

## *Mapping music education in Australia*

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**ABSTRACT** Music education research in Australia has grown almost exponentially over the past 25 years. Particularly in the area of doctoral research studies, there has been a substantial increase in the number of theses completed from two in 1977 to 72 in 2002. In addition, there have been increases in professional research undertaken by university academics, in the number of nationally competitive research grants being awarded by the Australian Research Council and other research funding agencies, and in commissioned research studies. This article reviews the various types of music education research being undertaken in Australia as well as discussing the dissemination of the findings of research through articles in national and international scholarly journals and papers presented at local and international conferences. One of the conclusions drawn is that Australian music education has 'come of age' in terms of both the quantity and the quality of its national research profile.

**KEYWORDS:** *music instruction, music learning, music teaching, postgraduate theses, research*

### *Introduction*

One of the hallmarks of any academic discipline – perhaps the defining hallmark – is the extent to which there has been substantive research undertaken to distinguish it from allied areas of scholarly endeavour. In this respect, music education as a discipline had clearly emerged by the 19th century with various treatises proposing particular theories and supported by empirical evidence. An early example of such research is provided by the 19th-century music educator, John Curwen who, in his *Musical Statics* (n.d. (c.1897)), reported on 'an attempt to show the bearing of the facts of acoustics on chords, discords, transitions, modulations, and tuning, as used by modern

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*sempre* :

composers' (the book's subtitle) which in turn he applied to his Tonic Sol-fa method of teaching choral music. By the mid 20th century there was a burgeoning of music education research in North America with music educators, both school music teaching practitioners engaged in postgraduate studies and university researchers undertaking research as part of their professional roles, engaged in predominantly quantitatively based experimental research studies.

In Australia, the first postgraduate student research studies in music education were undertaken by two (postgraduate) Bachelor of Education students at the University of Melbourne in 1936 and 1937, respectively G.R. Williamson with a thesis entitled *Music in Schools (Victoria)* and T.H. Coates with a thesis entitled 'An Investigation into Some Phases of Music in State Secondary Schools'. Since that time the number of postgraduate award research studies undertaken in Australian universities has grown substantially and, over the last couple of decades, has increased almost exponentially with our estimate of postgraduate awards completed to the end of 2003 being over 380, with research studies currently in progress numbering about 96 (BAMER Database, December 2003). Given such a research quantum, it was possible for the statement 'Music education research in Australia has indisputably "come of age"' (Stevens, 2000: 61) to be made with a reasonable degree of confidence.

However, any national profile of music education research in Australia needs to take account of the following identifiable forms of educational research that take place in the Australian context. The most obvious and most significant in terms of quantity of research output is what has already been identified as 'postgraduate award' or 'higher degree' research. This involves research undertaken for an honours, master's or doctoral degree or some other qualification such as a graduate diploma by a postgraduate student working usually under the supervision of a single principal supervisor. The types of research output may range from a research paper of say 20,000 words taken as an honours degree or part of a coursework master's degree, through to a doctoral thesis of between 80,000 and 100,000 words.

Another form of research is what may be termed 'professional' research, which is that undertaken by university academics (or prior to the introduction of the 'unified tertiary education' system in Australia, by staff attached to the former colleges of advanced education) as part of their professional role to undertake research as well as teaching and administration. Some of the research undertaken in this category may represent fairly small projects in themselves but, if the general topic is developed over a period of time, it may – through an accumulation of data – represent a substantial contribution to scholarship and research usually by individuals or co-researchers. Other professional research may involve research undertaken by professional researchers who are on the staff of the Australian Council for Education Research or other agencies such as the Music Board of the Australia Council for the Arts.<sup>1</sup>

A third category of research that is usually undertaken only by university academics is supported by nationally competitive grants awarded by government agencies such as the Australian Research Council (ARC) or by philanthropic or non-government organizations such as the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. This form of research may be termed 'competitively funded research' and generally involves a detailed application for substantial funding for a project of national significance which, if awarded, usually involves anything from a small select team of researchers working under the supervision of a Chief Investigator in the case of a Large ARC or more recently-termed 'Discovery' Grant, or a university or group of universities working in partnership with an industry or business (as in the case with 'Linkage' grants).

A final form of research is what may be termed 'commissioned' research. This form of research may be commissioned by a semi-governmental agency such as the Australian Council for Educational Research or by a national or state education department or other government department. Usually this involves either the commissioning of an individual to undertake a research project or the awarding of a competitive tender to a researcher or group of researchers (perhaps in a university or other institution) to undertake the project. A typical research project of this type would be the evaluation of a school music curriculum or other curriculum innovation such as, for example, the teaching of an instrumental music teaching program at a distance.

This article will review what has been accomplished in these forms of music education research in Australia, both in terms of areas of research focus (and the extent of research in each area of focus) and of exemplars of Australian music education research which have been published internationally in respected scholarly publications.

### *Postgraduate award research*

The amalgamation of various colleges of advanced education and universities in the late 1980s and early 1990s has resulted in a great deal of change to the ways in which school music teachers are trained – with the most dramatic being a more focused and concerted effort to establish specialist honours, masters and doctoral degrees in music education. The mid to late 1990s saw a rapid expansion in the type of postgraduate awards available. Up until the late 1980s, music teachers in most parts of Australia were restricted to completing their master's or doctoral degrees in either music or education, and there were few academics who were capable of supervising specialist postgraduate music education research projects. Now, however, there is a healthy and growing list of masters programmes including the degrees of MEd, Master of Education Studies (MEdSt), MMusEd, MEd (Music), MMus (Music Education), MA (Music Education), Master of Creative Arts, MEd (Creative Arts), and Master of Arts Education. In addition, several universities offer Doctor of Education degrees as well as the traditional PhD and

one institution at least – Northern Territory University – offers a Doctor of Teaching degree. The rapid development of specialist masters and doctoral degrees is a tangible indication of the ways in which music and arts education research has flourished during the past decade.

In a review of postgraduate award research in music education undertaken during the period from 1978 to 1997, Stevens (2000) cites an earlier study by Letts (1984) that listed 55 music education theses as having been completed for the period 1936 to 1978. Although there was a reasonable spread across several content focus areas, the largest number of theses had been undertaken in two research areas – 18 (32.7%) in class music teaching, and 11 (20.0%) in curriculum development and evaluation (Stevens 2000: 62). In comparison, the next 20 years saw a broadening of the content focus of postgraduate award research in Australia. The most researched area up to and including 1997 was instrumental music teaching, which represented 19.1 percent of the cumulative total of 267 completed research studies at that time (Stevens, 2000: 69). Then, in descending order, the most researched areas were curriculum development and evaluation (10.5%), creativity (8.2%), music psychology/perception (6.8%), music education history/biography (6.0%), music therapy/special education (5.6%), teaching methods (5.3%) and class music teaching (5.2%), with areas such as vocal/choral teaching, teacher education, music appreciation, music education policy and educational media less well represented. In relation to approaches to research or research paradigms employed, an analysis of the completed research studies across all levels (honours, masters and doctoral degrees) indicated that 6.9 percent were descriptive studies, 13.1 percent were experimental studies, 7.5 percent were historical, 4.1 percent were philosophical and, for the remainder, the type of research was not clearly apparent (Stevens, 2000: 68).

However, perhaps the most interesting finding from this study was the rate of growth of completed research studies. The following table (adapted from Stevens, 2000: 67) indicates the cumulative numbers of completed research

TABLE 1 *The growth of music education research studies according to degree, 1977–2002*

Degree	Cumulative numbers of completed research studies					
	≤1977	≤1982	≤1987	≤1992	≤1997	≤2002* (projected)
Undergraduate degree	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	66	164	267	346

\* this projection to year 2002 (made in 2000) was based on the assumption that 'in progress' research studies would be completed by this time.

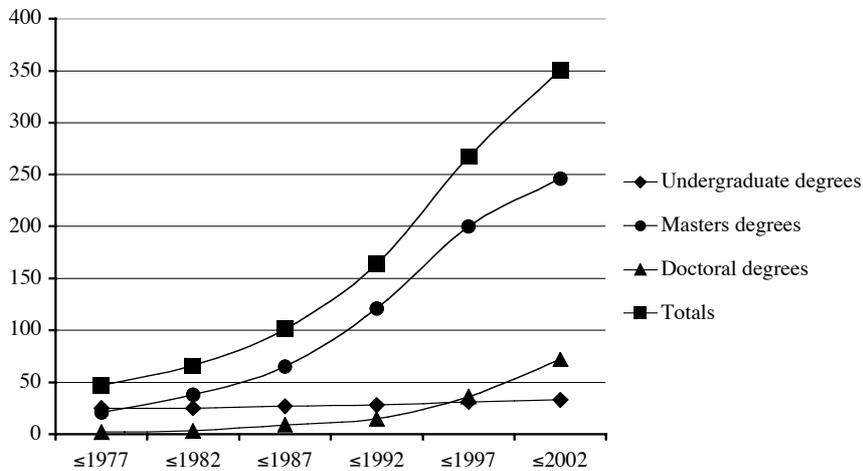


FIGURE 1 Graph showing the growth of research studies according to degree, 1977–2002.

reports for the period 1936 to 2002 with the *actual* numbers for 2002 now able to be added.

Shown as a line graph, the remarkable growth in completed research studies undertaken at Australian tertiary institutions from 1977 to 2002 is even more apparent. The total number of completed research studies increased significantly over the period in line with the increased numbers of masters and doctoral degree completions. However, the number of undergraduate research studies (honours theses or other undergraduate research projects) remained relatively static. The latter situation may be explained by the fact that, in many faculties of education, there is generally no longer the requirement to complete an honours degree before being accepted for a master's level course. Possibly the most usual pathway for postgraduate students is to complete an undergraduate degree and then proceed to a part-coursework and part-research master's course. Having demonstrated research capacity in a master's research paper or minor thesis, students are usually allowed to proceed to doctoral candidature.

If the current numbers of postgraduate students undertaking 'in progress' research projects are any indication – 45 at masters level and 51 at doctoral level (BAMER Database, 2003) – the area of postgraduate award research will continue to be the most important source of research being undertaken in music education in Australia.

### *Professional research*

As already indicated, professional research is for the most part now undertaken by university academics as part of their normal professional duties.

However, the change for tertiary music educators working in the former colleges of advanced education from a purely teaching culture to one that also included research has taken some time to achieve. There was also a need for music educators in tertiary institutions to achieve parity in relation to the research output of colleagues in other discipline areas where there was a stronger tradition of professional research. During the 1980s and 1990s, several leading Australian music educators identified the need for research to become more central to the role of both individual academics and professional associations. There were calls for such measures as cooperative action by all professional music education groups to identify and sponsor research projects, for the designation by professional associations of priority areas, for the formation of local research 'cells' to focus on specific research priority areas, and for lobbying of governments to fund research, all of which were all designed to increase the research quantum in Australian music education (Letts, 1984, 1988; Russell-Bowie, 1989; Van Ernst, 1993, 1994).

Despite some criticism of professional associations at times, organizations such as the Australian Society for Music Education (ASME) – founded in 1967 – and the Australian Association for Research in Music Education (AARME) and its antecedent the Association of Music Education Lecturers (AMEL) (1977–95) have done much to promote research. The biennial conferences of ASME and the annual conferences of AMEL and now AARME have given both professional researchers and postgraduate student researchers a forum in which to present the findings of their research as scholarly paper presentations. In both cases, there is also the opportunity for research papers to be published and therefore to be more widely disseminated to the music education community in the form of conference proceedings.<sup>2</sup> In addition, there are now several scholarly journals in the field of music education that are an obvious means for disseminating research findings.

The oldest and most established Australian music education journal is *The Australian Journal of Music Education (AJME)*, published by the Australian Society for Music Education. It was founded by Emeritus Professor Sir Frank Callaway in 1967. Although primarily a professional journal, *AJME* has formed the backbone for publication of Australian research articles, and over the years has published many research articles on a wide range of topics across a variety of issues.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the first series of the *AJME* represented an important means for publishing a set of articles on a single topic over several consecutive issues. For example, in a series of articles under the general title of 'Some Historical Backgrounds to Australian Music Education' (*AJME* 10–14 (April 1972–April 1974)), Doreen Bridges (Australia's first music education PhD graduate) reviewed the role of universities in Australian music education research as well as covering aspects of the historical development of music in schools. Bridges' set of articles represented a worthwhile means of bringing the findings from a doctoral thesis to the attention of the readership of the *AJME* that consists predominantly of practising music

teachers. Another important set of articles was 'Ethnomusicology and Australian Schools' by Frank Murphy (*AJME* 19–22 (October 1976–April 1978)) which again fulfilled an important educative role for school-based music educators. The *AJME* (second series) continues to fulfil a valuable role in bringing research as well as more general-interest articles to the attention of music educators.

Since 1974, most issues of *AJME* have included a 'Research News' section in which conferences, both national and international, that have included presentation of research papers have been reported (or announced) as well as recently completed research studies in music education which have been listed with full citations including abstracts where possible. The 'Research News' section is prepared by the journal's Research Editor who from 1974 to 1981 was Doreen Bridges and since 1991 has been Robin Stevens.

In 1993, *Research Studies in Music Education (RSME)* was established by Gary McPherson, Edward Gifford and Lawrence Lopherd, initially to service the burgeoning need in Australia and New Zealand, and then East and Southeast Asia, for a refereed journal in which university music educators and honours/postgraduate students could present the findings of their research. By December 1995, five issues of *RSME* had been published and the concept expanded to embrace music education research internationally. As *RSME* approaches its tenth year of publication, it has attracted support from a number of Australian and international music education researchers.<sup>4</sup> Among the more important Australian contributions are articles based on the doctoral dissertations of Margaret Barrett, Jean Callaghan, Barbara van Ernst, Noela Hogg, Kathryn Marsh, Ros McMillan, Deirdre Russell-Bowie, Jane Southcott, and Nita Temmerman. The mission of *RSME* is to promote high quality research employing a variety of methodologies that encompass a wide range of topics within music education. Indeed, an examination of the contents of *RSME* shows that it has published across the whole range of research methodologies and levels of music education, some of the most important of which include research on learning processes and teaching approaches for children in primary and secondary schools, development of instrumental and vocal skills, non-western and indigenous forms of music teaching and learning, historical studies on how music was taught in previous generations, and policy and administrative practices in schools and universities.

Professional research is now an established part of Australian music education activity with virtually all tertiary music educators being engaged in various research and development activities. Because of federal government funding for university sector being based in part on the quantum of published research, there is still the imperative (as in other countries) to 'publish or perish' and therefore the findings from research are being published in scholarly journals and conference proceedings, which also benefits the general music education community.

### *Commissioned research*

A major impetus for undertaking research in the field of music education came during the 1960s when the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) commissioned two projects, both of which received funding from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. The first was a survey of research findings and scholarly opinion about music education undertaken by V. Horner (of Claremont teachers College in Perth, Western Australia). *Music Education: The Background of Research and Opinion* (1965) was subsequently published as part of the ACER Research Series which, to that point in time, numbered some 78 books. The sequel was published in 1968 and was the result of a nation-wide survey of approximately 150 schools undertaken by Graham Bartle, then Senior Lecturer in School Music at the University of Melbourne (Bartle, 1968). Bartle's comments show that music in primary schools at the time was patchy, depending on whether the class teacher had any interest or expertise in music, and that even though secondary school music was more accepted, it was rarely offered beyond the year 8 level. Major recommendations included details for employing itinerant instrumental teachers in government schools who could help lay the foundation for further development of the subject in secondary schools, by beginning instrumental training at the primary school level.

Recently, there has been research commissioned by federal government's Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) as well as state curriculum and assessment authorities (or boards of studies as they are called in some states) and arts organizations such as the Music Council of Australia. For example, during 2002, DEST put out a tender for an evaluation of school-based arts education programmes in Australian schools which included two music-specific programmes – the Northern Territory Schools Boys Music Program ('Boys Business') and the Northern Territory Indigenous Music Education Program. A recently-completed research study commissioned by the Music Council of Australia investigated trends in the provision of music education in Australian schools (Stevens 2003).<sup>5</sup> While serving the particular evaluation needs of education authorities, such projects nevertheless represent a valuable contribution to the broader field of Australian music education research.

### *Competitively funded research*

In the highly competitive field of government-funded research, Australian music education researchers are finally achieving success, largely as a result of their collaborative efforts with colleagues internationally, as well as their concerted efforts to undertake systematic studies of the kind that are typical in more established areas of inquiry. The first Large ARC Grant was awarded in 1996 to Gary McPherson (University of New South Wales) to clarify the

range of natural abilities and personal and environmental catalysts which enhance musical development during the first three years of learning a musical instrument. This was followed by two Large ARC Grants in 2000 for longitudinal research – Margaret Barrett's (University of Tasmania, Launceston) project investigating young children's musical thinking as users of notation, and Gary McPherson's study examining the personal and environmental catalysts which motivate students to continue their musical participation. In 2001 Kathy Marsh (Sydney Conservatorium) received an ARC Discovery Grant (formerly Large ARC Grant) for her longitudinal cross-cultural study of the music play practices of children in school playgrounds.

These grants have been supplemented by other nationally competitive grants from the National Committee for University Teaching and Strategic Development in 2000 for Sam Leong (University of Western Australia), Neryl Jeanneret (University of Newcastle) and Jenny Rosevear (University of Adelaide), and a variety of successful consortium applications such as one by Queensland tertiary arts educators, including Andrew Brown, Glenda Nalder, Jude Smith, Judith McLean and Steve Dillon, which aims to construct a new conceptual framework for using digital technologies in achieving better arts assessment, and another by Andrew Brown (Queensland University of Technology) and Steve Dillon (Griffith University) to investigate modes of engagement with technology and the meaning of music in technological partnerships.

### *International collaboration*

Australian music educators have a long tradition of attending and participating in international conferences and symposiums, especially Commissions and World Conferences organized by the International Society for Music Education (ISME). More recently, music education researchers have also become active in cross-disciplinary research. Two examples include the Australian Music and Psychology Association, which holds regular seminars at the University of New South Wales on the intersection of music, music education and psychology. Since its inception in 1996, local and overseas researchers have presented their research across a variety of topics in the area of music education and music psychology. Recent activities of this group have culminated in the organization of the 7th International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition in Sydney during 2002, which was attended by a large number of Australian music education and music psychology researchers, as well as researchers from overseas.

Another recent development with which Australians are actively involved is the Asia-Pacific Symposium on Music Education Research, held biennially in the non-ISME conference years. The first conference for this group was held in Korea in 1997, with the second in Australia (University of Tasmania, Launceston) in 1999, a third in Japan in 2001 and the fourth in Hong Kong

in 2003. Activities such as these help to develop music education, not only in Australia, but in the Asia-Pacific region, with the result that Australian and Asian music education research activity is becoming broader, with a more distinctive and characteristic flavour that potentially will complement and extend the more established research traditions of North America and Europe.

These opportunities allow Australian researchers to disseminate their research findings internationally, and to make the types of contacts that enhance collaborative work across countries, a feature that is becoming more evident in research grants and published work in international journals. To-date, all Large ARC and Discovery Grants have involved collaboration with colleagues internationally, and these connections are helping to broaden and enrich the work that is being undertaken in Australia as a result of opportunities for researchers to exchange ideas and undertake the types of systematic research needed to further the discipline of music education.

### *Bibliographic database of music education research*

Perhaps the most important initiative mechanism for collating and tracking music education research is the Bibliography of Australian Music Education Research (BAMER) which was begun in the late 1980s by Robin Stevens, and was expanded in 1995 with a partnership involving Robin Stevens (BAMER Compiler and *AJME* Research Editor), the Australian Society for Music Education, and the Callaway International Research Centre for Music Education (CIRCME). Although there is now an online 'thesis search' facility maintained by ACER, which is available as a publicly-accessible web site, it includes (as of 2002) only 129 theses under the heading of 'music education'. This register appears to be limited to those postgraduate theses that are held in university libraries and therefore reported to ACER. The BAMER project, on the other hand, attempts to draw together details of all existing research, both completed and in progress, regardless of whether the theses are lodged in university libraries or not (many smaller research studies are housed within departmental collections or simply retained by the postgraduate researcher concerned and are therefore not reported to ACER).

Although confined to postgraduate research studies rather than other forms of research, the current total number of entries in the BAMER database of theses and other forms of research submitted to Australian universities (or their antecedent institutions), as well as those submitted by Australians to overseas universities for a postgraduate award is 479, of which:

- 383 are completed postgraduate awards; and
- 96 are postgraduate studies in progress.

In 1995, BAMER was published on computer disc by CIRCME, but with

almost universal access now being available to the internet, an index of award research studies is available as a web site.<sup>6</sup> With the support of a network of ASME 'research officers', newly commenced and completed research studies are added to the database and the index on the BAMER web site is updated annually.

### *Conclusion*

Bridges (1978), in posing the question 'why research in music education?', clearly identified an imperative for undertaking research into music education in Australia with her statement:

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)

This point was extended by Van Ernst (1994) in a set of recommendations for better promoting music education in Australia when she advocated that active researchers should see their principal aims as attempting to de-mystify research for practising music teachers, and to develop an expectation in practising teachers to undertake research as part of their normal routines (p. 48). Idealistic as this may be, the present research culture in Australian music education has gone a long way to achieving these aims. Considering the increasing research quantum (both professional and postgraduate studies), the recent small but successful forays into the nationally competitive ARC Grants scheme and the again small but significant interest from education authorities in evaluating arts (and specifically music) education curriculum initiatives, Australian music education has certainly 'come of age' from the research perspective.

#### NOTES

1. A recent research project undertaken by the Music Board of the Australia Council was 'Promoting the Value of the Arts', which included 'Education and the Arts' as one of the focus areas; for a description of and findings from this project, see [<http://www.ozco.gov.au/pva/>].
2. For an index of papers published in Proceedings of the Association of Music Education Lecturers, 1977–93, see [[http://education.deakin.edu.au/music\\_ed/aarme/cpindex.html](http://education.deakin.edu.au/music_ed/aarme/cpindex.html)].
3. Note that there have been two series of *The Australian Journal of Music Education*, the first series from October 1967 (1) to October 1982 (31) and the second series from 1983.
4. For an index of the contents of *Research Studies in Music Education*, see [<http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/CIRCME/rsme/research.htm>].

5. For a copy of the report of this project, see [<http://www.mca.org.au/StevensReport.htm>].
6. For an index of entries in the BAMER database, see [[http://education.deakin.edu.au/music\\_ed/BAMER/](http://education.deakin.edu.au/music_ed/BAMER/)].

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