

Editorial

Twenty-five years is a significant milestone in the life of the *British Journal of Music Education* (BJME). During this time, the relationship between educational research and the practice of teaching music has changed significantly. There has been increasing pressure on researchers to ensure that much more of their work is useful to teachers and to other practitioners. Ironically, the imperative on teachers has not been to draw upon this research to inform their practice, but rather to meet the demands of an increasing array of statutory and quasi-statutory edicts which urge compliance rather than exploration and reflection. In such a context it is the job of a journal such as the BJME to disseminate the latest research and thinking in music education which can be transformed into the knowledge that is needed by teachers and learners. Over the past 25 years, BJME has offered its readership an exploration of themes and imperatives that face researchers, teachers and policy makers.

A decision we made as incoming editors was that the 25th anniversary should be marked by a 'celebratory issue'. We consulted widely about the possible form this might take and received much valuable and wise advice from colleagues all of whom agreed that whilst such a milestone should, properly, invite reflection on past achievements, it must also look to the future.

From this emerged the idea of an issue which considers the important questions of the past 25 years and the challenges that still face researchers, teachers and policymakers. The papers in this issue fall into two sections. The first comprises reflections by past editors on their years in office whilst the second contains articles that are both of high quality in themselves but also offer new perspectives on perennial issues or engage with emerging issues or hitherto under-researched areas of music education.

We were delighted that all past editors accepted our invitation to contribute. We asked that they identify and discuss articles from their period as editors which reflected the debates, issues and ideologies current at that time. We also asked them to reflect upon articles which have had a continuing and sustained influence; in other words remain important today. Finally we requested that they should look forward, offering their particular perspective on 'where now?' for both music education in general and the BJME in particular. They could choose either to work independently or with their co-editor.

Not surprisingly a number of common themes emerge across articles. These include the importance of a holistic approach to music education which focuses on the richness of musical experience. As many of the contributors point out, this has become increasingly challenging in the context of a standards-driven agenda (in England, at least) which enforces an atomistic approach to music teaching and learning and its assessment. A second common theme is that many of the challenges facing today's music educators are the same as (or similar to) those faced by previous generations, and we can learn much from the way in which these were addressed. A number of editors emphasize the importance of remaining true to the original vision of the BJME as set out in the editorial of the very first issue: which was (and is) as both Swanwick and Cox and Pitts point out 'to help us towards

a better-informed and possibly more cohesive profession' through 'focusing on musical and personal transaction between teachers and students in whatever setting'(Paynter & Swanwick, 1984: 3–5, cited in Swanwick, this issue).

As well as common themes, each editor's contribution properly reflects their own interests and perspectives. Keith Swanwick, one of the founding editors, begins by reviewing the state of music education research prior to the founding of the BJME. He notes how a preoccupation with 'defining and testing musical 'abilities'' through 'isolating sounds, usually outside of any musical context', was at odds with emerging trends in music teaching which were rooted in 'the exploratory attitudes' of contemporary composers such as Maxwell Davies and John Cage. In the course of his article, Swanwick revisits a number of themes which have been constants in his work over the past 40 years, including the pre-eminent importance of music as a fundamental human experience and 'of lively and critical theorising' as the only 'defence we have against the arbitrary, the subjective, the dogmatic or the doctrinaire'. This leads him to a spirited defence of the Swanwick Tillman spiral of musical development, much criticism of which, he suggests, results from a misunderstanding of Piagetian developmental stages.

John Paynter's contribution is in the form of a documented discussion with William Salaman (written by Salaman) one of his immediate successors as editor. Paynter also makes the point that the creation of the BJME was, at least in part, due to the perceived need to establish a research forum which could reflect and build upon the work he and others were doing directly with teachers and children during the 1970s. He shares with Swanwick a concern that today teachers are hemmed in by a curriculum and assessment demands which leaves little 'room for the imaginative child'.

In 1998 Swanwick and Paynter were succeeded as editors by Piers Spencer and William Salaman. Spencer and Salaman make separate but complementary contributions to this issue. Spencer focuses on how articles published in the BJME reflected emerging issues and concerns in music education research, including the role of technology, vocal work, the place of music education in society and the promotion of equal opportunities. Salaman begins his contribution by suggesting that good research often provides 'intriguing questions' rather than 'definitive answers'. He goes on to offer personal reflections on three key issues in music and music education: the role of assessment; 'elitism'; and whether the emergence of electronic keyboards and computer-based music making has been entirely beneficial for children's musical learning.

The final contributions are by the most recent editors, Gordon Cox and Stephanie Pitts. They contribute a collaboratively written article which begins with a reflection on the role of the BJME in the present (or immediately recent) education and research climate. They go on to identify five themes which they suggest 'offer a newly expanded focus for research in music teaching and learning':

- The roles and identities of music teachers
- Pupil perspectives: access and inclusivity
- Blurring of boundaries between home, school and community
- Music in higher education

In their final section, which focuses on 'strengthening music education as a field of study', they echo Salaman's thoughts about research providing 'intriguing questions'

suggesting that ‘researchers need the freedom to explore ideas and generate as many problems as solutions’.

Turning now to the three articles which form the second part of this issue, we find that a number of the themes reflected upon by past editors re-emerge here. Lamont and Maton (‘Choosing Music: Exploratory studies into the low take up of music GCSE’) focus on an issue raised by Salaman as to why in some schools curriculum music remains unpopular from the age of 11 onwards and so few children choose to continue with it into GCSE. They suggest that this problem is undertheorised and, drawing on the work of Bourdieu and Bernstein, propose a framework for exploratory research based on ‘legitimation code theory’.

Tim Cain’s article ‘The characteristics of action research in music education’ goes to the heart of one of the core aims of the BJME: how research (and particularly action research) can inform and improve practice. Finally, in ‘From music student to professional: The process of transition’ Creech *et al.* explore the extent to which higher education courses ‘adequately prepare young musicians for the critical transition from music graduate to professional’. Through semi-structured interviews, they identify the challenges associated with embarking on careers in music performance and ‘mitigating factors that underpin successful transition experiences’.

We wish to thank all those who have contributed to this special issue. To the past editors from whose collective wisdom we have much benefited and also to the Editorial Board, International Advisory Board and other guest reviewers for their willing attention to detail in reviewing articles and commenting on our proposals. Thanks are also due to Stephanie Pitts, the Book Editor, the colleagues who act as book reviewers, and to Cambridge University Press for their unstinting support of the BJME.

Finally, whilst there is significant evidence of progress over the last decade in the quest for research to inform ideas of good practice in music teaching, we need much more profound involvement of teachers in research and more attention paid than in the past to teachers’ and student teachers’ own enquiries. In pursuit of this, our celebrations of BJME’s 25th anniversary continue with a one day symposium on ‘Teacher research: Making a difference in music education?’ This event will be held on 1 November at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. The aim is to bring together past and present editors, editorial board members, contributors and audiences to support and encourage teachers’ own research. We plan to share information with teachers researching their own practice and to reflect on the issues and challenges that we jointly face.

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