

UCL iMerc Newsletter — Vol. 31, November 2026

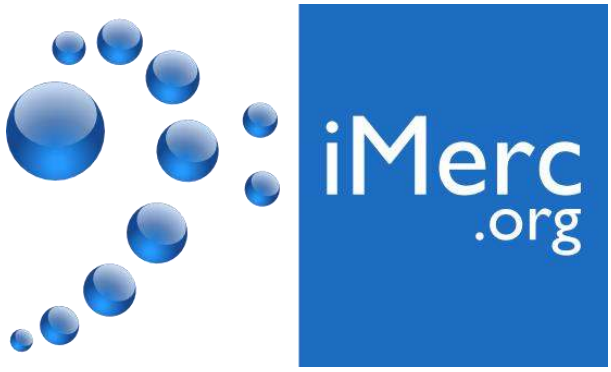
About us

Over the past 20+ years, we have been developing the International Music Education Research Centre (iMerc) at the UCL Institute of Education to nurture, celebrate and disseminate our extensive research in the field of music education, broadly conceived, and to hear about new research from colleagues elsewhere in the world. 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 and sense of community. 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, North America (including the 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 UCL iMerc Research Seminar will take place on **Wednesday, 25 November 2026**, 11am GMT via Zoom and, if you would like to come into London, in room 938 (9th floor), UCL Institute of Education. We are pleased to invite you to join us online HERE. Everyone is welcome!

In This Issue



1 - Credit: iMerc

1. *Previous UCL iMerc Research Seminar, 21 October 2026*
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Previous UCL iMerc Research Seminar, 21 October 2026



2 - From left to right: Dr Jiayi Wang, Bing Gao, Yunjie Wang, Sandra Oberoi, Professor Graham Welch, Ben Sellers, Dr Eunice Tang, Dan Wang, Baby Alexander Daniel Gao. Photo taken by Dr Gregory Boardman



3 - Credits: iMerc

Dr Jan Stupacher: Multiple pathways to social bonding through music

Dr Jan Stupacher (stupacher@clin.au.dk) presented and explored how music fosters social bonding beyond coordinated activities such as dancing or singing together. Drawing on research from music psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and social psychology, Jan and colleagues proposed a framework highlighting three pathways through which music brings people closer: coordinated movement, shared musical experiences, and imagined social connections during solitary listening. The presentation highlighted the psychological and neural mechanisms underlying these experiences, offering a broader understanding of how music strengthens social connections and opening new directions for future research.



4 - Credit: Dan Wang

Dan Wang: Place-based Enactment of Music Zhongkao: Urban-Rural Differences in School Practice

Dan Wang (dan.wang.20@ucl.ac.uk) shared her doctoral research on exploring how music teachers in urban and rural schools in Yancheng, China, responded to the introduction of computer-based music assessment in the high-stakes Music Zhongkao examination. Through interviews with eight teachers, Dan identified notable differences in how the policy was implemented, with rural schools benefiting from stronger collaboration and clearer accountability, while urban teachers faced challenges linked to academic priorities and limited professional exchange. Across both settings, insufficient preparation time, unequal resources, and limited access to assessment feedback presented further challenges. Dan's preliminary findings highlight the importance of equitable resources, supportive leadership, and teacher agency in ensuring effective music education assessment reforms.

Workshops: Graphic Scores: Art, Music and Parkinson



5 - Credits: Kings Place

Graphic Scores: Art, Music and Parkinson's' is the culmination of a series of creative workshops bringing together people with young-onset Parkinson's, professional musicians and visual artists. Over the course of the project, participants have been exploring their experiences through drawing, visual art and collaborative music-making, developing graphic scores that will be interpreted and performed live by an ensemble of professional musicians.

The evening will feature a performance of the music created through the project, alongside the visual artwork that inspired it. We hope the evening will be an inspiring and uplifting event, bringing together music, art, research and lived experience.

There will also be a drinks reception afterwards in the Rotunda Bar at King's Place, which will be a lovely opportunity to meet the participants, artists and musicians involved in the project.

Event details:

- Date: Saturday 28 November 2026
- Time: 6:30–7:30pm (doors open at 6pm), followed by a drinks reception
- Venue: Hall Two, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9AG

- Tickets: Free, but advance registration is required.

You can read more about the event here:

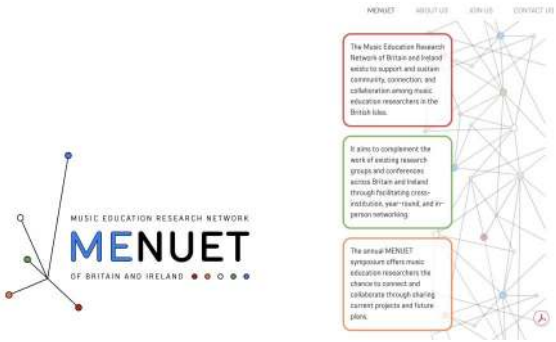
https://www.kingsplace.co.uk/whats-on/contemporary/graphic-scores-art-music-and-parkinsons/

And register for a free ticket here:

https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/s33q2TNxyn

The project is funded by Arts Council England and developed in collaboration with Parkinson's UK and King's Place.

New Launch: Music Education Research Network MENUET



6 - Credits: Dr Elizabeth MacGregor

A new Music Education Research Network, MENUET, is being launched to bring together music education researchers from across Britain and Ireland. The network aims to complement existing research groups and conferences by encouraging community, connection and collaboration among researchers at all career stages. To mark its launch, an inaugural symposium, MENUET27, will take place at the University of Leeds on Friday 9 and Saturday 10 April 2027. The event will provide an opportunity to connect and reconnect with colleagues, share current research and explore future collaborations. Music education researchers, including doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, are warmly encouraged to get involved HERE.

Contact: Dr Elizabeth MacGregor (E.H.MacGregor@leeds.ac.uk)

UCL iMerc Research Seminar, 25 November 2026

Guest Speakers: Dr David Thorarinn Johnson and Dr Pia Bygdeus

Topic: Singing, Health and Well-Being in School – A Societal Matter

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David and Pia's notes:

It is terrific for us to be able to keep in touch with the iMerc concerning our Swedish daily singing in schools (ages 8-9) study!

We are very happy to give you a little update here.

A total of nine scientific articles within the framework o f the research project, as well as one book chapter and an upcoming book.

The short summary is that we have four submitted publications out for review right now and three more drafts that are nearly ready to submit. Some of these seven articles (word definition and daily singing, body awareness and daily singing) report positive findings, two of them negative findings (narrative production/comprehension, vocal confidence). The article based on the paper Pia and David presented for the iMerc research team last autumn (October 2025) reports that daily singing was found to have a positive impact on music learning and on relationship building between teachers and students. Here is a short summary of the findings of each of the five articles (also attached in a word doc if that is more comfortable to read):

1. Implementation of daily singing

This study examines the development and implementation of a 15-minute daily singing activity. Results found daily singing facilitated musical learning, pupil enjoyment, and pupil–teacher relationships, and was particularly beneficial for less confident singers. Teachers further reported that the format was practical, well received, and preferable to weekly music lessons. Results suggest that daily classroom singing is a feasible and effective approach that may support the development of evidence-based models for equitable access to high-quality singing education in Swedish schools.

2. Children’s vocal confidence

This study investigated the effects of a structured classroom singing intervention on children's vocal confidence (VC), classroom interaction and participation (CIP), and classroom sound levels, and explored associations with these and teacher-rated self-regulation

VC was assessed using the Voice Self-Efficacy questionnaire (VSE), CIP using the ActivitieS and Interaction in the Classroom questionnaire (ASIC), and teacher’s ratings of pupil’s self-regulation using the Self-Direction scale of the Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS-3).

No intervention-specific effects were observed for VC. Although VC showed a small overall increase over time, changes did not differ between intervention and control groups. For CIP, no significant differences between intervention and control groups were found; however, intervention groups showed improvements from baseline to follow-up that were not observed in controls. Baseline self-regulation was positively associated with both VC (r = .200) and CIP (r = .221).

3. Word definition

This quasi-experimental study explored whether repeated multimodal exposure to target words through daily classroom singing could contribute to changes in word definition skills among pupils in Grades 2 and 3.

From pre-intervention to follow-up, the experimental groups improved significantly more than controls. Analyses including all groups showed a small but significant overall increase in word definition scores over time, together with significant group differences and a time-by-group interaction. The findings suggest that classroom singing may offer a promising, inclusive pedagogical context for supporting vocabulary depth, although effects were modest and varied across school contexts.

4. Narrative production and comprehension

Purpose: The aim of this paper was to investigate if and how singing intervention in the classroom has an effect on narrative production and comprehension in primary school pupils (2nd grade).

There was no indication that experimental groups improved more than the control groups from pre- to post-intervention. For narrative comprehension, the results suggested that scores for both groups improved from post-intervention to follow-up.

5. Self-concept and body awareness

This study examines the effects of daily classroom singing on children's self-concept and body awareness using self-figure drawings and Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) measures.

Results showed that children in the intervention group increased the number of body details in their self-figure drawings after the singing intervention, suggesting enhanced body awareness. Arousal ratings also increased over time, with a significant group and time interaction effect. The findings indicate that structured collective singing may support children's embodied awareness and emotional activation.

Beyond these articles, two more variables we have tested (phonology and self-rated health) remain to be analyzed and reported. Two articles have been published so far from our project:

https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-journal-of-music-education/article/making-space-for-singing-in-the-21st-century-classroom-a-focus-group-interview-study-with-primary-school-music-teachers-in-sweden/7D72607067AA04642D6156544D11650A

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/394528688_Benefits_and_challenges_of_implementing_a_daily_singing_activity_in_a_Swedish_primary_school_A_focus_group_study_using_a_triangulation_approach



7 - Credit: Dr David Johnson

Dr David Johnson (David.Thorarinn.Johnson@hvl.no) is Associate Professor of Music at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Bergen, Norway. He is a co-founder of the Decolonizing and Indigenizing Music Education (DIME) Special Interest Group of the International Society for Music Education (ISME) and leads the Singing Maps initiative to support indigenous and traditional Nordic singing through music education. His research focuses on singing in music education. He serves on the scientific advisory board of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music's Sjungande barn (Singing Children) initiative.



8 - Credit: Dr Pia Bygdeus

Dr Pia Bygdeus (pia.bygdeus@kau.se and pia.bygdeus@musikaliskaakademien.se) is Research leader for the research project: Singing, health and well-being in school – a societal matter, researcher and reader in Music Education and educator at Karlstad University in Sweden. She also serves as Research Secretary at the Royal Swedish Academy, where she works in research-related matters. During the period 2015-2024, Bygdéus served, among other roles, as Chair of the Board of The Swedish Society for Music Research (SSM). Pia is also a freelance conductor and pianist.

Guest Speaker: Dr Ruth Herbert

Topic: Sensory Lives: The Phenomenology of Female Autistic Experience and Creative Engagement

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9 - Credit: Dr Ruth Herbert

Ruth's Abstract:

What role can participatory arts research play in tapping the phenomenology of autistic experiences of being in and experiencing the world? Projects within autism research often centre on benefits of participatory arts with relation to diagnostic criteria (deficits) but far fewer profile qualities of autistic subjectivity *per se*. This talk draws on findings from a project exploring the use of music and sound as creative tools at the UK's only school for autistic girls where workshop participants were aged between 12 and 16. Highlighted key characteristics include qualities of autistic creativity (e.g., focus on detail, discrete

sonic/musical events, repetition, sensory play/multimodal stimming (auditory and tactile)); public and private musicking (including vocal stimming) to negotiate shared and hidden identities, and as a means of self-regulation, such as of mood, attentional focus and arousal levels.

Dr Ruth Herbert (ruth.herbert@citystgeorges.ac.uk) is a music psychologist and professional pianist based at City St George's, University of London where she is the co-director of the cross-School (Humanities & Medical Science) Creative Arts & Health Group. She has a keen interest in how and why people engage with the arts – particularly music – in everyday life, how creative engagement shapes ways of being in and experiencing the world, and how participatory arts can support health and wellbeing. Research interests embrace creative health, music and consciousness and psychological phenomenology. She has been a Co-I on Project *CREATE*, a UKRI-funded research project that applies transdisciplinary understanding to arts-based mental health research, and was previously a Co-I for an AHRC project investigating autistic girls' identities/experiences. Publications include a co-edited volume on music and consciousness (OUP, 2019), a monograph on the phenomenology of everyday music listening (Routledge 2016[2011) and a co-edited volume (with Prof. Nicola Shaughnessy & Dr Emma Williams) titled *Beyond Autistic Stereotypes: Gender, Identity & Experience* [OUP, forthcoming]. Journal articles and chapters have centred on a range of topics, including arts-based practices and mental health, musical daydreaming, trancing and cross-cultural musicking and identity. Ruth has contributed to UK BBC Radio 4 & 5 features on music and consciousness, music and spiritual wellbeing, and music, food and multisensory experience.

Guest Speaker: Lotta Kourilehto

Topic: Everyday Music Listening Fosters Connectedness in Youth

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10 - Lotta Kourilehto. Credit: Petteri Kiviniemi

Lotta's abstract:

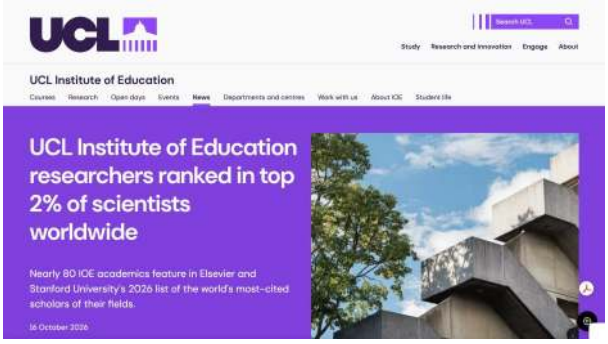
Listening to music is an important part of young people's everyday lives and its social aspects. However, while previous research on music's social functions has primarily focused on participatory forms of musical engagement, research on music listening has largely emphasized intra-individual functions.

This presentation reports on a study which explored the social aspects of music listening through the concept of connectedness, defined as a state of feeling connectedness to oneself, others, and the wider world. Data were collected from Finnish young people aged 15–25 years (*N* = 64; *M* = 19.7; *SD* = 3.5) using interviews, digital ethnography, and photo elicitation methods. Over a one-week period, participants collected photographs, videos, and audio-recordings of everyday situations involving music. These self-collected materials subsequently served as elicitation material during interviews exploring participants' experiences. The interviews were analysed by two independent coders using applied thematic analysis and a codebook approach.

Three main themes were identified: (1) managing self and social space, (2) building and maintaining social relationships, and (3) self-disclosure and gaining social awareness. The findings suggest that everyday music listening is an activity in which intrapersonal and interpersonal functions actively intertwine, fostering connectedness with self, others, and the wider world. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the holistic nature of everyday music listening experiences and the psychological functions that music serves in young people's lives.

Lotta Kourilehto (lotta.m.kourilehto@jyu.fi) is a doctoral researcher at the University of Jyväskylä and a member of the Centre of Excellence in Music, Mind, Body and Brain and the MUSICONNECT research project. Her doctoral research draws on ecologically valid methods, including digital ethnography and interviews, and focuses on the role of everyday music listening in young people's lives, particularly how music fosters experiences of connectedness with oneself, others, and the wider world.

Congratulations!



11 - Credit: UCL

Warmest Congratulations to Graham!

We would like to extend our warmest congratulations to Professor Graham Welch on being recognised among the world's top 2% of scientists in the 2026 Stanford University-Elsevier ranking. This is a wonderful and thoroughly well-deserved achievement, reflecting his exceptional contributions to music education research over many years. We are incredibly fortunate to benefit from Graham's leadership, wisdom, generosity, and unwavering support for colleagues and the wider research community. It is a real pleasure to see his remarkable work recognised internationally. Many congratulations, Graham – we are all delighted for you!

Read more: UCL Institute of Education

Upcoming Seminar

Please note that our upcoming UCL iMerc research seminar will be on 20 January 2027. If you're interested in sharing your work in future, we'd love to hear from you. Please feel free to get in touch!

Contact Us

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

Dr Eunice S Y Tang: eunice.tang@ucl.ac.uk