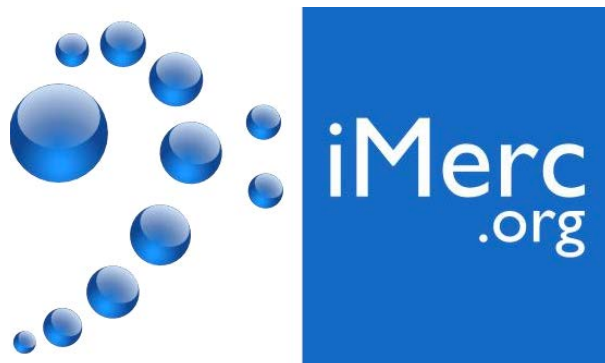




UCL iMerc Newsletter — Vol. 20, November 2025

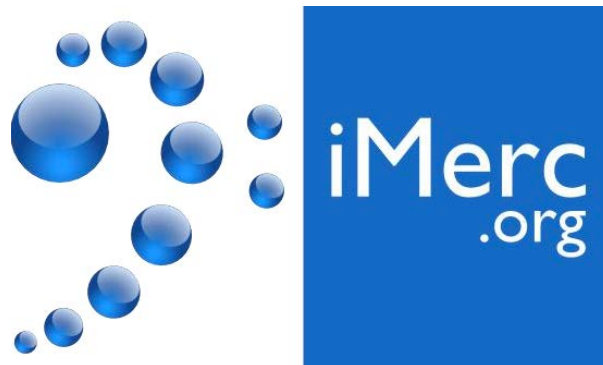
About us

Over the past 20 years, we have been developing the International Music Education Research Centre (iMerc) at the UCL Institute of Education to celebrate and disseminate our extensive research in the field of music education, broadly conceived. In the beginning, we often held our research seminars over several days, such as in different European cities to allow our doctoral students to have more intensive support as a community, to listen to local researchers, and to share their ongoing research journeys. These 'Travelling Research Seminars' visited Ireland (Limerick), Spain (Barcelona), Italy (Bologna) and Sweden (Malmö) and helped us to establish our international profile. With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, we have been meeting more regularly, both online and in person, to continue to share new research and insights related to diverse topics in music education. We are a group of researchers at doctoral and post-doctoral levels, as well as senior researchers, with a shared curiosity and interest in advancing basic and applied research. In line with our mission, the monthly seminars continue to foster a sense of shared endeavour amongst colleagues who are based in the UK, across mainland Europe (such as Portugal, Germany, Greece, Skandinavia), Asia (China, including Hong Kong), Latin America, USA and Australia. Opportunity is taken each month to be informed of research news and various current

research projects, including opportunities to listen to the latest research from our invited speakers. If you would like to know more or to join us, please contact us.

Our upcoming SEMPRES Student Study Day will take place on **Wednesday, 26 November 2025**, 11am-2pm GMT via Zoom and in room 938 at the IOE, featuring a range of engaging doctoral presentations. We are pleased to invite you to join us online [HERE](#) or in person. Everyone is welcome!

In This Issue



1 - Credit: iMerc

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Previous UCL iMerc Research Seminar, 29 October 2025



2 - From left to right: Ben Sellers, Dr David Thorarinn Johnson, Dr Pia Bygdeus, Eunice Tang and Dr Regina Saltari

Dr Pia Bygdeus & Dr David Johnson: Sångkvart: Assessing the Impact of Daily Singing in Primary School Education

Dr Pia Bygdeus (pia.bygdeus@musikaliskaakademien.se) and Dr David Johnson (David.Thorarinn.Johnson@hvl.no) presented findings from their study on the role of daily singing in primary school education. They outlined how group singing has long been central to music teaching across the Nordic region, yet has become less prominent in recent decades, prompting new national initiatives in Sweden, Norway and Denmark to revive the practice. Pia and David described their investigation of a five-week daily singing intervention implemented in four randomly selected Swedish primary schools (N=250, ages 8-10). Each class received a 15-minute singing session led by their music teacher, who designed lessons using an evidence-based framework for high-quality vocal pedagogy. Findings highlighted that the daily singing routine not only improved pupils' musical learning but also helped strengthen relationships between students and teachers.

Singing, health and well-being in school – a societal matter

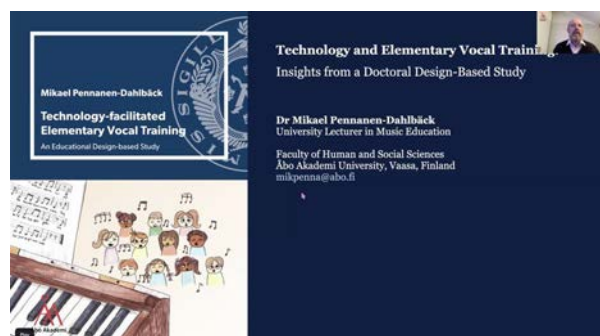
Interdisciplinary study
examining connections between
daily singing, language,
cognitive and social
development, and well-being



3 - Presentation Cover Slide Credits: Dr Pia Bygdeus & Dr David Thorarinn Johnson

Dr Mikael Pennanen-Dahlbäck: Technology and Elementary Vocal Training: Insights from a Doctoral Design-Based Study

Dr Mikael Pennanen-Dahlbäck (mikpenna@abo.fi) presented key insights from his doctoral research on developing and testing a technology-supported vocal training programme for young children. His work responded to concerns about declining singing skills among Finnish primary pupils and the limited confidence many classroom teachers feel in teaching singing. He described the creation of animated video-based exercises for Year 2 pupils and an educational design research process involving two classroom intervention cycles with a test and control group. Data included expert assessments of children's singing, self-efficacy questionnaires, and teacher and pupil feedback. The iterative approach allowed the training materials to be refined between rounds. Mikael reported that the technology-based programme supported children's vocal development, with stronger gains in the test group and some gender-specific response patterns. He noted the small sample size and emphasised the need for teacher involvement, especially in more demanding aspects of vocal training. He concluded with reflections on blending technology and pedagogy, the practical realities of school-based design research, and considerations for future work in music education. The full thesis is available online at: <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-389-095-4>

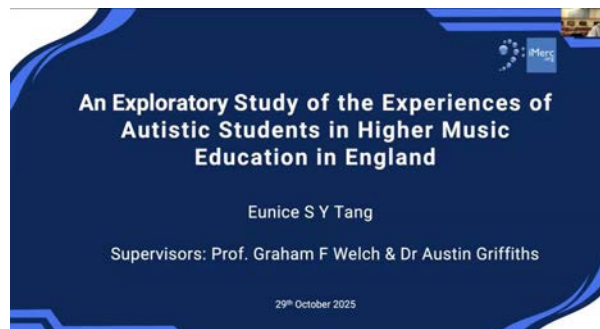


4 - Presentation Cover Slide Credit: Dr Mikael Pennanen-Dahlbäck

Eunice S Y Tang: An Exploratory Study of the Experiences of Autistic Students in Higher Music Education in England

Eunice S Y Tang (eunice.tang@ucl.ac.uk) presented her doctoral research on the experiences of autistic students in UK Higher Music Education, addressing a significant gap in current

scholarship. She noted the sharp rise in disability disclosure in music programmes, yet highlighted that autistic students' perspectives remain largely unheard. Using narrative inquiry, Eunice analysed four student accounts and conducted interviews with twelve disability officers across Higher Music Education Institutions. Her findings showed that autistic music students possess distinctive strengths alongside notable challenges, but that existing disability support, often reactive, generic, and diagnosis-dependent, does not fully meet their needs or recognise their capabilities. To address these shortcomings, Eunice introduced two new frameworks: Framework I: Strengths-Based Autism Inclusion (Theory & Design) in Higher Music Education (SBAI-TD-HME) and Framework II: Strengths-Based Autism Inclusion (Practice & Pedagogy) in Higher Music Education (SBAI-PP-HME). The study calls for a shift away from deficit-oriented provision toward subject-specific, strengths-based approaches that value the contributions of autistic and other neurodivergent musicians. Eunice concluded by emphasising the need for more responsive, sustainable, and strengths-focused inclusion practices that can enrich both student learning and institutional culture.



5 - Presentation Cover Slide Credit: Eunice S Y Tang

Shout at Cancer: A Decade of Voices Reclaimed – Louder than Before



6 - Credit: Professor Evangelos Himonides



7 - Credit: Professor Evangelos Himonides



8 - Credit: Professor Evangelos Himonides

On Sun 26 Oct, at King's Place (<https://www.kingsplace.co.uk/whats-on/contemporary/shout-at-cancer-presents-louder-than-before>) Shout at Cancer marked a powerful milestone – ten years of transforming lives through music, helping individuals rediscover their voices and rebuild confidence after undergoing a laryngectomy. The landmark concert celebrated resilience, innovation, and the unbreakable human spirit.

The founder of Shout at Cancer, Dr Thomas Moors, and Professor Evangelos Himonides (e.himonides@ucl.ac.uk) have been collaborating on various related projects for over a decade. One of their projects received the Provost's Award for Public Engagement (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/news/2020/oct/ioe-and-shout-cancer-project-wins-public-engagement-award>)

Having previously performed at prestigious venues such as the Royal Opera House London, Amsterdam Opera, V&A, Barbican, and Bozar Brussels, and honoured by both the Prime Minister and The Queen, the internationally acclaimed choir once again captivated audiences and media alike.

The concert offered a deeply emotional journey into the psychosocial impact of laryngectomy through:

- Musical storytelling
- Poetry and new compositions
- A groundbreaking laryngectomy vocal tract organ (created by Professor David Howard, UCL Alumnus and Emeritus Professor of Electronics Engineering at Royal Holloway, University of London), created using MRI scans of choir members (led by Professor Sophie Scott, UCL Brain Sciences and Professor Fred Dick, UCL BUCNI)
- A stunning collaboration with the award-winning Die Verdammte Spielerei Saxophone Band

For this special performance, Professor Himonides crafted the stage and furniture for the Vocal Tract Organ using IOE CCM's new Crafting Sustainabilities Lab (<https://craftingsustainabilities.org>) facilities, hosted at the UCL Knowledge Lab, with a focus on using repurposed and/or sustainably sourced materials. Blending science, art, and human perseverance, the performance demonstrated that the voice is more than sound- it is identity, connection, and strength. This unforgettable production was made possible with public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England, Atos Medical and the The Delegation of Flanders to the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Call for Joining: The Frances Clark Center 2026 Research Study Groups



9 - Credit: The Frances Clark Center



10 - Credit: Charlene Ryan, Cynthia Stephens-Himonides, and Margaret Young

The Research Study Groups are interactive and dynamic groups intended for people interested in research and its applications to teaching and performing. The groups will meet once a month between January and June. Each group will be moderated and guided by researchers and teachers Charlene Ryan, Cynthia Stephens-Himonides, and Margaret Young. Participants can choose between two interest tracks:

1. Research-informed teaching and performing. This track is intended for teachers, pianists and students who want to explore reflective practices in teaching and performance. These groups will introduce and discuss existing research and its

potential applications, with the goal of helping participants apply that research, and approach their teaching or performing with an inquiry-based mindset.

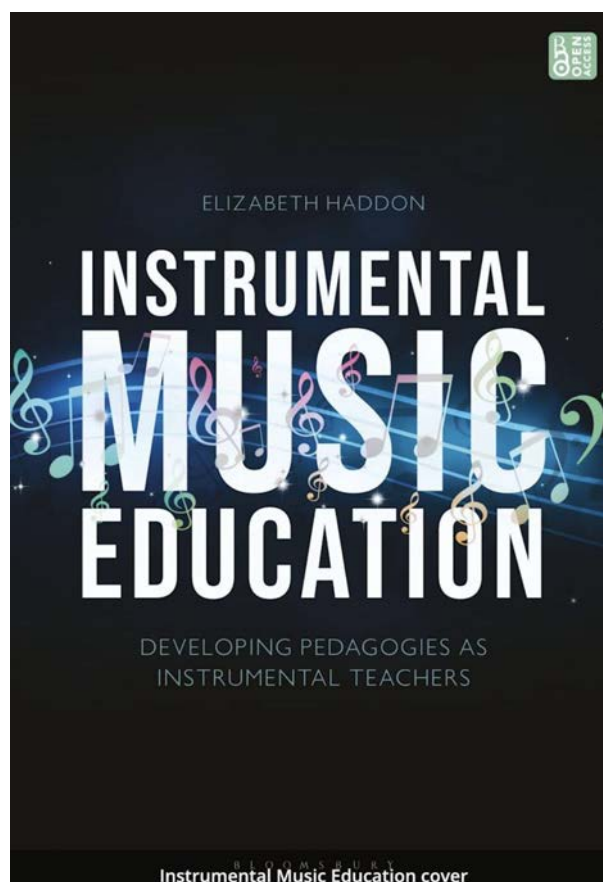
2. Research project incubator. The goal of this track is to offer mentoring, growth opportunities and collaboration opportunities to teachers, students, young professionals and emerging scholars interested in developing research projects. The discussion will focus on creating an effective research question, best ways to approach existing literature, choosing appropriate methodologies, collecting and analyzing data, and writing and submitting manuscripts and presentation/poster proposals. This track is intended for people with research interest, those with research ideas/questions, and researchers engaged in projects in early stages. Space is limited.

To register for these study groups, please fill out the following form by November 30, 2025:

<https://form.jotform.com/252883185767069>

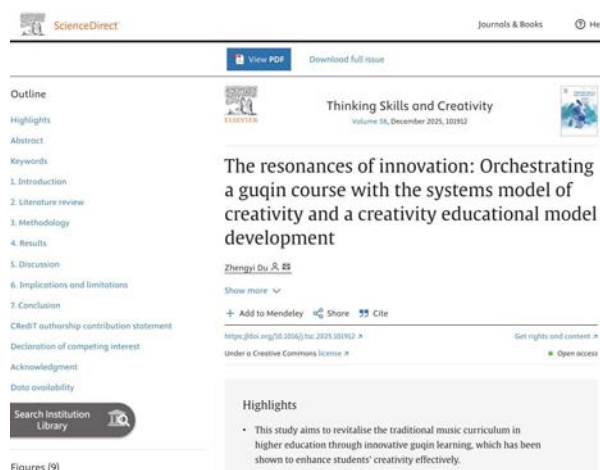
Frances Clark Center, a not-for-profit educational organization 501(c)(3) that serves the advancement of piano teaching, learning, and performing through highest quality resources and programs.

Newly Published: Instrumental Music Education



The new book, [Instrumental Music Education](#), is published on 13 November 2025 by Bloomsbury. This is the work of Dr Elizabeth Haddon, colleagues and students at the University of York, UK, and it has sprung from their research and many discussions about varied aspects of their work as instrumental teachers, thus being grounded in relevant, global pedagogical practice while also involving research and scholarship. There's some truly unique chapters in this volume that the scholars hope will spark further ideas, new research and conversations across countries and cultures between teachers, students, parents and researchers. They are delighted to offer an extra discount using the code GLR BD8 - please have a look at the [preview](#) (showing the prelim pages, introduction and first chapter) and the attached flyer. For any questions, or to share your feedback on the book, please contact Dr Elizabeth Haddon at liz.haddon@york.ac.uk.

Newly Published: The resonances of innovation: Orchestrating a guqin course with the systems model of creativity and a creativity educational model development



12 - Credit: Zhengyi Du

A new open-access article by Zhengyi Du (zhengyi.du.20@ucl.ac.uk) has been published in *Thinking Skills and Creativity*: “The resonances of innovation: Orchestrating a guqin course with the systems model of creativity and a creativity educational model development.” The qualitative case study followed a 16-week university guqin course (N = 11) and reports gains in students’ creative thinking and transferable skills, alongside positive shifts in motivation, self-efficacy, and well-being. The paper also proposes a systems model of creativity tailored to traditional music education. Zhengyi Du welcomes inquiries from anyone interested in this paper or in creativity and traditional music education more broadly.

Du, Z. (2025). The Resonances of Innovation: Orchestrating a Guqin Course with the Systems Model of Creativity and a Creativity Educational Model Development. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 101912. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2025.101912>

Call for Participants: Bodily and Emotional Engagement in Musical Experience



13 - Credits: University of York and Dr Andrea Schiavio

Dr Andrea Schiavio (andrea.schiavio@york.ac.uk) is inviting volunteers to take part in a research study exploring how physical engagement, movement, dance or even the urge to move, influences emotional experience when listening to music. The study is open to anyone with an interest in music and the research team is particularly interested in building a diverse, international dataset.

The survey is open to anyone with an interest in music, and we are especially keen to build a diverse, international group of respondents. Participation involves completing a short, anonymous online questionnaire featuring a mix of open and closed questions. The survey takes approximately 20–25 minutes.

Take part here: https://york.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6Msl1LC3Z3okOeq?Q_CHL=qr

SEMPRE Student Study Day, 26 November 2025



**Sempre
Student Study
Day**

**26
NOV
2025**

Rm 938, iMerc,
UCL Institute of
Education
20 Bedford Way,
London WC1H 0AL

Opening

11:00–11:12AM 1. Breaking the Binary: Teacher Perspective on AI in Music Classroom in Germany and South Korea, Madlen Poguntke (Hochschule für Musik und Theater)

11:12–11:24AM 2. Musical Composition and Artificial Intelligence: An Exploration into the Creative Capabilities of AI as a Collaborator within Higher Education, Tamara Elmes (University of Hull)

11:24–11:36AM 3. Music, Mood, and the Self, Shannon Skeffington (Oxford Brookes University)

11:36–11:48AM 4. Investigating the Role of Music Listening in the Lives of Individuals Experiencing Psychosis, Mark Rowles (Royal College of Music)

11:48–12:00PM 5. Is Song a Super Stimulus for Infant Language Learning? An Intervention Study, Alice Bowmer (Goldsmiths, University of London)

Zoom link: <https://ucl.zoom.us/j/93010291690>
Website: <https://sempre.org.uk/conference/sempre-student-study-day/>




Sempre
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Day

26
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12:00– 12:12PM	Break
12:12– 12:24PM	6. Exploring the Interplay of Culture, Self-Efficacy, and Music Performance Anxiety in Chinese and UK Music Students, Jiarui (Bella) Zhang (University of Edinburgh)
12:24– 12:36PM	7. The Development of Free Improvisation in Higher Music Education in the Early 21st Century, Xiaoqing Wu (University of Edinburgh)
12:36– 12:48PM	8. Smelly Music, Jon Paul Mayse (Guildhall School of Music and Drama)
12:48– 1:00PM	9. A Workshop Based Approach to Bridging Global Musical Practices with English Secondary School Classrooms, Catherine Lytle (UCL)
1:00– 1:12PM	Break

Zoom link: <https://ucl.zoom.us/j/93010291590>
 Website: <https://sempre.org.uk/conference/sempre-student-study-day/>

15 - Credit: SEMPRES




Sempre
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1:12– 1:24PM	10. Singing poems in second language learning: Can singing help learning Chinese classical poems for beginner to intermediate level mandarin speakers? Ziyang Cao (University of Edinburgh)
1:24– 1:36PM	11. Adolescence, Gender Identity, and Song Lyrics in the Portuguese Context: Exploring the Shaping of Gender Identity Perceptions and the Role of Education, Joana Maia (UCL)
1:36– 1:48PM	12. Music as the Main Tool to Improve Executive Functions in Early Childhood Education, Inés Soriano Monzó (ESMAR – Escuela Superior de Música de Alto Rendimiento)
1:48– 2:00PM	13. Loneliness and Choral Singing: Effects of Age-Related learning Impairment on Own-Voice Satisfaction in Amateur Choir Singing, Jessica Edgar (University of Oxford)
Closing	

Zoom link: <https://ucl.zoom.us/j/93010291590>
 Website: <https://sempre.org.uk/conference/sempre-student-study-day/>

16 - Credit: SEMPRES

We're delighted to share the programme for the Sempre Student Study Day, happening on **26 November 2025** at **Room 938, iMerc, IOE UCL, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL**.

This year's Autumn event showcases an exciting breadth of student-led research, reflecting the vibrancy and diversity of current work in music studies. Presentations will explore themes such as:

- Artificial intelligence in music education and composition
- Music, mood, and the self
- Psychosis and music listening
- Infant language learning through song
- Cross-cultural perspectives on performance anxiety
- Improvisation in higher music education
- Multisensory concert experiences
- Global musical practices in secondary schools
- Singing poems and second-language learning
- Adolescence, gender identity, and song lyrics
- Music and executive function in early childhood education
- Hearing impairment, loneliness, and choral singing

Full programme with abstracts available here: <https://sempre.org.uk/conference/sempre-student-study-day/>

Zoom link: <https://ucl.zoom.us/j/93010291590>

We look forward to welcoming participants to a day of inspiring scholarship and lively discussion!

Upcoming UCL iMerc Research Seminar

Please note that our next UCL iMerc research seminar will be on Wednesday, 21 January 2026, 11.00-1.00 GMT. Please mark this date on your diary. If you're interested in sharing your work, we'd love to hear from you. Please feel free to get in touch. Thank you for all your continued engagement!

13. Congratulations!



17 - Can Lu's Second daughter. Photo Credit: Can Lu

Warm Congratulations to Can Lu!

We are delighted to share the wonderful news that Can Lu (can.lu.16@alumni.ucl.ac.uk) has welcomed her second daughter! Our warmest wishes go to Can and her growing family as they celebrate this joyful new chapter.

Congratulations to Our Newly Successful PhD Candidates!

We are thrilled to celebrate the outstanding achievements of our PhD researchers who have recently passed their Viva examinations:

Lisa Carlin (l.carlin.16@ucl.ac.uk), supervised by Professor Graham Welch and Dr Sveta Mayer, with her thesis titled, *An exploration of university music students with dyslexia and/or dyscalculia and the possible impact on learning and musicianship: a mixed method approach*.

Eunice S. Y. Tang (eunice.tang@ucl.ac.uk), supervised by Professor Graham Welch and Dr Austin Griffiths, whose thesis is titled *An Exploratory Study of the Experiences of Autistic Students in Higher Music Education in England*.

Vicky Charisi (vcharisi@cyber.harvard.edu), supervised by Professor Evangelos Himonides and Professor Graham Welch, with her thesis *Digital Music-Making Processes and Interactions in Early Childhood: The Development of a Micro-Behavioural Framework*.

Warmest congratulations to each of them, and heartfelt thanks to everyone who supported their journeys along the way.

14. Contact Us

Visit us on the website at <https://www.imerc.org/>

Professor Graham Welch: graham.welch@ucl.ac.uk

Professor Evangelos Himonides: e.himonides@ucl.ac.uk

Ms Eunice Tang: eunice.tang@ucl.ac.uk