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Editorial

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Beyond Lucy Green:

Operationalizing Theories of Informal Music Learning

EDITORIAL

By

Carol Frierson-Campbell, *associate editor*

Most music educators are aware that there are many people—children and adults—involved in learning music outside the school setting. Whether at home, in the community, in a place of worship, or in the garage, informal music learning is alive and well around the world. Because most empirical knowledge of the music learning process was discovered in formal music learning settings or laboratory settings, the processes (and sometimes the products) of informal music learning are a mystery to many scholars.

There are two results of this ‘mystery’ that impact school-based music education. First, because informal music learning is not well understood by music education scholars, its processes are seldom part of university training for school music teachers. Second, as a result, school music programs fail to reach students who might prefer informal music learning to the ‘band, orchestra, chorus’ performance opportunities that are more typically available in secondary schools.

Author Lucy Green, a British music educator and sociologist, has written two books on this subject: *Music, Informal Learning and the School: A New Classroom Pedagogy*, published by Ashgate Press in 2008, and *How Popular Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead For Music Education*, published in 2001, also by Ashgate. Green’s writings challenge our traditional views of music teaching and learning. The five authors included in this issue each explore uses of the informal music learning processes prevalent in the world of popular music and extensively described by Lucy Green. These authors presented papers detailing their efforts at a symposium during the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, held in New York City. Their purpose was “to present the perspectives of university music education faculty members who describe the ways in which they are fostering informal learning in music education majors (rock band, guitar, etc.) and the theories underpinning the approaches taken. These programs are designed to provide future teachers with instructional experiences that goes beyond Lucy Green’s descriptive ethnographies of informal music learning to inform practice in music teacher education that is theoretically grounded” (symposium abstract).

Randall Allsup seeks “to introduce responses to an ethical mandate grounded in our profession’s obligations to diversify our curricula in an increasingly pluralistic and ever-changing world.” To this end, Allsup suggests four general concerns: that researchers do not confuse informal learning “ipso facto” with popular music, that the field examine the informal practices of popular musicians as they design instruction for the training of future music educators, that teacher quality remain a concern in informal or popular settings, and that the problem of “media literacy” in informal settings is given critical consideration.

Patrick Jones suggests that traditional secondary instrument classes, which have evolved almost strictly to support school-based ensembles, limit music education from having a greater impact on society and helping schools accomplish their social mission. Jones describes how one university developed a model for music teacher education that was conceived differently from this norm.

Ann Clements calls for a critical examination of Greens’ work in terms of application and suggests that multiple models or modes of implementation and further experimentation may lead to a more viable approach to musical learning as it is found in many musical communities.

Frank Heuser describes an Introduction to Music Education course that engages future teachers in two approaches to music learning—systematic aural transmission, as codified by Edwin Gordon, and informal music learning as described by Lucy Green—that differ from the formalized notation based training most have experienced. Heuser suggests that the struggles students experience while engaging in aural music learning serve as an excellent forum for developing understandings about the nature of music learning.

Finally, in her response to the panel, Gena Greher confirms the importance of studying applications of informal music learning in school settings, noting that part of our role as music educators should be to help students, both K-12 and Collegiate, navigate between the exemplars of “high culture” and the music that is central to their own lives and find spaces where they can explore the musical possibilities and connections.