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Operationalizing Theories of Informal Music Learning
Panel Presentation, AERA Conference 2008, New York, NY**

Response to Panel

By

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Dimensions and Tensions of Disconnect in Music Teacher Preparation

When you consider that most of the music coursework for *our* students is focused on the traditions of Western Art Music, the reality is that this will not be the “music of choice” for most of *their* students. This disconnect between training and practice can often lead new music teachers to believe they are ill prepared to teach today’s youth. Particularly those students who are on the fringes, the ones who either don’t see performance ensembles, which are the foundation of most school music programs, as being relevant to their own interests, or are just not motivated to become part of their school’s music culture. As a survival measure music teachers may introduce popular music into their classes to placate their students as mere ‘ear candy’, yet there may not be any sound pedagogy or musical integrity in their choices. It is not after all a matter of “if” popular music should be incorporated into the curriculum, but “how” and to “what purpose.” 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.

Those of us who as music teacher educators focus our own teaching on helping our students investigate these tensions, will emphasize the importance of being culturally relevant, and perhaps draw upon the growing body of research into musical intuition and cognition. Lucy Green’s recent work is a significant contribution to that body of research on many levels, and as suggested by Randall’s own experiences, her research would seem to validate many of the practices we have been incorporating in our own work. As our panelists have suggested, this pedagogy of informal music learning is but one approach to consider, but as they caution, taken at face value we could find ourselves heading down the path of a

narrowly cast curriculum, leaving little opportunity to actually help students expand their spheres of listening and musical understanding. As suggested by Ann's own research, there is much to be gained by the interaction of the master and apprentice model and just as our students are not a monolithic block, neither should our approach to teaching music be one dimensional.

Let's face it, the students who end up in our classrooms as potential music teachers are but a small percentage of Patrick's 20% of students who actually make it through the system with the motivation to continue on with music. These are the students who are acculturated in the traditions of the ensemble, and who see a career in music education as perpetuating that culture. As suggested by the journal of one of Frank's students, it is often hard for our students to accept other models of what music education can be if these approaches are far removed from their own personal experiences. Yet many of our music programs continue this practice through an instructional model based on the curatorial preservation and re-creation of music, all but ignoring the music and music making experiences our students willingly engage in outside of school; further widening the gulf between music teacher and student.

In an age of *American Idol*, *Guitar Hero*, *My Space* and *iTunes*, music is everywhere and central to our students' lives. In addition to traditional and non traditional instruments, technological advances such as intuitive programs like *Apple's GarageBand* and other digital audio programs, make it possible for our students to engage in music making activities on a level that was unforeseen generations ago. As suggested in *Music, Informal Learning and the School: A New Classroom Pedagogy*, we might do well to deviate a bit more from the traditional notation based model and cast a wider net for the development of aural skills than the traditional solfège approach. Rather than a de-contextualized focus on names, dates, places and roman numerals, we might engage them in the socio-cultural "back stories" of music as a means of relating the music of the past to the "here and now." Our students' musical choices are important to them and we need to find paths for all our music to coexist within our programs. Just telling teachers to stand there and do nothing will not advance teachers' understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy. Nevertheless we can advocate for and devise teaching and learning strategies that are focused less on direct instruction and perhaps more on non-verbal communication, so that as they themselves become music educators, our students won't disappear from the instructional model, as was the case in this book. Instead they will become less of a central authority, creating as Randall would suggest a more democratic

classroom environment where student's voices, opinions, and music choices are encouraged and supported. And perhaps the biggest hurdle for us may be that we may also need to push the envelope and encourage our music colleagues at our institutions of higher learning to accept that non-traditional music and musicians have a place in our programs lest we all be participants in our own extinction.