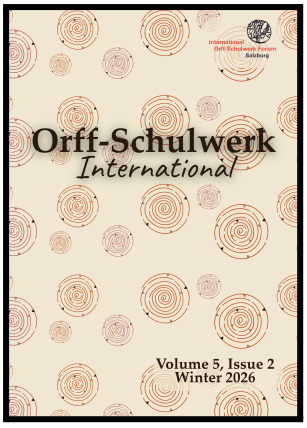
International Orff-Schulwerk Forum Salzburg



Orff-Schulwerk *International*

Volume 5, Issue 2

ISSN 2791-4763 (Online)

Research Sessions at the 2026 IOSFS Convention in Athens

Manju Durairaj and Werner Rohrer

©2026 IOSFS

Published online: November 2026

Full terms and conditions of access and use can be found online at:
www.iosfsjournal.com

Convention 2026 Research Sessions

Research Sessions at the 2026 IOSFS Convention in Athens

Manju Durairaj and Werner Rohrer

The Research Committee of the International Orff-Schulwerk Forum Salzburg (IOSFS) was established in 2025 as one of the organization's newer bodies. The primary purpose of the committee is to curate scholarly literature and develop a global network among researchers specializing in Elemental Music and Movement Education. The committee maintains three responsibilities:

- Research curation in the field of Elemental Music and Movement Education;
- Scholarly exchange through hosting quarterly online sessions that provide international students and researchers an opportunity to present methodological approaches and empirical findings to a global audience of Orff-Schulwerk practitioners and scholars; and
- Coordinating dedicated research sessions at the annual IOSFS conventions.

Building upon the successful integration of research sessions at the 2025 IOSFS convention in Salzburg, which featured presentations from Singapore, Slovenia, and Austria, alongside a global online forum, the 2026 convention in Athens expanded its programming. The committee extended presentation timeslots and increased the volume of accepted peer-reviewed proposals to accommodate increasing international scholarly interest.

The **IOSFS 2026 Convention** centred on the theme of *Storytelling: Finding and Making Meaning through Orff-Schulwerk*. The convention's research committee hosted two dedicated sessions focusing on broader topics within elemental music and movement. These sessions were co-chaired by Manju Durairaj (Vice President of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access for the American Orff-Schulwerk Association [AOSA]) and Werner Rohrer (Assistant Professor at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna).

The initial session highlighted advanced research projects presented by Dr. Olympia Agalianou and Dr. Raquel Pastor Prada. The subsequent session utilized a roundtable format to showcase the work of 11 graduate researchers—comprising master's and doctoral students who were either currently enrolled or recent graduates. This roundtable included three virtual presentations and eight in-person presentations.

Dr. Agalianou presented a thought-provoking analysis of the current relevance of both the methodical approach employed and the current implications of the findings of her doctoral study conducted twenty years ago. Titled *Elemental Music and Dance Pedagogy in Greek Primary Schools: A Critical Reflection on a Study Conducted 20 Years Ago*, this ethnographic case study investigated an Orff-Schulwerk-based education intervention within Greek primary school physical education. Dr. Agalianou proposed that if the study were to be replicated today, a research design that combined ethnographic case study with action research would be efficacious.

Copyright©2026 IOSFS

Dr. Prada's thesis *Visual Arts and Dance: Proposal for Interdisciplinary Teaching* combined historical, artistic, and action research that led to the development of a formal curriculum proposal with ten educational experiences based on creative educational dance methodology and the Orff-Schulwerk approach. Findings suggest that creative processes related to the visual arts can be transformed into highly meaningful and personal experiences when embodied learning is evoked. Prada concludes that artistic integration in education fosters more inclusive and pluralistic learning spaces that allow for understanding and learning about the arts in multiple ways and from multiple perspectives.

The research round table session featured researchers from around the world who presented a 10-minute overview of their research in Orff-Schulwerk and Elemental Music and Movement Pedagogy. Presenters included researchers who had recently completed their doctoral programs, and graduate students pursuing masters and doctoral work with a university advisor. These presentations are summarized as follows:

Zhengchang Cheng, masters student of the Orff-Institut, Mozarteum University, Salzburg / Austria, explored how Chinese music teachers' past learning experiences influence their creative self-concept and their engagement with improvisation in Orff teacher training. The study *Creativity in Orff Pedagogy and Chinese Teachers' Educational Experience: A Cross-Disciplinary Inquiry into Improvisation, Self-Concepts, and Adult Learning* used a mixed-methods design. The findings indicated that many teachers educated in environments that emphasised correctness, and model-based learning exhibited uncertainty in open-ended tasks. Nevertheless, embodied musical activities, reflective dialogue, and non-judgmental feedback in Orff workshops supported teachers in reflecting on their past experiences and developing a broader understanding of creativity.

Kelly Grace, doctoral student from Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York / USA, examined how three elementary music teachers experienced effectiveness in their teaching in a qualitative single case study *Elementary Music Teachers' Lived Experiences of Effective Teaching.* Grace reported three emergent themes. First, teachers perceived themselves as effective when they observed student success. Second, pedagogical training was a key factor in their perceived effectiveness. Third, participating in an Orff-Schulwerk association with other elementary music teachers contributed to their perceived effectiveness.

BethAnn Hepburn, recent doctoral graduate from Kent State University, Kent / USA, outlined a qualitative Generic Descriptive-Interpretive study (Elliott & Timulak, 2021). The doctoral research *The Nature of Peer Collaboration during Orff Schulwerk Rhythmic Composition Groups* examined peer-to-peer teaching strategies within cooperative learning groups during fourth-grade general music classes using the Orff-Schulwerk approach. The study design centred on student voices and demonstrated that students valued opportunities to work with peers and create their own compositions. Findings suggested peer learning can strengthen students' understanding of rhythmic notation and improve performance.

Tadeja Mraz Novak, masters student and her supervisor Dr. Petra Brdnik Juhart from the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, jointly presented *Music Heals: Elementary Music-Making as a Supportive Practice in a Paediatric Waiting Room.* The mixed-methods research design explored the role of elemental music-making in supporting children's experiences while

Copyright©2026 IOSFS

waiting for medical appointments. Zdravoglaski visual cards based on elemental forms such as breath, movement, sound exploration, simple rhythmic actions, and attentive listening invited children and adults to engage in quiet, non-invasive musical activities involving music creation, performance, and listening. Preliminary findings suggested that the activities effectively engaged children, encouraged caregiver involvement, and fostered positive child–caregiver interaction.

Joy Reeve, doctoral candidate from Teachers College, Columbia University, New York / USA presented her ongoing pilot research study on examining ways a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) framework could facilitate teacher expertise to expand and develop SEL opportunities in the music classroom. A music-based SEL curriculum framework, Social Emotional Education through Music Education (SEE in ME) was developed as a tool where rhythmic entrainment and emotional contagion are leveraged to create embodied SEL experiences for student well-being.

Werner Rohrer, professor at the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna, Austria, in his study *Methods of Elemental Music Pedagogy (EMP) in Instrumental Lessons for Beginners* analysed teaching sequences for children in early instrumental music classes using video-based research. The qualitative content analysis examined the EMP methods used in instrumental lessons for beginners in small groups of children aged four to eight, with a focus on violin, piano, or theatre.

Cassiano Santos, a postdoctoral researcher financed by the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, detailed a qualitative action research project *Curricular Repertoires in Undergraduate Music Teacher Education: A Study on the Mediation of a Licentiate Course based on the Triangular, Orff, and C(L)A(S)P Approaches.* The study outlined contemporary challenges in Brazilian Music Teacher Education and investigated how teacher education can move beyond transmission models toward reflective and collective curricular mediation.

Ezgi Tatar from the Mehmet Akif Ersoy University, Burdur / Turkey described a study that developed from her Master's thesis *The impact of Orff-Schulwerk-based movement and dance activities on the musical skills of preschool children.* The findings of this intervention study of 15 preschool children aged five to six, showed significant gains in several areas: pitch, rhythm, tempo, musical memory, form, and rhythmic and melodic improvisation tasks.

Marina Varouta, masters student of the Orff- Institut, Mozarteum University, Salzburg / Austria, offered an exploratory qualitative study of primary school children's emotional responses to new music composed after 1990. The study examined what children aged seven to eight in second-grade class in Germany feel when listening to selected works, and how they express these emotions in writing, drawing, or speech. The study *Children's Emotional Responses to New Music: The Role of Elemental Music and Dance Pedagogy* explored how preparatory strategies such as perception games, language games, and sound and movement improvisations related to emotions may help deepen and differentiate these responses.

Copyright©2026 IOSFS

Laura Wiedenfeld, recent doctoral graduate from Kent State University, Kent / USA, conducted a phenomenological study as a participant observer during an Orff-Schulwerk level 1 teacher preparation course. Her dissertation titled *Finding My People: Value Creation in Orff-Schulwerk Level One* examined the process of becoming part of a learning community through a levels course. All participants generated value along a continuum during the course of the study, with five participants who found the experience incredibly valuable and one who did not feel particularly connected to the approach or the group.

The research sessions hosted by the IOSFS Research Committee at the IOSFS Convention revealed the depth of interest in ongoing scholarly research and the wide breadth of research topics in Orff-Schulwerk. The animated and profound dialogue that took place during and after the research sessions brought to light the need for frequent meetings and opportunities for academic discourse, specifically around research methodologies and applications of research to practice.

Acknowledging the need for opportunities for dialogue, the research committee will host quarterly online meetings to provide an open forum for (a) sharing or re-sharing current research in Elemental Music and Movement Education, (b) identifying collaborative research opportunities, (c) networking with peers who share similar research interests, (d) offering support and guidance for novice researchers planning to present or submit their work for publication, and (e) discussing the implications of research on practice.



Copyright©2026 IOSFS