 1984 Association of Music Education Lecturers (AMEL) Research Forum, it was noted in the "Summary and Recommendations" of the Forum that "a number of research reports of theses and other purposes are prepared in the area of music education and related fields. These documents are often difficult to locate and borrow, and are part of an important body of information." (van Ernst, 1984, p. 6). One of the principal recommendations of the Forum was "that AMEL request the Music Board [of the Australia Council] to fund the Australia Music Centre or some other appropriate body to: (a) identify and/or collect all tertiary degree research studies and other reports relevant to music education, and (b) publish an index to the collection twice a year ..." (van Ernst, 1984, p. 6).

In addition there is the need for an on–going and comprehensive analysis both of trends in music education research in Australia and, in particular, of the strengths and deficiencies within this particular area of the Australian national research profile. Bridges (1970), Lett (1984; 1988), Russell–Bowie (1989) and more recently van Ernst (1994) have, in turn, identified areas of music education which they believe are particularly in need of research, but what is required is a more comprehensive and objective analysis. In recalling Lett's (1988) plea for orientation, planning and organisational structure to support research in

music education in Australia, Weidenbach (1992) advocated that the key research issues need to be identified by active researchers (generally university academics) and a long-term agenda mapped out so that students seeking research topics can be directed to worthwhile areas and also channeled towards identified leaders in their particular fields (p. 343).

In reflecting on future directions of music education research at the close of the XVth Annual Conference of AMEL, van Ernst (1993, pp. 16–18) made the following observations:

- despite comparatively little conference support for the notion, collaborative research could be one possibility for increasing the research quantum, but there does need to be a balance between individual and collaborative research
- given modern forms of communication, particularly the use of e-mail, the establishment of collegial support networks for researchers was seen as critical
- dissemination of research findings, particularly through scholarly journals, was also seen as a critical factor in promoting a research culture
- although an attempt to determine priority areas was not fruitful, there is still the need to establish some priorities for the long-term research agenda in Australia
- there is much that needs to be done in collating lists of potential topics for higher degree research, developing an understanding among researchers of the range of methodological possibilities for research, and extending the use of analytical tools and other software
- music education researchers need to become more aware of and skilled in applying for research funding.

In a subsequent article, van Ernst (1994) made several other useful points in relation to music education research in Australia. Her point is well made that music educators in Australia have, until recently, often been rather isolated and, as a result, have lacked a critical mass to nurture a research culture. However, through the use of electronic communication, this isolation can and should be largely overcome (p. 47). There is also a lack of collaborative research in Australia and little evidence of researchers building on each other's work. This has often resulted in particular projects having fragmented and unrelated findings.<sup>1</sup> The issue of priorities for research in music education also received attention. One of van Ernst's (1994) key recommendations was that it should be the responsibility of active researchers to de-mystify research for practising music teachers, and to develop an expectation in practising teachers to research as part of their normal routines (p. 48).

Common themes encountered in this literature survey include: (1) the need for research findings to inform practice; (2) the need to promote the outcomes of research through conferences and scholarly journals as well as to discuss research issues; (3) the need to promote a research culture through research 'cells', through research centres and, as has more recently been suggested, through the notion of collaborative research and/or electronic communications; (4) the need for government support of music education research; and (5) the need for a database of music education research studies to enable an analysis of trends, particularly as these apply to areas of deficiency and/or priority in our national research profile. It is principally the latter need which the BAMER Project has attempted to address.

## **Part 2—The BAMER Project**

Since 1989 bibliographic information about past and present research undertaken in music education for higher degrees at Australian tertiary institutions has been assembled as part of the BAMER Project. Although the original aim of the BAMER Project was to gather data on both award and non-award ('professional') research, it soon became apparent that, because non-award research is already sufficiently well documented in the proceedings of national music education conferences and in scholarly journals, the project should focus exclusively on gathering information on higher degree research studies for the BAMER database.

Prior to the BAMER Project, there were several attempts to document information about research studies in music education in Australia, but these were often incomplete. The most prominent of these was the *Bibliography of Education Theses in Australia* which has been published annually by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) since 1978.<sup>2</sup> However, because some research studies are undertaken for coursework masters degrees as minor theses, dissertations or research papers, many have not been deposited in university libraries and therefore are not reported to ACER. There has been a conscious attempt to locate and cite all such research studies in the BAMER database. The prime objective of the BAMER Project has therefore been to at least partially fulfil the need, expressed by several writers [including van Ernst (1984, p. 6)], for a comprehensive database of music education research in Australia.

### **Sources, Presentation and Analysis of Data**

Information for the BAMER database has been obtained from several sources<sup>3</sup> and has therefore varied considerably in the level of detail. It was therefore necessary in several instances for informed judgements to be made by the editor / compiler of the BAMER database, particularly in relation to content, type and sector focus of research studies, during the data entry process.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to the establishment of the BAMER database and of papers emanating from the BAMER project (Stevens, 1992; 1993), the only review and analysis of Australian music education research was by Lett (1984; 1988). Although Lett considered both higher degree studies and non-award / professional research studies at a time when Australian music education research was in its infancy, his study is utilised in the present article as a framework for analysis and also as a point of comparison for the present state of music education research with what it was in 1978—the year taken by Lett as the 'cut-off' point for his analysis and review.

Analysis of the data from the BAMER Project will first involve the categorisation of the research studies according to (i) their status as either 'completed' or 'in progress' and (ii) the degree level at which a research study has been or is being undertaken—undergraduate honours degrees, masters degrees or doctoral degree level. The undergraduate research represented in the BAMER database includes the additional honours year theses undertaken for BA(Hons), BMus(Hons) and BEd(Hons) awards as well as BMus and BMusEd theses undertaken as part of some four-year undergraduate degree courses and certain post-graduate BEd degrees. Masters level research studies include both 'total fulfillment' theses and 'partial fulfillment' dissertations / research papers for MA, MMus, MMusEd, MEd, MEd(SpEd), MEdSt, MEdAdmin, MSc, and MLib degrees,<sup>5</sup> some of which were taken at Honours level. Unlike the United States where there are several types of doctoral degrees, the only doctorates awarded for research in music education in Australia to 1997 have been Doctor of Philosophy degrees; however some dissertations in music education for Doctor of Education (EdD) or Doctor of Teaching (DTeach) degrees were in progress during 1997.

The second form of analysis is demographically-based. The data is considered in terms of the state / territory location of the institution through which the higher degree was or is being undertaken.

The categorisation for the third form of analysis is derived from the commonly-accepted division of educational research into the four basic types or paradigms of philosophical, historical, experimental and descriptive research<sup>6</sup> as well as a 'not apparent' category for those research studies where the research type could not be determined with reasonable accuracy. Although there are hybrid types of research which combine two or more of these four basic research types, all of the research studies in the BAMER database have been categorised according to the *predominant* type of research represented.

The fourth analysis is based on the educational sector to which the research study has been directed. The categories here are derived from the *Australian Thesaurus of Educational*

*Descriptors* (Lavander & Findlay, 1984). These include early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, tertiary education (including teacher professional development), adult / community education, and general education, the latter being for non-sector-specific research studies. An additional category—'primary-secondary education'—was adopted for research studies which appear to be cross-sectoral, such as private / studio teaching of instrumental and/or vocal music.

The fifth form of analysis is based on the music education content of the research studies. The criteria here are largely derived from Lett's (1984; 1988) review and analysis of research in music education in Australia in which he tabulated Bridges' (1975; 1978) listings of music education theses into the eleven content areas. These are listed in the left hand column of Table 2 below. However, in view of the nature of the research studies included in the BAMER database, this list has been expanded to incorporate additional areas of music education content, making a total of eighteen in all.

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Table 2  
*Categories employed for the Analysis of Music Education Content*

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<u>Lett's (1984) content descriptors</u>	<u>Content Categories</u>	<u>Inclusive Content</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theory / philosophy of music education</li> <li>• Class teaching / school music</li> <li>• Curriculum and content</li> <li>• Radio / TV and music</li> <li>• Instrumental teaching / orchestras</li> <li>• Music appreciation</li> <li>• Attitudes</li> <li>• Music therapy</li> <li>• Special music teaching systems</li> <li>• Vocal music</li> <li>• History / biography</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aesthetics / Philosophy</li> <li>• Class music teaching</li> <li>• Curriculum development / evaluation</li> <li>• Educational media</li> <li>• Instrumental teaching</li> <li>• Music appreciation</li> <li>• Music psychology / perception</li> <li>• Music therapy / Special education</li> <li>• Teaching methods</li> <li>• Vocal / choral teaching</li> <li>• History / biography</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>audio-visual media</li> <li>computer-based media</li> <li>sight reading</li> <li>aptitude / cognition / attitudes / abilities</li> <li>disability / sight &amp;/or hearing impairment</li> <li>Orff / Kodály / Dalcroze / Yamaha / Suzuki / etc.</li> <li>singing</li> </ul>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Additional Content Categories</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment</li> <li>• Community music</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Multicultural music</li> <li>• Music educational systems</li> <li>• Popular music</li> <li>• Teacher education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>composition / improvisation / music technology</li> <li>ethnomusicology</li> <li>comparative educ. / policy studies</li> <li>jazz</li> </ul>

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To the end of 1997, the BAMER database had 346 'award' entries which have been classified as either undergraduate or post-graduate research studies undertaken at Australian universities with the following results:

- Undergraduate Research Studies
  - 31 *completed* and 2 *in progress*
- Post-graduate Research Studies – Masters and Doctoral degrees
  - 236 *completed* and 77 *in progress*

These are then further classified into masters level and doctoral level research as indicated in Table 3 below.

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Table 3  
*Research Studies according to Degree Level and Completion Status*

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<u>Degree</u>	<u>Number of research studies</u> (n=346)	
	<u>'completed'</u>	<u>'in progress'</u>
Undergraduate degrees	31	2
Masters degrees	200	41
Doctoral degrees	36	36

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The growth in the numbers of research projects undertaken in music education at Australian universities is demonstrated in the summary of theses submitted over five year intervals for the past twenty years (1977 to 1997) together with a projection for the next five year interval to the year 2002 in Table 4.

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Table 4  
*The Growth of Research Studies according to Degree, 1935–1997 with a projection to 2002*

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<u>Degree</u>	<u>Cumulative numbers of completed research studies</u> (n=267 / 346*)					
	1977	1982	1987	1992	1997	2002*
Undergraduate degrees	25	25	27	28	31	33
Masters degrees	21	38	65	121	200	241
Doctoral degrees	2	3	9	15	36	72
Totals	47	66	101	164	267	346

\* the projection to year 2002 is based on the assumption that 'in progress' research studies will be completed by this time.

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Table 5 indicates the demographic distribution of higher degree research studies across the six states and two territories in terms of completed studies and the total of both completed and in progress studies—the latter shown in parenthesis. (Henceforth the totals of both completed and in progress research studies are shown in parentheses.)

Table 5  
*The Demographic Distribution of Research Studies  
according to State / Territory*

<u>State</u>	<u>Number</u> n=267 (n=346)		<u>% age</u>	
Australian Capital Territory	9	(9)	3.4	(2.6)
New South Wales	73	(98)	27.3	(28.3)
Northern Territory	0	(1)	0.0	(0.2)
Queensland	30	(46)	11.2	(13.3)
South Australia	9	(14)	3.4	(4.1)
Tasmania	6	(6)	2.2	(1.7)
Victoria	96	(112)	36.0	(32.4)
Western Australia	44	(60)	16.5	(17.3)

The analysis according to 'type of research' indicated in Table 6 below reveals that the vast majority of the research studies to date have been descriptive, with each of the other types—experimental, historical and philosophical studies—being far less numerous.

Table 6  
*Research Studies according to Type of Research*

<u>Type</u>	<u>Number</u> n=267 (n=346)		<u>% age</u>	
Philosophical	11	(12)	4.1	(3.5)
Historical	20	(24)	7.5	(6.9)
Experimental	35	(36)	13.1	(10.4)
Descriptive	184	(238)	68.9	(68.8)
Not apparent	17	(36)	6.4	(10.4)

The analysis according to the educational sector to which these research studies have been directed reveals that those concerned with the primary and/or secondary levels of education, and with non-level-specific research were predictably well represented (see Table 7 below). On the other hand, research focused on the early childhood and particularly adult / community levels is markedly under represented.



Table 7  
*Research Studies according to Educational Sector*

<u>Educational Sector</u>	<u>Number</u> n=267 (n=346)		<u>% age</u>	
Early childhood	12	(13)	4.5	(3.8)
Primary	59	(72)	22.1	(20.8)
Secondary	59	(69)	22.1	(19.9)
Primary–Secondary	55	(77)	20.6	(22.3)
Tertiary	32	(35)	12.0	(10.1)
Adult / Community	6	(11)	2.2	(3.2)
General (non–specific)	44	(69)	16.5	(19.9)

In the case of the 'music education content' area, one only of the possible categories—that which appeared to be the major content focus of each research study—was selected in order to enable a comparison with Lett's (1984) content analysis. Table 8 below indicates the distribution of the research studies across the various content areas.

Table 8  
*Research Studies according to Music Education Content*

<u>Content Area</u>	<u>Number</u> n=267 (n=344)		<u>% age</u>	
Aesthetics / philosophy	3	(4)	1.1	(1.5)
Assessment	4	(6)	1.5	(1.7)
Class music teaching	14	(18)	5.2	(5.2)
Community music	1	(1)	0.4	(0.3)
Creativity	22	(25)	8.2	(7.2)
Curriculum development / evaluation	28	(38)	10.5	(11.0)
Educational media	12	(16)	4.5	(4.6)
Generic	5	(7)	1.9	(2.0)
History / biography	16	(16)	6.0	(4.6)
Instrumental teaching	51	(64)	19.1	(18.5)
Music appreciation	11	(12)	4.1	(3.4)
Music education policy	12	(19)	4.5	(5.5)
Music psychology / perception	18	(24)	6.8	(6.9)
Music therapy / special education	15	(18)	5.6	(5.2)
Multicultural music	7	(14)	2.6	(4.0)
Popular music	9	(10)	3.3	(2.9)
Teacher education	12	(12)	4.5	(3.4)
Teaching methods	14	(16)	5.3	(4.6)
Vocal / choral teaching	13	(26)	4.9	(7.5)

## Observations and Discussion

One of the most striking aspects of the above data (Tables 3 and 4) is the amount of research which has taken place and is presently underway in music education. Lett's (1984) review and analysis of research in music education cites Bridges' (1975, 1978) listings of music education theses completed up until 1978 (many of which were undergraduate honours theses) as totalling 55 in number. In comparison, the number of research studies presently listed as 'completed' in the BAMER database is 267, there being 31 undergraduate theses and 236 post-graduate theses. The 1997 figures indicate the growth in *post-graduate* studies which has taken place during the two decades between Bridges' initial listing of music education theses in 1975/78 and the present time. Moreover, given that there have been 36 PhD degrees awarded in music education (or in the allied field of music psychology / perception) to 1997 and that there were—at that time—36 PhD theses 'in progress' or 'in examination', research in music education in Australia may now be considered to be in a far better state of health than it was in 1975/78.

However, in relation to *undergraduate* research, it is interesting to note that the situation with undergraduate honours or other bachelors degree research studies is one of stagnation with few if any research studies being undertaken at this level. The principal reason for this is that a number of music education courses are now post-initial-degree courses—for example, two year 'end-on' BTeach courses—which frequently articulate directly into masters level courses. Unlike other disciplines where an honours degree is generally the only means of entry to a higher degree course, professional courses such as education are often able to give direct entry from a bachelors degree to a higher degree either by research thesis or by coursework with a research component. This situation gives rise to the problem, taken up later in this article, of adequate preparation for research.

In relation to the demographic distribution of higher degree research (Table 5), the greatest proportion of the research has—as would be expected—been undertaken in Victoria and New South Wales at the older and better established universities—for example, in Victoria, 51 of the 96 research studies in music education have been undertaken at the University of Melbourne, the first having been accepted there in 1936. The prominence of universities in the so-called 'group of eight' which have a greater orientation to research than some of the newer universities explains the growth in higher degree research in Queensland (through the University of Queensland) and Western Australia (through the University of Western Australia) as represented in the difference between the number of completed research studies and those presently in progress. It is also pleasing in terms of a national profile to note that higher degree research in music education is now being undertaken in all of the Australian states and territories.

In contrast to the situation in the United States, which even from a cursory perusal of current American music education research directories such as *Approved Doctoral Dissertations In Progress in Music Education* (Council for Research in Music Education) reveals a predominance of experimental research, the situation in Australia is one where descriptive studies are the predominant type of research being undertaken (Table 6). Other research types are certainly represented, but it is noteworthy that philosophical research is the least well represented. The need for more philosophical research has been well argued by Stowasser (1993) as follows:

... consensus on music education is as elusive as ever and I believe that our failure to reach agreement on *why* music education is so important is the reason why so many members of the society in which we live regard it as irrelevant and expendable. ... If music education is to survive into the next millenium we will need to come down to a more practical basis for its philosophy ... (p. 13).

Her concerns are borne out by the available data which suggests that this type of research is very much under-represented in our national research profile.

Higher degree research in relation to the particular sectors of Australian education (Table 7) indicates that the majority of research studies have focused on primary, secondary and the cross-sectoral 'primary-secondary' areas of music education (including private / studio teaching) with which—it is probably true to say—the majority of Australian music educators are involved. It is pleasing to note that Russell-Bowie's (1989) concern that "very little research of note in the area of Primary School Music Education Research in Australia has been found" has now, in terms of the available data, been at least partially overcome. Nevertheless two of the sectors which other writers have commented on—the early childhood education and tertiary education sectors—are notably lacking in research studies.

The content of music education research (Table 8) is perhaps the most focused indication of the strengths and weaknesses in Australian music education research. By far the greatest number of research studies has addressed the area of instrumental music pedagogy. Other areas appear to be adequately well represented, particularly those such as class music teaching which are in fact better represented than the present subdivision of content categories indicates—certain of the studies in categories such as creativity, multicultural music, music appreciation and popular music also relate to class music teaching.

A consideration of the present situation with that in 1978 provides a worthwhile indication of trends in research interest. Lett (1984) undertook an analysis of music education theses for the period up to and including 1978 using the content categories cited previously in Table 1. A direct comparison of data drawn from Lett's study and of data included in Table 8 above indicates some major changes in the pattern of music education research in Australia<sup>7</sup> (see Table 9 below).

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Table 9  
*A Comparison of 1978 and 1997 Data on  
Completed Research Studies according to Music Education Content*

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<u>Content Areas</u>	<u>Lett (1984)—1978</u> (% age)	<u>BAMER—1997</u> (% age)
Aesthetics / Philosophy	7.3	1.1
Assessment	—	1.5
Class music teaching	32.7	5.2
Community music	—	0.4
Creativity	—	8.2
Curriculum development / evaluation	20.0	10.5
Educational media	3.6	4.5
Instrumental teaching	9.1	19.1
Music appreciation	5.5	4.1
Music education policy	—	4.5
Music psychology / perception	3.6	6.8
Music therapy / Special education	5.5	5.6
Multicultural music	—	2.6
Popular music	—	3.3
Teacher education	—	4.5
Teaching methods	5.5	5.3
Vocal / choral teaching	3.6	4.9

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In some content areas, there has been a more or less consistent level of interest shown by Australian music education researchers during the period 1978 to 1997. Interest in the areas of educational media, music appreciation, music therapy / special education, teaching methods, and vocal / choral teaching has remained at approximately the same level. In other content areas, there have been some changes in the pattern of research interest. The most marked of these may be seen in the number of research studies in the area of instrumental teaching which has virtually doubled over the period. Another content area in which there has been an almost doubled interest over the period is that of music psychology, in particular research which focuses on musical abilities (pitch discrimination, rhythmic response, etc.) and on musical cognition (development of sight reading skills, aural skills, etc).

There has also been an emergence of interest in researching the newer and more specialised areas of music education such as assessment of music learning, community music making, musical creativity (including technology-based approaches), popular music, and the role of multicultural music (including Aboriginal and South-East Asian music) in music education programs. There has also been an emergence of interest in researching music education / arts education policy and teacher education. As mentioned above in relation to types of research, the content area of aesthetics and philosophy of music education has received proportionately less attention by Australian music education researchers over the period than most other areas. Another area of seeming decline in interest—that of class music teaching—may not necessarily be the case, as many of the research studies previously assigned to this content area have, in the present analysis, been designated as being more appropriately placed in one of the 'additional' content areas cited in Table 9 above.

## **Findings**

The findings from some of the analyses undertaken are acknowledged to be tentative and can therefore be an indication of general trends only. The tentative nature of the categorisation undertaken in relation to certain of the research studies was due to the necessity for personal interpretation of often incomplete data by the editor / compiler of the BAMER database. Some of the categories that have been allocated, particularly those relating to research type and subject-matter content, were—for a variety of reasons—unable to be verified by the individual researchers concerned. Also, many of the research studies, although presently assigned to one content area only, will obviously relate to more than one music education content area. It will therefore be necessary at some later stage to allow for multiple content descriptors to be assigned to all research studies.

Nevertheless, the findings of this project, aside from locating and identifying most of the post-graduate research in music education undertaken to date,<sup>8</sup> have indicated the following trends:

- (i) there has been a considerable increase in both the number and the degree level of research studies in music education being undertaken for higher degrees at Australian universities over the past two decades;
- (ii) most of the research work undertaken in music education for higher degrees appears to be directed towards the primary and/or secondary school levels of music education as opposed to the early childhood, tertiary, or adult / community levels of education which suggests that the latter areas are currently being under-researched by music education researchers;
- (iii) unlike the situation in the United States, the predominant type of research work undertaken in music education for higher degrees appears to be descriptive as opposed to philosophical, historical, or experimental research; and
- (iv) certain content areas, which have been identified as the principal focus of higher degree research, appear to be of fairly constant or increasing interest to music education researchers (these include the areas of educational media, music appreciation, music therapy / special education, teaching methods, vocal / choral teaching, music psychology and instrumental teaching) and, in addition, several new areas have emerged more recently as being of interest (assessment of music learning, community music making, musical creativity, popular music, and the role of multicultural music).

### Part 3—Implications and Recommendations for the Future

There are several implications for the future which are suggested from the present review of data from the BAMER Project. The first of these is that there are now sufficient research studies in most areas for music education researchers—both university academics and post-graduate students—to be able to draw upon previous work of Australian (as opposed to overseas) colleagues for contextualising their own research. Greater use of the findings from 'indigenous' research is undoubtedly one aspect of van Ernst's (1994) plea that we should be more effectively building upon each other's work. In addition, it is only by drawing upon and drawing together the findings from each other's work that a synthesis of research in a particular area can begin to influence and improve music teaching practice in the way that it should.

Second, it is worth mentioning that several of the respondents to one of the items from the 1995 BAMER questionnaire (which listed a number of research types from which they could select the research methodology[ies] that best describe their research study) listed obviously conflicting methodologies. Despite the possibility that some researchers were employing two or more complementary research methods in certain cases, the citing of obviously non-complementary (sometimes contradictory) methods may be an indication that these researchers have no real understanding of some terminology and basic paradigms of research being referred to. The level of understanding of research methodology *per se* among music education researchers appears therefore to be an area of concern for supervisors and other tertiary music education academics. More attention needs to be given to preparatory studies in research methodology before students come to focus on their selected research topic.

Third, there is now a sufficient number of suitably qualified tertiary music educators to provide supervision for most types of music education research and in many of the music education 'content' areas. The need for music educators interested in pursuing higher degrees by research (or by coursework with a research component) to undertake their work overseas is now well passed.

Based on an identification of the areas of strength and deficiency as well as reference to specific research studies in the BAMER database, it may be possible for supervisors to direct post-graduate students towards research topics which will either 'fill some of the gaps' in our national music education research profile or enhance existing research findings through replication studies or extension of the topic into a new area. Access to the BAMER database and to findings from this review of trends in music education research will hopefully be of use in this respect.

The following practical suggestions for improving music education research in Australia emanate both from the outcomes of the BAMER project and from personal deliberations:

- there is a need to ensure post-graduate research students at all levels (both masters and doctoral degree levels) are more fully conversant with the range of research methodologies that apply to music education. Given that many universities are now engaged in the production and use of on-line delivery for subjects at the post-graduate level, an 'introduction to research methodologies in music education' subject covering all of the principal research paradigms and drawing upon expertise of staff from several universities could be collaboratively developed on an inter-institutional basis. The subject could then be made available Australia-wide through the AVCC-approved 'complementary' enrolment system and using Internet delivery.
- there is a need to establish a register and/or network of research supervisors who are able to provide expert support for higher degree candidates. Although post-graduate students are likely to apply for higher degree candidature to a university on the basis of expert supervision being available in a particular research area, there are instances where, for geographic location reasons, students may choose to enrol in a higher degree course at a local university where expert supervision may not be available. The establishment of a

system which provides for the appointment of external supervisors with specialist skills would enable students to have access to the supervision of a local, although perhaps non-expert supervisor for contiguous support while an academic from another university with particular expertise could be appointed as an external supervisor. Such an arrangement could work well, particularly if all concerned had ready access to computer-mediated communication facilities such as e-mail.

- there is also the need for a mechanism for supplying bibliographic information about papers published in conference proceedings and articles published in scholarly journals as well as completed theses or research papers to the Australian Council for Educational Research for publication in the *Australian Education Index* and other bibliographic databases. The situation at present is that many worthwhile research reports—conference papers and journal articles—are not included in the *Australian Education Index* due to the lack of an adequate 'reporting' mechanism.
- finally there is a need to ensure that music education practitioners—teachers in primary and secondary schools in particular—are familiar with the ways in which they might keep abreast of and utilise the findings of research in music education in their own teaching. Mention has been made by several writers—including van Ernst (1994)—of the need to de-mystify research for classroom teachers and to find ways of making research findings more accessible to teachers as well as actually engaging teachers in classroom-based research. Accordingly, there is a strong case for the inclusion in pre-service and post-initial courses of music teacher education of a module which introduces students to appropriate content.<sup>9</sup>

As indicated at the outset, the occasion of a new millenium provides an opportunity for reflection on the past and a looking forward to the future. Bridges (1970) pointed out almost thirty years ago that the role of research is crucial in finding solutions to the problems which confront teachers. One of the most important issues to be addressed by tertiary academics in particular and by music educators in general is provision of the sort of leadership required to promote research so that it becomes relevant to and informs the whole of the music teaching profession. Such action will hopefully avert the sort of situation referred to by Colwell (1988) a little over a decade ago:

We hit the 60's running, thinking that we could transform the schools through aesthetic education. We didn't conduct research or train researchers. Now we face the 1990's wondering if there is a place for music in the schools. Adopting the words of R. H. Tawney, music educators have walked reluctantly backwards into the future, lest a worse thing should befall them. (p. 15)

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## Endnotes

1. This issue has more recently been taken up by McPherson (1997) who has argued that "collaboration: [is] the key to maximising research potential" (p. 12).
2. Research studies reported in the *Bibliography of Education Theses in Australia* are also included in the *Australian Education Index* (ACER).
3. Data for the BAMER Project has been gathered from a variety of sources: (i) from existing bibliographic sources including research directories and scholarly journals and more

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recently from the on-line / CD-ROM-based *Australian Education Index* database (ACER); (ii) from bibliographic information supplied by libraries of various tertiary institutions (the 1989 questionnaire); (iii) from individual researchers (both post-graduate research students and supervisors) either by soliciting information directly from individuals or by requesting information via a *pro forma* published annually in publications of the Australian Society for Music Education; (iv) from the 1993 BAMER "National Survey of Music Education Research" questionnaire; and (v) from the network of 'Research Reporters' (one from each State and Territory) established by the Australian Society for Music Education in 1990/91.

4. On the basis of additional information obtained from the 1993 "National Survey" questionnaire, a reorganisation and revision of the BAMER database was undertaken. Accordingly, although similar tables appear in the present article to those in Stevens (1992; 1993), there are significant differences in the actual data presented due to more comprehensive information being available at the time of updating the BAMER database.

5. The designation of the research reports at masters level varies between institutions and includes the following: thesis, minor thesis, long essay, research paper, research project and field study project. Also, note that some of these masters level research studies were undertaken as 'qualifying' or 'preliminary' theses.

6. Opinion varies considerably on what the major research paradigms in music education are. However, after referring to various sources including Abeles (1992), Kemp (1992), Phelps (1969), Rainbow & Froehlich (1987), and the Council for Research in Music Education, this form of categorising the type of research was decided on as being the most widely accepted.

7. Note that the categories used to describe music education content are those employed in Table 9 and that equivalent terms to Lett's (1984) categories are shown in Table 2.

8. A complete listing of both 'completed' and 'in progress' higher degree research studies is available on the BAMER Web site at [http://education.deakin.edu.au/music\\_ed/BAMER/](http://education.deakin.edu.au/music_ed/BAMER/).

9. For an example, see Grenfell and Stevens' (1995) chapter on "Research in Arts Education" in *Directions in Arts Education: Contemporary Issues*, an off-campus unit offered by Deakin University.

### **About the Author**

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