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The Impact of Informal Music Learning On Fifth Graders' Music Learning Processes and Perceptions of General Music Class

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OF GENERAL MUSIC CLASS

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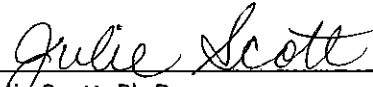Lecturer, Music Therapy

THE IMPACT OF INFORMAL MUSIC LEARNING ON FIFTH GRADERS'

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OF GENERAL MUSIC CLASS

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<u>The Impact of Informal Music Learning on Fifth Graders'</u>
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<u>of General Music Class</u>

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The purpose of this study was to describe qualitatively the learning processes and perceptions of music class that emerged in a fifth-grade general music setting in which informal music learning processes were the fundamental components of the pedagogical approach. Initial research questions aimed to examine the ways students perceived their previous music classroom, how they used music outside of school, how informal music learning strategies impacted them, and how they believed popular musicians learned music. Students in this action research study were 50 fifth graders in two classes. Data were collected using many ethnographic techniques including interviews, questionnaires, and video/audio recordings. The study describes how the students used informal music learning strategies to ultimately "cover" a song of their choice. Working with music in which the students were encultured seemed to foster immediate engagement and helped to create positive musical experiences, which ultimately changed many students' perceptions of general music class. By involving the music in which students were encultured, this curriculum helped to foster their musical identify, propel autonomy, and promote social consciousness.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the primary goals of music educators is to cultivate an appreciation for music in students, in hopes that the students will value the physical, intellectual, and moral properties of music throughout their lives. In North America, the music education methods of Kodály, Orff, Gordon, and Dalcroze have had great impact in achieving these goals within the last few decades. Although these traditional methods are powerful ways of teaching music and have had an important role to play in music education, their adaptation to the 21st-century musical worlds of today's elementary music students is perhaps more of a challenge (Wright 2016). As students put on their headphones and listen to their favorite music, one cannot help but ask whether there are any methods that educators can use to bridge the gap between the students' perception of music in and out of school.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Green (2006) states, "The school music classroom is a notorious site for the entanglement of

musical meaning, values, and experiences. This is particularly so in relation to pupils' "own"

music—the popular music field—as against what they often refer to as "old people's music"—

the classical or folk music field." (p. 101) Popular music has had somewhat of a presence in

music curriculum content, but by using only formal learning practices, we have largely ignored

the informal learning practices of popular music. Through research, the music education field

has recently begun to see how the presence of these informal learning practices can affect

teaching strategies and positively affect students' musical meanings and experiences (Folkestad

2005; Green 2002, 2006, 2009; Rodriguez 2009; Vakeva 2009). Informal learning practices may

not be the ultimate solution for this schism in students' perception of their music and "formal"

music, but they can be additional tools to narrow the gap.

Informal and Formal

In order to better understand informal music strategies, a very clear distinction between

formal and informal learning in the context of music must be made. In an article that examines

formal and informal learning situations, Folkestad (2006) provides a very clear definition.

In the formal learning situation, the activity is sequenced beforehand. That is, it is

arranged and put into order by a 'teacher,' who also leads and carries out the

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activity...The informal learning situation is not sequenced beforehand; the activity

steers the way of working/playing/composing, and the process proceeds by the

interaction of the participants in the activity (p. 141).

Although these two definitions seem like opposite ends of a stick, we must not see these two

styles of learning as a dichotomy. Folkestad provides fours ways of analyzing whether learning

is formal or informal: 1) situation (where the learning takes place); 2) learning style (learning to

play by ear or from written music); 3) ownership (teacher led or student led); and 4)

intentionality (to learn or to play).

Wright (2016) suggests that one way to think of these four descriptive factors in relation

to a real-life learning situation is as the sliders on a control panel, such as on an audio mixer,

where several of the sliders may be anywhere on the continuum between formal and informal

at any one moment in time. This description may capture the messy reality of real-life learning

more effectively than the idea of a single continuum. Further, Wright's example can help us to

see how there are points of interconnection between formal and informal musical learning.

After all, most of our formal music learning methods can be traced back to their informal

origins (e.g., Kodaly's collection of folk songs through the Hungarian countryside or the learning

of jazz standards by ear). Rodriguez (2009) advises that, "we might do well to explore these

interactions as a means of helping students more fully develop their musicality" (p. 39).

Informal Learning in the General Music Classroom

Informal music learning has been shown through research to be an effective and

successful learning strategy for many young people who develop into committed and

passionate musicians (Green, 2002). Moreover, informal music learning occurs in the everyday

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lives of children and teenagers and has been shown to be an effective medium for music

education in what might normally be perceived as a formal setting. According to Campbell

(2010), "Twenty–first-century learners may not respond well to traditional, didactic, teacher-led

pedagogy in music. Nor may they respond as enthusiastically to curricula that do not feature

music in which they are encultured by daily out of school listening" (p. 92). Conversations about

student engagement in the music classroom have been going on for a long time. Green (2002)

suggests that there is a logical and strong correlation between the pedagogy experience in

music education and student success and/or persistence in studying music. She writes, "We can

surmise that many children and young people who fail and drop out of formal music education,

far from being either uninterested or unmusical, simply do not respond to the kind of

instruction it offers" (p. 93). With the introduction of rock, pop, and jazz music; keyboard

laboratories; music technology programs; AP music courses; and the exploration of creative

music making, high school music education in North America has changed considerably with the

last couple of decades. Elementary music, on the other hand, has been slower to change and

appears to be mostly centered on teacher-led pedagogy. By introducing informal music

strategies to the already strong pedagogical methods of Kodaly and Orff in the classroom, levels

of enthusiasm and commitment to music can be raised, as well as, elevated motivation, thereby

providing a range of musical skills sometimes left out of a traditional music curriculum.

In the book, How Popular Musicians Learn, Green (2002) identifies five common

processes used by popular musicians that could be implemented into the music classroom. The

main principals are: (1) learners choose the music they learn themselves—music in which the

learners are thoroughly encultured; (2) music is learned by listening and copying recordings,

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rather than from notation; (3) learning takes place in friendship groups; (4) skills and knowledge are acquired according to individual need and often through peer teaching; and (5) the musical areas of performing, composing, improvising, and listening are integrated with the emphasis on creativity. Green has piloted this pedagogy and implemented these five principals as part of her Musical Futures UK program. Teachers participating in this program said that students enjoyed music lessons more than their previous curriculum, and that they appeared to be more confident and demonstrated enhanced motivation. Students were also better behaved, engaged in music in terms of academic ability, previously expressed interest in music, and developed positive social group skills. Teachers also noted more focus among students and enhanced musical skills, in particular, listening skills, instrumental skills, and strategies for composition. A better understanding of a range of musical genres was also noted among students. Apart from musical skills, students demonstrated greater leadership, improved small skilled groups, and improvement in independent learning (Green 2002).

Musical Meaning

Music does not operate at an abstract level separate from our everyday lives. It is part of everyday life and must be understood in that way. Green (2006), however, argues that:

> There is a theoretical aspect of musical experience that is, momentarily, virtually free, or autonomous of, the meaning of everyday musical experience. This aspect, which crosses over musical division and affiliations, can be reached in the classroom, particularly through formal music learning practices. Pupils can re-conceive not only popular, but also classical and, by extension, other musics as well. (p. 102) Green has also hypothesized a theory where music carries two forms of meaning: inherent meaning

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(the patterns of sounds and silence) and delineated meaning (music's social, political, religious, cultural, and other affiliations.)

Through this theory, Green (2006) believes we can have positive or negative reactions to either of these meanings when engaging with a piece of music. When we are familiar with a piece of music, we are more likely to have a positive inherent meaning response. Similarly, we can have a positive response when the delineated meaning relates to something we feel good or strongly about. When both occur, Green describes musical "celebration" as occurring. When both are negative, Green suggests that musical alienations occur. Even if one of the responses is negative, the result will be alienation, or at best, ambiguity.

If students are getting exposed to music in school that is unfamiliar, in that it is not part of their everyday home and communal lives, or if the music carries a negative connotation because of a previously formed associations, they are less likely to have a positive experience in the classroom. This might lead to an explanation of why teachers sometimes struggle to engage students in certain songs or why they encounter overall resistance at times to formal music education in the elementary setting. Mans (2009) asserts:

> Learning to know the musical templates of one's culture is a largely unconscious, enculturated process of which one only becomes fully aware when confronted with music that does not conform to the template. Being confronted with music that is perceived as 'outside' of what seems culturally acceptable can result in a certain amount of resistance in school classrooms (p. 84).

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Studies on Informal Learning

Through her Musical Futures UK program, Green (2006) investigates the problems and possibilities of bringing some aspects of informal music learning practices into the secondary music classroom. At the time, the project took place in eight schools (one pre-pilot, three pilot schools in London, and four main study schools). The study involved a series of teaching and learning strategies replicating the five main principal processes popular music musicians used, and the study was separated into two stages. In the first stage of the project, students were asked to bring their own CDs, form a small group, take the CDs into a practice space, and choose one song. They then had to "cover" the song aurally using their own choice of musical instruments. Teachers observed, diagnosed problems, and later offered help. In the second stage, a litmus test was given by introducing classical music. Next, the students were asked to copy a piece of music from a selection of CDs of recordings from the classical canon, which were provided by the researcher. Green observed through interviews and recordings how students' inherent meanings of classical music changed by using the informal learning practices of listening and copying.

Wright, Beynon, Younker, Linton, and Hutchinson (2012) conducted a similar study based on Green's work. It involved the introduction of informal music pedagogy to two Ontario schools—one secondary and one elementary—and observation and evaluation of the effects. The study used a qualitative methodology implementing a dual/comparative case study design. At the conclusion of the study, students, teachers, and administrators were interviewed. Through the use of informal music learning techniques, positive trends in learning velocity, attitude towards music, and discipline/behavior were observed. Researchers also noted that

students gathered during recess, in between classes, and outside the school to give hints, tips, or to teach their classmates instrument parts.

A sister project was conducted by Linton (2006), who investigated informal learning with grade one and two students at the same elementary school in Ontario. The study found evidence that suggests that informal music learning may have much to offer younger elementary school children from age 5 or even earlier. At the beginning of the study, there appeared to be a lack of confidence in younger students to be independently musical in classrooms where there had previously been a high degree of teacher instruction. However, once the barriers were broken down through improvisational games with body percussion, tuned percussion, or other available instruments or voices, confidence returned, and students embraced peer-led listening and copying of musical activities.

Harwood and March (2012) examined relationships between informal music learning practices and children's playground learning traditions. The authors assert:

> The intent of a formal school curriculum is to complement rather than duplicate out-of-school experience, both in terms of content and learning processes. But when we ask children to learn repertoire that is unfamiliar to them and at the same time ask them to learn it in a way that is unfamiliar and unpracticed, we place our learners and ourselves at a double disadvantage. (p. 334).

The authors go on to recommend the use of kinesthetic, aural, oral, holistic, and multimodal activities to address the issue of having students use unfamiliar repertoire through unfamiliar and unpracticed ways at the elementary level. Jaffers (2004) observed a garage band made of five students during 2 two–hour rehearsals. On his first visit, Jaffers recorded field notes,

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videotaped, and interviewed the group following the rehearsal. On the second visit, he

recorded the rehearsal and asked the participants to watch the video and use what Jaffers

called a "think-aloud" protocol. Through his observation and interviews, Jaffers noted that two

broad emergent groups of themes were prevalent. The first were inherent meaning topics, such

as technique, musicianship, and 'doodling`- the sporadic and intermittent playing of musical

ideas. The second were topics revolving around peer learning and peer critique. Although the

students participated in formal music training, Jaffers noticed that, in their minds, the students

separated their formal music world from their garage band world.

Limitations, the Teacher's Role, and Questions

Although the potential of informal learning can be seen through research studies, there

are a number of limitations and challenges with informal learning, as with any method,

especially with students of the elementary age. Some of the practical limitations music

educators face are those of instruments, classroom space, and time. In North America, the

quality and quantity of instruments in the classroom varies from a large classroom with 30 Orff

instruments to a teacher who travels from room to room with a cart containing books and a

few unpitched percussion instruments. Most music classes take place in one room, so the

amount of noise coming from each small group working on an informal learning project must

be taken into consideration. Time is another factor that varies from class to class, since music

classes are generally limited to 30-45 minutes. Through constant exposure to informal music

learning, however, the speed of learning can increase from week to week, and some

meaningful learning can be achieved regardless of the allotted time.

The teacher must also be brought into consideration when applying informal teaching strategies, since one of the most prevalent critiques of informal music techniques is that of the teacher's role. Allsup (2009) and Rodriguez (2009) suggest that in certain applications of these informal music strategies, the teacher's role disappears. Allsup goes on to add that through the application of informal learning, we may be sowing the seeds of our own demise. A question of teacher confidence and skill development must also be asked. Informal music learning requires teachers to do away with the comfort of classroom control, to trust their students to work purposefully away from direct supervision for periods of time and to venture into musical genres and styles far from the comfort zone of many classically trained teachers. Rodriguez (2009) observed in his own student teachers, "These students feel very threatened by the idea that their own education, which has shaped their high musical standards and made them who they are, has somehow been devalued" (p. 21). Vakeva (2009) provides answers for these questions and concerns. She suggests that the shift from formal to informal learning, as the situation requires, might represent a "natural development of the students' inner urge to learn more and to utilize their learning with the help of more formally established aiding structures and concepts" (p.12). Teachers must become experts in helping students make things happen for themselves. Green (2009) also suggest that as teachers, we are researchers involved in a type of ethnomusicology, learning to make music in the traditions with which our students are most familiar.

Looking Ahead

Autonomy in the pursuit of music and musical information and skills is an admirable learning objective, and informal learning may have much to offer general music education in

this area. In this practice, the teachers must constantly be aware of the shift between formal and informal modes, and must be willing to adapt to whichever mode is in the best learning interest of their children. Allsup (2008) states:

> I am no more or less inspired by the music that garage band musicians make than I am by the music of jazz, folk, classical, or hip-hop musicians. Resisting literal understandings of how garage bands are operationalized, I am inspired, rather, by how garage band communities are made and negotiated, the way problems get solved, and above all, the manner in which the music practiced and composed is personally meaningful and self-reflective (p. 5).

Informal music learning can help us achieve these certain goals, among others, in music education. It can have a positive impact on students' inherent and delineated musical meanings. However, it must not be seen as the ultimate method to bridge the gap between out of school music and in school music, but as an extension or expansion of the traditional methods we use in our classroom.

As demonstrated by the aforementioned studies and literature (Folkestad 2006; Green 2002, 2006; Harwood & March 2012; Jaffers 2004; Linton 2006; Mans 2009; Rodriguez 2009; Wright, Beynon, Younker, Linton, & Hutchinson 2012), an increasing field of research is growing around the importance of informal music learning and the manner in which it is taught and learned. Within the last two decades, the emphasis has shifted from descriptive research on how popular musicians use their informal learning strategies to qualitative investigations into the inner workings of informal music learning and how it could be applied to music education in a way to diversify our curriculum. The positive effect that these investigations have contributed

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can be evidenced through pilot programs and projects, such as the Lucy Green-based Musical

Futures program. Though these projects and qualitative research have shown success at the

secondary level, not much can be found with regard to the impact informal music learning may

have on elementary students' perception of general music. Therefore, the purpose of this study

is to describe the learning processes and perceptions of music class that emerge in a fifth-grade

general music setting in which informal music learning processes are the fundamental

components of the pedagogical approach. Further, post-study interviews and observations will

be conducted to examine whether informal music learning changed certain fifth graders' (n=50)

perception of the general music class.

SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

This study was conducted in a public elementary school located outside of a major metropolitan area in the southern region of the United States. This primarily white student body of 978 students (76% white; 8.47% Hispanic; 6.82% two or more races; 4.03% Asian; 3.31% African American; .41% Native American) is nestled in a newly established, fast-growing residential sub-division. The economic status of the school is high with only 1.24% of the student population on reduced lunch. Because of the newness of the residential sub-division, many families have moved from different states, which resulted in a diversity of music classroom expectations on the part of the students who participated in this study.

Prior to the study, a proposal outlining the study was submitted to both Southern Methodist University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the school district's Research Impacting Student Excellence (RISE) program. The RISE program is an initiative started by the district to provide an opportunity to submit a proposal in order to pilot instructional strategies, teaching styles, or new educational approaches. In this case, the new educational approach was the use of informal music learning strategies in the elementary general music classroom. Both the IRB and RISE program required permission slips to be created and distributed to all students participating in the study. Because the students were under the age of consent, a legal guardian's signature was required for each student to participate. A site form acknowledging

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that the head administrator was aware that research was being conducted with the approval of the IRB and RISE program was also filled out and signed by the school's principal. A presentation was also given to the parents and their participating students to explain the study and to answer any questions or concerns they might have. Parents and guardians were informed that, if they did not consent to their student participating, the student would be moved to a general music class section where the informal music learning approach was not being applied. The parents were assured that students who did not participate in the study would not be penalized in any way. In the end, all students (n=50) who were given permission forms turned them in with their legal guardians' signatures of consent.

Students in the study were 50 fifth graders split into two classes with 25 students in each class. Each class learned in the setting of their typical general music classroom, which met once every six days for 55 minutes. Out of the 50 students participating, 31 of them were male and 19 were female. Eight of the students participated in their grade's gifted and talented program. Out of the total, 2 students demonstrated Limited English Proficiency. The students' general formal music education background was mostly Kodály- and Orff-centered. 35 of the students had attended the school since its opening (4 years) and participated in a Kodály- and Orff-centered music approach. The remaining 15 students were new to the school. Out of those 15, eight participated in a Kodály-centered classroom, four participated in a Suzuki-based piano lab class, and three of the students were homeschooled previously and had received no formal music instruction. As for students who took formal instruction outside of school, 19 students cited private music lessons at a local studio, 28 students responded that they had taken no private lessons, and three commented that they had previously taken private lessons. As the

students' primary classroom music teacher, I have been at the school since its opening, primarily teaching general music classes centered on a Kodály approach. I graduated with an undergraduate degree in music education and label myself primarily as a classically-trained musician. Upon the completion of my undergraduate degree, I participated in Kodály training, where I earned my certification, which is endorsed by the Organization of American Kodály Educators. I have also received training in the Orff Schulwerk approach. Though informal music learning was new to me as an educator, I knew it would be quite familiar to me as a musician, since I have participated in groups who perform popular music since I was in high school.

METHOD AND DESIGN

The research design deemed most appropriate to answer the questions was a qualitative practical action research study. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) define action research as "trying out ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge about a given topic" (p. 6). The four main steps in this more formal process are listed by the researchers as: 1) plan, 2) action, 3) observation, and 4) reflection. Once the four steps have been completed, the process is repeated in revised forms until the objectives of the study are met. Phillips (2008) describes practical action research:

> [It] has the researcher and practitioner come together to identify potential problems, underlying causes, and possible solutions. Here the researcher encourages the practitioner to participate and become self-reflective, transforming the consciousness of the participants. The researcher acts as a consultant to help the participants engage in dialogue and self-reflection (p. 318).

As the sole teacher and researcher in this study, I was in a unique position to observe first-hand how the students would engage in informal music learning and also the realities of implementing the pedagogical changes necessary in my own classroom.

I designed the study to include interviews and questionnaires before and after the study. Students were given the option to be interviewed alone or with their choice of peers

participating in the study. The students were asked the same questions in the questionnaires and during the interviews, which allowed them to verbally discuss aspects of the study in greater detail than they had written. The initial pre-process questions were:

- Describe the experiences you have had in the elementary music classroom?

- What do you think you should learn in an elementary music class?

- Do you plan to continue your music education in middle school (band, choir, or orchestra)?

- Do you play any instruments outside of school? If so, for how long?

- What part does music play in your life outside of school?

- How do you think "popular" musicians learn music or write songs?

The post-interview questions were:

- Where are some things you learned from music class this year?

- Do you feel like you could apply the thing you learned in the music outside of the classroom? Why or why not?

- Has this year's music class had an influence on your decision whether to join band, choir, or orchestra in middle school?

- Has this year's music class influenced you to pursue something musical outside of school (i.e. learn an instrument, take voice lessons, start your own band, etc.)?

- Has this year's music class changed the way you see music overall? Why or why not?

At times, I met with individuals during class to clarify or confirm any meanings derived from the interviews. Data from all video- and-audio-recorded class lessons, interviews, questionnaires, and field notes were transcribed and coded. Through this data, I was able to

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develop a holistic understanding that drew upon multiple perspectives.

Data was gathered over five months using multiple ethnographic techniques, including questionnaires, interviews, participant observation, video and audio recording, and informal conversations with the children and their classroom teacher. During the classes, I filmed the students using an iPad, in conjunction with a video observation device called a Swivl—a device that allowed the iPad to video and film me around the classroom, instead of staying in a stationary position. After school, I took field notes regarding the video that was recorded that day.

Based on my initial research questions and understanding of informal music learning, I created a beginning list of codes. This list was mostly based on the informal process observed in Lucy Green's (2008) study and my own pedagogical strategies and approaches. As analysis proceeded, additional categories were determined using an inductive approach. Codes derived from emergent themes served to organize the data into bigger categories of the children's musical processes and socialization. Through coding and observation, I began to notice relationships among the broad categories and determined additional main themes of musical perspective through personal experiences, agency, engagement, and social identity.

Pedagogical Considerations

Adapting informal music learning designed for secondary students and what we know about the informal processes of children (Campbell, 2010; Marsh, 2008), I started to engage fifth graders in aurally copying, performing, and creating the music in which they were encultured, to learn about the nature of the learning and teaching processes that would emerge. Of key importance in informal music learning is the option of students to choose music

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they enjoy and understand (Green, 2008); due to rules set in part by the school district in which the study was being conducted, this excluded music containing explicit language and content. Regardless of the limitation on music selection, students were able to choose music in which they could apply informal music learning. To connect to the textured musical experiences in the students' lives, students were to post their current top five favorite songs on a bulletin board in the classroom and update them every two weeks. Along with the students' lists, the current Billboard's top ten songs were posted in order for them to see how their musical selections compared to those of the general American population. Popular music in the lives of fifth graders was derived from current pop charts, such as the Billboard Top 100, and also from the genres of classic rock, country pop, hip-hop, trap, and video-game themes. Apart from these genres, music from earlier decades (1960s-2000s) was also featured on the list, possibly correlating with the influence of parents or older family members' music experiences on the students. The students' lists became a big part of my listening world as they provided a springboard for compiling playlists for students that would lead to class discussions, the planning of lessons, and more importantly, further insight into my students' musical worlds.

First Steps

After students participated in the pre-process interviews, questionnaires, and favorite song lists, they took their first steps in the classroom using the informal music learning pedagogy. As a reference for the creation of the classes' lessons, I used Lucy Green's How Popular Musicians Learn- A Way Ahead for Music Education (2002), Musical Futures' Secondary Resource Pack-An Approach to Teaching and Learning (D'Amore, 2012), and the students' playlists. Musical Futures is a movement funded and managed by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

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The aim of Musical Futures was to devise new ways to teach music to children using pedagogies that bring non-formal teaching and informal learning approaches into more formal contexts, to provide engaging, sustainable and relevant music making activities (cite—either their written material or even their website). Being conscious of the students' interview responses, informal conversations, and previous musical experiences, I believed that starting with an assignment of covering a song on their own would overwhelm them. With this in mind, I created lessons that would give the students the tools/skills that would ultimately help them cover a song of their choice for their final project.

For the students' first activity, I decided to do "Project 1: Groove, Head and Solos" from the Musical Futures Resource Pack (D'Amore, 2012), with slight modifications to fit the classroom's available instrumentation. I believed that the project's emphasis on the beat and the identification of the rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic elements of a track would prove to be valuable for the students. The project starts by having students clap a steady beat under the direction of a student leader or music teacher. The leader then begins to clap a rhythm over four beats, which the students echo in the style of traditional call and response. Next, students are given some time to work on their own to come up with a four-beat looping rhythm. They are then brought into a circle with the leader, keeping a steady beat. Each student is brought in one-by-one, adding their looping rhythm until finally everyone is participating in the groove. The leader or another selected student is given the opportunity to point or cue certain students, indicating to them that they should continue their rhythm while everyone else stops. After giving several students the opportunity to lead, I then had the students attempt the same activity with the non-pitched percussion instruments available in the room. We concluded the

class by having the students identify the beat from a selection of songs from their lists.

For the next class, we decided to build on the activity with pitched instruments, such as ukuleles and Orff xylophones. Instead of performing the activity as a class as we previously had, I let the students choose their groups. After reviewing the A minor chord on ukuleles and demonstrating how to play open fifths (a drone on A and E) on their xylophones, I gave the students time to develop their own grooves using the instruments available to them. Each group then performed their groove for the class, concluding with the labeling of the beat in the songs selected by the students.

After spending the first two classes on harmonic and rhythmic concepts, the focus of the subsequent two classes was on melodic concepts. Before their next class, I recorded a sixteen-beat long D minor pentatonic-based melody, which I played on the piano, and uploaded it to the students' classroom iPads. After reviewing the harmonic and rhythmic elements, I had the students learn the melody by transcribing the recording on their iPads. Again, I let the students work in groups of their choice. Once a student's group had learned the melody successfully, they created a groove around the melody. When all the groups completed the task, they performed in front of their peers.

For the second melodic-centered class, I had the students create their own D-minor pentatonic melodies. After discussing characteristics of a good melody with the whole class, the students were given the opportunity to make their own melody, again, in groups of their choice. Once a group had created a functioning melody, they would create a new groove around their self-composed rhythms, to later be performed for their classmates. Due to the multiple steps involved, the melodic activity took at least two music classes for all of the groups

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to complete the project. After the completion of this activity, I felt as though the students were confident enough to cover a song as a whole class. They were familiar with the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic structures that they would encounter in the songs they would ultimately select for their final music cover project.

Island in the Sun

To further expand on the tools and skills needed to cover a song, we proceeded to cover a song together as a class. By doing this in a guided setting, my hope was to expose the students to some of the different methods they could use to cover a song. I also hoped that the students would encounter challenges in order to rely on themselves and others to find ways to successfully overcome them. The hope was that they would use these methods and experiences to successfully cover a song of their choice. For reference on how to proceed with this activity, I modified the first stage of the Musical Futures approach, since I felt covering an entire song on their own might be overwhelming. I wanted to create musical experiences in which all students could participate that featured processes as close as possible to those that many musicians use to create popular music. I was, however, concerned about leading the covering of a song as I felt it wouldn't create an authentic "informal music learning" experience full of peer-directed learning. Regardless, I proceeded with the activity, while keeping this concern in mind. For the song we would cover as a group, I selected Weezer's "Island in the Sun." I found the song ideal for this activity, because it had a straight-forward linear melody, a manageable chord progression, and a simple rock groove. For their first exposure to the song, I showed the music video to the classes. During the music video, positive statements such as "This song is cool!" and "I've heard this song before in a movie" echoed through the classroom.

By the third verse of the song, the majority of the class had joined in the reoccurring song's

"hip-hip" ostinato. At the conclusion of the video, we discussed the repeating patterns in the

song, including the "hip-hip" ostinato. Through the discussion, the musical form elements of

the introduction, verse, chorus, and bridge were isolated. Once the form elements were

isolated, the students mapped out the form of the song by listening to a recording. The

students split into their friendship groups and were given an iPad with a copy of the recording

for them to analyze. After much peer-driven discussion, we gathered as a class to check each

group's analyses and ultimately come up with a unified answer. For the final portion of the

class, I had the students in groups to learn the song's bass line by ear using xylophones and

metallophones. Again, the students referenced the recording of the song and helped each

other in the learning of the bass line in groups. Talking between the groups also occurred as

they referenced the bass line's starting pitch and the repetition of certain notes. Once I felt the

whole class had a good handle on the bass line, we proceeded to play it together as a class a

couple of times.

     For the following class, we reviewed the bass line and started our work on the rhythmic

element of the song using the classroom "tubano" drums. After listening to a portion of the

song, the students were asked to figure out the rhythmic groove using body percussion in

groups. After deciding that a stomp on one and three and a clap on two and four were the ideal

choices, the students translated the body percussion to the tubanos. Once everybody was

comfortable with the groove on the drums, the bass line was layered on, having students switch

between the two. Next, we played along with the recording as I played it through the classroom

speakers. Looks of confusion suddenly appeared among the students as the song entered the

bridge section. I stopped the recording to lead a discussion on why our bass line didn't fit anymore. After the students discovered that the bass line or chord progression had changed, they returned to work, learning it the same way they had learned the first bass line. Once they had figured out the new bass line, we played along with the recording again, this time playing the correct bass line with the bridge. Once the students felt comfortable with the bass line, they played open fifths on the Orff instruments to add harmony. In addition, some students learned the progression on ukuleles, referencing a ukulele chord chart in the room and a lead sheet of the song.

Once the harmonic and rhythmic elements had been established, we prepared the song's melody. After a couple of listens, the class identified three distinct melodic lines—one for each individual section of the song. Again, the students learned the melodies in their self-chosen groups. This time around, the conversation between groups seemed more frequent, and at times the whole class was working together. Conversations revolved around how many notes the melodies had, which notes repeated, and again, the starting pitches of each melody. After a couple more classes to review the elements of the song and play with the recording, the classes put the song together in their own groups, finally performing them for the class. We concluded the covering of the song by having an open class discussion about the different methods used, any challenges encountered, and how the whole process felt. At this point, I felt as though the students were adequately prepared to cover a song of their choice.

Covering a Song

For their final project, the students covered a song of their choice in their own selected friendship groups. The students were allowed to choose the size of their groups, or if

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requested, they could work on their own. Once the groups were decided, they were instructed

to select and give me a list of five songs they would like to cover. I went through the lists and

eliminated any songs that were considered lyrically explicit and/or too technically demanding.

After going through the lists, I returned them to the groups so they could discuss and select the

song they would cover for their final project. Once all the groups selected their songs, I built a

folder for them through Google Classroom that contained the group's chosen band name, a

chord sheet for the song, a recording of the song. Due to the ability of the Orff instruments to

play only in limited keys, some of the recordings' keys were altered using audio editing

software. Similar to the "Island in the Sun" activity, students had access to their folders through

classroom iPads and were supplemented with their own pair of headphones and audio splitters.

Also, to better aid the students, I learned the melodies, the chord progressions, and grooves for

all the songs chosen. For their final performance, each group had to perform their selected

song, including the melody, a bass line or harmonic accompaniment, and a rhythmic groove

from a non-pitched percussion instrument. As for instrumentation, students could select from

Orff instruments (xylophones, metallophones, and glockenspiels), ukuleles, keyboards, virtual

instrumentation (i.e., via the Garage Band iPad app) and non-pitched percussion instruments.

An option of singing or rapping the melody was given as well.

Once we had reviewed the guidelines and clarified the students' questions, I had the

students split up into their bands. As informal music learning emphasizes the acquirement of

skills and knowledge according to individual need and often through peer teaching, the

students were left to decide how they wanted to approach the song. Some groups went right

into learning the instrument parts through listening, while others listened to their recordings

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and analyzed the form in a similar fashion to their "Island in the Sun" activity. Most early discussions centered on how they were going to approach their song, while most comments made were of general support for each other. I noticed more cohesion in the groups in comparison to early projects, as their discussion and comments reflected a unity of purpose and a drive for the completion of a song they were excited and eager to learn.

For the first 10 minutes of the activity, cacophony abounded. Students were either engaged in playing instruments, involved in lively discussion with their partners, or listening to their recording on the iPads. As they worked, they were moving, singing, bobbing their heads, and tapping their toes to the beat. Students explored the range of their instruments, nodding with ideas and playing repetitive patterns. After some time however, some of the melodies and chord progressions started to become recognizable to my ear. Sudden excitement and shouts of "We got it!" could be heard around the room.. Students got up to observe other groups' bands playing certain parts, or just to hear songs played on a certain instrument. At times these actions would assist students who were struggling. After 25 minutes of working on their songs, I gave the students five minutes to come to a good stopping point.

In subsequent classes, students entered class with a deeper understanding of the songs, listening with a keener sense of musical awareness, as the songs progressed from a disarray of different noises to organized sounds. I believed this understanding came from the students' growing familiarity with their chosen songs by listening to them numerous times. After a couple of music classes working on their covers, the majority of the groups played along with the entire recording, while others rehearsed their cover in order to have it ready for their peer performances. Out of the 27 groups who partook in the activity, 21 of the groups were able to

perform their cover from beginning to end. The other six groups could perform their covers, but

only by playing along with the recording or with me playing on the piano.

RESULTS

As described in the Method and Design section, a beginning list of codes based on my

initial research questions and understanding of informal music was created. The initial codes

were mostly drawn from the strategies and approaches Lucy Green (2002) observed when

studying the way popular musicians learn music. In her research, informal strategies, aural

learning, peer-directed learning were all themes that were emergent. As I transcribed

interviews, gathered the students' questionnaires, and made observations on filmed classroom

lessons, additional codes were added to the original list. Following the analysis of concluding

data, such as post process interviews and questionnaires, I was able to gather the information

into bigger categories of the children's musical processes and socialization, such as their overall

music experiences in and out of school and any sociocultural contexts. A relationship between

the broad categories emerged, and an overall description of the impact informal music had on

the students' perception of the general music classroom could be evidenced. An overview of

the 13 categories I identified from the study are presented below.

Students' Informal Strategies

Laughter, spontaneous dancing, and physical engagement were rampant in the

students' experiences. In the final activity, engagement intensified through their playing and

peer-led learning. Therefore, enjoyment was shown throughout the process, from their

comments, cooperative learning, focus, and motivation to engage musically. The fact that the students selected the song was meaningful to them and as described by Austin, they articulated their enjoyment and pride in the outcome of the cover:

It was really cool getting to cover "Thunder" by Imagine Dragons...I saw them live last year with Trey and Chase and I thought it was so awesome that we could play the same song we saw in person...I can now say that I can play along with the song on drums...It was definitely fun and I wish we could have more time in music class to learn more songs by ourselves.

Aural Learning

The aural approach was predictably the most favored by the students and was not a barrier to engagement. For some students though, finding the melody was the most time-consuming aspect. Throughout, the students showed their informal music learning strategies as they collaborated together and as they taught their friends. Initially, students focused on obtaining a mental map of the melody described by the number of notes and note names in order to replicate the phrase, rather than working through a formal construct of the melodic contour. Rhythmic description was hardly ever used by the students, which implies that rhythm was embodied along with the student's descriptions of the melody. Finding the beat was evident throughout the process as they kinetically showed it by tapping their toes or bobbing their heads while working. Since they were familiar with the tune, the constant singing and humming seemed to be a tool that aided them as they worked to figure out the melody.

The informal music learning strategies observed by Green (2002) were active components as the children worked. Listening, observing, and copying their peers were all

strategies that were evident. The students chose to begin by exploring and "noodling" with random melodic or rhythmic ideas rather than beginning with the task at hand. The noodling was used as a tool to enter the aural process, but it also appeared to create brief distractions from the activity at hand—perhaps as a break—but also to explore their own melodic ideas before returning to the task at hand. Green (2008) observed similar processes stating, "In the early stages of musical encounter and/or musical development, leaners are primarily immersed in the immediate sonic qualities of musical development, learners are primarily immersed in the immediate sonic qualities of musical materials." (p. 71) Green also believed that with experience, musicians would be able to organize sound, but that this exploratory stage may be an important foundational step (Green, 2008, p. 71).

Peer-Directed Learning

The students self-selected who to collaborate with throughout the project, which gave them many opportunities for peer-directed learning. Initially, while they played instruments, the students would mainly play independently from one another until one of them would be able to play the part. While they appeared to be working separately, they were, in fact listening to each other only to suddenly stop to observe somebody who had played it correctly. The sense of playing as a group or playing together shifted at that point, with periods of simultaneous group play mixed with individual playing. The groups experimented with timbre and register until reaching a desired sound, which again facilitated a sense of ensemble. Successful peer demonstrations showed the emergence of peer leaders and facilitators, enabling others to draw upon the success of their peers as they navigated through their own musical processes. For the students, peer-directed learning strategies included modeling (visual

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and aural), rhythmic gesturing, some buried verbal instruction, and rarely, instruction written on paper. These processes were more beneficial to them than any kind of verbal instruction or worksheet. Student engagement with the music in which they were encultured is natural, but they would often comment that they enjoyed working with the music because "they listened to it every day." In other words, it was a familiar song and part of their current musical experience. Of course, students are capable of expressing passion with songs from other genres as they come to learn the music, but because of the familiarity of the music, the students' engagement is more immediate, and entrance into music making is at a higher level of musical understanding and greater connection to expression.

Sociocultural Context

Having the students choose their own music created interplay between home and school music, bridging the gap between the students' perception of music in school and music out of school. Musical choice is a main component of informal learning and in this scenario the playlist and song cover lists were vital to discovering the music that was important to the students. Applying this music prompted dialogue among students and the teacher, as well as a promotion of social awareness within the classroom and between home and the classroom. Students eagerly updated their playlists every two weeks. Sometimes they headed directly to the music room board just to scour the other students' playlists. I learned later that the charts became a main topic of discussion outside of class.

Complementary Pedagogical Approaches

At the beginning, I chose to start with a guided approach because I was unsure of the students' skill level with a new music learning approach. After observing initial student success

in the "Island in the Sun" activity, I discovered that students did not consult the teacher, but gathered knowledge from their peers. They enjoyed watching peer performances and immediately acted upon those observations on their own instruments. During the later stages of the final project, the process of covering a song was mostly peer-directed, and my role as teacher consisted of brief introductory instructions and comments to help guide the day's rehearsal based on my observations of the students' needs. These comments were meant to elicit a dialogue among the students, rather than to instruct. To facilitate the parts for some of the groups, I recorded the parts on the piano or xylophone and added the recordings to the group's Google Classroom folder. Often, I found myself physically engaging with the song. I would at times join in on the piano, bass, or the drum set found in the room. Their enjoyment of their music was infectious and I, at times, found myself listening to and playing their music outside of the classroom.

I have described the ways that the students engaged in learning a popular song and the ways in which I, as a teacher, supported their learning. One of the many themes that emerged through this process was the way the music in which the students were enculturated promoted personal agency through expressive music-making, uncovering musical identity. Through the music, the students articulated their identities with their words, sounds, and gestures.

The Students' Perceptions

Observing the students' actions and comments during the activities was very insightful in giving me perspective on the students' perception of informal music learning in the classroom, but just as insightful were the students' answers in the interviews and questionnaires. As a measure of qualitative data, I compared the students' answers before the

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study to their answers after the study. This process was very revealing, because it showed a change in the perception of music in the classroom. As evidenced by their answers, students perceived music as that to which they were enculturated and listened to outside of music class. After the study, music was seen more as something that could be more universal and as something that could occur through different media, including the general music classroom.

Experiences in the General Music Classroom

Because the elementary school where this study took place had been built recently, the students involved offered a variety of previous general elementary music class experiences. The majority of the students' music experiences centered on singing and playing games. How often students had music class varied widely from once a month to twice a week. For some students, whether or not they played instruments in the classroom played a major factor in whether they enjoyed the class or not. This was evident in Nolan's answer:

From Kinder to 3rd Grade, I had a music teacher that made us do actually music tests

[sic] and play cheesy songs. Then when we got to 4th grade, we started to learn

recorders and play more and more instruments. We kept playing games, but I didn't

really care about them.

When I asked Nolan to elaborate on what he meant by "cheesy" songs, he said, "I think they are songs that little kids listen to and honestly very boring. I don't think it is real music."

In some cases, music class was described as a place that was different from what the students normally did in their general classroom. Kate said, "Music is one of the places where I could escape from reality. It is just different, and that's why it's my favorite class."

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"What Should We Learn in Music Class?"

When prompted to discuss what they thought they should learn in music, the students gave answers that were quite diverse. Again, most students' answers revolved around instruments, with a desire to learn and play more of them. Some of them went into greater detail on what specific instruments we should learn, such as piano, guitar, and drums. Music history and dance were also popular answers among the students. Getting to perform the music they wanted was not mentioned at all.

Continuing their Music Education

I asked the 50 student participants before and after the study whether they had decided to pursue music education in middle school to see if the informal music learning pedagogy they had experienced had an influence on their choice. The results can be seen in the following table (see Table 1.1).

Continuing Music Education in Middle School (Table 1.1)			
	Yes	**No**	**Unsure**
Pre-study	28 (56%)	13 (30%)	9 (14%)
Post-study	35 (70%)	15 (30%)	N/A[1]

When asked during interviews if the new approach to music had an influence on their decisions, the students that said yes expanded on their answers by saying that they felt better prepared to learn an instrument, and some answered that they could use their instrument to

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[1] In the post-study interviews, all students decided whether they would participate in a music education class in middle school.

play music outside of class. Furthermore, I asked the 35 students who said they were going to

take a music course in middle school which elective they chose out of the three music

ensembles offered. Twenty-seven chose band, five chose choir, and three chose orchestra (see

Table 1.2).

Students' Fine Art Choices (Table 1.2)		
Band	Choir	Orchestra
27 (77%)	5 (14%)	3 (9%)

The students who responded that they did not want to continue their education either

mentioned that they wanted to sign up for the school's other elective offerings (coding,

technology, or art/theatre) or that they didn't have an interest in music at all.

Playing Outside of the Music Classroom

Before going through the process, I asked the students whether they played instruments

outside of the classroom. Out of the 50 students, 19 of them said yes, 28 of them said no, and

three of them responded that they used to. Out of the 19 of students that answered yes, 13

cited piano lessons, four cited guitar, and two cited drums/percussion. Three of the students

participating in the study mentioned that they were teaching themselves, not realizing that

they had been incorporating some of the informal music learning strategies they were about to

use in the class. Ione, a student learning guitar on her own, mentioned some of the processes

she uses on her own:

My parents got me a guitar for Christmas, but they said I couldn't take lessons until I

showed that I could stick with it... I started watching videos on YouTube on how to play

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some of my favorite songs and also tried an app called Yousician on my iPad. Once I got comfortable with some chords and fingerings, I started looking up tab sheets or learning by ear... I remember listening and playing along with "Ironman" until I could finally play it. It was cool learning to play a song by myself. I think I drive my parents crazy with how many times I play it, but I think it convinced them to get me lessons.

Ione was one of the students who really excelled in the activities and was seen as a peer-leader among the students. She quickly picked up melodies by ear, and upon her group finishing their cover, she moved around the room to help other groups learn their parts. The summer following the study, her parents signed her up at a music program where students have a weekly rehearsal in a traditional rock band setting and a weekly private lesson on their instrument.

Once the study was over, a parent whose child, Sam, was involved in the study told me that Sam had started a garage band with a couple of his friends. They had gotten Sam a drum set, and his friends have joined him on electric guitars. Furthermore, the members of this garage band had also worked together as a group during the study's activities. By performing as a garage band, they had not only bridged the gap between music in the classroom and music outside of school; they had, in a way, solved a challenge that many elementary music teachers encounter—time. By playing and rehearsing outside the classroom, students demonstrated that they were taking the skills and knowledge acquired in the classroom and expanding on them, only to apply them once again in the classroom.

Music's Role Outside the Classroom

How the students perceived music outside the classroom was very insightful as they viewed the music they listened to as "real" music and classroom music as something at an abstract level. As mentioned before, music does not operate separately from our everyday lives, and by applying informal music learning pedagogy in their classroom, the students perceived both classroom music and their encultured music as the same. Before the study, students listed the many ways music manifested itself in their everyday lives. They listened music as they walked to and from school. They listened to music while they studied or played video games. They listened to music during their extracurricular activities, such as sports or dance. Out of all the ways music manifested itself in their lives though, music while they were in the car with their family or friends played a major role in the music in which they were encultured. The importance of enculturated music revealed itself in interviews as students elaborated on how the selection of music in the car was a considerable highlight in their day. Kate echoed the significance of this everyday occurrence:

> I feel like most of my music listening happens inside the car. When my mom picks me up, I connect my phone to the car, and I get to listen to whatever I want. Sometimes once we pick up my brother, he gets control. Sometimes I like the music he chooses, but if I don't, I put my earphones in and listen to my phone. My parents don't really pick the music unless we go on long trips or drives. I like listening to their music, because it's what we listened to when we were little kids and we know all the words. Bohemian Rhapsody (by Queen) is my favorite because I feel like we know all the parts and we yell in the car.

Not everyone shared the same experiences in the car that Kate did. Some students did not ever have control of what they listened to in the car. Other students' parents preferred to just talk in the car and did not allow music to be played. The influence of parents' or siblings' music was often a topic of discussion during the interviews. This was also evidence of the appearance on the students' playlists of popular artists whose recordings were made long before the students were born, such as The Beatles, Elton John, AC/DC, and Dr. Dre.

How Popular Artists Learn

Lucy Green (2002) identified five ways popular musicians learn music, and I wanted to see if students also identified these ways in the music they listened to. Some students were really aware of how their favorite artists learned and rehearsed music as a result of the closer look social media offers fans of theirs. Colson, one of the participants in the study who is an avid fan of Imagine Dragons, said:

> Wayne Sermon (Imagine Dragon's lead guitarist) took lessons on cello, and he likes to
>
> take stuff that he learned on it and add it to their songs on guitar... Sermon talks about
>
> how he likes to add jazz stuff to his songs too.

Other ways students believed their favorite artists learned included taking music classes, copying songs, and as one student mentioned, "messing around." When asked to expand, she said that she saw "messing around" as a group of people just playing random things on their instruments until an idea stuck. Although the main focus was on how their favorite musicians learned melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic ideas, some students focused on more of the lyrical aspect. In terms of songwriting, many students believed that their favorite artists wrote the

lyrics based on what they experienced or how they felt. According to the students, once the

artists finished the lyrics, they added the music to fit the mood of the song.

Bridging the Gap

When asked about whether going through the informal music learning process changed

the way they see music overall, most of the students' answers revolved around Green's five

processes. Learners who participated felt successful in music class because they played the

music in which they were encultured. They got to choose the music themselves, and as a result,

demonstrated personal agency through expressive music-making, uncovering their own musical

identity. By listening to recordings and copying music, the students felt as though they could

apply these tools to playing in their own groups and learning new music. They enjoyed working

in friendship groups as it made them feel more comfortable sharing and exploring musical

ideas. Students taught each other the skills and knowledge to prepare a song for a performance

showing a keen understanding of the many processes musicians use. As demonstrated by their

final performances, the students showed improvement in the areas of performance,

improvisation, composition, and listening. Sienna summed up the experience:

>I just think it was really cool that we taught ourselves our favorite songs. I don't think we
>
>could teach ourselves something in our other classes... I never worked on anything I
>
>learned in music class until we started working on our covers. I would go home and
>
>work on the melody on my keyboard so that the next music class I could play it and
>
>teach it to my friends. Now I use garage band on my iPad and make up my own songs
>
>and sometimes learn the melody to some new songs... I can't wait to learn trumpet in
>
>band so that I can use it to learn the melodies to my favorite songs!

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has potential limitations and they should be noted. First, the study only

consisted of 50 students. By conducting a study with a larger population, different perspectives

and data may present itself. Second, the study was conducted with 5th graders as they were

the oldest grade at the elementary school. If the same method and design was applied to 4th

graders or younger, the study might yield different results as well. Third, the students were

limited by how many times they met for music. If the students were to meet more than once a

week or for longer than 55 minutes a class, the likehood for all the participants to finish their

final project and/or start on a second song cover could had been more probable. With more

time, the students could also participate in more activities based off of Musical Futures'

Secondary Resource Pack-An Approach to Teaching and Learning (D'Amore, 2012).

Furthermore, the participants of the study were mostly anglo/white and lived in a very affluent

neighborhood. By running a study that involves a contrasting or more diverse participant

population, different data regarding the participants' perspectives on informal music could be

collected. Lastly, the music room was equipped with classroom sets of percussion instruments,

Orff instruments, ukuleles, iPads, and headphones to comfortably accommodate 30 kids a class.

The impact of the instruments and the technology available to the participants is one that

cannot be ignored. Consequently, availability to certain instruments and technology could be

limited in schools with lower economic statuses or limited classroom budgets. All these factors

must be considered in any future studies concerning the impact of informal music learning in

the general music class as they alter the experience and perspective of the participants.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the learning processes and perceptions of music class that emerged in a fifth-grade general music class where informal music learning processes were used as the primary pedagogical approach. Additionally, post-study interviews and observations were conducted to examine whether informal music learning changed the perception of general music class for the 50 fifth-grade students who participated in the study. Using a modified approach based on Green's How Popular Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead for Music Education (2001) and the first two stages of Musical Futures' Secondary Resource Pack: An Approach to Teaching and Learning (2012), students learned about the different ways popular musicians learn music, covered a song as a class, and ultimately, covered a song of their choice in peer-chosen groups. The study began with a very teacher-led approach, and as it went on, the teacher's role diminished as the students' peer-directed roles increased. While this study differed from Green's 2008 study in age, scope, and logistical accommodations, a number of similarities in the way the students learned surfaced.

The students in this study appreciated working with their chosen groups on music that was chosen by them. They embraced aural learning by imitating of aural models from given recordings and those provided by their peers. The findings of this study corroborated those of Green (2008), in that children favored the finding the repetition of musical passages in the

process of playing, rather than breaking it down into smaller sequences. The students were encultured in the music they selected; therefore, its familiarity facilitated their engagement. While a student provided the starting pitch for the song, there was still a challenge at first to match the pitches from the recording to the instrument, something that Green (2008) noted as well. In most ensembles, such as wind ensembles and bands, sectional passages are often rehearsed simultaneously, but in this study, the groups rehearsed at their own pace, non-paralleled, and yet in awareness of the other members of their group. The students participating gravitated from this non-paralleled approach of ignoring each other in rhythm and note issues to one that was peer-directed, which facilitated a feeling of ensemble. This was truly evidenced during the final classes in the study as the students demonstrated a comfort level with technical and aural images, assisted by performances with and without the recording and with the emergence of the class leaders. Students relied on each other's musical strengths and observed and participated with each other, with the intention of learning from one another. In the case of this study, the intention of learning was coupled with the intention of playing music together instead of necessarily performing for an audience.

Children engaged at various skill levels throughout the study. In the first activity, some of the students were able to create their own rhythms, while others were comfortable just playing the beat. Informal music learning allowed the students various entry levels of participation and provided some flexibility and differentiation for all learners to participate at a comfortable level. With brief interaction occurring sparingly from the teacher, the students self-regulated in their approach to learning and had control of participation and expressive decision-making. The recognition by these students to access their own ability to expand their feelings

through popular music making suggests a change in the student's perception of the general music classroom and in their identity as musicians. Many important observations about musical identify can be drawn from the way the students engaged in learning during the project. In the same way Green (2006) describes musical meaning through positive/negative inherent and delineated experiences, Wenger (1998) describes the students' participation and negotiation of information:

> What makes information knowledge—what makes it empowering—is the way in which it can be integrated within an identity of participation. When information does not build up to an identity of participation, it remains alien, literal, fragmented, unnegotiable. It is not just that it is disconnected from other pieces of relevant information, but that it fails to translate into a way of being in the world coherent enough to be enacted in practice (p. 220).

Because of its familiarity, working with music in which the students were encultured not only fostered immediate engagement, but also heightened emotional connection to the music. For the students, being able to "get into" the song was enriching, because it showed ability connected to meaning and demonstrated music as a part of their everyday life.

Although this project was carried out in a formal classroom, many of the processes reflected what Folkestad (2006) characterized as informal learning. The learning style was completely aural, and the children had ownership in all decision-making processes. The approach to learning centered on playing music, rather than on how to play. As the facilitator— not the teacher—I was able to support the children's learning situation, so that information processing could occur. Initially, this meant connecting to the musicians and artists in the

students' lives and finding out and having a dialogue about the artists and bands that were meaningful to them. As for classroom management, staying on task was a problem for very few students, but on occasion I had to interact with some students to keep the work flow going. As the study was a collaborative undertaking among the students, my role was less directive and I was, the majority of the time, able to stand back and observe my students from a new and different perspective. The groups the students chose to join revealed information about their skills, passions, and ability to maintain engagement. I was enthusiastic about any possible ways I could support my students' music learning, and I saw myself less as a teacher who followed a sequential list of strategies that followed an objective to the end. The students' aural abilities and the importance of expression through creativity guided my thought processes as I prepare for future lessons.

As a result of using an informal music learning approach in the elementary music classroom setting, I have implemented some change in my classroom setup and pedagogical approach. I have been able to incorporate appropriate iPad applications and have purchased instruments used in popular music making such as ukuleles and keyboards as the school budgeting allowed. Opportunities for peer-directed learning are regular occurrences in the classroom, particularly those that rely on aural strategies. The inclusion of students' musical choices created a change in the literature involved in our class music experience and the approach to music making. The students all came to expect that their music was going to be a part of our music class. Accessibility to the music they were encultured in prompted some in the study groups to include the music we were learning in school as part of their home-listening choices, signaling an important connection between school and home. This, coupled with the

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incorporation of informal approaches where student decision-making was central, illuminated social consciousness, providing a source for social development and personal agency.

As a formally trained musician who had partaken in a ska cover band full of "jam sessions," I found this approach to be particularly welcomed. While this has been a regular part of my own practice for some time, it was not something that was a part of my university education and teacher preparation. The processes of playing music by ear, copying recordings, improvising, and creating my own music were processes that I experienced separate from my schooling, and which I then integrated into my classroom experience. These organic processes seemed to be undervalued in my formal music experience; however, as I learned to embrace these approaches, I learned to trust my musical instincts, rather than relying solely on notation. I gained the courage to experiment without fear of penalty and to appreciate the value informal approaches afforded me as a musician—something I want to foster in my own students.

Music in which the students are encultured is important to children and becoming aware of and acting upon their musical interests in the classroom validates, honors, and respects who they are personally. The music they choose to listen to outside the classroom is part of their evolving identities and deserves a place among the wealth of literature at the disposal of music educators. Teachers should therefore be aware of the music that is current in their students' lives, and this music should figure regularly into lesson plans and discussion. Teachers should allow time for students to figure out whole songs without a sequential or incremental breakdown of the music. Highlighting students' success can also promote peer-directed learning. Pedagogical scaffolding will occur as a result of emergent student need, rather than an a priori lesson plan. Informal learning practices may not be the ultimate solution

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for this schism in students' perception of "their" music and "formal" music, but it can be another effective tool to narrow the gap.

Musical experience in which informal processes can operate in the elementary classroom should include opportunities for students to have the power to choose their own music, engage in music making utilizing processes germane to the music, and collaborate with peers. Since their own music is important to children, and since they are clearly capable of playing songs by ear and creating their own groups, further research should include the incorporation of informal processes in elementary music classrooms for longer periods of time than are represented in this study and include opportunities to create music that can foster student agency and cultivate an appreciation for the physical, intellectual, and emotional qualities of music.

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