

A Research Agenda for Music Education: Thinking Ahead

Excerpted from: <http://www.menc.org/resources/view/a-research-agenda-for-music-education-thinking-ahead>

The fifty-three research questions listed in this document reflect a wide variety of issues and concerns important to music education. On the basis of these questions, it is clear that the following broad areas of study and the categories within each area are our key concerns for research in music education:

Music Teaching and Learning in a Time of Innovation and Reform

- Curriculum

- Learning and Development

- Assessment

- Teaching and Teacher Education

Music Education for New, Diverse, and Underserved Populations

- Diversity and Inclusion

- School and Community

Supporting and Surrounding Issues

- History

- Research and Dissemination

- Advocacy

Finding answers to the questions in this agenda is now our challenge. All music educators, preservice and inservice--regardless of what level or which area they teach, can and should be involved in this inquiry. By seizing this opportunity to study and investigate these important research questions, we can look forward to the promise the results of our research hold for improving the quality of music teaching and learning in classrooms across America.

Music Teaching and Learning in a Time of Innovation and Reform

Members of our professional organization place a high priority on student learning and development, and on instructional strategies. Curricular innovations and challenges have forced teachers to rethink music content, scheduling, technology, delivery of instruction, and assessment. Researchers and teachers have theoretical and practical interest in how children develop and learn across many domains related to music. Music Teaching and Learning in a Time of Innovation and Reform encompasses questions in four categories: Curriculum, Learning and Development, Assessment, and Teaching and Teacher Education.

Curriculum

The National Standards for Music Education identify what students should know and be able to do as they progress from kindergarten through grade 12.⁴ Most states have established standards, largely in line with the national standards, and many school districts have, as well. In addition, to help schools deliver a comprehensive music curriculum, MENC has outlined opportunity-to-learn (OTL) standards in the areas of staffing, facilities, equipment, and curriculum.⁵ Now the challenge is to find ways to implement and study the outcomes of the standards and examine emerging curricular issues in a time of education reform.

The profession's best thinking is needed to explore questions such as the following:

How can content listed in the national standards be communicated to and implemented by persons responsible for local curriculum development? To what extent are the standards being implemented, by whom, and with what result?

What are the potential costs and benefits to music programs of school reform proposals such as charter schools, school-to-work programs, and distance learning?

What are the potential costs and benefits to music programs of instructional arrangements such as block scheduling, class size, out-of school programs, and time in class?

What are the most appropriate school music activities, and what is the best balance among these activities to bring about aesthetic responding? performance achievement? lifelong involvement in music?

What are some ways that music can be integrated with other school subjects, such as language arts, visual arts, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education? How can teachers maintain high standards of music education within interdisciplinary settings?

How can cooperative learning models be adapted to music instruction?

Is there a core of songs that can and should be learned by all American school children?

How can advances in technology enhance existing music curricula? How can advances in technology change traditional curricular content and values?

Learning and Development

Music education is a lifelong process involving students at all levels. Music is an academic subject with its own special body of knowledge, skills, and unique ways of knowing and thinking. It offers unique opportunities for creativity and self-expression. Musical knowledge and skill need to be developed and nurtured. Further study is needed to determine how children learn music, what developmental levels are optimal for emphasizing various skills, what experiences students should have, and what techniques should be used.

The profession's best thinking is needed to explore questions such as the following:

What are successful materials, techniques, and settings that motivate students to participate in general music and ensembles?

What are effective techniques that help students acquire music knowledge and skills?

What are successful techniques to help students apply their acquired music knowledge and skill to new pieces and situations; that is, how do they learn to make transfers and solve problems?

How are positive attitudes developed toward music learning and unfamiliar music experiences?

Are there prescribed sequences of learning experiences or teaching techniques that will lead to musical understanding and performance?

What is the importance of early experience on the musical development of children? Are there developmental "windows of opportunity" for learning certain music skills or attitudes?

What are successful techniques and classroom protocols for maintaining good discipline in music classes?

What music learning experiences are good precursors to continued music participation beyond the school years?

Assessment

Once standards have been set for student achievement, learning must be assessed in line with those standards. A variety of assessment techniques may be used in music classroom and ensemble settings. Studies are needed to determine what techniques are most effective and how best to use the results of assessment. Music assessment should be based on specific objectives that identify clearly what students should know and be able to do.⁶

The profession's best thinking is needed to explore questions such as the following:

What are valid forms of assessment in the arts, and how can they be used to improve student achievement in music?

What are the expected musical and other outcomes of a good music education, and how can they be documented?

What are some strategies for incorporating ongoing assessment into ensemble rehearsals and general music classes? How can individual learning, as well as group learning, be determined within context?

How can technology be used to facilitate record keeping and assessment?

Teaching and Teacher Education

Teacher education institutions need to examine their programs and ensure that they are prepared to educate tomorrow's teachers. Since music educators cannot teach what they do not know, they must themselves develop the skills and knowledge that will be required of their students. Preservice education alone is not enough, however. Professional development is also essential to enable music educators to be productive throughout their professional lives. To meet these challenges, colleges and universities will need to work in partnership with local school districts and professional associations, find new ways of mentoring their graduates, and develop new ways to participate systematically in inservice teacher education.

The profession's best thinking is needed to explore questions such as the following:

What are some good models for cooperation between school districts and colleges or universities in providing field experiences for preservice and beginning teachers?

What are some good models for support and mentoring of beginning music teachers?

What is a good balance of subject matter expertise (music), methods classes, and practicum experiences in preparing new teachers? What should be the distribution of these elements throughout the music teacher education program?

What are appropriate goals, modes of delivery, and instructional methods for preparing preservice early childhood and elementary educators to incorporate music into their classrooms?

What techniques--such as journal-keeping, observation, continuing education, and graduate study--keep teachers engaged and learning throughout their professional lives?

What information, support, and services can be provided by MENC and other organizations to assist teachers in meeting their responsibilities?

Music Education for New, Diverse, and Underserved Populations

Because of changes in social ideals and public policy, today's music educators must be prepared to include students of diverse backgrounds, abilities, and interests in their classes and ensembles. Initiatives in music in early childhood and in later adulthood are increasingly common. The expansion of music education services to diverse populations was voiced as a priority for research by many MENC members. Questions related to Music Education for New, Diverse, and Underserved Populations fall into two broad categories: Diversity and Inclusion, and School and Community.

Diversity and Inclusion

Social issues, changing demographic patterns, and inclusion of special learners in the music classroom present significant challenges for music education. The fact that today's music educator must be prepared to teach diverse and underserved populations underscores the need for examining the best methodologies, techniques, conditions, and materials for bringing music to the entire student population in the nation's classrooms.

The profession's best thinking is needed to explore questions such as the following:

How may different learning characteristics be approached successfully in music instruction? Under what conditions are adaptations necessary in ensemble or classroom instruction? What types of adaptations are the least intrusive and allow for maintaining high musical standards within the inclusive setting?

What classroom environments are most conducive to the inclusion of children with disabilities, and what strategies can best facilitate successful inclusion?

How can music facilitate interaction and communication among children with different learning abilities and cultural backgrounds?

What principles guide the selection of repertoire and materials for children in various settings (urban, rural, suburban, regional) and groupings (multicultural, multiethnic, homogeneous)?

What techniques and materials are available to ensure that American and international students whose first language is not English are involved in school music programs?

What are some strategies for including other significant persons (parents, other teachers, classroom aides, other music professionals) in the development, implementation, and evaluation of individualized programs for children with different learning abilities and cultural backgrounds?

What techniques are available to ensure that learning in the classroom will transfer to environments outside the school setting?

School and Community

In the future, we can expect that the role of the certified and qualified music specialist will grow, expanding to that of a facilitator who works with others who are involved with students' music education, including parents, other teachers, and the community. To be most effective, music educators will need to promote lifelong learning in music, becoming involved with music programs for both preschool children and older adults. Such efforts will require contributions and cooperation from the community, other school personnel, the media, and the music industry.

The profession's best thinking is needed to explore questions such as the following:

How do school music programs contribute to community life? What contributions can music organizations and musicians in the community make to the school music program?

What types of out reach programs can be developed between school and community that will provide lifelong music learning and involvement?

How can music programs be extended to young children and older adults? What opportunities exist for intergenerational music participation?

How can school personnel more actively engage parents and other caregivers in their children's music education?

How can music teachers assist parents in helping their children reach long-term goals?

How can local and national news media contribute to music education by working with schools and professional organizations on programmatic initiatives?

How can the music industry and professional arts organizations contribute to music education?

Supporting and Surrounding Issues

There are a number of questions that are important to the research process but not directly concerned with teaching and learning. Not only does the history of our profession have intrinsic interest, but it can yield knowledge and insights that are useful in contemporary settings. The timely dissemination of research is a key concern in today's fast-paced and information-overloaded world. Finally, knowledge gained from research using various modes of inquiry may be used to support and advocate existing music programs and to provide the background for new ones. Questions related to these surrounding and supporting issues are grouped into these three categories: History, Research and Dissemination, and Advocacy.

History

Music education has a history of more than 160 years in America's public schools. Many individuals have played an important role in the development of school music programs, as have educational institutions and professional organizations. As we look to the future, we need to study past practices and review current practices to determine their relevance to current and future programs.

The profession's best thinking is needed to explore questions such as the following:

What is the significance of place in the history of American music education? In what particular locations across the country have important music education developments taken place?

What institutions, organizations, and other similar groups have been important in the development of music education in this country? What is the impact of this legacy on music education in the present? How might planning for the future benefit from a knowledge of the history of music education in various localities, states, and regions of the country?

What is the history of major concepts and ideas in American music education history? What are the antecedents of present issues and concerns in the profession? How can a knowledge of the past explain the present and help us prepare for the future?

Who are or were the most important people in the history of music education in America? What were their most important contributions? What is the impact of their legacy on music education in the present? How might planning for the future benefit from a knowledge of their lives and works?

Research and Dissemination

The music education research community has been growing for more than eighty years. Especially since the establishment of the Society for Research in Music Education in 1960, research has been thriving. Research today is facilitated by technological advances. Interest in applied research is expanding, and a wide variety of methodologies are available for the researcher. The audience for research findings is also growing as the importance of research becomes increasingly apparent.

The profession's best thinking is needed to explore questions such as the following:

What are the characteristics of successful partnerships (school university, teacher collaborations, and so on) for answering questions through applied research?

How can students, teachers, administrators, and parents learn to read research, make transfers, and apply it wisely to their own interests?

What steps can be taken to allow timely dissemination of research findings and their replications?

How can technology such as electronic databases and on-line journals be used to communicate research to a broad audience?

How can the knowledge gained from programmatic research efforts be communicated and applied to the international community?

Advocacy

While music programs in some schools are thriving, in other schools, the position of music in the curriculum has eroded substantially in recent years. To preserve and enhance music education in the schools, improved communication with the public sector and with education decision makers is necessary. Effective collaborations are needed, as well as increased support from a wide variety of constituencies. Such advocacy efforts will be crucial for keeping music at the core of the school curriculum.

The profession's best thinking is needed to explore questions such as the following:

What are the musical, academic, and social outcomes of music education, and how can they be communicated to the public as a basis for continued fiscal support?

What are useful repositories of information, materials, and strategies for music teachers whose programs are being challenged?

What lines of personal and professional support exist or can be developed for music teachers who are experiencing lack of public support for their programs?

What are the characteristics of schools and communities that have well-established, respected, and financially supported music programs?

How might collaborative relationships among arts educators be established at the local level and be used as a basis for arts advocacy? Are there effective ways to prepare preservice arts educators for effective collaboration?

Research Questions

Music educators face broad and important issues: What is so important about music that communities are asked to allocate precious time and fiscal resources to its place in the curriculum? How can we communicate this value? How do children learn music and teachers teach it? How can we reach such a diverse population as American school children? What does it mean to be a good musician? Such questions are at the heart of music education, and we need all of our professional resources to answer them.

Scholarship in music education encompasses philosophy and history. It includes rich description of successful programs. It explores new ideas about individual and group behavior in music, and it tests the outcome of certain conditions or techniques, for better or worse. Diverse modes of inquiry are invaluable to research in music education when they are applied to important questions about what we want and need to know (see Research and Its Forms sidebar).

The following questions are broad enough that they may be studied from many perspectives. They were developed from questions submitted by students, music teachers, researchers, college and university faculty, arts education specialists, and members of state departments of education. The questions are divided into three areas: Music Teaching and Learning in a Time of Innovation and Reform; Music Education for New, Diverse, and Underserved Populations; and Supporting and Surrounding Issues. In each of these areas, we need our profession's best thinking.

Research and Its Forms

Research is a systematic inquiry and can take many forms: **Philosophical**--Why

Formal examination through systematic logic and examination

Knowing, valuing, realizing meaning

Historical--What has been

Documented discussion of the past

Analysis, interpretation, preservation, discovery

Descriptive--What is

Quantitative and qualitative observation of people, places, settings, and things

Ex post facto description, evaluation, interpretation, verification

Experimental--Establishing cause and effect

Observation of outcomes based on controlled inquiry and structured situations

Development of theories over time, isolation of cause and effect relationships, hypothesis testing, theory application

Notes

- See Ruth V. Brittin and Jayne M. Standley, "Researchers in Music Education/Therapy: Analysis of Publications, Citations, and Retrievability of Work," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 45, no. 1 (1997): 145-60;
- Charles P. Schmidt and Stephen F. Zdzinski, "Cited Quantitative Research Articles in Music Education Research Journals, 1975-1990: A Content Analysis of Selected Studies," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 41, no. 1 (1997): 5-19; Cornelia Yarbrough, "A Content Analysis of the *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 1953-1983," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 32, no. 4 (1984): 213-22; and Cornelia Yarbrough, "The Future of Scholarly Inquiry in Music Education: 1996 Senior Researcher Award Acceptance Address," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 44, no. 3 (1996): 190-203.
- MENC National Executive Board, "MENC Strategic Plan" (Music Educators National Conference, Reston, VA, photocopy).
- Patricia J. Flowers, Mark W. Gallant, and Nancy A. Single, "Research Dissemination in Music Education: Teachers' Research Questions and Preference for Writing Style," *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education* 14, no. 1, 23-30.
- Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, *National Standards for Arts Education: What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able to Do in the Arts* (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1994).
- Music Educators National Conference, *Opportunity-to-Learn Standards for Music Instruction: Grades PreK-12* (Reston, VA: Author, 1994).
- Music Educators National Conference, *Performance Standards for Music: Strategies and Benchmarks for Assessing Progress Toward the National Standards, Grades PreK-12* (Reston, VA: Author, 1996).
- Music Educators National Conference, "Handbook of the Society for Research in Music Education," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 41, no. 4 (1993): 269-81.
- Clifford K. Madsen, "Making Research Apply to Your Classroom," *Music Educators Journal*, 71, no. 8 (April 1985): 18-19.
- James L. Byo, "Comments from the Editor," *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education* 15, no. 1 (1996): 2.
- Margaret Merrion, ed., *What Works: Instructional Strategies for Music Education* (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1989).
- Albert LeBlanc and Jan McCrary, "Motivation and Perceived Rewards for Research by Music Faculty," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 38, no. 1 (1990): 61-68.

Resources

MENC Research Journals

Journal of Research in Music Education--Quarterly by the Music Educators National Conference. Published reports of descriptive, experimental, historical, and philosophical research. Each article is preceded by a brief summary (abstract). Subscription address: *Journal of Research in Music Education*, MENC, 1806 Robert Fulton Drive, Reston, VA 20191-4348. MENC members may subscribe by choosing an option on their MENC membership form. Selected back issues available from publisher. Microfilm copies of all back issues available from University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Update: Applications of Research in Music Education--Two issues annually by the Music Educators National Conference. Attempts to bridge the gap between music education researchers and teachers by publishing the results of research studies in nontechnical language. Subscription address: *Update*, MENC, 1806 Robert Fulton Drive, Reston, VA 20191-4348. MENC members may subscribe by choosing an option on their MENC membership form. Photocopies of back issues from volumes 1-7 available from Music Library, University of South Carolina. Selected back issues and photocopies of other issues from volumes 8-present available from publisher.

Other Research Journals

Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education--Quarterly by the School of Music, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana. Publishes reports of descriptive, experimental, historical, and philosophical research, and reviews of books and dissertations. Subscription address: Council for Research in Music Education, School of Music, University of Illinois, 1205 W. California, Urbana, IL 61801. Selected back issues available from publisher.

The Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education--Three issues annually by the Department of Art and Music Education and Music Therapy, University of Kansas. Publishes historical research articles, book reviews, reprints of selected historical documents, and lists of recent publications. Subscription address: George N. Heller, *The HRME Bulletin*, 311 Bailey Hall, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045 2344. All back issues available from publisher.

Journal of Music Therapy--Quarterly by the National Association for Music Therapy. Publishes reports of descriptive, experimental, behavioral, historical, and philosophical research about music therapy, music in medicine, and music for persons with disabilities. Subscription address: National Association for Music Therapy, 8455 Colesville Road, Suite 1000, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910.

Journal of Band Research--Semiannually by the American Bandmasters Association. Publishes reports of historical, descriptive, and experimental research about bands, as well as analytical research on band music and book reviews. Subscription address: Troy State University Press, Frankie Muller, Managing Editor, Troy, AL 36082. Selected back issues available from University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Contributions to Music Education--Semiannually by the Ohio Music Education Association. Publishes descriptive, experimental, historical, and philosophical research articles. Subscription address: *Contributions to Music Education*, The Hugh A. Glauser School of Music, Kent State University, Kent, OH 44242-0001. All back issues (some only as photocopies) available from publisher.

Missouri Journal of Research in Music Education--Annually by the Missouri Music Educators Association. Publishes reports of research studies of various types, and abstracts of research papers presented in Missouri. Subscription address: Charles Robinson, Associate Editor, *Missouri Journal of Research in Music Education*, Conservatory of Music, 4949 Cherry, University of Missouri-Kansas City, MO 64110.

PMEA Bulletin of Research in Music Education--Annually by the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association. Publishes reports of research studies of various types. Subscription address: Joanne Rutkowski, Editor, *PMEA Bulletin of Research in Music Education*, Pennsylvania State University, School of Music, University Park, PA 16802-1901.

Research Perspectives in Music Education--Annually by Florida Music Educators Association. Publishes research articles with accompanying abstracts on a wide variety of topics related to music education. Subscription address: *Research Perspectives in Music Education*, Florida Music Educators Association, 207 Office Plaza Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32301.

Southeastern Journal of Music Education--Annually by the University of Georgia Center for Continuing Education. Publishes articles based on papers presented at the annual Southeastern Music Education Symposium held at the University of Georgia. Subscription address: *Southeastern Journal of Music Education*, Suite 295, Georgia Center for Continuing Education, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602.

Philosophy of Music Education Review--Semiannually by the School of Music, Indiana University, Bloomington. Publishes results of philosophical research in music education. Subscription address: *PMER*, Music Education Department, School of Music, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405.

Texas Music Education Research--Annually by the Texas Music Educators Association. Publishes reports of

research studies submitted and reviewed following presentation at the annual meeting of the Texas Music Educators Conference and the Texas Music Educators Association. Subscription address: Texas Music Educators Association, P. O. Box 49469, Austin, TX 78765.

Special Research Interest Groups

For information regarding Special Research Interest Groups--Adult Community and Continuing Education, Affective Response, Creativity, Early Childhood, General Research, History, Instructional Strategies, Learning and Development, Measurement and Evaluation, Perception, Philosophy, and Social Sciences--contact Music Educators National Conference, 1806 Robert Fulton Drive, Reston, VA 20191.

Related Research Agendas

Goals 2000 Arts Education Partnership (1997). *Priorities for Arts Education Research*. Available from Goals 2000 Arts Education Partnership, One Massachusetts Ave., NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001-1431.

NAEA Commission on Research in Art Education (1994). *Art Education: Creating a Visual Arts Research Agenda Toward the 21st Century: A Final Report*. National Art Education Association, 1916 Association Dr., Reston, VA 20191-1590.

National Association of Music Merchants (no date). [Research Agenda] Executive Summary.

National Endowment for the Arts (February 1994). *Arts Education Research Agenda for the Future*. Order number 94-3402. Available from U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Mail Stop: SSOP, Washington, DC 20402-9328 (order desk phone 202-783-3238).

U.S. Department of Education/Office of Educational Research and Improvement (December 1996). *Building Knowledge for a Nation of Learners: A Framework for Education Research 1997*. Order number OAS 97-6004. Available from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Mail Stop: SSOP, Washington, DC 20402 9328 (order desk phone 202-783-3238).