

Editorial

All research starts with identifying a problem, drawing on a firm knowledge of a particular context as well as the literature relating to the problem and its potential solutions. For music educators these problems are usually located in some aspect of their practice as teachers. It is this connection between research and practice that has been at the heart of this journal since its inception.

The articles presented here exemplify the relationship between research and practice in their exploration of a variety of research 'problems'. For Rebecca Berkley, the challenge lay in her observation that the teaching of composing is frequently driven by the demands of external agencies rather than stemming from a clear understanding by teachers of what the experience of composing actually is. This motivated her to develop the idea that composing can be conceptualised as problem solving. Her investigations show that teaching composing demands sensitivity as well as clear guidance if students' confidence and skills are to flourish.

Christopher McGillen wanted to understand the processes by which a group of adolescent musicians in a rural Australian secondary school wrote and performed their own music within the context of a school band, *Jungle Express*. Their emphasis upon group compositional processes prompted McGillen to explore the idea of cooperative learning as a theoretical basis for his research. Fundamental to this way of working was taking seriously the perceptions and insights of the students themselves.

Many music teachers are challenged by the different ways in which girls and boys approach music-making. Brigitte Charles's article addresses the complications caused by children's views of themselves as composers, presenting an analysis of how attitudes and behaviour in composing are affected by gender. Intriguingly, she noted that whilst girls in conversation talked about preferring soft and slow music, in practice there was evidence that they played loud and fast music. Conversely, while boys portrayed themselves as improvisers, frequently they were found with graphic scores which were detailed and meticulously presented. Charles concluded that while her 8–10 year old pupils were not yet displaying gendered practices in their work, they had learnt the discourse of gendered musical behaviours, and portrayed themselves and one another as working within stronger boundaries than were in fact evident.

Instrumental teachers are much more used to dealing with individual students than are their classroom counterparts. Nonetheless it is easy to miss the singularity of students' needs and circumstances. The 'problem' of parental involvement is the focus of Jenny Macmillan's article, in which she considers the relationships between teachers, students and parents and looks at the extent to which parental support is fostered, or even welcomed, by instrumental tutors. She finds varying levels of parental support amongst all three interested parties.

Sometimes research is prompted by a technical issue. Helena Gaunt observed both in herself as a performer on the oboe, and in her pupils, that breathlessness was in many ways

a taken for granted aspect of playing the instrument. Through an extensive literature review she analyses aspects of oboe teaching with specific reference to the often conflicting advice on breathing. She formulates a number of principles, tentative as yet but to be underpinned by future research.

Finally, Preti and Welch draw us into the world of the hospital musician, exploring some of the ways in which music can help some children modify the perception of pain and reduce stress. What can appear to be an informal and relatively unstructured form of education can in effect be powerful and long-lasting. In this therapeutic setting, 'performers, patients and members of the (often participant) audience "share" a musical experience and perhaps are all changed by it in some way'.

The research reported in this issue not only identifies real concerns relating to the teaching and learning of music, but also attempts to interpret and explain the findings in ways that are intelligible and relevant to music educators. Through its value and relevance such research should help make a real difference to our practice.

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