Chapter 32

My voice is important too: Non-formal music experiences and young people

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My voice is important too: Introduction

Until recently, formal music education has dominated the research agenda of our discipline (Veblen, 2012). Over the last decade this pattern has begun to change, with informal music teaching and learning becoming a fertile ground for discussion, debate, and research.[1] Following Lucy Green (2014), formal music education refers to both types of institution and types of practice. Broadly reflecting a top-down curriculum formation involving explicit teaching and assessment strategies, Western classical music has been historically linked to formal music education, although there is now a much larger range of musical styles on offer within schools, universities, and conservatoires that would fall under this banner including jazz, popular, and musics from traditions across the world. Informal education might be understood as the other end of a continuum and thus associated with conversational forms of engagement with learning practices rooted in the passing-on of musical knowledge and skills associated with music from a particular context, culture, or society (Busch, 2005; Jeffs & Smith, 1990, 2005). If we consider formal music education and informal musical learning as part of a continuum, then it is perhaps reasonable to locate non-formal music education as siting somewhere between the two, thus reflecting a bottom-up or negotiated curriculum formation that involves a music leader, or facilitator, in continuous dialogue with the young people with whom they work.

The discourse concerning non-formal music experiences has not been a significant feature within music education scholarship. Those who have explored its efficacy mine the following themes: person-centered and peer learning, inclusivity, facilitation as a strategic approach to teaching, valuing learners' personal musical interests, the recognition that music-making can contribute to young people's overall social, educational, and personal development, the interconnections between in-school and out-of-school musical interests and experiences, and the contribution that non-formal education has to a lifelong musical journey. Examples of such enquiry can be found in the work of Abigail D'Amore (2009) and her analysis of approaches employed by musicians working in the Musical Futures project, Nina Kors (2007) and Peter Mak (2007) through their research with Rineke Smilde (2008), and the Lifelong Learning Lectorate in The Netherlands, On Nei Annie Mok (2011), who recognizes the lack of discussion surrounding the term non-formal and attempts to bridge the gap by introducing the concept by providing examples from both Japanese and Chinese musical transmission, Jo Saunders and Graham Welch's (2012) investigation into Youth Music Action Zones in England, and Kari Veblen (2012) in her discussion surrounding different types of learning under the umbrella of lifelong learning. The purpose of this chapter is to explore what non-formal music experiences are and what opportunities they can offer a young person engaged in making music.

Non-formal education

Initially an "alternative" approach to formal education within developing countries, interest in non-formal education emerged from those who felt that formal education systems alone could not respond to the challenges of modern society. These included changes in the cultural, social, economic, and political landscape such as ideas connected to globalization, government decentralization, and a growing democratization. Coming to prominence around the late 1960s, with the work of Philip Coombs (1968), non-formal education continued its growth through the 1970s within the context of development, "the idea that deliberate action can be undertaken to change society in chosen directions considered desirable" (Rogers, 2004, p. 13). Although the term non-formal education had been used prior to the 1970s, it was Coombs who claimed the first systematic study of it by laying down a number of definitional frameworks, the most refined of which states that non-formal education is "simply any organized activity with educational purposes carried on outside the highly structured framework of formal education systems as they exist today" (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974, p. 233).

As part of the lifelong learning discourse, those working in non-formal education searched for terminology which would cover alternative educational programs, especially for marginalized, excluded, and/or subordinated populations (Otero, McCoshan, & Junge, 2005). This emphasis on non-formal learning is reflected at the turn of the millennium in the Council of Europe's recommendation that non-formal education should be recognized as an essential aspect in both lifelong learning processes and youth policy (Europe, 2011). In tune with technological advances, the Council of Europe has now extended its discussion to include e-learning environments for young people within non-formal contexts (Lopez, 2012). In short, if formal education is categorized as curriculum based and leading toward some sort of certification and placed within education and training institutions, non-formal education can be understood as an alternative, born out of insufficiencies within and criticism of the formal educational system (Torres, 2001). As an educational activity, non-formal education often takes place outside the established formal education system and is highly contextualized, intending to serve identifiable learning goals, and is based on a series of learning opportunities that are tailor-made and adapted to the needs of the learner group. Schemes of work are flexible and as such signify that the structure is non-linear and thus resists top-down curriculum. Consequently, non-formal education can be characterized as "learning by doing," depending strongly on reflection ("in" and "on" action) and fostered by a leader in the field who acts as a mentor, facilitating to transform experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and convictions (Colardyn, 2001; Rogers, 2004).[2] Resonant to key educational thinkers of the time, non-formal educators place emphasis on a "bottom-up" rather than a "top-down" approach to teaching, a stress on inclusivity and participation, encouragement of a personalized learning experience, and an understanding that the work can have an impact beyond the content area itself. In order to understand non-formal music education in practice, the following section offers illustrative examples of five projects in an attempt to respond to the question: How can we describe the musical experiences of young people engaged in non-formal music education?

Music-making in a youth club

Consider the work of Caroline, a musician working within an inner-city youth service in Liverpool, UK. As a local musician known to youth workers in the area, Caroline was invited into one of its youth centers to discuss the possibility of supporting some of its young people in their musical development. This request came about through discussion between the youth workers and those

who attend and use the center. It was of particular interest for a group of young males who were trying to form a cohesive rock band but were struggling to organize themselves. There were many reasons why creating an active music-making ensemble was important for the youth in the group. Many of their reasons went beyond those of a musical nature, as those in the ensemble wanted reprieve from instability at home, getting in trouble with the police, difficulty in forming healthy relationships, and lack of confidence brought about through low self-esteem.

The club that the boys attended was an after-school facility that stayed open until around 10 p.m. Young people from 12 to 19 years met at the center, where there are spaces to simply sit and chat, and regular opportunities to become involved in a range of trips, sport, and art activities. During the opening times adult youth-workers are on hand to give advice and offer instruction at the young people's request. Working in ways that might be described as "informal," the youth-workers know the local context and are well aware of the issues and pressures that surround the young people.[3] As with most youth, there has always been a great interest in music amongst both the girls and the boys. Background recorded music is always playing, predominantly the current popular sounds but also classic rock and heavy metal. A number of those who attend the center own guitars, drums, and keyboards, and play them with varying levels of expertise. In order to harness this interest, and in consultation with the young people, the youth-workers hired Caroline, a skilled and experienced local musician who regularly worked as a music facilitator in and around the city. With the help of a seeding grant, the center purchased a basic backline, a drum kit, a couple of guitar amps and guitars, a small P.A., microphones, and a keyboard. This money also enabled them to employ Caroline to facilitate their twice-weekly music club. During this time Caroline guided the young people in their musical performing by helping with instrumental technique, arrangements, and constructive criticism both on the groups' original material and on the cover numbers they had chosen to perform. Her role is not passive but rather highly engaged, and Caroline was constantly aware of the shifting group dynamics through regular conversation with youth-workers and heeding their advice.

The music club has been popular over and beyond the initial request and the center is now beginning to see an overspill of its activities into the other weekday evenings. An independent network of peer mentoring is now taking place between those with instrumental skills and those who wish to learn. Almost every night you can witness peer teaching, a young musician teaching someone else a new lick, chord sequence, or vocal line.[4] Although there is growing confidence amongst the young people, Caroline's weekly presence is still treasured and appreciated. She is seen as an important and stable influence both in terms of facilitating non-formal musical learning and as someone who knows aspects of the young people's lives. From my observations of Caroline and other community musicians that work in these ways, participants look to the facilitator for reassurance, clarity, direction, encouragement, guidance, or help in shaping their music material. In this sense there is a constant negotiation of power that the skilled educator reflects upon both within and outside their music sessions. Music facilitators who are tuned into the effects of this are often able to find a comfortable balance between being a "friend" and also taking responsibility for what comes with working with young people, such as being asked advice on a diverse range of topics which might include sexual health, bullying, careers, and parents.[5] The ability to find comfort between being prepared and being able to let go bleeds into approaches to music-making that have an emphasis on enabling the group or individuals to discover the journey of musical invention. To better understand the experiences of the young people that engage in non-formal musical projects, the next section briefly describes the key features of this approach.

Facilitating musical learning

As an approach to participatory music-making, non-formal music education provides opportunities to develop skills such as trust, respect, empathy, and creativity whilst intentionally intertwining social and personal aspects with music-making. Those who work within this domain often refer to themselves as music facilitators rather than teachers. From this perspective, facilitation is concerned with encouraging open dialogue among different individuals with differing perspectives (Benson, 2010; Hogan, 2002, 2003). As a self-reflective "teacher" who has a variety of technical skills and knowledge, together with a wide range of experiences to assist groups of people to journey together to reach their goals, non-formal music educators act as conduits who enables participants' creative energy to flow, develop, and grow through pathways specific to individuals and the groups in which they are active.

A facilitator does not mean that the musician surrenders responsibility for music leadership, but rather their sense of control in the musical learning is relinquished. In other words, the musical facilitators purposefully enable the learners to co-construct their learning, and through this indirect approach, deeper learning happens. Within any group setting, there is a fine line between leading and controlling, but the two processes are very different and therefore provide contrasting results to the group experience. For example, in controlling the group journey, there is a strong sense of the beginning, middle, and end, and the expectations and needs to be met. In facilitating the group experience, however, there may certainly be a starting point, but the rest remains uncertain. Non-formal music educators offer routes toward suggested destinations and are ready to assist if the group journey becomes lost or confused, but they are always open to the possibility of the unexpected that comes from individuals in their interactivity with the group. These possibilities cannot be predicted, and that is the excitement of facilitated music that grows from the group, be they a class of young children or members of a youth rock band. Anything can happen when musical events are proposed and facilitated but not directed in the manner of the top-down conductors/directors tradition.

Good facilitators move in and out of roles as the group dictates necessitating trust in the ability of others as well as submission to the inventiveness of others. Non-formal music educators can develop this trust as they learn to listen to others whilst maintaining the skill to enable the participants to work together. By establishing a secure but flexible framework from the outset, non-formal music educators often give over the control to the group and trust in the direction it takes. In giving up control, the possibilities emerge for musical outcomes that are unpredictable; music becomes an invention personal to the participants, owned by and meaningful, with the potential to generate an experience that can shape, create, and have an impact on identity formation (Green, 2011).

Findings from studies into effective parent–child communication provide a useful analogy to that of the facilitator–group relationship (Karofsky, Zeng, & Kosorok, 2000; Rogers, 1995; Steinberg, 2001). A young child needs clear instruction and boundaries to feel safe and secure; this is the premise that enhances the child's growth and development. As he or she becomes older, the parent needs to step back a little. The child must face some milestones alone, but is always able to return to the security of the caring parent who is ready, waiting, and expecting to offer comfort, support, guidance, and perhaps redirection. As the child moves into adolescence, so the parent needs to release the reigns further, enabling the young adult to overcome challenges, encounter new discoveries, and develop self-assurance. With the aim of enabling the development of autonomy, the diligent parent will carefully consider when to sensitively step in with offers of support, guidance, advice, or comfort.

School of Rock

Non-formal musical approaches are then predominantly rooted in group-based activities that focus on performing, listening, composing, and improvising. Learners are encouraged to have significant input in the learning and this means that the material is often co-constructed. Another good example of this, a project that serves to highlight young people's musical needs within a particular community, is the School of Rock, a twice-yearly project that is run by a village youth project on the Wirral, UK. Under the strap-line "Labels are for jars, not young people,"[6] its mission has been to support and enable young people to achieve their full and unique potential, emotionally, socially, morally, and spiritually.[7] Amongst its offerings includes a drop-in center open four days a week and providing a wide range of facilities including a café, IT suite, pool, table tennis, and a video games area, outdoor residential weeks, a shop selling a variety of clothes and gifts, plus a range of clubs including canoeing, Christian study groups, dance, and drama. As an after-school program, the School of Rock has three components. First, the young people have individual lessons on instruments of their choice from a range of guitar, bass, drums, keyboards, or vocals. The instrumental tutors are a mixture of professional and trainee facilitators drawn from a local pool of working musicians and recipients of past projects. The situation is complex, as the tutors have to deal with a range of skills from beginners upward and teach in rooms spread across the youth center and church hall. Instrumental instruction is more akin to facilitation and non-formal strategies rather than formal one-to-one instrumental teaching. Second, and after six weeks of engagement in instrumental learning, everybody is placed in an ensemble and has a further six weeks to rehearse two or three songs. Finally, and with the guidance of the music facilitators, the groups perform a number of gigs for an audience. In some instances the venues can be quite prestigious and include a full sound rig, lights, and access-all-areas passes!

As well as providing a fun and engaging learning experience for those young people who desired to "have a go," the project has created opportunities for others to explore their music further. 23 Fake Street is one such group that has benefited from the project. Starting out as a group of mates, their involvement with the Bank has helped consolidate their friendship and their musical ambition. Now an established band on the local scene, the group plays regular gigs and makes recordings of their original music. They continue to support the School of Rock project through the music development program, a training initiative that educates participants to become peer mentors and eventually music tutors.

Rock 'n' Roll for Girls After-School Music Club

In a similar vein to the School of Rock but with an overt emphasis on addressing the underrepresentation of female songwriters in British music, singer–songwriter and BRIT[8] award winner Kate Nash started her Rock 'n' Roll for Girls After-School Music Club.[9] Through collaboration with a number of schools across the UK, Nash and her band began running songwriting workshops in 2011. The motivation to begin the enterprise was the shocking statistic that only 14% of the 75,000 members of the Performing Rights Society, which collects and pays songwriting royalties in Britain, is female. In Nash's own words, "A lot of women in pop aren't writing their own songs and there is this preconception that women are meant mainly as performers" (Sharp, 2011). Employing non-formal music education strategies the workshops are designed to support female songwriters in finding confidence in their identity as musicians.

Fig. 32.1 Esme, a participant in Kate Nash's Rock 'n' Roll for Girls After-School Music Club, performs her own work
Photo courtesy of Deborah Krikun.

Esme, known in her school as a singer/songwriter, was invited to be involved in Nash's project (see Figure 32.1). She was asked what she played and how she would like to work with the professional musicians from Nash's band. Choosing to work with the drummer, Esme discussed with her how the music should sound. Conversation between the two of them revolved around the types of artists that were currently influential on Esme's compositions and the musical possibilities for the songs she had written. Esme recalls that "the project was about not going with the crowd, to feel self-confident about what you do, to know that everyone is different and special." Esme felt that the project was in contradiction to her school's formal music education: "Music in school was never about self-expression, it's too structured." The impact of the project has helped Esme move forward as a performer, playing in local venues around the city and continuing her music education at a community college where non-formal strategies are being used within a formal setting. From Esme's perspective, non-formal approaches to music-making have "allowed" her to make the music she wants and to express the person she is.

Connect project

Operating in a non-formal context, the Connect project, as reported by Peter Renshaw (2005), offers rich opportunities for the "voices" of its young musicians to be heard and acknowledged.

In an effort to demonstrate ways through which quality music-making can be achieved through collaborative forms of composition and performance, the connect project has made efforts to identify the leadership skills necessary for engaging in creative workshop practice. These include:

- Knowing how to work musically in a group that incorporates any instrument brought to an ensemble by the young musicians;
- Knowing how to work effectively in mixed groups varying in size, age, technical ability, and musical experience;
- Knowing how to make music in a genre-free ensemble, where its musical material reflects the shared interests of the leaders and participants;
- Knowing how to engage in music-making virtually without notation;
- Knowing how to create music collaboratively.

Like these examples, musicians work collaboratively with young people to create, shape, and perform new music. Underlying the teaching strategy is knowing how to incorporate a range of people, their instruments, and their musical styles into an ensemble situation. Because the ethos of the project promotes inclusion, having the facilitatory skill-set to work effectively in mixed groups becomes a vital attribute. As skilled facilitators, the musicians work with processes and strategies that enable participants to embrace their music potential while connecting it to the world in which they live. When I spoke to participants during a Connect project in Essex, UK, those that I spoke to emphasized the collaborative nature of the work. For example, Jim who played the trumpet said, "I really like the creative tasks [the facilitators] have been very helpful [. . .] you get along with them [and] that is what makes it different." Shawn and Jane reinforced this by saying, "Yeah, the [Connect] people are really helpful [. . .] they [the facilitators] like the ideas you come up with [and] encourage you." A group of five 11-year-olds told me during their lunch break that the approaches employed by the facilitators had enabled their ideas to be heard and that they felt that the "teachers" were always listening to them: "We like it" they said, "as it is a challenge."

Through a relational structure both the facilitator and the participant work alongside each other negotiating the educative journey. There is an emphasis on engaging in a "quality" learning experience rather than a focus toward making just "good" music. Context is all-important for those working with young people in non-formal music education and therefore activities must be judged fairly by the appropriateness of their learning goals and the way they make meaningful connections to the specific environment they find themselves operating in: "the criteria used for evaluating a creative project in a non-formal setting are determined as much by the workshop/performance context (e.g. school classroom, hospital ward, prison, youth club, shopping mall) as by the shared values and expectations of the participants and their leader" (Renshaw, 2005, p. 21).

Samba at the Frederick Douglass Academy

My final example is the extraordinary music program taking place at the Frederick Douglass Academy (FDA) in Harlem, New York. In this is a school where over 200 students play samba every week on instruments imported from Brazil. Students learn traditional Rio-style samba, with singing entirely in Portuguese. In 2002, prior to the Brazilian music program, music classes at the FDA were not popular. The band program had been in steady decline and in order to re-establish it the school administration hired trumpeter Dana Monteiro as its new music educator. After trying for four years to revitalize the band program, Monteiro felt that he had made little progress: numbers were still low, the young people did not seem interested, and there were significant

decreases in class sizes and a growing transient student population. Whilst on vacation in Brazil, Monteiro met some Pagode musicians who encouraged him to visit a local escolar de samba. It was at this event that Monteiro witnessed young people engaged in non-formal musical experiences and thought that this approach to making music might resonate with his students back in Harlem.

An after-school club was started with an initial purchase of ten drums. It did not take long for the club to grow, as the demand for both samba drumming and the style of musical learning ignited an interest with the students. In an example of how young people can play an important role in determining their learning, what started as a non-formal after-school music club eventually superseded the entire "formal" music program. With the help of a grant to buy a larger collection of drums, Monteiro took a leap of faith and put his trust in employing non-formal strategies in his classroom teaching. Learning by doing became paramount and the needs of the learner were respected by giving them a voice through which the content was co-constructed through the creation of an open environment where active musical participation and dialogue was encouraged.

Described as a "dynasty" by senior students, samba at the FDA encourages peer mentoring and community cohesion. Students are enthusiastic toward the teamwork involved and note that being in the bands demands that you help each other out rather than being in unhealthy competition. This is a testament to how the music program has been organized, a place where creative music-making opportunities, enjoyment, and celebration become available to those that wish to participate through teaching strategies that empower students to take ownership of the music they make. As one student told me, "He [the teacher] takes the time to make sure things are a certain way [. . .] you come in and you might not know the instruments [. . .] you learn from everybody else around you [. . .] through the examples of others." This collaborative spirit is reflected in the day-to-day running of the classes, where students take leadership roles and feel ownership of the classes and their learning as two young boys told me when I asked them if they like playing: "Yes, I'm leading the repinique section [small tenor drum] and he [pointing to his mate] is the leader for the caixa section [snare drum]. I'm pretty much the music director."

As a consequence of this co-constructed learning, after graduating, the youth in the school return each year to play with the FDA performance band Harlem Samba, a group that has now performed at the Lincoln Center, the Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, World Café Live in Philadelphia, and the Broward County Performing Arts Center in Fort Lauderdale. The samba program has also been featured in the documentary film "Beyond Ipanema: Brazilian Waves in Global Music" (Barra & Dranoff, 2009) and was the winner of the 2012 Brazilian International Press Award in the category of Best Institution for the Promotion of Brazilian Culture in the United States. Beginning as an after-school club, the FDA samba program has developed to include almost every member of the school community, resulting in just about every ninth- to twelfth-grader in the building knowing how to play and partake in ensemble music-making.

Conclusion

When young people work with musicians in non-formal musical contexts they are typically in groups co-constructing the types of music to be created, and identifying specific tasks and goals together with an emphasis on learning within the participants' life context. Inclusivity is at the heart of pedagogical methodology, with musicians working alongside the young people to actively identify their learning needs. Because context is a vital component to the agency of non-formal music education, those working as facilitators are skilled in responding to the differing demands

and needs of individuals and groups. In these contexts, young people have the opportunity to be exposed to a musical interaction that is co-authored and meaningful to their lives.[10]

The examples I have used can provide an illustration to some of the benefits of non-formal music education. From a big picture perspective, the interaction of formal, non-formal, and informal learning contexts and processes is vital in the promotion of lifetime music learning. If we consider musical learning as a dynamic interaction of a multi-phased process that changes emphasis from 1) independent learning in informal settings during early childhood to 2) formalized learning during the school years followed later by 3) non-formalized interactions occurring in community settings, then recognition that teachers might (and often do) move in and between both formal and non-formal approaches may benefit the development of young people's music-making in their childhood, their adolescence, and their adulthood. From the adolescents' perspective, when they play a significant role in the development of their learning goals, active and meaningful participation increases. Those that I interviewed emphasized this by highlighting the relationship between themselves and the facilitator, and by affirming that their "voice" was more often heard.

Through strong facilitator–participant (teacher–student) relationships built through openness, trust, and empathy, young musicians engaged in non-formal music education can grow in confidence about their self-image and their musicianship. The teacher as facilitator is well placed to encourage environments where peer teaching flourishes, empowering the students through a sense of owning both the process and the product. The young people engaged in making music in the Music Club, School of Rock, the Rock 'n' Roll for Girls After-School Music Club, the Connect music projects, and the Samba program at the FDA all valued the fact that their input mattered. Although there were learning goals, they were not constructed outside of the context of each particular situation. Co-authorship ensured that the projects were owned by those whom they were meant to benefit. The very fact that the young people's ideas were listened to came as a welcome surprise for them. I believe we should be working toward a situation where young musicians expect their voices to be heard. If we create environments of trust, then responsibility will flourish and musical learning will deepen.

Research suggests that there may be a lack of mutual understanding between potential partners in formal and non-formal musical settings (Saunders & Welch, 2012). There are distinctive strengths in the different approaches, but as I have suggested, music learning contexts need to make every effort to break down silos and recognize that in order to genuinely advocate for a lifetime of active music-making, value must be given to both formal and non-formal music education. In order to strengthen partnerships it will be essential that those working within a formal education system and those who operate within the non-formal sector understand, respect, and celebrate each other's approaches. If this type of collaborative understanding can be accomplished, then young musicians will benefit in ways that enrich their active music-making both now and well into the future.

Reflective questions

1 How might you introduce non-formal musical approaches into your classrooms?
2 Is there someone in your class who appears disconnected from the music curriculum you are working with? How might an approach akin to non-formal education help?
3 Map your musical journey on a continuum. Does it reflect the schema put forwarded in the conclusion: 1) independent learning; 2) formalized learning; 3) non-formalized learning? How have you negotiated these transitions?
4 How can music educators encourage lifelong musical learning?
5 Why might non-formal music education be effective with young people?

Notes

1 See Folkestad, 2005, 2006; Green, 2008; Jaffurs, 2004, 2006; Jenkins, 2011; O'Flynn, 2006; Rodriguez, 2009; Smith, 2013; Soderman and Folkestad, 2004; Westerlund, 2006; Wright and Kanellopoulos, 2010.

2 See also The Encyclopedia of Informal Education (<http://www.infed.org>).

3 For a discussion on informal education of this nature see Jeffs and Smith, 2005.

4 For discussions on peer mentoring and music education see Baker and Krout (2012), Goodrich (2007), Green (2008), and Lebler (2008).

5 For further exploration on the idea of friendship within non-formal encounters see Higgins (2012).

6 Labels R4 Jars, Not Young People is a phrase that emulated from a piece of research carried out in an effort to warn the media of the dangers of negative labelling of young people (Wiles, Curtin, & Brown, 2007).

7 See the website: <http://thebank.org.uk/>.

8 The BRIT Awards are the British Phonographic Industry's annual pop music awards and can be likened to the American Grammy Awards. On February 20, 2008, Kate Nash received a BRIT Award for Best Female Artist.

9 See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-RLVciwbaA>.

10 Contextualization could be a possible paradigm to be used as a tool for analysis and as a tool to plan educational encounters (Rogers, 2004).

Key sources

<http://infed.org/mobi/what-is-informal-education/>.

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