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Exploring Informal Music Learning in a Professional Development Community of Music Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore the perceptions and practices of four music teachers as they participated in a professional development community (PDC) to discuss and implement informal music learning practices. Participants met bimonthly as a PDC to discuss research articles on informal music learning, share student work, socialize with peers, and develop ideas to use in their classrooms. Data included video recordings of PDC meetings, audio recordings of semi-structured interviews, in-school observations of informal music learning activities, field notes, and written artifacts; these were coded and analyzed for emerging themes. Three themes that emerged from the data included experiments and modifications, pedagogical practices, and finding value. The participants implemented a variety of activities using informal processes, which they developed by modifying ideas presented in research articles they read and lessons they taught previously. They used many pedagogical practices during informal activities, which fell on a continuum of teacher and student control and a continuum of teacher scaffolding. The participants found value in informal music learning because it provided a new avenue for them to help students develop independent musicianship. Exploring informal music learning in the PDC helped participants feel validated in using this new pedagogical approach. Implications for the use of informal music learning with younger students and suggestions for professional development are also discussed.

My kids were really proud of themselves. . . . That process was really fun to watch, but I think that what they came up with, they had ownership of it in a way that they wouldn't have had if I would've been like, "Play the drum part like this." So that ownership piece, I think, was huge for my kids, and the permission to experiment and to take ownership of it.

—Cara (a participant)

Recent scholars in music education have advocated for the inclusion of musical genres and practices used by popular musicians and garage band musicians as well as from vernacular traditions (Kratus, 2007; Rideout, 2005; Väkevä, 2006; Westerlund, 2006). Music educators have been encouraged to consider the "pragmatic political reality" that students are motivated by learning music informally and in ways that may differ from traditional practices (Rideout, 2005, p. 40). However, practicing music educators may

need support and guidance in beginning to implement informal music learning with students, particularly those teachers who may not have previously experienced these practices. This study explored the perceptions of music teachers in the United States as they read about, discussed, and implemented informal music learning for the first time in a professional development community (PDC).

INFORMAL MUSIC LEARNING

Informal music learning is the term commonly used to describe processes individuals use when learning music without teacher-directed, formal instruction (Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2008). Scholars have made a case for using informal learning in schools as a way to strike a balance between teachers' goals and students' interests, as well as be relevant to youth culture (Bowman, 2004; Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2008; Jaffurs, 2006; Rideout, 2005). In addition, they have described the use of informal processes of individuals in a variety of settings, including adults as popular musicians, teenagers in garage bands, and children at play (Abramo, 2011; Campbell, 1995; Davis, 2005; Green, 2002; Griffin, 2009; Harwood, 1998).

Researchers have noted several informal music learning characteristics, including experimentation with sounds, integrated musical roles, aural copying, and autonomy in making musical decisions (Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2008; Jaffurs, 2004). They have found that musicians often experiment with musical sounds in both learning repertoire and composing (Allsup, 2003; Campbell, 1995; Davis, 2005; Green, 2008; Jaffurs, 2004). Additionally, researchers have described informal music learning as having an integration of listening, performing, improvising, and composing (Davis, 2005; Green, 2006, 2008; Harwood, 1998).

Individuals informally learn songs by ear more frequently than with notation (Green, 2006, 2008; Davis, 2005, 2010; Jaffurs, 2004). Musicians with vernacular backgrounds were better able to perform a song learned by ear than musicians with only classical training, and they described unique processes that facilitated this ability, like predicting melodic and harmonic sequences (Woody & Lehman, 2010). Additionally, Folkestad (2006) theorized that informal learners experience a sense of ownership due to having choice in multiple aspects of the process. Allsup (2003) found that informal learning could allow for democratic processes to occur, and Green (2008) documented students' use of self-direction, peer teaching, and group learning.

Music education seems to lack a solidified definition of informal music learning, and it is often compared with terms describing similar experiences, like non-formal learning, popular music pedagogy, and vernacular music learning. Mantie (2013) conducted a discourse analysis of the terms popular music, informal learning, rock music, and garage band, resulting in 81 different articles from 1978–2010, which reveals some of the diversity of labels being used for informal music learning. Some scholars believe that informal music learning cannot occur in situations where a teacher guides the

learning. For example, Mok (2011) argued that a better term for teacher-guided experiences might be non-formal learning. On the other hand, Folkestad (2006) pointed out that formal learning does not necessarily take place only in schools, and informal learning does not necessarily occur outside of schools. Folkestad (2006) stated that they should instead be viewed as “two poles of a continuum” (p. 143). Similarly, Cain (2013) described how the two are not opposites, but have fundamentally distinct educational aims, with formal learning having a “pedagogy of transmission” and informal learning having one of “authentic reproduction” (p. 89). While the semantics surrounding these terms is beyond the scope of this paper, I acknowledge that they carry weight and need more discussion. In this study, I use the term informal music learning to describe music learning processes featuring characteristics from the literature above.

Although much research exists on the experiences and practices of the informal music learner, few studies have focused exclusively on the role of the music teacher in informal music learning in the classroom context. In a large-scale study investigating the experience of both teachers and middle school students in the United Kingdom, Green (2008) gave teachers a sequence of stages for implementing informal music learning as well as several pedagogical strategies. Frequently, Green asked music teachers to step back to let students work independently; at other times, the teachers were permitted to diagnose students’ needs, make suggestions, and model musical examples. Green distinguished the teachers’ techniques from formal music instruction, saying that teachers acted in response to students, rather than through predetermined objectives. In trying these new practices, many teachers initially described feeling reticent, but they eventually believed that using informal learning practices resulted in student musical growth.

Other researchers found that music teachers who had experienced informal music learning practices in their own musicianship outside of school felt tension in reconciling the differences between informal and formal processes, including a tension of “teacher control vs. learner agency” (Ruthmann, 2006, p. 243) and role shifts between being instructors and peer performers (Jaffurs, 2004). Abramo and Austin (2014) described the identity struggle of a formally trained teacher using informal teaching practices in a composition class, comparing it to his identity as a trumpet player and band director. Music teachers have also been found to struggle when deciding which practices would be most appropriate during informal learning situations (Abramo & Austin, 2014; Green, 2008). Teachers who used informal practices were reported as acting more as a coach rather than an instructor (Allsup, 2003), being flexible (Davis, 2010), and providing “space” for students to learn (Allsup, 2003, p. 35, footnote).

Some have critiqued the use of informal music learning in schools, saying that using these practices in the classroom may be challenging for teachers (Rodriguez, 2009). In one Swedish study, Lindgren and Ericsson (2010) found that music teachers failed to support and motivate student groups, resulting in less successful student musical products and a lack of teacher control. However, they did not describe whether these music teachers were given specific training or had experiences in informal music

learning and whether music teacher professional development might have resulted in better student outcomes.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Researchers in professional development for practicing music teachers have investigated teachers' preferences and their experiences (Bauer, 2007). Respondents to surveys of music teacher professional development have revealed that music teachers appreciate topics such as technology, methodology, and assessment (Bernard, 2009; Bowles, 2002; Tarnowski & Murphy, 2002); prefer to attend professional development within 100 miles of home (Bowles, 2002); and appreciate opportunities for autonomy (Ferrara, 2009). Researchers have also found that elementary teachers prefer attending professional development specific to elementary general music, as opposed to those focused on music more broadly (Bowles, 2002; Conway, Hibbard, Albert, & Hourigan, 2005).

Researchers have also studied PDCs in general education and music education. Several studies of PDCs have taken place among math and English teams at the secondary level (Horn, 2005; Little, 2002; Rousseau, 2004). Teachers in these PDCs benefitted from informal interactions (Horn, 2005) and often developed shared beliefs and understandings. However, in some cases, the PDCs did not result in long-term reforms in their teaching practice (Rousseau, 2004). Gruenhagen (2007) and Stanley (2009) studied professional development communities in music education as a way for music teachers to connect with peers, especially since they may be isolated from other music teachers. Within these PDCs, music teachers shared ideas and reflected on their teaching with others, but needed to have time to get to know group members personally before being open to talk about their teaching. Stanley (2009) also described how bringing in teaching videos and the use of a "collaborative consultancy protocol" guided discussions and facilitated a safe environment.

In contrast to these studies of professional development practices among in-service teachers, professional development focused on the topic of informal music learning has primarily been investigated with preservice music teachers in their music teacher methods courses (Davis & Blair, 2011; Finney & Philpott, 2010; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). In these courses, preservice teachers had opportunities to make music using informal practices, although Davis and Blair (2011) discovered that their undergraduate students needed opportunities to select their own repertoire in order for the experience to be successful. In another study, preservice teachers made music informally with children, helping them gain new perspectives of informal learning processes (Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). Through exploring informal music learning in these courses, many preservice teachers began to reflect on their own musical backgrounds and consider ways to incorporate informal practices into their teaching.

While previous studies have explored characteristics of informal music learning and their effects on student understandings (Abramo, 2011; Allsup, 2003; Davis, 2010;

Green, 2006, 2008; Jaffurs, 2004), and scholars have promoted the use of informal music learning in school music settings (Davis, 2010; Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2006, 2008; Väkevä, 2006; Westerlund, 2006), few studies have explored music teachers' experiences in implementing informal practices (Abramo & Austin, 2014; Green, 2008; Ruthmann, 2006). The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and practices of music teachers as they participated in a PDC to discuss and explore implementing informal music learning practices in the classroom. Questions guiding this investigation included (a) How do music teachers in this PDC implement informal music learning in their classrooms? and (b) How do music teachers' beliefs and practices evolve throughout their participation in the PDC?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several scholars have described informal music learning as a social constructivist practice (Abramo & Austin, 2014; Davis, 2010). Social constructivism is both a learning theory and a pedagogy characterized by opportunities to engage actively in problem-based learning, collaborate with others, think autonomously, and build upon socially and culturally acquired knowledge (Windschitl, 2002). It is rooted in progressive ideals of child-centered education (Dewey, 1902) and the theory of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). However, teachers may struggle in implementing social constructivist practices and face several "conceptual," "pedagogical," "cultural," and "political dilemmas" as they not only develop new skills but also "reorient" their personal philosophies (Windschitl, 2002, pp. 131–132). Windschitl (2002) called for professional development to explore both the practical applications and philosophical roots of constructivism.

However, music teachers should not only learn about constructivism to apply in their practice but also experience it in their professional development. Barrett (2006) noted that while professional development can be "congruent with constructivist teacher education practices" (p. 23), offerings at schools, workshops, and annual conferences often provide limited opportunities. She proposed that professional development include "contextual fit," "disciplinary fit," "self-directed inquiry," and "collaborative interaction" (Barrett, 2006, p. 24). In the current study, I was guided by the understanding that informal music learning uses social constructivist practices, but teachers may need self-guided, collaborative professional development to reflect on these ideas according to their own contexts and philosophical beliefs. Additionally, I applied social constructivism in my research methods by taking a participatory approach in the PDC and acknowledging that participants constructed their own understandings of informal music learning (Patton, 2002).

METHODS

This study was an instrumental case study that took place in the Midwest (Stake, 1995). I used ethnographic techniques in collecting and analyzing data in order to explore participants' perceptions and interactions in naturalistic settings (Creswell, 2007).

Participants were three elementary music teachers and one intermediate-level teacher who taught general music and choir. They were selected based on recommendations of area music education faculty because they had expressed interest in learning about new issues in music education. However, given the time and travel commitment needed to attend the PDC, selection was somewhat limited to teachers within a given radius of the PDC meeting location. After receiving institutional review board approval, data collection took place from November 2011 to April 2012 in PDC meetings, individual interviews with participants, and observations of the participants' music classes.

The PDC

The PDC met eight times biweekly for approximately two hours each. Prior to each meeting, participants read a research article related to informal music learning, which I selected based on participants' expressed interests and PDC discussions. The articles read in the PDC were by Allsup (2003), Davis (2010), Green (2006, 2008), Harwood (1998), Jaffurs (2004), and Woody and Lehmann (2010). Having participant input in the readings allowed for discussions to unfold naturally, rather than following a predetermined curriculum.

Each PDC meeting was divided roughly into four 30-minute segments. First, there was a social time with food in order for participants to build rapport with each other. Second, participants shared updates from informal music learning practices they had implemented since the previous meeting. Without prompting, participants often brought in video clips or written student work to share with other members. Third, participants discussed the research article they had read prior to the meeting. Finally, participants developed ideas to implement informal music learning in their own classrooms. This time frequently included brainstorming new ideas with each other and talking through logistics of the activities. However, participants had agency to choose if and when they wanted to implement informal practices. Overall, the four segments of PDC meetings were flexible and sometimes blended together.

My role in the PDC was both as group facilitator and member. As facilitator, I introduced the reading, prompted questions when needed, and ensured that the conversations took place in a comfortable environment. As a member, I shared from my own music teaching experiences. In this way, I hoped to function in the role of a peer and co-structor of knowledge within the group. This aligns not only with prior models of teacher study groups (Gruenhagen, 2007; Stanley, 2009), but also characteristics of informal learning (Allsup, 2003; Finney & Philpott, 2010) and social constructivism (Windschitl, 2002).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In data collection, the following forms were used: video recordings, audio recordings, observations, field notes, and artifacts (Creswell, 2007). First, I recorded all PDC meet-

ings using a Canon FS200 digital video camcorder. Second, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant at the beginning and end of the data collection; these were recorded using Garageband software and later transcribed. Third, I observed each participant's classroom one to three times, depending on the frequency with which they chose to implement informal practices and whether they informed me of their plans; this resulted in seven observations. During the observations, I took rich field notes (Creswell, 2007). Finally, I collected written artifacts from a private Facebook group and an online file-sharing software, which were implemented at the participants' requests.

After data collection ended, I reread and coded the data by looking for patterns using both etic codes from the literature and emic codes based on the data. I then used HyperResearch software to compare and contrast the codes to determine the most salient ideas, which were grouped into emergent themes. In analyzing the data, I used four criteria: credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). In order to establish credibility and authenticity, I sought to represent the participants accurately. I looked critically at my research methods throughout all stages of the process and sought integrity in my own actions by being reflexive. I ensured trustworthiness through four means: prolonged engagement, data triangulation, member checks, and peer review with two music education researchers (Creswell, 2007). Because this is a case study, the findings cannot be generalized, although others in similar contexts may find the results useful.

PARTICIPANTS

The four participants in this study were Tyler, Kendra, Cara, and Diana (pseudonyms). The participants stated that they did not have any experiences with informal music learning and had learned music through formal private lessons and traditional ensemble programs. While all of them enjoyed listening to various kinds of popular music, none of them regularly used this repertoire formally or informally in their classrooms prior to this study.

Tyler was in his second year as an elementary general music teacher at a fairly affluent school and was a proponent of using technology to support his teaching. Although Tyler was a trombonist, he chose to teach elementary music because he did not want to focus on the performances and competitions traditionally part of secondary programs. As the youngest teacher in the group, Tyler was not only interested in getting new ideas but also in receiving "encouragement . . . that what I'm doing is good for my students" (interview, November 20, 2011).

Kendra was in her seventh year of teaching. She knew she wanted to be a teacher before deciding to teach music. Originally, she was not interested in teaching music because of negative experiences with her high school band director. Kendra taught music in a lower socioeconomic school district, and she felt her students were often disinterested in school, so she was interested in developing meaningful, relevant experiences to motivate them.

Cara taught compulsory fifth-grade general music and an elective sixth-grade choir at an intermediate-level school, which made her setting unique from the others who taught younger grades. However, Cara's sixth graders were required to take either band or chorus, and she struggled to motivate some of these students who were only in her choir out of obligation. She tried to reach her students by sharing her own intense passion for music-making. Cara had been in the same district for nearly 10 years, but she had taught high school choir and then kindergarten before coming to this intermediate school.

Diana was the most veteran teacher in the PDC with 20 years of experience, but she was only in her second year in her current school building, after being transferred because of district budget cuts. Diana described her teaching as both "well-planned" and "evolving," because, although she had detailed and structured lesson plans, she would constantly reflect on and adapt her teaching to meet her students' needs. As Diana explained, "I think I spend maybe more time than the average bear thinking about what I'm going to do" (interview, December 1, 2011).

While some of the participants knew each other from local music teacher organizations, others met for the first time through their participation in the PDC. Three of the participants had received at least one degree from the same university, and all had received certifications in Orff and/or Music Learning Theory. While methodologies were not usually a topic of PDC meetings, they invariably shaped the lens through which participants viewed informal music learning, and they seemed to provide some connections in PDC meetings that aided in building community.

FINDINGS

Three themes emerged from the data: *experiments and modifications*, *pedagogical practices*, and *finding value*. *Experiments and modifications* describes the types of informal music learning applications participants developed in the PDC and the modifications they made for their unique contexts. *Pedagogical practices* refers to the strategies participants used in implementing informal music learning, and *finding value* details the appreciation participants developed for informal music learning as a result of observing their students' motivation and independent musicianship.

Experiments and Modifications

Participants initially referred to their applications of informal music learning as "experiments" because of their uncertainty about the potential success of these activities. For example, when Cara began brainstorming her first informal music learning activity, she exclaimed, "This could be a total social experiment! Who knows what's going to happen!" (PDC meeting, January 29, 2012). The participants developed these activities through an organic process that unfolded over the course of the PDC meetings as they drew from the readings, reflected on their own teaching, collaborated, and learned from each other's

experiences. Sometimes, one of the participants would suggest or develop an activity individually, and other times they developed activities together. Ultimately, participants developed five types of activities. Table 1 lists the activities developed to include informal music learning, a brief description, and the participants who implemented the activities.

The participants chose to implement informal music learning activities primarily in grades four through six, with the exception of Music Share Day, which they used in many grade levels. The participants discussed at length which grade levels would “work” with informal music learning processes, and while they were interested in trying these processes with lower elementary grades, they included them mostly in upper grades. Additionally, participants varied the length of time spent on each activity. While they implemented Music Share Day in one class period of 30 to 45 minutes, they typically provided two to four music classes for the other activities. The participants were often concerned about the amount of time students took to complete the informal activities, but they found validation from the readings and in each other’s experiences. All of them found that the informal learning activities took longer than expected.

In developing their “experiments,” participants made modifications of informal music learning practices by (a) modifying ideas presented in the research articles to fit their classroom needs and (b) modifying prior lessons they had taught. These modifications revealed insights into their processing of informal music learning and ideas

Table 1
Informal Music Learning Activities Developed in the PDC

Activity	Description	Teachers
Music Share Day	Students performed songs from outside of school for music class. Students could perform vocally or instrumentally, although teachers reported that virtually all students performed vocally.	Cara Diana Kendra Tyler
Popular Recorder Melodies	Students learned popular music melodies on their recorders with little teacher guidance. Teachers frequently chose the songs or provided a set of songs from which students could choose.	Diana Kendra Tyler
Small Group Instrumental and Vocal Covers	Students worked in small groups to perform a cover of a popular song learned aurally and played on a combination of voice and classroom instruments (e.g., recorders, various types of drums, and Orff instruments).	Diana Kendra Tyler
Small Group A Cappella Covers	Students worked in small groups to perform a cover of a popular music song learned aurally and performed only with voices on melody, harmony, and accompaniment.	Cara Diana
Rock Compositions	Students composed and notate their own rock songs in small groups using a combination of classroom instruments.	Tyler

discussed in the PDC. Because most of the articles they had read about informal music learning took place with adolescents, participants had to make modifications to use these practices with their younger students.

The participants frequently modified practices they read about in research articles. Often, they began developing these modifications as they discussed ideas together. As Tyler once shared in the group, “The wheels are turning in my head” (PDC meeting, December 16, 2011). The participants recognized they could not replicate activities exactly as they were described in the articles, partly because of a difference in instrumentation. Diana asked, “How do I get a drum kit and guitar for each group of five students?” (PDC meeting, December 16, 2011). Instead, participants chose to use instruments that were already in their classrooms and curriculums, like Orff instruments, drums, and recorders.

Several participants discovered that their students struggled to create cover songs using the Orff instruments and drums because they could not find the right pitches to match those heard in recordings. However, the participants did not explain why they believed students struggled. After seeing students struggle on Orff instruments, Cara and Diana modified their next informal activity to have students create a cappella covers. In explaining this modification, Cara said, “I wanna see what those guys can do, and I don’t have enough instruments to say, ‘Okay, you can take my bongos . . .’ So I think it’s the only logical thing” (PDC meeting, January 29, 2012). In this case, having the PDC as a place to troubleshoot aspects of informal activities that were less successful allowed participants to build their knowledge collectively, leading to an activity that they believed was more effective.

A second type of modification participants used was to change previous activities they had taught in order to incorporate informal characteristics. For example, Diana used informal practices to teach the fingering for F# on the recorder instead of using her regular formal lesson. She shared how a student had been playing the melody to “Kung Fu Fighting” (Douglas, 1974) on the recorder outside of class and decided to ask him to share that song and the new fingering in class. So instead of teaching F# herself in a formal way using traditional repertoire, Diana let her student share his knowledge and enthusiasm while still meeting her curricular goal. In her words, “So we learned the F#, but we used [the student’s] music” (PDC meeting, February 26, 2012).

As the participants “experimented” with informal music learning, they sometimes expressed concerns and challenges. Initially, the participants described concerns about the time length of each informal music learning activity. As Tyler explained, “As time gets more limited, and there’s the stuff that you need to teach, so that you can get the building blocks in there . . . you can’t give them as much informal time” (PDC meeting, February 26, 2012). The participants tended to view informal music learning activities as something they could use in addition to their formal instruction, and several discussions in the PDC focused on determining how the learning occurring during informal activities aligned with their required district curriculums.

Pedagogical Practices

Participants not only developed activities that included informal music learning, but they also implemented these using a variety of pedagogical practices. The pedagogical practices used by the teachers fell on one of two continua: a *continuum of teacher and student control* and a *continuum of teacher scaffolding*. These practices ranged on the continuums from more overt teacher involvement to little teacher involvement in students' music learning processes.

Continuum of Teacher and Student Control The *continuum of teacher and student control* involved varying the amount of control participants provided to students during informal music learning activities in selecting songs and determining small group memberships. In selecting songs used in the informal music learning activities, the continuum ranged from participants choosing songs for students to play to letting the students have freedom over their song choice. In the middle, participants selected a set of songs from which student groups could choose. Regardless of who selected the songs, though, virtually all of the songs used in the informal music learning activities were current popular music selections, which indicates both the students' preference and the participants' sensitivity toward students' interests. Similarly, in determining small group membership, participants ranged from choosing the groups for students to providing some input into group selections to allowing students to choose their own group.

In the teacher-selected songs, participants made the selections because they wanted to choose songs with appropriate lyrics and accessible music content. Other times, the participants provided teacher-mediated choices for their students, representing a mid-point on the continuum. Rather than choosing specific songs, they would let students vote as a class or provide a set of teacher-selected songs from which students could choose: "Yeah, limit their song choices, [but still] allow them decision-making with music" (Cara, PDC meeting, January 29, 2012). Tyler described purposefully selecting a song that was in a minor key to provide greater variation in his song set: "I've gotta have something other than major. What's in minor that's pop-y that the kids would like?" (PDC meeting, January 20, 2011).

At the other end of the continuum, participants gave students control over choosing their own songs. As a result, all of the participants had to negotiate when conflicts arose among students or give permission to students when they felt undecided. For example, Diana negotiated with a group who wanted to perform a song with questionable lyrics called "Sexy and I Know It" (Gordy, Listenbee, Beck, Robertson, & Oliver, 2011). She struck a compromise with them by introducing a parody of that song called "Elmo and I Know It" from the show *Sesame Street* (PAFilmsdotcom, 2012). The students were greatly amused by the parody. Even though it was intended for much younger children, they still liked how it was musically similar to their own choice, and they tried to recreate Elmo's funny dance moves.

Continuum of Teacher Scaffolding Participants exhibited varying degrees of teacher scaffolding over students' informal music learning activities. The pedagogical practices they used to scaffold students' learning in informal music activities were (a) providing lyrics and notation, (b) modeling examples, (c) giving permission, and (d) being hands-off. On the continuum, these ranged from more involved to more diminished teacher involvement.

Participants frequently provided sheets with song lyrics and/or notation for students to use in many of their informal learning activities. For example, I observed students using lyric sheets that Diana and Cara had provided. Diana explained that she provided the lyrics so students would listen to parts other than the melody: "They already know the main melody. It's not that complex" (PDC meeting, January 29, 2012). Cara only provided portions of the song lyrics, such as a verse and a chorus, to show how much of the piece she expected students to cover: "I didn't give them the whole song because I didn't want them to take forever" (PDC meeting, March 11, 2012).

Participants used modeling as a teacher intervention that provided some scaffolding and guidance. However, they frequently used modeling to provide representative examples of possible ideas, rather than something exact for students to replicate. In the a cappella cover song activity described earlier, Cara and Diana chose to set up the project by modeling examples of vocal percussion from a cappella Internet videos before students started working in groups. As Cara shared, "I'd try to draw their attention to all of the different parts . . . [I'd say,] 'Listen. Oh, that's really good!' or 'Listen to that beat!' or draw their attention to all of the background stuff" (PDC meeting, February 12, 2012).

In a less involved type of scaffolding, participants verbally gave students permission to make their own choices. The participants discovered that, when given the opportunity to work independently in informal music learning activities, some students felt unsure without the teacher directing each step. Diana described student groups as "looking for approval" in their choices (observation, March 14, 2012). Kendra described how giving permission led to positive outcomes:

On the first day, many students would raise their hands and tell me that they didn't know what to do. After being reassured that there was no "wrong way" of playing the song or experimenting, they began to gain confidence in their ability to create. (e-mail, February 26, 2012)

The final practice on the continuum of teacher scaffolding involved a lack of input from participants through being "hands-off" while students worked. Participants monitored groups and occasionally checked in with students, but they would not offer direction unless asked. While giving directions to students, Cara said, "I'm gonna sorta stay out of this," and explained this was "an opportunity for them to be creative and work together" (observation, February 2, 2012). Tyler physically manifested this idea by walking in between student groups with his hands clasped behind his back, as though reminding both himself and the students to work independently.

However, participants were not initially comfortable being hands-off when implementing informal activities. Kendra explained, “I don’t know how I would be judged if someone would come in and see my classroom” (PDC meeting, February 12, 2012). Diana compared this type of teaching to the fairy tale “The Emperor’s New Clothes”: She believed that if others found out about her new practices, they might presume she was not really teaching. She initially called the approach “anti-teaching” (PDC meeting, March 11, 2012). In particular, Diana and Kendra described feeling nervous when their principals came in unannounced to observe. However, they both felt relieved when their principals praised them for having students who were engaged and focused.

Finding Value

As the participants implemented informal music learning in their classrooms and discussed ideas in the PDC, they began to appreciate this new approach. Participants found value in the enhanced motivation and independent musicianship they observed from students while using informal practices. Ultimately, the participants began to view the informal learning activities they had implemented as important, or, as Cara stated, “Definitely worth my time” (PDC meeting, February 26, 2012).

Motivation Participants frequently expressed their surprise and appreciation at the increased levels of engagement they observed from students. Kendra wrote, “There are many positives to using this approach. One of the biggest factors is the level of student engagement. All students were actively engaged in the music-making process in their groups and everyone was contributing” (PDC meeting, February 26, 2012). Also, participants were impressed with the increased motivation of students who were typically reluctant to participate. Diana shared how a group of boys were so motivated during the informal a cappella cover song activity that they made special arrangements for their in-class performance to accommodate a missing student, even though these same boys had chosen not to attend their choir concert a few weeks prior.

That group at my [choir] concert three weeks ago, 11 of the 13 boys didn’t come because of peer pressure. They had no problem letting the whole class down during the concert, but they were really worried that their [informal music] performance wouldn’t be good enough without one person coming! (PDC meeting, March 25, 2012)

Musical Independence At the end of the study, three participants expressed how, as a result of observing their students’ informal musicking, they had changed beliefs about independent musicianship. Cara felt as though her understanding of independent musicianship had “expanded.” “Yeah, so basically, I believe that independent musicians come in different forms now. They can hear it, they can jam, or they can interpret musical scores” (interview, April 6, 2012). Diana compared her approach to teaching before and after using informal processes:

Well, it’s funny, because before [being in the PDC], I did this independent recorder project, where I let them choose from so many songs . . . and then they were to

learn it on their own. But now I'm thinking it's not that independent. I somehow still had so much control over it. And [during] the last project, I was thinking about how little control I really had. (interview, April 14, 2012)

However, unlike the other participants, Tyler felt that his definition of independent musicianship had not changed as a result of implementing informal music learning.

I've always thought that my whole goal as a music teacher is not to produce, you know, the best musicians, or to make sure that everyone's going to be the best music maker; it's to make sure that they understand music in a way that's relevant, applicable, and important to them. So independent musicianship is being able to achieve in music with your own interest, your own skills, and your own understanding. (interview, April 16, 2012)

Tyler explained that his role as a teacher was to help students "understand stuff that's important to them" (interview, April 16, 2012). Tyler's views may not have changed because he was the youngest participant in the PDC and had been in an undergraduate music education program that promoted independent musicianship and introduced more progressive pedagogies. Thus, using informal practices may have supported beliefs he already held about independent musicianship.

Overall, the participants viewed the informal music learning activities they had developed as something they wanted to pair with their formal teaching. They believed that informal practices could be used in tandem with formal instruction, as summarized by Kendra below:

I think we need to [give students the tools they need] through both formal and informal music learning experiences. Formal music learning ensures that we cover all the bases. . . . We can assess, create, improvise, play, sing, experiment—but it is almost always guided by the teacher and there is always a structure in place. Informal music learning feels a little bit like taking the training wheels off the bike. Students have a base knowledge and skills, but it is an opportunity to let go and let them experiment on their own. Informal music learning has more to do with self-motivation, flow, and enjoyment—all key components for deep learning to take place. (e-mail, February 26, 2012)

The participants believed that, while formal instruction was useful for developing skills in a more structured way, informal music learning provided students with a motivating, relevant, and holistic approach to musicking that resulted in greater musical independence, and they felt they should provide both approaches in their teaching.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The participants developed and implemented five activities they perceived used informal music learning. However, if these are examined through Folkestad's (2006) categories of situation, learning style, ownership, and intentionality, they had varying levels of informal qualities, which further supports his view of formal and informal learning as a continuum, rather than a dichotomy. Participants developed these activities by modify-

ing ideas described in PDC readings about secondary-aged learners and by modifying activities they had taught previously so that they would be suitable with their younger students and build on their prior teaching.

Participants found that their students struggled to replicate multiple parts from popular selections on Orff instruments. They believed that students were more successful with their voices because they could vocally imitate both melodic and harmonic parts more easily than they could on classroom instruments, which may have been due to the diatonic setup of the instruments. However, the participants did not explain why students struggled. It is possible that students may have lacked technical skills on the Orff instruments, lacked enough chromatic pitches to successfully recreate the pieces, or struggled to match pitches because of the timbre differences between the instruments and the recordings. Allsup (2003) found that choice of popular or classical genres influenced older students' compositional choices, but in this study, participants found that song selections affected students' success in covering their piece, but not necessarily the learning processes they used.

The participants seemed to view informal music learning as activities to use in addition to their formal instruction, as when Tyler described having "building blocks" he "needed to teach." They viewed informal activities as a way to reinforce skills and concepts learned formally, as evidenced in Kendra's metaphor of "taking the training wheels off the bike," although some may view this as a misconception of informal music learning. The participants believed that both formal and informal learning had a place in their teaching. Music education may benefit from examining how formal and informal learning can coexist in the classroom pedagogically and philosophically. There are concerns that bringing informal processes and popular music into the music classroom could result in a hybridized "school" genre. However, it is also possible that informal and formal learning could be used in school music in mutually beneficial ways, regardless of genre. Future research should explore whether learning music informally might influence students' formal learning, and vice versa, as well as whether certain skills or concepts are learned more effectively through more informal or formal processes.

In this study, the teachers used new pedagogical practices to accommodate their students during informal music learning activities, which were described in the *continuum of teacher and student control* and the *continuum of teacher scaffolding*. Cain (2013) described how teachers naturally "adopt different pedagogies for different situations," including an "informal pedagogy" (p. 78). Cain also stated that whether teachers use formal or informal processes might not only be determined by the musical genre, but by their educational aims. He proposed that the aim of teachers using informal pedagogies is to have students reproduce popular music using processes authentic to the genre. However, the participants in this study did not seem to be guided by an aim of "authentic reproduction," but an aim to help students become independent musicians. As general music teachers, the participants were aware that their students might not participate in school music after attending their music classes. They wanted their

students to have musical skills and an interest in music to support themselves in any of their future musical endeavors whether in or outside of school; this was an educational aim they held prior to the PDC. However, through their experiences in implementing informal music learning, they developed an expanded view of independent musicianship. They believed that independent musicianship was not only a demonstration of musical competency but also students' ability to solve problems, work collaboratively, and pursue their own musical interests.

Participants' beliefs about informal music learning evolved over their time in the PDC. Cara's, Diana's, and Kendra's initial hesitations are similar to the "dissonances" (Finney & Philpott, 2010, p. 18) experienced by undergraduates who experienced informal music learning for the first time (Davis & Blair, 2011; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010), as well as the tensions described by other practicing teachers as they analyzed their beliefs and assumptions regarding informal learning (Abramo & Austin, 2014; Ruthmann, 2006). Uncertainty may be a common first reaction to informal music learning for many music teachers, regardless of their level of teaching experience. Conversely, Tyler initially seemed more open to informal music learning, but he had been introduced to similar ideas in his undergraduate program. Thus, these ideas may have been less dissonant or unfamiliar to him, allowing him to more easily accept informal learning practices since they corresponded with beliefs he already held.

Anecdotally, the participants have continued to share with me how being in this study transformed their teaching, but these long-term changes were not revealed in the data. Thus, the study's time frame may have been too short for participants to fully conceptualize informal music learning. However, the finding that participants were able to modify their prior activities and ideas found in research suggests that acceptance and incorporation of informal music learning into teachers' existing practice may be an initial step in a longer process of change. Additionally, more studies may need to examine such issues as whether and how music teachers use both formal and informal experiences and how this affects student learning.

Participants believed the PDC played an important part in helping them feel comfortable with and validated in using informal music learning that they might not have developed on their own. Kendra explained the PDC gave her "permission" and that reading research convinced her that "it's valid [and] it's valuable." Other experienced teachers may be open to learning about informal music learning but may benefit from a supportive community and opportunities to read music education research in order to change their beliefs. Music teacher educators might want to develop modifications of degree programs and also provide opportunities for practicing teachers to experience informal learning in graduate courses and long-term professional development.

Future research is needed to explore the applications of informal music learning practices and perceptions of music teachers as they implement them at various age levels, particularly with younger children and in various types of classrooms (general music, choral, instrumental, music technology, etc.), as well as how teachers might use

both formal and informal processes in their music classrooms. Also, further research is needed to explore whether changes in teachers' perceptions about implementing informal music learning are lasting and result in philosophical and pedagogical change. Finally, future studies might look at the role of autonomy in teacher professional development and whether the components of this PDC—socializing, reflecting, reading research, and brainstorming new applications—can result in teacher growth.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Julie Derges Kastner is an assistant professor of music education at the University of Houston. This article is based on her 2012 dissertation, *Exploring Informal Music Learning Pedagogy in a Professional Development Community of Elementary Music Teachers*, at Michigan State University. The author would like to thank her advisor, Dr. Cynthia Taggart, for her guidance on this project.

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