Phelps’ Guide to Research in Music Education has been a standard in American institutions for years. The first edition came out in 1969, and a lot has happened since. Also to this book, where Phelps brings in support from his esteemed colleagues, most notably Lawrence Ferrara. The latter takes care of two tricky chapters, about ‘Qualitative Research’ and ‘Philosophical Inquiry’. It is unusual to include a chapter on philosophical inquiry in any guide or handbook, and the decision to do so is an interesting one. It reflects the need for a more reflective and above all conceptual approach to music and music education.

A new edition of Phelps’ standard book and the complete revision of the text are not surprising in an age where research is gaining ground in the education programmes for future music teachers. ‘Not only’, argues Phelps, ‘can these students expand their knowledge and receive intellectual stimulation, but they also will have had some practical research experience should they eventually pursue a doctorate’ (p. 9). Two things are immediately apparent in this argument. First, the written thesis is the start, middle and end of every research. In this book, notions of reflective and/or reflexive practice, the enquiring practitioner, and performance as research are not addressed as means of intellectual stimulation. Second, research at Master level must be seen as a preparation for the real stuff – a doctorate.

**Americanness**

In the US a doctorate would be the logical step to take: it is a prerequisite for obtaining tenure or rising within the ranks of an institution. Students in the US usually see the Master’s as a transitional step to the doctorate rather than an expansion or further development of their Bachelor’s. This focus on the American Way is something that is apparent in every chapter of the Guide. Chapter One for example, ‘Selecting a Research Problem’, is crammed with references to American institutions, sources and the way the system (in the US) works. This makes the book a little less applicable to students outside the US.

The other consequence of the ‘Americanness’ of the book is more substantial, and although it will not exclude many potential users of the Guide, it should be noted. As Harry Price already observed in *Mapping Music Education Research in the USA*, research in the US tends to focus on classroom or ensemble management or ensemble conducting. Likewise, classroom teaching is the focus of Phelps’ book, with side-steps to one-on-one instrumental teaching. Other forms of educational practice (e.g. group learning or peer education, mentoring, community arts practice, to name but a few) receive only little attention.

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Harry Price also notes that US research so far has been deficit of philosophical inquiry. This at least has no correlation to the Guide; Chapter 4, by Lawrence Ferrara, deals with ‘Philosophical Inquiry: Concepts and Techniques’. It is the core of the book, and it is useful in more than one way. It provides the main target group of the book, graduate students, with a handy overview of philosophical approaches to research: logical positivism, rationalism, postmodernism, and realism. The brief explanations are to the point and will give students a much needed foothold as they grapple with specialist literature and academic discussions. This will help them get more out of journals and conferences than tips and tricks for in the classroom. The use of logic as a tool in philosophical inquiry receives special attention in the paragraph about logical positivism. Phenomenology, hermeneutic inquiry, and experimental research are discussed within the framework of postmodernism. The chapter also provides students with an insight into how academic debate takes form.

**Positivists are so yesterday**

An interesting part of Chapter 4 consists of the first eight pages, in which Ferrara takes on the big question: Is philosophical inquiry research? Ferrara explains, of course, that it is indeed. In the paragraph ‘The Status of Philosophical Inquiry’, he makes his point by expounding how philosophical inquiry informs the underlying principles and theory in any field, and by pointing out how ‘professionals who demand that research methods in music education must be empirically based, miss the rich possibilities of the juxtaposition of philosophical with traditional research methods’ (p. 122). However, despite the many arguments that he brings in to support his view, Ferrara’s explanation consists mainly of an attack on the article ‘Maintaining Quality in Research and Reporting’ by Jack J. Heller and Edward J.P. O’Connor in The New Handbook of Research on Music Education.

According to Ferrara the Handbook takes an old-fashioned positivist view and therefore dismisses philosophical inquiry as research. While research in science has moved on beyond positivism, argues Ferrara, research in music education should do the same. ‘A realist philosophy of science provides a much more fluid sense of scientific practice, method, and theory construction than in the positivistic vision. Why then should research in music education be delimited to a positivistic vision of research that is not representative of scientific inquiry?’ (p. 126). In his response to Ferrara, Heller takes down the positivist outlook of his Handbook and (almost tartly) observes that even Ferrara does not go so far as to call it philosophical research. Thus the book also provides students with a valuable insight into the ways of academic literature: attack and response in relation to theory and methodology. Another skill to master as an oncoming academic.

**Meaning**

One of the more striking observations in the first pages of Chapter 4, however, does not concern positivists or realists, but consists of an almost oblique reference to meaning:

‘Furthermore, human actions, which constitute music education and are objects of study in traditional and non-traditional research designs, are meaningful. Therefore research in music education must merge understanding of meaningful human actions with (traditional) causal explanation in order to generate insightful and useful results’ (p. 123).

It seems a shame that this elemental aspect of music and music education, meaning, does not receive more attention in the ensuing chapter. It may be what makes art art, what makes music more than sounds stringed together. Even when Ferrara touches upon tacit knowledge and understanding as propagated by Michael Polanyi, the issue of meaning does not arise.

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4 Michael Polanyi, The Tacit Dimension, Garden City, N.Y. 1967
This seems striking, since in his earlier work, Ferrara demonstrates that each method of musical analysis confines musical significance to a single level. He devises an ‘eclectic method’ that provides bridges for musical sound, form and reference. In response to the multiplicity of levels of musical significance, Ferrara’s eclectic method draws upon a wide-ranging number of conventional and nonconventional approaches to musical analysis, resulting in a dialectic of methods.  

Although the same can be said about the chapter in the Guide, it is unclear why he does not give this appealing notion more emphasis.

Other chapters
With Chapter 4 at the heart of the book, one would almost forget that there is more to life than philosophical inquiry. The set-up of the Guide makes sense. The first two chapters are spent on selecting a research topic and problem. Chapters 3 to 7 are dedicated to concepts and techniques of respectively qualitative research, philosophical inquiry, nonexperimental research, quantitative research, and historical research. Chapter 8 deals with technology in music education research.

After the obligatory reference to a changing world after 9/11, Chapter 1, ‘Selecting a Research Problem’, starts with definitions and concepts of research and categories of music education research. Seven pages are spent on how degree programmes in the US have expanded, and on distinctions between D.A., D.M.A., Mus.Doc., D.M.E., Ph.D. and Ed.D. Gripping stuff for specialists surely. More helpful is the way Phelps guides the reader in overcoming the first challenge, the Great Blank that every researcher faces at the start of research. He spends the first two chapters describing and discussing the five steps of the research process: choosing a topic, formulating a research problem, developing procedures to solve the problem, successfully implementing these procedures, and carefully interpreting the results. Effectively, Chapter 2 deals with setting up a research plan that will serve as a proposal within an institution.

Lawrence Ferrara was also heavily involved in Chapter 3, about ‘Qualitative Research’. It is an interesting chapter with many useful pointers for starting researchers. The only problem is that the distinction with Chapter 5, ‘Nonexperimental research’, by Roger Phelps, is not clear. The latter is mostly an overview of kinds of studies and tools, while the preceding Chapter 3 is a more in-depth explanation of how particular strategies and techniques are implemented. Practical pointers about how to perform an interview go hand in hand with ethical considerations concerning participant observation. It is almost as if Phelps found it hard to forge the two approaches by two authors into a single chapter and decided to make them into two chapters instead.

Chapter 4 has already been discussed above. Chapter 6, ‘Quantitative Research’, is short and to the point. Chapter 7, ‘Historical Research’, is riddled with recommendations for handbooks and exemplary studies. Far most of the examples in this chapter are about American music and American (musical) history. This is a welcome deviation from the Bach and Beethoven normally found in text books. It also contains a fairly long description of one of Phelps’ own studies as an example of external criticism.

Chapter 8 is the last chapter, and the odd one out. It does not focus on concepts and techniques, but on technology for acquiring and processing data and information. Why this chapter, written with Ronald H. Sadoff and Edward C. Warburton, was added separately, is a mystery. The use of computers for data management, analysis and writing (!), implementing computers in the classroom, MIDI, music software and digital instruments – for today’s graduate students these are hardly different from other means and tools in music education and research. The frequent mention throughout the book of the Internet as an additional source of information will probably also puzzle students. Nowadays this is where every query begins in the first place.

Lawrence Ferrara, Philosophy and the Analysis of Music: Bridges to Musical Sound, Form, and Reference, New York 1991. The quote is from the cover text.
Conclusion
The fifth edition of Phelps’ *A Guide to Research in Music Education* has some clear viewpoints when it comes to philosophical underpinning of research and its place in the education of musicians and music teachers. University and college teachers looking for a good textbook should familiarize themselves with these viewpoints before deciding to use it. Additional guidance concerning the recent state of events of music education research is also a must. The fifth edition has been updated and links up with recent events concerning research in higher music education, but there is little room for general theories that currently hold ground. For example, David Elliott’s concept of ‘musicking’ within the praxial philosophy of music education receives only passing attention in the paragraph about using computers in the music classroom (p. 249). This kind of notion is just as valuable to researchers as are tips about the construction of an interview or what postmodernism can do for you. A joint implementation of the *Guide* and compulsory reading and discussion of specialist literature could do the trick. Then, in Phelp’s words, ‘research need not be something to dread; it even can be fun!’ (p. 19).

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6 Elliott places the ‘praxis’ of music making itself (‘musicking’) at the centre of his philosophy, an approach which he terms *praxial* (Elliott, D. *Music Matters – A New Philosophy of Music Education*, New York 1995). Placing the music MAKING at the centre of philosophy and reasoning, has implications for any research in music education.