

Part I: The International Research Symposium on Talent Education

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The International Research Symposium on Talent Education (IRSTE) is a biennial event that highlights research related to the Suzuki method of music teaching and learning. Past symposia provided an opportunity for researchers to share their work and for teachers interested in pursuing their own studio-based projects to learn how to locate, interpret, and conduct research. In addition, several expert researchers (including Robert Duke, Laurel Trainor, and Robert Cutietta) provided insightful master classes for graduate students and early-career researchers.

The current IRSTE research group is made up of the following researchers and teachers:

Co-Chairs Patricia D'Ercole (University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point) and Karin S. Hendricks (Boston University); Kathleen M. Einarson (McMaster Institute for Music and the Mind); Elizabeth M. Guerriero (Rider University, Montgomery County Community College); and Nancy Mitchell (Durham District School Board).

Our research group came together after the 2012 symposium and began by conducting a pilot study investigating possible connections between Suzuki group classes and the development of empathy in young children. The study focused on one collegiate-based program in the Midwest. Data were collected through online surveys completed by students' parents at two points in the year. Some interesting trends emerged that indicated a need for further investigation. For instance, average parental ratings of empathy on both surveys were higher for students who were enrolled in group class. In addition, average empathy ratings for the students who were enrolled in group class were higher on the second survey, while average ratings for students who did not participate in group class slightly decreased. These preliminary findings indicate the need for further research to determine if the trends are generalizable.

In planning for a subsequent, larger study of empathy development in Suzuki students, we realized that it would be necessary to have a clearer understanding of how group classes are structured in various programs across North America. Beginning in the fall of 2014, we prepared a large-scale demographic study that would give a profile of Suzuki teachers and programs. With

support from the SAA, we sent a link for an online survey to the entire SAA membership. We received 1128 completed surveys containing detailed information about teachers' backgrounds, professional lives, and implementation of group class teaching and parent education.

After sharing some of our findings at the SAA Leadership Retreat in May 2015, we are pleased to share with the wider SAA membership through a series of articles in upcoming issues of the *American Suzuki Journal*. The articles will address the following aspects of the demographic study:

1. Who are Suzuki Teachers?
2. What do Suzuki programs look like?
3. Joys of Group Class
4. Challenges of Group Class
5. Parent Education

Our goal is that these articles will help inform the membership about these areas and stimulate conversation within the Suzuki community about how to strengthen our legacy. We hope that you will join us at the 2016 SAA Conference in Minneapolis for the IRSTE sessions. The sessions are open to researchers, teachers and everyone interested in the future of Suzuki research. ☺

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