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Equity and Access in Out-of-School Music Making

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter focuses on the importance of community to both music education and the ways that youth shape their ideas, interests, and identities in music. Musical learning is rarely, if ever, about a learner operating a new musical technology-based tool in isolation. Music is inherently social, and these influences have a great impact upon the development of musical identities. This chapter explores the ways that out-of-school spaces like those in the Computer Clubhouse Network, YOUmedia, and Musical Futures support social music learning by providing private recording studios that allow youth to assume increasingly public roles as musicians, performers, and producers. The chapter also describes how mixing formal, nonformal, and informal learning spaces helps to develop a youth's musical maturity through what is known as the "progression pathways model."

Keywords: peer-to-peer learning, music, technology, out-of-school learning, digital audio workstations, interest-driven learning

DISCUSSIONS around music technology and learning often center on the capabilities of a particular tool to impact individual learning. What musical concepts can it convey? How does the learner interact with it? How can we assess improvement in conceptual understanding and performance through experiences with the tool? What we miss from this focus, as several others have also argued in this book, is that musical learning is rarely, if ever, about a learner operating a tool in isolation. Rather, the communities—the physical places and spaces—that come together around these tools are central to how youth shape their ideas, interests, and identities in music.

Attention to the communal function of music is particularly important when we consider access and equity in music learning in out-of-school spaces. Music is inherently social: it is meant to be performed, listened to, and even danced to. Therefore, it is critical that we don't lose track of the notion that social influences and spaces heavily mediate the development of musical identities. In other words, in the rush to embrace new technologies, often overlooked in the learning process is the value of shared physical and communal spaces. However, youth need not only physical access to high-quality, professional grade software and hardware to record, mix, and share their original work (e.g., high-quality microphones, digital audio workstations (DAWs), soundproofed rooms, etc.) but also access to communities where they can jointly engage in shared music making. Consequently, informal or nonformal after-school spaces—such as libraries and other community centers—are now serving this nearly

insatiable need, particularly in traditionally underresourced areas. These kinds of communal spaces extend access to high-quality equipment and software, as well as providing social settings in which youth can make and share music, and are playing an important role in the musical development of youth.

(p. 504) **Out-of-School Music Learning Communities**

One of the major findings to emerge from a series of ethnographic observations is that today's youth are using technologies like the DAWs described above to assume increasingly public roles as musicians, performers, and producers and are sharing their work through social media platforms (Ito, Baumer, & Bittanti, 2010). Prior ethnographic research suggests that whereas little creative production and reflection occurs when young people work alone at home on their computers (Giacquinta, Bauer, & Levin, 1993; Sefton-Green & Buckingham, 1998), well-designed social learning environments encourage youths to explore new kinds of musical learning more than they would be inclined to on their own (Peppler, 2014).

Many out-of-school spaces support social music learning by featuring a private recording studio that youth can reserve to record and mix their own albums. These studios are typically a room off to the side of the main communal area, with a microphone, a keyboard and/or piano, a computer with music software, and a glass window that allows others to see into the space while a dedicated group rehearses, records, and produces their work. In most out-of-school centers, the music studio is one of the most frequently used areas, and several spaces boast stories of youth who have "made it" in some fashion through the albums created there. The studios generally do not have a dedicated music staff, so youth often learn how to use the recording equipment or play on the instruments by observing or working with more experienced peers. This type of peer-to-peer learning is a trademark of informal learning communities, which support learning that happens in a casual or haphazard way through the use of dedicated "zones" for musical production or participation. That is, they have available resources, including tools, materials, and adult mentors, but they lack a formal organization and, importantly, rarely feature technology dedicated to more traditional musical skill acquisition, such as interval identification or music engraving. By contrast, content learning is an unplanned or unintentional byproduct when youth congregate based on a shared interest, and they unexpectedly gain insight through activities that were otherwise designed to be "just for fun." An organizing principle of many informal communities is that if youths engage in music making, learning will happen without additional and intentional curricular scaffolding.

One long-standing example of a large network of informal learning communities that support music making is the Computer Clubhouse Network, which aims to give youths, especially those in economically disadvantaged communities, opportunities to become fluent with new technologies (Kafai, Peppler, & Chapman, 2009). With the realization that youths who were disengaged from formal schooling were still interested in creative spaces in which to explore, design, and share work, the Computer Clubhouse Network adopted a constructionist approach to ensure that participants had opportunities for discovery and personal expression (Papert, 1980). As Mitchel Resnick, one of (p. 505) the founders of the Computer Clubhouse Network, says, "if [youth] are interested in video games, they don't come to the Clubhouse to play games; they come to create their own games. ... In the process, youth learn the heuristics of being a good designer; how to conceptualize a project, how to make use of the materials available, how to persist and find alternatives when things go wrong, how to collaborate with others, and how to view a project through the eyes of others" (Resnick, 2002, p. 34). Likewise, clubhouses in the Computer Clubhouse Network offer similar kinds of experiences of making and sharing music, generally

striking a balance between structure and freedom in youths' music learning. Sample songs and albums are shared widely and are distributed on the Computer Clubhouse Network. These projects give youths multiple entry points into the production process, as well as a sense of what is musically possible.

Another example of an informal community that supports music learning is YOUmedia and the associated Learning Labs, which consist of a rapidly growing network of more than 30 public libraries, museums, and community-based organizations across the United States. The spaces are dedicated to youth for their explorations of digital media. Within these settings, designers allow for “hanging out, messing around, and geeking out” (Ito et al., 2010) and make a special effort to develop youths' critical thinking, creativity, and digital media skills through hands-on activities. YOUmedia Chicago, for example, provides an open, 5,500-square-foot meeting space on the ground floor of the Chicago Public Library's downtown center, which serves close to 200 youths per day. At this YOUmedia site, any youth with a valid Chicago Public Library card has free access to equipment, including still and video cameras, rhythmic video games, instruments, laptops, and professional grade software. With the support of mentors from Chicago's Digital Youth Network as well as librarians, young people create rap music, spoken-word pieces, documentaries, and other digital media and art forms. The design of the YOUmedia learning space encourages individual and collaborative work and provides a safe and open area where youth can hang out and observe work created by their peers. YOUmedia youth also have access to a version of Remix World, a social learning network where young participants can share and reflect on their work, including their original tracks produced in the YOUmedia music studio.

Some out-of-school centers augment their musical material resources with more direct forms of musical instruction, an approach to out-of-school programming referred to as “nonformal learning communities” (Hirsch, 2005; Cole & Distributed Literacy Consortium, 2006). Nonformal communities differ from informal learning spaces because they emphasize goal-oriented learning and organized programming determined and implemented by adults. Proponents of these types of space believe that these learning communities can support large numbers of young people while also allowing individual students to pursue their interests at their own pace (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). It is important to note that many learning communities—informal or nonformal—tend to be hybrid in nature. For example, the Computer Clubhouse Network includes physical spaces but also has a virtual Intranet that connects young people across the globe and allows those within the network to share and comment on one another's work.

(p. 506) **Deepening Interest via “Progression Pathways”**

There are several substantial hurdles between initial interest or experience in music and the type of long-term engagement that is sought after in more formal settings. Toward this end, a number of approaches have been developed to help youth cross the divide between initial interest and long-term engagement, approaches referred to by some as “progression pathways” (Price, 2006). YOUmedia offers a progression pathways approach in some of their programming, where they initially provide a place for youths to explore new programs and tools informally and then let them sign up for workshops in digital music production, digital video production, radio and podcasting, and the spoken word. This allows youth to first “mess around” and then “geek out” with the new technologies. Beyond the accommodation of different types of engagement with music and other forms of new media, the success of YOUmedia is largely based on having professional artists work directly with youths. Nichole Pinkard, founder of YOUmedia, and colleagues have observed that having adult mentors who are active

musicians and professional artists is an important starting point for youths' creative engagement, but that these artist-mentors must also undergo professional development to ensure that they have the right combination of technical skills (a presence in Web 2.0 and social networks, knowledge of new media tools, and an understanding of a mentor's role), cultural capital (the ability to relate to youth as well as the credibility in their art form), and pedagogical knowledge (how to teach project-based learning strategies, critique youths' work, and incorporate new media literacies). The mentors then serve as brokers, inviting youth to pursue their passions and supporting their development in the arts.

Another exemplary model of progression pathways is the Musical Futures program in the United Kingdom (Price, 2006). The Musical Futures curriculum, which emerged from an exploration into why teens were not pursuing music education despite their obvious passion for music in their everyday lives, offers a series of models and approaches that teachers can adapt to their own settings and instructional styles. The emphasis is on guiding and modeling, rather than direct instruction; experienced students act as peer leaders. For example, youth incorporate their favorite pieces into the curriculum, teaching each other how to play simple parts on their instruments, either through notation or by ear, depending on varying levels of prior musical ability. Musical Futures is connected to a virtual space called NUMU, where participants can publish, share, and critique one another's work. Research from the Musical Futures project has conceptualized developmental pathways, based on speaking to young people about their aspirations and observing their responses to projects. As a result, this research identifies four typical participant archetypes in music (Price, 2006, p. 4):

1. Refusers—those with little or no inclination to engage with music other than as consumers. Refusers are perhaps the most complex group to understand because (p. 507) they carry cultural and social baggage that often keeps them from participating. Skilled administrators of the curriculum, with strong interpersonal skills and persistence, can usually persuade these young people to shed their reluctance and defensiveness.
2. Waverers—those who have an interest in music but are not sure what they want to do or how to participate. Conventional music skills may often be rudimentary, and confidence can be fragile. Participants are more likely to feel comfortable finding “their own way in” to projects. Having a negative experience with performance can turn Waverers into Refusers.
3. Explorers—those who have acquired some skills and confidence but have not yet found a good match for their interests. Youth making the transition from primary to secondary education often fall into this category.
4. Directors—those who have already accessed a range of opportunities and are developing performance and rehearsal skills. They are confident among peers and motivated, with a clear sense of musical direction. They often form their own groups and are eager to extend their depth and range of skills.

By identifying young people's interests and skills, adult mentors, professionals, and the youths themselves are able to coconstruct progression pathways. The general progression pathways model both (1) outlines distinct stages toward deeper engagement, and (2) suggests the need to coordinate across multiple settings so as to deepen participation over time (including schools, informal learning, nonformal learning, and online social networks). As a result, the Musical Futures pathways suggests different activities (p. 508) targeted to each group of participants, ranging from music “taster” workshops to professional recording sessions. The intent of these activities is to meet youth wherever their current interests in music lie and get them excited about the possibilities of making and performing music. Note that the activities recommended by Musical Futures all position learners to actively reformulate their conceptions of music through the production of meaningful artifacts. Thinking about different strategies to engage learners at various points along the continuum is developmentally appropriate. Strategies that

might engage Directors who want more opportunities to create professional quality work (such as providing supplies or resources for their latest projects) probably won't work for Refusers who aren't yet interested in the arts. Instead, Refusers would first need an engaging introduction, such as rhythmic video games like Rock Band, that are novice-friendly and allow them to play popular music .

Table 48.1 Musical futures—categories of engagement and suggested activities

A: Refusers	B: Waverers	C: Explorers	D: Directors
<p>Music Taster Workshop: Arrange a number of taster sessions in different musical styles and genres for young people, as a means of establishing what extra-curricular work might be successful and might appeal to students.</p>	<p>Songwriting and technology club: An after-school club that involves re-mixing and using technology to create music and videos.</p>	<p>Songwriting project: Introduction to chords, riffs, scales, lyric writing, melody, group skills and performance.</p>	<p>Professional recording sessions to produce an album.</p>

Mixing formal, nonformal, and informal learning spaces, for example in the way described in the progression pathways model, is a necessary and important part of the individual's whole learning system, forming what scholars have referred to as an ecological approach (Sefton-Green, 2006) to interest-driven learning. New efforts in interest-driven music learning should build on this work, seeking to determine its applicability to other spaces, including virtual communities. For example, is it possible to use a similar progression pathway solely in online communities? Is the distinction between virtual- and physical-space-based learning important to youths today? If so, what are the major differences? This stance encourages us to design out-of-school learning communities more intentionally, as well as to change the way we study and see music learning at work in these environments.

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