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Toward an Informal Informed Classroom: Professional Musicians' Informal Music Learning
Experiences

Rachel Marie Smith

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

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School of Music

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FACULTY COMMITTEE:

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Dedication

I dedicate this document to my students. They make me want to be a better teacher every day. Now that this project is complete, we can finally start that D&D club.

I also dedicate this work to my maternal grandfather Dr. Royce Stephenson, and my paternal grandmother Alma Bryson, M. Ed. Papa made me want to be a musician and played piano duets with me as kid. Grandma made me want to be a teacher and taught me how to crochet last winter. I love you both.

Acknowledgements

I get by with a little help from my friends. And my family. And many, many teachers over the years. The following people have helped me find my way, and I want to properly thank and acknowledge them here.

I would like to thank my committee, Will Dabback, Alice Hammel, and Chuck Dotas for their feedback and support in the creation of this document. Your consistent, reliable, and impeccable advice was so utterly necessary for the completion of this work.

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Reflecting back, this path of teaching and making music would never have come to be without the following teachers growing up: Cindy Mongold, Cathy Brown, Phil Bravo, Ben Frenchak, Holly Dickerson, Bill Posey, Melissa Harper, and Blair Jones. Thank you.

To my brother James: thanks for being the best bud a sister could ask for. And thanks for enduring me not being able to hang out and play *Overcooked* for months. We have a lot to catch up on.

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And finally, to my parents, without whom none of this would be possible: Thank you. I could write a whole thesis on the nearly infinite ways you have loved me, showed up for me, and inspired me, but alas. That’s another paper! Love you.

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Abstract

Authors have studied informal music learning with different age groups. Lucy Green (2005) studied the topic with adolescents and said it was an intuitive and natural way children learn. Chad West and Radio Cremata (2016) studied informal music learning at the collegiate level, and Martina Vasil (2019) studied secondary music teachers who implemented informal music learning strategies in their teaching practices. Informal music learning in adults is relatively under-explored compared to adolescent and collegiate age groups. Utilizing lenses drawn from John Dewey's curricular ideas to help students find meaning in learning and motivation as viewed through Self-Determination Theory, I sought to investigate informal music learning practices of professional musicians. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the informal music learning experiences and current practices of professional musicians based in Virginia. Four research questions guided the interview questions and analysis: 1) What informal music learning experiences were formative to professional musicians who perform live music? 2) How did participants utilize informal music learning in their practices? 3) What are the challenges of informal music learning? 4) What are the benefits of informal music learning? I interviewed eight professional musicians about their informal music learning experiences in individual interviews as well as a focus group interview, and conducted a rehearsal observation. I used an iterative coding process to analyze interview transcriptions and the following themes emerged: Self-Teaching, Autonomy, and Collaboration.

Chapter One: Introduction

I didn't really think I was musical, I guess until I was in college, at 19. And I went to kind of a hippie dippie school, and a lot of people were playing guitar around the fire. And I was like, I want to be able to do that. It seems fun...so I organically picked it up by just playing with other people who played guitar. I wouldn't say any of them were masters. It's just kind of like a community thing. And I also looked up chords online... So it was half, random kind of self-taught and community based.

(Lindsay)

Authors have identified the nexus of informal music learning and professional musicians in research literature and casual observations (Green, 2002; Soderman & Folkestad, 2010; Waldron, 2013). Stories of savant musicians in touring bands and artists with little to no formal music training permeate the United States zeitgeist, including Dolly Parton, The Beatles, P!nk, David Bowie, Carlos Santana, and Aretha Franklin (Carson, 2022; Gorlinski 2022; Miller, 2022; Ritz 2022; Tikkanen, 2021; Wallenfeldt, 2022). In this study, I explored the connections between informal music learning and eight professional musicians in central Virginia.

In the opening quote, Lindsay, who leads a band that plays her original music, reflected on her learning experiences as embedded in community and removed from hierarchical structures of power. She distinguished her learning process as different from a sequenced, formal process:

The first time I heard of the folk method was in terms of like, making herbal medicine when I was in school for that. So there's the scientific method and there's the folk method! And the scientific method is very book based and like, measurements and all that. And in the folk method, you learn from other people!

Learning from other people without a formal dedicated teacher and without a formal designated learning space is Veblen's (2018) definition of informal learning. Whether termed folk method or informal learning, the processes involved feature independent learning and learning from a community without structures of power in place (Veblen, 2018).

Informal Music Learning

Informal music learning has less structure than formal music learning (e.g. learning that features measurable objectives and direct teacher guidance), is determined by student interests, includes peer-led learning, and connects to music in students' lives (Davis, 2013; Jaffurs, 2004; Rifai, 2016). Practicing music teachers from elementary to college levels that have implemented various degrees of informal music learning in their classrooms have found this type of student-centered pedagogy yields themes of inclusivity, autonomy, and affirmation (Vasil, 2019; West & Cremata 2016). School music classes that include informal music learning can provide improved opportunities for student musical independence, promote learner agency and identity, and foster lifelong music making (Gilbert, 2016; Jenkins, 2001).

Authors have studied informal music learning with different age groups. Lucy Green (2005) studied the topic with adolescents and identified it an intuitive and natural way children learn. Chad West and Radio Cremata (2016) studied informal music learning at the collegiate level, and Martina Vasil (2019) studied secondary music teachers who implemented informal music learning strategies in their teaching practices. Informal music learning in adults is relatively under-explored compared to adolescent and collegiate age groups. Lucy Green (2002) interviewed popular music musicians in her book, *How Popular Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead for Music Education*, while Johan Soderman and Goran Folkestad (2010) interviewed two specific hip-hop groups regarding their practices. Green, Soderman, and

Folkestad recommended further study in these areas to improve our understanding and inclusion of informal music learning in the classroom (Green, 2002; Soderman & Folkestad 2010).

Authors have reported positive outcomes of informal learning approaches that include autonomy, motivation, expression, and self-determination (Evans, 2015; Green, 2008; Niemiec & Ryan 2009; Reeve, 2002). These outcomes were a result of students' autonomy to choose and guide their own learning within informal learning contexts. Some authors have pushed back against informal music learning in the classroom (Allsup, 2008; Jenkins, 2011) and caution against adopting informal music learning as the primary, or only mode of learning in the classroom. Allsup (2008) claimed that critics of the education field would use the hands-off approach integral to informal music learning as ammunition for the argument that teachers do very little, and do not need much in the way of qualifications, training, and compensation.

Schippers and Bartleet (2013) explored the idea of formal and informal music education existing on an intertwined continuum in their study of community music in Australia. Community music benefits from and is comprised of a diverse population of individuals with varied wants and needs; therefore, a blend of formal and informal music learning is necessary to serve the members of the community. Community music is one pathway students can follow in music after their formal time in school. How can we best prepare students to teach themselves, engage in community music, and participate in music in the ways they want?

Though not as prevalent as the formal vs. informal music learning spectrum (Folkestad, 2006; Jenkins, 2011; Schippers & Bartleet 2013), Veblen (2018) noted “nonformal” as a third option when considering learning contexts. Veblen wrote that formal

learning occurs in a classroom and will be sequenced and taught by an instructor, focused on best practices in teaching, intentionally focused on how to play or write, and often includes music notation as a significant component. Informal learning takes place in an unofficial and casual setting, interactions are between participants and not planned ahead of time, learners have full control over what, when, and how learning takes place, is focused incidentally on playing music, and often involves learning by ear in the absence of music notation.

Nonformal learning lies somewhat between these two, and can take place in an institution or not, can be led by a teacher or a peer, and is focused on student learning and choice. The instructor maintains a final say over pacing in nonformal learning. This learning style also includes a significant intentional or incidental social component, and may or may not utilize music notation. The distinctions between these three modes of learning address differences in physical context or situation, learning style, ownership, intentionality, and modes for transmission. In some ways, nonformal suits balanced and democratic learning (Allsup, 2008).

Research has indicated that there are differing benefits to formal, informal, and nonformal approaches to learning. Formal learning can address the need for education to be intentional and diverse (Allsup, 2011), informal learning may honor students' needs for autonomy, voice, and self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Green, 2008), and nonformal learning can facilitate student democracy alongside teacher guidance (Veblen, 2018). Despite the documented strengths of informal learning in the classroom (Cremata, 2017; Davis, 2013; Green, 2008), it is not consistently adopted in teaching practice (Blackwell, Matherne, & Momohara-Ho, 2022; Kastner, 2014). When compared to other areas of music education, how successful popular musicians learn and how teachers might incorporate informal music

learning into the classroom are relatively underexplored, and researchers recommend further study and implementation (Coulson, 2010; Green, 2002; Karlsen & Väkevä, 2014).

John Dewey

Informal and student-guided learning approaches are not new to education. John Dewey piloted a school with curricular flexibility based upon the interests of the students (Keene, 1982). Dewey had a significant impact on education theory and expressed that school needed to connect to life outside of school. He believed that school is not “preparation” for life, but *is* life, and students should learn by doing (Keene, 1982). He emphasized that educators should pursue curricular flexibility geared toward the interests of students (Tanner, 1997). In 1896 he started the “Laboratory School” to put these thoughts to practice. He achieved this curricular flexibility by following the interests of the students to determine the curricula (Tanner, 1997).

The philosophies of John Dewey were integral to Elliott’s (2006) work that explored the intersection of education research and democratic practices. Dewey prioritized student freedom of thought, discussion, inquiry, and questioning in school (Elliott, 2006). A democratic approach to teaching and learning was central to his philosophical approach. All forms of inquiry were deemed important in this flexible curricular approach, including “ethics, aesthetics, and philosophy... curiosity, objectivity, honesty, open-mindedness, and a commitment to freedom of thought and discussion” (p. 178-179).

Shyman (2011) compared and contrasted the similarities, overlaps, and divergences between the philosophies of John Dewey and Paolo Freire. This study shed light on some of the criticisms Dewey and Freire share about some types of education. Both philosophers believed in democratic classroom practices and disagreed with teaching practices that called upon students to simply absorb information rather than engage in reasoning and knowing.

Freire called this flawed process a “banking concept,” and Dewey described it as a teacher “telling” and the student “being told” (Shyman, 2011, p. 1038-1039).

Some teachers have adopted John Dewey’s flexible curricular approach to co-generate knowledge and meaning in the classroom. This incorporation of Dewey’s philosophies in teaching practices has resulted in students experiencing feelings of belonging, inclusivity, and finding meaning (Cremata, 2017; Kastner, 2014; Vasil, 2019). As students get older, music class sometimes becomes less popular while it is still a compulsory part of the school day, and students do not always see their musical lives represented in the classroom (Davis, 2009; Ripani, 2022). Problems that come with a student-guided curriculum include time needed to address the many opinions and wishes of a diverse class, and the belief that some educators hold that modern or popular music is of little curricular value (Allsup, 2008; Vasil, 2019).

Self-Determination Theory

Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 68) described Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as “an approach to human motivation and personality” and identified three basic human needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. SDT relates to how people are motivated and behave. Deci and Ryan (1980) proposed that behaviors can be sorted into two main categories, self-determined behaviors, which are behaviors that are consciously chosen, and automatized, automated, or conditioned behaviors, which occur with less intentional thought. Similar to Dewey, Deci and Ryan posited that teachers who support student autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and self-determined choices in a classroom setting will facilitate higher student engagement and learning outcomes.

According to Niemiec and Ryan (2009), intrinsic motivation and some types of autonomous extrinsic motivation explained through SDT are helpful to engaging students

and creating an optimized learning environment in the classroom. Teachers taking the time to support and honor their students' "basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness facilitates students' autonomous self-regulation for learning, academic performance, and well-being" (p. 133).

Evans (2015) discussed Self-Determination Theory in the context of music education, reflecting on the impacts of teachers and parents utilizing extrinsic motivation like rewards and incentives to compel students to practice. Utilizing extrinsic motivation is opposed to intrinsic autonomous motivation, which is at the heart of SDT. This approach of employing short-term rewards for isolated instances of compliant behavior leads to short term success and compliance but does not lead to permanently modified behavior. Students who no longer have an extrinsic reward do not continue to pursue musical achievement for the sake of enjoying it. Evans described the process being counterproductive, saying "The gold star has the effect of distracting from the intrinsic value of the task itself. The emphasis becomes on the immediate, short-term moment, at the expense of longer-term learning, persistence, and value, and it prevents the student from internalizing a sense of motivation for music learning" (p. 73).

Purpose

Lucy Green's (2002) landmark study explored the experiences of popular musicians without the exclusivity of being a professional, and some studies have teased out the practices of adolescent and adult amateur musicians within specific genres (Söderman & Folkestad, 2004; Waldron 2013; Waldron & Veblen 2009), as well as with professionals included in the study (Waldron, 2013). There is research regarding professional musicians and their formal music learning experiences from the Western Classical tradition of performing in orchestras and military bands (Coulson, 2010; Hallam, 1995; López-Íñiguez &

Bennett, 2020; López-Íñiguez & Burnard, 2022; Smilde, 2012), but professional musicians and their informal music learning experiences is a comparatively under-explored area.

Utilizing lenses drawn from John Dewey's curricular ideas to help students find meaning in learning and motivation as viewed through Self-Determination Theory, I sought to investigate informal music learning practices. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the informal music learning experiences and current practices of professional musicians based in Virginia. Four research questions guided the interview questions and analysis:

1. What informal music learning experiences were formative to professional musicians who perform live music?
2. How did participants utilize informal music learning in their practices?
3. What are the challenges of informal music learning?
4. What are the benefits of informal music learning?

In this study, I interviewed eight professional musicians about their informal music learning experiences with the intent to identify a series of curricular pathways that utilize informal music learning techniques in classrooms. If utilized by K-5 general music teachers, these could help facilitate classroom learning environments that allow informal music learning to exist alongside formal and nonformal teaching practices.

Definition of Terms

Album. An album is a collection of recorded music, typically 6-12 songs in length, by an artist or band. An album can consist of original music, cover songs, or a mix of both.

Cover. A cover, or cover song, is replicating a pre-existing song. This may be a close to exact copy, or have creative liberties and be adapted or arranged differently. For example,

an example of a cover would be Becky's band covering The Beatles' *Hey Jude* in a reggae style.

EP. An EP is similar to an album, but is shorter in length, typically anywhere from 3-6 songs in length.

Gig. A paid job in which musical skills are utilized. This includes but is not limited to a performance, recording music by playing or singing, recording music as a recording engineer, sound engineering for live music, composing or arranging music, teaching music, facilitating music at a place of worship.

Gigging musician. A musician who "gigs" regularly and earns part or all of their monthly income by this work.

Jam, jamming, or jam session. A jam session is typically an informal gathering of musicians playing together in a communal setting for enjoyment and is not compensated. This is often at a private home, but could be in a communal space like a park, restaurant, etc. The act of jamming is playing music in this setting.

Music festival. A music festival is an event, typically spanning from one to four days, in which a multitude of bands are hired to play on a series of stages for audiences. Attendees purchase one ticket for the day, or for the whole festival, and the festival may include outdoor stages and camping options, or may be hosted in a city center and have a mixture of outdoor and indoor stages.

Music festival circuit. A music festival circuit is a colloquial term for playing numerous music festivals over the course of "festival season." This is typically summer, but often extends into spring and fall.

Open mic or hosting an open mic. An open mic is a community event hosted at a music venue, restaurant, or bar. Musicians from the community may come and perform for

their peers, often one or two songs each. Performers are typically not paid, but the musician running or “hosting” the open mic is paid. Hosting an open mic event typically entails running live sound, organizing musicians, and performing throughout the night as needed.

Professional musician. For this study, I will use and slightly expand upon Lucy Green’s (2002) definition of a professional musician: “they make a living or part of a living from playing and in some cases also composing and/or arranging music” (p. 9). The one addition I have made to this definition expands upon the ways musicians are paid for their skills, and stays in the spirit of Green’s definition, adding “or facilitating music making via teaching, running live sound, or audio engineering work in a studio setting.”

Sub or subbing. Performing with a group one does not typically perform to substitute, or acting as a sub, for a person missing who is typically present.

Tour or touring. A tour in relation to music is when a musician or band travels from town to town performing at venues, restaurants, bars, and music festivals for paid compensation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Informal learning is learning in a relatively unstructured and self-guided manner. People may engage in peer teaching at times, but in its naturally occurring form, informal learning takes place outside of formal learning environments in the “real world” (Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2002; Jenkins, 2011). Informal learning practices predate formal schooling, and are natural and intuitive to people (Dewey, 1903; Green, 2002). Vernacular and community music practices lean on informal music learning as a significant—and sometimes the only—conduit for passing on traditions and knowledge (Green, 2022; O’Flynn, 2006; Schippers & Bartleet 2013), and authors have argued that informal music learning should have a place in modern music education.

In this literature review, I explored the background of informal music learning, music education philosophical context, informal music learning and teaching, informal music learning and autonomy, Self-Determination Theory, and ideas from John Dewey and Lucy Green.

Informal Music Learning

Folkestad (2006) examined numerous research studies that explored informal and formal learning and argued that music learning is not a dichotomy, but rather a continuum. He said that in the vast majority of learning experiences, both types of learning are present to differing degrees. Four ways of understanding formal and informal learning emerged in this study, including the situation, learning style, ownership, and intentionality of the learning. Folkestad suggested that an incorporation of both formal and informal learning is necessary to serve the culturally diverse students in schools, as well as to intentionally incorporate music from numerous cultures.

While many teachers and researchers agree that informal music learning has its strengths and is a desirable pursuit in music education, Jenkins in his 2011 philosophical study pushed back slightly against this “bandwagon over-enthusiasm” with a more cautious approach (p. 180). He claimed formal vs. informal learning is on a continuum, and that practically no informal learning taking place in a classroom can be truly informal due to the presence or prompting of a teacher.

Jenkins (2011) defined informal music learning as “a self-motivated effort to reach competence in some task or skill, using resources ready to hand in one’s everyday life” and claimed informal learning is valuable, as well as the first form of learning (pp. 181). Jenkins also engaged in a close analysis of Lucy Green’s work *How Popular Musicians Learn* in which she conducted a series of interviews with popular musicians to better understand how they learn and how to possibly integrate this style of learning into public school music class. Jenkins said a potential downfall of allowing students to learn only what is of interest to them is, if learning exclusively in this manner, students’ musical horizons will remain small and stunted. Regarding learning by copying (learning covers) one’s favorite music, Jenkins questioned whether this was truly music education or a superficial pursuit.

Informal music learning was a relatively under-explored area of research at the time of Söderman and Folkestad’s (2004) qualitative study. Their investigation followed two hip-hop communes (or groups) in Sweden, and the focus was on the creativity and learning that went into creating the music and lyrics in their work. The two groups consisted of boys ages 16-19 and 17-19, and during the study they participated in semi-structured interviews, were observed composing in studio, and watched and commented on recordings of themselves. Findings included an emphasis on the importance of lyrics, the collaborative and cooperative nature of creating, and what the researchers called the use of “cut-and-paste aesthetics” (p.

324). This essentially referred to the fluid nature of musicians' ideas, and how one verse idea, for example, from one person might easily get moved to another section of the song, and that their work is not necessarily initially through-composed. Participants also discussed the importance of expressing meaning in their lyrics, as well as being entertainers and earning a living for themselves through their art.

Waldron (2013) studied the informal music making made possible by an online community called Banjo Hangout in a cyber ethnographic field study. The music making, learning, and teaching taking place on banjohangout.com provided an online extension to a pre-existing musical community. This made learning and playing banjo in the Old Time and Bluegrass musical traditions more accessible for members isolated either by physical mobility or geographic location, and provided diverse resources for all members. The type of learning this online community facilitated was largely an informal music learning, as it contained a breadth of chat rooms, areas for posting recordings to receive feedback, compilations of TAB charts and video tutorials, and recordings of standard Old Time and Bluegrass tunes. Ages, backgrounds, and levels of expertise ranged from novice to professional. Professional musicians received benefits of community as well as practical musical resources, and informal music learning was the driving force behind individuals accessing this website as a resource to learn and interact. The study demonstrated the prevalence of informal music learning in both in-person and online contexts.

Jaffurs' (2004) ethnographic study investigated the out of school, informal music learning experiences of some of their students in a rock band setting through interviews with students and parents as well as rehearsal observations. The study included a band of five children, and the ethnographer was the current teacher of one of the students. Two of the students in the band were former students of the elementary music teacher researcher, and

two were friends or siblings with band members. The purpose of this ethnography was to better understand the phenomena of informal music learning outside a school context. Skills and accomplishments within the rock band observed were related to democracy and social constructivism. Democracy in learning encapsulated individuals working together to achieve learning, and social constructivism in the classroom resulted in students creating a community of learners with their experiences coming together to create new meanings. Findings included significant elements of democracy among the students, self-guided and determined scheduling, and peer guided rehearsal and feedback. Jaffurs recommended further study on the topic of informal music learning. The author also recommended that teachers find ways to make students understand that they do care about the music that they like, and to prioritize making the music room feel like the students' space. A teacher who emphasizes these things will hopefully enable democratic learning and social constructivism to take place in the music classroom.

Randall Allsup (2008) made a case for a focus on democracy in the classroom instead of informal music making. He expressed multiple concerns and critiques of Lucy Green's work in his article, claiming four primary weaknesses of informal music in the classroom. The first critique was that Green's model focused on garage band styles of learning, and her interviews came from predominantly male, all white participants. This could focus these ways of learning in an Anglo-centric way, making such learning not as inclusive as intended. Secondly, Allsup questioned how research regarding the informal practices of popular musicians could possibly be adapted to the classroom and pointed out a lack of defined terms in the field. Third, the visible role of the teacher in an informal music learning experience looks hands-off, and Allsup believed that this would feed the flames of the claims of some people's beliefs that teachers do not need to be highly qualified to teach, i.e. that

anyone could do it. Fourth, he argued that students will be ill-served and undereducated if this is the only method of education. The scope would be too narrow, students would not learn about a diverse variety of music, and their skills would be somewhat random and limited. Allsup proposed democracy in the classroom as a potential solution to this, through which students have voice, choice, and impact over the proceedings of the classroom, but the teacher still has a tangible role.

Music Education Philosophical Context

To contextualize the discussion in this literature review around informal music making and learning, I have summarized the work of several philosophers and how they relate to music and music education. Philosophies that guide the music education field in a direction that could align with the values of informal music making include praxialism (Elliott, 1995; Goble, 2003; Regelski, 1981), robust praxialism, and anti-aesthetics (Alperson, 2010).

Bowman and Frega (2012) pointed out the distinction between small-p philosophy which comprises minute by minute guidance and decisions in teaching and learning interactions, and Capital-P Philosophy. Capital-P Philosophy essentially encompasses large scale ideas and seeks to change something to make our actions match our beliefs as a profession. They argued that the point of a music education is not all about gaining understanding and cognitive benefits, but more to enhance quality of life. University schools of music often subscribe to a philosophy of replicating or conserving what is, rather than engaging in critical reflection and philosophical questioning. The authors also contrasted the purpose of advocacy to gain even more support for something that is already being done, while Philosophy is instead a catalyst to inspire change and to impact the way things are now.

Elliott (1995) teased out the issues of philosophy, pointing out that no philosophy can be truly comprehensive, but it must be as comprehensive as possible by asking a range of questions, using a lens of objectivity, and consistent procedure. He explored the aesthetic concept of music by specifying that “aesthetic” experience is a sense experience and is not necessarily linked to beauty. According to aestheticism, music is a collection of works, musical works are to be listened to aesthetically alone, musical works’ value is consistent and intrinsic, and if a listener hears a piece of music in an aesthetic way, they will have an aesthetic experience. Elliott was against the aesthetic concept in music education, and acknowledged its influence, and wrote of its decline.

Elliot (1995) and Regelski (1981) did not agree with aesthetic philosophies, and aligned with a praxial view. Formalist aesthetic perspectives included ideas of Enlightenment philosophers, and that music is to evoke an aesthetic experience. The expressivist version of the aesthetic cognitivist view expands to include expressive and symbolic aspects of music to impact meaning. In contrast, the praxial view focuses on social, historical, and cultural situations in which the music exists, and what the meaning is in that context (Goble, 2003). Elliott (1995) proposed that music is a tetrad, and is at minimum a four-dimensional concept centered on the idea that music is a human activity that includes a doer, some kind of doing, something done, and the complete context in which this all happens. Regelski (1981) championed a teaching approach that valued connection and relevance to the student’s life. Goble (2003) compared Elliott and Regelski’s philosophies and found overlap, but some distinctions as well. Regelski argued that many aesthetic concepts are established by people in positions of power and are inherently a seat for cultural elitism. He also went on to explore the ideas of action learning and action research, in which we see practitioners-as-

researchers. In this paradigm, the instructor reflects on lesson results, and evaluates the way the lesson was taught, and considers the value (Goble, 2003).

Philip Alperson (2010) arrived at his own praxial philosophy by first commenting on the relative dearth of extant music education philosophy despite the fact that music is nearly ubiquitously acknowledged to be important to people. Some music is created for art's sake, and other music is made for other social purposes. Alperson commented on the anti-aesthetic turn, and posited that it is not necessary to fully exclude or devalue aesthetic properties. He argued that robust praxialism is inclusive regarding a variety of musical practices, and if we ignore what many individuals believe a significant element of music production is (aesthetic philosophy), then we take away the reach and thoroughness of praxial thought. At its core, robust praxialism is a contextualist view. It highlights anthropological, sociological, social, and political matters.

These Philosophical (Bowman and Frega, 2012) ideas guiding the music education profession demonstrate how values have shifted and changed over time. It has moved from a purely aesthetic point of view, through which music was pursued for its intrinsic and consistent value (Elliott, 1995; Goble, 2003), toward a praxial Philosophy (Elliot, 1995; Goble 2003; Regelski, 1981), that includes and prioritizes social and cultural context. Beyond this, Alperson's (2010) robust praxialism recognized that some music is still aligned with the aesthetic view *as well* as music that is defined by context, aligned with the praxial view. Alperson (2010) calls for a robust praxialism that is open to the inclusion of music and music making practices from all walks and experiences, and to not intentionally leave out purely aesthetic or praxial ideas. To this end, the neglect of informal music learning approaches in some music education contexts (Blackwell, Matherne, & Momohara-Ho, 2022; Kastner, 2014), is not aligned with robust praxialism (Alperson, 2010). To align with

this Philosophical position is to acknowledge all ways of making music as essential, including informal music learning.

John Dewey

Over the course of formal education's history in the United States, how philosophers and educators viewed psychology, the mind, children, and how people learn best has changed drastically. Child-centered learning and informal learning practices were practically nonexistent in school contexts in the early and mid-1800s (Keene 1982). Keene (1982) explored how psychological research was studied and understood, and the how it changed from the end of the 1800s into the early 1900s. This shift in psychology study paved the way for acceptance of the arts in education. Faculty psychology was the prevailing theory accepted in the United States around the turn of the century, and asserted that the mind is separated into three "faculties" including will, emotion, and intellect. This faculty psychology valued mental discipline, and the way this was achieved in schools at the time was through intensive memorization, drill, and practice. William James (1890) wrote in his "Principles of Psychology" that he believed that the mind is not separated into segments, and any mental activity is a flowing continuous action. Keene (1982) connected that this led G. Stanley Hall and John Dewey to develop their own beliefs, practices, and studies, and they both believed that education should center on the child, and "the school should adapt itself to the various natural stages of a child's growth" (p. 222).

John Dewey's (1903) impact on education theory pushed beyond these early theories of William James and his contemporaries. He believed that school needed to connect to life outside of school, and teachers should prioritize curricular flexibility geared towards the interests of the student. His theories were piloted in his "Laboratory School" where ideas of

curricular flexibility, child-centeredness, and democratic teaching were prioritized in instruction (Tanner, 1997).

John Dewey (1902) in his journal article “The School as Social Center” reflected on the need for school to, as the title suggests, become the social center of the community. In his argument, John Dewey stated that schools “must provide means for bringing people and their ideas and their beliefs together, in ways that will lessen friction and instability, and introduce deeper sympathy and wider understanding” (p. 83). For school to become a social center, students must be drawn in to want to spend time with their peers at school. This idea of bringing people and their thoughts together cannot take place without the individual’s input in class and extracurricular activities.

In Dewey’s (1903) journal article “Democracy in Education” he explored the issues with strict mandated curricula for teachers to use and believed that this led to a lack of efficiency and interest for both teachers and students. The child has growing intellect and individuality, and lack of democracy in the classroom robs the student of their ability to pursue inquiry. Rote memorization used in schools is the opposite of scientific inquiry-based pursuits. If society values inquiry and scientific understanding, then schools should foster this skill in children. Dewey goes on to describe alternative ways of engaging the child’s mind of inquiry through spending time outside and asking questions, as well as teaching skills such as sewing, cooking, art and music. He concluded with the assertion that people are motivated to learn by three things: affection, social growth, and scientific inquiry. Dewey believed that rigid classroom structures without democracy and student choice make it near impossible for children to experience the third motivation, scientific inquiry.

Dewey's curricular flexibility and a child-centered approach led to growth in music education in the 20th century (Keene, 1982). The first half of the 1900s saw an increase of students in music, and school band classes flourished, but this progress was thwarted by:

A reaction to Dewey's progressivism as an insecure citizenry turned upon its educational establishment in the late 1950s at the real or imagined threat of the Soviet Union and as the educational mentality of the nation again turned from a child-centered approach back to concepts resembling the mental-discipline theories of the nineteenth century (p. 225-226).

These themes of curricular flexibility and a child-centered approach were piloted by and rose to popularity because of John Dewey in the early 1900s, and were lost from the mainstream in the mid-1900s (Keene, 1982).

Informal Music Learning and Teaching

Lucy Green has generated a body of research focused on a variety of topics, including informal music learning (Green, 2002; Green, 2005; Green, 2008). When Green began this work, informal music learning was relatively under-explored, but her work in informal music learning has led to a new wave of study and practice (Cayari, 2015; Cremata, 2017; Davis, 2013; Folkestad, 2006; Jenkins, 2011; Kastner, 2014; Vasil, 2019; Veblen, 2018) engaging with informal music learning. Green found informal music learning demanded curricular flexibility and centering the child and their interests, which directly connects Green to Dewey's historical work (Green, 2008).

Lucy Green (2005) wrote an article reflecting on the processes of her ethnographic study assessing the feasibility of incorporating some elements of informal music learning into the classroom. Methodology included observation, field notes, audio and video recordings, teacher interviews, pupil interviews, and lesson observation forms completed by teachers.

Students were encouraged to bring in music that they liked that they would like to learn. These students worked in groups, and through extensive peer-teaching over the course of numerous class periods, were successful in putting together their own versions of agreed upon songs. Green noted that the process often looked like chaos before sensible results came about. Many students agreed that “being thrown in the deep end” was part of the fun of this style learning, and that they found that they listened to music differently after experiencing this type of learning (pp. 30).

Green (2008) also outlined the impacts of an informal music learning approach in 21 secondary schools. The mixed methods study spanned from 2002-2006, included 32 classroom teachers, and ultimately involved upwards of 1,500 students. Green incorporated the use of survey data, interviews, observations, field notes, recordings, and transcriptions. The author commented that despite informal music learning practices being “fundamentally as old as the hills,” she found that very few of the 1,500 students who engaged in this research had regularly engaged in informal music learning prior to the study (p. 21). In response to the findings of her study, Green suggested that informal music learning should be an addition to current education practices and wrote:

They are learning practices that can awaken many pupils’ awareness of their own musicality, particularly those who might not otherwise be reached by music education, put the potential for musical development and participation into their own hands, open their ears, and enhance their appreciation and understanding of music, not only in relation to what they already know, but also taking them beyond the known as more critically aware and open-minded listeners. (p. 22)

At the time of its publication, Lucy Green’s (2002) book was one of the first examples of music education research taking a serious look at informal music learning and

popular musicians. Fourteen musicians based in and close to London, ages 15-50, participated in a series of interviews. These participants were all white, and of the 14, only two were women. They were popular musicians with a variety of experience specified on a scale of “professional, semi-professional, and beginner popular musicians” (p. 13).

The purpose of Davis’ (2013) action study was to describe learning and teaching in an elementary music classroom in which popular music and informal learning processes were significant pedagogical components. Participants included one fourth grade class consisting of 24 nine- and ten-year-old students, and data collection included recordings, field notes, and interviews. Findings indicated that incorporating popular music that students had connections to led to high levels of engagement and peer-directed learning, and students valued their emotional connection to the music. Learning and performing music that was meaningful to students led to these students and the instructors gaining understanding of students’ musical identity, ignited agency in performance, and facilitated social community and consciousness in the classroom.

Davis noted an abundance of research pointing out a disconnect between the ways students chose to engage with music outside of school with how they engaged with music in school, as well as the reality that many contemporaneous practices were out of date and separated from students’ personal musical lives. Findings indicated informal learning, aural copying, musical choice, and the social context are important to student learning and finding meaning in school music class. Challenges included rapidly changing musical tastes and popularity, lack of teacher knowledge and comfort with popular music, and some teachers’ belief that popular music does not have educational or musical merit. Davis posited that aural learning and peer directed learning were meaningful and worthwhile avenues to pursue.

Successful implementation of informal music learning and the use of technology as a medium was central to Cayari's (2015) multi-modal study. University students at a midwestern public university made music videos as part of an informal music learning project and had the option to post these publicly online. Data were gathered via observations, surveys with quantitative and qualitative questions, and interviews. Emergent themes included satisfaction, accomplishment, and a diverse array of project outcomes across topics, formats, content, and execution.

Vasil's (2019) multiple case study examined the ways four secondary music teachers utilized popular music and informal music learning in their classrooms and the ways they perceived these enacted changes. Data collected included semi-structured interviews and observations. Findings revealed that these teachers adopted this approach due to student feelings of insecurity about their musical skills and a lack of student engagement in class due to feeling unconnected to the content of class and the way it was taught. Analysis of themes revealed eight primary characteristics that led to their success:

- (1) holistic and gradual change processes, (2) teacher reflection and inquiry, (3) teacher autonomy, (4) enabling institutional factors, (5) use of a variety of supportive networks, (6) student-centered pedagogy, (7) teacher-selected professional development, (8) a balance of structure and chaos and formal and informal learning (pp. 304).

Implications and recommendations for further research included a call to action for pre-service teachers to be mindful of utilizing student-centered pedagogy and democratic practices. Vasil (2019) wrote that these could lead to increased engagement, relevancy, and ultimately result in more students enrolling due to the greater variety of needs met by these ways of teaching. Vasil also pointed out that there is a general lack of research around music

teachers incorporating informal music learning practices (IMLP) and popular music in their classrooms as well as student perceptions of these practices (Vasil, 2019).

Cremata (2017) explored the practice of music teachers in a variety of contexts as facilitators in student learning through a case study approach. Student feedback indicated this style of teaching, using student interest as a jumping off point and facilitating learning, had a positive impact on student learning outcomes. Interviews revealed feelings of democracy, autonomy, diversity, hospitality, differentiation, exploration, creativity, collaboration, and inclusivity. These perspectives were obtained through a series of case studies that took place in five different classrooms from elementary to high school throughout the United States as well as one school in the Caribbean Islands. Classrooms were selected for the study based on their respective teachers, who all self-identified as teachers who use popular music and facilitation as significant pedagogical tools in everyday learning. The case studies involved a total of six one hour-long observations at each school, and semi-structured interviews with 30 volunteer students and facilitators. Students specifically noted in their interviews that learning was inclusive, they appreciated the fact they were free to use notation or play by ear as they wanted, and that they all had differing strengths and weaknesses, which created a positive learning environment in class. The expressed feelings and opinions of these music classes indicated this type of inclusive learning is potentially a path to students finding meaning in school music.

West & Cremata (2016) explored participants' sources of meaning experienced in a blended formal and informal musical ensemble. Research methods included observations, field notes, and voluntary semi-structured interviews with 13 student members of a voluntary instrumental and vocal ensemble situated in a small college in New York State. This qualitative study noted emergent themes of inclusivity, autonomy, and affirmation. This

ensemble was intentionally designed to utilize a blend of formal and informal learning. Students played their choice of instrument (including traditional wind band instruments, rock band instruments, and electronic instruments) or singing, as well as utilizing notation, playing by ear, or a combination of the two. Student musical experience ranged from complete novice to 30 years of experience, and, despite this gap, students valued specific attributes of the class: community, differences, relevance, expression, fluidity, enjoyment, informality, musicianship, ear-playing, and respect.

Kastner (2014) explored four music teachers' perceptions and uses of informal music learning in her instrumental case study. These music teachers, like all teachers in the US, engaged in professional development sessions to acquire points for re-licensure to teach. These PDC (professional development community) sessions included discussions regarding research on informal music learning, sharing experiences with students, and ultimately developing some resources and ideas to implement in the classroom. Teachers were interviewed and observed in meetings and in school. Emergent themes included experimentation and modification, pedagogical practices, and finding value. Teachers found they needed to modify practices as they went to suit the needs of their students, and these lessons fell on a continuum of teacher and student control as well as a continuum of teacher scaffolding. The four interviewed teachers also found that informal music learning did a lot for students' independent music making abilities. In discussion of these findings, research and examples of successful application of these informal music learning practices for younger elementary students was relatively unexplored and needed.

Self-Determination Theory

A common issue facing elementary music teachers today is a lack of student engagement, fulfillment, and finding meaning in general music class (Griffin, 2011). Self-

determination theory (SDT) deals with how people are motivated and behave. Deci and Ryan (1980) proposed that all behaviors can be sorted into two main categories, self-determined behaviors or behaviors that are consciously chosen, and automatized, automated, or conditioned behaviors, which occur with less intentional thought. Deci and Ryan said that teachers who support student autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and self-determined choices in a classroom setting will see higher student engagement and learning outcomes.

Ryan and Deci (2000) said Self-Determination-Theory encapsulated three basic human needs, “the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy” (p. 68). They also delineated intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and suggested that the most impactful motivator for positive outcomes is intrinsic motivation, which is tied intimately with human well-being. Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) is a theory nested within SDT that attempts to measure elements of social and environmental influences that facilitate and hinder intrinsic motivation. CET specifically focuses on the basic human requirement for competence and autonomy, and the theory explains that social and contextual elements or events such as incentives, communications, and reward systems can be conducive to promoting feelings of competence and therefore increased intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Educational settings are a logical place to study Self-Determination Theory. Reeves (2002) explained the findings of his study that indicated that students experience higher levels of self-determination as a result of working with autonomy-supportive teachers. Students reported experiencing strong feelings of competence when they were listened to, encouraged through conversation, given time to work independently, and given hints, but rarely the answer, when they needed help. The findings also indicated autonomy supporting teachers demonstrated they were “responsive (e.g., spend time listening), supportive (e.g.,

praise the quality of performance), flexible (e.g., give students time to work in their own way), and motivate through interest (e.g., support intrinsic motivation)” (p. 186).

MacIntyre, Schnare, and Ross (2018) investigated musicians’ motivations through studying the ways differing aspects of motivation interact with each other. Their study included 188 musicians and data gathered through an online survey. Findings demonstrated intrinsic motivation was the most significant type of motivation in musicians, and extrinsic motivators were less impactful. Learning led to increased effort in learning, or motivational intensity, and this led to participants’ perception of competence, which then cycled back to an increased motivation to learn. Their study indicated that the tenets of Self-Determination Theory, the human need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, certainly apply to musicians. MacIntyre, Schnare, and Ross said their findings implied:

Aspiring musicians and their teachers who can tap into the intrinsic motives that help create a desire to learn, intensity of effort, and increasing perceptions of competence, will go a long way toward creating a virtuous cycle of motivation for music learning and performance (p.712).

In their article “Self-determination theory: An approach to motivation in music education,” Evans (2015) explored the various pitfalls of some current practices and teaching styles, and the ways that SDT provides a logical lens to approach and meet the psychological needs of music learners. Poignant and concise, Evans asks the question “how can parents and teachers create social environments in which their students are more likely to generate their own interest, enjoyment, and motivation, so that they can identify the value of musical practice, integrate it with their sense of self, and find intrinsic motivation in the inherent rewards that musical engagement has to offer?” (p. 78).

Informal Music Learning and Autonomy

John Dewey piloted a school with curricular flexibility based upon the interests of the students to great success as reflected in Keene's historic account (1982). Self-determination theory suggests engagement and outcomes increase in quality when students are in environments that support autonomy (Deci & Ryan 1980). Extant literature has interrogated school music practices and explored various intersections of informal music learning, democratic processes in education, and motivation.

Kupers, van Dijk, van Geert, & McPherson's (2015) mixed methods study based in the Netherlands pertains to themes of autonomy, student-teacher relations, and student achievement and persistence. They found different students thrived with differing amounts of autonomy in private string lessons, and that friction between student and teacher (e.g. a student expressing frustration at an exercise) is not something to be avoided at all costs, but rather something to be acknowledged, honored, and used to learn. The sample of students and teachers included four violin private instructors, four cello private instructors, and their 38 novice students. These students ranged in age from 3 to 11, and had spent no more than 18 months playing their respective instruments. Data were collected in the form of observations, interviews, and practice diaries which were subsequently transcribed and coded for themes. Findings pointed toward the benefits of autonomy in student learning, although the needs of individual students varied by disposition and age. Literature supported the necessity of teachers to promote student learning autonomy for positive learning outcomes, and Kupers et al. provided more evidence towards this idea.

Griffin (2011) found in a Canadian elementary school the majority of students complained that the music they studied did not interest them, and they had very little choice in what they did. The author studied and compared how 2nd and 3rd grade students in an

urban Canadian city experienced music inside and outside of school with the purpose of better understanding student attitudes toward music in school. Students were observed and interviewed over the course of three months, and consistently expressed in interviews a loose tolerance for music class, but they did not particularly enjoy it. Students also mentioned they liked music and thought it was important, but time and time again noted that the music they cared about was never mentioned in class. Several students also acknowledged the importance of learning about music from other cultures, but pointed out that music from their own culture was important as well. Observations and interviews revealed negligible overlap between in-school music and music at home. Griffin proposed the significance of acknowledging and honoring the lived realities of students in the music classroom.

Meaningfulness of experiences to students was central to Davis' (2009) investigation of a middle school general music class. The results of the investigation found that student attitudes regarding music class gradually decreased from grade 3 to grade 6, but once in middle school, opinions improved. Additionally, the author developed and administered an open-ended "Music Meaning Survey" to 792 students enrolled in general music in grades 6-8 across nine middle schools located in eight different states in the US. Students specifically attributed meaningfulness into four basic ways, including vocational, academic, belongingness, and agency.

Lucy Green (2008) reflected on her work studying informal music practices, and revealed through her findings that a key to student engagement and learning was having fun. Specifically, more traditional approaches to teaching music were valued less highly than the student-driven project in the study because the more formal approach came with directives almost exclusively from the teacher. Students experienced increased levels of motivation and

educational achievement over the course of the study when utilizing informal music practices. The type of autonomy that was particularly key to the success of this project was “circumstantial autonomy,” meaning they had choice, or were afforded “independence of action” in their learning (p. 103). Green identified that students enjoyed and were motivated by the project because of the high levels of autonomy over the content they were learning as well as the strategies they used to learn. In her findings, Green connected informal approaches to popular musicians:

The rationale for allowing such autonomy derived from empirical observation and analysis of real-world learning practices adopted by popular musicians in the society outside the school. Their learning practices, being informal and self-governing, are therefore by default accessible to a wide range of learners who can work at their own pace and level, without reliance on a teacher or other expert to provide guidance and structure. Through adopting and adapting such learning practices in the classroom, not as a substitute, but as a complement to more formal teaching methods, we are making the autonomy of the learner into a *means* to becoming educated, not necessarily an *end* of education. (p. 117)

Summary

The importance of curricular flexibility, child-centered approaches, and student autonomy in education were reflected in the topics explored in this chapter. Informal music learning allows the student to learn at their own pace, and to follow their interests (Green, 2008). I sought to explore how successful professional musicians experienced some amount of self-determination to pursue their goals and be successful making a career as a musician. In the next chapter, Chapter 4: Method, I explained how I utilized a series of interviews with

professional musicians along with other forms of data to better understand the informal ways they learned music.

Chapter Three: Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the informal music learning experiences of eight professional musicians in Virginia. This study paradigm enabled me, the researcher, to access detailed and rich information about individuals' learning experiences (Creswell, 2007). The topic of learning experiences and influences is a vast one; I chose to utilize interviews with participants to understand the depth of these active musicians' learning experiences and practices. Additionally, the use of interviews in qualitative research allows participants to bring forward influences and practices that the researcher perhaps had not considered and could miss in a quantitative study (Creswell, 2007). For this study, I conducted an individual interview with each of the eight participants, a focus group interview, and a rehearsal observation with one of the participant's bands on a regular evening preparing for a show.

Positionality

My relationships with the participants affected the ways I generated data and my analysis of those data (Holmes, 2020). I employed convenience sampling for the study and was able to select and contact professional musicians because of my shared background as a professional musician. I am based in the same central Virginia area as the study participants, and I have worked and played with each of the musicians in one capacity or another due to the fluid nature of musicians in this community. I regularly play baritone saxophone in the same band as two of the study participants (Sarah and Ross), and I have been a guest sit-in or recorded albums with each of the other six participants in the study. My relationships with the participants range from colleagues and friends, to colleagues and close friends.

My experiences as a professional musician gave me insight into what kinds of questions could be helpful to ask in interviews and gave me common ground with

individuals. It also required me to carefully consider the differences between my own experiences playing in bands, experiences in formal education, and those experiences that were unique to various specializations within the wide range of represented professional musicians.

While I acknowledge my biases related to my shared experiences with participants, I employed bracketing, or the process by which the researcher puts aside preconceived notions, knowledge, ideas, beliefs, or experiences with the research topic when engaging with data collection and analysis, in this study (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). This is a technique used to confirm validity in phenomenological research and is necessary to accurately reflect data from participants without any biases or assumptions of my own impacting the findings. This process began at the onset of the research process and was not limited to the data collection and analysis phases. Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013) recommended the implementation of reflexivity throughout the research process, which they defined as “the key thinking activity that helps us identify the potential influence throughout the research process. Reflexivity involves the realization of an honest examination of the values and interests of the researcher that may impinge upon research work” (p. 3).

Participants

James Madison University’s Institutional Review Board approved protocols for this research in the spring of 2022. This proposal included the research purpose statement, all interview and focus group questions, a sample of my literature review, all recruitment materials (email text), and participant agreements. Upon receiving approval, I was given permission to recruit participants and begin collecting data.

I utilized a slightly expanded version of Lucy Green’s (2002) definition of a professional musician, which read “they make a living or part of a living from playing and in

some cases also composing and/or arranging music” (p. 9). To this, I added “or facilitating music making via teaching, running live sound, or audio engineering work in a studio setting” as this was consistent with the modern career pathways of the invited participants in this study. Participants were therefore professional musicians based in the central Virginia area who engaged in one or more activities that included performing in shows at music venues and festivals, performing for recorded albums, recording albums by working in a recording studio, running live sound, teaching music, and being a music director at a place of worship. Their areas of expertise and genre experience varied: some specialized in singing or a single instrument, others were making their way as multi-instrumentalists.

I selected participants for this study via convenience sampling from several cities in central Virginia. I contacted participants who were professional musicians according to the primary criterion for study participation. I knew the people who I contacted were career musicians because of my own professional contacts. While I have worked with a large number of musicians, I initially contacted 11 musicians based on 1) my personal rapport with them and my speculation that they may be interested in participating in this study, 2) seeking diversity and variety in type of musical experiences they have (singer-songwriter, instrumentalist, vocalist, etc.), and 3) seeking diversity in race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and age. I assumed that not all musicians I contacted would ultimately participate in the study. I hoped that the final number of participants would range from six to nine, which is how many individuals Krueger (1994) suggested was ideal for a focus group interview and discussion.

I contacted participants by email to gauge interest in participating in this study. All responded positively; however, I was not able to coordinate schedules with three of the people during the busy summer festival season. Those not included in this study included

two drummers and one guitarist/lead singer. The eight participating musicians lived in and near several medium sized cities and suburban areas in central Virginia, and the greater Washington D.C. area, all of which have a range of small, medium, and large capacity music venues that attract various touring popular music bands and artists, as well as theatres and venues for concerts and musical theatre productions.

Participant Descriptions

In this section, I introduce the eight participating musicians, their performing experiences, their personal backgrounds, and their experiences with music learning through brief written descriptions. I used pseudonyms instead of their real names to protect their privacy and confidentiality via the signed agreement approved by James Madison University's Institutional Review Board.

Becky is a vocalist and songwriter who began singing professionally as a child with her sister and went on to sing and tour full-time with numerous well-known artists and bands. She now sings with numerous projects in various styles, including her own band that specializes in music that is a *mélange* of reggae, Appalachia music, rock, country, and soul. Becky is called upon to sing with well-known musicians when they come to the central Virginia and Washington D.C. areas, and she does recording work singing on albums for bands.

Phillip is a multi-instrumentalist who began performing as a harmonica player in his teenage years and expanded to guitar, accordion, upright and electric bass, and singing. He toured full-time for years initially playing harmonica and then transitioning to bass in a successful full-time touring band. He now gigs with numerous projects of various styles including rock, rockabilly, Old Time, country, glam-rock, and heavy metal, runs a home recording studio, and collaborates with local artists.

Holly is a multi-instrumentalist and singer-songwriter who began her career as a ukulele, piano, and guitar player, and she later learned harp. She gigs professionally on all of these instruments, and toured for years in duo projects, bands, and as a solo act as her primary form of income. She taught elementary music in a public school for 19 years and has since retired. She now gigs with several bands playing styles including classic rock, soul, folk, and country, teaches private lessons, plays in orchestra pits for musical productions, is the music director at a local church, and is working on recording an album of her original music.

James is a multi-instrumentalist who gigs as a pianist and a woodwind specialist on bassoon, oboe, saxophone, flute, and clarinet. He currently teaches elementary music in a public school and plays piano and woodwinds in orchestra pits for musical theatre productions, piano for choral accompanying, bassoon and oboe in professional orchestras, piano for wedding events, teaches private lessons, and is the music director at a local church.

Lindsay is a guitarist and singer-songwriter who began performing and touring as a teenager in both solo and duo musical projects. She traveled and performed in this way for about 10 years, and more recently has founded a band. Her group regularly books shows at music venues and performs on the music festival circuit in Virginia. Her band plays a variety of genres including soul, neo-soul, rhythm and blues, jazz, and rock. She also does recording work, and her band has put out numerous singles and two full-length albums.

Perry is a multi-instrumentalist and singer-songwriter who performs as a guitarist, bassist, and pianist who plays as a solo act, band leader, and subs (fills in and plays a show in a band when a typical band member is unavailable) with numerous local bands. He has also spent a significant amount of time working and hosting open mic events at local venues and recording his original music in studio. He has released one full-length album and several single releases, and his music is self-described as “psychedelic Americana rock music.”

Sarah is a drummer and percussionist who is a founding member of a performing, touring, and recording band. She began her musical life as a marimba player, and transitioned to djembe in bands, then a cocktail drum set, and today a full-sized drum set. She has been a member of several bands over the years, and today is regularly called on to play with numerous local bands in addition to the band she founded. Her band is active on the music festival circuit, and has recorded three full-length albums, one EP (a shorter album), and numerous singles over the years. Her band plays mostly original music, and their style is a mix of funk, soul, neo-soul, rock, country, gospel, swing, and Americana.

Ross is a bassist who is a member of a performing, touring, and recording band. He performs on both upright and electric bass. He has been a member of several bands over the years, and today is regularly called on to play with numerous local bands in addition to his own. His band is the same one as Sarah's, and their band is active on the music festival circuit, and has recorded three full-length albums, one EP, and numerous singles over the years. His band plays mostly original music, and their style is a mix of funk, soul, neo-soul, rock, country, gospel, swing, and Americana.

Data Collection

Creswell (2007) defined a phenomenological study as focusing on “understanding the lived experiences of individuals around a phenomenon,” and interviews are frequently the medium by which participants generate data (p. 122). In this study, I employed multiple data sources following Creswell's (2007) recommendation for phenomenological research as well as to reduce the possibility of my own bias to impact the findings, to allow a more complete understanding of the emergent themes, and to confirm the validity of the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997; Maxwell, 2005). Creswell (2000) defined triangulation as “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources

of information to form themes or categories in a study” (p.126). It was necessary to employ validity procedures in this qualitative study to ensure I accurately reflected the participants’ experiences and realities (Creswell, 2000). I accomplished this by generating data through individual interviews, a focus group interview, and a rehearsal observation. The semi-structured interviews with participants included eight individuals, the focus group included four of the original eight, and the rehearsal observation was of one rehearsal of one participant’s band.

I conducted individual interviews with participants to gather detailed and rich information about their informal music learning experiences. I knew it was important that participants be at ease to ensure accurate and reflective data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). To this end, I gave participants the choice of where and when interviews were conducted (some preferred the logistical ease of remote video interviews via Zoom, and a few preferred the experience of talking with me in-person). I assured participants that there were no right or wrong answers and that they were allowed to share as much or little as they wanted for as long or short a time as they would like. My prediction was that the time commitment would span between 30 minutes and an hour. Most participant interviews were approximately 50 minutes along, with a few closer to 30, and a few closer to an hour. I chose a semi-structured interview approach so that I could easily compare data across interviews and so that unanticipated information could still easily emerge from participants (Maxwell, 2005). The interview questions are located in Appendix A. I recorded the audio for the remote individual interviews on a password-protected private computer via Zoom, and recorded in-person interviews on my password-protected phone using the Otter.ai app.

A focus group interview is a group interview focused on a specific topic (Eros, 2014). According to Vaughn et. al. (1996), phenomenological approaches are particularly

suited to focus group study, as it allows us to develop “a more in-depth understanding or in clarifying potentially conflicting or equivocal information from previous data” (p. 25-26). This made the addition of a focus group interview to complement the individual interview data a logical choice. Krueger (1994) recommended a group of six to nine participants as the ideal size for a focus group discussion, whereas Kitzinger (1995) recommended a group four to eight participants. While I had initially planned to align with Krueger’s recommendation, this study’s focus group interview ultimately included four of the eight total individual interview participants, which fell within Kitzinger’s (1995) recommended range. The reason for partial participation in the focus group interview was due to individuals’ scheduling constraints rather than a lack of interest. The focus group interview lasted 60 minutes, and all participants commented on how much they enjoyed their time talking with each other as we said our goodbyes. Gathering together in a focus group interview allowed for participants to interact with each other and uncover, further explore, and confirm themes I had identified from individual interviews (Eros, 2014; Patton, 2002). The focus group interview questions are located in Appendix B. I recorded the audio of the focus group interview on a password-protected private computer via Zoom per the Institutional Review Board protocols.

In the rehearsal observation I took field notes, which in conjunction with data from the individual and focus group interviews provided additional context and perspective on as well as corroboration for what participants said in the interviews (Maxwell, 2005). I sat in the back of the rehearsal space, as out of the way as I could be, to minimize my intrusion on the rehearsal. This rehearsal was one of Holly’s bands, and I obtained verbal permission from the other members of the band in advance to observe and record. I obtained signed agreements per James Madison’s IRB protocols on the day of the rehearsal. The documentation the participants signed is found in Appendix C. I recorded the rehearsal on

my password-protected phone using the Otter.ai app and took field notes while observing the rehearsal to confirm accuracy. I did not initiate any conversation during the observation, and only spoke if a participant initiated a comment or question at me to minimize my interference in the rehearsal (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). As with all of the participants in this study, I have sat in with the band I observed. Specifically, I played Holly's most recent album release party show several years ago, so I was acquainted with her bandmates prior to the observation.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data I collected from the individual interviews, focus group interviews, and rehearsal observation by first utilizing a secure online transcription tool, Otter.ai. I listened back, checked, and edited all transcriptions for accuracy and clarity.

I coded the transcripts using three rounds of descriptive coding for the individual interviews, focus group interview, and rehearsal observation field notes. In qualitative research, a "code" is a word, or series of words, that accurately summarizes the content of a longer statement or observation (Saldaña, 2013). My first level of coding utilized "in vivo" coding, in which I created codes directly quoting participants instead of summarizing the content myself (Saldaña, 2013). After this, the second level of coding included sorting individual interviews' first level codes by topic and content, resulting in a total of twelve categories across all eight interviews, the focus group interview, and the observation. The twelve emergent categories based on commonalities will be discussed in Chapter Four. After sorting first level codes into these second level categories, I coded the data a third time. I did this by sorting the twelve second level codes by related topics, into umbrella terms that encompassed the meaning of the twelve second level codes, resulting in three overarching themes.

I utilized member checking once I had identified the major themes in findings. Member checking involves giving interviewees the chance to review findings to confirm or correct the data for accuracy (Creswell, 2007). To do this, I sent each participant the transcription from their interview as well as a summary of the emergent themes. Each participant confirmed the accuracy of their transcription and confirmed the authenticity of the emergent themes to reflect their personal experiences. These responses were used to inform and confirm the final analysis and narrative.

Chapter Four: Findings

Several themes emerged from the personal stories of study participants about their experiences of learning and playing alone and with others. Analysis of the interviews and observation resulted in twelve level two codes that emerged based on level one in vivo coding commonalities: Songwriting and Arranging, Learning Instruments, Learning Songs, Thought Process, Early Music Experiences, Formal Music Learning, Motivation and Inspiration, Philosophy, Gigging, The Band, Family, and Community. I coded the data a third time into larger categories or themes that comprised Self-teaching, Autonomy, and Collaboration.

Theme 1: Self-Teaching

Lucy Green (2002, 2005, 2008) found that self-teaching and self-guided learning were key to informal music learning and went hand in hand with autonomy in learning. All eight participants engaged in self-teaching, or the act of learning without someone directly showing how something is done, and discussed the importance of listening, practicing, and developing musical skills on their own with time, patience, and persistence. Through the process of analysis, I identified four sub-categories that fell under the umbrella of Self-Teaching, including Songwriting and Arranging, Learning Instruments, Learning Songs, and Thought Process.

Songwriting and Arranging

Six of the eight interviewees mentioned the process of writing original music, or songwriting, as well as arranging music. The topic also came up numerous times in the focus group discussion and was prominently demonstrated in the rehearsal observation. Songwriting entailed writing lyrics, composing a melody for the lyrics, and creating a harmonic structure and organization for the song. Arranging music was the process of taking

an existing song (either one that the band originally composed, or a cover) and making changes to customize it. This included, but was not limited to, determining instrumentation, rearranging the order of verses, choruses, bridges, etc., adding interludes, deciding where to add vocal harmonies and where individuals will sing alone, etc.

Participants viewed both the songwriting and arranging processes as both very personal, self-taught, and rewarding. Lindsay said “songwriting would probably be the biggest thing I taught myself” when reflecting on how she learned and what she did truly independently, also reflecting “songwriting is a very personal experience.” While participants cited various ways they learned and practiced songwriting and arranging, some aligned with Perry’s open-ended approach to songwriting: “I don’t really take any formal, structured approach to it. It’s like, here's a couple ideas. I see which ones stick, which ones work together.” Others utilized a more methodical approach, more aligned with Phillip’s process where arranging and songwriting meet:

Like all these like arrangement tricks, it really kind of rounded out in a way and balance it so it's not just square. Or maybe it's super square, that's fine too. But I think that's the way I do it. And it tends to that seems to be the way that it's always seems to work out with original material. You know, listen, get the feel of it noodle along to the basic notes, and really dial in the notes and then expand on the arrangement and then play it a million times.

Learning Instruments

Learning Instruments came up in seven of eight participants’ individual interviews. Participants’ experiences varied as some of them learned how to play their instruments initially in a class or in a private lesson, some picked up their skills almost entirely on their own, some learned in a casual community music setting, and several experienced some

combination of these paths. The one participant who did not discuss learning instruments was Becky, who was a vocalist. Regarding her singing skill acquisition, Becky recounted many fond childhood memories of singing with her family at home, and said “it’s all God-given.”

Phillip learned harmonica and guitar informally with his friends and on his own by listening to music he liked and learning how to imitate it. He later learned accordion informally with his bandmate on his own, and sought out music theory classes after learning independently for years. He sang throughout his life, learning from singing on his own and with others.

Holly learned ukulele informally from the teenage girl who lived down the street from her as a child and taught herself guitar by listening to music she liked and learning how to imitate it. She took formal piano lessons in her childhood, and formal harp lessons as an adult. She sang from an early age, learning from singing extensively with her family at home, and with others in church choirs.

James learned saxophone in private lessons and band class at school, piano in private lessons, oboe and bassoon in private lessons, and taught himself clarinet and flute with support from a class at school and a few books. He sang from an early age, learning from singing on his own and with others in church choirs.

Lindsay learned guitar on her own from looking chords up online and through informal jamming in community settings. She sang from an early age, learning from singing on her own and with others.

Perry learned guitar on his own from looking chords up online, and on his own by listening to music he liked and learning how to imitate it, and through informal jamming with friends. He had formal piano lessons for a short time when he was younger, learned

saxophone in middle school band, and eventually took guitar lessons when he felt he was ready. He sang from an early age, learning from singing on her own and with others.

Sarah learned drum set on her own by listening to music she liked, and by trying things out trial and error. She initially learned marimba and hand percussion from an Orff class in middle school, and played and performed on djembe first in casual jam settings, and then eventually in a band. After years of gigging as a djembe player, she taught herself how to play drum set.

Ross learned guitar and bass on his own by using a few reference books on his own by listening to music he liked and learning how to imitate it, and jamming with friends. He learned how to play tuba in band class in middle school, and played bass in an influential jazz band class.

Learning Songs

The process of Learning Songs by ear, meaning learning without the aid of notation, and how they do it came up in all interviews in one form or another. For all participants, the key was a great deal of repeated listening. Yet paths diverged with a variety of approaches and styles to learning new material written by either fellow bandmates or cover songs by famous artists. Lindsay, Perry, James, Ross, and Holly all specifically noted they have noticed dramatic improvement in their ability to learn and memorize a new song quickly compared to when they were first starting out. All participants learned music by ear, either a lot, or all of the time.

Holly and James both regularly utilized Standard Western Notation in their work as teachers, church music directors, and orchestra pit musicians, but still learned by ear a great deal in their musical practice. Some participants specified an organized method for learning songs by ear, and others simply listened over and over until they had it. Some participants

preferred to listen and memorize as they went and hated writing things down, and others preferred to chart out a song as they learned it, meaning writing down lyrics and/or chords, form, and other musical information to remember it as they figured out what it was. Perry in particular noted charting songs, particularly when he was subbing in a band, was helpful to learn a lot of material quickly and to prepare for a gig efficiently.

After college, actually is when I really started learning, learning other people's songs, who were like in smaller bands, where it wasn't available for me to look up a lesson or chords online when I needed to learn material for a show. Then I got obsessed with charting all of my songs because I was like, I know how I want them to sound... there were no resources other than here's a recording of it. So it took me a while on the first one. I've gotten a lot faster at it now.

Thought Process

Thought Process encapsulated discussion regarding how participants conceptualized their learning, playing, and practice. All participants discussed their thought process to some extent, and several musicians (Sarah, Jesse, James, and Perry) talked about their thought processes at length throughout discussion. These ideas ranged from who people listened for most when performing, learning music in general, and how they mentally prepared for a gig. James reflected on how his experiences playing multiple instruments helped him understand different musical perspectives and how it informed how he thinks about music:

When I started playing oboe, my band director remarked that my bassoon playing got a lot better because I was playing more melodically... So when I started playing an instrument in class that played the melody more often, that playing transferred across. Doubling was actually one of the bigger things for me in terms of how I play

and how I approach, and this goes back to the mental paradigm of like being a flutist vs. an oboist vs. a whatever, so really being in multiple paradigms of musicianship. When I make music with others, I'm always interested with how others perceive music and how they process reading, interpreting, playing. Everybody has a different thought process behind what they do, and a different way that they even react to musical stimuli.

Sarah spoke on this topic the most of all participants. When responding to the interview questions, she circled back to how she thinks about music and drumming as a part of her response to almost every question. Her experiences learning and practicing as a drummer were unique in several ways compared to the rest of the participants. Drum set is part of what is called the rhythm section in a band, and she, in tandem with the bassist in her band, were largely responsible for the groove, beat, or feeling of the song. She thought structurally about how to mark the changes in sections of the song, how to support or highlight different bandmates at any given time, and shared an interesting look at how she thought about playing, and prepared for a show:

I anticipate lots of changes and stops and things like that... sometimes it just comes out without me even thinking about it. When I'm headed to a gig, when I'm driving, I like to put on songs that kind of resemble what the style I want to go for. Something that's similar to the band I'm playing with, but also something that kind of motivates me like, what do I want to try tonight? It's sort of like, free meditation/studying before a gig.

Theme 2: Autonomy

Ryan and Deci (2000) said “choice, acknowledgment of feelings, and opportunities for self-direction were found to enhance intrinsic motivation because they allow people a

greater feeling of autonomy” (p. 70). This sense of autonomy, the ability for a person to have choice in what they do, to have feelings acknowledged, and the freedom to engage in self-directed learning, came up in all interviews in multiple forms. Each participant discussed, oftentimes at great length, topics that aligned with autonomy or a distinct lack of autonomy in their experiences. They also discussed having agency and its positive impacts on their learning, as well as a lack of agency being detrimental. Through the coding process, four sub-categories emerged following the tenants of Autonomy, including Early Music Experiences, Formal Music Learning, Motivation and Inspiration, and Philosophy.

Early Music Experiences

All participants had a great deal to share about their early music experiences. These experiences ranged from early memories of music playing on the record player or radio consistently in their homes, folks playing music around them and in their communities, and singing with family. All participants pointed toward their early music experiences influencing them in one way or another, whether it was inadvertently discouraging them from pursuing a formal music education, like Lindsay, or having parents who played music all the time on the radio and encouraged them to explore music on their own and how they wanted, like Ross. Others had stories of meeting friends who were already skilled players with whom they spent time and learned important early lessons from them. Phillip discussed a few distinct childhood memories:

My first real moment where I understood that you could make music, I went in the woods around the house and all these downed logs that were sort of floating above the ground on mounds of dirt. They were sort of in a ring and my parents were blasting a Mannheim Steamroller album. I picked up two sticks and found tonality in the logs in such a way that I was playing along to Mannheim steamroller in the

woods. By myself on these logs, with sticks, and it was a very, very joyous moment. After that, music became a pretty important part of my life too, even just as a listener.

I made some friends with some guys who were actually very skilled. Very talented guitar players. They took me under their wing and I was able to learn how to play with people. By ear, and with dynamics, and when not to play and when to play. One of those guys is now a guitar player with P!nk, so he was a total shredder.

Formal Music Learning

All participants discussed formal music learning experiences in one form or another. Some participants had truly almost no formal music learning, and some picked up some of their knowledge from a school, institution, or private lessons instructors. Participants engaged with formal music learning on a spectrum. Holly and James engaged with it the most with private lessons on multiple instruments as well as music classes and ensembles in school, though they both learned numerous instruments and musical skills on their own time, without a teacher. Perry and Phillip had some experiences in classes and private lessons, although they also learned some instruments and skills outside a formal environment. Both Perry and Phillip also sought out private lessons in their adult gigging lives to expand upon their existing knowledge and practice. Phillip sought out theory classes and guitar lessons, and Eric enrolled himself in guitar, piano, and voice lessons. Sarah, Becky, and Ross participated in ensemble classes in school, did not engage in private lessons at any time, and learned many of their musical skills independently and with friends.

Lindsay's background was almost entirely without formal music learning at the secondary level, and she acquired her guitar and singing skills in community settings and through self-teaching. She had recently taken a songwriting class and a few weeks of vocal

lessons, but she did not perceive these as skill acquisition for her, but rather polishing her already existing abilities. She reflected on her limited formal music experience as a child:

I literally took two piano lessons when I was a kid. I don't remember anything really from that... I shied away from that when I was a kid because my dad was a composer and a piano player, and he tried to get me to do that. And I didn't want to do it.

This resistance to formal lessons, or Lindsay experiencing a lack of autonomy being enrolled in piano lessons she did not want to take, is what connected this data to the third level code Autonomy. Conversely, Holly reflected on remembering her time in piano lessons fondly, and their significance to her training as a musician:

My mother enrolled us in piano lessons. She was an excellent teacher. She was very kind, but very exacting. And so that's how I learned how to read music and play the piano. We took lessons from her for just probably just three years, three or four years. But really that was such important training for me. And I've got all the basic theory and basic knowledge that I carried me for a long time after that.

James had a variety of formal music learning experiences, and when asked the interview question "What are some of the most helpful things you did to learn music in your life?" something quickly came to mind:

When I was a freshman in high school we had a class in our high school called woodwind techniques, which was really just like an auxiliary supplement to band. So we would play in small chamber groups and do assignments. We had to learn a scale pattern in all 12 keys. I was doing the thing where I was trying to learn more by ear... it helped me in that area because I was going more by sound and not by notes,

and the fingerings and the exact notes stopped mattering and it was more about intervals.

James brought up this band director several times throughout the interview in conjunction with themes of autonomy. He reflected on how he was given lots opportunities and choices to make and play music in different settings, fond memories of unstructured time in the band room making music with friends around the piano, and he also reflected on how those impactful lessons of learning scale degree patterns in his woodwind techniques class led to some self-teaching and learning by ear:

I started doing stuff like that on my own, where I would just make something up, and I would play that in a bunch of keys, and that would be my warm-up. It also helped me read music... I was still able to see patterns and contour and split things up into groups of like "okay this is a ti - do. There's just a bunch of ti - dos going up the scale. Something like ti - do, ti - do, ti - do, ti - do!" And that, have fun transcribing that! *laughter*

Motivation and Inspiration

Topics of motivation and inspiration appeared in all interviews, and at length in many. Commentary on the fulfillment of making music for and with others, connecting with audiences, facilitating meaningful emotional experiences for listeners, and the ability to continually improve and grow in their art form came up across interviews. Ross was deeply motivated by the fulfillment he experienced from making music with others, and he explained, "Playing music for people is the most awesome thing. I've just found that being a musician is about knowing people. The collaboration. It's magical."

Phillip explained his love of connecting with audiences with a band he plays in that facilitates live karaoke, where audience members can sign up to lead and sing a song with the

band. He said that these experiences of facilitation inspired him and were some his most memorable gigs, and explained “My favorite part is seeing those people leave the stage. And they go connect with their friends and all their friends are so happy. It's like the best night of their lives.” All participants mentioned in one form or another appreciating the fluid nature of music, and that there is always something new to learn or understand. Becky discussed her interest in learning from all types of musicians, “That's why I like to listen to just about everything, so I can be knowledgeable on stuff. And I love learning, you know?”

All participants echoed this sentiment of the importance of listening, learning from others, and expanding their horizons. Lindsay reflected on her own grit in learning on her own, saying “willpower and determination was the most important tool that I had inside of me.” Ross discussed grit and willpower from another perspective, finding joy in making music in his sobriety:

And honestly getting a little personal.. when I stopped drinking. Like those first few shows, I was like, this is it. This is what it means. Like, definitely an “ah-ha” moment. Like I was immediately creating again onstage. I was listening. I was leaving space, I was taking up space, and just being more present. I hadn't felt like that in years. Years and years. That’s when I realized why people dance, why people come to shows. It’s like an exchange of energy.

Philosophy

Participants discussed their personal connections with their personal code of ethics regarding making music, playing, and learning. Everyone naturally had unique perspectives on important experiences, and what they focused on when they approached the stage, or recording, or another task at hand. Participants discussed the importance of working well with others, being prepared for rehearsals and performances, being willing to listen and

collaborate, and knowing when to take a back seat and let others lead. Perry came back to the idea of being prepared, and knowing he will do a good job at a gig being very important to him, several times in the interview. This led Perry to talk about his connection to intentional practice, and it was very much central to his philosophy of performing. Perry did a lot of work subbing in bands, so he has had a lot of experience needing to prepare a lot of new music quickly. He discussed a quotation that stuck with him about preparation from a guitarist he admires:

There's a Derek Trucks quote, where he says, "you should never practice on stage."

He said you can do something new on a song, but like, you have to *know* what the new thing you're doing is. You shouldn't think "I'm going to try this and see if it works." You should *hear* it and *know* that this part you're gonna play is gonna work.

Holly had a lot to say about collaborating with others and the importance of listening to bandmates. Holly, in her 70s during this study, had many experiences making music in bands in the 1970s when casual sexism, in her experience, was a lot more common than it is today. She experienced not being taken seriously, male bandmates trying to pigeon-hole her into a role of exclusively singing instead of playing guitar or piano as well, and not being listened to initially when she knew how a part of a song went and someone else was wrong. Despite these frustrations, she still believed in the importance of playing in bands:

Playing in a band is a really, *really* valuable thing to do, because it teaches you so much that that you really need to know if you're going to be a professional gigging musician. Starting that early learning... and learning the dynamics of how to put together instruments to play a song. And learning to work together with other musicians.

Theme 3: Collaboration

The Cambridge Dictionary defines collaboration as “the situation of two or more people working together to create or achieve the same thing” (Cambridge, n.d.). Similarly, Cremata and Powell (2017) stated “music making is a communal and participatory practice.” (p. 302). This connection between communal participation and music making is why I chose Collaboration for the term to encapsulate the third theme in this study. Each participant discussed how collaboration drives what they do as a musician. Participants discussed collaboration being both challenging and rewarding, and in fact being at the very heart of being a musician. I coded the individual interviews and focus group interview, and four sub-categories emerged following the tenants of collaboration. Gigging, The Band, Family, and Community round out the topics discussed by the participants about their music learning experiences.

Gigging

Participants discussed gigging in every interview. As defined in the introduction chapter, a gig is a paid job in which musical skills are utilized. This includes but is not limited to a performance, recording music by playing or singing, recording music as a recording engineer, sound engineering for live music, teaching music, facilitating music at a place of worship. All participants cited a great deal of their gigging as involved with performance. Other types of gigging were distributed across participants.

Becky performed live music, composed and arranged music, and recorded music by singing on albums

Phillip performed live music, composed and arranged music, recorded music by playing on albums, and recorded music by working as a recording engineer

Holly performed live music, composed and arranged music, recorded music by singing and playing on albums, taught music, and was the music director at a church

James performed live music, composed and arranged music, taught music, sound engineered for live music, and was the music director at a church

Lindsay performed live music, composed and arranged music, and recorded music by singing and playing on albums

Perry performed live music, composed and arranged music, recorded music by singing and playing on albums, and sound engineered for live music

Sarah performed live music, arranged music, and recorded music by playing on albums

Ross performed live music, arranged music, and recorded music by playing on albums

In addition to these gigging elements of working as a professional musician, Lindsay went into detail discussing the business side of being in charge of booking and running a band:

It takes a lot of time to run a band and gig professionally. It takes a lot more time than like, the two hours that you're playing music. The social media, the website, the calendar, the back and forth emails, merch, a vehicle, show advances. like everything. There's just so much involved in promoting your shows. It's very stressful.

The Band

The band, or the people with whom participants interacted, collaborated, and performed the most, were centered in all interviews as well. This subcategory is distinct from the larger umbrella of Collaboration due to the personal nature of The Band. Collaboration occurs, but is not limited to, whenever musicians sub for another band, play in an open jam

session, work and record in recording context. The Band is a distinct sub-category of Collaboration because the musicians in this study identified one or two groups of people they regularly collaborate with, and for many participants, there is a very personal and familial element to calling someone a bandmate. This is related to, but not exactly the same, as jamming at a park with strangers and acquaintances.

Participants discussed the importance of being a good collaborator, being able to listen to bandmates, knowing when to stop and listen or not play at all, and when to assert themselves. These social elements of learning to play were valued as much as the technical skills of playing, and several participants noted experiences in which they were at one time or another working with people who were difficult to create with for one reason or another. Ross discussed his early experiences joining the band he was playing with during the study and the importance of his ability to play and learn by ear:

It really started with the band because I kind of got thrown in there. They'd say "this is in C," I was like, "Okay! I guess I'm just gonna go with it." So a lot of the songs I learned by ear, there was no real chord charts or anything. Someone would just call out keys and I basically learned half the material that way.

Philip reflected on his thoughts on the creation and composition process in a band setting, specifically when a bandmate brings a new original song idea:

Somebody's presenting something they have emotional attachment to in a way that requires more patience, and empathy, in a way like, you know, trying to understand what the feeling of the song should be before even understanding what the notes are. It requires a lot of patience, and humbleness and empathy. But also confidence.

Lindsay discussed the importance of collaborating with her bandmates when she is fleshing out a song idea, "my songs would not be what they are without playing with the

other guys and learning different aspects of music from them.” In stark contrast, Holly reflected on what it was like working when she was touring full time in the 70s and 80s:

There were times when, especially when I'm working with all men that you know, I can tell I rub them the wrong way because I'm very assertive. And I don't think I'm imagining it to say that I have many times because I'm usually the only female in the group. And many times I have run into you know, a certain kind of prejudice about what it is that I can and can't do, what I shouldn't be allowed to do and what I'm capable of doing.

Becky grew up writing music with her sister and performing in bands, and recounted a fond memory:

Me and my sister, we were writing songs from about nine years old on up. There's a video that one of her friends took at our performance last Friday. That song my sister wrote, it's called *Dance the Way You Want*. And she wrote that song when she was 12. That was the first time we did it in years. I mean, we used to do it with the reggae band. We used to do that all the time. And last Friday was the first time she did it, like in *years*. And we still remembered our parts and our harmonies and stuff. It was so fun.

Family

Family also came up in one way or another in all interviews, ranging from supportive familial experiences, restrictive family experiences, family being the earliest memories of making and listening to music, and bandmates becoming chosen family. Clearly, the collaborative nature of making music lent itself to topics of family, and for many participants, had some overlap with discussions of The Band. Sarah discussed her love of music coming from her family's love of music, and being surrounded by music growing up:

I remember always been interested in music. I grew up with a lot of not musicians in my family, but music lovers. Always had a lot of music playing in my house. My mom's wakeup call in the morning was like, crank the radio. I learned a lot of those like, classic rock songs. The beginning of learning like, cool guitar solos and cool, you know, drumming solos and sounds.

Becky described her experiences growing up singing with her sister in her childhood and always having music around her home growing up:

Every weekend, you know, we would sit on the porch after church, you know, and we would listen to, my mom would bring the record player out or the radio, and we'll just like, listen, and then the neighbors, they will come by. While we're playing, I'm just listening to music. So that's how I came into music. It was always music at our household.

Community

Topics of community in music came up across all interviews and were discussed in the focus group interview as well. As indicated by the “Self-Teaching” theme, spending time alone to learn was important to these musicians, but as the importance of collaboration to participants indicates, both sides of the coin are keys to making music. Whether it was learning with a close childhood friend, like Ross and Holly, or learning largely from a casual community jam setting, like Lindsay and Sarah, or some combination of these, working with others, and being able to do it, and finding community in music came up across topics.

One story stood out in contrast to these mostly positive stories of community. Becky described her experiences growing up with her sister as two Black girls in a predominantly white community. They experienced prejudice in various ways, and she cited her familial ties

and their love of music as what got them through in spite of a harsh community environment:

Growing up me and my sister, we were called Black rednecks. They were like, you guys, you're not Black, because we didn't listen to the same music. And we weren't really into all the, you know, we listened to Whitney Houston. But we listened to anything and everything. So we were picked on a lot, we were asked to do like school concerts and whenever they had like singing parts, they would always get me and my sister. And then it was more of like the Black people calling us that, they would call us Black rednecks. That's because all our friends were mostly white. And we grew up in a white community.

So, music was all that we had, you know, we're said we're only gonna do our music. You know, we hear those things, but I'm like, "I'm not gonna listen, I'm not gonna listen." So now it's like all of them coming to my shows like, "Oh my god, you guys always sang in school! You always did that. Can't believe you're out there across the world with [famous band]. I can't believe." Like, *that's* following your dreams!

Phillip's interview was the longest one of the individual interviews. The last interview question was open ended and simply asked if there was anything else he would like to share that he felt was related to our discussion, and he had a lot to say about community. He reflected on the impactful nature of finding community in music:

It's my favorite thing to do with other people, making music. It is my religion. My church is all in music and doing it with other people. I really fell in love with playing Old Time music, even though I don't do it as often as I used to. It is community music. It doesn't lean on soloist as the main event like Bluegrass does. I want to play

the groove. And lots of neat things can happen without it being ego driven. And that's my favorite stuff.

Returning to Lindsay's opening comments in this document about what she called the "folk method," she spoke at length about her experiencing learning from the community she found in making music and learning it from others in an informal way:

It was community based. Not in school, I guess. The opposite from being in school and learning from a book it's more just like old school way of like playing on porches. Just learning from whoever's around you kind of thing, like non-officially. So much of my musical knowledge and abilities and have come from playing with other people.

Summary

The themes of Self-Teaching, Autonomy, and Collaboration that emerged from the data demonstrated that participants required a combination of choice, time alone, and time with others in their informal music learning backgrounds. Self-Teaching led to participants being able to work at a pace that suited them and pursue topics that aligned with their interests. Autonomy was a requirement for all, and several participants had memories of times when they did not have autonomy in music, and this being a detriment to their learning and performing. Collaboration came across as the "beating heart" of the participants' experiences, each with their own fond and sweet memories of time spent working with others toward a musical goal. In the final chapter, Chapter Five: Discussion, I explored the implications of these impactful informal music learning experiences of professional musicians.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the informal music learning experiences and current practices of professional musicians based in Virginia. Lucy Green (2002) defined informal music learning as the process by which individuals “teach themselves or pick up skills and knowledge, usually with the help or encouragement of their family or peers, by watching and imitating musicians around them and by making reference to recordings” (p. 5). This student-driven music learning can include, but is not limited to, learning by ear (Green, 2002). I used and slightly expanded upon Lucy Green’s (2002) definition of a professional musician as reflected in Chapter One: “they make a living or part of a living from playing and in some cases also composing and/or arranging music” (p. 9). My addition expanded the ways musicians are paid for their skills as a musician, and aligned with the spirit of Green’s definition, adding “or facilitating music making via teaching, running live sound, or audio engineering work in a studio setting.”

Four research questions guided data collection and analysis: 1) What informal music learning experiences were formative to professional musicians who perform live music? 2) How did participants utilize informal music learning in their practices? 3) What are the challenges of informal music learning? 4) What are the benefits of informal music learning?

The findings of this study on professional musicians’ experiences with informal music learning were consistent with previously conducted research, and illuminated answers to these questions from perspectives that had not been previously explored in detail. Results relating to research question three, however, push against some existing research, which I will discuss in further detail.

Research Question One

Participants discussed research question one, “What informal music learning experiences were formative to professional musicians who perform live music?” throughout their interviews. Themes of Self-Teaching, Autonomy, and Collaboration emerged from the data; specifically, level two codes of Songwriting and Arranging, Learning Instruments, Learning Songs, Early music experiences, Family, and Community frequently connected to this research question regarding formative informal music learning experiences.

This research question was unique to this study in the context of previously conducted research. Research exists on amateur adolescent and adult musicians and informal music learning (Söderman & Folkestad, 2004; Waldron 2013; Waldron & Veblen 2009), and formal learning in professional musicians (Coulson, 2010; Hallam, 1995; López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2020; López-Íñiguez & Burnard, 2022; Smilde, 2012). Research specifically investigating the informal music learning experiences, past and present, of professional musicians is very limited. Lucy Green’s (2002) study is the closest match, though the participants in her study were not all exclusively professionals. This is one of the few studies exploring the specific phenomena of informal learning among professional musicians.

Research about the informal music learning of amateur musicians at all age levels is consistent with this study’s participants’ early music learning experiences. Themes from Davis’ (2013) study investigating the impacts of informal music learning on a class of 4th students included engagement, peer-directed learning, valued emotional connection to music, agency, and community. West & Cremata’s (2016) study took a close look at informal music in a non-music major collegiate setting, and themes of community, relevance, expression, and enjoyment emerged from data and analysis. These findings across ages were consistent with the experiences of the professional musicians in this study.

Participants reflected on the ability to Self-Teach and work at their own pace to prepare and learn, and described those early and initial experiences playing with others as casual and welcoming havens of community. As Sarah commented when describing her early experiences learning from jam sessions with friends, “if you goofed up, it’s whatever. We’re sitting in a living room.” The consistency of the findings from this study about professionals and the findings of other studies included in Chapter Two: Literature Review indicate that the benefits of informal music learning are not only valuable, but also accessible.

Autonomy, and the importance of it, came up throughout all interviews. Participants who experienced high levels of autonomy in their learning flourished, and when participants were limited and choices were taken from them, they resisted whatever was being forced upon them. Lindsay strongly disliked her brief experience with formal piano lessons as a young child because of her father’s attempt to influence her into a particular formalized path, and she didn’t continue in music again until she was 19, on her own terms. Lucy Green (2008) explored the impacts of autonomy in the classroom through the use of informal music learning practices, and found that:

The main reasons why pupils seemed to have enjoyed and been motivated by the project are that it allowed relatively high levels of autonomy over both the content and the strategies involved in learning. The rationale for allowing such autonomy derived from empirical observation and analysis of real-world learning practices adopted by popular musicians in the society outside the school” (p.117).

The participants are professional musicians. They had these impactful informal music learning experiences, and it led them to their fulfilling careers as musicians. Preexisting research and this study corroborated findings of informal music resulting in positive outcomes for participants. Informal music learning can suit the learner’s unique interests and

preferred learning modalities. Opportunities to engage in music this informal way were not commonplace in K-12 public education, and it begs the questions: why is informal learning not more widespread in K-12 education, and how can we incorporate it more? We know that pre-service teachers are not often trained in informal music learning pedagogies at the collegiate level, and in-service teachers who do not have training in informal learning practices do not usually choose to employ them (Blackwell, Momohara-Ho, & Matherne, 2021; Kastner, 2014). However, when in-service teachers are properly equipped and trained in these methodologies, they feel comfortable, see value in teaching in this way, and their students benefit from experiencing self-teaching, autonomy and community as a result (Blackwell, Momohara-Ho, & Matherne, 2021; Kastner, 2014).

Research Question Two

Research question two, “How do professional musicians utilize informal music learning in their practice?” was a similarly unique question to this study in the same ways as research question one. As discussed in the previous section, research exists on exploring amateur adolescent and adult musicians and informal music learning (Söderman & Folkestad, 2004; Waldron 2013; Waldron & Veblen 2009), and professional musicians and their formal music learning (Coulson, 2010; Hallam, 1995; López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2020; López-Íñiguez & Burnard, 2022; Smilde, 2012). Research specifically around the informal music learning experiences, both past and present, of professional musicians is very limited.

Folkestad (2006) called formal learning any learning that takes place where there is a clear teacher-student relationship, takes place in school or space dedicated to learning, and the learning taking place is designed with objectives and teaching techniques and sequencing specifically in mind. Consequently, the primary focus of research question two is opposite of Folkestad’s (2006) definition. Participants discussed learning experiences in settings without

formal teachers, learning instead from friends, peers, family members, books, and online resources in outside-of-school places like homes and parks. No one designed these learning experiences for them; rather, participants sought them out on their own at a self-paced rate.

Lucy Green (2008) drew connections between informal music learning and the importance of giving her students opportunities for authentic collaboration, and the data from these interviews corroborated these connections. Musicians in this study sought out their own opportunities for authentic collaboration in their current day-to-day practices. The participants talked about, time and time again, the importance of their informal music learning environments being welcoming and positive. They valued a blend of informality and competent musicianship. Participants in this study reflected on the importance of making music with people they were able to work well with, and these people skills being absolutely essential for learning music in an informal manner in collaboration with others.

Research question two, “How do professional musicians utilize informal music learning in their practice?” interfaced with all three primary themes, Self-teaching, Autonomy, and Collaboration. Participants discussed topics that fall under level two codes including Songwriting and Arranging, Learning Songs, Thought Process, Motivation and Inspiration, Philosophy, Gigging, and The Band. Some participants gave very detailed accounts of how they learn or write new songs using their informal backgrounds and skills. Some compared it to their old practices and how they have improved, and others discussed how they conceptualize music and music making through informal and “by-ear” approaches. Perry reflected on how his songwriting practice has improved over the years, and described how he writes today:

A lot of times when I'm writing a song, I'll come up with a really cool guitar part. And then I'll start trying to write the rest of the song around it and just be too

hyper focused on that so I'll strip it down to be like, "Alright, here's simple chord changes, that like, the melody that I wrote works over the cool guitar part and just the changes." And then oftentimes with that, like the simpler approach ends up sticking and being the meat of a song. So I do that often, just like simplifying one part to focus on the other.

Similar to Research Question One, the findings and themes of this study were consistent with studies of informal music learning in amateur adults and children. Themes of engagement, peer-directed learning, valued emotional connection to music, agency, Davis, 2013 community, relevance, expression, and enjoyment (Davis, 2013, West & Cremata, 2016) emerged from data and analysis. These themes across ages were consistent with the experiences of the professional musicians in this study.

Research Question Three

My findings related to research question three, "What are the challenges of informal music learning?" that were not entirely consistent with preexisting research. Some scholars stated that many musicians who learned primarily in an informal way, upon reflection, regret or bemoan their perceived lack of technical skills or ability to read or write music in the Western Standard notation tradition (Feichas, 2010; Green, 2002). Green (2002) found that many of the popular musicians in her study felt that despite the commonality of popular musicians not having formal music reading and writing skills, that they were missing something in their skill set, and that these musicians typically sought out some formal training after a point to balance their skills. In this study, two of the eight musicians regularly used Western Standard notation for some parts of their jobs, but not all. The musicians who did not read Western Standard notation well, or at all, did not express that they felt like this was a flaw, or something missing. They found they were able to do their jobs as musicians

without it. One element that was somewhat consistent with Green's (2002) findings was that some participants (five of eight participants) in this study did seek out some manner of formal training in addition to their long periods of informal learning. It was not in pursuit of music notation fluency, but rather of a variety of singing, songwriting, and instrumental lessons.

Of the four research questions, data were more limited regarding this question because participants did not seem particularly challenged by informal music learning. Challenges came up briefly in the Self-teaching, and more frequently in Collaboration level three themes, but was absent from discussion regarding Autonomy. This perhaps speaks to the customizable nature of informal music learning, and participants being able to decide what is best for themselves does not lead to issues regarding Autonomy.

Within the themes of Self-teaching and Collaboration, level two codes and topics that included challenges were Learning instruments in the Self-teaching category, and Gigging, and The Band within Collaboration. Participants discussed several challenges in the Learning instruments category, including needing a lot of grit and determination to learn brand new skills or how to play an instrument using independent and self-teaching strategies. Lindsay, who taught herself how to play guitar on her own and in community jam settings, laughed in her interview "I re-learned how to play the G chord SO many times."

Challenges that arose from the Gigging and The Band categories all centered on the challenges associated with working with people. Due to the "by ear" nature of playing and gigging in bands and the lack of charts or music notation, a group of musicians has to collaborate to learn the same song and agree on how it should go. There is not necessarily a written down "right answer" or creative authority like in other forms of more formalized music making. This act of collaboration can lead to arguments or disagreements about what

something sounds like on a recording in the case of learning a cover song, or artistic disagreements about how an original composition should be arranged or composed. Phillip talked about how these differing understandings could both lead to something positive or a conflict:

Because I found that like everyone in the band learned the song, but they did something a little bit different. And sometimes that ended up being something really cool. And then sometimes it ended up in us being like, “dude, that's not how the bridge is.”

Research Question Four

Research question four, “What are the benefits of informal music learning?” is perhaps the most explored question in preexisting research. I also discussed this topic at length in interviews with participants in this study. Findings were overall consistent and in a similar thematic vein of previous research. As previously discussed, benefits of informal music learning can include increased student engagement, relevancy, and accessibility for engagement (Vasil, 2019). Researchers have also found that informal music learning can lead to learners to engage with democracy, autonomy, diversity, hospitality, differentiation, exploration, creativity, collaboration, and inclusivity in participants (Cremata, 2017; West & Cremata, 2016), as well as affirmation (West & Cremata 2016).

In this study, discussion about the benefits of informal music learning touched on all three larger themes in this study: Self-teaching, Autonomy, and Collaboration. The level two codes relating to this question were Songwriting and Arranging, Motivation and inspiration, Philosophy, Family, and Community. All participants talked about these themes and feelings in the interviews repeatedly throughout this study, especially when compared to the challenges of informal music learning. This stark contrast makes it reasonable to assume that

the participants in this study believed that the benefits of informal music learning outweigh the challenges.

Participants tied their experiences of informal music learning to the benefits of expressing themselves through songwriting, finding motivation and inspiration through making art, developing a personal philosophy of music and life, and forging connections to family and community. Phillip reflected on the significance of his family and his musical journey, saying “My aunt was really my source. I mean, she was my inspiration for a lot of music.” Holly remembered her early learning experiences with her familial community:

My first memory of learning is my father teaching me how to sing harmony. He was a in a barbershop quartet... A lot of it was just hilarity and my siblings, we'd make up really dumb lyrics to songs that we knew and we'd think it was hilarious and we'd be falling on the floor. Every child wants this you know, it was a freedom. We had a freedom with singing and music. That was a great thing, you know, nobody was telling us to be quiet.

Becky talked about the importance of community to her in music, reflecting “All the musicians I know, all of us are friends and, and everybody come out and they support each other. And I just love it.” On the topics of community, participation, and accessibility, Phillip had some specific opinions regarding school music education:

I think in schools it seems to be like zero or everything. And there's not a plebeian easy community part. And I think that's challenging for some people, especially young people, because I don't know, I'll play trombone because my teacher wants me to play trombone, which is great. It was totally fine. But maybe some kids are turned off by the process of figuring that out. Like, nah. I just want to clap along. Or

I want to play some sticks on a log. Whatever it is, I wish there was a low-key music education part of school in general.

Toward an Informal Informed Classroom

The principles of Self-Determination Theory of competence, autonomy, and relatedness have a documented positive connection to learning, and music learning (MacIntyre, Schnare, & Ross, 2018; Reeves, 2002). SDT also shares these concepts with the emergent main themes in this study regarding informal music learning. SDT's Competence and this study's theme Self-Teaching have a great deal of overlap in meaning. Participants experienced feelings of competency when they were able to self-teach in a way that suited their interests and learning styles. This was evident in the sub categories of Self-Teaching: Songwriting and Arranging, Learning Instruments, Learning Songs, and Thought Process. Autonomy was directly related to this research as it emerged as one of the three main themes from findings. This need for having voice and choice was prevalent throughout participant interviews, and was found particularly in the level two codes within Autonomy: Early Music Experiences, Formal Music Experiences, Motivation and Inspiration, and Philosophy. Relatedness from SDT and Collaboration from this study shared meaning as well. Relatedness, or feeling connected to peers, goes hand in hand with Collaboration, working with others, and the sub-categories of Collaboration in this study: Gigging, The Band, Family, and Community.

Dewey and his vision for education encapsulated a number of philosophies, and in this study, I explored his approaches of curricular flexibility, child-centeredness, and democratic principles (Keene, 1982). Curricular flexibility aligns with Self-Teaching, child-centeredness shares meaning with Autonomy, and democratic principles is in harmony with Collaboration. Dewey's ideas in conjunction with Self-Determination Theory's principles

encapsulate what it means to engage in informal music learning. The participants of this study expressed levels of deep gratitude for opportunities to find meaning through music in their communities. It stands to reason that these experiences of meaning are worth bringing to students in public education.

Jenkins (2011) and Folkestad (2006) would say that no true informal learning can take place inside the school setting, so perhaps this approach may best be termed “informal informed,” in which teachers teach, and then provide the open-endedness necessary for students to explore and learn music in informal ways.

Curricular Pathways

Research indicated that one of the most cited barriers for teachers incorporating informal music learning practices in the classroom is being properly trained in the topic (Blackwell, Matherne, & Momohara-Ho, 2022; Kastner, 2014; Vasil, 2019). When teachers are equipped with the knowledge, tools, and skills to incorporate informal learning practices in the classroom, they are more likely to include them and see positive impacts (Blackwell, Matherne, & Momohara-Ho, 2022; Kastner, 2014; Vasil, 2019).

Lucy Green (2008) reflected on the high levels of motivation of her pupils in her study that allowed for high levels of autonomy:

Their learning practices, being informal and self-governing, are therefore by default accessible to a wide range of learners who can work at their own pace and level, without reliance on a teacher or other expert to provide guidance and structure.

Through adopting and adapting such learning practices in the classroom, not as a substitute, but as a complement to more formal teaching methods, we are making the autonomy of the learner into a *means* to becoming educated, not necessarily an *end* of education. (p. 117)

In the following section, I identify a series of potential pathways through which K-5 general music teachers might facilitate informal music learning in the classroom, using the main themes from this study (Self-teaching, Autonomy, and Collaboration) as the tentpoles of these “informal informed” techniques. These ideas are organized by student grade and meant to inspire further experimentation and implementation of informal-oriented activities. Most of the pathways listed can be scaled up as students age. Rather than a complete curriculum guide, this content instead comprises a series of suggestions and ideas to scaffold informal music learning skills in the elementary general music classroom.

Self-Teaching

Grade level	Pathways: Self-Teaching	Underlying Principles
K/1	<p>When introducing new instruments (e.g. auxiliary percussion instruments) give students opportunities to learn and explore on their own how each instrument makes sound by independent experimentation, instead of demonstrating and telling them how they work right away. After students have time to explore on their own, give them time to talk to a partner about what they found, and then bring the whole group together to discuss their thoughts, and provide any necessary clarification.</p>	<p>This allows students to learn by doing and create their own understanding of how instruments work.</p> <p>Opportunities for students to find an answer or solution rather than providing it right away supports Self-Teaching.</p>
2/3	<p>When teaching a new song to students, consider playing the melody over time on various instruments, and when it is time to add lyrics, give them to students in print, and in small groups give them the time to try and work out how the lyrics could line up with the melody they know.</p>	<p>This gives students the opportunity to apply their pre-existing knowledge of a melody to a new variable: lyrics.</p> <p>Opportunities for students to take what they know and apply it to something new supports Self-Teaching.</p>
4/5	<p>When students are working together in small groups to learn songs of their choice on instruments and/or singing, give them support where they need it regarding harmonic information, but encourage them to compose their own drum and percussion parts, organize and arrange the song's form how they see fit, determine instrumentation, and who plays when in the song.</p>	<p>This enables students to decide for themselves what they think will work for them in a song. They will need to compose via trial and error to find a drum part that is not too complicated nor too boring. Arranging a song also requires trial and error to find what they like.</p> <p>Opportunities for students to take ownership of how they want to play a song allows them to self-scaffold their learning, supporting Self-Teaching.</p>

Autonomy

Grade level	Pathways: Autonomy	Underlying Principles
K/1	When playing together as a class, give students choices between auxiliary percussion instruments to play once they know how they work, as well as singing, movement, and other instrument choices	<p>This allows students freedom and choice to decide how they want to engage with music.</p> <p>Opportunities for students to select a modality of learning and engagement supports Autonomy.</p>
2/3	When students are playing together, give students expanded instrument, singing, and movement choices, as well as utilizing student feedback when arranging songs as a class to perform	<p>This gives students freedom and choice to decide how they want to engage with music, as well as a feeling of ownership and voice over how the class performs together.</p> <p>Opportunities for students to select modality of learning and engagement as well as performance choices supports Autonomy.</p>
4/5	When students are working together in small groups on any given project, allow students to select what instruments they wish to specialize in or focus on, and incorporate student song suggestions into full class and small group activities	<p>This enables students to choose what musical skills they want to focus on and invest in, as well as a feeling of ownership and voice over the curriculum.</p> <p>Opportunities for students to select modality of learning and engagement as well as curricular directions supports Autonomy.</p>

Collaboration

Grade level	Pathways: Collaboration	Underlying Principles
K/1	When engaging in listening activities, teach students how to talk together about music in a small group that you assign, and how to take turns talking to and listening to each other	<p>This allows students to develop skills working with their peers in a safe and scaffolded way.</p> <p>Opportunities for students to talk with each other about music creates social opportunities in class, and supports Collaboration.</p>
2/3	Introduce working in small groups to practice and later perform simple songs, and begin teaching how to inclusively create groups for these projects. Once students demonstrate the necessary social skills to inclusively create groups, allow them to do this to practice and master songs (can include any combination of singing, instruments, and movement) you introduce from full class instruction	<p>This gives students the chance to further develop their skills working with their peers in a safe and scaffolded way going beyond discussion, and into practicing music. This also ensures that students will learn how to include each other when making their own groups.</p> <p>Opportunities for students to talk and play with each other in groups and enact inclusivity in their classroom supports Collaboration.</p>
4/5	When students are working together in small groups, allow them to choose their groups, instruments, and if they wish to focus on composition or arranging/covering songs	<p>This enables students to select peers to work with who share common interests them, and to pursue a common musical goal.</p> <p>Opportunities for students to have the freedom to choose who they work with, and what they work on, supports Collaboration.</p>

Recommendations for Further Study and Practice

The findings from this study paint a picture of eight professional musicians who had successful careers full of meaning and connection, and who all cited the importance and vitality of informal music learning to their success. As previously discussed, there are gaps in the literature regarding informal music learning. Green's (2002) landmark study explored the learning experiences of popular musicians but included a mix of professional and amateur participants, and some studies took a close look at learning experiences of adolescent and adult amateur musicians within specific genres (Söderman & Folkestad, 2004; Waldron 2013; Waldron & Veblen 2009), and some included professionals of specific genres (Waldron, 2013). Plenty of research regarding professional musicians and their formal music learning experiences from the Western Classical tradition of performing in orchestras and military bands has been conducted (Coulson, 2010; Hallam, 1995; López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2020; López-Íñiguez & Burnard, 2022; Smilde, 2012), but professional musicians and their informal music learning experiences is comparatively under-explored.

More research replicating this study with new participants to confirm, expand upon, or challenge the findings of this study would be illuminating. In addition to more research regarding the informal music learning experiences of professional musicians, more research about the implications for music education could offer a deeper understanding of how students can learn in an informal way within a formal setting. It could also provide ideas of how teachers can learn to facilitate informal learning practices in the classroom.

There are some studies that explored the experiences of secondary aged students and college aged students in classroom settings in which informal music learning techniques are employed (Cayari, 2015; Cremata, 2017; Green, 2008; West & Cremata, 2016). There is a gap in the research regarding elementary aged students, with Davis' (2013) study being one

of the few published studies that directly addresses elementary aged students and informal music learning. Despite this, Davis only addresses students in the 4th grade, so younger elementary students are completely neglected in the literature.

Given the studies explored in this document, it is clear that informal music learning has a variety of benefits that suit a wide variety of learners. Despite this reality, public education does not include informal music learning practices in the classroom. This brings to mind the question: how do teachers learn to adopt informal music learning techniques alongside their current practices? This would require cooperation from the collegiate and university level, as well as professional development opportunities for in-service teachers. As evidenced by Lucy Green's research (2008), a teacher must have a grasp of popular music and popular music instruments to effectively facilitate informal music learning for students. Creating opportunities for collegiate students training to be music teachers to learn popular music techniques, like how to read and write a lead sheet, and learning a song by ear, would be necessary. In addition to these learning techniques, a basic understanding of guitar, bass, and drum set would also be required. While not all students will choose popular music approaches in their informal music learning, many likely will (Green, 2008). Adding a "popular music techniques" class in the spirit of woodwind techniques or brass techniques classes would be a step in the right direction for preparing pre-service teachers for informal music learning facilitation.

In-service teachers would require professional development opportunities to build these same skills. This could be accomplished at the county level when divisions provide professional development options for teachers, as well as the state level at music conferences. An additional hurdle for incorporating informal music learning practices with the inclusion of popular music is equipment. While popular music certainly can be learned

and performed on more traditional elementary general music classroom instruments, and many students may gravitate toward this option, it would be a more well-rounded approach to have more variety available. This question of equipment is a matter of funding, which returns music education to the seemingly never-ending struggle for appropriate support from the state and national level.

Conclusions

Self-Teaching, Autonomy, and Collaboration are themes consistent with research in the field of informal music learning, and are aligned with ideas and concepts from John Dewey's curricular recommendations of flexibility and child-centeredness (Dewey, 1903). Guiding students to find meaning in learning by following their interests can lead to learners experiencing high levels of intrinsic motivation (Evans, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Preexisting research, and this study, corroborate the assertion that informal music results in positive outcomes for music learners. Despite this, informal music learning opportunities are not widespread or standard in K-12 public education. When in-service teachers are trained in informal music learning practices, they feel comfortable, see value in teaching in this way, and their students (Blackwell, Momohara-Ho, & Matherne, 2021; Kastner, 2014). The practice of incorporating informal music learning practices as a part of standard curricula for pre-service teachers, and the development of professional development opportunities for in-service teachers, would allow teachers to be equipped as informal music learning facilitators. Students could then experience self-teaching, autonomy, and community through informal music learning with their peers in public school music.

I did not select participants who are professional musicians because my goal for students is for them all to be professional musicians. Being a professional musician with an informal music learning background indicates a level of both competence and a successful

learning background. All of these participants reflected on deep feelings of fulfillment and meaning through engaging with music in their amateur years and today. My hope for students is for them to learn, understand, and enjoy music, and to be able to engage with music in a meaningful way to them when they leave school. All these professional musicians with informal music learning backgrounds did just that, and so it makes them a worthy model to draw inspiration from when designing learning experiences for students.

As a profession, we must center student engagement, growth, and fulfillment in our pedagogical decision-making and practice. Participants in this study provided insights into the potential value of informal music learning and the autonomy and collaboration it brings in relation to those objectives. Phillip summed up his feelings on learning and making music with others:

For me, I really enjoy the learning process. It's sort of my plan to evade Alzheimer's and old age, and keep my spirit fresh by interacting with new musicians and new people and new ways of thinking about songs. And it's not so much the gigs as much as the camaraderie of making music with people. But yeah. It's community for me. And it just happens to be music.

Holly chimed in responding to Phillip, and found her own words to reflect on her own fulfillment through music:

We're so blessed. I mean, I think of it every day. I just am so thankful for the blessing of music in my life, and that I can do this. You know, it's it means so much more than the money I might have made doing something else. Because it's just a daily joy. It's so wonderful.

Becky agreed with her peers and shared her thoughts on the importance of music to her in her life:

Yeah, I don't care about the money either. I just want to get out there and sing. I have this rare disease. It's almost like arthritis. But my immune system attacks cartilage. And I've been singing since I was five years old, and that's when I started saying "okay, this is music. I want to do music forever in my life." And so thank God, I don't have this disease very prominent like other people, because it can affect your voice. Music is my passion. I love it. And I'm thankful every day that I have a voice and I can keep it.

Appendix A

Individual Interview Questions

1. What is your personal background or history performing as a professional musician?
2. How did you first learn music when you were younger?
3. Did you participate in any music lessons or classes in or out of school? If so, what were they?
4. Tell me about your experiences with music notation when you were young. a. How important was it to your music making? b. Tell me about your experiences learning by ear. When did you begin?
5. What musical skills did you develop on your own? a. How did you do it?
6. What have you learned from making music with others?
7. What are some of the most helpful things you did to learn music in your life?
8. What strategies do you and/or your band use to learn a new song? a. How does this differ (or stay the same) when learning a cover vs. a new composition?
9. Is there anything else about your learning experiences that you would like to share?

Appendix B

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Tell us about who you are, your band, and what kind of music you play.
2. How did you meet the people in your band? a. How did you decide to play together?
3. Does your band have a consistent lineup? a. If you ever have subs, how do you help them learn your setlist?
4. What helps you learn by ear and memorize music?
5. What strategies do you and/or your band use to learn a new song? How does this differ (or stay the same) when learning a cover vs. a new composition?
6. If you are rehearsing songs you already know, what kinds of things do you work on or focus on?
7. Moderator summarizes content from discussion, then asks participants if this summary is accurate.
8. Is there anything else related to what we talked about today you would like to share?

Appendix C

Participant Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Rachel Smith from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to better understand the formative informal music learning experiences of professional musicians, and to take these experiences to create a curricular resource for elementary general music. This study will contribute to Rachel Smith's completion of her master's thesis.

Research Procedures

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study consists of an interview, focus group, and potentially a rehearsal observation that will take place online via Zoom, or in-person at the participants' location of choice.

You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to formative informal music learning experiences. This study includes audio and video recordings to document and then transcribe interview, rehearsal, and focus group outcomes. All recordings will be deleted when transcriptions and participant checks are complete.

Participation in this study will require 2-3 hours of your time over two or three meetings. The individual interview will take 45 minutes to an hour, the focus group meeting will take 45 minutes to an hour, and if you agree to a band rehearsal observation, this would take as long as your rehearsal normally would run.

Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

Benefits

Potential benefits from participation in this study include the opportunity to reflect, in interview and focus group format, on meaningful learning experiences. This reflection has the potential to help musicians hone their craft further, and to learn from the experiences of others in the focus group. The subjects will also have the opportunity to shape a curricular resource, thereby helping the next generation of musicians.

Incentives

You will not receive any compensation for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

The results of this research may be presented at a conference. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers including audio/video recordings will be destroyed. Final aggregate results will be made available to participants upon request.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Rachel Smith

Dr. William Dabback

School of Music

School of Music

James Madison University

James Madison University

smith5rm@dukes.jmu.edu

Telephone: 540-568-3464 (office)

dabbacwm@jmu.edu

Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject

Dr. Lindsey Harvell-Bowman

Chair, Institutional Review Board

James Madison University

(540) 568-2611

harve2la@jmu.edu

Giving of Consent

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

I give consent to be video/audio recorded during my interview. _____ (initials)

I give consent to be video/audio recorded during focus group discussions. _____ (initials)

I give consent to be video/audio recorded during a band practice of my choice. _____ (initials)

Name of Participant (Printed)

Name of Participant (Signed)

Date

Name of Researcher (Signed)

Date

This study has been approved by the IRB, protocol #22-3225.

Appendix D

Consent to Participate in Research – Band Rehearsal Observation Only

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Rachel Smith from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to better understand the formative informal music learning experiences of professional musicians, and to take these experiences to create a curricular resource for elementary general music. This study will contribute to Rachel Smith's completion of her master's thesis.

Research Procedures

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. Your involvement in this study includes exclusively a band rehearsal observation and video/audio recording of the rehearsal.

Participation in this study will require observation of one band practice, and the amount of time required will be however long your band would typically rehearse.

Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

Benefits

Potential benefits from being a rehearsal observation participant in this study include helping portray an accurate picture of what it is like playing in a musical group, and how those groups successfully coordinate. These observations will be utilized as a part of the study in finding the formative and useful ways musicians learn and rehearse. These findings will be shared with music educators and will positively benefit the next generation of musicians.

Incentives

You will not receive any compensation for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

The results of this research may be presented at a conference. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers including audio/video recordings will be destroyed. Final aggregate results will be made available to participants upon request.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

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harve2la@jmu.edu

Giving of Consent

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

I give consent to be video/audio recorded during a band practice. _____ (initials)

Name of Participant (Printed)

Name of Participant (Signed)

Date

Name of Researcher (Signed)

Date

This study has been approved by the IRB, protocol #22-3225.

Appendix E

Recruitment Email for Musicians

Hello,

My name is Rachel Smith, and I am a graduate student at James Madison University conducting research. The purpose of my study is to better understand the formative informal music learning experiences of professional musicians, and to take these experiences to create a curricular resource for elementary general music. This study will contribute to my completion of my master's thesis.

Participation in this study will include an interview about your experiences learning music, which will take 45 – 60 minutes. If you agree to participate in a rehearsal observation, your band would rehearse according to your regular schedule and allow me to observe and record. This would take however long your group wants to rehearse. If you agree to participate in a focus group discussion after your initial interview, that would take 45 – 60 minutes of your time. If you agree to both the interview and focus group, the total time commitment would be 2 hours, plus any rehearsal time you choose to record.

These interviews will take place via Zoom or an in-person location of your choosing. Any interviews and rehearsals will be recorded for documentation purposes, and then deleted.

There are no perceived risks outside of everyday living associated with this study. You can influence and inform a curricular resource that will help a new generation of young musicians by participating in this study.

This study has been approved by the IRB (Institutional Review Board), protocol # 22-3225.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at 540-560-2434, or smith5rm@dukes.jmu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration,

Rachel Smith

James Madison University

Music Specialist - Stone-Robinson Elementary School

Albemarle County Public Schools

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