

New Perspectives on Research

At our All-State session, graduate students from institutions across the state will present a series of lightning talks where each presenter will briefly share the purpose and findings of their research study and a few implications for music education practice. The graduate student panel will be seated in a circle, and non-presenting attendees will be seated in an

outer circle, which will then be integrated with the presenters during the Q&A portion of the session in order to promote the sharing of ideas between all in attendance. Please join us to learn about the fresh and exciting topics that graduate student researchers are focusing upon within the field of music education. In order to highlight a few examples of the

exciting projects being presented, Yank'l Garcia and Nicholas Quigley, master's degree students at Boston University, will briefly introduce their research projects below.

—Tawnya D. Smith, Chair of the Research and Teacher Education Council, MMEA

Pilot Study on Instrumental Music Performance, the Creative Arts, and Childhood Poverty

By Yank'l Garcia, Boston University

It is my belief that every child has the right to receive access to quality instruction in schools. When facing the difficulties of prolonged exposure to poverty, students tend to have higher stress levels, which impacts typical brain development and, in turn, influences their academic performance in school. Jensen suggests that the most significant risk factors affecting students raised in poverty are (a) emotional and social challenges, (b) acute and chronic stressors, (c) cognitive lags, and (d) health and safety issues. Current research displays positive correlations between music and decreasing stress; music improving cognitive behavioral outcomes; music improving visual-attention skills; music improving memory, and music aiding in social/emotional development. In order to better understand how to adapt the instrumental classroom to meet the musical and emotional needs of the students, I piloted a series of instrumental music and creative arts workshops in a low socioeconomic status (SES) community.

The pilot study encompassed five workshops designed to cover activities that address the four risk factors identified by Jensen (2009) that have been shown to affect students raised in poverty. These workshops engaged 15 students for two hours once a week for five consecutive weeks in a string orchestra environment designed to provide appropriate socialization opportunities through collaborative music-making (music learning, composition, improvisation); art journaling; and cultural integration. Using Dolamore's String Choral Concept, the study employed a choral singing approach in order to help students learn the repertoire they

selected. Art journaling provided students with a platform to be creative while also using their critical thinking to reflect upon the learning process. In creating these workshops, I involved social, emotional, and cognitive domains to support the learning process. Socialization occurred through collaborative music-making, peer teaching, and learning. The emotional domain was addressed by providing a culturally responsive classroom where the creative arts were used as a platform to reflect and encourage mindfulness. The cognitive domains were activated through the use of attention skills, engagement in short-term working memory while learning new music, problem-solving when peer-teaching, and formulating how to create a visual representation in their journals. By combining music performance and the creative arts, the students had multiple opportunities to activate brain plasticity to support the student's learning and memory and to mitigate stress responses during the workshop process.

At the time of this publication, this study is still in the data collection phase. Some insights I hope to learn are how the participants respond to a nontraditional orchestral classroom. I project that students will have an overall positive reaction and experience from participating in the workshops. My hope is that the skills learned and reflected upon can be applied in the future when learning a new piece of music in a group setting. I want the students to know that they have a voice and that by allowing themselves to be introspective and by collaborating and learning together, they can create, weave ideas, and arrive at a final project they can feel proud to have accomplished.



Yank'l Garcia is a violist and board-certified music therapist. She is currently pursuing her Master of Music in music education at Boston University. Yank'l is a violin instructor at Tufts Community Music Program and music director at music programs inspired by El Sistema, Josiah Quincy Orchestra Program, as well as Youth and Family Enrichment Services.

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The Educational Backgrounds of DIY Musicians

By Nicholas Patrick Quigley, Boston University

DIY, or “do it yourself,” is a culture of musicking that relies on entrepreneurship and self-motivation to produce concerts, recordings, and other media. Through the use of home recording technologies, digital distribution platforms, and common spaces such as living rooms and basements for performances, DIY artists carry out individual projects and entire careers in music. Because DIY music is a different type of music-making than the types of music opportunities typically offered in public schools, the purpose of this study is to identify the extent to which formal music education has contributed to the development of some DIY musicians and to what degree their musical practices can be accredited to their school music education.

I enjoyed the privilege of speaking with twelve musicians throughout this study, and I made music with half of them. Live interviews and creative sessions took place in Boston, Connecticut, and New York City, and I also connected with artists in California, Colorado, Delaware, Maine, and Washington, D.C., via video conferences. All of the musicians interviewed had released albums, and most had significant live performance experience, including self-coordinated and self-promoted regional and national tours. Some musicians had established significant online followings—one person had more than one million streams on their SoundCloud page alone—in lieu of live performances.

Most participants were aged 18–25, and a few were slightly older. About half of the musicians interviewed identified as female, one person identified as androgynous or gender non-binary, and another half identified as male. The participants were fairly diverse in terms of religious backgrounds and identity, and some had been diagnosed with a mental health disorder. About a quarter of participants received individualized education programs while in schools. All of the participants attended a public school for all or some part of their education; however, some also attended private, religiously-affiliated, or public magnet schools for a portion of their K–12 education. It is important to note there was little racial diversity in the group (most participants were white), despite targeted efforts that were made to recruit a racially diverse cohort of musicians for the study—and this is an issue that should be addressed in further research and action. Participants expressed concerns regarding the issue of racial and cultural underrepresentation in DIY music communities, and some expressed similar concerns relating to gender in DIY music communities, which should also be addressed in further research and action.

The preliminary findings from this exploratory study are important for music educators to consider when developing curricula and instruction that empower students towards independent musicianship and creativity. While at the time of this publication I was in the preliminary stage of data analysis, some trends had become clearly noticeable. First, an overwhelming majority of the participants made other forms of art in addition to music or had a significant experience with arts education outside of music in schools. Some participants had an entrepreneurial role model in nonmusical settings who inspired the musician to take responsibility for their musical development and growth as an artist in a business-oriented sense. However, this was not usually relating to monetary gains but in terms of name recognition within local DIY music scenes, online music scenes, and gaining access to or creating performance opportunities. Other trends and important insights include students’ preference for content including a vast spectrum of musics, student leadership, and peer-assisted learning. Furthermore, many participants stated that exclusion from music in schools was an impactful experience for them as students—such exclusion caused some to seek out or create opportunities outside of school and caused others to develop a preference for producing music with some degree of privacy.

What does all of this mean for the elementary general music teacher or high school band director? These are questions that should be considered once the data has been more fully analyzed, and I hope we may begin to examine these issues together at the Graduate Research Session.



Nicholas Patrick Quigley is a composer and music educator based in Boston, Massachusetts. His compositional debut album was released in 2017 and heralded as “precise and emotional,” “inquisitive,” and “exhilarating.” He has most recently taught as a string instrument specialist with the Boston University Tanglewood Institute and Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras.

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AT THE CONFERENCE: Tawnya Smith & Tavis Linsin

THURSDAY 4:00–5:00 FEDERAL COMPLEX

Celebrating Graduate Student Research:
New Perspectives on Research