

Preliminary Findings from a National Survey of Music Education Research in Australia

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by

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Abstract: This paper reports on the progress of the 'Bibliography of Australian Music Education Research' (BAMER) Project and the subsequent 'National Survey of Music Education Research in Australia'. The findings from a preliminary analysis of data from over 140 research theses - including both 'completed' and 'in-progress' studies - undertaken for higher degrees at Australian tertiary institutions are discussed. Tentative conclusions are drawn regarding the spread of music education research across the various educational research paradigms as well as the focus of research in relation to both content and educational level. The paper also identifies areas of growth of research interest within this initial profile of Australian music education research.

Introduction

Since 1989 I have been engaged in a 'National Survey of Music Education Research in Australia' which has had, as one of its principal objectives, the identification of all past and present research undertaken in music education for higher degrees at Australian tertiary institutions. This survey began as the 'Bibliography of Australian Music Education Research' (BAMER) Project which aimed to gather data on both award and non-award (i.e. 'professional') research (see Stevens 1989). However, in view of the fact that non-award research is undertaken almost exclusively by university academics and that it is already well documented in the proceedings of national conferences of such organisations as the Association of Music Education Lecturers and the Australian Society for Music Education, it was decided that the focus of the present survey should be on higher degree

research only. It was also considered that, as award research is undertaken by a far broader cross-section of music educators than non-award research, the survey would be more representative of the research interests of the wider music education profession.

Prior to the present project and its precursor (the BAMER Project), the only reliable sources of information about research studies in music education in Australia were:

- (i) lists of music education theses - 'accepted' and 'in progress' - undertaken in Faculties or Departments of Music which have been published in *Studies in Music* (University of Western Australia Press) since 1967;
- (ii) lists of music education theses - 'accepted' and 'in progress' - published in the 'Research News' section of *The Australian Journal of Music Education* during the period 1970-1982 and more recently under the title of '*Recently Completed Post-Graduate Studies in the Broad Field of Music Education*' in the new series of *The Australian Journal of Music Education* ;
- (iii) Drummond's (1978) *Australian Directory of Music Research* ;
- (iv) the *Bibliography of Education Theses in Australia* published annually by ACER since 1978; and
- (v) a list of theses and research articles included in Lett's (1984) paper entitled '*Research in Australian Music Education: A Review and Analysis*'.

Despite what have undoubtedly been the best efforts of the compilers of these publications to provide as complete a listing as possible of research studies undertaken for higher degrees and, in some instances, of professional research as well, there have been several omissions from these listings over the years. In addition, research studies designated as minor theses, dissertations and research papers which may have been undertaken as part of coursework master's degrees have either been too difficult to locate or have been outside the scope of these bibliographic sources.

With increasing numbers of school music educators undertaking higher degree studies and more tertiary music educators becoming involved in 'professional' research, a need for far greater access to the existing body of research in music education has been clearly identified. Music education researchers not only need to select their research topics in the light of existing body of research, but also need to cite the findings from previous studies as they build upon the cumulative knowledge about music education as it applies both specifically to the Australian socio-cultural context and more generally within a global context. Also, although planned replication of previous research studies is a legitimate form of investigating a particular research problem in greater depth, there is always the danger of unknowingly replicating existing research if access to the existing body of research is not readily available.

The importance of a bibliographic database of music education research to both scholars and students is amply demonstrated by the publication by the Council for Research in Music Education (CRME), based at the University of

Illinois, of Approved Doctoral Dissertations In Progress in Music Education since 1977 and of reviews of recent research studies in its Bulletin. Access to documentation of research studies in music education undertaken as part of tertiary education courses in Australia was highlighted as an important issue at the 1984 Association of Music Education Lecturers (AMEL) Research Forum. Indeed, 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.' (Gifford 1984, p. 6) One 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 ...' (Gifford 1984, p. 6). Regrettably this recommendation did not come to fruition.

In addition there is a need for a comprehensive analysis both of trends in music education research in Australia and of the strengths and deficiencies within this particular area of our national research profile. In a recent paper, Weidenbach (1992) drew attention to some of these issues and in particular cited Colwell's (1990) assertion that:

... with (a) coherent data on the knowledge we possess, (b) tentative knowledge that we need to verify, [and] (c) the areas in which data are lacking, a quantum leap forward in music education research would become possible.

Objectives of the National Survey of Music Education Research

The prime objective of the original 'BAMER' Project was simply to fulfil the expressed need for a comprehensive database on music education research in Australia by publishing the database in computer software format and

then in a hardcopy format as a Directory of Australian Music Education Research. This objective was partially realised with the publication of a bibliographic listing in abbreviated form of all post-graduate studies in music education for the period 1964 to 1989 (see Stevens 1990). However, given the large amount of data obtained, the project has been extended to become a 'National Survey of Music Education Research in Australia'. As such it took on the additional objectives of:

(i) analysing the data with a view to providing information about those areas of music education in which research has been done, the extent of research in these areas, those areas in which little or no research has been done, those areas for which there is a need for research to be undertaken

(ii) identifying general trends in the field of music education research;
(iii) identifying institutions at which research in music education may be

undertaken for higher degrees and the particular areas of research foci at these institutions; and

(iv) identifying potential supervisors for post-graduate research students as well as examiners for theses and research papers in some of the more specialised areas of music education.

Certainly in the case of (i) and (ii) above, the 'National Survey' Project has embraced the basic tenets of Colwell's (1990) assertion cited above.

As already stated, it was also decided to limit the survey to 'award' as opposed to 'non-award' research, given that professional research is well documented in the proceedings of national conferences of the Association of Music Education Lecturers and the Australian Society for Music Education and in The Australian Journal of Music Education (published by ASME).

Data Collection

Data for the 'National Survey' project has been gathered from the following sources:

(i) from existing bibliographic sources including the research directories and scholarly journals listed at the outset of this paper;

(ii) from bibliographic information supplied by the libraries of tertiary institutions;

(iii) from individual researchers (both post-graduate research students and 'professional' researchers); and

(iv) from a network of 'Research Reporters' (one from each State and Territory) which was appointed by the Australian Society for Music Education in 1990-91.

In the case of data collected from tertiary institutions, a letter was sent in November 1989 requesting information about theses and research reports submitted for both undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications held in university libraries and in the libraries of the then Colleges of Advanced Education. In addition to the researcher's name, title of the thesis and bibliographic details, libraries were asked to supply a copy of the summary / abstract generally included in research reports of this type.

At the same time, individual researchers who could be identified from existing bibliographic sources were sent a detailed questionnaire. Aside from basic information such as personal details (name, address, etc.) and the title of the research being reported, these researchers were asked for:

- a summary or abstract of the research;
- full details of the nature of the research ('award' or 'non-award', 'completed' or 'in progress');
- the name of the higher degree for which the research was being undertaken, the institution at which it was done, the year of submission, the designation of the research report (thesis, dissertation, etc.), the

name(s) of the supervisor(s), etc. in the case of award research;

- the name(s) of co-researcher(s), funding details, etc. in the case of non-award research;
- details of the format, length, etc. of the research report, together details regarding access to and/or publication details of the research report; and
- key-word descriptors.

With regard to the latter information, respondents to the questionnaire were asked to nominate up to five key-word descriptors which best described the nature and content of their research. To assist in this task, two lists of possible descriptors - one for music and the other for education - were located (Lavander & Findlay 1984) and provided for respondents to refer to at the end of the questionnaire.

In addition, a 'preliminary information' questionnaire published in The Australian Journal of Music Education on several occasions enabled contact to be made with new researchers and/or with those who have not been previously identified. The full questionnaire was sent to any of these researchers.

The data collected from the questionnaire and from the tertiary institutions was entered into the ProCite bibliographic computer database. This database was selected as being one of the most flexible bibliographic systems then available. It allows for user definition of data categories, allows for both importing and exporting data, has facilities for searching the data and for storing searched data, etc. A customised 'workform' was assembled into which the data gathered from university and CAE libraries as well as from questionnaires returned from individual researchers was entered (see sample entry below).

Figure 1 Sample Entry from the BAMER Workform, Pro-Cite Database

The initial data obtained from the questionnaire and from tertiary institutions has been supplemented over the past three years by additional information obtained from the 'preliminary information' questionnaire

published in The Australian Journal of Music Education, from personal and professional contacts, from the network of ASME 'Research Reporters', from the annual publication of the ACER Bibliography of Education Theses in Australia, and from reference lists / bibliographies included in journal articles and conference papers.

Analysis of Data

In line with the expanded objectives of the 'National Survey of Music Education Research in Australia' Project, a preliminary analysis of the data was undertaken to ascertain the current state of music education research in Australia. The four forms of analysis were employed as a means of identifying the nature and focus of the research studies represented in the database:

- (i) the post-graduate qualification for which the research was undertaken;
- (ii) the research type or paradigm which the study represents (historical, experimental, descriptive, etc.);
- (iii) the educational level being focussed upon by the research study (primary, secondary, etc); and
- (iv) the particular music education content of the research study.

The first of these analyses involved the simple categorisation of the research as either undergraduate studies or post-graduate studies, and then - given that only post-graduate research is being considered in the present study - as either masters or doctoral theses. Masters level research studies in the computer database included MA, MMus, MMusEd, MEd, MEd(SpEd), MEdSt, MEdAdmin, MSc, and MLib theses, 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 date have been Doctor of Philosophy degrees.

The categorisation for the second analysis was derived from the commonly-accepted division of educational research into the four basic types or paradigms of philosophical, historical, experimental and descriptive research.

The third analysis was based on the educational level which the research focussed upon and the categories were derived from the Australian Thesaurus of Educational Descriptors (Lavander & Findlay 1984) and included the following criteria: Early childhood, Primary, Secondary, Tertiary, Adult, and General (the latter being for non-level-specific research studies).

The fourth analysis of data was directed to the particular music education content of the research studies. The criteria here were 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 listed in the left hand column of Table 1 below. However, in view of the nature of the research studies included in the database, this list was expanded to incorporate additional areas of music education content, making a total of seventeen in all.

Table 1
Categories employed for the Analysis of Music Education Content

Lett's (1984) Content Categories Inclusive content descriptors Content

- Theory / philosophy of music education • Aesthetics / Philosophy
 - Class teaching / school music • Class music teaching
 - Curriculum and content • Curriculum development / evaluation
 - Radio / TV and music • Educational media audio-visual media computer media
 - Instrumental teaching / orchestras • Instrumental teaching sight reading
 - Music appreciation • Music appreciation

 - Attitudes • Music psychology / aptitude / cognition / perception attitudes / abilities
 - Music therapy • Music therapy / Special disability / sight &/or education hearing impairment
 - Special music • Teaching methods Orff / Kodály / Dalcroze / Yamaha / Suzuki / etc.
 - Vocal music • Vocal / choral teaching singing
 - History / biography
- Additional Content Categories
- Assessment
 - Community music
 - Creativity composition / improvisation
 - Ethnic music ethnomusicology
 - Music educational comparative educ. / systems policy studies
 - Popular music jazz
 - Teacher education

Findings

The computer database assembled for the earlier 'Bibliography of Australian Music Education Research' Project has 412 'award' entries which were

classified as being either undergraduate or post-graduate with the following results:

- Undergraduate Research Studies
 - 271 completed of which 27 are Honours level theses
- Post-graduate Research Studies - Masters and PhD
 - 110 completed and 32 in progress or in examination

These were then classified into masters level and doctoral level (PhD) research as indicated in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Post-graduate Award Studies according to
Post-graduate Qualification

Qualification	Number of research studies (n=142)	
	'completed'	'in progress' or 'in examination'
Masters degrees	97	17
PhD degrees	13	15

Due to uncertainty regarding the completed, in progress and in examination status of many of these research studies, all of them were considered as a single group for the purposes of the three other forms of analysis outlined above - this is, the type of research, the education level, and the music education content.

The data from the questionnaires and from the bibliographic information supplied by libraries required interpretation to enable a classification

according to type of research, educational level and content. This was undertaken using the title, the abstract or summary, and the keyword descriptors. 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 for this phase of the project in order to enable a comparison with Lett's (1984) content analysis.

The analysis according to 'type of research' indicated in Table 3 below reveals that well over half of the research studies to date have been descriptive in nature, with each of the other types - experimental, historical and philosophical studies - being less numerous.

Table 3
Post-graduate Award Studies according to Type of Research

Type	Number of research studies	Percentage (n = 142) (%)
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Philosophical	12	8.5
Historical	18	12.6
Experimental	27	19.0
Descriptive	85	59.9

The analysis according to the educational level to which these research studies applied revealed that those concerned with the primary and/or secondary levels of education, and with non-level-specific research were predictably well represented (see Table 4 below). On the other hand, research focussed on the early childhood and adult levels was markedly under represented.

Table 4
Post-graduate Award Studies according to Educational Level

Educational Level	Number of research studies	Percentage (n = 142) (%)
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Early childhood	5	3.5
Primary	42	29.6
Secondary	39	27.5
Primary / Secondary	14	9.9
Tertiary	15	10.5
Adult	2	1.4
General (non-specific)	25	17.6

The distribution of the research studies across the various content areas (see Table 5 below) indicates that the greatest proportions of research studies were concerned with music curriculum development and evaluation, music teaching methods, and music psychology / perception studies. Areas

in which comparatively little research has been undertaken include aesthetics / philosophy, assessment, community music, music appreciation, popular music, and teacher education.

Table 5
Post-graduate Award Studies according to Music Education Content

Content Area	Number of research studies (n = 142)	Percentage (%)
Aesthetics / Philosophy	3	2.1
Assessment	3	2.1
Class music teaching	12	8.5
Community music	3	2.1
Creativity	7	4.9
Curriculum development / evaluation	22	15.5
Educational media	11	7.8
Ethnic music	6	4.2
Instrumental teaching	11	7.8
Music appreciation	2	1.4
Music educational systems	10	7.0
Music psychology / perception	15	10.6
Music therapy / Special education	9	6.3
Popular music	3	2.1
Teacher education	4	2.8
Teaching methods	16	11.3
Vocal / choral teaching	5	3.5

Observations and Discussion

One of the most striking aspects of the above data is the amount of research which has actually taken place and is presently taking place 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 total number of research studies presently listed as 'completed' in the computer database is just under 150, there being 27 undergraduate honours theses, 12 BEd theses, and 110 post-graduate (masters level and PhD) theses. The present figures indicate that a significant increase has taken place in the amount of music

education research which has taken place during the fourteen years between Bridges' initial listing of music education theses in 1975 and 1978 and the present time. Moreover, given that there have been 13 PhD degrees awarded in music education (or in the allied field of music psychology / perception) to date and that there are currently 15 PhD theses in progress or in examination, the discipline of music education in Australia has very much 'come of age' with regard to its research profile.

In this respect, it is important to note that, even as recently as ten years ago, it was simply not possible to undertake PhD research in certain areas of music education due to the lack of appropriate supervision. For example, up to and including 1983, no less than five Australians went overseas to undertake PhD research and certainly, in one of these cases, the researcher has stated that there was simply no one capable, let alone qualified, to supervise in his area of research interest (music psychology) in Australia at that time. It is therefore encouraging at the national level to have a growing number of music educators who have qualified for PhD degrees in music education. There are now university music educators qualified to supervise all of the major types of research. For example, there are three music educators whose PhD thesis are in the area of music education history, five whose PhD work involved experimental research and

five whose PhD theses are descriptive studies. In this regard Australian music education can regard itself as having become fully autonomous as far as its potential to supervise and examine theses at doctoral level is concerned.

It is also of interest to note that there appears to be a far greater level of interest in descriptive research than in philosophical, historical or experimental modes of research in music education. This situation here in Australia would undoubtedly contrast markedly with that in the United States where, even from a cursory perusal of current U.S. music education research directories such as Approved Doctoral Dissertations In Progress in Music Education (Council for Research in Music Education), the focus of American music education research is still predominantly on experimental research.

The content of music education research is also of interest from a comparative viewpoint. Lett (1984) undertook an analysis of music education theses for the period up to and including 1978 using the content categories cited above. A direct comparison of data drawn from Lett's study and of data included in Table 5 above indicates some major changes in the pattern of music education research in Australia (see Table 6 below).

Table 6

A Comparison of Lett's (1984) and the Present Data on Award Studies according to Music Education Content

Content Areas	Lett (1984) §	Present Data (1992) ¶
	(%)	(%)
Aesthetics / Philosophy	7.3	2.1
Assessment	- 2.1	
Class music teaching	32.7	8.5
Community music	- 2.1	
Creativity	- 4.9	
Curriculum development / evaluation	20.0	15.5
Educational media	3.6	7.8
Ethnic music	- 4.2	
Instrumental teaching	9.1	7.8
Music appreciation	5.5	1.4
Music educational systems	3.6*	7.0
Music psychology / perception	3.6	10.6
Music therapy / Special education	5.5	6.3
Popular music	- 2.1	
Teacher education	- 2.8	
Teaching methods	5.5	11.3
Vocal / choral teaching	3.6	3.5

§ Note that these theses include both undergraduate and post-graduate research.

¶ Note that these theses include post-graduate research only.

* For the purposes of this comparison, Lett's 'History / biography' category has been re-assigned to that of 'Music education systems' on the basis that the two historical theses concerned focus principally on the development of music education policy.

In some content areas, there has been a consistent level of interest shown by Australian music education researchers during the period 1978 to 1992. Interest in the areas of curriculum development / evaluation, instrumental teaching, music therapy / special education, and vocal / choral teaching has remained at the approximately the same levels. In other content areas, there has been a marked change in the pattern of research interest. For example, the number of research studies in the area of teaching methods - comparative studies focussing on the pedagogical effectiveness of, for instance, the Kodály, Orff, Dalcroze, and Yamaha teaching methods - has virtually doubled over the period. The same is true of research which focuses on the effectiveness of various forms of educational media for

teaching music. In particular, the application of new technology to music teaching and learning - particular computer technology - has been of interest to an increasing number of music education researchers. Another content area in which there has been increased 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, etc).

There has also been an emergence of interest in researching in the newer and more specialised areas of music education such as assessment of music learning, community music making, musical creativity / composition in education, popular music, and the role of ethnic musics (including

aboriginal music) in music education programs. There has also been an increase in interest in the area of comparative music education and music education / arts education policy development.

The one research 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 study, been designated as being more appropriately placed in one of the 'additional' content areas cited in Table 2 above.

Summary and Future Directions for the Project

As indicated at the outset, this project began as the 'Bibliography of Australian Music Education Research' Project in 1989 and, in line with the objectives of this project, a bibliographic listing in abbreviated form of all post-graduate research studies in music education for the period 1964 to 1989 was published in *The Australian Journal of Music Education* (see Stevens 1990). In addition, all bibliographic details of music education research studies have been supplied to the 'Australian Index of Research in Design and the Arts' Project (AIRDA) being conducted by the Institute of Education at the University of Melbourne, for inclusion in its own computer database. A full bibliographic listing of all entries in the computer database, including summaries / abstracts and thesis publication / access details, will be published in 1993 by the Callaway International Music Education Resource Centre (University of Western Australia) as a *Directory of Music Education Research in Australia*.

The findings from the analyses undertaken to date are, at this stage of the project, both preliminary and tentative. Many of the research studies, although presently assigned one content area only, will obviously relate to more than one music education content area. It will therefore be necessary as part of the next phase of the project to allow for multiple content descriptors to be assigned to all research studies. In addition to the four types of analysis included in the present study, it is also planned to consider additional analytical criteria, including those of the research method, research design, and data collection and analytical techniques

employed. Finally, it has been decided to undertake a full analysis of the data for undergraduate research studies as well as for post-graduate studies on the basis that undergraduate research work - particularly at Honours level - can be reasonably substantive and certainly indicates the interests of beginning researchers in the field of music education.

One of my concerns about the present study has been that it has been necessary for me to interpret the existing data about each research thesis in order to decide on the most appropriate way of categorising each study. Verification of the current categorisation by the researchers themselves will need to take place as part of the next phase of this project and so in this sense the present findings must be considered as being tentative only.

Nevertheless the preliminary findings of this project, aside from identifying most of the post-graduate research in music education - either completed or in progress - to date, have indicated the following trends:

- (i) there has been a considerable increase in the amount of research work being undertaken in music education over the past fifteen years or so;
- (ii) 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;
- (iii) 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 levels of education which suggests that the latter areas are currently being under-researched by the music education profession;
- (iv) most of the research work undertaken in music education for higher degrees appears to be descriptive as opposed to philosophical, historical, or experimental research; and
- (v) certain content areas which have been identified as the principal

focus of award research appear to be of fairly constant interest to music education researchers (these include the areas of curriculum development / evaluation, instrumental teaching, music therapy / special education, and vocal / choral teaching) and in addition, several new areas have emerged more recently as being of interest (assessment of music learning, community music making, musical creativity / composition in education, popular music, and the role of ethnic musics).

For music education in Australia to receive full recognition as a academic discipline, its body of knowledge must not only be transmitted to future generations of music educators and be applied in the practice of music education, but must also be contributed to and extended through research. This project has demonstrated that there has been a great deal more formal research undertaken in music education in Australia than has been recognised both within the music education profession and outside. It is hoped that the 'Bibliography of Australian Music Education Research' Project and the subsequent 'National Survey' Project will contribute to a wider recognition of the research work already completed and currently in

progress, and will be of professional use to both music education practitioners and music education researchers. It is also hoped that these projects will contribute to the further recognition of music education as a significant academic discipline in Australia.

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The Research News section compiled by Dr. Doreen Bridges, began with an article by Bridges entitled 'Why research in music education?' (*The Australian Journal of Music Education* (7), October 1970), and continued as a regular section in the AJME until the first series of this journal ended in 1982.

The undergraduate research represented in the database includes BA(Hons), BMus(Hons) and BEd(Hons) theses, BMus Special Studies from the University of Melbourne, BMus and BMusEd theses from the University of Western Australia and BMus theses from the University of Wollongong.

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 level theses and some were undertaken as Honours level theses - for example, as an MEd(Hons) theses at the University of Wollongong or as an MA(Hons) thesis at the University of Sydney.

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),

Merrion (1990), etc., the categorisation above was decided upon as being the widely accepted.

These listings of 'Theses / Investigations on Music Education' include undergraduate theses (e.g. for BMus [Hons] and BA[Hons] degrees), graduate theses (e.g. for BEd degrees) and post-graduate theses (e.g. for MEd and MMus degrees).

It has been assumed that, given the effect of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) on post-graduate students, there is higher probability than prior to its introduction that research studies 'in progress' will be completed.

It is acknowledged that there may be some inaccuracies and inconsistencies that occurred in this categorisation process as it was not possible at this stage of the project to verify this with the Masters and PhD respondents concerned. However it should be noted that the categorisation of research theses according to these three criteria - as well as to other criteria (including specific research methodologies employed) - will be verified during the next phase of the project.

Note that the categories used to describe music education content are those employed in Table 4 and that equivalent terms to Lett's (1984) categories are shown in Table 2.

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