

Informal music learning, championed by Lucy Green, is extremely student-centered. Informal music learning aims to “enhance student motivation, enjoyment, and skill-acquisition” through relatable music experiences (Musical Futures 2015). Even though this learning process is very student-centered, teachers must be extremely organized and prepared in order to ensure students’ success. Green and D’Amore (2015) list the general sequence of an informal learning lesson. The teacher must be prepared to “set the task going, stand back, observe, diagnose, guide, suggest, model, take on students’ perspectives, and help students achieve the objectives they set for themselves” (Green & D’Amore 2015). Students may also participate in informal music learning when objectives are set by the teacher as long as students complete the objectives “independently without intervention from the teacher” (Abrahams, Rafaniello, Vodicka, Westawski, Wilson 2009). There are two important skills that the teacher must master. The teacher must have excellent analysis skills, and the teacher must also be able to guide students without interfering with the music learning process. This could be difficult for teachers who are driven by sequencing. The exact sequencing of each lesson might be different due to the process in which students learn.

Jerome Bruner’s Generative Theory is directly related to Green’s philosophy. Bruner’s theory supports “discovery learning” and “insists on intrinsic motivation to move towards higher order learning” (Nsamenang 2012). Students need to be motivated in order to have meaningful experiences that can be applied to their lives. Bruner’s theory states that a learner starts with the “known” concepts or information, travels into the “unknown”, and then synthesizes both to become the “new known”. Students participating in informal music learning are using their pre-established skills as musicians to learn new skills that then add to their musicianship. Students are empowered to explore the “unknown”.

The “unknown” of Bruner’s theory is also the zone of proximal development in Vygotsky’s social learning theory. “The zone of proximal development has been defined as ‘the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers’” (McLeod 2012). The “adult guidance” would be the teacher, and the “independent problem solving” would be the process of informal music learning within student groups. For example, students may be asked to create a cover for a familiar pop tune. The teacher will guide students by giving them the objective, and possibly ideas of how to plan out the rehearsing or recording process. The students then have to solve the problem of how to create something different than the original with the resources that they have as musicians. The entire process of learning the cover to the song is within the zone of proximal development.

Going through this process is an extremely empowering experience for student and teacher. Students learn that they are independent musicians, and teachers learn that they can trust their students’ musicianship. However, I feel that this process must be taken in small steps when first beginning to use it. Students are intuitive, but may be overwhelmed if the teacher does not properly prepare them. As a teacher, I would feel lost without taking preliminary steps to accustom myself to the process. Applying independent learning in segments of separate classes beforehand would be helpful in preparation. For example, students in groups may listen to a track of music and try to sing or play the bass line. The groups would then share their findings. If a group found something different than the bass line, this could also be taken into account as an important part of the piece to be used later. Students learn how to listen, decode, and replicate a pattern in a piece of music. This prepares them to re-create a cover for a song

without jumping into the entire activity. The teacher also has the chance to guide students in discussion and analysis before tackling an entire song.

Informal music learning seems to be a natural occurrence whether or not it is incorporated into a school curriculum. This is apparent based on the number of musicians that I know both personally and in the general public who do not read music or were not involved in school music programs. Including informal music learning in a curriculum will simply invite students who are already musically inclined to create and discover in a natural way.

References

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