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The First 20 Years: A Content Analysis of the *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 1991–2011

Bryan E. Nichols¹

Abstract

This study reports the frequencies of methodologies and topics appearing in the *Journal of Music Teacher Education* from 1991 to 2011. Exploratory review of the middle years of publication was used to categorize methodologies and topics prior to formal analysis. Results indicated that few articles documented the profession's history, reinforcing the importance of editor and Society for Music Teacher Education chair comments for audience communication. Publication count increased from four articles per volume to seven, on average. The year 2003 marked the introduction of qualitative methods, and the early 2000s marked a shift toward a balance of research reports with other article types, whereas early issues had few reports of empirical evidence. Finally, article topics were not represented similarly among article types. Results are discussed in terms of implications for the music teacher preparation profession.

Keywords

music teacher preparation, music educators, content analysis

The Society for Music Teacher Education (SMTE; <http://smte.us>) is open to all members of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME). SMTE was founded in 1982 to serve the interests of music teacher education, and nearly 10 years later, it began publishing the *Journal of Music Teacher Education (JMTE)*. By publishing papers on music teaching and learning, and music teacher preparation specifically, it shares a purpose with other journals representing similar content, namely, to

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disseminate data and other relevant information to the readership (see Ebie, 2002, for a review of journal analyses).

In her introduction to the first issue, chairperson Irma Collins (1991) cited three factors compelling the establishment of the *JMTE*: increasing state reforms, promoting study in music teacher preparation, and addressing the needs of young music educators. Years later, Hamann and Lucas (1998) undertook an effort to determine journal eminence in music education research, stating that professional journals provide an effective and permanent record of research activity in a profession. If that is true, then what do publications in the *JMTE* tell us about the profession? The purpose of this analysis was to report the frequency of various modes of inquiry (article types) and subject matter (article topics) from the inception of the journal in 1991 to 2011. A secondary purpose was to identify any emerging trends in the articles published therein.

Procedure

For the purpose of this report, music education is defined as the teaching and learning of music usually in the context of K–12 school environments. Music teacher education or music teacher preparation are synonymous and are defined here as the teaching and learning of how to teach music, usually in the context of degree and certification programs. The term school is reserved for K–12 institutions; college and university are used interchangeably for degree and certification programs. For the music education major, both the degree itself and the professional certification are outcomes of college attendance, and so satisfying the degree and certification requirements are a part of the teacher preparation curriculum. As indicated below and similar to an early inquiry of music therapy research (Jellison, 1973), articles were divided into editorial and article formats and only articles were analyzed. Articles available online prior to publication (such as OnlineFirst) were not analyzed.

Article Types

First, an exploratory review of Volumes 7 to 9 was conducted. Article types were examined using an existing typology (Yarbrough, 1984). Changes to Yarbrough's etymology were deemed necessary based on the specific content of *JMTE*. For example, instead of the label Philosophy to encompass certain article types, I used Conceptual, to differentiate writing that is informally referred to as philosophical but not actually grounded in philosophy. Several broad categories were used to classify articles: conceptual, historical, applied, research reports, and so on. Then, articles were classified into a specific article type:

“Introduction” or “From the Chair.” Each issue usually begins with a column written by the Chair of the SMTE. These articles generally concern the formation, status, or growth of the Society and its membership. Articles in this category were not analyzed for content.

“Commentary” or “From the Editor.” Usually found as the second article in each issue, this column is written by the editor of the journal. The topics therein concerned the organization of the particular journal issue they prefaced or more generally the vision for the journal’s role in the Society. Articles in this category were not analyzed for content.

Historical Articles

History of an event. Articles in this category document a single occurrence in the history of music education or music teacher education. Like the categories that follow, the subject can include both American and foreign topics and audiences. References are historical artifacts or personal experience. Articles that document and subsequently recommend the implementation of programs in schools or universities are included in the Applied/Professional category (below).

History of music education or music teacher education. These articles document teaching and learning in schools and universities; they describe trends and issues from a historical perspective (i.e., what happened and what was the significance). References are artifacts of developments in the profession or personal experience.

Conceptual Articles

Critical. These articles are philosophically grounded. They are practical or theoretical criticisms that examine ideas, logic, language, or processes in music, music teaching, and music learning. Theoretical criticisms examine the meanings of ideas from the perspective of a specific theory or theories. Practical criticism addresses theoretical suppositions that something should be able to work in a certain way but practically cannot. In these articles, authors typically do not express outright opinion. Articles in this category are sometimes referred to as philosophy and usually depend on if–then statements of logic. In other words, they make arguments based on logic, not opinion. Like later article types, these articles may make reference to the profession’s history but the main objective is not to provide a historical account.

Speculative. Some articles of this kind could also have been referred to as visionary. They may or may not rely on a philosophically grounded approach for describing the state of music education/music teacher education, or its future. These articles can be exploratory in nature and use comparisons to past practice as a basis for argument; as such, authors may express opinion or otherwise take a position. Articles in this category include those labeled in the journal as “Perspectives,” which usually featured two authors each representing differing positions on a topic.

Applied/Professional Development Articles

Applied. These professional articles apply action to specific goals, outcomes, or settings and may not express outright opinion. These articles often reference professional journal articles. The conclusions therein are practical considerations for improving the nature of music teaching and learning by describing optimal practice and thus may include the reporting of previously implemented programs for instruction or proposals

for future implementation. Because the reflection on or evaluation of implemented programs may involve analysis, some articles may be considered to be reports of *action research*. Reports of teachers/professors using their own students as subjects were always included here.

Research Reports

Research reports. These articles report original research in three categories: (a) experimental/behavioral studies that manipulate variables; (b) qualitative studies that include ethnographic techniques, case studies, and others, or a combination of qualitative methods; (c) descriptive studies that described phenomena, often using questionnaire or observation data. This category does not include reports documenting the implementation of programs to help teachers' own students or to assess or compare teaching practices; those reports are considered action research and are included in the category for Applied/Professional articles.

Reviews

Book reviews. These were identified as such by the publisher.

Reviews of literature. These were also analyzed for content regardless of their designation as such by the publisher or the author. In other words, whether or not the author defined his or her writing as a review of literature, authors who surveyed previous literature as a primary purpose (rather than developing or promoting an argument, or reporting new research) were placed here.

Article Topics

Just as article types were outlined and then refined prior to the analysis, a list of topics was similarly developed in order to categorize articles by specific topic area. While these topics are self-explanatory (they say what they are), some elaboration may help the reader understand that subtopics could have been designated as stand-alone areas of study but were close enough in domain to be considered as similar. Since an a priori review of three volumes was undertaken, it should be specified that the prevalence of article topics did not influence the definition of topics, and new topics were added during the analysis. In other words, topics were defined based on their distinction from other topic areas, and those topics that received little attention were as likely to be included as a formal area of study as those receiving more (rather than being combined with another topic area or included as "Other"). The categorization of topic categories (as well as article types, above) was done in consultation with other experienced music educators. Members of a university graduate music education seminar were asked to provide feedback and their comments informed the identification and development process.

When articles addressed two topic areas, one was chosen to be the primary topic, based on its treatment in the title and/or the literature that the author referenced. These were the topics used to categorize each article:

1. *Student teaching*: all article types/methodologies with ‘ student teaching’ as the primary subject matter
2. *Teacher preparation and curriculum*: includes study of teacher characteristics, behaviors and attitudes that lead to developing these qualities in future teachers; also includes subjects like methods courses (including field experiences) and teacher certification and their role in teacher education programs
3. *Collaborative, cooperative, or cross-disciplinary learning, including keywords like “integrated curricula”*: describes teaching/learning that was at one time considered nontraditional
4. *Specific teaching methods, techniques, approaches, and standards*: includes each of these even when they are sometimes referred to as a curriculum
5. *Professional matters*: advocacy and arts education in schools, the state of the arts, practical concerns like scheduling, continuing education like professional development and national board certification, music teacher identity
6. *Assessment of K–12 school students*
7. *Assessment of preservice (before or during student teaching) or in-service teachers*
8. *Teacher reflection and self-evaluation*
9. *Beginning teacher issues, including retention and mentoring issues*: For example, an article on a mentoring program discussed in the context of teacher certification has the role of mentoring as its primary purpose and is placed here rather than above
10. *Cross-cultural topics, multiculturalism, cultural diversity*
11. *Classroom management*
12. *Music repertoire, including selection topics and articles recommending music literature*
13. *Special learners*
14. *Other*: articles not directly related to music teacher education, such as (a) an instructional approach for improving literature reviews for dissertations, (b) the development of learning college Teaching Assistant roles, (c) inappropriate teacher conduct among one state’s music teachers, and (d) collegiate job postings in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Results

The journal has published two issues per volume and one volume per academic year since 1991. All issues were reviewed from Issue 1 in Volume 1 in 1991 to Issue 2 in Volume 20 in 2011, and it should be noted that given the static nature of the data, no reliability testing was performed for this study. There were 41 “Introductions/From the Chair” columns and 39 “Commentaries/From the Editor” columns in a total of 282 entries. The remaining 202 entries were articles reviewed for this analysis. Table 1 shows the frequency of article types.

Table 1. Frequency of Article Type

Article Type	Frequency	Percentage
Research report	70	34.7
Applied/professional	64	31.7
Speculative	27	13.4
Book review	18	8.9
Review of literature	9	4.5
Critical	6	3.0
History of music education or music teacher education	5	2.5
History of an event	3	1.5
Total	202	100.2 ^a

a. Percentages do not total to 100 because of rounding.

Table 2. Frequency of Article Topics: Historical and Conceptual

Topic	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher education curriculum	24	58.5
Teaching methods, techniques	5	12.2
Music teachers in schools	3	7.3
Cross-cultural or multiculturalism	2	4.9
Student teaching	1	2.4
Assessment of pre-/in-service teachers	1	2.4
Classroom management	1	2.4
Music repertoire	1	2.4
Special learners	1	2.4
Other	2	4.9
Total	41	99.8 ^a

a. Percentages do not total to 100 because of rounding.

Table 2 shows the frequency of article topics from those articles coded as histories (*History of an event*, *History of music education/music teacher education*) or as conceptual (*Critical* and *Speculative* articles). Of these 41 articles, 24 were coded as teacher preparation curriculum. Articles in this category included specific subjects like curricula, including methods courses and teacher characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes. Discussions of field experiences as a part of methods coursework were included here, with the exception of student teaching, which normally occurs after the completion of a sequence of methods courses and as a full-time endeavor. Teacher certification was included here as a part of coursework preparation. The second most frequent topic was teaching methods, which included methods, techniques, approaches, and school curriculum as opposed to university curriculum and included standards-based

Table 3. Frequency of Article Topics: Applied

Topic	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher education curriculum	32	50.0
Collaborative learning	7	10.9
Reflection or self-evaluation	6	9.4
Assessment of pre-/in-service teachers	5	7.8
Beginning teacher issues	3	4.7
Cross-cultural or multiculturalism	3	4.7
Music teachers in schools	2	3.1
Other	2	3.1
Student teaching	1	1.6
Teaching methods, techniques	1	1.6
Assessment of music students	1	1.6
Music repertoire	1	1.6
Total	64	100.1 ^a

a. Percentages do not total to 100 because of rounding.

curriculum. There were no historical or conceptual article types that were coded in the article topics of collaborative learning, assessment of music students, reflection, or beginning teacher issues.

Table 3 shows the frequency of article topics from those articles coded as Applied. Again, the most frequent topic by far was teacher education curriculum, followed by collaborative learning, which includes cooperative teaching and cross-disciplinary foci. Integrated curricula topics were categorized as collaborative learning rather than as teaching methods and techniques. No Applied articles addressed classroom management or special learners.

On the entries coded as Research Reports or Reviews of Literature, articles about the teacher education curriculum appeared most frequently (Table 4). With the exception of one Conceptual article (see Table 2), the only articles on special learners were Research Reports or Reviews of Literature. Most articles about music teachers in schools were also Research Reports or Reviews of Literature. The music teachers in schools topic included articles on the topics of advocacy, rationales, practical concerns (e.g., scheduling), continuing education (e.g., professional development or national board certification), and music teacher identity. None of these articles included the topics of collaborative learning, assessment of music students, or music repertoire.

Research Reports were further classified into three broad methodological subcategories: Descriptive, Qualitative, and Experimental/Behavioral. The majority of these research techniques were descriptive (Table 5).

I further analyzed the content of book reviews ($n = 18$; Table 6). Six of the 12 topics defined for this analysis were the focus of the books on music education or music teacher education. Those topics not addressed by book reviews were student teaching,

Table 4. Frequency of Article Topics: Research Reports and Reviews of Literature

Topic	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher education curriculum	27	34.2
Music teachers in schools	15	19.0
Reflection or self-evaluation	7	8.9
Beginning teacher issues	7	8.9
Student teaching	6	7.6
Other	5	6.3
Special learners	4	5.1
Assessment of pre-/in-service teachers	3	3.8
Teaching methods, techniques	2	2.5
Cross-cultural or multiculturalism	2	2.5
Classroom management	1	1.3
Total	79	100.1 ^a

a. Percentages do not total to 100 because of rounding.

Table 5. Methodology Frequency for Research Reports

Methodology	Frequency	Percentage
Descriptive	50	71.4
Qualitative	19	27.1
Experimental/behavioral	1	1.4
Total	70	99.9 ^a

a. Percentages do not total to 100 because of rounding.

Table 6. Frequency of Article Topics: Book Reviews

Topic	Frequency	Percentage
Teaching methods, techniques	9	50.0
Teacher education curriculum	2	11.1
Beginning teacher issues	2	11.1
Other	2	11.1
Collaborative learning	1	5.6
Music teachers in schools	1	5.6
Cross-cultural or multiculturalism	1	5.6
Total	18	100.1 ^a

a. Percentages do not total to 100 because of rounding.

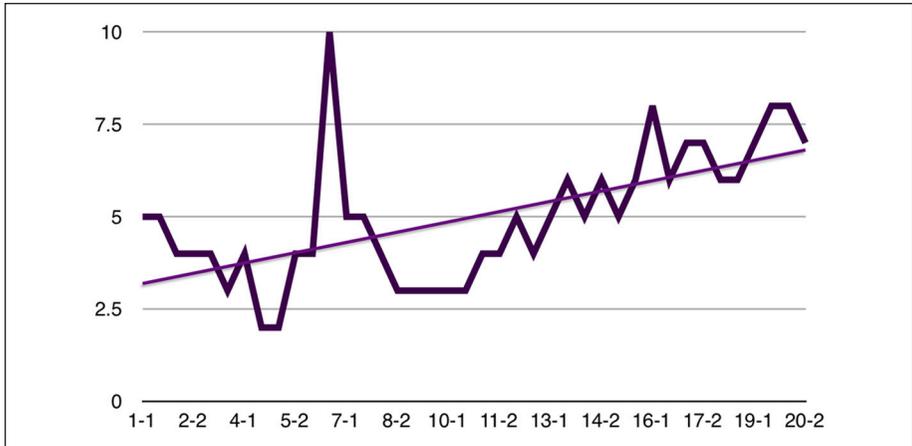


Figure 1. Publication count by volume-issue (1991–2011)

assessment of music students, assessment of pre-/in-service teachers, reflection/self-evaluation, classroom management, music repertoire, and special learners.

The number of published articles has increased from an average of four articles per issue in the first four volumes to an average of seven articles per issue in the four most recent volumes (Figure 1). Volume 12 in 2003 marked the introduction of qualitative methods of inquiry in research reports with the inclusion of a report on electronic forms of teacher portfolios (Berg & Lind, 2003) and in the same issue an introduction to story and narrative inquiry (Conway, 2003). If action research articles had been included here in Research Reports, rather than with other Applied articles, qualitative methods could have been considered to be introduced much earlier, as these often used qualitative-type methods for analyzing and describing the effectiveness of teaching one's own students. The early 2000s generally marked a shift toward a balance of Research Reports with other article types, whereas early issues had fewer reports of empirical evidence (Figure 2). The greatest number of articles published in an issue was in Volume 6, Issue 2, following the 1996 Retreat for Choral Music Education, where speakers were invited to submit proceedings in the *JMTE*. I decided to keep this issue in the Publication Count chart, rather than to omit its special occurrence, and added a linear trend line to assist the reader.

Finally, frequencies of topics were not similar across article types. Research Reports generally addressed different topics than did Applied articles, which addressed different topics than did Conceptual articles, which suggests that some methods have been more useful than others in answering specific questions or at least that researchers tend to address particular topics with certain methods. Specifically, occurrences of Conceptual and Applied articles decreased to make way for research reports in recent volumes, as indicated in the single-line graphs for each article type in Figure 3.

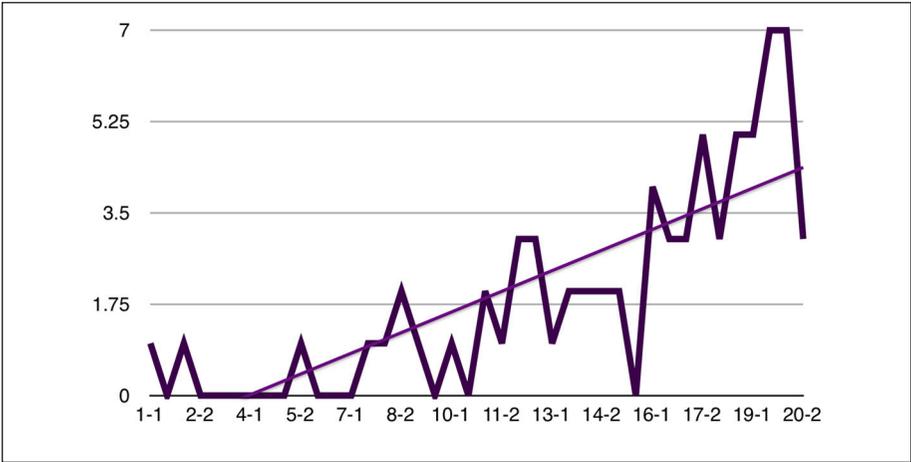


Figure 2. Research report count by volume-issue (1991–2011)

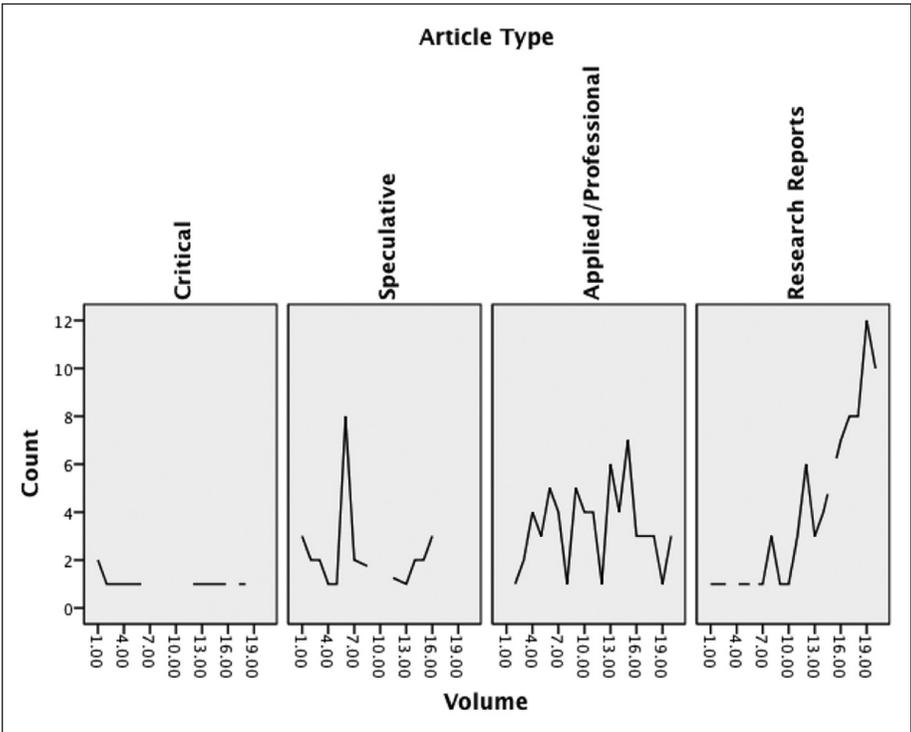


Figure 3. Line graphs of specified article type counts

Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to analyze the content of the first 20 years of the *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 1991–2011. The role and eminence of the journal were topics of many columns written by the editor or by the Chair of the Society, though the analysis of these columns was outside the scope of this effort. An attempt was made to categorize each article by type/methodology and by topic. Admittedly, the categorization of ideas and activities in any endeavor is challenging at best. For example, the decision to include action research as Applied articles was influenced by a perceived emphasis from authors on the practical nature of their work, often with their own students. These Applied/Professional articles perhaps indicate the commitment of the profession to improve actual teaching and learning in schools and in universities. They are an important source of instructional strategies that can perhaps directly and immediately enhance teaching and learning in schools.

The acceptance and publication of various article types have exposed the readership to a wide range of methodologies designed to address the challenges inherent in preparing future teachers. As a vehicle for communication but also for knowledge dissemination, the journal has increased its output of research reports. The *JMTE* has contributed greatly to the profession by advancing critical, speculative/visionary, applied, and literature review articles (however we may each refer to them), and the profession would conceivably benefit from a continued balance of these article types. The *JMTE* fills a unique role considering its historically prolific inclusion of action research articles that communicate evolving and improving teaching practices to members of this professional niche, as this analysis demonstrated.

While research reports on classroom management and special learners were identified in this analysis, no Applied articles were published on these two topics, which is surprising given the long-term attention to classroom management in education. Music teacher educators will recognize both of these topics as regular chapters in music method textbooks. Relatively few articles documented a history of the profession and no biographies were found, which reinforces the importance of the columns written by the editor and the chair for communicating a history of professional activities and interests with the journal's audience. Articles labeled "Perspectives" by the journal described topics about which there were contrasting views, often presented by two articles side-by-side. Used primarily in the earlier years of the journal, these "Perspectives" declined as the journal grew in number of articles per issue.

This analysis demonstrates *JMTE*'s relevance to teacher educators regardless of their specific niche as choral or instrumental ensemble directors, studio teachers, and others. That teacher educators come from various performance or academic backgrounds raises the following question: How can the SMTE increase exposure to these useful articles to educators from all specialties, and specifically to those who are not members of the SMTE? Teacher educators can be active in multiple instructional subjects, and certainly some may read other journals than the *JMTE*. Others may subscribe to associations and journals related to performance, theory, or musicology, for

example. Perhaps “research highlights” columns in other journals could be expanded to include *JMTE* since so many *JMTE* articles included topics that concern practicing teachers, such as curriculum and professional issues.

As indicated by the content of the journal, the articles contained therein are remarkably relevant to all those who have a stake in music learning: school practitioners, teacher educators, music education researchers, and arts philosophers. The authors of these articles identify problems facing music educators, and more important, they identify a profession addressing those problems in order to enhance music learning for K–12 students. This professional communication in the form of the *JMTE* reinforces music as a vital part of the general curriculum. As such, the journal complements the mission of the SMTE as described in the introduction to this article: to serve the interests of music teacher education.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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