On Informalities in Music Education

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Abstract and Keywords

This article proposes a pluralistic and comparative view of informalities in music education. After critically examining issues surrounding the definition of informality, it describes and critiques informality as a metaphorical model of music education, and discusses how formality and informality intersect in this model. The discussion then sketches a contrasting manifestation of informality in the context of connectivity, another metaphorical model of music education, and notes the implications of these differing informalities for music education theory and practice.

Keywords: music education informality, music education models, music connectivity, music education theory

Definitional Issues

For the better part of the last two centuries, music education has been conducted in the public sphere (if by public, we mean a collective will of the people who comprise it and on whose behalf education is conducted, e.g., Dewey, [1927]1954). In this milieu, formality in music education has been normative, its root “form” requiring particular shape, design, discipline, system, organization, control, teacher-led induction of a student, and particular outcome. This systematic approach to education has also been seen by some women to have been organized by and for men if also conducted by women who sometimes felt estranged by it (e.g., Grumet, 1988; hooks, 1994; Martin, 2000). Lucy Green (2002, 2008) has proposed that informal approaches to music education constitute a way forward for music education and a basis for classroom pedagogy. In educational dis-
course, informality has been construed as an inversion of formality with characteristics of the private sphere (if by private, we think in terms of domestic life, e.g., Montessori, [1967]1972, Martin, 1992). Such education is focused on process, idiosyncratic, rhapsodic, unsystematic, learner-generated, and divergent in its outcomes, and potentially more hospitable to women and girls. In the field of music education, while the term formality has been used generally to describe institutional programs of music instruction in schools, conservatories, colleges, and universities that were often publicly supported, informality has been employed to refer to various situations, be they the transmission of music from one generation to another in home and social life (McCarthy, 1999), the behavior of popular musicians in rock bands and garage bands (Green, 2002), or music programs in publicly supported schools that complement formal approaches (Green, 2008) or transform them (Allsup, 2003; Westerlund, 2006; Allsup and Benedict, 2008). In challenging the hegemony of formal music education, advocates of informal music education have posited that formal approaches are narrowly construed in omitting potentially useful insights or misguided in advocating methods at odds with the ways in which people have learned music in the past or make and take it in the present technologically mediated world. As they see it, ways of learning music are needed that take advantage of these other means of coming to know music in ordinary lived life.

Another interrelated question set concerns how broad the scope of informality should be, whether limited to certain aspects of musical education and ancillary to formal approaches or definitive of the whole cloth of music education. In response to Green’s (2002, 2008) practical approach to informality as an adjunct to formal learning in school music, I have wondered how the entire enterprise of music education might be construed informally if we think of it educationally to include music qua music, teaching, learning, instruction (or the interaction between teachers and students), curriculum, and administration (Jorgensen, 1980). Regarding Informality as a model of music education seems less radical, today than Ivan Illich’s ([1971] 2002) prophetic call for a radically informal approach to education and the “deschooling” of society may have seemed in the latter twentieth century. Which of these conceptions of informality is nearer the mark? How do these various conceptions of the purview of informality shape what is meant by informality (and formality) in music education? My own response to this question set is complicated by the fact that theoretical characteristics similar to those in a model of informality grounded in the metaphor of the home also emerge in other music educational models such as connectivity that derives from the metaphor of the Web (Jorgensen, 2010). Informality serves both as a defining quality and an ancillary attribute of various metaphorical models of music education. (The same is true of formality (p. 455) evident to varying degree in such models as rule predicated on the metaphor of the courtroom and pedagogy derivative from the metaphor of the guide.)

A further caveat relates to the power of the context in which music education, by whatever means, transpires. In the United States, music education is intimately connected with publicly supported education; as music education goes, so goes public education (Jorgensen, 2011). Formality infuses the present music educational system and informality is restricted and adjudicated by its values. Having spent the better part of two centuries de-
developing public schools, inserting music into them, and regarding music education as a matter of public policy, supporters of public education and music education may concede a limited role for informality but reject the broader view of informality as its modus operandi. Construing music education as informality would challenge the education profession's raison d'être and reshape publicly supported schooling as we know it. Such a move would impact not only the context of music education but all of its musical, teaching, learning, instructional, curricular, and administrative aspects. These changes would transform education generally.

Beyond the immediate institutional context in which music education is conducted, societal and cultural milieus frame informality (and formality) more broadly. Today's musical, political, religious, familial, and commercial institutions are resisted by pervasively informal technological and mediated realities that are more open to informal approaches to education. Informality is fostered by mediated communication that has proved difficult even for those institutions with societal and global reach to contain; these technological values are also contested in the public and private spaces. Taking into account these broader contextual possibilities requires complicating notions of informality (and formality), challenging the institutional mores, beliefs, and practices of education and music education, and negotiating practically the likely resistance to a more radical view of informality.

In foregrounding informality in music education in this writing, I cannot also do justice to notions of formality that are pervasive in music education and merit the self-same philosophical attention. Recent examinations of the claims of informality for music education, the critical response to Green's (2002, 2008) proposal for music education and her responses to her commentators (for example, issue 8(2) of *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* [October 2009], and the special edition of *Visions of Research in Music Education* [September 2008]), and my own recent writing (Jorgensen, 2011) suggest that addressing matters of informality is the more immediate priority. A fuller discussion of formality in music education must await another day.

Rewriting and extending my earlier discussion (Jorgensen, 2011), I briefly describe the metaphor of the home, sketch some of the musical, teaching, learning, instructional, curricular, and administrative aspects of informality, and reprise some of the strengths and weaknesses of this model. Predicating informality on the metaphor of the home constitutes only one of a possible array of metaphors that might illumine it. Still, it is a pervasive one in music and education and I am intrigued by its close association with classical as well as vernacular traditions from antiquity and internationally. Its very commonality is a compelling reason to explore its implications. This metaphor has particular implications for the various aspects of music education and appeals to imagination beyond reason, so its ambiguity suggests a variety of possible conceptions of informality of which the one I describe is an instance.

I do not claim that the particular model that I describe here is the only or best example. More modestly, it is simply one metaphorical model of music education derivative from
the metaphor of the home. Figurative thinking about music education spawns what Max­
ine Greene (1988, ch. 4) aptly terms “multiplicities and pluralities” or what Gilles Deleuze
and Felix Guattari (1987, ch. 2) think of as “multiplicities” and seek to capture in their
metaphor of the “pack of wolves.” The ancient roots of this pluralistic approach and its
enduring character are evidenced by Plato’s dialectical pursuit of the “one and the
many” (Richards, 1942, 215) and the more recent discussion of the ambiguity of language
and the relationship of theory and practice by such writers as Israel Scheffler (1973, ch.
16; 1979) and Joseph Schwab (1971). If these sorts of arguments hold, and I cannot tra­
verse this ground here, one might expect multiple visions of informality rather than one—
that is, informalities rather than informality. Green’s (2002, 2008) conception of informa­
ity is one, Green’s commentators’ conceptions are others, and my own is still another. My
point is to show that it is unlikely that any one of these conceptions can or should offer
the only or infallible view of music education construed as informality. Rather, one might
better take a pluralistic and comparative view and explore their commonalities and differ­
ences through examining the metaphors on which they are predicated and the particular
ways in which they play out, explicitly and implicitly, in music education. This analysis
constitutes an example of how this approach can work theoretically and practically.

Informality as Metaphoric Model

In unpacking the metaphor of the home (as opposed to house), I think of a spiritual as
well as a literal place and time within the context of the wider world of space and time
that is socially as well as individually constructed. It is an intentional space apart from
the world of public affairs yet intimately interconnected with it. It revolves around com­
mitments and caring on the part of its members. Construed ideally, it requires love, de­
sire, affection, and faithfulness, and its members value intimacy, tact, safety, and respect.
Practically, these ideals and values play out imperfectly in lived life. Still, one hopes that
it will be a refuge and place of contentment and that all who dwell together within it will
experience happiness even as they participate in the sometimes mundane domestic roles
and responsibilities that mark home life. Inevitably, home life brings sorrow and death as
it may also yield joy and life. Social mores, beliefs, and practices also formalize around
domestic relationships and delimit who may dwell together and the people’s free­
dom to construct homes and home life differently from what societal norms allow. What
may begin as informal bursts its bounds to become formal just as that which is formal be­
comes informal. Notwithstanding commonalities in the living of domestic life, homes are
construed diversely around the world so I am interested in the specific differences as well
as similarities between homes at a given time and place.

Thinking more systematically about music education construed as informality, I begin
with music. Although some proponents of music educational informality see it almost ex­
clusively in terms of popular musics, it is pervasive in classical as well as vernacular mu­
sics. The classical traditions of East and West that grew out of vernacular musics retain
aspects of their informality. Traditionally, the young in these traditions became musicians
largely through being immersed in a music, participating in it, picking up requisite skills
often in the context of performing it, and socializing around it. This largely osmotic and imitative process in which formal instruction was often quite limited can be seen, for example, in the lives of families by whom a musical tradition was practiced as a means to a livelihood (Geiringer & Geiringer, 1954; Neuman, 1980). Also, the seeds of musical formality lie within informality and vernacular musics are interconnected with the classical traditions that they sometimes become or spawn. Rose Rosengard Subotnik ([1987] 1994) points to the musical loss that occurs when these connections are ruptured. The importance of vernacular musics as the source of classical traditions is also recognized by Zoltán Kodály (1974) who advocated a system of vocal music education grounded in the traditional music of the “folk,” and Shinichi Suzuki (1969) who designed his program of string education around children’s song and the home. The history of jazz and various popular musics likewise illustrates the urge to formalize, canonize, and reify exemplary instances of these musics and transmit them systematically to the next generation. In a host of musics, formality peeks through informality and seeks to order it just as informality peeks through formality and seeks to humanize it.

Music in informality is construed in pervasively practical terms. Its adherents can talk about it, as they do everywhere from the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea to the music schools of North America. Still, it is something that is done, often in the context of other things, and thereby not always the focus of attention. Contra the notion that classical music must be attended to in particular ways, Peter Kivy (1990) quotes E. M. Forster’s Howard’s End to notice that some people are like Mrs. Munt who taps “surreptitiously when the tunes come,” or “Helen, who can see heroes and shipwrecks in the music's flood,” or “Margaret, who can only see the music,” or Tibby, “who holds the full score open on his knee.” The sheer variety of types of musical listening can be multiplied by the host of performing situations (Jorgensen, 2008, chs. 7, 8). Classical performers often serve sometimes ancillary if also important roles in social events and they are often required to improvise in these settings. Becoming a musician in the context of informality means gradually picking up the practical skills in a particular musical tradition as one is surrounded by it in ordinary lived life.

(p. 458) Even within the informality, there is design, whether of rhythmic and melodic patterns, formal structures, timbrel and dynamic qualities, and performance practices. Improvisations have form. All musicians who improvise apply formal rules to the procedure of creating in-the-moment-of-performance improvisations. These formulae may sound fresh and spontaneous or not, but they are a part of a musician’s repertoire of approaches to these particular situations. Once, a Western classical musician might extemporaneously perform a concerto cadenza but, although this phenomenon is more rarely seen today, some classically trained musicians continue to improvise (Jorgensen, 2008, 144, 166-72). Irrespective of their particular prowess, formality lurks within this seemingly spontaneous and informal music-making and creates the impulse to work out this music more systematically and fully into definitive compositions, performances, or recordings that are enjoyed by a music’s public and regarded as memorable and even exemplary.
On Informalities in Music Education

Thinking about teaching, musical practices are literally transmitted to the next generation by the elders in the tribe whether literally or figuratively construed. Musical groups are motivated by a desire to continue in existence and, if possible, thrive and a system of transmitting musical beliefs and practices is essential to the continuance of every musical tribe. Mentoring by the most senior members of the junior members occurs informally as it may also happen quite formally.

Although much of the teaching may be done indirectly by means of exemplifying a tradition and living a way of life that goes well beyond the narrow confines of musical practice, some teaching is direct in response to questions by younger and less experienced musicians or by showing them what to do. As Vernon Howard (1982, especially chs. 3, 4) notes, music teaching occurs by means of words and actions. In some musical traditions, teaching by means of action or demonstration is the only or principal means of direct instruction. Whether from words or example, the student must grasp what to do. In this way, the physicality of music (or its embodiment as some may prefer to put it) is communicated to the student by the teacher.

There is considerable fluidity in the role of the teacher which is assumed on the basis of expertise rather than a formal role assignment as in the appointment of a school music teacher. Even though it often falls on the more senior or more experienced musicians to transmit their knowledge to those who are younger and less experienced, the role of teacher is not necessarily formalized and depends upon the particular expertise of a musician. In this model, more talented and younger musicians may have something to teach their elders.

Concerning learning, the largely osmotic, participatory, imitative, and sensibility-oriented informal means of learning (Jorgensen, 2003, 101–8) rely on the learner’s initiative and insight as knowledge is caught by students rather than didactically taught to them. What is more, musical knowledge is learned in the context of activities that are not necessarily or intentionally pedagogical. In the midst of the various musical and other activities, students are surrounded by musical examples that become normative, and they pick up a practical knowledge of music-making through listening and participating in musical activities. Imitation, sometimes (p. 459) through play but often driven by the claims of performance, is also of particular importance as a means of learning. Examples constitute exemplars that become imperatives to learners. Such learning is often holistic in its focus on the entire event rather than atomistic in the sense of systematically analyzing its particularities.

More formal ways of learning through such means as instruction, example, practice, and reflection (Howard, 1992) are also sometimes selectively employed in families and musical clans especially in the case of talented youngsters and where the family’s or clan’s reputation is at stake. When it takes on this formal tilt, the learning process is less serendipitous and more systematic, and the learner’s attention is less peripheral and more focused on specific musical aspects at issue. To ignore a role for this type of direct-
ed and focused attention in informal learning would overlook an important dimension of informal musical learning.

Green (2002, 2008) has noticed the collaborative and communal dimensions of informal learning by the popular musicians and in the informal school music programs that she studied. Although much has been made of these aspects by writers such as Christopher Small (1980), individual and competitive aspects also emerge across a swath of musical traditions in which informality predominates. It may be in the interest of talented musicians to keep their knowledge secret from others or ensure that others do not play “their” songs without permission. This is so because musical prowess is a potential source of livelihood and of power. A music’s public is also identified with a particular musical tradition and the musicians who exemplify and express it. Identity is a matter not only of power but of pride, and this reality likewise resists efforts toward collaboration and self-effacement and fosters competition and individualism, even in musics that exemplify communal aesthetics. The desire to excel in one’s craft seems to be endemic among creative people and naturally fosters individualism and competition on the part of learners as other more experienced musicians who wish to be considered among the best. Links between musical prowess and matters of individual and social identity and public evaluation provide a source of motivation for learners since what is learned will likely be performed and evaluated publicly, and the social standing of the performers will be on the line.

Under these circumstances, instruction, or the interrelationship between teacher and student, is likely to be driven by choice. Students seek assistance from those they respect or from whom they wish to learn, and teachers determine whether, who, what, how, or when they will teach. An egalitarian relationship between teacher and student may obtain especially because the teaching role is more fluid and sometimes dependent on the relative expertise in a particular skill in question at a moment in time.

The familial roots of informality are evidenced in qualities such as love, tact, forbearing, and an interest in the student that may well be literally in loco parentis if the teacher is related to the student (e.g., Montessori, [1967]1972; Suzuki, 1969; van Manen, 1991; Martin, 1992). A family has a vested interest in the student’s success especially when this student has been identified as musically gifted. In families that pass down expertise through a lineage of generations, and in which this knowledge is often quite specialized, whether as instrumentalist or singer, accompanist or soloist, familial bonds reinforce music instruction just as instruction bursts the bounds of pedagogical situations to encompass the entirety of lived life. Living with or in close proximity to one’s teacher opens the possibility of affection forged over an extended time and fosters a sense of duty and obedience to the claims of a musical tradition. In less literally familial circumstances, the members of a musical clan affiliate by choice and remain out of affection for the clan and its music-making. There is also freedom to leave the clan should one wish, although in some traditions, a sense of duty and obligation may bind teacher and student for a lifetime. The love that is expressed by teacher and student is also disinterested in the sense of wanting the welfare of the other and caring for that person (Noddings, 1984). These qualities foster potentially humane instructional situations. Since this instruction is often
occasional and conducted in the midst of other musical activities, it takes on a greater urgency since it cannot be counted on to be available at any time. It is also serendipitous and potentially idiosyncratic and is not necessarily planned for systematically. Much hinges on the extended time during which it takes place and the hope that through all of this lived musical life, a neophyte gradually acquires the knowledge of an exponent of the musical tradition.

Regarding its curriculum, informality evidences a pervasively traditional approach that relies on the exemplary character of the music-making of its exponents. The recordings and performances to which a garage band listens, the stature of the traditional musicians in a particular family, and the distinction of a particular musical lineage being transmitted impact the nature of the musical knowledge to be transmitted. This tradition first needs to be mastered by students before they can set out to transform it, hence the normative quality of examples from past and present practice. Given the performative emphasis, this approach fosters not only a knowledge of how to go on in music but a grasp of the tradition’s lore—the stories of its principal exponents and their teachings. In informality, one approaches the tradition from the perspective of a particular set of interests or obligations and one masters it gradually through doing it. Within bands of popular musicians as with traditional and classical musicians, at least in the past, there is often a sense of beginning intuitively, moving on to master the requisite technical skills, and then coming to a more generalized grasp of this tradition as the musicians also develop their signature styles and sounds. In so doing, Alfred North Whitehead’s ([1929] 1967) cyclical approach to the phases of romance, instrumentalism, and generalization that are repeated at different stages of development seems particularly relevant.

Rather than a systematic or generalized conceptual approach to a musical tradition, students approach it from the perspective of a need to know in the context of musical performance and by following a principle of antecedence whereby they learn what they perceive they need in order to master the next thing that they want to do. In this model, the student’s interest and need to know drives the process. Some traditions require that the student demonstrate aptness, teachability, and trustworthiness before teachers can be persuaded to impart what they know. Daniel Neuman’s (1980, 49) case of the ustad who, after twenty-six years of instruction, had still not taught a particular student the surbahar is a notable example of the obligations for the students to convince their teachers to teach them. This onus on the student frames coming to musical knowledge quite differently from formal curricula in which teachers are obligated to communicate subject matter to their students. Doubtless, the contextualization of the curriculum and its immediate application to music-making and taking makes its relevance readily apparent to students who grasp the imperative for their mastery of particular skills and subject matter.

Thinking of administration within informality suggests a relatively “flat” organizational structure in which roles and responsibilities are sometimes fluid; in which those within the system have immediate and unfettered access to others; in which musical groups can emerge, coalesce, and thrive in the midst of a dynamic and changing system; and in which the organization bleeds into its context. With families, for example, one generation
gives way to the next (sometimes unwillingly, but nevertheless inexorably) and there is an ongoing sense of transformation over time. Tracing the generations of the Bach family, for example, one sees moments of change interspersing with periods of continuity. All of this happens quite naturally as each generation relies on the next one to carry on the tradition as it also feels obligated to pass on the wisdom bequeathed to it.

Construed more figuratively, organizations may be constructed in cellular ways that enable small and large groups to find each other, develop their expertise, and pass on their knowledge to those who are more junior or less experienced. Thinking of informality within the context of a music school suggests envisaging a dynamic organization that provides times and places for informal music education. Such a system focuses on music-making in a dynamic and contextualized curriculum that emphasizes a “need to know” on the part of students. Creating a figurative “home” such as this requires administration to create and sustain a humane environment where all its members are valued, in the hope that all will thrive musically and in other ways. There is also a premium on creating and sustaining spaces and times to meet individually and in small groups. These realities make informality challenging to administer, especially if conducted within the frame of formal educational institutions.

The diversity and idiosyncratic quality of such a system obviously transgresses or resists educational systems predicated on what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) characterize as “arborescent” or “tap rooted,” striated, hierarchical, and static thinking that manifests in educational imperatives such as normalized or standardized beliefs and practices, accredited programs, and teacher licensures. Informal organizations that evidence the “rhizomatic,” “smooth,” nomadic, and dynamic thinking advocated by Deleuze and Guattari require some measure of institutional independence to carry off their programs informally.

Inevitably, the work of informal music education spills beyond music schools to encompass community and other musical organizations under the aegis of commercial, political, or religious institutions, and is affected by the particular values that undergird those institutions.

It is difficult to imagine musical organizations that do not have formal educational elements. Symphony orchestras, concert halls, and opera houses now also operate formal educational programs within the purview of their pervasively performance focus. Likewise, even were one to imagine a music school that operates informally, it is unlikely that it would bypass formal approaches altogether. Rather, the spontaneity and dynamism of such an organization are likely to bubble up into a demand for more formal instruction. The pervasively informal European conservatories that emerged during the mid-nineteenth century illustrate the significance of the instruction given for the students and the intensity that such instruction often generates. For example, Amy Fay (1880) and Ethel Smyth (1919) studied in Germany during this period and gained a rich musical and cultural education. They received the serious attention of the male teachers with whom they sought to study and returned to their respective countries prepared to undertake professional careers as musicians. Although their educational programs were unregulated and idiosyncratic, their informal study resulted in their eventual development as musi-
cians steeped in the Euroclassical tradition. It is likely that this sort of instruction created a demand by students and teachers for more formal administrative arrangements.

Whether music, teaching, learning, curriculum, or administration, then, informality is evidenced in particular characteristics that derive from the metaphor of the home. Taken literally and figuratively, informal and formal approaches intersect in all of these aspects of music education and some degree of formality is evident throughout an entire music educational system predicated on informality. I now turn to a critique of this model.

**Informality Critiqued**

The metaphorical model that I have just described has light and dark sides. Reworking and commenting on my earlier writing (Jorgensen, 2010), I briefly sketch the attractions and detractions of informality for music, teaching, learning, instruction, curriculum, and administration. Regarding music, I note the advantages of the practical nature of music as something that is done in the midst of lived life. Its organic connection with other things imbues it with relevance and importance as a means of giving voice to celebratory, mourning, instructional, courting, and working activities among those that comprise ordinary living. Its ephemeral character requires that it be kept alive through its continuing practice, and its practical emphasis helps maintain this musical tradition. Its accessibility to its public contributes to its widespread impact in and identifying marker for a society. Among its disadvantages, its practical rather than theoretical interest may render it insufficiently critical of the tradition. Thinking of past tradition as normative may render it excessively conservative, proscriptive in terms of its requirements of musicians and its public, and insufficiently responsive to the claims of change and transgression of the status quo.

To its credit, teaching in informality is done by those with greater expertise than those they teach, and much hangs on a teacher’s musicianship and expertise. Given the more egalitarian circumstances that may prevail, teaching may be more like mentoring as more experienced and expert musicians help those who are less experienced and expert. Potentially, teaching may be humane and teachers may evidence a caring and compassionate approach that is tactful in the sense of relating to students in ways that are helpful to their development. Such teaching is fallible and collegial as the teacher in this particular situation is absolved from being omniscient but simply knows more than the student about a particular thing. Nevertheless, this teaching may be too rhapsodic and serendipitous and too reliant on a learner’s insight. It may fail to be sufficiently systematic and may prove an inefficient means of transmitting knowledge from one generation to another. Such teaching may be both too directive in insisting that something be done “exactly as I do it” and insufficiently directive in failing to provide extended opportunities to gain this knowledge. Since the teacher’s example constitutes an exemplar and teachers have differing levels of expertise, teaching may vary in quality and rely on the caliber of the examples offered to students.
Learning in informality has several advantages. Among them, musical learning is contextualized and related to other aspects of life. It is a lifelong experience that transpires within a host of differing circumstances. Participating in the various rituals of different institutions may impact what is experienced by learners. Its often multigenerational quality helps bind together society and enables extended opportunities for musical learning to occur. Its serendipity takes advantage of learners’ curiosity, surprise, impulse, and desire, and their need to know motivates them and fosters a sustained commitment to learning. Among its disadvantages, its reliance on learner impulse and desire may be insufficient especially when these falter. Some students may not know what they need and may require more direction and systematic guidance from teachers than this model provides. Where the exemplars provided are of indifferent quality or expertise, informality may cultivate an amateurish approach to music-making that can degrade common standards of musicianship and pass them off as competence. Its hope for a cooperative approach may be dashed when students are not treated humanely, tactfully, or with genuine caring, or where individual desire runs counter to the common good.

In instruction, among its advantages, the model’s reliance on choice makes it possible to achieve compatibility between teachers and students that can potentially create happy working relationships. Such instruction thrives on intimacy so that the small groups of people know each other well and the teaching and learning can be tailored to the particular needs and interests of teachers and students. As much instruction is occasional, it is valued by students when it does occur. This urgency of instruction as the basis for a possible livelihood or its relevance to music-making helps motivate teacher and student alike. Among its disadvantages, informality may be too egalitarian on the one hand and too directive when it allows only particular musical practices on the other. The fluidity of teacher and student roles may make it more difficult to communicate what needs to be learned because of the lack of stature of the one teaching and because it is so focused on imitating particular exemplars that it does not allow space for creative divergence from these models. As much hangs on individual desire, teachers and students may lack persistence and instruction may be of uneven quality. This being the case, the model’s reliance on choice may result in a lack of equity for all teachers and students, as those who are more talented or privileged are advantaged over those who are not. Further, in hoping for humanity, the model may overlook the possibilities for abuse and violence in this instruction.

Concerning curriculum, on the one hand, this is an unabashedly constructivist approach in which learners actively come to know music in their own ways. Its communal and often cellular character in which family and friendship bonds are taken advantage of lends it a divergent and somewhat idiosyncratic character. This is a rhapsodic and opportunistic curriculum in which serendipity plays a significant role in the subject matter of instruction. What is learned is of immediate practical significance and can be put to imminent use in ordinary lived life. As such, musical knowledge has instrumental value as a means of ordering, enhancing, and expressing those things that members of a society believe are of crucial importance. Traditional approaches to music-making and taking are employed and reinforced. What is learned in this process is often partial and specialized, and de-
dependent on the particular interests and aptitudes of students. In situations such as vocal, dance, and instrumental ensembles, specialization amplifies individual members’ potency and prowess, as students are not necessarily required to learn everything but rather something. The occasional character of this instruction also multiplies the array of possible situations in which teaching and learning can occur. On the other hand, the traditional thrust of the subject matter may render this curriculum insufficiently theoretical and critical of the tradition. Although subject matter from a particular musical tradition may be contextualized, the scope of what is learned may be specific only to that tradition. The curriculum may also be disconnected from a broader societal and global perspective in its failure to contextualize this musical tradition within an array of others represented in the broader society. Beyond the narrowness of its scope, it may be too serendipitous and even amateurish when it fails to provide a systematic and exemplary approach to musical traditions.

Regarding administration, on the bright side, the small-scale operation and cellular and dynamic quality of informality make it nimble in the face of the changing circumstances. The possibility of involving various institutions potentially widens the scope of music education and the opportunities and circumstances for coming to know music. Its humane values promote the happiness and morale of all those engaged in music teaching and learning. Where inclination and desire falter on the part of teachers and students, duty and obligation may be counted on to create persistence in the transmission of musical knowledge from one generation to the next. On the dark side, dysfunctional homes may render this metaphor unattractive to those who have suffered unhappiness and domestic abuse. Thinking of music education as a private rather than public undertaking potentially leaves it out of the public eye and less important as a societal and cultural activity. The model does not necessarily provide for an equitable distribution of opportunities for music education as a human right. By virtue of its rhapsodic and serendipitous character, it may be less efficient and effective a means of mass music education where resources for publicly supported education are scarce. Values associated with formality that often emphasize intellectualism, restraint, and virtuosity may be marginalized and insufficiently emphasized in society.

These, among other arguments that might be offered, suggest that the metaphorical model of informality cannot be relied upon as the sole basis for music education. Its potential strengths and weaknesses pose a practical problem for music educators in navigating between the shoals that lie on either hand. Rescuing the best of this picture while also avoiding the worst is fraught with practical difficulties for music education policy makers. It is by no means clear how this approach would work practically in the myriad situations that comprise music education. Rather, it seems that those involved in particular circumstances need to figure out how to accomplish these tasks in situations where the imperatives, values, beliefs, and practices differ from time to time and place to place. Here, policy needs to be framed in terms of general principles and the people involved in the practice need to do their own thinking about what should be done in their individual circumstances.
Toward Informalities

Thus far, I have traced one metaphor’s implications for various aspects of music education, namely, music teaching, learning, instruction, curriculum, and administration. Given its ambiguity, my systematic unpacking of its implications for a model of music education likewise constitutes one instance of how such a model may work. Already, we should begin to speak of informalities or espouse a pluralistic view of informality that is figurative as well as literal and that spawns diversity rather than uniformity. This would suggest a view of music education that celebrates multiplicities and pluralities and rejoices in divergences, openings, and possibilities. Such a way of thinking flies in the face of the search for the one transcendent approach to music education or the one universal scientific truth about it. It avoids the either/or thinking that John Dewey ([1938] 1963) criticized in order to creatively engage the tensions and juxtapositions that these differing approaches constitute. As I explain elsewhere (Jorgensen, 2011), juxtaposing metaphor and model seeks precisely the sorts of insights in the ground between them and the possibilities of sometimes irreconcilable tensions and discontinuities that emerge when one conceptually puts things together that may be potentially contradictory or dissonant.

It is also possible that informality shows its head not only as informality in the “hard” or technical sense, construed as a metaphorical model of music education but informality in the “soft” sense within the context of other pictures of music education in which it takes on a different character (Jorgensen, 2011). Since space is an issue, I want to illustrate these possibilities with reference to another metaphor and model pair, namely, the Web and connectivity. My choice of this particular pair of pictures is driven by its contemporary possibilities for music education. Bypassing a more systematic sketch of the metaphorical model of connectivity, my focus is on how informality functions in this context. Drawing literally on the spider’s web and figuratively on the World Wide Web, this metaphor set spawns a metaphorical model of connectivity that relies on values of individualism, communitarianism, internationalism, populism, technophilia, and virtuality. Individualism speaks to its emphasis on personal experience, communitarianism to the possibilities of its collective and egalitarian association, internationalism to its global reach, populism to its open access to the public, technophilia to the mediation by technological institutions, and virtuality to the creation of a world apart from phenomenal experience. The educational possibilities described by Illich ([1971] 2002) of an information exchange system that enables ordinary individuals to bypass formal schools and other public agencies and directly access desired information beyond the reach of credentialing and certification systems are possible in present-day online environments. Still, the informality that presents in this context has a different character and nuance from that of the model of informality that I have described earlier.

As we think musically, new technologies permit a shift in music’s ontological status from a live performance to a virtual experience facilitated by downloaded electronic files mediated by technology of an individual’s choice. These technologies also permit bypassing institutional arrangements for music’s performance and distribution and transcending the limitations of time and space. As such, musicians can gain a measure of immortality. Infor-
mal means of accessing music are accompanied by potentially fragmenting musical
cultures driven by virtual communities. These communities create mediated cultures
and bubble up around particular musicians and musical traditions. These interconnections
between musicians, again informally operative, enable new musical styles and genres to
emerge from the more pervasive knowledge about different musics and their intersection
as musicians draw on these various traditions. The process of musical acculturation is
speeded up in such an environment and the traditional gatekeepers of musical traditions
can be bypassed. As a result, musicians are in a position to control a wider swath of the
process of performing, producing, recording, and marketing their music and they can
exercise greater artistic control over their music. In such a dynamic and future-oriented mi­
lieu, these musical traditions are oriented toward change. In this setting, musical infor­
mality takes on a different character from the model of Informality that is more in keep­
ing with technological values that drive the Web.

In terms of teaching, although the potential reach of a teacher is greater, in time and
space, and teachers act as “custodians, museum guides, and reference librarians” (Illich,
[1971] 2002, 84), there is a sense in which informality in this setting may not cover a way
of lived life. Rather, its scope is limited to an array of technologically mediated subject
matter. This is primarily a virtual experience of what something is like, and while the ob­
jective of virtual education is to create something like the “real thing” in the phenomenal
world, physical experience is normative. I do not mean to suggest that actual physical ex­
perience is in all respects superior, since technological prowess enables vivid and
“larger than life” presentations of subject matter. The Web’s informality, while threatened
by commercial, political, and religious among other interests that jeopardize its openness
and power, allows misinformation to spread, since all who think themselves knowledge­
able are enabled to disseminate what they know. A crucial role of teaching, then, be­
comes enabling learners to discriminate among the available information. The physical
proximity of teachers and their students is replaced by a virtual experience that potential­
ly alters the character of the personal relationships that teachers can forge with their stu­
dents and the particular skills they need in order to navigate such a world. Illich stops
short of the belief that this form of teaching suffices and posits a crucial role for formal
teaching. Commercial, educational, and other interests that drive the Web also provide
formal courses in which teachers may act only as “facilitators” of systems that are driven
by mathematical algorithms and designed by others. So, in the midst of this system, for­
mality lurks to fill the need on the part of Web denizens for formal and technologically
mediated instruction.

Learning is pervasively informal, and students’ impulses drive the process. Where com­
merce increasingly drives the Web, this learning seems akin to pictures of the boutique
and consumption (Jorgensen, 2011) where the presentation of an attractive product
geared to appeal to the buyer becomes preeminent. This might be the case, for example,
in distance learning courses in which market-tested and prepackaged attractive and me­
dia-rich content is presented formally to students who “consume” it. Still, there is a sense
in which the learning is ultimately individual in character, notwithstanding the formation
of “milieu cultures” comprised of people with like interests (Webb, 2007) which are tech­
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nologically mediated, and prepackaged courses of instruction that seem more formal than informal. In this environment, learners may determine how much to disclose to others and, by masking their identities, create an illusion of who they are that would be difficult to maintain in the ordinary face-to-face communication in the phenomenal world upon which informality relies. Contra the sometimes restricted quality of the materials in a particular place or time, this mediated reality is potentially rich in intensified experiences that may render ordinary lived life dull by comparison. Again, there are different nuances in the quality of informal learning in the context of connectivity that differ from those in informality.

As for instruction, connectivity relies on choice, both by teachers and students (and these roles are fluid and sometimes interchangeable). As in informality, the role of the teacher is determined by relative expertise, so mastery of particular information or proficiency is a driving factor in the interaction between teachers and students. The mediated quality of this interaction presents a simulacrum of ordinary lived life. Virtual reality is a parallel universe of sorts in which the trappings of the phenomenal world are ever present. Still, virtual or online communities are impacted by the fact that the denizens of the Web can disclose what they wish of themselves or create fictitious personae, and it is difficult to imagine a group of people being fully present to one another in the sense of the face-to-face communities advocated by Greene (1988) and Palmer (1998). The difficulty of verifying the authenticity of the “presentation of self” (Goffman, 1959) on the Web may create a sense of danger or fear. Sometimes, the lack of apparent social consequences in the phenomenal world for words and actions expressed on the Web may cause some people to divulge more in online conversations than they would in face-to-face conversations. Where interaction occurs within formal Web-based courses of instruction that increasingly abound, technology limits the degree and quality of interaction and creates an illusion of interactivity on the part of participants. There is also the technological possibility of extending the times of conversation beyond those of face-to-face formal situations. So even in informal instructional situations in connectivity, technological mediation may impact the quality of interaction and cause it to differ in quality from that in the face-to-face communication in informality.

Curriculum in connectivity likewise reveals similarities and differences to that in informality. Learners can approach subject matter informally but their engagement with it is mediated technologically. The curriculum may begin with learner impulse and may be idiosyncratic, serendipitous, and hyper-textual in nature as the subject matter is engaged in a myriad possible ways. Still, the claims of technology can also prevent teachers from improvising to the extent that may be possible in face-to-face informal instructional situations. This is especially the case in asynchronous settings where the teacher and student are not present at the same time. In formally designed courses, there may also be a static quality to the curriculum that constitutes a barrier to an otherwise dynamic and free flow of interaction between teachers and their students. The hoped-for unfettered access to information or unhindered interaction between teachers and students is not always possible. Learners often seek procedural information and this curriculum has a practical quality. Certain types of information such as skills that are often developed through drill seem...
particularly appropriate to technological mediation, and formal programs of instruction to systematically develop them complement the otherwise informal curriculum. Sometimes, curricula are co-opted by commercial and other institutions that seek to regulate and restrict the access to this information. Increasingly, writers refer to internets or splinternets as ways to describe an increasingly fragmented web in which power brokers create limited access to the Web and the curricular informality of connectivity is challenged by formality.

Concerning administration, the deschooling of society envisaged by Illich becomes, for him, an opportunity to create alternative institutions that are pervasively informal. Conducted in cyberspace, these virtual organizations open opportunities for collaboration by people in different times and places. Milieu cultures are of especial interest because they emerge informally but may become more formalized over time as people want to be present to each other not only virtually but actually in the physical world. Institutions increasingly seek to control cyberspace despite this ideal of informality as a means of open access to music education driven by learner impulse and interest, despite the democratization of knowledge that connectivity suggests, and despite the premium this model places on communication and cooperation. The digital footprints left by people on the Web permit (p. 469) and encourage surveillance by others. In online instructional programs operated by for-profit corporations, this surveillance can become draconian in allowing little deviation from prescribed norms. Fiscal imperatives provide objective data on which decision making can be based and become important considerations in the “delivery” of information. The open communication hoped for in this environment can be squelched by a form of traditional “banking education” in which knowledge is “deposited” in students (Freire, 1990). When informality and formality collide in the context of connectivity, formality may gain the ascendancy because it is often administered by institutions skilled in forwarding their interests, wielding power, and resisting informality.

It is clear, then, that informality in the context of connectivity may operate differently from the way it does in the case of informality. Notwithstanding the fact that in both models, informality and formality are often interrelated, and one is often in process of becoming the other, the values that guide their work and their musical, teaching, learning, instructional, curricular, and administrative aspects have differing nuances. These differences only multiply as we consider other metaphoric models of music education. Still, on the matter of which conception(s) of informality—construed as a metaphorical model or other different or more limited views of informality—are nearer the mark, my response is equivocal and contingent. I have shown that informality is not an unmixed blessing. Differing visions of informality are likely (both respecting informality predicated on the metaphor of the home, or as construed in the context of differing metaphoric models of music education, in this case, connectivity). Informality and formality are inextricably linked and in the process of becoming the other. It is also likely that none of these informalities is exempt from flaws of one sort or another. Given the realities in the phenomenal world, they are likely to intersect in various ways. Much depends on the beliefs, val-
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uses, practices, and particular situations that music educators face in the phenomenal and virtual world.

In the face of the diversity, ambiguity, complexity, uncertainty, and contingency of these informalities, what are music educators to do? Rather than search for the one true path for music education, even in informality as a way forward, music educators need to think figuratively and literally about the particularities of our situations and the theories that claim our attention, and celebrate our differences and common purposes. As we imaginatively, comparatively, and critically examine the merits and flaws of our aims and methods and seek to improve music education, we also need to recognize the fallibility and contingency of all our plans.

References


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Notes:

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